

KNOWLEDGE ABSORPTION IN BEAUTY BUSINESSES

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Purpose: The purpose of the article is to analyze the processes of acquiring knowledge from the environment in companies providing services in the Beauty industry.

Design/methodology/approach: The study used the method of literature analysis and critique, as well as a review of the websites of companies offering opportunities for Beauty companies to acquire and expand their knowledge and practical skills.

Findings: The availability of a very wide range of studies, trainings, courses, workshops for Beauty entrepreneurs to acquire and expand their knowledge was indicated. Both the technical offer during the operation of specialized equipment dedicated to the performance of treatments, as well as the offer of training and courses dedicated to those who want to expand their knowledge related to the latest trends and improve the workshop of performing specialized treatments using innovative products.

Practical implications: Sources of knowledge absorption for entrepreneurs running companies in the Beauty industry have been identified, which can prompt them to acquire, share, expand and develop knowledge using the wide range of offerings in the marketplace.

Originality/value: Insights and conclusions are presented that contribute to the diverse research context of the problem addressed and fill a kind of research gap in the form of showing the sources of knowledge acquisition in Beauty industry enterprises. The article can expand the literature on knowledge acquisition and sharing in Beauty industry enterprises.

Keywords: knowledge absorption, Beauty industry.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

In a dynamically changing (turbulent) environment, a company's most significant resource becomes knowledge, the ability to absorb it, and the ability to transform potential absorptive capacities into real ones (Jelonek, 2016, p. 57) that improve organizational performance. Knowledge management, therefore, is important from the perspective of doing business. The creation of knowledge in an enterprise is related to the process of acquiring and transforming data into specific information, which consequently creates or enriches knowledge

in the enterprise (Rumniak, 2011, p. 160). When doing business in the Beauty industry, it is important to be aware that it is not just about gaining a competitive advantage, but about constantly keeping up with trends and technology. In order to be able to provide top-notch services and meet the expectations of customers you need to follow innovative solutions, the latest innovations and stay up to date, because the industry is developing very quickly, using the latest equipment, introducing innovative products, using modern methods of skin care. This development is fostered by global trends regarding the increase in awareness of health-oriented lifestyles and beauty care (Kryczka, 2021, p. 225), and advances in education are forcing the accelerated development and implementation of scientific and technical, marketing, product and service innovations (Wisniewska, 2019, p. 251). From the point of view of business management, it is important to acquire, update and develop this knowledge.

2. Knowledge absorption in organizations

One of the principal issues concerning the development of companies is the ability to obtain knowledge “from outside”. It can be assumed that in an environment full of potential sources of innovation any company will find the information and knowledge it needs and use it accordingly. Companies vary in their ability to receive signals from the environment. A measure of the ability to invent and adapt new knowledge is absorptive capacity (Absorptive Capacity) (Tidd, Bessant, 2011, pp. 356-359). The concept was first introduced by Cohen and Levinthal (1990, pp. 128-152), defining it as “the ability of a company to recognize the value of new externally sourced information to assimilate it and apply it commercially, whereby this information largely a function of the company's level of prior knowledge”.

In works on innovation and development, the concepts of learning the processes by which companies acquire new technologies and assimilate organizational and management procedures have been widely described in the works of C. Freeman, L. Soete (1997), M. Bell, K. Pavitt (1993, pp. 157-211). The authors revised the concept of absorptive capacity, we are dealing not with mere absorption of knowledge, but with various processes that consist of separate activities of seeking, acquiring, assimilating, and using.

Among the various definitions of absorptive capacity, there are several positions according to which it is: (Cohen, Levinthal, 1990; Fu, 2008; Spithoven, Zahra, George, 2002):

- the ability (of an individual, an organization) to evaluate, assimilate and apply new external knowledge,
- the sum of learning ability and problem-solving ability; learning ability is the ability to assimilate knowledge for imitation and solve problems to create new knowledge for innovation,

- the set of organizational practices and processes through which a company acquires and assimilates (potential capability) and transforms and applies (consumed capability) knowledge to create a dynamic organizational capability.

Taken together, all four dimensions of absorptive capacity (acquisition, assimilation, processing, and utilization) enable a company to reconfigure its resource and adaptive base to changing market conditions to gain a competitive advantage.

Not all companies have the same degree of absorptive capacity. Companies (for distinct reasons) face barriers when trying to develop based on acquiring and using new knowledge:

- some are not aware of the need for change at all,
- some recognize the need for change in the long term, but are unable to either choose a search target or assimilate or consume the knowledge already identified,
- some are aware of what they need, but are unable to acquire or internalize this information,
- part of them have well-developed procedures for dealing with all these problems and have the means and strength to serve as an example to the less experienced.

A review of the literature provides a number of dimensions and skills that make up absorptive capacity. The most identified dimensions of absorptive capacity are identifying, assimilating, internalizing, and exploiting new knowledge (Lenart, p. 929).

Identification of new knowledge by the organization means determining the sources of knowledge that remains in the environment and “bringing it into transparency”, recognizing the value of this knowledge using the knowledge that is held.

These activities are aimed at adapting companies to changes in their environment. These elements can be measured. The ability to identify baseline knowledge, the knowledge gap, sources of knowledge, knowledge of the organization's learning mechanisms, and previous experience with identifying new knowledge can be evaluated.

Assimilation: is defined as the ability of an organization to absorb knowledge gained from “outside” and interpret it. This requires having a base knowledge and the ability to combine it with new knowledge.

Internalization of new knowledge is the ability to design, develop and improve procedures that enable combinations of existing knowledge and absorbed knowledge. Exploitation of new knowledge is defined as the application of new knowledge acquired externally, gaining economic benefits from previous exploitation, while using the existing competencies of employees. Exploitation makes absorbed knowledge valuable to an organization when the organization can apply it to achieve its intended purpose.

The basic manifestation of absorption capacity is "the ability to absorb external knowledge, use it in creating innovative solutions and imitate other organizations, as well as recognizing new values and layers of knowledge in the environment and assimilating them, including using them to solve problems in the organization" (Cohen, Levinthal, 1990).

The ability to absorb requires three types of skills:

1. The ability to identify new sources of information and external knowledge that may be valuable to the development of the personnel function.
2. The ability to assimilate current information and knowledge through analysis and processing, to achieve a new quality in the personnel function.
3. The ability to create an “internal market” for new knowledge, so that it can be transformed, adapted to the specifics of the company, new applications.

Absorption capacity is determined by a number of external and internal factors that overlap and influence each other in numerous ways. Basic internal determinants include:

- the specifics of the company are determined by its culture, strategy, structure, size, financial capabilities, form of ownership, management,
- process determinants related to the ways in which information and personnel knowledge are acquired and flowed,
- competencies of change leaders - business owners, managers.

3. Analysis of the Beauty industry's processes for acquiring knowledge the environment

As an economic category, the market is an institution of exchange between entities that have certain resources (sellers) and entities that need those resources (buyers) (Kryczka, 2021, p. 226). Treated on a sectoral basis, it refers, among other things, to the service market, and on an industry basis to the Beauty industry service market, which can be defined as: “all fields dealing with beauty and well-being” (Beautyrazem), and the model areas of the Beauty industry, refer to: hairdressing, cosmetology, aesthetic cosmetology and aesthetic medicine, eyelash, eyebrow and eye frame styling, makeup, makeup with wig making and makeup artist and stylist work, tanning beds, light therapy and spray tanning, ear piercing, piercings including those performed by piercers, tattooing and permanent makeup, manicures, pedicures, nail styling and podiatry, hairdressing and trichology, cosmetic massage, relaxation, wellness and spa, body shaping, depilation by any technique, including laser, sales of aftercare products, and courses education and training and other forms, in all of the above areas of Beauty (Wiśniewska, 2024, p. 523). Particularly noteworthy are the courses and training, because they are short 1-2-day meetings, and the knowledge and practical skills gained during them are certified by receiving a certificate. This is important when working in the Beauty industry due to the fact of raising the value of the person holding them on the labor market. It is a guarantee for the client to receive a professional service at the highest level, according to the latest trends, using the latest technology. Services in the Beauty industry today have a lot to do with aesthetic medicine and dermatology, as well as skin care and beauty treatments.

The services offered include those in the fields of dermatology, cosmetic chemistry, allergology or plastic surgery. Their performance requires not only experience but also thorough knowledge of anatomy, dermatology pharmacology. The issue of authorization to perform invasive procedures from the borderline of cosmetology and medicine is not directly regulated by law (www.gov.pl). It happens that aesthetic medicine procedures can be performed at a bargain (in terms of price) by cosmetologists. Based on the current legislation, which does not regulate the matter comprehensively, cosmetologists are sufficiently authorized to perform non-invasive aesthetic procedures. However, they should not be confused with aesthetic medicine procedures.

Beauty industry is developing extremely fast, companies in it acquire knowledge by hiring specialists to use their skills in the process of providing services. Also, they cooperate with entities that allow them to become increasingly competitive. They acquire knowledge that comes from market participants such as customers, mass media, politicians, and financial markets, but also by purchasing specialized software, advanced applications to help personalize services. They also take advantage of various courses.

The economic reality is changing very rapidly therefore enterprises as open systems must adapt to these changes knowing that they can consider each change as an opportunity or a threat (Karas, 2021, p. 75). Individual companies, depending on the time, and the degree of response to the volatility of the environment, especially those operating in the Beauty industry, can take advantage of this situation, treating it as an appropriate time for their own development. One of the most key factors that affect the competitiveness of enterprises is knowledge, which, being properly targeted, becomes the basis for creating innovative solutions.

Knowledge in the form of data is absorbed first. Then knowledge in the form of information to take the form of new organizational knowledge in its final form which relates to the assumptions of the DIK model creating data and information (Ackoff, 1989, pp. 3-9). Data as unconnected observations or facts are unprocessed and unorganized, so they remain meaningless. If they are not placed in context and subjected to interpretation, they do not represent value. However, if the data is systematized, information will be created from it, considered an initial representation of reality (Stelmaszczyk, 2024, p. 32). Knowledge, on the other hand, provides the ability to translate information into specific actions and is created by combining information with existing knowledge. Thus, we can define it as the effective use of information in action, and as a key factor in building competitive advantage. Knowledge is the practical use of the information held (Sopinska, 2010, pp. 84-86; Sopinska, Dziurski, 2018, p. 25). Managing an organization in the 21st century requires experience and relevant knowledge.

Nowadays, it is extremely difficult to succeed economically without the organization's ties to the environment in which it operates. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to effectively and efficiently use the resources an organization has at its disposal. The most important category of resources an organization has at its disposal is human resources and the associated

intellectual capital (Dziwulski, Harasim, 2019, p. 201). Human capital refers to the most flexible factor that exists in an organization and that is the human being. It is human capital that determines success or failure in achieving the organization's goals. On human capital is based the knowledge management system, which is created in the minds of people, and the task of the knowledge management system is to identify it and use it effectively. The knowledge that organizations have consists of two levels, explicit knowledge, and tacit knowledge (Brdulak 2005, p. 14).

Companies can use internal and external sources of knowledge to build market advantage (Kozioł, Wojtowicz, Karaś, 2017, pp. 159-172). Internal ones include the state of knowledge of employees, their creativity and databases and data resources. External sources of knowledge, on the other hand, include information that comes from the environment: from customers, competitors, research and development centers and suppliers. Therefore, the ability to absorb knowledge from external sources means the ability to acquire new data, transform it into information and then into knowledge.

Achieving success in the Beauty industry requires conscious planning of education, permanent improvement of qualifications and the ability to adapt to trends and customer expectations. The road to professionalism in the industry in question requires passion, constant development, and maximum commitment. Self-discipline, continuous improvement of skills and expansion of industry knowledge are especially important (Wiśniewska, 2024, p. 527). This can be done both during education e.g.: cosmetology studies, cosmetology courses, courses in aesthetic medicine, marketing of services, personal branding, AI training for the industry, or building relationships with clients. In the Beauty industry, knowledge cannot be outdated, so entrepreneurs in the industry in question invest in courses, training, postgraduate studies, attend congresses and industry conferences and scientific symposiums. They visit Beauty fairs but also reach for industry publications. Entrepreneurs also monitor the activities of competitors.

The Beauty industry is constantly training. There are many sources of acquiring knowledge, which are shown in Table 1. One of them is the completion of cosmetology studies, which allow one to acquire extensive theoretical knowledge. However, these studies do not teach the most important thing, which is to practice in top offices that would be able to share their knowledge. They do, however, teach perseverance and give you a college education and a cosmetology degree, which you can use to perform a variety of body care and beautification activities. With a degree you can perform procedures that are unavailable to others, for example, plastic surgery procedures and some aesthetic medicine procedures. Knowledge of chemistry is also important. Learning about the ingredients used to make cosmetics, their properties and effects on the skin gives you the ability to select preparations for different skin types. However, not everyone chooses to study cosmetology or medicine.

Knowledge in the industry in question can also be gained by completing a 2-year post-secondary study after which one can obtain the title of cosmetic service technician, passing professional examinations. The study offers condensed knowledge but also emphasizes practical skills. You can also take advantage of postgraduate studies, the advantage of which is that there are no superfluous subjects and students gain specific knowledge on selected issues.

The most common source of knowledge acquisition in the Beauty industry is training and courses. These intensive 1-2-day meetings conducted by practitioners, people with years of experience and practical knowledge provide specific information, ways to operate, use equipment, technology or apply the latest cosmetic formulations.

Courses and trainings are held both in classrooms and online. The advantage of training is gaining knowledge that is necessary here and now, that is, when we need it most. Training is designed for entrepreneurs, but also for employees, although in micro-enterprises it is the boss who goes to training, sometimes with a selected employee, sharing new ways, ideas, and skills within his team. This usually happens for economic reasons. The cost of training ranges from PLN 1000-6000. There is the possibility of funding from the National Training Fund granted by the PUP (mezoplus.oszkoleniach). Usually, participation in training confirms the acquisition of a certificate allowing the use of the products of the training form or conditions the possibility of acquiring specialized equipment used for dedicated care treatments.

The industry also offers health, cosmetology or hairdressing conferences and congresses. There you can get inspiration, learn about the latest technologies, new solutions, innovative equipment for scalp and body care. This is a good place to make new business contacts and start cooperation. There are also large scientific symposiums for specialists in cosmetology and aesthetic medicine. These events are accompanied, for example, by an exhibition with companies that present their achievements in white cosmetology, (treatments involving care of the body and face with non-invasive treatments gentle to the skin, providing an alternative to aesthetic medicine treatments), and the latest technologies.

Entrepreneurs wishing to enrich the offerings of their Beauty salons can take advantage of the several-hour workshops both outside and invite practitioners to their business to gain knowledge and acquire specific skills. It is a good form that engages the audience by focusing on the practical application of the knowledge gained through discussions and exercises. Examples of workshops include the latest techniques for special hair and makeup for special occasions.

Table 1.*Selected sources of knowledge absorption in the beauty industry*

Knowledge absorption source	Example	Speakers	Topic	Access/Source	Certification
Cosmetology studies	Field of study: Cosmetology	Highly qualified specialists working in the beauty and medical industries	The functioning of the body, the secrets of the human body, selecting treatments for specific cases. Rules for operating specialized equipment used in cosmetology, how to perform podiatric treatments.	www.wsz.pl/studia-licencjackie/kosmetologia/ 31.01.2025	Graduation diploma
Cosmetology program	Post-Secondary Cosmetic School	Experienced cosmetology professionals	Training future beauticians to work in the beauty industry with mandatory practical training in selected beauty salons.	https://szkolajaroszevska.pl/ 03.02.2025	Diploma in Cosmetic Services Technician
Postgraduate studies	Modern Hi-tech Cosmetology	Experienced specialists in cosmetology, dermatology, physiology, cosmetic chemistry, and other fields related to state-of-the-art equipment.	State-of-the-art equipment and devices used in cosmetology, enabling advanced aesthetic treatments.	https://podyplomowe.wsnoz.pl/oferta/studia-podyplomowe/kosmetologia-nowoczesna-hi-tech-ii-stopnia/ 13.02.2025	Postgraduate diploma certificate
Trainings	Rapid relationship building	Michał Lenczyński, founder of Beauty Razem	How to build positive relationships with customers, which are key to growing your beauty business.	https://beautyrazem.pl/eventy/ 02.02.2025	Certificate of participation in the theoretical and practical parts of the training
	Law in the beauty industry	Jagoda Rusińska, attorney (legal advisor to Beauty Razem, that provides services to beauty salons and aesthetic medicine clinics)	How to avoid unsubstantiated claims and damages, how to minimise the risk in terms of compensation claims for post-surgical complications, how to protect the image of the company and clients, respecting the regulations.	Błyskawiczne Budowanie Relacji - Beauty Razem 04.02.2025	Certificate
	Needle mesotherapy Permanent makeup	Industry experts	The training consists of two parts: theoretical general information, indications, contraindications, legal regulations, sanitary requirements, client interview, and practical information on performing individual treatments, exercises on models.	https://www.mezopuls.pl/szkolenia,20 07.02.2015	Certificate confirming the qualifications obtained
	Highly concentrated chemical peels				
Courses	Hairstyle	Original training methods based on techniques used by the leading hairdressing academies. Team of trainers	Expansion of the range of services offered in salons to include professional treatments: hair extensions, trichology, hairstyles and updos.	https://kursy-alan.pl/kursy/fryzjerskie/ 08.02.2025	Course completion certificate
Conferences	Biznes&Beauty 2.0	Industry experts and trainers	Education and combining expertise and business knowledge	https://www.akademiaszkolenbeauty.pl/konferencja 10.02.2025	Conference attendance certificate
Workshops	Hairdressing workshops	Professional hairdressers	Hairdressing workshops for companies to develop their potential and learn advanced hair cutting and styling techniques.	https://warsztatyfryzjerskie.pl/ 07.02.2025	Certificate confirming attendance

Cont. table 1.

Symposium	SKINLIVE II	Cosmetologists, clinical dietitians, doctors, pharmacists, and marketers who are also academic lecturers	Issues in psychocosmetology, post-treatment complications, pharmacology, facial anatomy, dermatology, safety in the cosmetology salon, use of artificial intelligence (AI) to promote the company in the beauty industry..	https://beautyrazem.pl/sympozjum-skinlive-2023/ 13.02.2025	Participation in the Symposium will be confirmed with a certificate
Trade fairs	Poznań International Fair Look and BeautyVision 2025	Experts in makeup and hairstyling	Program A program of inspiring lectures and demonstrations on global trends in makeup and advanced skincare, aesthetic cosmetology, hairdressing, trichology, and modern services offered in beauty salons.	https://beautydays.pl/ 08.02.2025	Participation certificates
Congress	Beauty Innovation Congress		Trends and innovations to grow your business. Inspiration, networking, shaping new standards.	https://beautydays.pl/ 08.02.2025	Participation certificates

Source: Based on own research.

Table 1 shows various sources of knowledge absorption and presents selected examples of them for the Beauty industry. Graduation from a cosmetology post-secondary school, college or post-graduate cosmetology course provides comprehensive preparation for work in the industry, gives the opportunity to combine, for example: specialization in regenerative cosmetology and anti-aging diet therapy. Trainings, courses, and workshops are shorter forms of knowledge absorption and are a key element of development and professional improvement for the Beauty industry due to the need to introduce new, safer, more innovative solutions, devices and technologies to the range of treatments performed.

4. Shaping knowledge absorption processes in organizations

Building knowledge resources in an organization and sharing them with all employees is fundamental to controlling the absorption process. This involves adopting a model that captures innovation as a cycle of so-called four episodes, overlapping and occurring not necessarily in a linear order.

The first episode boils down to creating and acquiring knowledge. Companies can acquire knowledge from internal and external sources. Given that many ideas arise in the environment, a company's ability to capture them becomes important. This usually manifests itself in employees developing networks of contacts outside the organization and using them to gather various innovative ideas, concepts, best practices, etc., which they then share with other employees.

The dissemination of knowledge is the subject of episode two. Networks of contacts determine the quantity and level of latest ideas flowing into the organization from external sources.

New ideas are not yet innovations as they need to be developed and adapted to the specific nature of the company. At this stage, the bonds between employees in the company are particularly important as they facilitate dialogue and discussion, thereby increasing the chances of ideas being put into practice. All these activities are part of the third episode – the selection and implementation of knowledge.

The trigger for starting the knowledge management process is to identify gaps in the organization's knowledge and skills. Admitting that they exist is necessary and at the same time marks the beginning of the process of assimilating innovative ideas. Companies that decide to fill these gaps must start by gaining transparency of their internal and external knowledge resources (Probst, Raub, Romhardt, 2004, p. 84). The first step is therefore to assess the current situation, i.e., to identify the knowledge assets existing within the company and to locate sources of knowledge in its immediate environment.

Sources of valuable knowledge for a company can also be found in its immediate environment.

The main external sources of knowledge include:

- entities providing information, e.g., consulting companies, trade fairs,
- consulting and training companies specializing in specific areas of knowledge,
- benchmarking, which allows companies to assess their own capabilities by comparing their competencies and effectiveness with those of their competitors.

Regardless of whether knowledge is obtained from internal or external sources, it is necessary to develop knowledge, which includes all conscious actions taken by management to create new competencies. The creation of knowledge within a company should be viewed strategically; the long-term perspective of the benefits of maintaining control over key competencies is of decisive importance.

Understanding the process of knowledge creation is fundamental. New knowledge in an organization always starts with individual employees and is only then transferred and transformed into organizational knowledge. Many researchers believe that creating new knowledge is not just a matter of processing information appropriately but rather depends on skillfully extracting hidden and often subjective views, intuitions, and hunches from individuals and making them available for testing and verification by the entire organization.

To understand Nonaka's dynamic process of knowledge creation, Toyama and Konno (2000) proposed a model consisting of three elements:

- the knowledge creation process and the knowledge creation process moderator,
- the knowledge context formation process,
- knowledge resources and the knowledge creation process moderator.

These three elements of knowledge creation interact with each other, forming a so-called knowledge spiral, which is a kind of perpetual motion machine for its creation.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to analyze knowledge acquisition processes and identify sources of knowledge absorption in companies in the beauty industry. It was shown that at the current stage of the industry's development, knowledge is acquired from external sources, from the market, where a wide range of certified training courses, workshops, and training companies are available. They offer training in cosmetology, skin care, facial treatments, but also eyelash styling, eyebrow styling, eye makeup, nail styling, and body shaping. There is also a wide range of companies that offer sales and rental of specialized equipment for performing treatments, such as lasers or cryolipolysis devices. Such companies train their partners on how to use the equipment and how to perform the treatment to ensure that it is effective and conducted in a professional and safe manner for the customer. There are also training courses available on customer service, establishing customer relationships, and understanding customer personalities. The training courses cover marketing and the use of social media to promote the company and its services, sales training, and the use of artificial intelligence to promote the company. There are also courses on the legal aspects of running a service business in the beauty industry, covering topics such as unjustified claims for damages and the protection of the company's image.

In order to absorb knowledge, it is worth visiting trade fairs whose organizers want to open the doors to the world of beauty, offering participants a formula that supports professional development. You can also take advantage of dedicated courses, e.g., 25-day courses.

The beauty industry is unique because staying in it depends on constantly gaining broad specialist knowledge in various fields from many sources. In further research on an increased number of companies, it seems reasonable to focus on internal sources of knowledge absorption.

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