



Knowledge Mapping

Knowledge is a key resource in obtaining strategic advantage. But it can only do so if it is something that others do not have – in other words, if it is distinctive in some way. It could be because you have a patent so there is legal protection to stop others using it. Or else it could be that what you know is so complex others can't understand the technology.

One way of thinking about the knowledge base is to develop a 'portfolio map' of your firm and its sector. What kinds of knowledge are generally available and which anyone can access and use. And what kinds are proprietary – you own and control them in some way? What kinds of knowledge are likely to be important in the future – setting the pace for the next generation of products or services? You probably need to be aware at least of where to get hold of these if you don't already possess such assets. And what kinds of knowledge might be long-shots – something to play around with and explore as a possible high-risk option but which might help you rewrite the rules of the game?

Thinking about your firm and its sector, try to build up such a 'knowledge map'. What knowledge is currently used in the sector and what knowledge gives competitive advantage? And how could this change in the future?

You will probably need to talk to some people about this and read about the firm and the sector. Try and capture your thoughts in a simple summary – you may find the chart below helpful as a framework for doing so.

What knowledge do firms in the sector use to provide the basis of competition – e.g. product designs or key process technologies?	Is this generic – i.e. widely and easily accessible?	Is this proprietary – owned by or protectable by one firm?	Is this a pacing technology which must be kept in sight because it provides the basis for future development?	Is this a long-term possible technology which could go nowhere but could rewrite the rules of the game?