

6 Conclusion

This study has investigated the external strategic drivers of knowledge protection. The drivers were analyzed along the dimensions of Porter's industry-oriented view [9, 10]. The results were structured into themes of protection in the vertical and horizontal industry dimensions. Thereby, the paper identifies external strategic drivers. Thereby, I identified three types of protection, the Doves, Magpies and Urban Sparrows.

In addition, the paper contributes insights into the external strategic drivers of protection. They relate to competitive advantage on the one hand. These drivers are competitive position and knowledge-based entry barriers. On the other hand, they go beyond competitive advantage. Such drivers are protection itself as an entry barrier, entry barriers through regulation and protection-related cost-shifts. Furthermore, the paper calls for considering not only the protection of a firm's own knowledge but also of knowledge that other firms entrust to it. In summary, research and practice should consider these externals when setting up and evaluating protection.

The study has four main limitations, the focus on Germany, the focus on SMEs, the limited amount of interview transcripts and the use of interview data for analyzing organizations. The focus on Germany and SMEs limits generalizability. Firms in other countries act in different environments. Thus, they may encounter further strategic drivers that affect knowledge protection. The focus on SMEs may restrict insights as large firms have more resources available. Thus, protection approaches may not vary as intensively as for SMEs. The third topic limits the validity of our results. In 79% of the interviews, recording was forbidden. The last topic addresses the issue that interview data was used though the object of interest is the firm. The interviewee may be biased towards the firm. Thereby, he may try to shed a firm in a more positive light. Furthermore, interviewees may not report on the situation in a firm but on their general experience. However, I believe that the results are robust due to the measures taken. Future studies should overcome our limitations. Researchers should include firms of all sizes and outside of Germany. In addition, research should try to develop an objective checklist for protection types and conduct interviews with multiple persons per firm.

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