

THE EFFECT OF TQM PRACTICES ON KNOWLEDGE SHARING : CASE OF MOROCCAN AGRIBUSINESS COMPANIES

L'EFFET DES PRATIQUES TQM SUR LE PARTAGE DE CONNAISSANCES : CAS DES ENTREPRISES MAROCAINES DU SECTEUR DE L'AGROALIMENTAIRE

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Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of TQM practices in agribusiness firms to demonstrate that they have a critical effect on knowledge sharing.

The discourse on the importance of knowledge sharing has invaded firms and has become a major necessity.

This paper aims to highlight the role of total quality management practices, after the wave of information, to make visible the knowledge and know-how of the organization as a factor for improving the problem. knowledge management.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as part of this study. The research sample consisted of 8 companies with employees from the middle and top level of management.

Evidence shows that, first, all respondents recognized the importance and need for knowledge sharing. Second, it shows that for successful knowledge sharing, TQM practices need to be constantly improved.

Index Terms: TQM practices, Knowledge sharing, leadership, teamwork, customer focus, training.

Résumé

Ce papier aborde la question des pratiques TQM dans les entreprises agroalimentaires pour démontrer qu'elles ont un effet critique sur le partage des connaissances.

Le discours sur l'importance du partage des connaissances a envahi les entreprises et est devenu une nécessité majeure.

Cet article vise à mettre en évidence le rôle des pratiques de gestion de la qualité totale après la vague d'informations, pour rendre visible les connaissances et le savoir-faire de l'organisation comme facteur d'amélioration du problème. Gestion des connaissances.

Des entretiens semi-structurés ont été menés dans le cadre de cette étude. L'échantillon de recherche était composé de 8 entreprises avec des employés de niveau intermédiaire et supérieur.

Les preuves montrent que, premièrement, tous les répondants ont reconnu l'importance et la nécessité du partage des connaissances. Deuxièmement, cela montre que pour un partage réussi des connaissances, les pratiques TQM doivent être constamment améliorées.

Mots clés: pratiques TQM ; partage des connaissances ; leadership ; travail d'équipe ; orientation client.

INTRODUCTION

In a global environment that is increasingly competitive and increasingly open to globalization, the customer is now at the heart of the business model. It is more demanding and these requirements are constantly changing.

To meet this challenge, companies must convey consistent and enriched information on customers on each link of the information chain in order to ensure its evolution, its performance, and its sustainability.

Knowledge is often seen as the essential resource of businesses and economies (Davenport and Prusak 1998, Nissen 2007), because knowledge and its implementation are the tools by which creativity can be encouraged (Mac Morrow, 2001).

In addition, companies have long taken steps to manage their intangible capital and exploit their knowledge, which is how knowledge management came about with the work of Nonaka and Takeuchi in the 1990s.

And since the 90s, there is more and more interest in knowledge management, because it is a subject of success in all sectors of activity. Indeed, knowledge management and quality are now important issues in both academia and business.

However, total quality management (TQM) is the quality-centric management approach focused on the satisfaction and commitment of all staff to continually improve their business performance.

Authors like Mukherjee and al., (1998), as well as Lapré and Van Wassenhove (2002) consider that TQM programs make organizations more learning. Hung and al (2010) assume that knowledge management is a TQM facilitator.

In fact, these systems give pride of place to the involvement of all staff, to continuous improvement and could, therefore, stimulate creativity, initiative and responsiveness. In addition, knowledge sharing in any industry or company size is critical to enabling the company to have a real competitive advantage.

In this paper, we will study the effect of TQM practices on business performance through knowledge sharing.

Thus, we try to answer the following question: How does knowledge sharing have the moderating effect between tqm practices and business performance?

This article is structured in order to answer these questions as the following :

- 1. A literature review on total quality management**
- 2. A literature review on knowledge sharing**
- 3. Determination of the effect of TQM practices on knowledge sharing**
- 4. Conceptual model of research**
- 5. Main results of the study.**

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT (TQM)

Conforming to Kanji & Asher (1995, 1996), all work can be seen as a "process", and TQM is a continuum of continuous improvement action for individuals, groups and entire organizations. In the scientific literature, we find a large number of definitions relating to the concept of total quality management. We illustrate in Table 1 (Appendix 1) some of them.

Although the TQM has a variety of definitions, it can be noted that the TQM is a management approach to improve organizational performance that encompasses both technical and behavioral topics (Lehyani F. and Zouari A., 2016).

Of course, different researchers have identified different key TQM practices and have created assessment tools to analyze the realization of such a tool in organization. In addition, the diversity of TQM practices reflects the broad characteristics of organizational cultures introducing that the TQM creates an organizational system and a culture that fosters innovation. However, the success of TQM requires an organizational culture based on trust and knowledge sharing (Hung and al, 2011).

Saraph and al., (1989), synthesize the different practices of TQM via a literature review to build a set of 8 TQM factors.

Saraph et al. (1989) summarize them in the following points: (1) Role of the division manager and quality policy. (2) Role of the quality department. (3) Training. (4) Design of products or services. (5) Quality management of suppliers. (6) Management process. (7) Quality data. (8) Relationships between employees.

Another version of TQM practices, that proposed by Anderson and al. (1994). He suggested the following practices: (1) Leadership. (2) Continuous improvement. (3) Internal and external cooperation. (4) Customer focus. (5) Learning. (6) Employee satisfaction. (7) Management process.

The broad review of the literature has shown that authors agree on one set of practices and don't agree on others. In the same vein, numerous studies show the positive link between TQM practices and the company's performance. For example, Kaynak (2003) investigated the same issue of links between the following TQM variables: leadership, training, employee relations, supplier quality management, quality information, product design, management processes and their effect on overall performance. Empirical research conducted on 214 companies led to the validation of the interdependence between the practices of the TQM studied. In addition, the results show positive relationships between TQM practices and the overall performance of the company.

Ooi and al (2010) examined the relationship between TQM practices and knowledge sharing. The six practices studied include: organizational culture, customer focus, leadership, training and development, reward system, and teamwork. Furthermore, the results show that customer orientation, training and teamwork have a positive and meaningful relationship to knowledge sharing. Their results reveal that leadership is insignificant in predicting knowledge sharing behavior. In contrast, in the work of Bradshaw and al. (2015), they found that leadership is important to facilitate knowledge sharing. Thus, they emphasize that the role of the leader is crucial because it has a strong influence on knowledge sharing to promote learning and thus create opportunities for workers to share knowledge.

It's in this sense that we propose a number of TQM practices to test their effects on knowledge sharing.

1.2 KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Knowledge sharing is defined as the level of intra-organizational cooperation as well as the exchange of new ideas, learned things and other relevant information (Bontis & Serenko, 2009). A central concept of knowledge management is that knowledge can be shared (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Knowledge sharing can establish an uttermost opportunity of the organization ability, and to respond to those needs and generate solutions that enable a company to provide a competitive advantage (Olowodunoye, 2015). Otherwise, Bartol and Srivastava (2002) describe knowledge sharing as a social exchange throughout the enterprise where employees give each other relevant information that primarily affects the business, such as suggestions, skills and ideas that owns each employee.

In the context of the organization, people can learn not only from their own direct experiences, but also from the experience of others. Because employees interact with each other, the knowledge acquired by one person can be transferred to one's colleague through feedback, explanation, help or advice (Hutzschenreuter and Horstkotte, 2010).

Davenport and Prusak (1998) and Hsu and Chang (2014) propose that knowledge sharing is about providing others with knowledge and receiving knowledge from others. This definition means that any knowledge-sharing behavior involves giving or gathering knowledge and collecting or receiving it. In practice, companies are continually learning to deal with a range of challenges and threats to its sustainability. Thus, this learning generates the knowledge that materializes and comes true in the organizational routines.

However, some ways of doing things are rejected and eliminated from internal routines while others work well and are integrated as part of internal routines, if they are not included between them. This notion of routine is defined in an inter-organizational perspective as a model of inter-company interaction that allows the transfer, combination and creation of specific knowledge.

These internal routines will determine the modalities of specific actions to share knowledge of the company, and have repercussions on the sharing of knowledge and its performance. These routines can also be considered as contextual factors that can influence the effectiveness of knowledge sharing, in particular, the sharing of tacit knowledge. The only possible way for a company to obtain and transfer tacit knowledge is to learn and share experiences.

1.3 THE EFFECT OF TQM PRACTICES ON KNOWLEDGE SHARING

A number of empirical studies have been conducted to highlight the relationship between total quality management (TQM) and knowledge management (KM) and to justify the positions of previous studies on the relationship between the two paradigms (Zetie ,2002, Ribiere & Khorramshahgol, 2004, Zwain and al., 2010).

The positive role that TQM plays in the transfer of internal knowledge is consistent with the principles that underpin it. Indeed, teamwork, collaboration and the participation of all employees, essential to the success of total quality, create a favorable context for the sharing of experiences and knowledge. Likewise, the TQM advocates very strong partnership and

trust relations with suppliers and regular communication with customers. Thus, the company that implements a total quality program can benefit from the expertise of its suppliers but also experiences from its customers following the use of its products. Overall, we can say that TQM practices can influence knowledge sharing in many sectors, specifically industry and services.

To understand the nature of the relationship between these two paradigms, Table 2 summarizes the important results of these studies (see Table 2 in Appendix 2).

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF RESEARCH

According to Ooi and al., (2010), TQM practices essentially reflect a positive and strong effect with knowledge sharing, espacially in manufacturing firms.

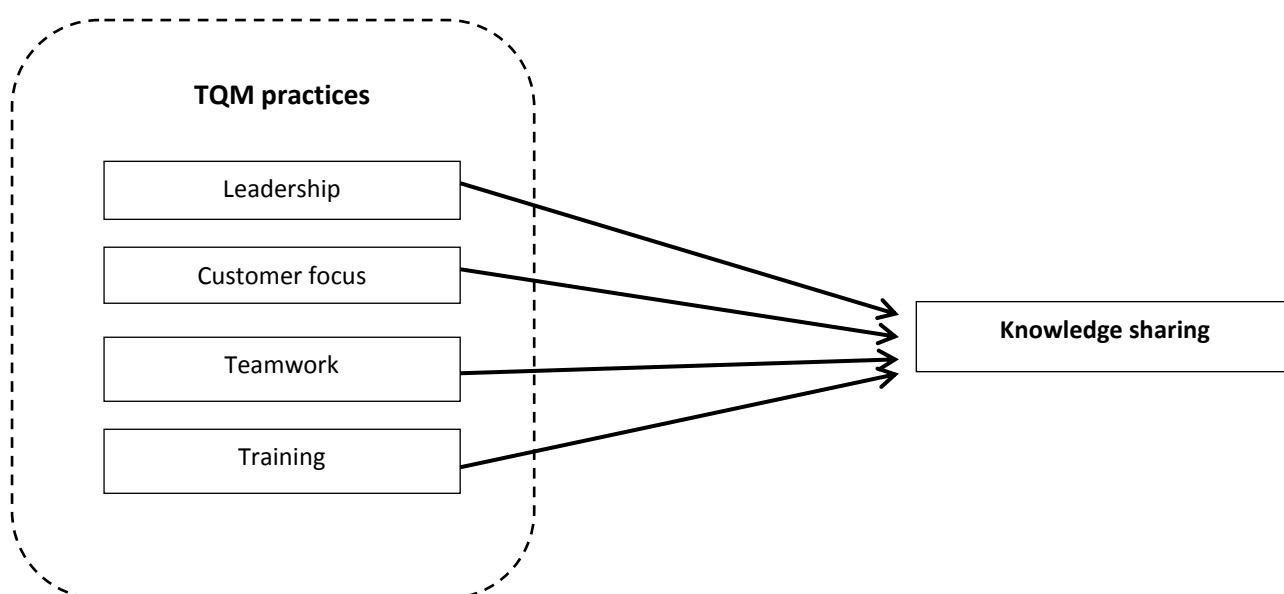
It is then in the same order of ideas, the results of zwain and al., (2011), indicated that TQM practices were strongly associated with knowledge sharing.

Their study is consistent with previous research conducted by (Ju and al., 2006, Molina and al., 2007, Ooi and al (2010).

Based on the literature review, we found that serveral authors have discussed the positive impact of TQM and KM on organizational performance.

As a result, we propose in the (fig. 1) the conceptual model that illustrates the relationship between TQM practices and knowledge sharing.

Figure N°1 : Research framework



Source : Author's

2.1 RESEARCH IMPORTANCE AND OBJECTIVE

This study is important for leaders who want to build knowledge sharing capacity. Leaders could focus on implementing total quality management practices to create effective knowledge sharing capabilities. However, our research therefore aims to demonstrate how quality practices influence knowledge sharing and how employees perceive it. Next, to identify the difficulties and possible conditions for success in order to understand how this could be conducted in a more dynamic way and to benefit from more sustained exchanges between the members, all with a view to fostering genuine exchanges of knowledge between all the employees, and in a more frequent manner.

Our model then takes into account four independent variables:

- Leadership
- Customer focus
- Teamwork
- Training

In addition, we looked at knowledge sharing as a dependent variable and a key process in knowledge management. It is indeed a process that brings employees together to exchange ideas, evidence and expertise.

3. PRACTICAL STUDY: CASE OF THE EIGHT AGRI-FOOD COMPANIES

3.1 METHODOLOGY

This article aims to verify the impact of TQM practices on knowledge sharing. To do this, we conducted semi-structured interview studies in eight Moroccan companies of various sizes using an interview guide to collect qualitative data.

At this stage of our research, the aim was to review the state of the art of total quality management practices and knowledge management, then to get a general understanding of the links between these managerial practices. It was also for us to appreciate the interest of Moroccan companies in the issues of knowledge management.

To achieve this, we targeted a group of companies that we contacted by phone to interview them. Out of twenty-three companies contacted, we had fifteen responses, eight of which were positive ones, that is, people who agreed to answer our questions. The profile of the

surveyed participants belonged to the "manager" category. Also, we have chosen only one representative of each company.

The chosen method is the content analysis that is the most suitable for explaining the elements collected in the qualitative surveys. To do this, we have divided the questions into two parts, namely the interviewer's sheet and the analysis of managers' perceptions of TQM practices on knowledge sharing.

3.2 RESULT OF THE STUDY

In the following table, we presented a questionnaire of the interviewees that will give us a general idea about the companies with which we conducted our interview.

Table N°2 : List of interviewees

Interviewee	Post occupied	Length interview
Interviewee A	Director of Information System	0:25:00
Interviewee B	Export Manager	0:35:20
Interviewee C	Quality Manager	1:16:00
Interviewee D	Milk Marketing Manager.	0:30:00
Interviewee E	R&D Manager	0:45:18
Interviewee F	Customer quality leader	1:00:00
Interviewee G	Purchasing Manager	0:40:38
Interviewee H	Financial officer	0:36:32

Source : Author's

The first question asked in the eight interviews was to know whether the Moroccan company is aware of the importance of knowledge management. The unanimous answer of the managers was "yes" but with the constraint of the insufficiency of the means implemented to capitalize this knowledge and pass from individual knowledge to a collective knowledge.

The structure of our interview guide focuses on the four independent variables.

Leadership

The Director of the Information System says: « *We encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing across the organization because we are aware of the strategic importance of knowledge. In addition, knowledge sharing is embedded in the vision and strategy of our firm* ».

He adds, « *Knowledge flows better when people trust each other, and this trust will overcome both resistance to seeking advice and resistance to sharing personal experiences with each other. Based on our experience, we have concluded that to create an environment that is conducive to knowledge sharing, it is necessary to establish what is called "leadership" otherwise it will not happen without strong leadership to guide behavior of the people who make up the firm* ».

The customer quality leader emphasizes and affirms, « *Knowledge sharing and learning are social activities, creating a positive atmosphere for knowledge sharing can lay the groundwork for cultural change. overnight, but top management can provide the fertile ground for that to happen, so we start with leadership* ».

In addition, the other six firms say that leadership promotes knowledge sharing. They argue that the role of leaders is no longer to guide performers, but to benefit from the knowledge and intelligence of all.

Customer focus

Interviewee C states that creating knowledge bases to serve customers and synthesizing the skills of network employees is a lever to stand out from the competition. He adds : « *Every interaction between a customer and a company is an opportunity to refine knowledge about her or him and to further build the relationship* ».

Also, Interviewee G reveals that in the agri-food sector, where companies share the same market and offer more or less similar products, satisfying a customer becomes a central objective. For them, customer satisfaction is a priority. He continues: « *Moreover, our business objectives are mainly focused on customer satisfaction* ».

Businesses A, B, D, E, F, H say that their strategy to gain a competitive advantage is based primarily on their understanding of their customers' needs. they also mention that they pay special attention to the customer's evaluation of their product. Because this will allow them to have a coming and going of information and knowledge, in other words, a two-way flow between company and customer.

Indeed, to achieve the quality of products or services, it is essential to know what customers want and provide them with products or services that meet their requirements. The key to

quality management is to keep on a close relationship with the customer in order to correctly determine their needs and receive feedback on the extent to which these needs are met.

Teamwork

All respondents in the eight companies focused on the principle of teamwork. The data showed that the majority say that it is necessary to work in a team while creating a climate of cooperation to allow everyone to go in the right direction.

Most interviewees say that this team building contributes to knowledge sharing. The members of this group are usually bound by a common interest in a field of knowledge, a desire and a need to share problems, experiences and good practices.

In addition, Interviewee H states that *« through the sharing of knowledge that group members learn from each other and interact with each other to develop professionally »*.

In brief, the data demonstrated that new knowledge is developed by individuals and that the organization plays an important role in articulating and developing this knowledge. The team is constantly acquiring and developing shared knowledge among members. It can be considered one of the most important resources of the organization.

However, the interviewee A, B, D say that *« the functional diversity within the team allows for the exchange of specific knowledge. These weak links formed between the members of a functionally heterogeneous team offer access to new information and the creation of tacit knowledge »*.

Training

Certainly, training and learning play a vital role in creating an appropriate environment that encourages each employee to share their knowledge.

Interviewee B declare: *« We have the ultimate belief that people are continually improving through training and learning, and from our experiences we have noticed that our company achieves performance through good people. We believe that in order to achieve business performance and to have a good commercial impact, it is essential to go through organizational learning »*.

In the same vein, interviewee F states that the company provides employees with the required training related to new tasks and responsibilities, as the training provides a place where employees are brought together to acquire and share new knowledge.

In the qualitative results, the interviewees also mention that when the employees knowledge of their professional skills is improved, consequently the efficiency at work increases. This involves improving the skills required through specific training and learning programs.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Significantly results, many employees share their know-how, knowledge and experiences during the work.

Practically, the members of the firms we interviewed were unanimous on the fact that TQM practices, particularly leadership, customer focus, teamwork and training, have a positive impact on knowledge sharing and therefore on the business performance of the company.

Thus, organizational learning is an opportunity for staff members to share what they know and understand. If these employees do not learn, and are not trained, and do not share, customer service may suffer. This is why leadership has a critical effect on knowledge sharing, because the leader provides specific direction to their members, and knows the value of their data and skills. As a result, team members receive confirmation from a leader for the dissemination of ideas and knowledge and this motivation is created to share their unique knowledge.

So knowledge sharing is not done automatically, and leaders play an important role in its development.

If a problem arises, as a problem-solving process, the leader's main characteristic is to identify and evaluate knowledge and to share it within the organization in order to learn from mistakes and capitalize on its success. A leader is the driving force that directs, accompanies and controls the coming and going of knowledge. He also possesses the necessary and thorough experience, which can be easily codified by himself. Leadership can result in the reduction of certain costs such as communication and improve the credibility of circulated knowledge.

Most interviewees agreed that staff are able to absorb and digest more content when there is strong leadership, a customer-oriented organization, and a good climate for teamwork. In addition, we note from our observations that:

- Increasing creativity and new ideas through leadership.
- Good leadership promotes and contributes to knowledge sharing, This is in line with Zhang L. and Cheng J. (2015) who argue that leadership in knowledge plays an important role in the strategic direction of actions to share more effectively knowledge.
- A most preoccupation of customer focusing on the exchange (Client-Company).
- The customer-oriented company is successful at developing knowledge sharing within its organization, and this is in line with the findings of (Ooi and al., 2010) that customer orientation helps to improve knowledge sharing.
- A fiercely competitive sphere in the agri-food sector because of the concentration of firms on customer satisfaction and loyalty, and each firm tries to preserve its knowledge to avoid information leakage to competitors.
- Business focus on teamwork, team employees had more opportunities to more effectively combine distributed capabilities through knowledge sharing.
- Surprisingly, according to interviewees, training has no direct effect on performance but an indirect effect by improving employee performance. That is, the positive effect of training on performance is due to the fact that training can foster organizational learning, and as a result, it could improve organizational knowledge which is considered one of the main sources of competitive advantage for a company. In sum, learning-based training promotes organizational performance primarily through its positive effect on business capacity.

Each firm determines its own TQM practices that are beneficial and useful to them. She adapts them to her needs and available resources.

Despite several dissimilarities among firms interviewed about TQM practices, the four practices mentioned above represent the crossroads for the eight firms.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, we must conclude that all interviewees echo the necessity and importance of implementing the sharing of knowledge and experience in the company.

The data collected in this study showed that the TQM practices studied have a direct effect on knowledge sharing. Our findings corroborate those of some empirical research, such as (Ooi and al., 2010) and Zwain A.A.A and al., (2011).

Knowledge sharing and TQM practices are complementary. A synergistic combination of knowledge management and total quality management is a cycle of improvement and development leading to organizational excellence.

An approach of knowledge-based TQM will inform, guide and promote improvement and continuous learning, thus helping the organization to better meet the evolving needs and expectations of clients.

Nevertheless, our results can not be expressed with precision in a general way, and this favors the use of a quantitative study to better apprehend the characteristics of each practice within agribusinesses.

As a result, one of the issues that remains clearly under-explored in the area of knowledge sharing and will be addressed in a future article is the moderating role of knowledge sharing between TQM practices and business performance.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1 : TQM DEFINITIONS

Authors	Definitions
(Kivimäki and al., 1997)	TQM can be defined as an approach to improve organizational management with product quality, service, increased productivity, customer satisfaction and increased profits.
(Gharakhani and al, 2013)	TQM can be defined as a holistic management philosophy that aims for continuous improvement in all functions of an organization, and it can be achieved only if the concept of total quality is used from the acquisition of resources to service of the customer after the sale.
(Kahre and al, 2014)	TQM can be defined as a global management philosophy, which aims for continuous improvement of the organization.
(Taheri A. & Asgari H., 2018) Source : author's	TQM is a critical approach to improving the industry in terms of quality, consumption, customer satisfaction and profitability.

APPENDIX 2 : EMPIRICAL STUDIES OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TQM AND KM

Authors	Sector	Methodology	Statistical analysis	Results
Ooi and al., (2009)	Manufacturing and service	Survey	Multiple regression analysis	<p>The results show a relatively stronger positive relationship between TQM practices and knowledge sharing. Finding indicated that customer focus is significant and contribute to enhance the knowledge sharing in manufacturing firms.</p> <p>Regarding the teamwork, the result proves that teamwork is perceived as an essential TQM practice and there is a positive association with knowledge sharing.</p> <p>Same for training, the results indicated that training is vital to promote knowledge sharing.</p>
Zwain and al., (2011)	Higher Education	Survey	Correlation and multivariate analyses	<p>Results have shown that the TQM core elements had a significant effect on knowledge sharing; organizations need to find solutions on how to improve the tqm practices in order to enhance the capabilities of knowledge sharing among staffs. On the other hand, the study provides empirical evidence of the essential of implementing of TQM core elements holistically rather than individually.</p>
Duran C and al., (2014)	Manufacturing & service	Survey	ANNOVA test	<p>As a result of the analysis, it was discovered at statistical significance that the enterprises having the Total Quality Management are better in the fields of degree of knowledge obtained from the customer, participation of employees in dissemination of knowledge, the quality process, the quality culture, and the quality performance than those not having the TQM.</p>
Gutierrez and al., (2015)	Industry et services	Survey	ANOVA analysis and PLS approach (structural equation modeling)	<p>The results show that Six Sigma team managers greatly facilitate the exchange of ideas.</p>
Alimohammadlou and Eslamloo, (2016)	Higher Education	Survey	Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and Correlation.	<p>The results showed a positive relationship between knowledge transfer and TQM practices (continuous improvement, student satisfaction, autonomy, process management).</p>

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