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Constructing a definition for intangibles using the resource based view of the firm

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to construct and propose a definition for intangibles derived from the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm for use in academic research and practical applications.

Design/methodology/approach – Intangibles are defined as a subset of corporate resources. In this paper, various definitions for intangibles are tested against the RBV framework.

Findings – The majority of definitions in the extant literature are (implicitly or explicitly) in synchronization with the RBV. Thus, it is possible to find and propose a common definition for intangibles.

Research limitations/implications – Some researchers argue that the field is still in its embryonic stages and thus the concepts might still be too fresh in order to find a stable common definition.

Practical implications – The paper offers a conceptual lens through which one can clearly link intangibles to strategy and offers a proposed definition of intangibles that incorporates a meta-review of the literature.

Originality/value – The paper shows that it is in fact possible to accommodate various definitions of intangibles under one common framework and propose a unified characterization.

Keywords Intellectual capital, Intangible assets, Resource management

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

Intangible assets have always been present in a company's operations. The first recorded mentioning of intangibles can be found in 1896 by Lawrence R. Dicksee, (Wu, 2005), and Kenneth Galbraith for the term intellectual capital in 1969 (Bontis, 1998). It has only been in the last couple of decades that this field has skyrocketed into prominence (Serenko and Bontis, 2004). The importance of disclosing information related to intangibles has also grown significantly (Botosan, 1997; Bontis, 2003).

Research dealing with intangibles suffers from one fundamental problem: the lack of common terminology. The applied concepts are all differently labelled and every researcher or practitioner who develops a new definition wants to establish his own terminology (Bontis, 2001). This academic dissent is a hindrance to research progress and so far, there is no agreed-on definition (Sveiby, 1997; Bontis *et al.*, 1999; Andriessen, 2004; Mølbjerg-Jørgensen, 2006).

This paper is motivated by the definitional disagreement over the term intangibles (and its related cousins intangible assets and intellectual capital). In the following



sections, we will discuss the terms employed, present different negative and positive definitions, and attempt to derive a common characterization from the resource-based view perspective of the firm.

Literature review

There is an abundance of definitions as to what intangibles exactly are, which is both useful (i.e. an exhaustive array of terms encompasses the complex nature of the concept) and harmful (i.e. no consensus leads to confusion). It is unclear whether the primary terms used are arranged in a synonymous or hierarchical manner, since neither literature nor practice has managed to find a common and clear differentiation (WGARIA, 2005). The main terms usually found in the literature that relate to intangibles (and their relative Google count) are: intellectual property – 127M, intangible assets – 2.3M, intellectual capital – 1.8M, intellectual assets – 394k, knowledge capital – 334k, and knowledge-based assets – 44k. Because the field is still in its embryonic stages, many researchers continue to develop their own terminology because no one is willing to give up one's own nomenclature (Bontis, 1996, 2001). Habersam and Piber (2003) contend that it will take a while until researchers are able to draw from a common terminology. During the beginning of the major wave of intangible assets research in the mid-1990s, many authors defined intangibles according to the following equation for intellectual capital (Edvinsson and Malone, 1997):

$$\text{Intellectual capital} = \text{Market value} - \text{Book value}.$$

According to Upton (2001) this is rather ill-defined. The equation states that the entire difference of market value and book value can be attributed entirely to intellectual capital and one is “done with the exercise” (Upton, 2001, p. 2). It seems apparent that the decision-usefulness prerogative is failing at the definitional level. Habersam and Piber (2003) support this notion by claiming that intellectual capital is not composed of just objects in order to be added up. Defining the difference between market value and book value as intellectual capital is flawed since this difference might be attributable to many other factors (i.e. stock price fluctuations may occur because of issues not related to intangibles at all). García-Ayuso (2003) argues that there are many influential factors apart from intellectual capital that can affect stock prices such as undervalued tangible and financial assets, liabilities in stockholders' equity, legal events, and timing issues such as the January-effect (García-Ayuso, 2003; Upton, 2001; Andriessen, 2004). Thus, the aforementioned definition of intellectual capital as stated above is rather misleading and not entirely comprehensive.

As a further extension, many authors rely on describing the nature of intangibles by suggesting categorisations of intangibles and taxonomies within a larger concept. The question “what are intangibles?” is often replaced by answering “what categories of intangibles are there?”. This misses the point since by providing categories of intellectual capital like human capital, structural capital and relational capital (Bontis, 2002; Choo and Bontis, 2002; Andriessen, 2004), one still does not know the phenomenological characteristics of the term. It is like asking “what is a car?” and giving the answer “sedans, convertibles, off-roaders, limousines and vans!” Ultimately, one still has no idea what a car is. It seems logical to understand what we are dealing with first, and then define the various possible components afterwards.

When defining intangible assets, there seems to be an affinity for researchers to take the negative approach (WGARIA, 2001). In other words, defining intangibles as what they are not, namely tangible, leading to anti-definitions (Lev, 2001). Table I summarizes the most common definitions to date.

As Johanson (2000) points out, the same intangibles could be interpreted in different ways. Intangibles consist of objective facts, conscious cognitive interpretations, and unconscious interpretations. Therefore, although there might be a chance for a common definition and classification of intangible assets and intangible investments for accounting and statistical purposes, a common basis for intangible phenomena as cognitive or unconscious structures and processes in a firm might be unlikely (Johanson, 2000). Firms may be regarded from two angles: from the product side, and from the resource side (Wernerfelt, 1984, p. 171, calls it “two sides of the same coin”). Where the former has been subject to mainly economic theory, the latter has some highly compelling strategic implications in terms of competitive advantage and the use of resources in order to gain higher profits (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991). Strategic resources are a subset of a company’s resource portfolio (Wade and Hulland, 2004). This renders the resource focus suitable for attempting a definition for intangibles. It makes sense to use a general theory of the firm as a starting point in order to anchor the concept of intangibles where it all happens: the company and its set of strategic resources.

The theory of the resource-based view of the firm (RBV) (Penrose, 1959; Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991; Barney *et al.*, 2001) focuses on the latter. It generally states that a firm is able to secure sustainable abnormal returns from their resources (including static resources, dynamic capabilities, and knowledge; see Barney *et al.*, 2001). However, these resources need to be (Barney, 1991; Wade and Hulland, 2004):

- *Valuable*. Firm resources need to be able to create sustainable value for a company.
- *Rare*. Resources need to be heterogeneously distributed across firms, and not easily accessible to competitors; possessed by a low number of firms.
- *Inimitable*. Or low imitability (Wade and Hulland, 2004) of resources in order to protect them from being copied by competitors (Barney, 1991).
- *Non-substitutable (non-transferable)*. Competitors must not have equivalent resources in order to substitute an otherwise inimitable resource.

The VRIN (valuable, rare, inimitable, non-substitutable) indicators show whether or not a firm possesses these strategic resources, and how secure they are (i.e. high or low resource position barrier, see Wernerfelt, 1984). Additional characteristics and requirements for resources are:

- (1) *Appropriable*. They should be able to earn rents exceeding the cost of the resources (e.g. Wade and Hulland, 2004).
- (2) *Immobile*. It should not be possible to acquire them on factor markets (Wade and Hulland, 2004).
- (3) They include all assets, capabilities, organizational processes, firm attributes, information, and knowledge that a company may employ in order to increase its performance (Barney, 1991), and are useful in reacting towards market’s opportunities and threats (Wade and Hulland, 2004).

Source	Term	Description
IAS 38 www.iasb.org	Intangible assets	Non-financial assets without physical substance that are held for use in the production or supply of goods or services or for rental to others, or for administrative purposes, which are identifiable and are controlled by the enterprise as a result of past events, and from which future economic benefits are expected to flow
McMaster World Congress on Intellectual Capital worldcongress.mcmaster.ca	Intellectual capital	Intellectual capital consists of the study of innovation, knowledge management, new technology, intangible assets, intellectual property, human capital, organizational learning, and knowledge workers
NYU Stern – Intangibles Research Center www.stern.nyu.edu/ross	Intangible assets	<i>Broad definition:</i> intangibles are non-physical sources of probable future economic benefits to an entity or alternatively all the elements of a business enterprise that exist in addition to monetary and tangible assets <i>Narrow definition:</i> intangibles are non-physical sources of probable future economic benefits to an entity that have been acquired in an exchange or developed internally from identifiable costs, have a finite life, have market value apart from the entity, and are owned or controlled by the entity
Bontis (1996)	Intellectual capital	From capturing, coding and disseminating information, to acquiring new competencies through training and development, to re-engineering business processes
Stewart (1997)	Intellectual capital	The sum of everything everybody in the company knows that gives the company a competitive advantage in its marketplace
Roos <i>et al.</i> (1997)	Intellectual capital	The sum of the hidden assets of the company not fully captured on the balance sheet, and thus includes both what is in the heads of organizational members, and what is left in the company when they leave.
Edvinsson and Malone (1997)	Intellectual capital	The possession of the knowledge, applied experience, organizational technology, customer relationships and professional skills that provide (a company, ed.) with a competitive edge in the market
Sveiby (1997)	Intangible assets	Invisible assets that include employee competence, internal structure and external structure
Sullivan (1998)	Intellectual capital	Knowledge that can be converted into profits

(continued)

Table I.

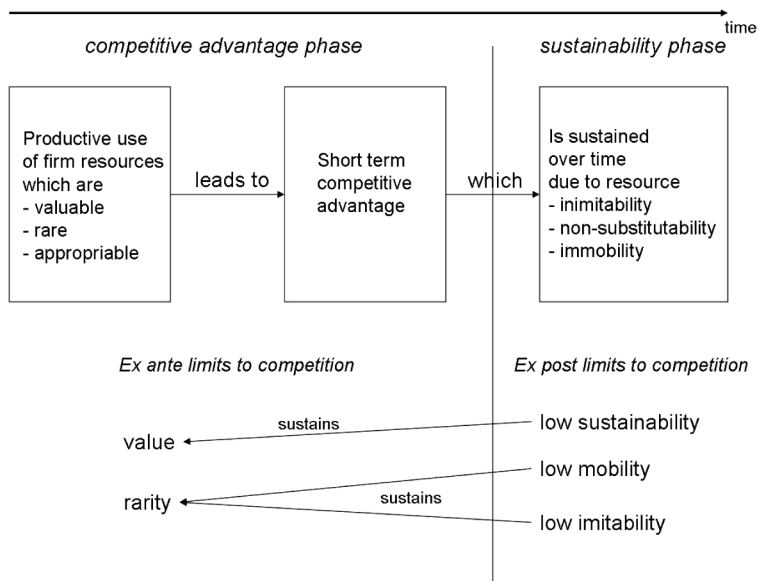
Source	Term	Description
Brooking (1998)	Intellectual capital	A term given to the combined intangible assets which enable a company to function, consisting of market assets, intellectual property assets, human-centred assets and infrastructure assets
Johanson (2000)	Intangible investments	Covering all long-term outlays by firms aimed at increasing future performance other than by purchase of fixed assets
Blair and Wallman (2001)	Intangibles	Non-physical factors that contribute to or are used in producing goods or providing services, or that are expected to generate future productive benefits for the individuals or firms that control the use of those factors
Upton (2001)	Intangibles	Index scores, ratios, counts, and other information not presented in the basic financial statements
Upton (2001)	Intangible assets	Assets that are neither tangible nor financial instruments; items that fail the definition of an asset, but are important elements of business success, are merely non-financial information
Lev (2001)	Intangibles	A claim to future benefits that does not have a physical or financial (a stock or a bond) embodiment
MERITUM (2002)	Intangibles	Non-monetary sources of probable future economic profits, lacking physical substance, controlled (or at least influenced) by a firm as a result of previous events and transactions (self-production, purchase or any other type of acquisition) and may or may not be sold separately from other corporate assets
MERITUM (2002)	Intellectual capital	Embraces all kinds of intangibles, either formally owned or used, or informally deployed and mobilized; it is more than the sum of the human, structural and relational resources of the firm, but also how to employ them to create value (connectivity capital)
MERITUM (2002)	Intangible assets	Representing the set of intangibles or elements of IC, that are susceptible of being recognized as assets in accordance with the current accounting model
Mølbjerg-Jørgensen (2006)	Intellectual capital	Defined from a philosophical background as knowledge about knowledge, knowledge creation, and leverage into a (social or economic) value

- (4) They are heterogeneously distributed across companies (Barney, 1991).
- (5) The differences between the companies are stable over time (Barney, 1991).

Homogeneously distributed and or unstable differences in resources do not provide a company with sustainable abnormal returns (Barney, 1991). This holds true for stable as well as dynamic markets (Barney *et al.*, 2001; Fiol, 2001; Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000), where the ability to continuously change and adapt (and find opportunities to generate abnormal returns) is regarded as a firm resource. This is similar to the ability to protect the resources and employ resources in a stable market such as human capital, or organisational capital. A company is not necessarily required to secure sustainable competitive advantages, but must be able to secure a constant path of temporary advantages in a dynamic market (Fiol, 2001; Barney *et al.*, 2001).

Figure 1 distinguishes between attaining a competitive advantage, and sustaining it (Peteraf, 1993; Wade and Hulland, 2004) with the ex ante and ex post limits to competition. The former suggests limited competition for the then potential advantage, rendering the resources to do so not exclusive, but available to all the competing firms. The resources might be valuable, rare, and appropriate for the task in order to become a source for competitive advantage, but they are not inimitable, non-substitutable, or immobile at this point. This happens ex post, when companies manage to make an advantage hard to imitate, difficult to substitute by other resources, and immobile (non-transferable).

The following section attempts to connect the (main) definitions from the literature to the RBV, which does not only include intangibles, but also tangibles (Galbreath and Galvin, 2004). The RBV, *per se*, does not distinguish between tangibles and intangibles. However not all resources are equally important to performance, and the most



Source: Wade and Hulland (2004, p. 119, slightly modified)

Figure 1. RBV over time

influential ones seem to be intangible (Barney, 1991; Galbreath and Galvin, 2004). Consequently, both can be employed by a firm in order to gain strategic advantages (Wade and Hulland, 2004). We therefore attempt to define intangibles as a subset of strategic resources under the RBV, which comprises assets as well as capabilities. A subset of resources under the RBV might be defined in terms of intangibles, indicating that we might be able to come up with a first step towards a common definition. From an RBV point of view, competitive advantage is a result of employing strategic resources, both assets and capabilities, to the sustainable benefit of a company. The unique development of these resources might be a result of a company's individual portfolio of assets, both tangible and intangible, thus making it difficult to transfer or trade (Wade and Hulland, 2004).

Definitions revisited

In an attempt to derive a common definition of intangibles from a resource-based view perspective, it is important to conduct an initial review of some of the more common characterizations. For instance, Lev (2001) uses some of the terms synonymously, claiming that they "refer essentially to the same thing: a non-physical claim to future benefits" (Lev, 2001, p. 5). He claims that the terms "are widely used – *intangibles* in the accounting literature, *knowledge assets* by economists, *intellectual capital* by management, and *intellectual property* in the legal literature – but they refer essentially to the same thing: a non-physical claim to future benefits" (Lev, 2001, p. 5). Fincham and Roslender (2003) see a danger in the synonymous use of the terms. They argue that this confusion may undermine the promotion of intangibles. The authors of the MERITUM (2002) project apply the same arguments as Lev (2001). They argue that intellectual capital originates from the "human resources literature", whereas intangibles come from an "accounting perspective" (Johanson, 2000, p. 59). Intangible assets as a term is even more restrictive since it refers to the recognition-criteria of the current accounting system (Fincham and Roslender, 2003; MERITUM, 2002) and often "does not cover all components of intangibles" (Andriessen, 2004, p. 63). If one applies the definition of intangible assets as stated by regulatory standard setters such as the IASB (or the FASB), it is increasingly evident that one is referring to an item that can or can not be presented in a balance sheet. This accentuates the confusion that already exists. Ultimately, from most definitions reviewed in the extant literature, it can be determined that there is no clearly agreed on hierarchical relationship between intangibles, intangible assets and intellectual capital.

RBV and intangibles

Examining intangibles through the theoretical lens of the RBV of the firm is not a straightforward task. Wade and Hulland (2004) state that even when the RBV is applied in many different fields of research, it must not necessarily be applicable in all of them. However, we claim that the RBV and intangibles can be positioned in a natural hierarchy, since the latter connects to a company's strategy, and both contribute to sustained corporate performance and competitive advantages. This might not happen directly, but within interactions of assets and capabilities, where the latter transform the former into outputs of increased value (Wade and Hulland, 2004; Peppard and Rylander, 2001; Rylander *et al.*, 2000). Figure 2 shows how intangibles might be defined as a subset of strategic resources according to the RBV.

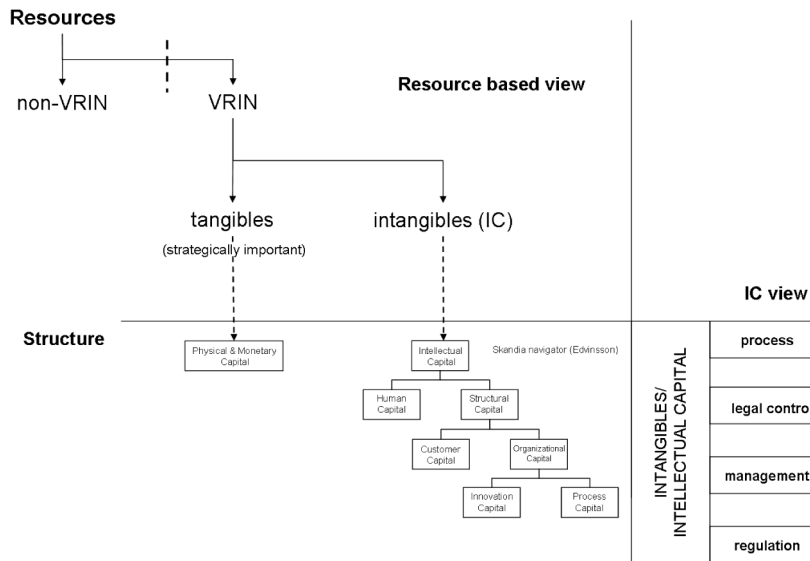


Figure 2. Intangibles and IC as a subset of strategic firm resources (RBV)

Figure 2 shows intangibles as a subset of a company’s strategic resources, which in turn are a subset of its full resource portfolio. By slicing away resources with no importance to strategic goals (which would concern a portion of tangible assets), we arrive with a set of strategic firm resources. By continuing the logic above, if we slice away all tangible resources which are of strategic importance, we arrive at intangibles. The definition we are aiming for will follow down from the top resources to the intangibles, delimiting with every step. The figure also shows the link to the first criticised suggested structures of intellectual capital. Each structure can be tested against the definition whether it can be defined within the RBV, or outside.

Notwithstanding, we do not attempt to test the suggestions for intangible categorisation within this paper. At this level, the different points of view of as stated above might add several dimensions. The reader might infer that among the non-VRIN resources, there might be intangibles as well. However, we argue that intangibles that are not able to create value, are not unique to a company (and thus can be employed by a majority of firms in the same way), are easy to copy, and easy to substitute, are not able to contribute to corporate performance and thus not important to a company. Such resources would be either ignored, or discarded. Therefore, we arrive with a set of corporate intangibles following VRIN characteristics.

Bearing this in mind, we now attempt to allocate definitions for intangibles from the literature to the broader framework of the RBV. Its usefulness for defining intangibles is largely dependent on the explicit recognition of “the characteristics and attributes of resources that lead them to become strategically important” (Wade and Hulland, 2004, p. 115). First, we compare the various definitions from selected sources with general RBV attributes, and then test additional (exceeding) parts of the respective definitions against them. If we find contradictory definitions of intangibles to the framework, we drop them from the final definition.

Resource attribute	Terminology
<i>Ex ante limits to competition</i>	
Value	Embedded value (MERITUM, 2002)
Rarity	Not explicitly referred to
Appropriability	Future economic benefits (Epstein and Mirza, 2005); future productive benefits (Blair and Wallman, 2001); probable future economic benefits/business success (Upton, 2001); profits (Sullivan, 1998); competitive advantage (Bontis, 1996; Stewart, 1997); competitive edge (Edvinsson and Malone, 1997); claim to future benefits (Lev, 2001); probable future economic profits (MERITUM, 2002); increasing future performance (Bontis, 1998); value (Mølbjerg-Jørgensen, 2006)
<i>Ex post limits to competition</i>	
Imitability	Social complexity: customer relationships (Edvinsson and Malone, 1997; Bontis, 1998); relational/connectivity capital (MERITUM, 2002; Bontis, 2001)
Substitutability	Implicitly by Edvinsson and Malone (1997) referring to a competitive edge in the market, hinting at resources that are not accessible to everyone
Mobility	When control is defined as a hindrance to mobility and transferability on a factor market, then: control (Epstein and Mirza, 2005; Blair and Wallman, 2001; Upton, 2001; Edvinsson and Malone, 1997; MERITUM, 2002). Transferability as it relates to human capital turnover (Stovel and Bontis, 2002)

Table II.
Resource attributes in
RBV and IC

Source: Wade and Hulland (2004)

Table II shows which resource attributes within the RBV are met by the definitions from Table I. Interestingly, not all of them are mentioned, but none are contradictory, which allows us to believe that the selected researchers may not have explicitly stated, but implicitly not out-ruled the missing attributes (e.g., the substitutability attribute, where Edvinsson and Malone (1997) refer to a competitive edge in the market, which may be a result from resources that are not accessible to other companies). The mobility attribute on the other hand can be linked to the often-mentioned control attribute. When control is defined as a hindrance to the mobility and transferability of a resource, then a majority states this attribute.

Table III adds attributes too specific for the RBV, but tailored to intangibles. It is clear that none of these attributes are contradictory to the resource attributes one level higher. This makes it possible to add these attributes without contradicting the basic RBV framework. As a last step, asset recognition criteria (for both US-GAAP and IFRS) are added in order to move from intangibles to intangible assets. Tables I-III, as well as the RBV framework and the literature investigated, allow for a testable definition of intangibles. Based on this meta-review process, we propose the following unified definition for intangibles:

Intangibles are strategic firm resources that enable an organization to create sustainable value, but are not available to a large number of firms (rarity). They lead to potential future benefits which cannot be taken by others (appropriability), and are not imitable by competitors, or substitutable using other resources. They are not tradeable or transferable on factor markets (immobility) due to corporate control. Because of their intangible nature, they

Resource attribute	Terminology
Non-physical	Without physical substance (Epstein and Mirza, 2005; Upton, 2001; Brooking, 1998; Sveiby, 1997; Lev, 2001; MERITUM, 2002)
Non-financial	Non-financial (Epstein and Mirza, 2005; Blair and Wallman, 2001; Upton, 2001; Lev, 2001); non-monetary (MERITUM, 2002)
Outside financial statements	Not represented in financial statements (Bontis, 1996; Upton, 2001; Roos <i>et al.</i> , 1997)
Context-dependent value contribution	Value contribution in combination with other factors (MERITUM, 2002; Bontis and Fitz-enz, 2002; Bontis <i>et al.</i> , 2002)
Finite life	Finite life (Upton, 2001)
<i>Asset recognition</i>	
Linked to provision of products and services expected	Production/services (Epstein and Mirza, 2005; Blair and Wallman, 2001)
Identifiable	Epstein and Mirza (2005); Upton (2001); MERITUM (2002)
Result of past transactions	Epstein and Mirza (2005); Upton (2001); MERITUM (2002)

Table III.
Additional attributes

are non-physical, non-financial, are not included in financial statements, and have a finite life. In order to become an intangible asset included in financial statements, these resources need to be clearly linked to a company's products and services, identifiable from other resources, and become a traceable result of past transactions.

A different point of view

At this point, we also add other related terms in the context of intangibles to the unified definition presented above:

- *Intellectual property.* Intangible assets with legal and contractual boundaries; assets to which a company has property rights and whose ownership is granted to them by law (Marr *et al.*, 2002) such as patents, trademarks, registered designs, and copyrights.
- *Intangible resources.* Intellectual property rights, trademarks or information technologies, that can be measured at any time in a company due to their static nature (MERITUM, 2002); Hall (1992) divides them into assets (trademarks, patents, copyrights, registered designs, etc.) and skills (know-how, culture).
- *Intangible activities.* Activities in a company for developing or acquiring new intangible resources, increasing the value of existing intangible resources, or evaluating and monitoring intangible activities (MERITUM, 2002).
- *Intangible investments.* All new goal-oriented activities to a firm or disembodied tools used by a firm, on a strategic and tactical level, during the reference period. On the tactical level, they are aimed at a quantitative change or extension of existing knowledge, while on the strategic level they are aimed at the acquisition of completely new knowledge. They refer to services or output indicators of these services that can be bought from third parties or produced for their own use, and normally embrace a certain degree of risk. They include marketing, technological, informational and organisational activities or tools. These activities or disembodied tools have to be separately identifiable and measurable in financial terms. The results are reflected by expected pay-off in

the near future. They are assets concerning the stock of knowledge or power on the market or strength of the internal organisation, having a useful life of more than one year. These investment activities are measured by their expenditures, occurring in the present. Purchases of small, disembodied tools or minor activities, which are not capitalised, are considered expenditures on an operational level and are included under current expenditures. Assets acquired through restructuring (such as mergers, take-overs, break-ups, split-offs) are excluded (Statistics Netherlands, 1998, p. 9).

In summary, intangibles can be regarded from a process standpoint when discussing resources and activities, a legal standpoint when discussing property rights, a standard setting standpoint when thinking about recognition criteria, and from a managerial standpoint when discussing strategic investments. Within the RBV, each of these specifications are easily introduced to the framework.

Goodwill versus intangibles

It is necessary to state that the broadly defined concept of intangibles is not to be confused with the term goodwill (WGARIA, 2005). Goodwill contains some items that are intangible and some that are not. Furthermore, goodwill is only recognised under current regulation when a company is acquired (Wagenhofer, 2005). There is a final price (after negotiations) within which goodwill resides and is valued (WGARIA, 2005). Goodwill also does not comprise of intangibles being recognised in the balance sheet (see Figure 3 for details).

As a result of the various viewpoints presented, we propose the following hierarchical representation (see Figure 4).

Apparently, we note that there is overlap in this representation. However, we also note that this figure should not be regarded as classifications of intangibles, but a mere arrangement of conceptualizations.

Limitations

Swart (2006) argues that theoretical frameworks such as human capital theory or RBV have added to the understanding of the sub-components of intangibles, however, such frameworks do not clearly state what it is and how it contributes to corporate performance. However, it is not the task of the aforementioned frameworks to provide a manual on how to link intangibles to corporate performance, but to provide a foundation for deriving and embedding intangibles in a much broader concept of what

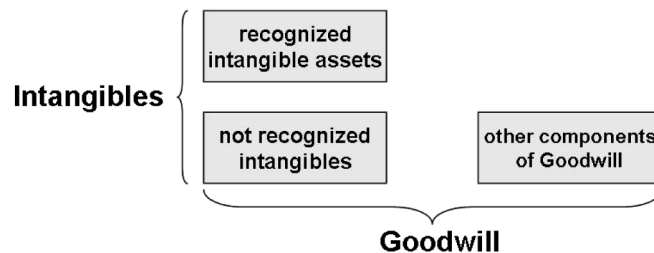


Figure 3.
Definition of intangibles
versus goodwill

Source: WGARIA (2005, p. 69)

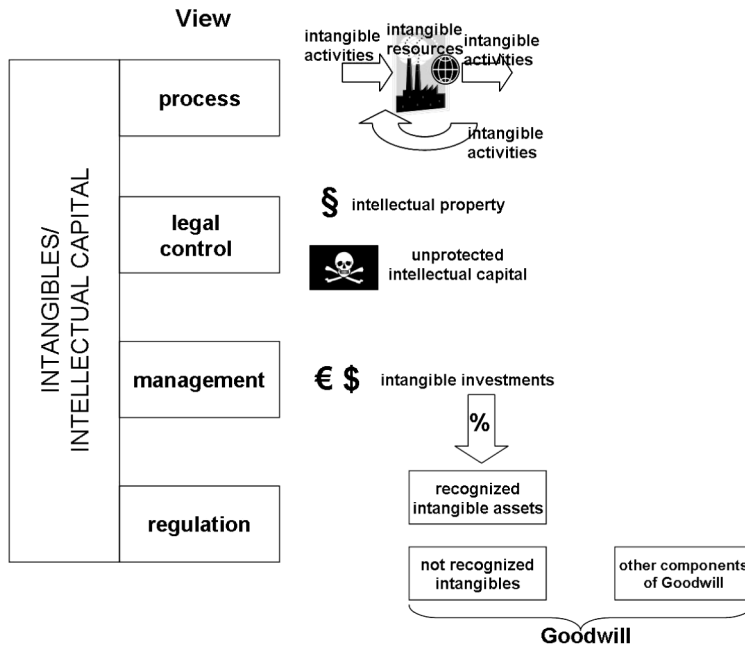


Figure 4. Arrangement of terms used

constitutes the firm. A company is not just made of intangible assets, and concepts which do not heed this fact are prone to forget valuable synergies. As we have shown, the RBV does indeed provide a useful conceptualization lens.

Another limitation of our paper lies in the relatively young age of the concept of intangibles in general. With only three decades of research to draw on, the instability of common definitions is a challenge. Furthermore, the empirical impact of intangibles is not empirically known with certainty over the long-term (i.e. over 30 years). Although we do assume that the nature of their impacts will still be evident and positive beyond that time period.

Conclusion

This paper attempts to derive a comprehensive definition of intangibles for future research. We show that it is possible to unify a characterization by first applying a resource-based view of the firm, defining intangibles as a subset of strategic resources, and then testing current definitions against this framework. It is even possible to assign these definitions to different points of view. We believe that by using our approach, a consensus is possible. Nevertheless, this paper is intended to be a first step in triggering further discussions, so researchers and practitioners refer to the same concepts when investigating the measurement, management, and disclosure of intangibles. The alternative is to bask in the glory of our own personal definitions while at the same time suffering from nomenclature regurgitation against untested common criteria.

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