

THE SURVEY OF TACIT KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN ORGANISATION

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Abstract: *At present the knowledge and experience of employees are considered to be the most valuable sources that organisations have to strive to protect. The correct, efficient, precise and timely management of knowledge of knowledge employees by the organisation's managers creates a competitive advantage. The purpose of the contribution is to identify the reasons for knowledge transfer in an organisation, test a dependency among selected qualitative characteristics and identification of preconditions supporting knowledge sharing as well as reasons for sharing knowledge by employees. The data has been collected through quantitative research done on the basis of a questionnaire survey aimed at managers in organisations in the Czech Republic.*

Keywords: *Knowledge Employee, Tacit Knowledge, Knowledge Sharing, Knowledge Continuity, Organisation, Survey.*

JEL Classification: *J24.*

1. Introduction

Information is an important and valuable commodity of today. If used efficiently (combined with an individual's ideas, skills and abilities), information is transformed into the most valuable knowledge. Information not only has to be transferred speedily and efficiently, but it has to be collected, stored and efficiently shared in order to get transformed "by hand of a capable person" – a manager or an employee – into knowledge. Formerly knowledge management and administration of knowledge were performed by individual in-company units, but they gradually gained strategic importance for the entire organisation. At present knowledge management is one of the most studied areas in organisations. This is because without their employees organisations would not be able to achieve the set goals. Only thanks to knowledge that is carried by people organisations can succeed compared to others. All an organisations' employees – regardless of the type of work they do – possess knowledge, predominantly tacit knowledge. It is important to understand who knows what and how they treat their knowledge and to make sure that it is not lost when an employee leaves the organisation.

Society has always had employees that could be described as knowledge employees. In the last fifty years, however, developed economies have seen a rapid increase in their percentage in relation to the overall number of employees, and organisations' growth and prosperity are attributable primarily to these employees (Mládková, 2004; Truneček, 2004). (Drucker, 1998) says that further economic growth cannot be achieved by the continuous growth of human resources. The productivity of each individual has to be enhanced, i.e. the transformation into a knowledge employee

has to take place. (Reboul et al. 2006) list the following characteristics of knowledge employees:

- Their main work tool is their brain, the loss of a knowledge employee therefore means a loss of the company's capital.
- They utilize knowledge in their work – they create it, distribute it or apply it.
- Their work position requires constant learning and improvement.
- They have their own ways – two knowledge employees would never use exactly the same method.
- Their productivity and quality of work is hard to measure.
- They dislike being told how to proceed.

According to (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) all employees of an organisation, including workers, can be knowledge employees, i.e. people with the necessary (critical) knowledge who are able to utilize it at the right moment. They thus emphasise the concept of knowledge management as a strategic advantage of an organisation which determines the change in organisational culture shared by all employees. (Mládková, 2004) defines a knowledge employee as an individual who possesses a specific item of knowledge or a set of such items, the so-called tacit knowledge.

It is possible to say that tacit knowledge is associated with a specific carrier and its transfer to another employee is more difficult than in the case of explicit knowledge. The major part of knowledge possessed by an employee is considered to be tacit knowledge. This type of knowledge is crucial for an organisation. For other employees in the organisation it may be difficult to gain this knowledge (it can be time consuming and costly or completely impossible if they lack the knowledge or skill that conditions the creation of a specific piece of knowledge) or use it (if it is tied to a certain certificate, usually a university diploma or a certificate of apprenticeship). A knowledge employee is often the only person in an organisation who possesses this specific piece of knowledge.

(Mládková, 2004 and Reboul et al., 2006) highlight that managing a knowledge employee is connected with a number of obstacles, for example:

- a part of the knowledge s/he works with can be subconscious, which can cause problems when training the employee's successor,
- a knowledge employee's leaving can cause greater problems than expected.

In other words, the main problem regarding knowledge employees lies in the fact that the process through which they create value takes place in their heads, is partially subconscious and managers are therefore unable to check it directly (Mládková, 2004).

2. Statement of a problem

The aim of the contribution is to identify the reasons for knowledge transfer in an organisation and test a hypothesis that the employee's motivation to transfer knowledge depends on the size of the organization whether there is no such dependency. Furthermore, the article specifies preconditions facilitating the use of

tacit knowledge by knowledge employees. The first part is dedicated to the explanation of key terms, and the following parts deal with the identification of preconditions supporting knowledge sharing as well as reasons for sharing knowledge by employees.

The article is based on the analysis of secondary sources and the synthesis of outcomes. The data has been collected in a quantitative survey designed as questionnaire investigation. The respondents (167) were medium- and higher-level managers employed by organisations from different sectors operating in the Czech Republic. The data was evaluated by means of absolute and relative frequencies using the LimeSurvey application and the Microsoft Excel 2007 and SPSS software. Testing is done by Pearson Chi-Square and Fisher's exact test.

3. Problem solving

3.1 Role of a knowledge employee in an organisation

A knowledge employee is therefore described as a person who possesses the relevant piece of knowledge, knows how to use it and, most importantly, is given an opportunity to use it. Knowledge employees also include managers, i.e. employees who are responsible for the performance or process of certain activities and for the achievement of an organisation's goals. To perform their work they also need certain knowledge, skills and abilities.

Tacit knowledge is associated with one specific carrier. In case knowledge employees leave the organisation, their knowledge leaves too. Organisations have to be able to identify knowledge employees, carriers of knowledge that is critical for organisations (critical knowledge being knowledge without which certain job cannot be performed properly (Beazley, 2004; Eucker, 2007; Stam, 2009), and in case they want to leave (e.g. for reasons of retirement or joining a competitor) to motivate them and stimulate them to transfer their tacit knowledge to their successors, i.e. to ensure knowledge continuity.

One of the individual psychological factors that manifest in the process of implementation of knowledge management in organisations is, for example, the fact that many employees still associate knowledge with power. Therefore an employee providing his/her knowledge to another person feels that they are losing this power. These employees usually worry about the loss of exclusiveness of their influence that is a guarantee of work and colleagues' respect. What can also matter is the fear of revealing the knowledge to others because the carrier is afraid that the information provided would not be sufficiently appreciated by the recipients.

In particular younger and less experienced employees feel insecure, as they are unable to correctly assess the benefit their work brings. Employees' motivation plays an important role too. Knowledge sharing can be perceived as extra work; this is closely connected with the fear of loss of compensation. Some employees see knowledge sharing as a way of depriving themselves of the possible remuneration for their work.

When introducing knowledge management it often appears that some employees have difficulties identifying the basic company values, needs and goals. They are not aware of individual elements of the organisational culture and they often experience conflicts of motives and incompatible tendencies, i.e. deciding between two or among more different tendencies.

In the first quarter of 2010 a survey was carried out among organisation managers. They were asked to participate in the survey on the application of knowledge management and management of knowledge continuity. 814 managers at the middle and higher levels of management were selected, regardless of the sector in which their organisations operate. Respondents had to meet three selection criteria. The following people were addressed:

- middle- and higher-level managers responsible for the functioning of their organisation,
- 2 managers per organisation, as a maximum,
- respondents who have at least one direct subordinate.

The questionnaire was completed by 167 managers and the total percentage of questionnaires returned was 20.52 %.

The survey question “Do you share your knowledge? If not, please state why.” was answered as follows: the first group of respondents (56 %) answered that they preferred to share all knowledge under any circumstances while the second group of respondents (44 %) said they preferred to share only general knowledge. The latter do not wish to transfer a major part of their knowledge as they consider it their competitive advantage against others and they do not want to lose their job and be substituted by somebody who is better than they are. See Figure no.1.

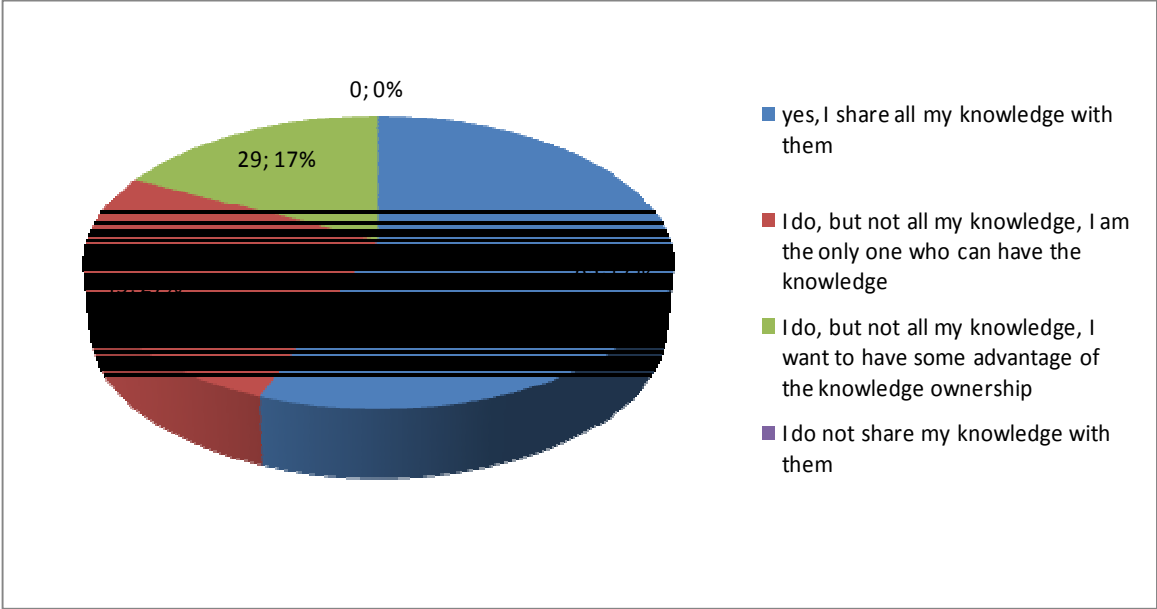


Fig. 1: Knowledge sharing in organisations

Source: (author’s survey)

A total of 117 respondents (70 %) responded that when they shared knowledge with their colleagues they did so because they were pleased that it would be spread throughout the organisation and would be of use to everybody. This is so-called altruism. On the other hand, 43 respondents (26 %) said they expected to be provided with a piece of knowledge in exchange for the piece of knowledge they had communicated. This is so-called reciprocity. Only 7 respondents (4 %) provided knowledge with the aim of improving their image and reputation. The results in graphic form are displayed in Figure no. 2.

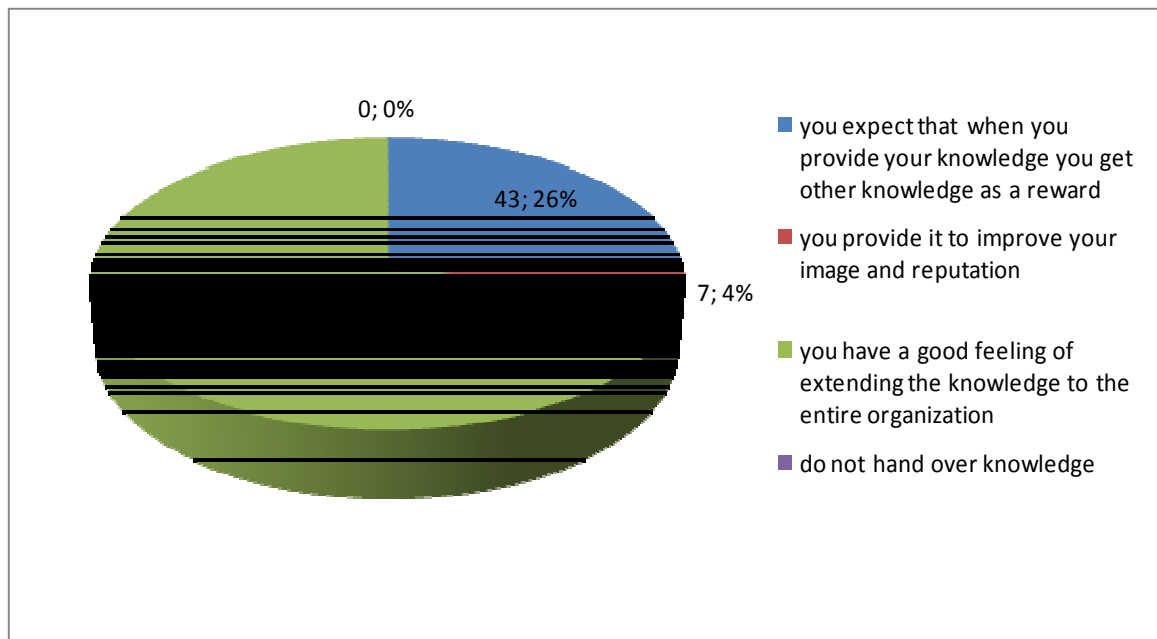


Fig. 2: Reasons for knowledge sharing in organisation

Source: (author's survey)

Employees who possess knowledge and experience should be treated as experts by their organisations and the management team should be aware of these employees. Organisation should stimulate their employees to transfer knowledge and experience and to try to eliminate the traditional rivalry accompanying the transfer of experience and knowledge. Managers at the middle level of management should concentrate on assisting their direct subordinates to succeed and thus perform the role of instructors within their organisation.

The research was also focused on determining whether employees were stimulated to share, transfer and preserve knowledge and experience in the given organisation. More than half of the respondents, 61.7 % in total, responded that in their organisation they were not stimulated to do so. Only 38.3 % of the managers addressed stated that they were stimulated and therefore had internal motivation for the transfer thereof.

As the question was presented as half-open, the respondents could specify how they were stimulated and subsequently motivated to share, transfer and preserve knowledge and experience. 11 of the respondents who gave a positive answer (i.e. "yes") did not provide any specification. A total of 53 respondents said that their organisation stimulated and ensured knowledge continuity. For example, 13 of the respondents

mentioned the financial compensation given to employees leaving the organisation as one factor. Two respondents from the above 13 said financial sanctions were also applied in the event that leaving employees were not willing to transfer the knowledge and experience related to their work position to their successors. Four respondents expressly stated that this process was enacted in their corporate culture. Other respondents (36 in total) mentioned that the sharing, transfer and preservation of knowledge and experience by a leaving employee (document filing, handover documents, database completion, initial training of a successor, monitoring (supervision) of a trained successor, etc.) were required, but were not incorporated in the organisational culture. In cases where the knowledge continuity ensuring was not part of the organisational culture, organisations relied on good long-term working relationships with the leaving employee and a personal agreement that would stimulate the employee's will to train his/her successor.

The hypothesis was tested based on the above findings: H0 - Motivation of employees leaving with critical knowledge to transfer their knowledge does not depend on the size of organisation.

Tab. 1: Contingency table

			Stimulation and motivation		Total
			no	yes	
Velikost organizace	do 19 zaměstnanců	Count	30	11	41
		Expected Count	25,3	15,7	41,0
		% within Velikost organizace	73,2%	26,8%	100,0%
		% within Stimulace a motivace	29,1%	17,2%	24,6%
		Adjusted Residual	1,7	-1,7	
	20-99 zaměstnanců	Count	43	14	57
		Expected Count	35,2	21,8	57,0
		% within Velikost organizace	75,4%	24,6%	100,0%
		% within Stimulace a motivace	41,7%	21,9%	34,1%
		Adjusted Residual	2,6	-2,6	
	100-249 zaměstnanců	Count	14	9	23
		Expected Count	14,2	8,8	23,0
		% within Velikost organizace	60,9%	39,1%	100,0%
		% within Stimulace a motivace	13,6%	14,1%	13,8%
		Adjusted Residual	,0	,1	
	250 a více zaměstnanců	Count	16	30	46
		Expected Count	28,4	17,6	46,0
		% within Velikost organizace	34,8%	65,2%	100,0%
		% within Stimulace a motivace	15,5%	46,9%	27,5%
		Adjusted Residual	-4,4	4,4	
Total	Count	103	64	167	
	Expected Count	103,0	64,0	167,0	
	% within Velikost organizace	61,7%	38,3%	100,0%	
	% within Stimulace a motivace	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	
	Adjusted Residual				

Source: (author's survey)

Contingency Table 1 shows the relationship between stimulating and motivating staff to transfer knowledge and experience and size of organisation. The results show that workers are most stimulated and motivated in large organisations (i.e. 65.2 %), followed by small organisations with under 19 employees (26.8 %) and the organisations with 20-99 workers (24.6 %).

The conclusiveness of the gathered outputs was evaluated by tools of descriptive statistics i.e. absolute and relative frequency. The Pearson Chi-Square test checks dependencies in a contingency table. The Pearson's chi-square test, also known as the chi-square goodness-of-fit test, is used to match expected and observed frequency (i. e. H0). If an H0 is rejected the observed frequency differs from expected.

In table 2 there are listed other results of Chi-Square tests. Likelihood Ratio provides statistically same estimation as Pearson's chi-square test. For overall interpretation of test results asymptotical significance level is important and is compared to value specified at 0.05. Linear-by-Linear Association shows level of coupling between variables in contingency table.

Tab. 2: Dependency test of qualitative features for contingency table no. 1

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	20,941 ^a	3	,000
Likelihood Ratio	20,851	3	,000
Linear-by-Linear Association	17,168	1	,000
N of Valid Cases	167		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8,81.

Source: (author's survey)

Table 2 shows the results of the qualitative features of the test subject. Since the p - value observed by using χ^2 test (Pearson Chi-Square) is 0.000 (statistically) lower than the selected significance level $\alpha = 0.05$, the zero hypothesis H0 is rejected. Doing stimulation and motivation of leaving employees with critical skills depends on the size of the organization. Dependence between the stimulating and motivating departing employees and the size of the organisation is statistically significant at the 5 % significance level. Therefore the larger the organisation is, the more it stimulates its employees to transfer knowledge and experience to the successor, which are then more personally motivated. The power of dependency was determined by the correlation coefficient and Cramer's coefficient (see table 3).

Tab. 3: Dependency test

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	,354
	Cramer's V	,354
	Contingency Coefficient	,334
N of Valid Cases	167	

Source: (author's survey)

Based on the contingency coefficient the proven statistical relationship among the descriptive characteristics can be confirmed as direct (due to its positive value) and weak (relative to the calculated absolute correlation characteristics near 0.4).

From the specified the hypothesis H0 was rejected and an alternative hypothesis H1 was accepted. Both are telling about the dependence among investigated characteristic. Also the force of dependence measured is 0,4. The following hypothesis was confirmed: Motivation of leaving employees with critical knowledge depends on the size of organization (the dependence is direct, weak). Presented results can be generalized on selected sample.

The results are consistent with a research of Kim, Lee (2006), which states that a reward system influences willingness to share knowledge. It also state, that stimulation of employees is more sophisticated in large organisations. Smith and Mckeen (2003) and Zhang et. al. (2006) state that existence of reward system (e.g. bonuses) strengthens employee motivation to share knowledge. It means that regard system can stimulate knowledge transfer and simplify access to the knowledge in the organisation. Motivation system has also positive effect on knowledge quality.

3.2 Discussion

One of the crucial preconditions for the utilization of tacit knowledge is to understand the significance of tacit knowledge of each individual for the organisation. This should be embedded in the organisational culture which should clearly recognise that employees and their knowledge are indispensable for any organisation. The organisational culture should also stipulate that the organisation supports learning and continuous improvement of qualifications and knowledge of its employees. Each employee should identify with the organisational culture which should teach him/her from the very beginning of his/her professional career in the organisation to share, transfer and preserve tacit knowledge and experience and to adopt this as his/her personal duty and not as an obligation imposed in a directive manner. This can be achieved by a suitably designed motivational remuneration system – covering not only financial remuneration, but also opportunities for professional growth, etc. It is clear from the above that knowledge is still frequently seen as a source of power and sharing it with other people as risky, dangerous and threatening. One of the solutions consists in creating a team of managers and employees of the organisation that will be involved in the implementation of knowledge management and management of knowledge continuity. It is equally important to appoint a so-called knowledge professional holding, for example, the position of a Chief Knowledge Officer who would be able to

motivate employees in a suitable way and fairly evaluate their willingness to share and transfer their knowledge. The basic activities of a high-quality knowledge manager include participation in the development of an appropriate organisational culture that encourages knowledge sharing.

Organisation management should respect the fact that tacit knowledge is the intellectual property of the given employee. Managers should realise that sharing, transfer and preservation of knowledge in organisations cannot be imposed in a directive manner. Such an approach would demotivate employees and undermine their will to share knowledge with their colleagues (knowledge management) or transfer it to their successors (knowledge continuity management). Therefore it is fundamental to create a suitable organisational climate and friendly atmosphere that would enhance the use of tacit knowledge, its sharing through apprenticeship, storytelling and communities.

In terms of business strategy, management of knowledge means trying to surpass what is already known earlier than somebody else does and benefiting from the creation of challenges and opportunities that others have no idea of.

4. Conclusion

Organisations start to realise that in a continually swifter competitive environment they can no longer rely solely on their size and capital strength, but primarily on their employees, i.e. knowledge employees who are knowledge carriers. Employees are usually carriers of tacit knowledge and it is very important for organisations to focus on the identification of critical knowledge of their employees and to encourage, to the maximum possible extent, sharing, transfer and preservation of such knowledge.

The survey has confirmed that in a well set-up organisational environment there is willingness to transfer knowledge and organisations should take advantage of that since this in itself is a motivational element. The requirements for a person's knowledge and skills are constantly changing in modern society and for man to succeed on the labour market and to compare favourably with his/her competitors, s/he has to continuously deepen and widen his/her knowledge and thus increase the competitiveness of the organisation s/he works for. This is how s/he turns into a knowledge employee possessing critical knowledge that is highly valued in today's organisations.

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