

ANALYSIS OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN POLISH COMPANIES

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Knowledge management is knowledge about what people know and how to acquire, organize and benefit from that knowledge. Knowledge management, from a strategic point of view is the art of building, a knowledge-based company that effectively use knowledge, business strategy, people, and corporate culture. Therefore, an important prerequisite for developing and achieving competitive advantage through knowledge management is the way to utilize human potential. Because the modern educational system for future employees is an important factor that influences the development of a knowledge-based economy. It is important to raise the level of educated and talented people in Poland, who can quickly adapt to changing environmental conditions.

In the knowledge-based economy, there have been observed several types of processes related to knowledge. These processes are: localization, acquisition, creation, transfer, use and retention of knowledge. These processes take place at the level of the whole economy. Properly supported, they complement each other, creating added value mainly using knowledge in the company.

Processes related to the use of knowledge also occur at the level of an individual company. These are companies that manage knowledge in a conscious and systematic way. Knowledge is a strategic resource for them, they seek to manage it as efficiently as possible. It seems that knowledge management is most effective at the level of an individual company.

The main instrument for promoting the knowledge-based economy at the regional level is the creation of the Regional Innovation System. Moreover, regional aspects of the education policy of the country important at the time of Poland's integration with the European Union. EU countries in the field of education have a diverse but very interesting internal policy. The cumulating of certain experiences, related to functioning in the administrative and educational system, gives rise to the formulation of conclusions about local and regional conditions and certain actions regarding legislative corrections. Thus, it allows to take appropriate innovative measures. Region performance is determined based on demographic, socio-economic, regional, technological and institutional factors. Recommendations are based on a comparative analysis of the development potential of individual regions, which are characterized by similarities and are a source of later successes.

The connection between the central and local aspects of the knowledge-based economy varies from country to country in the European Union. It is the governments

that take responsibility for controlling and managing the educational systems through appropriate legislation. This does not mean that there are no regional policies and that other competencies such as human resources, finance and above all pedagogical supervision, do not undergo some gradual decentralization. The principle is simple: the more freedom or autonomy is given to schools, cultural institutions or other organizations of this type, the more powerful must be the external and regulated supervision of the higher levels, regional and central.

The institutional and business environment has an indirect influence on the knowledge-based economy. It comes from forces acting in several dimensions, such as a political, technical, economic, capital and sociocultural dimension.

The economic dimension is affected by inflation, living costs and money supply. The sociocultural dimension, directly related to social values, determines what types of products and services will be accepted by consumers. In the creation of a knowledge-based economy, the role of the capital market is also very important. A knowledge-based company is often a very difficult undertaking, operating only within a particular high risk action. It seems, however, that the technological dimension has the greatest impact on such activities. It is related to the new production and organizational techniques that a company must implement and for which a company must create appropriate adaptive systems [1, p. 16].

In 2011 there was research work conducted through questionnaire forms addressed to professionals in project management of various industries and specialties. Respondents filled in traditional surveys or answered questions via the specialized survey portal SurveyMonkey.com. In total, 309 respondents answered. The results of the research showed that the most common actions were: «identifying the set of knowledges needed to carry out the project during its planning» and «arranging summing up meetings after their completion». Both actions have been assigned «always» by one fifth of respondents. In terms of the least frequently used actions, the answers were:

the project management department assists teams in accessing the knowledge they need to implement the project (23,5 % – «never», 24,1 % – «sometimes»);

the project experience is being documented during the project (17,1 % – «never», 30,5 % – «sometimes»);

the project summary meeting is held at the end of the project (29,5 % – «never», 14,7 % – «sometimes»).

The distribution of responses regarding the set of knowledges required in the project at its planning stage

is, except for the last answer, almost uniform and oscillates within a quarter of respondents' responses. The largest group of respondents (25,6 %) indicated that the practice was «usually» implemented in projects. A bit smaller number of respondents (24,6 %) answered «often». On the other hand, 23,5 % of the participants «always» determined the set of knowledges. Only one out of twenty respondents (4,44 %) stated that the practice was «never» applied. Almost every fifth respondent (18 %) «always» identified sources of knowledge during project planning. The largest group (27,6 %) was respondents who «usually» identified the sources, and 27,3 % of respondents «sometimes» did that.

Creating the possibility in a company to go back to previous project experiences, when starting new projects, seems to be a fundamental and key practice for knowledge management in projects.

17,5 % of the participants indicated that there was «always» the possibility of going back to previous experiences. And almost one third (29,6 %) referred to «often». At the same time, however, it should be noted that almost an identically large group of people (28,9 %) gave it «sometimes» response. In turn, one seventh respondent (7,2 %) «never» had the possibility.

The importance of project team competencies for project success is well known and not questionable. Although it is the knowledge and competencies of individuals that decide on their membership and role in the team, the process of selecting and recruiting the right people for the team is often beyond the scope of the project manager. The team's knowledge, which consists of the sum of its members' knowledge and synergistic effect, should be specific to the project and complemented where deficiencies arise.

In the distribution of responses in regards with the appropriate level of knowledge and competencies of project teams in terms of project requirements, 39,4 % of the respondents indicated that the level «usually» corresponded to these requirements. The answer «often» was indicated by every third respondent. Knowledge and competencies of project teams «always» corresponded to project requirements according to every fourteenth respondent (6,8 %). It is worth noting, however, that the answer «never» was pointed out by just four respondents.

Another issue was the practical awareness of the sources of knowledge and possibilities of their use in the project. Most responses belonged to the answer from the middle of the scale. 44,5 % of the respondents indicated that such awareness «usually» exists. The second was the «sometimes» answer (28,4 %). Every sixth respondent (16,4 %) indicated that such awareness «often» exists and every twelfth (7,5 %) chose «always». Total lack of such knowledge was acknowledged by 9 people (3,1 %) [2, p. 1].

Another study was presented by PWC in 2013 and was aimed at diagnosing the approach of Polish medi-

um-sized enterprises to knowledge management processes. It was about identifying and overcoming barriers that hinder employees from knowledge sharing. 65 companies of a diverse workforce took part in the survey.

1. The research showed that: medium-sized enterprises were aware that lack of knowledge management processes could reduce their ability to compete:

about 80 % of respondents saw the strong negative impact of lack of knowledge management solutions on the company's ability to compete;

nearly 60 % of respondents recognized the dominant role of key employees in the formation of the value of a company;

respondents were concerned that the outflow of knowledge from the company or the barriers to knowledge sharing could have significant (42 %) or key (33 %) importance for the quality of the services provided;

two out of three people considered limited innovation a significant loss for the company, and one out of five claimed that it was a key loss.

2. Despite awareness of threats, knowledge management was not always a priority for businesses:

about every fourth respondent believed that the company did not have any system supporting knowledge management;

even though one third of employees strongly agreed that supervisors encouraged employees to share knowledge, one out of five respondents did not share that opinion;

a relatively high percentage of companies (over 60 %), where few or no meetings were held for sharing information, could mean that sharing information within the company is not a priority for them.

3. Employee involvement and definition of strategic knowledge resources were identified as key contributors to knowledge sharing in companies:

respondents rated employee involvement as a key factor in knowledge sharing (nearly 100 % of respondents). That meant that companies were aware of the importance of non-financial motivational incentives;

nearly 60 % of the participants emphasized the key role of the appropriate organizational culture for the effectiveness of knowledge management processes;

the fact, that companies perceived the need to involve a broad group of employees in knowledge management processes, indicated the maturity of companies in the awareness of the role of knowledge management;

90 % of respondents recognized the identification of key employees in terms of their knowledge as important;

respondents also perceived the need for system solutions for processes of the inflow of knowledge, including dedicated IT solutions [3, p. 1].

Another research named «Knowledge management in IT companies in Poland» was presented on the Management, Knowledge and Learning International Conference in 2014 in Slovenia.

The first issue concerning knowledge management status was the issue about the level of advancement in knowledge management in the companies participating in the survey.

In a large enterprise, most employees (86,56 %) could see and they were aware that knowledge management had been implemented. In medium-sized enterprises, the largest group of respondents (35,84 %) rejected the existence and need for knowledge management. At the same time, 30,18 % of respondents claimed that their companies planned to introduce knowledge management or were implementing such an idea. 10,37 % of respondents were in favour of practical knowledge management. In small enterprises, the percentage distribution of responses at two levels of knowledge management was comparable. 29,75 % of respondents stated lack of knowledge management and at once could feel a need for knowledge management. Almost an identical percentage of respondents (28,51 %) confirmed that knowledge management existed in their companies. Almost every fifth respondent (19,42 %) knew about planning activities for knowledge management implementation.

Another issue concerning knowledge management referred to corporate strategy. In a large enterprise, 83,58 % of employees said that knowledge management was a component of corporate strategy. In medium-sized enterprises, the response was usually negative. Only 24,52 % of respondents confirmed that knowledge management was a part of the business strategy. As for small enterprises, 88,42 % of respondents considered knowledge management an element of corporate strategy.

Another question refers to a responsibility for knowledge management. In a large enterprise, 77,61 % of respondents believed that there were job positions in charge of implementing knowledge management in a company. As for medium-sized and small companies the response was negative. Only 16,98 % of employees working in medium-sized enterprises and 15,28 % in small enterprises knew that knowledge management was a responsibility of certain job positions.

Another question concerns the existence of a system of measurements that enables the assessment of knowledge management effectiveness. In a large enterprise, most respondents (77,61 %) believed that such a system did exist. The results were opposite in other enterprises. 81,13 % of employees in medium-sized companies and 88,84 % in small ones refused that such system of measurements existed.

The next question making it possible to describe the status of knowledge management in information technology companies referred to reasons for taking interest in and implementing knowledge management. In a large enterprise employees subject to survey mentioned the following factors as causing the need for knowledge management: – improved quality of services – 65,67 %, –

increased competitiveness – 62,68 %, – improved customer satisfaction – 59,70 %, – cost reduction – 56,71 %.

Employees of medium-sized enterprises could see the function of knowledge management as an improvement in the following areas of the organisation: – increased effectiveness – 78,30 %, – improved customer satisfaction – 75,47 %, – time savings – 70,75 %, – improved management – 62,26 %, – cost reduction – 60,37 %.

Among indicators which, if improved, were/could be the reason for putting the concept of knowledge management into use, 242 of responding employees working in small enterprises mentioned the following: – improved quality of services – 71,07 %; – improved management – 57,02 %; – increased effectiveness – 56,19 %; – time savings – 56,19 %; – improved customer satisfaction – 53,71 %; – increased competitiveness – 50,82 %.

Knowledge management encounters some barriers that limit its effectiveness. Barriers stated by employees of a large enterprise included: lack of financial support (59,70 %), ineffective communication (56,71 %), employee turnover (50,74 %) and improper management style (41,79 %).

Taking into consideration the results of survey, a list of the best and the weakest practices regarding knowledge management process could be developed. Employees of a large company declared the following good knowledge management practices: – using the consulting services to find specialist information (74,13 %); – setting up appropriate conditions for developing individual and group knowledge (73,23 %); – archiving the knowledge of key employees (73,13 %); – using proper data protection (65,12 %); – creating knowledge by using own research and development resources (63,78 %) [4, p. 280].

In this way, the research shows that knowledge management is a management area that uses knowledge, methods and tools to effectively coordinate complex and unique enterprises. According to this definition, project knowledge can be considered as a useful resource of information that enables projects to meet their goals regarding time, cost and quality.

Based on the analysis of the survey results, it follows that knowledge management was implemented in accordance with the plan only in the large companies. The main aim of this measure was to increase customer satisfaction by improving the quality of services and, consequently, to increase the competitiveness of the company. Knowledge management is associated with corporate strategy. It means that it is viewed to accomplish strategy. It had been integrated into the structure of a company, which resulted in the formation of positions in charge of knowledge management. Knowledge management effectiveness is evaluated by means of specifically developed ratios. The large company subject to survey uses diverse sources of knowledge. Major sources include external training, obtaining knowledge from external experts, market research, previous experience

and meetings of executive staff with employees. They often participate in seminars and conferences; use relations with customers and third parties. Moreover, the company collects ideas of employees in the form of findings. To access these sources of knowledge, the employees usually use the intranet, internet, databases.

Knowledge in the company's activities, as well as in the implementation of projects, for many years has been of interest to researchers, who have proved its key importance for building competitive advantage for companies and businesses. Furthermore this subject area within the project management is taking on a new character as it is transferred to dynamic, limited in time, temporary and cooperatively implemented projects. There has been no proper research on this subject in Poland. And the literature presents the problem from a theoretical and model perspective rather than an empirical one.

The research has led to several research proposals. Most surveyed companies see a significant loss of business opportunities because of the difficulty in us-

ing knowledge effectively in projects. At the same time, however, this phenomenon is significantly related to the implementation of knowledge management practices in projects. In the group at risk of losing a chance in all cases, the average practice rates were lower. The biggest difference in the averages was in documenting project experiences. The essence of the respondents' positions in the projects was significant only from the perspective of the assessment of activities of project management department in terms of assisting in accessing knowledge. The best assessment was given by the members of the senior management in the company. The worst one was given by the members of steering committees and people not directly associated with the project work. Having rejected quite a few categories of positions, a statistically significant relationship was captured in the case of the perception of project team competencies. They were best assessed by project managers. The lower the level in the project hierarchy, the lower the assessments were.

References

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