

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AT THE ARMED FORCES ACADEMY OF GEN. M.R. ŠTEFÁNIK IN LIPTOVSKÝ MIKULÁŠ

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Abstract

In the article, we deal with the issue of knowledge management and its use in the Slovak Armed Forces (OS SR). The authors point to possible implementation of Knowledge management in the OS SR. A part of the article is an analysis of a conducted survey, which was focused on the results of the issue of Knowledge management with the aim of finding out how students, professional soldiers and employees apply their acquired knowledge and experience of Knowledge management in practice and, in particular, the manner in which they share it.

Key words: knowledge management, knowledge sharing, tacit knowledge, knowledge-based organisation.

Introduction

Management is currently undergoing changes which are often disruptive and obviously very quick and hectic. Man can hardly cope with them and already has to face new and further changes, almost as if from the future of the Galaxy.

Managers and leaders, and also employees in the various organisations – including the military – have to, as part of their assigned roles, pay attention to these outcomes and various situations in the present economic scene. One of the main sources of the development of society is information and knowledge that are significantly involved in the generation of new social (organisational) structures.

A new phenomenon in solving problems for the management of an organisation is the quality and innovation of knowledge of everyone's abilities, skills, and, in particular, competence. Takeuchi Nonaka states that *information and knowledge* are

also of importance; therefore, both depend on contexts and relationships. Information is more factual, knowledge is about beliefs and subjective opinion. In addition, knowledge is always associated with activity and should be used in practice¹.

The analysis of the survey focused on the issue of knowledge management in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic

Knowledge management in a civilian setting applies by virtue of the various methodologies set for its implementation. In the OS SR, none of the methodologies of Knowledge Management has been implemented so far. This issue has confirmed the fact that even in our sector, it is extremely necessary to create within the organisation and improved organisational behaviour of people at the sector, not only knowledge but also to teach people to share the knowledge database. The ability to access tacit knowledge comprehensively is most important, and to know how to use the tools accurately when sharing this knowledge within the OS SR².

On the basis of established knowledge, we can propose concrete measures and recommendations for management practice. On the basis of a study of the literature related to the subject of Knowledge management, and management and teachers' experience in consultation with experts in the field of management, we have set the following major and minor exploration goals.

Major goal: To find out whether respondents understood the issue comprehensively and whether they consider this kind of Knowledge management as a key factor for management in the Slovak Armed Forces. Minor tasks (goals):

- find out the opinions of respondents on the concept of management and Knowledge management
- find out the opinions of respondents on the use of knowledge and information in management practice
- find out the opinions of respondents on the need to know how to exchange and share knowledge,
- to find out the views of the respondents on the need to establish a knowledge database in the OS SR,
- find out the opinions of respondents on the need for a modern AOS as a high-quality knowledge-based organisation.

The setting of hypotheses is an important part of each survey because it directs the entire research process. On the basis of the objective of the survey, we have formulated the following hypotheses:

1 NONAKA, I., TAKEUCHI, H.: *The knowledge Creating Company: How Japanese Companies Create the Dynamics of innovation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

2 Petrufová, M. and Belan, L. (2015), *Manažment poznatkov v podmienkach OS SR*. Liptovský Mikuláš: AOS. Vedecká monografia. 2015. 282 s. ISBN 978-80-8040-123-4.

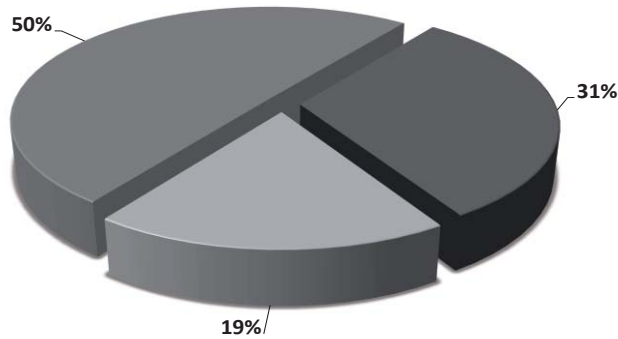
- *Main hypothesis* – Despite the importance of Knowledge management for further development of society, more than 60% of the members of AOS are not in favour of this issue.
- *PH1* – Non-understanding of the issue of Knowledge management is the main cause of inadequately applied knowledge sharing in the OS SR.
- *PH2* – We assume that in the Slovak Armed Forces, the knowledge-based organisation is not the preferred one, and the knowledge database has not been created yet.

The survey was carried out by the Armed Forces Academy of gen. M. R. Štefánik in Liptovský Mikuláš. The questionnaire was personally presented to all regular students of AOS, selected students of external study, participants of career courses, professional soldiers at the Centre of Education and professional soldiers. In the given period, we handed out a total of 200 questionnaires, while ensuring a 90.5% return and maintaining the anonymity of respondents. A total of 181 respondents participated in the survey. The questionnaire consisted of 21 questions.

Evaluation of the hypotheses of the survey

The first of the working hypothesis states that the professional soldiers and employees are unaware of the issue of Knowledge management and this is the main reason for inadequately applied knowledge sharing within the OS SR.

From the analysis of the replies, we have come to the conclusion that up to 71% of respondents understand the knowledge as an acquired concept of theoretical knowledge, the idea of terms. From what was stated, it follows that with reference to extensive and non-uniform characteristics of this concept, the majority of respondents correctly understand this concept, which is quite gratifying. In connection with the issue of Knowledge management, the result is worse as only 46% of the respondents understand this kind of management properly. It follows that the use of this type of management in military practice is still small. The process of the exchange and transfer of knowledge in contemporary organisations is little known to the respondents. Up to 50% of the respondents understand it rather technically, only 31% of the respondents are for the creation and dissemination of new knowledge, and only 19% of the respondents are in favour of the process of four-grade conversion of knowledge, which is supported by the Knowledge management.



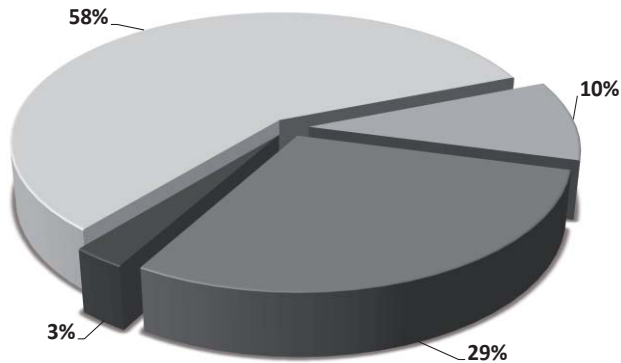
- a) by means of individual knowledge of employees - collecting and combining of knowledge by the creation and dissemination of new knowledge-31%
- b) in the process of four-grade conversion (SECI), the individual phases are socialisation, externalisation - articulation, combination - linking and internalisation - adopting - 19%
- c) through communication, individual and group approaches of managers and organisational politics and culture - 50%

Chart 1. Exchange of knowledge

Part of the issue of transfer, exchange and hand out of knowledge was also its application into the OS SR. 35% of respondents think that this method is rather bad to weak, 3% of respondents believe that it is quite wrong, and 28% of the respondents say they cannot assess it. On the other hand, 34% of respondents perceive it as a good way of exchange. From the analysis of these issues focused on the issue of Knowledge management, as well as at the level of exchanges and the sharing of this knowledge, it can be deduced that respondents do not understand the issue of Knowledge management correctly, by which hypothesis No 1 has been confirmed.

The second hypothesis was based on the assumption that there is no preferred knowledge-based organisation and the knowledge database has not been created yet in the OS SR. In the context of this hypothesis, we were interested in the opinions of respondents on their motivation to increase their knowledge, how they would prefer to exchange knowledge in their organisations, and which favoured tools of tacit knowledge they would choose to share with the rest of the employees in the organisation. From the analysis of the replies, we have come to the conclusion that our organisation should be knowledge-oriented, about 78% of the respondents believe in this. Unfortunately, there are still 17% of respondents who do not know and only 5% of respondents disagree. This refers, in particular, to the realisation that new knowledge and updating it are not possible without awareness of this intention.

We were also interested in the views of the respondents on the creation a knowledge database by means of a software program within the department of defence. 58% of respondents believe that we need to have such a database, 9% of respondents do not know how to respond to this issue, and 10% of respondents do not consider it as a priority and a need for the OS SR. The results of the analysis of the survey clearly show that the creation of such a database as a tool for sharing the tacit knowledge in the OS SR is necessary, by which hypothesis No 2 has been confirmed.



- a) it is necessary - 58%
- b) it is not necessary - 10%
- c) I do not know to comment - 29%
- d) Your opinion - 3%

Chart 2. Database of knowledge

The main hypothesis of the survey: In spite of the importance of Knowledge management for further development of the organisation, more than 60% of the OS SR professionals are not in favour of this issue.

In the context of the main hypothesis of the survey within the questionnaire, this was based on the assumption that Knowledge management in the OS SR and its meaning are rather underrated, and knowledge of the issue for most OS SR professionals is unknown. This also refers to the motivation of knowledge sharing among OS SR professionals.

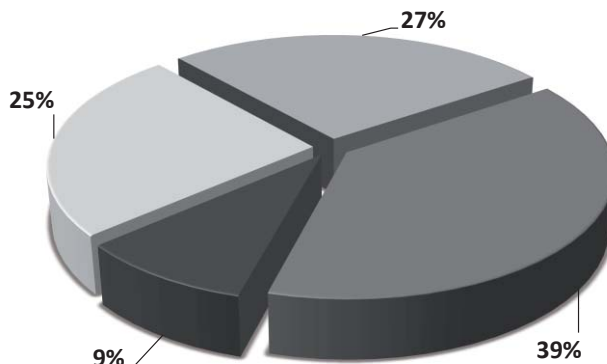


Chart 3. Motivation for knowledge sharing

Based on the responses, it can be deduced that the motivation of people is still an unexplored process that can still amaze today. As can be seen from the analysis of the survey, 45 respondents take it for granted – 25% - and understand the motivation as part of the culture of the organisation. Up to 49 respondents do not know how to judge this - 27% , which is a huge shame, even though most of it is claimed by

external students (37), who are still in the process of their own self-development. The response “Partially Yes“ appealed to most respondents (70) - up to 39%, but they did not state the cause of the claim, or what discrepancies they see. Only 17 respondents – 9% think that motivation for knowledge sharing within AOS is zero. They see the causes, however, in these interesting claims and arguments:

- no one in the management has any interest in my potential
- the question is defined too extensively
- the lack of greater freedom, motivation and a realistic view of the situation
- vertical system does not work, the error is in the management of AOS
- the lack of motivation and the objectivity of the evaluation of the subordinates
- lack of motivation, the question of a superior, a role model
- in OS SR, the sense of personal engagement, training and the possibilities for creative approach have disappeared
- a new way of thinking is more of a nuisance – bureaucracy, stuffy system, repressiveness, etc.
- there is no motivation - the cause is, in particular, the management.

On the basis of these claims, there emerges an entire range of respondents’ observations, which relate, in particular, to low motivation of staff and PrV, which is, in fact, a shame. In the context of knowledge management, motivation is incredibly important and necessary. Without it, it is not possible for subordinates to participate in the process of implementation of management knowledge into any organisation.

On the basis of the survey, it was found out that the level of knowledge about Knowledge management in the OS SR is not very positive. Knowledge arising from respondents on career courses and the Learning Centre does not transfer to lower grades, and subordinates do not understand this area, nor learn. Professional soldiers prefer personal development in the military professional field to in the field of Knowledge management. The staff of AOS would certainly welcome greater willingness from the management to create the conditions for sharing expertise, a new way of thinking, as well as new forms and possibilities of education in the field of Knowledge management. This fact is not in alignment with the policy of modern organisations that today focus on development of change management, project management, personal development, self-management, as well as Knowledge management. The reasons for this are various, for example, a lack of interest from current commanders, preference for an authoritative style of leadership to the lack of stimulation from the supervisor, or a lack of personal motivation.

A positive aspect of Knowledge management is that in the OS SR, the transfer and sharing of experience of commanders and soldiers from missions are already implemented within Lessons Learned. In light of the above findings of the survey conducted in connection with Knowledge management and the achievement of improvements, it is necessary to propose some recommendations and suggestions for management practice.

During the application of the principles of Knowledge management, it is possible to achieve considerable success in nearly every area of activity in the organisation.

For example, in the production sphere, this is, in particular, the improvement of processes, through to the development of new products. Similarly, it is necessary to apply the principles of Knowledge management in AOS conditions. This concerns, in particular, the improvement of all major educational and outreach activities, to the development and introduction of new services (educational services, development, cooperation, implementation of scientific knowledge into practice, etc.).

On the other hand, it is not possible to forget that critical knowledge is not only in the heads of employees, but is stored in multimedia devices (articles, books, guidelines, procedures, rules, laws, regulations, and others) from which data can be downloaded, processed, used, transmitted or archived. The following knowledge and skills can be acquire gradually by employees, downloading them from various sources, while applying their own subjective views and intuition. Thus, the implicit knowledge is deeply rooted in an individual's conduct, in his ideals and emotions. This type of knowledge is difficult to formalise, communicate and distribute. The justification given suggests the need to improve existing processes in AOS by means of using Knowledge management.

From the perspective of Knowledge management, it is necessary to know the external environment in any organisation – competition, customers, products, and surroundings (this should be part of the project or design study). In terms of AOS, it is possible to identify that the competition at the Ministry of Defence is weak (almost none), because they fulfil specific tasks arising from its mission. In the Slovak Republic, there is no similar higher education establishment that it would be possible to communicate with and compare to, what sometimes can be an advantage, but, at other times, turn into a disadvantage. One possibility is to use the experience of a similar military high school abroad. Therefore, it is necessary to develop international cooperation, identify current trends in education and training, a new vision and strategy. The important thing is to learn from the status of these schools within the society and, in particular, within the OS, to discover their strengths and weaknesses, and to assess the quality of education in all areas.

In relation to the customer (in AOS, customers are students and participants in courses), it is necessary to have information as to which current military environment they operate in, because they can also be participants in international missions, etc. Products for the customer form:

- theoretical knowledge of military issues, which should have a value in use
- practical skills and habits
- familiarity with the educational environment, book stock, and research establishments
- key trends for the development of AOS etc.

Knowledge is applied to solve new challenges, or problems at AOS, which everyday work in the educational process brings. Each of the fields should be considered, i.e., the specifics of technologies, methods and techniques, work procedures, and the possibility for their concrete implementation. Therefore, the use of Knowledge management must always be comprehensive and tangible. Knowledge management is not a goal, but only a means to achieve an objective in

any organisation. With respect to the efficiency of Knowledge management in the environment of each of the organisations (AOS), it is necessary to note, that this is a cycle that must be part of the strategic and operational components of Knowledge management – see figure 1.

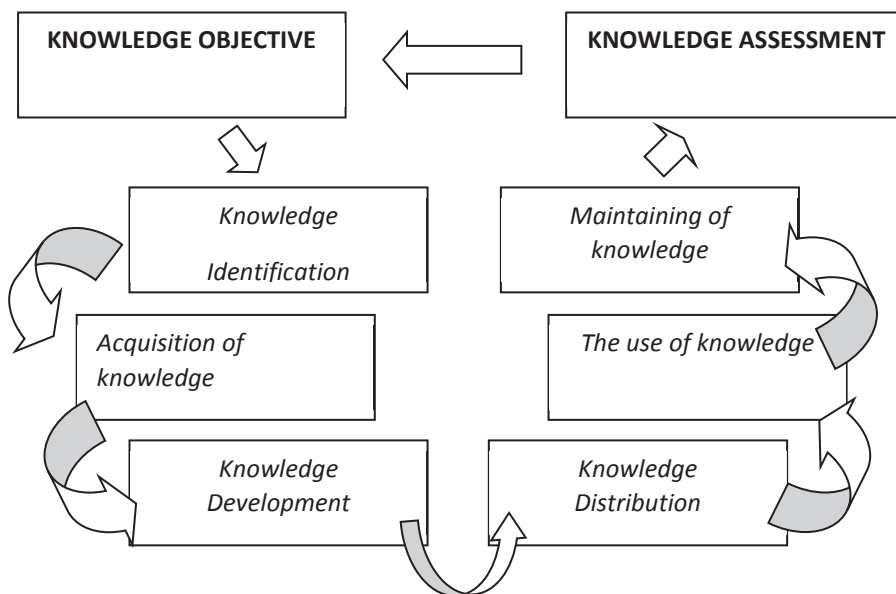


Figure 1. Components of Knowledge management³

On the basis of an analysis of the current situation, it is necessary to search for concepts of solutions, ideas for Knowledge management and, of course, to make a plan of necessary measures. In this context, it is necessary and important within AOS, to pay attention to the modifications to the current plan updates but especially the “AOS long-term development plan for the years 2015-2020”, which should already be “tailor-made” for this organisation. In this step, there is an opportunity for the development of the culture of the organisation, which should not be neglected. The following questions could be inspiring:

- What measures, procedures and mechanisms are to be implemented in order to increase the level of necessary knowledge and skills?
- How can we ensure that users / employees have access to relevant knowledge?

³ Mládková, L. (2004). *Management znalostí v praxi*. Praha: Profesionál Publishing, 2004. 189 s. ISBN 80-86419-51-7.

Possible steps – Knowledge management – a guide to its use in the AOS

1 step – Assessment of the initial situation.

At the beginning of this step, it is necessary to analyse the current situation in the AOS in order to review the activities and working methods that are associated with the use of knowledge and skills, their application and development, etc. For this purpose, in particular, the following questions can be used:

- What kind of knowledge is now used and what will be needed in the future, and in what areas?
- Where are the new, relevant knowledge and skills formed?
- In what form will the knowledge be archived/protected/destroyed?
- What kind of technological applications are used?
- Who performs what tasks, what are the concrete results?

It is very important to involve employees in the process of identifying needs and processing analysis of the current state. Employees may perceive knowledge gaps differently, and thus they can contribute with their ideas to the improvement of a given status. The results obtained must be evaluated and processed.

2 Step – The development of the concept of Knowledge management.

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3 step – Implementation

In this step of this phase, it is necessary to discuss the following questions:

- Organisational structure of an organisation (to clarify the detailed organisational structure of AOS; assign specific responsibilities and tasks, to agree on the rules which will be used in the framework of organisation within Knowledge management).
- Motivation of AOS employees (employees must obtain confidence in Knowledge management and must have the motivation for active participation in the project - involving people, organising training, information meetings etc.)

- Quality technological systems (project of information management, which includes the use of ICT, so that technological systems work and are stable and the system of transmission and data collection must be functional).

Other measures necessary for the successful implementation of Knowledge management in organisations such as the AOS (dissemination of positive results in the framework of the organisation and the development of appropriate steps to ensure that the leadership of the organisation should proceed on the basis of the Knowledge management project and the establishment of an advisory body for the settlement of issues related to Knowledge management).

4 step – Project assessment

After the introduction of the first steps, we need to start with evaluation of the plan for the implementation of Knowledge management and its measures. Already at the beginning of the Knowledge management project in AOS, it is important to determine whether, and the extent to which, the project plan is successful. We need to check to see if there are any problems in its implementation, which could jeopardise the next process. It is therefore necessary and ideal, if we are aware what areas we need to define right at the beginning of the implementation of the management:

- The criteria on the basis of which they will measure success – establishment of standards and performance indicators.
- The measures and steps that must be taken for the collection of data (surveys, interviews, evaluation, statistics, indicators, etc.).
- People who will be involved in the evaluation process.
- The regularity and the intervals of assessment.
- The documentation and dissemination of information.

These steps should help to identify problems in the implementation at the beginning of the process and for appropriate measures to be taken. They also have a positive impact on the success and continuation of the implementation of Knowledge management in the organisation. In terms of trends in the current knowledge-based society as well as in terms of the AOS, it is currently possible to identify:

- an increase in complex organisational structure and overstuffed administrative apparatus
- lack of optimisation of processes, particularly the process of planning, performance management and prediction of planning of educational services in conjunction with the needs of OS SR
- inadequate management of interpersonal relations,
- habits of managers, which often do not correspond to the current state of the open state university and the current state of the society.

These are all areas that give rise to the complexity of the organisation as a whole. It is also part of the proposal to integrate Knowledge management into the multi-dimensional strategy portfolio of the OS SR, which manages the academy – adopt a strategy of simplification into all management processes in terms of effectiveness and the process optimisation in AOS.

Conclusions

Knowledge management – relates, in particular, to the effective use of knowledge, skills and creativity as the key to the success of the modern organisation, which AOS certainly wishes to be. Knowledge management itself concentrates all of the development trends of recent ages, and, moreover, is trying to systematically develop a way how to identify, acquire, maintain and most importantly use the intellectual capital. Controlling the flow of knowledge is now becoming the most important priority. The concept of Knowledge management is currently considered to be the most advanced trend of development of organisations. A new age brings new hope, but also hidden threats. Indifferent attitudes to recognition inevitably leads to failure. The main factors of the knowledge society are becoming the people themselves, who are able to create and use new knowledge efficiently, deliberately and mainly constantly.

Implementation of Knowledge management in the OS SR is not at all a simple matter. Today's turbulent times create constant changes in the OS SR, and, as a result of this process, there are frequent organisational changes. The evil phenomenon of such changes, which affect the current events in the OS SR, is also the fact that professional soldiers are leaving, along with the leaving of intellectual capital, which is not currently adequately recorded. In this case, it is up to individuals and their willingness to leave their knowledge for other followers⁴.

An organisation that does not appreciate the work of its people and does not record their current information, data, knowledge, and experience necessary for further development of Knowledge management in their system, will not be able to learn in the future. The system can only function well if the whole cycle of Knowledge management is constantly filled, obtained, modified, and distributed through new knowledge.

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⁴ Hájeková, A., Kostrec, B. *Vreckový šlabikár lídra, máj 2013*, Oddelenia analýz a doktrín OdVCD Šbo GŠ OS SR. Dostupné na internete: <http://web.gs.mil.sk/sbo/ovcad/oad/lider/>.