

STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN THE ARMED FORCES ACADEMY OF GENERAL M. R. ŠTEFÁNIK IN LIPTOVSKÝ MIKULÁŠ, THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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The article stresses the importance of strategic knowledge management in the era of global competition. Strategic knowledge management raises the demand for permanent learning stressing the visions and personal aspirations of everyone within the modern efficient organisation. Within the AFA of General M.R. Štefánik and, inherently, in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, strategic knowledge management employs and implements knowledge as the ultimate step in the knowledge pyramid.

Key words: *strategic knowledge management, learning organisations, paradoxes of knowledge management, science, knowledge - oriented teaching at state military university.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The world of continuous change is similar to a living organism that should be examined systematically. Without changes in management it is not possible to change the system of education and self-education. The way towards establishing learning organisations affects every individual. Organisations which do not want to lag behind are constantly adapting to changing conditions and implementing new ways of thinking and acting. The substance of changes is based on personal mastery. It is a pity that public, as well state universities do not take a special interest in this matter. This is all the more true when it comes to defense establishments. Therefore, the implementation of knowledge management in the Slovak military collage (The Armed Forces Academy in Liptovský Mikuláš), as well as in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic is part of modern trends.

The reasons underlying the aforementioned fact are already known. In these turbulent times current management practices are full of revolutionary and apparently rapid changes. By the time of their adoption, new changes emerge as if from a future galaxy. Within the scope of

their competencies managers, leaders and company employees as well as military institutions staff have to pay particular attention to these areas and different situations in the current economic environment. Human resources management specialists often claim that the world of labor in the 21st century reincarnates and personifies itself. Hence, under such circumstances, human resources are the asset of nowadays' successful organisations and the "human capital", in particular, represents the basis for top knowledge creation and timely quality information. This process is secured with the considerable assistance of new electronic information, cyber technologies and professionals able to communicate rapidly anywhere on the planet [1]. Thus, the struggle to survive takes place in a large arena of competitiveness.

The same tendency exists within the Armed Forces of the SR although there are specific conditions laid down for state organisations and the powerful departments of state. Even in this environment management, as a corpus of theory and established practices, faces, instability, flexibility and speed of decision-making (sometimes there are more political decisions than military ones). If professional soldiers

want certainty in uncertain times they give their fate to the hands of managers who can help them achieve future objectives during these turbulent times. Nowadays there is more and more talk about organisation behaviour, learning organisations and their higher level – knowledge organisation, knowledge, and knowledge management. These notions and phenomena have been considered to be assets expressing new values. **The part of those efforts is also understanding knowledge management matters as strategies for the future.**

Thus, concerning the Armed Forces of the SR, knowledge management has been only partially implemented in military practice. It is partially replaced by Lessons Learned during training of units for missions. There is a lack of correct information in different processes, for different people at different levels (e.g. academics' access to various approved documents has been limited). If a knowledge management system existed within the Armed Forces of the SR, the necessary knowledge would be available. It would facilitate the work of managers as well as the performance of all organisation employees. It is the most important reason underlying the attention to be paid to this matter by professionals, as well as by the management team of every organisation (including the defence sector).

2. FUNDAMENTALS OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

The main goal of this chapter is to explain one of the basic notions used all along the article, namely “knowledge management” (hereinafter referred to as “KM”). “Knowledge” can be translated into the Slovak language as ‘vedomost’, ‘znanost’ poznatok – poznanie, (cognition, know-how), etc. There is no consensus in Slovakia at present which term is the best suitable for this kind of management (in practice it is often translated as: vedomostný manažment, znalostný manažment, poznatkový manažment, manažment poznatkov, etc.).

Collins and Parcell claim that **knowledge management (KM)** is a hybrid discipline which is not about science or certain ability. Knowledge management rather focuses on linking areas of learning with organisation development, human resources management and information systems. I. Burger asserts that

a knowledge company builds its existence on its employees' knowledge forwardness, on a deep knowledge analysis of its activities and processes, on knowledge – based management, and targeted management of knowledge discovery, improvement and its usage. Knowledge can be depicted as a **knowledge pyramid** including seven categories of which are interconnected and form a hierarchy.

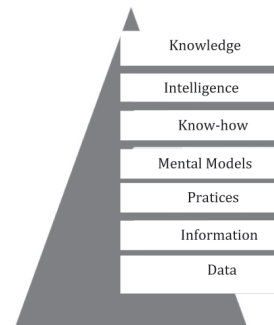


Fig.no. 1. Knowledge pyramid

Source: Burger, 2011.

According to scientific literature, the management of intellectual capital is defined as a complex sum of activities and processes orientated towards the creation, development and use of intellectual capital within a company. The management of intellectual capital is a file of activities and processes implemented particularly in the following areas: information management and knowledge management, customer and supplier relationship management, process management, output (performance) management, production management, controlling and protection of intangible assets. In simplistic terms, there are two forms of knowledge. Knowledge can be explicit or implicit. **Explicit knowledge** can be expressed by both formal and systematic languages. It can be written, drawn, or displayed. This type of knowledge is saved as data and information in documents, manuals, procedures, etc. and can be transferred, saved, stored, and archived. Knowledge can be expressed and shared as data and as such can be used in practice. **Implicit (tacit)** knowledge is a result from the interaction of explicit knowledge and experience, ideas, skills, abilities, intuition, personal ideas, and mental models of an individual, etc. This kind of knowledge is difficult or impossible

to explicitly transfer to another person, write it down or verbalize and share it, as it exists only in “people’s minds”.

Most tacit knowledge is hidden in the subconscious of people, but it is extremely important for an organisation. The current management experience points to the fact that the wealth of organisation knowledge is in the minds of its employees, in a tacit form. However, it depends on the individual features of an employee or work groups. It is not easy to gain or use this potential, because tacit knowledge is not visible, it is silent and managers tend to underestimate or ignore it. The consequences are usually unpleasant. Organisations orientated towards explicit, codified and directive management and the consequent strategy usually have difficulties in using tacit knowledge.

2.1 Conversion process and new knowledge creation – SECI model

Knowledge is created through the integration of its tacit and explicit forms, as well as through memory dimensions. The relationship between explicit and implicit (tacit) knowledge is dynamic and continuous. The change from one form to another is called “*conversion*”. Creation and advancement of knowledge in organisations is secured by a four-level conversion process (SECI) which consists of individual phases – socializing – experience, externalization – articulation, combination – connection and internalization-acquisition. In the current modern world of management organisations should be able not only to work with their employees’ knowledge, but also direct its transfer. Knowledge flow management is a new task from the point of view of management development. Efficient knowledge management shall focus on all operations aimed at making knowledge accessible for all organisation activities. It is necessary to create a methodology that connects specific knowledge with organisation specific needs. The theory of this article is based on an assumption that organisations shall focus on the use of such knowledge that contributes to the development of key processes and activities. Neither knowledge nor employees can be owned by the organisation. An employee is not a knowledge source of an organisation but its investor who invests this source under certain circumstances.

The *efficiency of knowledge management* shall be measured by its results, activities, expenditures and income. The use of stories proved to be an effective tool for breaking down barriers related to knowledge implementation. Nowadays, knowledge can be shared by two people or within a group of people, or a nation. Mankind has always used three tools to share tacit knowledge: storytelling, *master -apprentice relationship, and communities*.

The creation of a suitable environment inevitably creates preconditions for efficient KM. An excellent precondition for KM implementation is the creation of a friendly, open and non competitive environment and that depends on the type of organisation and its environment. The character of the environment in which knowledge is used can be influenced by different preconditions, factors and inhibitors that are all labeled as ‘environment friendliness’.

The basic assumptions of an efficient environment include: suitable organisation chart, free knowledge flow, knowledge as a basic assumption of competitiveness, information and knowledge systems integration, direct relationship with a customer, involvement of managers and employees, cultural differences. Efficient strategic KM requires the creation of a suitable organisation environment and culture. In order to create a suitable environment it is necessary to:

- *Eliminate technological barriers* – in order to avoid incompatibility among knowledge-sharing systems;

- *Eliminate barriers in processes* - the processes are often established in a way that there is no space to record knowledge after actions and hence the creation of special processes for KM is necessary;

- *Eliminate barriers of human behaviour*- request for help is not a weakness. Even an individual overloaded with work can help. One such barrier may be a person’s fear to provide information in order to avoid losing advantage.

- *Application of a community approach* – interpreted as we either sink to the bottom together or we manage it, as learning from others, creating common values, doubting conventions, being an example for others by means of openness and information-sharing.

The **Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO)** is a position filled by a person with specific knowledge that is extremely important for the organisation. Skilled employees are a significant part of an organisation's intellectual capital because they possess human capital – knowledge, motivation and competencies. Consequently, a Chief Knowledge Officer shall be appointed in order to establish a knowledge centre. The Chief Knowledge Officer and the centre employees have several responsibilities: an analytical responsibility to map sources of knowledge, a business responsibility to interpret and codify knowledge meaningfully, a technical responsibility to keep knowledge in databases, a responsibility for archiving to provide assistance to database users and search in databases, a managerial responsibility to undertake knowledge initiatives. It follows from the above that a special attention shall be paid to the Chief Knowledge Officer, in particular to his education and professional growth.

2.2. Objectives, advantages and benefits of KM for modern organisations

It follows from the above that KM focuses on unveiling existing or creating new knowledge, its formalization, storage, transfer, sharing, selection, processing, use and evaluation of its efficiency by means of feedback, as depicted by **Figure 2**. The support of mutual communication, cooperation, and the creation of a friendly non competitive environment for knowledge transfer is part of knowledge management. We can state that knowledge management coincides with all managerial activities. *The objective of KM is to have proper knowledge available at the right time.*

As for the **benefits of strategic KM for modern efficient organisations**, in order to successfully implement KM in organisations it is necessary to use various managerial procedures, methods and techniques (inductive, as well as deductive), time management techniques and methods at the border of management and psychology that consistently support knowledge management implementation in organisation. From the point of view of management, the benefits of successful KM implementation can be divided in two groups and these are as follows.

The first group contains benefits related to KM: knowledge processes realization, the use of technologies, improvement of knowledge – sharing and cooperation among organisation employees, expansion of best practices within the organisation, enhancement of learning and new employees' integration, improvement of project and innovation quality, improvement of relations with external environment (customers, competition, etc.), preparedness to respond to unexpected events and the ability to manage urgent and critical situations.

The second group comprises benefits related to the fundamental objectives of the organisation since the ultimate goal of KM is enhancement of the organisation functionality and achievement of higher quality performance such as increase in profits and revenue maximization, costs reduction, implementation of new working methods, creation of labour market opportunities, etc.

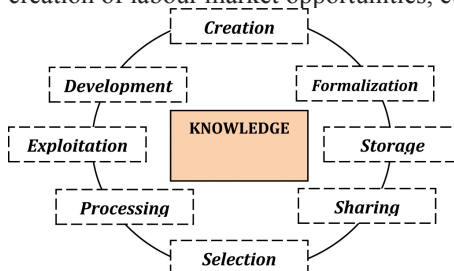


Fig. no. 2. The process of knowledge management.
Source: elaborated by the author

3. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT WITHIN THE AFA AND THE ARMED FORCES OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC. THE LESSONS LEARNED CASE

One of the most important factors contributing to achievement of objectives and tasks that should be fulfilled by the Armed Forces is the willingness of professional soldiers to learn and improve their knowledge continuously.

The data as well as opinions obtained from the surveys (survey in The Armed Forces of the Slovak republic conditions and also in Academy of Armed Forces in Liptovský Mikuláš) prove that professional soldiers are active with regard to their self-education and improvement of skills acquired. The Armed Forces Academy of General M. R Štefánik in Liptovský Mikuláš plays a crucial role in this process. Thus,

the academic staff of this educational establishment draws the attention of all the students taking bachelor and master degree studies, and in particular of those within the study program "Management of the military organisation" that all of the above are part of future managers'/commanders' education. In this respect, this approach is formalized within the aforementioned study program by the inclusion of compulsory optional subject matters, especially into the subsequent master program. Within the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic the academic staff has good experience with the application of new age management practices such as Lessons Learned. Despite increased efforts and several measures it still remains difficult to fully implement Lessons Learned in the environment of the Armed Forces of the SR and it will take time until it is completely applied. With regard to *Lessons learned* the use of *Lessons Learned* as a source of learning from real situations **is to be improved**. Further, *Lessons Learned* can be used to communicate the existence of a new situation, the change of an initial situation, to recommend behaviour change or to communicate a personal observation. It follows from the above that "*Lessons Learned*" should not be misinterpreted or misused it as a control means, as an instrument for the assessment of subordinates, as a form of negative event notification, nor as a method to express claims or to abuse people, units, etc.

In conclusion, *Lessons Learned* are used in practice within the Armed Forces of the SR. However, there is no complex system for finding the right direction and the establishment of clear rules for the work of professional soldiers and employees. The comprehensive knowledge database consists of regulations, directives, ordinances which are stored in every organisation or unit. Specialized course literature and textbooks are kept in military schools. However, they are not always easily accessible. Within the SK AFA, knowledge is transferred by means of contact between younger and older generations of professional soldiers and employees. However, **this process is not systematically controlled and the transmission of knowledge is mostly based on intuition**.

Consequently, it is necessary to build the system of knowledge management starting with a knowledge database available

for all levels of professional soldiers and employees. That requires a number of system measures in order to create an ideal environment enabling exchange, transmission and preservation of knowledge which should reach its target population, namely the people who need this knowledge in order to solve difficult situations arising in their life or at their workplace as soon as possible

Undoubtedly, the creation of a system in the form of knowledge management implementation is a crucial form of support of its implementation at all levels of organisation management (as the case should also when it comes to the AFA and the Armed Forces of the SR). On the basis of our finding and opinions of people who have been working in the environment of the Armed Forces for some time we can conclude that it is necessary ***to create not only the system of knowledge management but also a related knowledge database.*** By analyzing various methods suitable for knowledge management implementation in practice, we conclude that KM-Beat-methodology is appropriate for this purpose. As for the process of knowledge management implementation in practice the *following steps and procedures must be respected:*

- to appoint a Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO),
- to involve the senior management of the AFA, as well as other top managers of the Armed Forces of the SR,
- to integrate knowledge management in the key processes within the Armed Forces of the SR,
- to create an environment of confidence and learning within the organisation,
- to support knowledge creation and speed up innovations by means of information technologies,
- to take appropriate measures for practical implementation of knowledge management at all levels of management and command,
- to implement the issue of knowledge management in the sector rules,
- to use the intellectual potential of teachers and employees of the Armed Forces Academy to support a comprehensive system of knowledge management under the circumstances of the Armed Forces of the SR,
- the AFA as a higher education institution shall become a representative knowledge

disseminator through the main guarantor of the system creation under the circumstances of the Armed Forces of the SR – namely a learning modern organisation,

- the implementation of knowledge management will require a high level of security to prevent the disclosure and loss of information and knowledge,

- to propose the knowledge database structure in full accordance with the features of the Armed Forces of the SR and with the effective use of information technologies,

- accession of the Armed Forces of the SR to NATO significantly extended the spectrum of use of our military units,

- a special training unit has been established in order to prepare and deploy the soldiers on foreign military missions. The officers of the unit have applied that knowledge in practice.

- lecturers have knowledge from working in various missions. In addition to preparation and training they are also responsible for direct cooperation and assistance in military contingents rotation abroad. They transfer their own experience to their followers. This leads to valuable knowledge-sharing and supports the building of a learning organisation (Lesson Learning); the application of knowledge management issue within the AFA and realization of trainings through short term courses focused on *Knowledge management in full accordance with the features of the Armed Forces of the SR.*”

4. CONCLUSION

Military knowledge plays a crucial role in a dynamically developing world. This will be the basis for further steps in the education process – education, training and professional training courses in full accordance with the features of the Armed Forces of the SR. On the basis of proper analysis of the current state in the field of knowledge management we can claim that the process underpinning this new kind of management can be more efficient as well as faster also in the case of the Armed Forces of the SR. Knowledge management is a predestined tool contributing to increasing any organisation value. Its successful implementation is challenging but not impossible. In terms of the Armed Forces of the SR professionalization the objective to implement knowledge management

in the military environment is a necessity in today's world. It is already clear that it is not an easy way. Our knowledge, experience and the recent management development prove that this way will inevitably lead to a higher quality and competitiveness of the defence sector. It is equally important to learn how to become gradually competent and able to use this knowledge, acquire and share it. The constant improvement and systematic, innovative and prognostic thinking are required. ***We have to be aware that knowledge regarding certain phenomena, processes and systems improves and more and more knowledge occurs.*** It depends on us show quickly, reliably and precisely we can understand these arguments and reasons and use them in practice. Yet, it is our mission to put and implement new knowledge as part of knowledge management. This knowledge arises from developments in scientific and technical knowledge and from continuous life changes, changes in work efficiency in the lives of managers, commanders, professional soldiers, employees as well as administrative professionals. We shall encourage all students (through higher education at three levels), other participants in various forms of lifelong learning and participants in military career learning to become aware of this fact.

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