

# Some Problems in Managerial Knowledge Sharing

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**Abstract** The paper is oriented on the problems related to the managerial knowledge sharing as well as its transmitting. It shows that it is incredibly difficult to share some kinds of knowledge. This paper interprets the results of research that was made within the framework of author's dissertation thesis, presenting the real experience of Czech managers with knowledge sharing. This contribution was written within the framework of the GA ČR (Czech Science Foundation) grant-maintained project: Reg. No. 406/08/0459, Developing Managerial Tacit Knowledge, and with the financial support of GA ČR.

**Keywords** – Knowledge Sharing, Managerial Knowledge, Tacit Knowledge, Culture of Knowledge Sharing.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Sharing of managerial knowledge faces many problems. This paper will show that it is incredibly difficult to share some kinds of managerial knowledge. Probably, there exists some kind of knowledge that is impossible to share or transmit.

Sharing of managerial knowledge faces another challenge. Sometimes some managers in some environment or culture don't want to share their knowledge and try to hamper knowledge transmitting.

This paper interprets the results of research on Czech managers' willingness to share or transmit their knowledge and main obstacles in knowledge sharing. The research was made within the framework of author's dissertation thesis.

The resolution of this thematic topic can increase the quality of the professional preparation of managers and improve their work system. The results will show themselves in the actual performance of individual managers in their work. This can as a consequence lead to increasing the competitive abilities of individual organisations.

## II. MANAGERIAL KNOWLEDGE SHARING

### A. Is It Possible to Share all Managerial Knowledge?

There exist three fundamental sorts of knowledge [7], [10]:

- Explicit
- Implicit
- Tacit

Explicit - formalized or documented knowledge, which is mostly well-structured and easy transfer-able (documents, manuals, computer codes, etc.), can be formally articulated or encoded; can be more easily shared; is abstract and removed from direct experience [7], [10].

Implicit - knowledge, which is stored in heads of workers, however is possible to put it into explicit form at any time (knowledge of process and its binding limits in the head of process holder etc.) [7], [10].

Tacit - not-formulated, knowledge-in-practice, knowledge hidden in heads of workers. Isn't simple or even isn't possible to put it into explicit forms and formalize it or to prove it by evidence (knowledge of an expert in definite area, gained experience, etc.), is developed from direct experience and action; highly pragmatic and situation specific; subconsciously understood and applied; difficult to articulate; usually shared through highly interactive conversation and shared experience [7], [10].

Tacit Knowledge, according to Mládková [6], originates through the interaction of explicit knowledge and experience, skills and abilities, intuition, personal notions and ideas, mental models, etc.

Unlike Explicit Knowledge, which can be formalized (i.e. we can describe them in words and letters, or depict them graphically through icons and symbols) however, it is very difficult (and sometimes even impossible) to express Tacit Knowledge and to transfer/pass it on to someone else. They are of and have a highly individual and personal nature and character.

Gertler [3] believes that a manager exploits Tacit Knowledge among others in the course of formulating problems and their solutions. Experienced professionals (in contrast to beginners) clearly demonstrate with the help of their acquired Tacit Knowledge an ability to better understand just how a given system functions and operates, to rapidly distinguish and penetrate to the core of a problem, to find potential and alternative approaches to solutions, to more easily anticipate and predict/forecast possible consequences and results of the decision-making process and to select the most optimal decision.

A manager, who disposes of the appropriate social tacit knowledge, manages to communicate more easily, and to judge which people will work well as part of the team, and – on the contrary, those who will not. There is a greater probability that they will choose ways and means of motivation that suit a particular employee or to select appropriate education, training and development for that employee.

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And it is for this very reason that it is incredibly difficult to transfer some kind of managerial knowledge. The reasons for this are predominantly the following:

- It is very difficult (even sometimes impossible) to express Tacit Knowledge in words or in writing or to depict it graphically or with the assistance of icons and symbols.
- Tacit Knowledge represents a large element of managerial performance and duties.
- A manager may not even be aware of their “owing” any/certain Tacit Knowledge (i.e. they are unaware that they have learnt some things, they simply do things).
- The tacit knowledge sharing is supported by good-quality inter-personal relationships, trust and the possibility of having informal meetings too.
- The rate and the easiness of the managerial tacit knowledge understanding are influenced by the personality of the manager.
- A self-reflection of the manager is important for the tacit knowledge formation.
- To understand tacit knowledge it is demanded to understand context

We can say that the success of tacit knowledge sharing is influenced by the person of tacit knowledge owner (his/her ability to express and articulate the knowledge), the person receiving the knowledge (his/her ability to gain or understand tacit knowledge, precious experience, self-reflection, actual mental state, willingness to understand, way of thinking), the place and the environment, where the knowledge is shared (mutual relationship between tacit knowledge owner and receiver, informal discussions), the process of sharing the knowledge (the way of sharing – telling stories, mentoring, communities of practice) and the knowledge itself (kind of knowledge and its difficulties to articulate) [6].

This part of paper has shown that even if we want to share our managerial knowledge, there are quite significant problems. These are based on the huge amount of tacit knowledge as part of the managerial competence and the essential feature of tacit knowledge related to difficulties of its sharing. This is very difficult to overcome.

When exploring this issue, it points out another question there. Are managers willing to share their knowledge? Next part of this paper tries to bring a brief answer based on explorative research among managers in Czech Republic.

### III. RESEARCH AMONG CZECH MANAGERS

#### B. Research Aims

The subject of research is to find the personality, situational, and experiential factors which influence the forming of managerial tacit knowledge. It is oriented on the possibilities for the sharing of tacit knowledge requisite among managers as well as the possibilities for making managerial tacit knowledge explicit. The research findings should contribute to increasing the performance and success of managers, and thereby the competitive abilities of the organisations that they manage.

The research has been planned for 3 years and this paper only presents partial findings within the framework of the first research phase.

#### C. Used Methodology

The whole research is being done through many different research methods. There were used the qualitative research methods complemented by the quantitative research methods as well.

This paper presents partial findings acquired through the questionnaire for managers. The aim of this questionnaire was quantitative approach to the solved issue. That is why this questionnaire consisted mostly of closed questions.

Target respondents were “common” managers acting in the Czech Republic in the middle and top management because we wanted to get the overview of opinions and personal experience with training activities especially of “common” managers.

First of all, the questionnaire was tested on two managers and then the questionnaire research was realised. After previous phone calls explaining the essence of the questionnaire research was addressed 204 respondents that filled in the questionnaire and sent it back. The data were collected from August 2007 till December 2008. 8 questionnaires had to be rejected due to missing or wrong answers of some questions. The results come out from the file of 196 questionnaires. 62 respondents were members of top management, 134 were middle line managers.

#### D. Knowledge Sharing with Colleagues

If a member of management shares his/her knowledge, than probably, other employees has a good example to share their knowledge too. Furthermore, manager sharing his/her knowledge will probably create the organizational culture supporting knowledge sharing.

That is why respondents were addressed with the question: Do you share your knowledge with your colleagues?

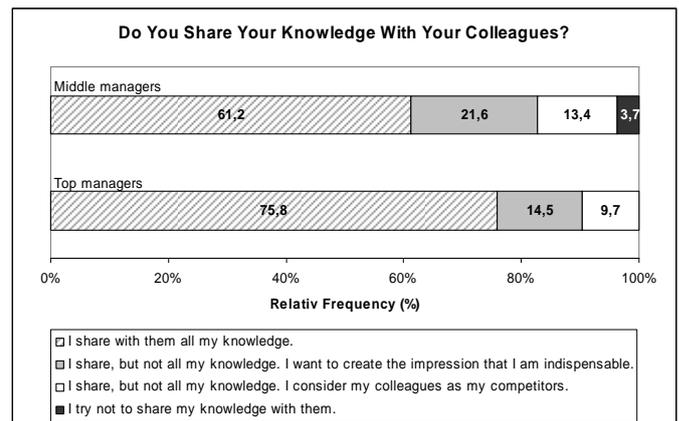


Fig. 1. Knowledge Sharing with Colleagues

In Fig. 1 there is shown that more than 60 percent of Czech managers share their knowledge. But we have to mention the difference between top managers and middle managers. It has shown that top managers share their knowledge more than middle managers. 4 percent of middle managers try not to

share their knowledge at all. 13 percent of middle managers consider their colleagues as their competitors and share with them only some knowledge. 22 percent of middle managers want to create the impression that they are indispensable. Probably, top managers much more realise that it is good for the whole company to share their knowledge and probably, middle managers are focussed much more on their individual success and career path.

#### E. Willingness of Managers to Transmit their Knowledge

If a manager experienced profiting from knowledge sharing, his/her willingness to share his/her knowledge is higher.

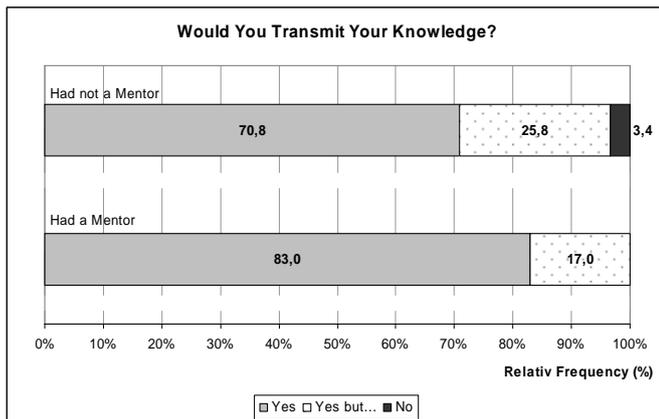


Fig. 2. Willingness to Transmit Knowledge

As you can see in Fig. 2, it is obvious that managers, who had not any mentor, are less wilful to transmit their knowledge to further generation. Managers, who had a mentor, have no problem with transmitting their knowledge further – it looks like they feel they should give it back because they have realized the benefit for practice.

### IV. DISCUSSION

#### F. Benefits from Knowledge Sharing

If we would like to discuss knowledge sharing, we have to mention another idea. Koubek [5] claims, that intellectual capital is created by reserves and flows of knowledge, skills and abilities, that are available in an organization and which make for processes of creating and adding values. It is about intangible sources, which create (together with material sources) market or general value of organization. Intellectual capital has three components [5, page 27]:

- Human capital - knowledge, skills and abilities of workers in an organization.
- Social capital - reserves and flows of knowledge, which follow from nets of relations inside and outside the organization.
- Organizational capital - institutionalised knowledge owned by organization that is stored in databases, manuals etc.

To create social and organizational capital, we need to share our knowledge.

Social capital benefits from synergic effect. That is why social capital is not only the sum of individual human capitals but knowledge owned and shared by several people generates new knowledge. This can be done even faster and more creative.

“Sharing knowledge is a synergistic process – you get more out than you put in. If I share a product idea or a way of doing things with another person – then just the act of putting my idea into words or writing will help me shape and improve that idea. If I get into dialogue with the other person then I’ll benefit from their knowledge, from their unique insights and improve my ideas further.” [4]

We can even say that team psychological safety and social interaction influence the synergic effect positively, task conflict influence the synergic effect negatively.

Organizational capital prevents the company from losing knowledge usually related to losing an employee.

We can’t speak about social or organizational capital without knowledge sharing.

“Many organizations today feel the only way to survive and prosper in a world characterized by speed, complexity, and global competition, down-sizing and constant change, to work smarter, not harder.” [1]

Observation of 'knowledge-aware' companies led us to conclude that systematically exchanging what we know with one another can result in [1]:

- Faster knowledge creation and innovation.
- More efficient and effective use of existing organizational know-how.
- Reduced risk of loss of valuable knowledge when people leave the organization.
- Better understanding our customers and anticipating their needs.

“We gather our knowledge on various subjects from experience and studying and sometimes from our mistakes. When that knowledge is share, it will become easier for others to get the information faster. The knowledge and expertise gathered from years of experience can be easily transmitted to the new generation, when it is effectively presented and communicated.” [2]

#### G. Creating the Knowledge Sharing Culture

“The purpose of knowledge sharing is to help an organization as a whole to meet its business objectives. We are not doing it for its own sake. Learning to make knowledge productive is as important if not more important than sharing knowledge.” [4]

Let’s consider what we can do to create the culture of knowledge sharing in organisation.

“In effect this necessitates organisations putting knowledge sharing higher up the priority list.” [9]

The best way to foster a value is by example. Here’s an instance of how leaders can demonstrate that they truly value knowledge sharing. Leaders need to change their behaviour. People are convinced by actions more than words. In organizations everyone watches the leaders for clues as to what is really valued and worthwhile. A knowledge sharing culture emerges partly, but significantly, when leaders display behaviors that indicate they value knowledge sharing [8].

Leaders' behaviors that mould the organization's culture can be [8]:

- Attention – what leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a regular basis
- Resource allocation – are leaders allocating for, and investing (their time, money, efforts...) in knowledge sharing?
- Walking the talk – as leaders express their identity through deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching – so we follow!
- Recognition – how leaders allocate rewards and status. Are your leaders rewarding knowledge sharing?
- Recruitment – leaders are key influences for how collaborative (and willing to share their knowledge) people are brought into the organization.

And as Mackay (principal consultant at ICL) says: "If an organization takes the time to explain the importance of knowledge sharing to its business and involves people in the process of working out what to share and how to share it, then enough people will buy-in to the idea to make a difference." [9]

## V. CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the topic of knowledge sharing. There was shown that some kind of knowledge is very difficult (if not impossible) to articulate, share and transmit.

But there exists another problem – it is natural that people sometimes do not share their knowledge. This must be taken as a challenge for managers to face it.

First of all managers should put knowledge sharing higher up in their priority lists and express it through their performance. Other people will follow them. Managers can explain why they considered knowledge sharing as higher priority value. They can take attention on this kind of character when choosing new employees; they can support knowledge sharing by technological support, allocating their status or rewards to people sharing their knowledge; and ask employees to take part in setting new rules of organizational culture enabling and supporting knowledge sharing.

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