

## Culture and Knowledge Management in Organizations in Slovakia

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### Abstract

*One of the most important features of culture is that, it does not refer to one person, but to members of a community. It follows from this that culture is a community phenomenon. The culture, apart from is it national or organizational culture, influences the behaviour of individuals and distinguish them from other groups. It covers values, beliefs professed by the person, which were acquired during the socialization. The attitude of the person is affected by the culture and therefore it is also influenced how the person is willing to share the relevant resources within the organization. In the constantly changing economic environment the knowledge and the experience is the prerequisite of competitiveness. The knowledge management of a company is responsible for the converting of the tacit and explicit knowledge of a person to organizational knowledge. This paper examines the features of knowledge management and organizational culture among companies in Slovakia.*

**Key words:** organizations culture, knowledge, knowledge management, GLOBE research

**JEL Classification:** M12, M14, M29

### 1 Introduction

The functional approach considers the company as a corporation, which is oriented by its purpose. The employees of these companies have different cultural background, which implements to reach their own objectives and contributes to achieve organizational goals. According to the functional approach the culture is a tool which contributes to the realization of organizational goals. Taking the certain elements of culture for instance customs, values, assumptions into consideration makes the understanding of organizational life easier. If the managers of a company are able to manage the organizational culture, new tools are available to control the members of the organization (Málovics, 2004).

In the 20th century, beside the technological explosion, the reorganizing of production factors and management methods are also observed. The individual, and later the collective knowledge gained more and more ground in the life of organizations. The company executives became aware of that the power of knowledge is in the hands of individuals. In favour of the transformation of knowledge into organizational knowledge more and more methods began to develop. If companies want to be successful, it is need to adapt the changing market conditions. This is often carried out by differently aimed strategic actions, specific duration and appropriation. In the toolbar of knowledge management exist several methods to assist the flow of knowledge and the processes of sharing.

## 2 The Main Approaches of Organizational Culture

According to the standardization of culture there is a difference between strong and weak culture, depends on the achieving of an aim. The culture may play diverse role in the organization's management. These roles are called: the role of coordination, integration and motivation. The role of coordination is needed because the individuals have their own interests. The organizational culture is a device of non-structural coordination, which is able to insure an agreement between the members. There could be formed groups inside the organization, which interests may differ from the interests of the organization. In cases like this, the role of culture integration comes to the front, because corporations with strong organizational culture are able to enumerate the group's interests behind the company's interests and manage the ambitions of these groups. It is able to influence the individuals with the strength of cultural motivation to increase their efficiency. Such a culture of a company encourages the people to take responsibility, acknowledge their work, create good atmosphere, which helps employees become loyal towards their organization (Borgulya-Barakonyi, 2004).

The organizational researchers started to focus on organizational culture researches in the 1980 years. It is very hard to give homogenous definitions what the organizational culture is, because there are several opinions and definitions for the culture and organization itself. The literature contains several definitions. According to Meyerson and Martin (1987, 623-647. p.) three approaches can be distinguished: integration, differentiation and fragmentation approach. We examine what these single approaches include.

According to the integration approach the organizational culture has a kind of power of unity, which influences the individuals, defines their behaviour on some kind of level. The individuals have their own presuppositions, values, which are divided with each other by the members of an organization. It creates a common belief system in the organization, an identity, which helps them to interpret the external and internal environment. All this contributes to the fact that the members of an organization should turn into committed one for the given organization and let their efficiency be increased inside an organization. The integration approach is typical for learning organizations, in which the regular changes mean the basic assumption.

The differentiation approach emphasizes the presence of the different cultures which can be found inside an organization, it is based on the so-called subcultures. Inside an organization more subcultures may exist simultaneously which show a part of the environment's complexity. In organizational culture can be environmental elements, like the national culture, religion and ethnic culture. In the case of differential approach the homogenous approach is pushed into the background. Be worth noticing that inside the subcultures can be found a homogenous culture, which may be even religious, national - it is a group of individuals with the same identity.

The researchers of the fragmentation approach throw doubts about the existing of homogenous, unambiguous meanings. According to their opinion it is necessary to lay the emphasis on the ambiguity, and they do not agree with the previous approaches. The manifestation of culture inside of an organization can be explained variously; therefore the homogeneity is not possible. Culture could be examined with qualitative research methods, rather than with quantitative devices. Éva Málovics is worded Meyerson's thoughts in such way: "The complex problems, the different belief systems, the different waitings may create

various reactions and identities. The excessive abstraction considers the variety of interpretations and responses as collectively distributed values and beliefs.” (Málovics, 2004, 160.p)

According to Attila Bokor’s opinion the researchers try to grasp the organizational culture along two methods. In the first case the researchers try to grasp the object of their research through the functions of the culture, which deals with promotion of the internal integration, external integration and with the creation of an interpretational framework of social reality, which one reduces the insecurity. The internal integration is similar to the previous integration approach. The function of the culture is to keep together the individuals and motivate them to act inside of an organization. So the culture provides an opportunity for the individuals, who working in the organization to achieve collectively the organizational aims. Several questions, like how much could the leader contribute to form a culture, are arising between the followers of mentioned approach. There are people, like Schein who thinks that the leader’s task is to form and keeping the culture on a level, but other thinkers do not agree with this view. According to them the management style is specified by the national culture, the GLOBE himself joins this thought also.

The external integration is a cultural device, which helps us to respond positively to the changes of the external environment and adapt them. Beyond the inherited characteristics the continuously accumulated knowledge and it’s sharing with the other people makes the mankind capable on the survival.

The function of culture, like a social reality creation, could be correlated mostly with the interpretive theories. The organizations are not independent of the organizational members, but they come into existence as the process of a social reality creation. Therefore the people develop the organizations and on the other hand the organizations develop them.

In the second case the object of the investigation is the content of the culture, therefore the phenomenon belonging to the culture. According to the content definitions there are deeper, hidden contexts behind the phenomena which can be seen on the surface. On the basis of Bakacsi’s definition, which considers the organizational culture as a set of the cognitive phenomena - there are specialists, who consider that some factors are far important than the rest of the factors. There are two approaches according to one the culture is based on values, and other one says it based on symbols. (Bokor, 2010, 9-16 p.)

## **2.1 Culture dimensional researches – GLOBE**

Within the culture researches the culture dimensional researches are the most widespread ones, which analyse the various cultures along the single dimensions. The culture dimensional researches belongs to the group of ethic researches, which strives for comparing and characterising certain cultures based on homogenous criteria’s.

Based on the certain models the number of the dimensions may be different. In Hofstede case five, in GLOBE research nine culture dimensions, Trompenaars and Turner characterize the certain cultures along seven dimensions. As it was mentioned these researches base on quantitative methodology, and bear the marks of functional paradigm. It is not by chance, that this culture research is the most widespread and most accepted, it follows the formerly adopted paradigm. These researches try to specify the values of individuals and according to this try to draw a conclusions about cultural differences (Topcu, 2005).

The values defined by Bakacsi: The values are fundamental convictions, which reflect the final aims of the human life or interpreted our choices of lifestyle methods (Bakacsi, 2004, 41. p.). So the values have vital importance in the today's culture researches, because they influence our actions.

In these days the culture and leadership is the most comprehensively examined topic by the so-called GLOBE research, whose central leader is Robert J. House. The Globe is an international research extend to 62 countries, which examines the national and the organizational culture and leadership in certain countries. The project alloys all of the theories yet, and examines the culture based on homogenous criteria. The examination of the model is based on 9 dimensions, included Hofstede's culture dimensions. The dimensions are the next (House et al., 2002, 5-6 p.):

- Avoid the uncertainty – it measures, how much the members of a society or an organization rely on the norms, rituals to avoid the uncertainty. How important the predictability is.
- Power distance – it measures, how much the members of an organization or a society agree with the unequal division of power.
- Collectivism I: Institutional collectivism - the measure of how much the organizations and the social institutions support the collective distribution of the resources and the collective attitude.
- Collectivism II: Team collectivism – it shows, how much the individuals inside the organization or the family show their pride, their loyalty and their cohesion ability.
- Equality between genders – it measures, how much the societies, organizations are characterised by gender distinctiveness, and the reduction of the discrimination stemming from this.
- Assertiveness – it measures, the aggressiveness and vim of the individual inside the organization and society.
- Future orientation - the measure of how much the individuals plan in advance.
- Performance orientation - how much are the individuals motivated to the achievement of the performance.
- Human orientation - how much the fairness, unselfishness, friendliness, care, liberality, therefore the humane behaviour are typical for the individuals and the organizations.

The GLOBE project in the case of culture also examines what kind of features the society or organization should have along the single dimensions. Therefore it examines not only descriptively, but also from a normative viewpoint.

### **3 Knowledge Management and Knowledge Passing**

The basis of knowledge theory is Polányi's approach, which distinguish an explicit and tacit knowledge (Polányi, 1966). To the group of explicit or codified knowledge belongs the elements of fixable, visible and expressible knowledge which can be easily collected, conveyed and constructed. On the other hand the tacit knowledge is invisible, hardly conceivable and transmitted knowledge, which can be fixed into knowledge sets. It bases on experiences and on knowledge to act. In the iceberg model the two types of knowledge cannot be separated, because they mutually complement each other. According to Polányi the

knowledge is on the one hand dynamic process, on the other hand static element (Tua Haldin-Herrgard, online, 2013; Polányi, 1966).

The practical approach of the knowledge originates from the realistic philosophy, according to which the social phenomena could be examine from three aspects. Jashapara (2007) applied the realistic notion in his view, to interpret the organizational knowledge as the nature of the capacity of process. In his approach the organizational knowledge structure consists of collective memory. The collective memory, based on Jashapara's view, is the connection of the context of the community and temporal aspect. In his assumption the main knowledge process is connected with the collective consciousness. The necessity of the development of the organizational knowledge follows from the environmental changes.

On the other hand the individual knowledge focuses on the solution of the new problematic situation. The basis of the individual knowledge constitutes the human consciousness (is based on the person's cerebral activity), which draw from the past memory and adapts to the present state. During the adapting of the environmental changes depending on the human and the existing organizational capital – take into consideration the social and consumer expectations -, and the organizational knowledge process based on the organizational memory takes place on community nets.

Between the conversion of the organizational and individual knowledge the organizational structure, the processes and the behaviour play an important role (Jashapara, 2007). The organizational routines generate management mechanisms, which integrate the dispersed knowledge in the same space and time. As a result, different viewpoints are discovered, which make the opportunity to develop common understanding and interpretation. (Weick and his comp., 2005). The previously presented concept of organizational knowledge admits the key role of the memory and the individual consciousness.

The knowledge management as the organization's management contributes to its competitiveness, because supports the reduction of the companies' expenses, the acceleration of developmental velocity, and fits the organization's strategy to the consumer's and the market's needs (O'Dell-Grayson, 1998). In Beckman's interpretation the knowledge management is the synthesis of more areas of science, because of this it would be beneficial to examine it from more aspects. His perspective distinguishes more of these branches of science: conceptual, with principle for processing, technological, organizational, executional and managerial. In the conceptual approach the knowledge management refers to several different interpretations. The process based explanation distinguishes more levels of the knowledge process. The number of the levels differs according to authors and models. According to Beckam the characteristic features of organizational knowledge management are: organizational structure, task determining, distribution of responsibility and the learning organizational characteristics. The execution perspective includes those methods, that are attached to the introduction of the knowledge management systems and processes. The view based on management sums up those managerial tasks, that help to form a combination of the needed knowledge management changes and organizational strategy, which results in efficient and fruitful activity of the company (Bureš, 2007).

### **3.1 Knowledge passing and knowledge creation**

The organizations by their nature in all cases use and create some kind of knowledge. During the creation of knowledge they interact with their environment, collect information by using different activities, which are adapted into organizational activities and create new

knowledge. If the company is not capable to organize his knowledge, is not able to create knowledge (Davenport-Prusak, 2001). The dynamic companies which respond flexibly to the environmental changes organize low added value processes nowadays and optimize inner knowledge creator and supporting processes (Pakucs-Papanek, 2005).

The special knowledge which contributes to competitiveness can be created by the knowledge processes realized in organization. The inner environmental factors of corporation knowledge sharing are organizational culture, the confidence, the communication, the technology, the organizational structure and the style of management. The model is built on a spiral, in which the going processes present the interaction of the explicit and implicit knowledge. In the creation of the organizational knowledge four dimensions can be demarcated from each other: the socialization, the externalisation, and the internalisation (Nonaka, 1994., Bencsik, 2009).

Walsch and Ungson (1991) examines in his approach how could be an organization supportable with the accumulation of the employees' experiences and the management of the organizational knowledge. In their model they created the system of the organizational memory. The collected experiential knowledge and knowledge become accessible for all of the organization's members through it. The organizational recollection is the device of the storage of the knowledge, which collects the organizational experiences, stores them, and develops the opportunity of availability to the knowledge. The contact between the past and present decisions becomes clear by it. More elements form the organizational memory based on the concept. It includes the opportunity of storage the information and knowledge, as well as the several methods of new information supplying. The model supposed to have five memory element and knowledge receiver, which collectively with the outer organizational sources create the organizational memory. The individuals build (the company's employees) their own recollection around the organizational activities and events. There are the obtained experiences and observations in the centre of the organizational activities. The employees store the information, which are observable in the form of values, assumptions or principles, directly. The organization has several technological device to support the individual recollection and search capacity, for example various databases. There are past experiences in the culture (organizational culture), that influence current decision processes. The culture includes the organization's language, the concepts of the framework system as the part of the organizational memory, and the various typical symbols of the company objects, stories and gossips. The business and transformational processes (transformation) contain several information in the organization, which contribute to the efficient function. This information implies the imprints of the past periods in a hidden or known form, which are the parts of daily operative processes and decisions. They include the known production procedures and standard function expectations. The organizational structure summarizes the knowledge deriving from the company's norms and the observed organizational environment. In the part of memory structure is this information that influence and define the behaviour of organizational characters. The environment and workplace planning (ecology) also contain several coded information that influence the function of organization. These are for example office equipment, state of light, state of persons, number of employees in a locality, the number of employees in a room, officials etc... So the environment includes features that have an effect on the employees' behaviour and their norms, so the workers' performance is influenced indirectly. The exterior archives can be reached by the organization exterior affects. Their significance resides in it, that they should contain information and knowledge about the past and activity of the organization that for any reason is not a part of the organization's inner memory. Here can be enumerated the data of the earlier employees who are already not employed in the organization, different memoranda and information about

competitors, government, offices, associations and other institutions. The model of Walsch and Ungson can be reviewed easily from the position of the information and the necessary knowledge; however it does not supply information about the organizational memory and groups' interaction, and does not supply information about the participation of memory in company's aims and its strategy. It does not go into detail about the opportunities of the application of informational technologies. The aim of the model is to define punctually the place of necessary knowledge type and his availability in the organizational memory - contributing to the efficiency of the activities - because it takes into consideration the process of knowledge storage, the process of information retrieval and its acquisition (Walsch-Ungson, 1991; Spender, 1996; Dragusanu, 2006).

## **4 The Features of the Organizational Culture and Knowledge Management in the Companies**

During the course of our research after the processing of secondary data resources we got doing to apply the primary descriptive research methods. The data were collected by questionnaires during the quantitative research. We paid a proper attention to the compilation of the questionnaire in order to imply well-structured and unambiguous questions.

The aim of our research is the examination of organizational culture and knowledge management among Slovakian companies. We collected the necessary data by way of questionnaire asking in the course of the primary research. The target area of the query in Slovakia is: district of Dunaszerdahely (county Dunajská Streda), district of Komárom (county Komárno) and district of Érsekújvár (county Nové Zámky). Altogether 360 companies form the sample. During the selecting of the sample elements we used stratified sampling method. The stratified factor was company's premises. These cities, county seats were classified into the sample, where the number of population, based on the latest data of the Slovak Statistical Office, exceed 8500 people. Based on the registered number and using the percentage division we obtained the number of the questionnaires. The samples belong to the strata were chosen by chance and were selected from the central trade registers, that we obtained information by way of other electronic information carriers.

After the questionnaire filling we controlled the completed questionnaires and completely examined the answers. The information, that were obtained by questionnaires were analysed by mathematical and statistical methods.

### **4.1 The presentation of the sample**

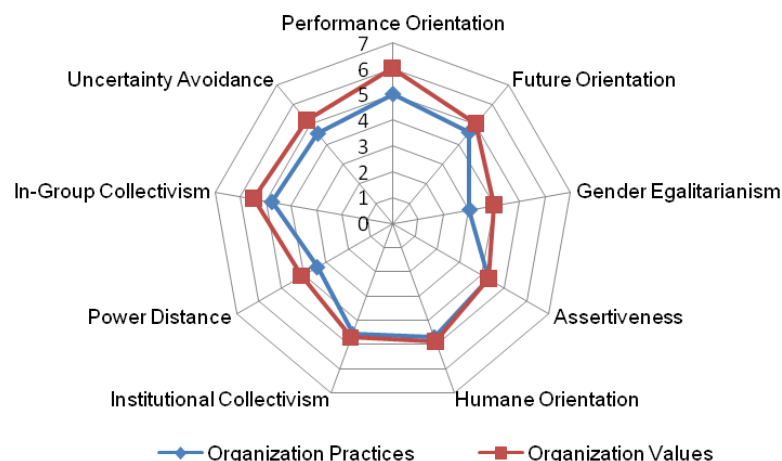
Most of the entrepreneurial units started his entrepreneurial activity more than 10 years before (53%). The organizations coming next in the row are on the market in between 6-10 year intervals (25,5%). The 19,9% of respondents embark on a business between 1-5 years. In the sample 1,6 % of responders represent those organizations, which running less than one year. The 21 % of asked is private entrepreneur, 3 % limited partnership, 1 % non-profit organization, 16 % share company, 57 % limited liability company, 1 % other legal form. The responders marked agricultural cooperatives as other opportunities. The results reflect the statistical office's results, in which on the first place from organizational legal form is the limited liability company type.

With the questions about the number of employees and one year turnover we may deduce to the types of enterprises. Micro-enterprise can be considered as a company, which employs

less than 10 people and its year turnover is equal or not over 2 million euros according to the European Commission's statute No. 2003/361/EC. The number of the employees in small enterprises reaches as far as 10-49 people; its year turnover is equal or less than 10 million euros. The number of employees may be 50-249 people in medium-size enterprises; its year traffic is equal or less than 50 million euros. Those organizations are enumerated in big companies, which employees' number exceeds the 249 people and their year turnover is more than 50 million euros. If we examine the companies' classification based on the year turnover we may establish, that the proportion of companies belong to different groups does not change more. Based on this grouping the largest proportions of respondents are rated to micro-enterprises. 72,8% of asked is micro-enterprise, 11,1 % small enterprise, 8,3 % medium-size enterprise, 7,8 % big company.

#### 4.2 The characterization of the Slovakian organizations culture according to the GLOBE project

First of all we should interpret, what does descriptive and normative variables mean. Descriptive variables are those observed cultural variables that write down the present situation. The questions belong to this category are: *How the things are in the organization?* The normative variables examine what should be the desirable situation inside an organization. To the certain variables inside these groups of questions concern a different number of questions. We used statistical methods to add the certain respondents' answers. We applied a seven-grade Liker-scale to the measurement of the single variables, therefore the values moved between 1 and 7. The 1. graph exemplifies the received results.



**Graph 1 Comparison of Organization Practises and Values**

Source: results of own research

On the figure is observable, that in case of each dimension the desirable values are bigger, than the values of the present situation. In connection with the performance orientation can be related, that people performance are important for organizations. During the rewarding of the individuals the organizations take into consideration individuals' performance, and acknowledge the innovative solutions. Out of the 9 dimensions here can be shown the largest observed value (6,02), and at this dimension has the largest difference between noticed and expected values (1,02), which mean that competition and performance correction is important for organizations. The index of the future orientation shows us, that looking into the future is important for organizations. The conscious planning is essential for a successfully working organization, furthermore the additional development of this value. The figure clearly shows, that in the case of organizational value the average of respondents are around five. In this case is ascertainable that the companies identified to looking to the future could have several



benefits. Among other things, the conscious planning makes somewhat the future predictable, therethrough the company could pulling through easier a potential crisis, as those companies who do not pay sufficient attention to this. At what bigger the mentioned average is, it is more important for organizations to focus on the future. In the case of Slovakian organizations we may talk about a masculine organizational culture, because this value is closer to zero, it is accurately 3,03. In the future the organizations would like to move towards the feminine culture, but this can be considered as a middle value (4,02). The masculine organizational culture is characterized by leader consist mostly from man, and the decisions are mostly in their hand. In the case of assertiveness dimension we receive a value close to a middle value (4,3). The assertive behaviour is typical for the organizations in a medium rate. Depend on the results can be established, that human contacts, solidarity and empathic behaviour are important. For the employees is important to make permanent contacts with other employees, furthermore the decisions of important questions happens in groups. In case of the power distance individuals would be glad if the power and the control would be concentrated in the hand of the leadership. The organization's members are loyal to their organization and proud that they could work there. According to the uncertainty forbearing index the employees like predictable situations.

#### **4.3 Characteristic features of knowledge management in companies**

The importance of the knowledge management contributing to a corporate strategy (73,3%) is acknowledged by the informants. In the case of big companies all respondents propose the knowledge as strategic device. During the research we learned that many entrepreneurs recognise the importance of the knowledge management but they do not have the suitable financial resource to adapt the methods of knowledge management in his organization.

The majority of micro-companies do not have a register of the full cost devoted to knowledge management, or it takes place on 0-2 % of an interval. The small companies dispose with similar features. The medium-size companies represent a small number in our sample. From among these 36,3 % of them executes investments to the knowledge management, 45,4% is takes place on 5-6 % of an interval. 42,8% of the asked big companies invests 10% of the total expenditure to the methods of knowledge.

In the course of the survey we analysed the character of knowledge management related steps and developments. The respondents characterized on a 1-5 expansive scale the realised steps of knowledge management in an enterprise. The results are: the micro-enterprises consider as the most essential realized element of their knowledge management strategy is the benchmarking and the stimulation of knowledge sharing; the small sized organizations prefer the benchmarking, and the practical experiences; the medium-size enterprises show identical practice. According to the big companies in Slovakia most important steps are the benchmarking, the forming of the strategy of the knowledge management, and define knowledge centres and individuals who are responsible for them.

In the practice of organization's knowledge management the problematic areas come up. During our research and questionnaire analysis we examined the value of reality and the definition of the problematic factors. The lack of the knowledge sharing tendency and the lack of resources are the most problematic factors among the Slovak micro-enterprises. According to the opinion of small enterprises the biggest problem of knowledge management is the lack of tendency and transfer of the knowledge sharing on different levels. The medium-size companies represent the same opinion. Among the big companies the problematic features are the lack of information about the virtues of knowledge management, the information dumping, and the difficulties of individual knowledge acquisition.

## 5 Conclusions

We established during the analysis of the knowledge management in organizational practice that the largest proportion of organizations consider the knowledge as a strategic device, however much of the organizations have not the suitable financial resources. Among the devices of knowledge management in practice mainly the application of community information- and document container systems spread. The majority of the asked companies is planning the development of different knowledge networks or joining the existing ones in a short time.

The realised steps of knowledge management in the organizations means the sharing of the experiences, obtained by the professional practice, and the development of formal informational channels. The other methods applied by the organizations include inspiration of knowledge passing and benchmarking. The big companies recognised the necessity of the development of the knowledge strategy. In the organizations frequently occurring the problem of knowledge passing on different levels (individual, collective, organizational) and its stimulation. The creation of the knowledge and its transfer in the units of enterprises, but also between the organizations is a complex phenomenon. The effect of these to each other and their environment, hidden a number of unexplored areas and problems which can be researched.

Finally the definition of organizational culture is influenced by the paradigm which was chosen by the researcher. From the aspect of knowledge sharing is essential the collaboration between the members of the organization. In case of the companies examined by us this is given, but on the other hand the changes may signify a challenge to the leaders inside the organization.

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