
Intra-Organizational Conditions in Knowledge Sharing

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Abstract:

Purpose: The globalisation of the world economy is causing the increase in the demand for „knowledge". In order to stay ahead of the competition, companies implement „knowledge management" programmes. The concept of knowledge management has become a new paradigm of 21st century management. The forerunners of this concept are global corporations, claiming that knowledge determines their competitive position in increasingly competitive markets of the global economy. Therefore, in order to make optimal use of this resource (intellectual capital), it is necessary to improve management in this area. The aim of the research was to identify barriers to sharing knowledge.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The conducted research used the method of literature analysis and a diagnostic survey. In this article was based on the analysis of literature on the subject of knowledge management. The studies in literature also included secondary sources, which were communications from research of similar scope. A diagnostic survey was adopted as the leading method. The remaining methods applied in the paper were auxiliary (complementary). The sample was selected using the random method.

Findings: Research shows that the transfer of knowledge is hindered by excessive formalization, poor communication with the superior, lack of task teams. The presented research also indicated factors contributing to the sharing of knowledge among employees.

Practical implications: The article presents the results of research conducted among several dozen companies in Poland. The research results are very interesting and encourage research on a larger scale. They are a valuable source of information for managers responsible for creating a friendly working atmosphere and an atmosphere for sharing knowledge. The organizational culture really depends on the management. Building trust among employees becomes especially important. The performance also results of the Polish market for overcoming the knowledge barrier.

Originality/value: On the basis of empirical research, the article proposes an original set of system solutions in the field of „knowledge sharing" to improve the functioning of the organizations.

Keywords: Sharing knows, knowledge, knowledge management.

JEL classification: J24, M12, D83, M54.

Paper Type: Research article.

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1. Introduction

The end of the 20th century was the end of the industrial era; the importance of the material capital of an organization and the possession of land were becoming less and less important. In the knowledge-based economy, an important role is played by information and knowledge. The existence of an organization depends on its information technology, which includes much more than just the infrastructure (computers and their software), but also the know-how and, consequently, intellectual (human) capital.

By implementing organisational and IT solutions related to knowledge management, global economy leaders benefit. Mutual exchange of knowledge between employees results in savings of time and money for both employees and organisations. This also reduces the duplication of work already done. Acquisition of information, its proper processing, localisation and transfer lead to minimisation of risk in the decision-making process. There is a growing migration of processes, technologies and knowledge in international organizations (Czaińska, 2019). Thanks to the knowledge, the customer receives a product resulting from the combination of knowledge of the entire organisation. Summing up, the client receives an innovative product (James and Lucardie, 2003).

In modern organizations, human capital and knowledge management take on strategic importance (Sus, 2016; 2017). With constantly growing resources of knowledge, it becomes more and more difficult for managers to function (organisation management) (Balcerzyk, 2020). Terms such as 'knowledge work' and 'knowledge worker' are emerging. Peter Drucker is considered the forerunner of these concepts (Drucker, 2011). It was he who initiated the trend that material goods, land or labour lose their importance in relation to knowledge resources, information or knowledge workers, claiming that "the essence of management is the productive use of knowledge. In other words, management is a social function and as a practice, management is undoubtedly a liberated art".

The aim of the article is to verify the values that constitute a barrier to the sharing of knowledge among employees of the Lower Silesia company. This can be done by trying to answer the following questions:

- Which factors constitute a significant barrier to knowledge sharing?
- Which of the factors determine the willingness to share knowledge in organizations?
- What are the most common mistakes made by management in sharing knowledge?

The article consists of three parts. The first part of the article presents an analysis of the literature on knowledge management (knowledge, knowledge sharing), the second part presents the results of research on the issues of knowledge sharing. The

third part of the article presents conclusions from the research and indicates areas for further exploration.

2. The Concept of Knowledge Sharing on Management Sciences

In the literature the concept of knowledge management is defined in various ways. Knowledge is awareness, consciousness or understanding gained through experience or study" (Materska, 2007). Knowledge is an information prolonged for productive use, it is individual and often difficult to grasp, and can be elusive (Armstrong and Taylor, 2014). It is also the state or fact of understanding something, the sum of everything that has been experienced, discovered or learned. Other sources, however, state that knowledge is the totality of information. It is created and used in the consciousness of its owner" (Materska, 2007). Knowledge is exhaustive and comprehensive, blatant and hidden, common and personal, physical and intellectual, static and dynamic, verbal and encoded (Armstrong and Taylor, 2014).

Knowledge is a changing mixture of experience, contextual information values and expert insight, providing a framework for assessing and connecting new experiences and information. It is created and used in the consciousness of its owner" (Davenport and Prusak 1998; 2000). Knowledge is a network of connections and interactions. The knowledge network is a dynamic structure, not a static one. The role of knowledge networks is to promote interactions such as knowledge acquisition, knowledge transfer and knowledge innovation, and knowledge transfer by connecting a series of interconnected network nodes (Chen *et al.*, 2019).

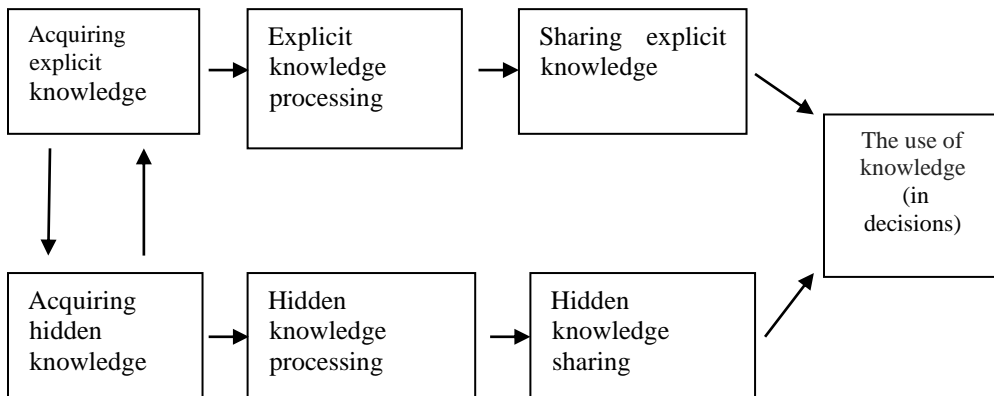
We can consider knowledge on two levels as individual and organizational (Bonache and Brewster, 2001). The individual level covers the knowledge of each participant in the organization. Each employee is a source of knowledge and at the same time its owner, as organizations cannot create it on their own (Raab *et al.*, 2014). But it is the sum of the knowledge of individual members of the organization that generates its value.

The sources of knowledge can be divided into cognitive and experimental (Krok, 2007). From the point of view of an organisation, a distinction is made between internal and external sources of knowledge. Suppliers, customers, and partners constitute an external source of knowledge. Co-workers, in turn, are an internal source of knowledge e.g. during the implementation of various projects. Knowledge management involves four processes, creation process, transfer process, integration process and application process (Asiaei and Bontis, 2019).

According to Perechuda (2005) „knowledge management is a process of continuous implementation of management functions, focused on knowledge-related resources (internal and external, existent and non-existent, known and hidden) and the tasks and instruments of organising and communicating".

A.K. Kozminski and D. Jemielniak's (2008) state that „knowledge is an organised resource of information that we remember, record and store for use in the pursuit of our personal goals, or in relation to an organisation - its missions and organisational goals. Knowledge is sometimes understood narrowly, as scientific or technical knowledge (...)”. A. Sopińska, P. Wachowiak (2006) devised the following model of knowledge management in a company (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Model of knowledge management in an enterprise



Source: A. Sopińska, P. Wachowiak, 2006.

The first stage of knowledge management is the acquisition of explicit knowledge. It consists in obtaining all information from various sources. At this stage an important role is played by the analysis of the company's information needs and data collection. In the next stage - the processing of explicit knowledge - the information collected is subject to preliminary arrangement and storage and then analysis and interpretation. These activities are followed by the sharing of explicit knowledge. It consists in disseminating the collected and processed information, reaching out to parties interested in the results of the analyses conducted. They provide new insights into the interpretation of events, phenomena or objects. They can influence the behaviour and judgment of the recipient.

Another kind of knowledge is hidden knowledge. Its acquisition mainly consists in improving the competences of employees. Its processing (second stage) consists in the assessment of the degree of assimilation of knowledge acquired by the employee, verifying the usefulness of knowledge from the point of view of the objectives to be achieved by the employee and the organisation itself. The next stage is the sharing of hidden knowledge consisting in passing the knowledge on to other employees.

The last stage of knowledge management is the joint use of explicit and tacit knowledge used to make managerial decisions. It is important to link explicit and tacit knowledge since they intersect with each other. It leads to the rational use of knowledge resources in the organisation.

Authors of the described concept of knowledge management attribute a special role to the organisational culture in this process. It should be oriented towards innovation, openness to the environment and pragmatism. Within the framework of knowledge management, in order to achieve the organisation's goals, we are able to (Kisielnicki, 2004):

- use the knowledge resources available in the organisation,
- seek, absorb and create knowledge,
- create an organisational culture in which sharing knowledge is a natural and desirable phenomenon within the company.

The organizational culture of the company focused on sharing knowledge plays an important role in knowledge management. The 'atmosphere' in the organisation should be conducive to openness to the outside world, cooperation and exchange of ideas in a way that enables their implementation and development. The challenge is to share knowledge, and basically the employee's willingness to share his or her knowledge with co-workers and management. It is not easy an easy task because sharing is not in human nature. Interpersonal relations and the manner of communication deserve special attention.

Sharing knowledge is a multidirectional activity consisting in the exchange of knowledge, for a not always clearly defined purpose (Kožuch and Lenart-Gansiniec, 2016). In a well-functioning enterprise, knowledge capital should be valued and properly managed (Macnik, 2013). The benefits of sharing knowledge for the sender of knowledge are: satisfying his individual needs, which can include recognition, prestige, belonging, increased self-esteem, satisfaction with contributing to the development of the organization, confirmation of one's position in organization (Kožuch and Lenart-Gansiniec, 2016).

The organization should provide tools and places (knowledge centers, institutions, universities) to gather knowledge and experience from its employees and to create a knowledge sharing mechanism by organizing trainings, workshops, e-learning (Przytuła *et al.*, 2018). Knowledge sharing in the management science literature is defined as a centrally managed process of disseminating knowledge within a specific group of employees (Hooff and Ridder, 2004)

Sharing knowledge requires trust between the sender and the recipient, the adaptation of different cultures in international organizations and business practices (Choong and Fang, 2010). The absorption of knowledge takes place in an atmosphere of cooperation and a climate of positive social interactions in the company's organizational culture (Przytuła *et al.*, 2018).

The creators of the culture of sharing knowledge are managers who promote norms, attitudes and values conducive to this process. Managers who should promote norms, attitudes and values conducive to this process also have a direct impact on sharing knowledge. Effective knowledge sharing is possible thanks to the transformation of tacit knowledge into explicit and effective dissemination in the organization (Li, Scullion, 2010). The creators of the knowledge-sharing culture are managers who promote norms, attitudes and values that favor this process (Kozuch and Lenart-Gansiniec, 2016).

Sharing knowledge is a collective action consisting in the exchange of knowledge within and between teams (King, 2006). Thanks to this, new knowledge is created and individual knowledge is transformed into organizational one. In this way, the added value of the organization is created. Knowledge is a unique resource of an organization. It is an inexhaustible resource. Its specificity lies in the fact that as the frequency of its use increases, its resources grow.

3. Methods and Characteristics of the Research Sample

The conducted research used the method of literature analysis and a diagnostic survey. Scientific publications in the area of knowledge management as well as reports and research reports on similar topics were analyzed. A diagnostic survey was adopted as the leading method. The remaining methods applied in the paper were auxiliary (complementary). This made it possible to obtain a wider context of the studied phenomenon and enabled a higher quality of research. The diversity of methods was aimed at achieving a consistency of the empirical basis for the inference.

The questionnaire was developed on the basis of literature analysis. The questionnaire was intended for employees of companies from the Lower Silesia.. The sample was selected in a non-random way, using the random method In the research, the following variables were set as independent variables: the gender of the respondents, the age of the respondents, the size of the company (workplace), the place of residence. 356 employees employed in companies from Lower Silesia participated in the research. The gender division of the study group was even. Women constituted 51% of the surveyed group and men constituted 49% of it.

About 69% of the respondents were young people aged 19-29. 19.7% of the respondents were aged 30 to 40. The least numerous group were employees over 40 years of age (11.2% of respondents). Analysing the age structure of the surveyed group, it should be stated that most of them are young people, up to the age of thirty. It proves that they recognise the importance of intellectual capital in an organisation in the era of globalisation of the economy. They appreciate the importance of knowledge and skills as components of competences. They want to build their individual intellectual capital based on personal and professional development. In

this way they can see the chances of "being competitive" in the labour market.

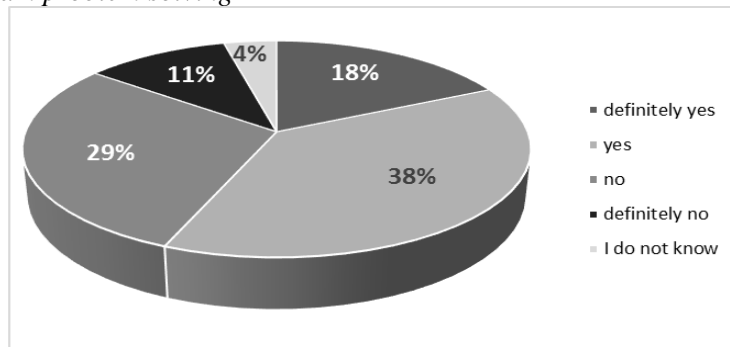
About 35% of the respondents are employees of companies employing more than 100 people. Over 21% of employees were employed in medium-sized companies (from 21 to 50 employees) and the same percentage in organisations employing from 6 to 10 employees. The companies employing from 51 to 100 employees account for only 10.1% of the respondents. Respondents are mainly employees of small and medium companies due to the fact that they live in the surrounding villages.

Two of the examined Universities were located in poviat towns in the Lower Silesian Voivodship. Therefore, 43% of the respondents are inhabitants of small municipalities with up to 50,000 inhabitants (Figure 4). Almost one third of the respondents are rural residents (over 28%). A relatively small group of respondents are inhabitants of municipalities with up to 10,000 inhabitants (7.3%). Only 1.1% are residents of larger cities. Therefore, the respondents are employees at small and medium companies.

4. Acquisition of Knowledge within an Organization

In one of the first questions the respondents were asked for their opinions on the organisation of meetings aimed at solving problems together (Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Team problem solving*



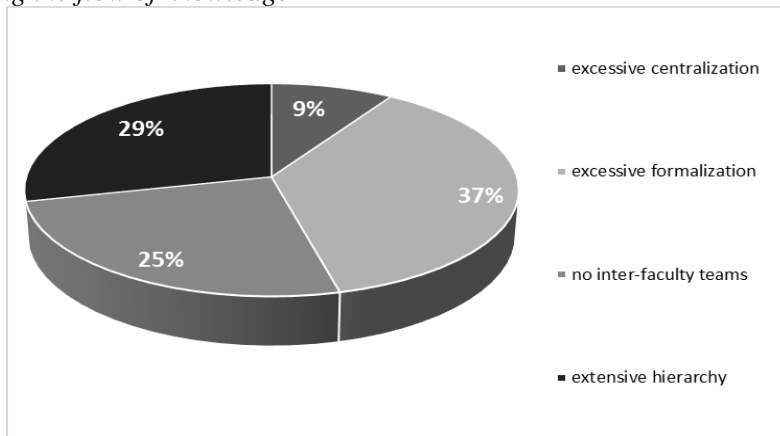
Source: *Own research.*

Nearly 60% of respondents believe that in companies employing them problems are solved together. The organisation of such meetings encourages the sharing of knowledge. Employees cooperate with each other, there is an intensive exchange of experiences and ideas. Thanks appropriate selection of teams, the organisation generates better ideas, and thus also profits. The remaining employees (approx. 40%) have never participated in such meetings. The reason for such behaviour is probably the organisational culture, which hinders the transfer of knowledge. It can be assumed that employees in these organisations are afraid of losing their position or prestige. They are characterised by a lack of security and trust in their co-workers and management.

Another potential reason for the lack of knowledge sharing within teams may be the lack of preparation of managers to lead such teams. Managers are not able to take care of effective communication and synergy in the group. They cannot encourage employees to think creatively and are unable to conduct such meetings. They do not create an atmosphere conducive to knowledge sharing and creative thinking.

The next question asked to the respondents was to determine the features of the company's organisational structure that hinder the flow of knowledge within the organisation. These features are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Respondents' opinions on the features of organisational structure hampering the flow of knowledge



Source: Own research.

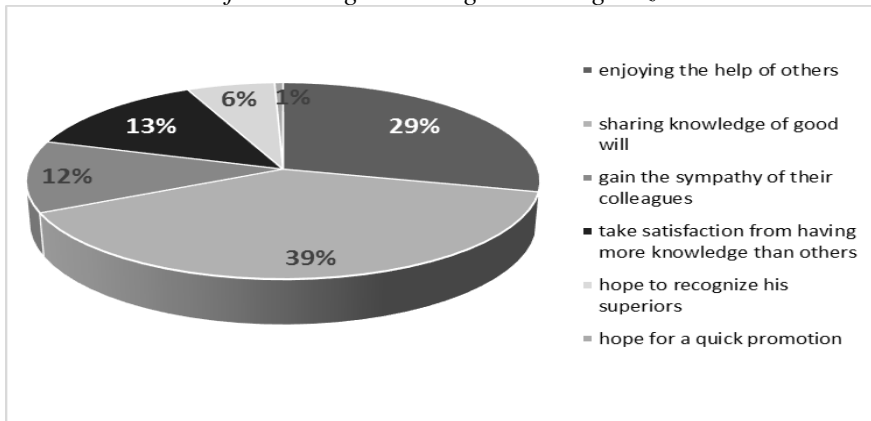
According to a significant part of respondents (37%) stated that a feature hindering the flow of knowledge in an organisation is excessive formalisation. The course of implementation processes is strictly defined in procedures, rules or regulations. Rigorous adherence to them is not conducive to transferring knowledge. In the opinion of the respondents, the degree of formalisation in the organisations surveyed is greater than necessary to meet legal requirements or discipline employees in terms of excessive and unjustified freedom of action.

Knowledge sharing is hampered by the lack of inter-departmental teams established to implement specific processes or projects (29%) and a developed hierarchy (25%). The lack of inter-departmental teams is probably due to excessive formalisation, which does not provide for the involvement of employees in working teams outside the parent organisational units. Too many management levels in an organisation's structure make it difficult to communicate information, exchange opinions between various units in the hierarchy and, in particular, share knowledge. The reason for these difficulties is also the fact that each lower-level employee is assigned to a specific supervisor. Only 9% of the respondents said that the barrier to knowledge flow is excessive centralisation. This means that in every tenth company the top

management does not delegate authority to lower levels of management, and therefore is not competent to implement the concept of knowledge management, for example in solving problems.

In their statements the respondents expressed their willingness to share knowledge. Therefore, they were asked to give their reasons for sharing knowledge with their colleagues. The answers are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. The reasons for sharing knowledge in an organization



Source: Own research.

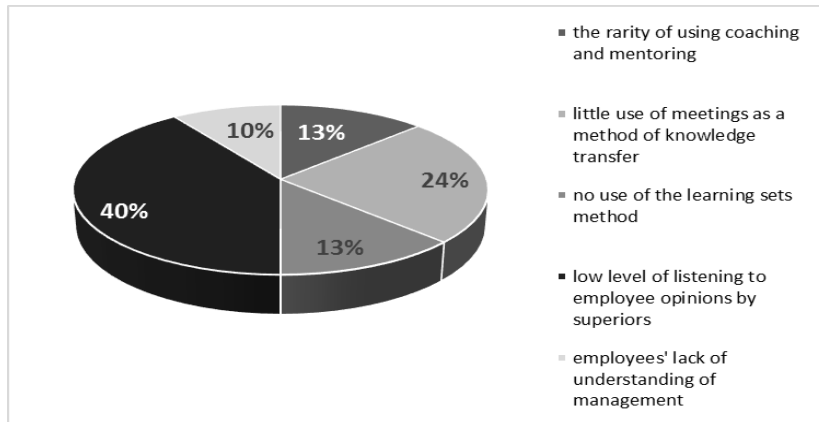
The More than 39% of the respondents give goodwill as the main reason for sharing knowledge and 29% of the respondents enjoy it. This proves the good atmosphere of cooperation in the studied companies. When building positive relationships with colleagues and supervisors, principles such as mutual respect, kindness, honesty and tolerance should be observed. The research shows that these principles are present in the companies of the studied respondents. They are aware that one can achieve much more through cooperation and kindness than alone. It also proves that employees are emotionally connected with the organisations employing them, identify themselves with them and care about the development of the companies. Their aim is to achieve the goals of the organisation.

About 13% of the respondents share their knowledge to gain the sympathy of their colleagues and the same number (12%) takes satisfaction from having more knowledge than others. Helping other employees makes the respondents feel better, more valuable, needed and ultimately happy with their work.

Only 6% of the employees hope for the recognition of their superiors and 1% believe that this way they will ensure faster promotion. The recognition of the superior is their priority value. By sharing knowledge with their colleagues, they want to get material benefits. They do not really show concern and understanding towards their colleagues. They are only pursuing their goals and professional ambitions. They are not interested in the good atmosphere of cooperation in the company.

In the course of research, employees were asked to indicate the factors constituting the most common irregularities in knowledge transfer. This is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. *The Factors constituting the most common irregularities in knowledge transfer*



Source: Own research.

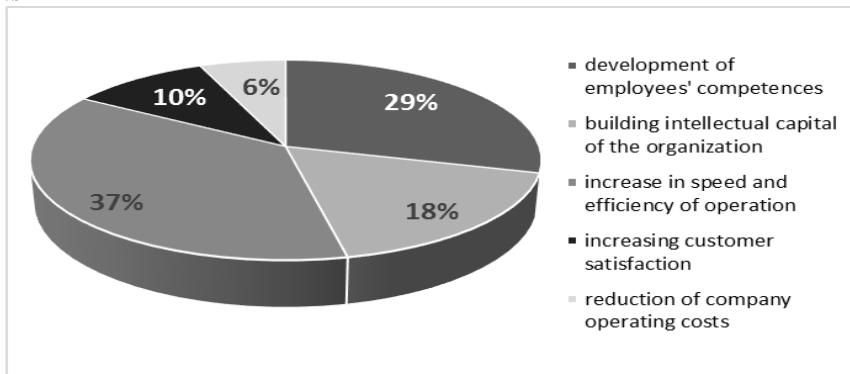
The vast majority of employees (over 40%) claim that the problem in knowledge transfer is the fact that the superiors pay little attention to the opinions of employees. Respondents appreciate the positive relationship between the superior and subordinate in the transfer of knowledge. The involvement of both of these parties plays an important role in this process. Job satisfaction and employees' trust in their supervisor play an important role. Third parties should not be involved in this.

Approximately 24% of the respondents claim that superiors do not use meetings as a means of transferring knowledge in the process of knowledge sharing and 13% claim that the method of learning sets (mutual learning sets for managers) is not used. Management does not organise information meetings devoted to reporting and presentation of results in order to analyse the effectiveness of work under certain conditions. Lack of teams and not assigning them tasks integrating the team results in the loss of the opportunity to obtain information on existing problems and complaints.

According to 13% of respondents, coaching and mentoring are not used in the process of knowledge transfer. Managers underestimate this form of knowledge sharing. Coaching is aimed at increasing the pace of development and improving efficiency through knowledge transfer. It also helps to improve the quality of work. Over 9% of the respondents blame employees for the fact that they do not understand the management, which in turn hinders the transfer of knowledge. This is probably due to the fear of criticism from the management. It should be remembered that if criticism is unavoidable, it must be constructive. It is more difficult to criticise somebody than to praise them. Criticism should encourage employees to improve the quality of their work.

The globalisation of the world economy is causing the increase in the demand for „knowledge". In order to stay ahead of the competition, companies implement "talent management" or „knowledge management" programmes. Respondents were asked for their opinions on incentives for companies to implement knowledge management systems (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Opinions on incentives for the implementation of knowledge management systems



Source: Own research.

According to the respondents (37%), the implementation of knowledge management systems increases the speed and effectiveness of action. They are aware of the fact that the efficiency of processes increases the profitability of the company. Competition in the economy forces organisations to optimise their costs. More than 29% of the respondents believe that it supports the development of employees' competences. It is a proof of exceptional treatment in the companies surveyed. Employees are treated as the most valuable resource of an organisation. They make it possible to gain an advantage over the competition. They are the ones who create the "added value" of the organisation. In the opinion of 17% of the respondents, the implementation of such systems helps to build intellectual capital of the organisation. A small number of respondents (10%) see this as a chance to increase customer satisfaction, and only 6% believe that it reduces the costs of running a company.

5. Conclusion

The presented research shows a subjective approach to knowledge management, but also contributes to the further exploration of this area of management. In further studies, the research sample should be selected in a way that maintains the representativeness of the studied population.

Summarizing the issues of knowledge sharing, it should be stated that a significant part of management problems is solved individually. Lack of team problem solving hinders the transfer of knowledge, experiences and judgements within an

organisation. This transfer is made possible by mutual assistance and support of co-workers. While working, it is important for the working groups to respect other people's privacy, refrain from public criticism, respect the common space. It is a mistake when the management expects ready-made solutions from their subordinates, believing that it builds positive relations in the contacts between the superior and subordinate. In sharing knowledge within working teams, the interpersonal skills of the management are just as important as their professional skills.

Research shows that excessive formalisation hinders the transfer of knowledge. Bureaucracy results in the introduction of legislation or rules for the organisation itself, trying to ensure rigorous compliance. Therefore, the degree of formalisation of the organisation be limited, giving employees the opportunity to implement new concepts and ideas as well as create a sense of creativity in action. Knowledge sharing is hampered by excessive formalisation, lack of inter-departmental teams established to implement specific processes or projects as well as lack of a developed hierarchy. Therefore, excessive formalisation should be avoided and inter-departmental responsibility for the company's fate should be sought.

Respondents share knowledge with colleagues because they enjoy it and have good will to pass on knowledge. Such a positive organisational culture is conducive to positive employee motivation. It can be assumed that such a culture consists of: honesty, loyalty, mutual assistance, tolerance, teamwork, effective communication. Employees who help others feel better and have boosted self-esteem. After all, helping others increases the chances of survival of organisations in such a competitive economy. Good communication with the superior plays a crucial role in knowledge transfer. Work and knowledge transfer is faster and more efficient. This fosters the employees' trust in their superior, they perceive him/her as competent in the position they hold. It is important to remember that organising meetings and conferences is a method of sorting out information. They shape a sense of identity, create good teamwork relations and, above all, provide an opportunity to exchange knowledge and experience.

Managers underestimate the importance of coaching and mentoring as modern methods of knowledge sharing. Thanks to their implementation, employee self-awareness is boosted, their potential for knowledge and skills is unlocked and activated, their motivation and ability to think flexibly are improved. Sharing knowledge leads to increased speed and efficiency. Knowledge management systems allow to focus on key processes that generate the greatest costs and value added. Growing competition in the global economy forces companies to maximise profits by improving their efficiency. Knowledge is a phenomenal resource for 21st century organisations. It progresses with an increase in its sharing frequency. Knowledge management plays a vital role in Industry 4.0. Further research should focus on trying to answer bothering questions:

- how to support employees in sharing knowledge in Poland?
- how to build a network of relationships for knowledge transfer?
- how artificial intelligence influences the sharing of knowledge?
- will artificial intelligence improve the process of sharing knowledge?

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