

METHODS OF ENRICHING KNOWLEDGE. HOW DO THEY INFLUENCE THE EMPLOYEES' ACTIVITY?

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Abstract:

Since managerial patterns have constantly been one of the major concerns of the scientific world while trying to find an optimum model for administrating organizational resources, the present article focuses on one of the most recently developed models, knowledge management. As expected, the proposed managerial paradigm is founded on the organizational knowledge developed within any functional system. In order to emphasize this particular resource's importance and contribution to the process of boosting organizational activity, our scientific effort aims to establish and analyze the employees' perceptions of some proposed knowledge developing methods, as well as regarding some internal/external aspects that could influence the managerial model implementation within military institutions. The primary methodological tool used by the author is the questionnaire, ensuring a significant informational corpus that is certainly useful for achieving the proposed research objectives. Subsequently, the study encourages a scientific dialogue regarding the main opportunities and solid challenges in implementing the new model.

Keywords: knowledge management; knowledge sharing; managerial challenges; self-improvement; fair rewards

1. Introduction

Ever since the earliest phases of modern history, people have struggled to manage their assets and exploit different opportunities at their best, so they could benefit from optimum results. At a larger scale, small, medium, or leading companies, profit-oriented or having a non-economic profile of activity, have been aiming towards the same goals. The managerial science has developed further and further throughout time, and it has born a multitude of branches, each of them specializing in a specific type of resource (Burlea-Șchiopoiu and Rainey, 2013). The interest shown by researchers and practitioners towards the human resource involved in the creation process evolved into a deep concern regarding intellectual capital, and, in the end, the scientific drill turned towards knowledge.

The concept of *knowledge* can be defined or approached in plenty of different ways, but in terms of the present research, its most suitable meaning is as the cluster of expertise, experiences, and know-how possessed by the employees of a company. Therefore, from the scientific point of view, the paper emphasizes the

methods connected to creating/exploiting (organizational) knowledge. Furthermore, the evolutionary phases of the managerial process differentiate only recently organizational knowledge as an independent resource. Thus, the administrative model founded on knowledge is characterized by an early stage of development.

Considering the rather insufficient degree of scientific coverage of the concept in question within the studies and reports carried out by now, especially at the national level, the present paper sets as main purposes: 1) identifying the most common methods of creating knowledge within an organization and 2) establish the perception that the employees have regarding the proposed methods.

The research study is carried out using the scientific questionnaire, the survey representing the primary tool in accurately gathering data and information within the selected sample. Between October 2021 and February 2022, the forms were distributed to the workers and ex-workers of the military units that have responsibilities in maintaining the state of national defense and security within the South-Western part of Romania. The answers of over 250 people guarantee the representativeness of the sample within the population from which it was selected, as well as the statistical significance of the conclusions adopted regarding the entire evaluated group.

The added value of the research work within the field is assured through the conclusions withdrawn regarding both the challenges and opportunities that the subjects identified regarding the different perceptions that the sample's members confessed in regards to the efforts that are likely to be needed in order to create and exploit knowledge in a superior way.

2. Literature Review

The scientific efforts within the management field have known a broad interest and appreciation during its evolutionary phases, but there are still some sectors that can be improved regarding scientific hypotheses testing and academic discussions. Nevertheless, the unanimous acceptance of the scientific approach's indispensability in terms of administrating a functional system's intrinsic resources indeed marked the beginning of the branching expansion of the contemporary managerial models that have been developed, especially since both the field's specialists and practitioners have constantly tried their best in regards to optimizing the newly individualized patterns.

The significance of the term *management* is chiefly described by the assertion made by Stephan Robbins and his colleagues (2013, p.6): "*The term management refers to the process of getting things done, effectively and efficiently, through and with other people.*" Even though it occupies the last place in the sentence, the concept of *people* represents the quintessence of the management's definition provided above. Ever since its earliest developing stages, the administrative models created emphasized the need of exploiting the potential of the human resource involved in the production/creation processes carried out within the organization (either profit-oriented or performing non-economic activities). Frederick Winslow Taylor (1911, p.10) introduces the idea that ensuring prosperity within any organization should be understood as guaranteeing a long-lasting profit for the manager and reaching the highest level of the employee's abilities. It is easy to anticipate that the perspective mentioned above is still available nowadays, since more and more managers have understood that a collective objective is

easier to achieve when all the team members gather their efforts in the same direction. Moreover, people are usually motivated if their work assures them certain satisfactions (personal or professional).

Under these circumstances, human resources started to be perceived as a significant asset within a company, and the managers began to struggle to find new ways of motivating their employees to overcome specific barriers and optimize their results. Abraham Maslow (2007, p. 92) defines the pyramid of human needs as a synergetic effort, claiming that any person acts to satisfy their physiological needs, followed by personal safety ones. The third-ranked necessity is the one of social belonging, while the last two refer to the desideratum of (self) esteem and respect, and self-improvement.

Utterly connected to human resource management, the intellectual capital and the organizational knowledge achieved due to the employees' cumulative efforts have been constantly analyzed and evaluated throughout management's evolutionary history. According to various researchers in the field (Burlea-Șchiopoiu, 2003; Brătianu, 2015, Burlea-Șchiopoiu et al., 2017), intellectual capital represents a determinant factor in overcoming a crisis. Going deeper into the conclusion adopted by the researchers, it can be easily adjudged that the most valuable resource of any functional system, especially in the contemporary context of globalization and digital transformations that ease a great variety of the previously performed human efforts, is organizational knowledge.

Constantin Brătianu (2015, p. 2) appreciates that *knowledge* can be defined as a balanced blend of rationality and perceptions, an idea that also sustains the argument that management is considered both a scientific process and a form of art. Therefore, according to the specialist's observation, we can assume that a managerial model based on knowledge as the leading resource to be exploited can be a better chance for the decision-making responsibility to optimize their results and gain a significant competitive (or even strategic) advantage.

Since the research works nationally developed found their basis in the innovatory ideas and scientific debates regarding the individualization of knowledge management as a stand-alone administrative model carried out mainly in the USA, Canada, and some Asian countries, the enrichment of the national scientific efforts will be achieved by encouraging the research works within this field and comparing the results obtained in respect to the local or regional businesses. In one of his works (2005, p.10), Thomas Davenport exposed that there can be distinguished three main categories of companies according to the degree of knowledge management's implementation. The researcher claims that top companies are the ones whose managers approach productivity through corporative initiatives and push the technological development's limits by trying to exploit it at its best through human capabilities and offer an integrated attitude towards the established objectives. Furthermore, this business category is considered to be the ones that adapted their managerial pattern to the constant changes in the environment they perform their activity within and exploit the available tangible and intangible resources to their maximum standards.

On the other hand, the second category of organizations includes those with an intermediary state of development. Their managers are currently adapting to the new realities. They aim to establish a more efficient managerial pattern, but the significant error identified within this division is that organizational knowledge's importance is not perceived from a holistic point of view. The companies which fall

into this section focus their effort mainly on technology and technological advantages but insufficiently or inappropriately combine them with the know-how and expertise given by the employees. Companies reluctant to change are considered the least evolved, as their decision-makers are less capable of being aware or anticipating any potential difficulties. Moreover, since there is only very little interest in technological developments and opportunities, they have reduced the possibilities of employing human resources with higher qualifications who could increase organizational performance or efficiency.

From this point of view, we appreciate that contemporary military institutions are part of the second category aiming to constantly develop and adapt their administrative model to gain strategic advantages. Having as its main characteristics a variety of strict internal rules and regulations, a very well-defined internal communication system, and a unique command center, the military organization is a "specific social entity" (Pişleag et al., 2011, p. 47). Some of the previous research works (McIntyre et al., 2003; Wayne and Martin, 2009; Popa, 2010; Lordache and Lordache, 2014) identify various challenges and opportunities in implementing knowledge management within military organizations, as follows:

- The desire and ability to constantly innovate, as the innovative ideas and support received towards developing the employees' intellectual capacity represent the primary resources in implementing an administrative model based on organizational knowledge.

- The degree of common sense and good collaboration, since the better the communication function is fulfilled within an organization, the more valuable data and information get to be shared and efficiently exploited.

- The expertise, experiences, and know-how disseminated within the group are indispensable conditions for efficiently exploiting not only the explicit knowledge possessed by the organization's personnel but also the tacit knowledge developed by each individual.

- Formal or informal meetings and discussions, as they are the main channels of interchanging data, information, experiences, potential solutions, or mistake made in the past in terms of similar situations and which can serve as *lessons learned* models.

- Training and practical courses centered on the most recent technological developments, as they can bring a real added value if understood and applied or, on the other hand, can generate significant time and money losses if not correctly or completely mastered.

- The capability to adapt and desire to access/implement different managerial patterns to improve the results either in the short-to-medium or long term.

Knowledge management's implementation within military units at the national level is characterized by some still incomplete scientific efforts, as the research within this area is relatively scarce, given both the specificity and confidentiality of the military activities and the embryonic degree of development of the managerial model based on the organizational knowledge in Romania.

3. Research objectives

Since the contemporary geopolitical context is relatively unstable and the national and regional security dimension, as one of the most important pillars of

any nation, depends on the way the critical resources are managed and the organizations responsible for maintaining the state of security perform their duties, the present research paper aims to:

- Deepen the analyses regarding the real potential of an eventual knowledge management's implementation upon the efficiency of the organizational activity.
- Identify which are the main influential factors (as considered by the human resource within the military organization) to interfere with one's activity.
- Establish how the questionnaire respondents perceive the factors influencing the employee's activity.

3.1. Methodology of research

The main research tool used in order to complete the scientific efforts carried out at the national level, especially regarding the military units' way of managing the available resources in terms of knowledge, was the scientific questionnaire. During October 2021-February 2022, the survey was distributed within the military units from the region of Oltenia (more precisely, within the counties of Dolj, Gorj, Olt, Mehedinți, and Vâlcea). The informational corpus ensured by more than 250 active or former military responses was analyzed and statistically processed using the dedicated software of SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solution).

The selected sample was statistically representative and significant, in which case the conclusion withdrawn within the research study regarding the sample can undoubtedly be extended to the whole population the subjects were selected from. Furthermore, each member had equal chances to be part of the sample, and the survey was completed voluntarily, without revealing any personal information or distinctive features that could lead to a later identification of the respondent or their professional tasks or responsibilities. Moreover, the answers collected are used exclusively for statistical purposes within the present research study, and the results obtained and discussed represent the personal conclusions and beliefs of the author, who does not identify with any other official opinion or statement of any state (military) institution.

3.2. Research questions

Which are the most apparent influential factors that can affect/interfere with the employee's activity if implementing knowledge management within military organizations?

What are the most frequently used methods of implementing knowledge management/ improving individual/organizational knowledge within the military units by their personnel?

4. Results and discussion

The perception of knowledge management's implementation within the military units can differ from one employee to another, so in order to be statistically significant, we would consider the mean results regarding the research questions expressed above. In terms of the efforts which may be perceived by the employees of a military institution in case of adopting a managerial model based on exploiting at its maximum the organizational knowledge, the dedicated item proposed the following alternatives:

- The need to primarily work in teams and collectively assume the potential successes and/or failures
- The extra time needed to be allocated to professional self-improvement;

- The time allocated to disseminating the knowledge gained/ detained to the other members of the team one is part of
- The time allocated to learn from the similar experiences of field specialists
- The lack of significant awards when attaining the desired/established objective

According to the responses given by the 257 national defense and security system employees, a cumulative percentage of almost 62% of the sample's members appreciated that working in teams and collectively assuming the results achieved would be the factor that would certainly influence their activity.

Table 1. The frequency of responses connected to the influence of working in teams and sharing all the successes and failures on employee's activity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Very little extent	22	8.6	8.6	8.6
	Little extent	17	6.6	6.7	15.3
	Neutral	57	22.2	22.4	37.6
	Large Extent	88	34.2	34.5	72.2
	Very large extent	71	27.6	27.8	100.0
	Total	255	99.2	100.0	
Missing system		2	.8		
Total		257	100.0		

On the other hand, a quite large number of the respondents (57 persons) declared neutral toward the potential managerial switch, while a total of 39 (17, respectively 22) confessed to feeling affected to a small and very little extent by such a managerial model. Also, it is essential to mention that the respondents did not complete the corresponding item correctly, so there are 255 valid answers.

The frequencies of the answers are illustrated in the figure below for a better visual representation.

The extent to which is considered that working in teams and sharing the successes and failures would influence the employee's activity

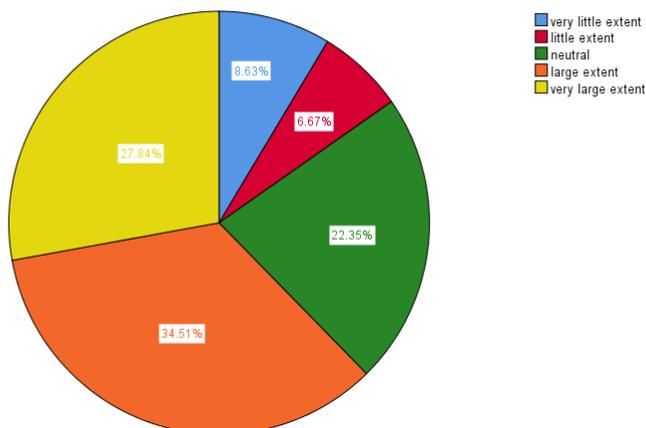


Figure 1. The frequency of responses connected to the influence of working in teams and sharing successes and failures on employee's activity

Source: Created by the author.

In terms of additional time allocated to specific professional self-improvement activities, the members of the sample showed a pretty similar approach, as almost 52% of them appreciated that such activities could influence their individual activities. Also, there were a pretty representative percentage of those who elected to be neutral regarding the referred question, while almost 21% claimed that such a change would affect their regular duties from a little to a very small extent.

Table 2. The frequency of responses connected to the influence of the additional time allocated to self-improvement on employee's activity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Very little extent	8	3.1	3.1	3.1
	Little extent	45	17.5	17.	20.8
	Neutral	70	27.2	27.5	48.2
	Large Extent	101	39.3	39.6	87.8
	Very large extent	31	12.1	12.2	100.0
	Total	255	99.2	100.0	
Missing system		2	.8		
Total		257	100.0		

From the statistical point of view, as marked within table no. 2, we notice that the total number of validated surveys was still 255, as two of the sample's members might mistakenly or incompletely be filled in the questions addressed. In addition, the frequencies of the answers are also illustrated in the figure below for a better visual representation.

The extent to which the additional time allocated to professional self-improvement will influence the employee's individual activity

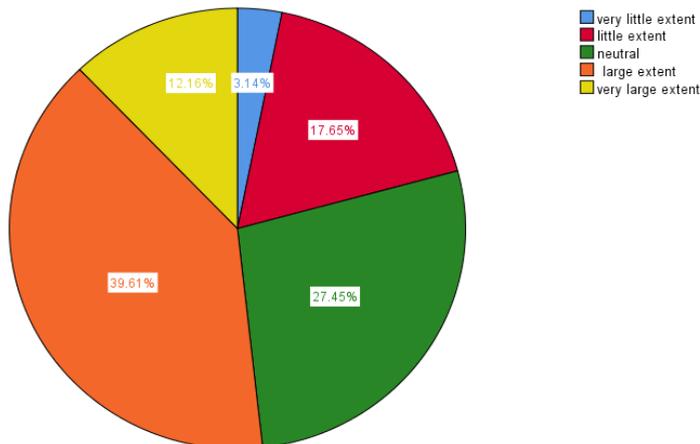


Figure 2. The frequency of responses connected to the influence of the additional time allocated to self-improvement on employee's activity

Source: Created by the author.

Evaluating the third factor in question, that is, the time that would be additionally allocated in order to disseminate the personal knowledge developed in time to the whole group an employee is a part of showed some pretty disappointing results compared to our expectations. Examining the graphic representation displayed on the following page, one cannot help noticing that a considerable percentage of the respondents placed themselves in a neutral zone, respectively, almost 40% of the sample's members. Still, choosing this option in regards to the analyzed subject can be interpreted in two different ways: 1) as a lack of interest in teaching/helping others how they can improve their daily performance or (very) little availability of collaboration and cooperation within the group or 2) as an excessive concern not to (involuntarily) reveal some confidential details of their specific tasks/activities that other members of the staff should not be aware of for counter informative reasons.

The cumulative percentage of those considering that the proposed activity would influence their work considerably is another 40%, while the respondents situated on the opposite sum up around 20%.

The extent to which allocating additional time in order to disseminate knowledge within the group influences the employee's individual activity

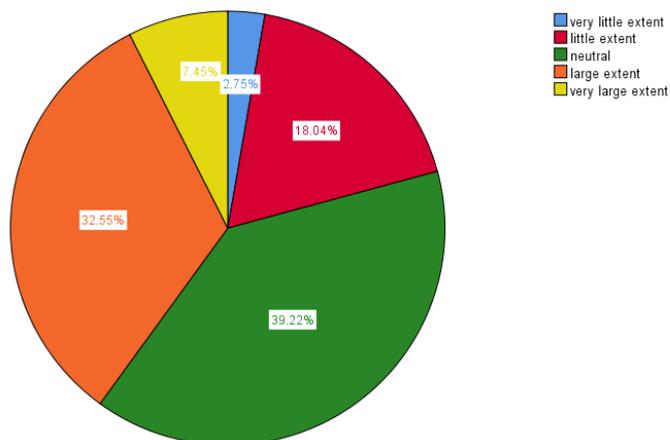


Figure 3. The frequency of responses connected to the influence of the additional time allocated to disseminate knowledge within the group on employee's activity

Source: Created by the author.

The fourth method to be analyzed is quite similar to the previous one from the point of view of the process – knowledge dissemination respectively refers to the time allocated by each individual to enrich their knowledge through the active efforts of an expert. This is practically the reverse situation of the previous scenario of sharing/disseminating knowledge, as in this case, the employee is the one who benefits from the advice and expertise, not the one giving them. Probably that is also the reason why a number 87 of the respondents representing 34.12% of the whole evaluated sample, chose the answer of *neutral* in regards to the extent they consider that such a method would influence one's activity within the organization.

The representatives of the cumulated categories who selected the alternative *minimal extent* is lower this time, reaching only 17.25% of the subjects, while the *large* and *very large extent ones* fall below the median line of the entire sample's members number with almost 49%.

The concept of *expert* could have been interpreted here as an outsider, a person who is not adequately involved in carrying out the same tasks or have any concrete responsibilities in the analyzed field of activity, a case in which some of the respondents might have been reluctant (chose either to be neutral or appreciated that the proposed method would influence their activity to little or very little extent). This might represent an actual limitation of the present research, which will be discussed in the last section of the present study so that it can be overcome in a future scientific evaluation of the proposed method while specifying that the expert would most probably be represented by someone working within the same field of activity and having great expertise and knowledge to share due to experiencing diverse situations or interchanging opinions with other intellectual workers.

Table 3. The frequency of responses connected to the influence of the additional time allocated to assess knowledge from an expert on an employee's activity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Very little extent	5	1.9	2.0	2.0
	Little extent	39	15.2	15.3	17.3
	Neutral	87	33.9	34.1	51.4
	Large Extent	98	38.1	38.4	89.8
	Very large extent	26	10.1	10.2	100.0
Total		255	99.2	100.0	
Missing system		2	.8		
Total		257	100.0		

The last factor to be evaluated was considered to have the highest rate of influence on the employee' activity within the organization since the author personally considers that in Romania most workers would be significantly motivated to perform their daily activity if rewarded accordingly. Still, the frequencies statistically measured bring out the second surprise of the present research, as the respondents who considered that the lack or scarcity of rewards provided when reaching the established objective would influence to a large or very large extent their individual activity represent only 23,92% from the subjects.

The extent to which the lack/scarcity of the rewards connected to reaching the established objectives influences the employee's individual activity

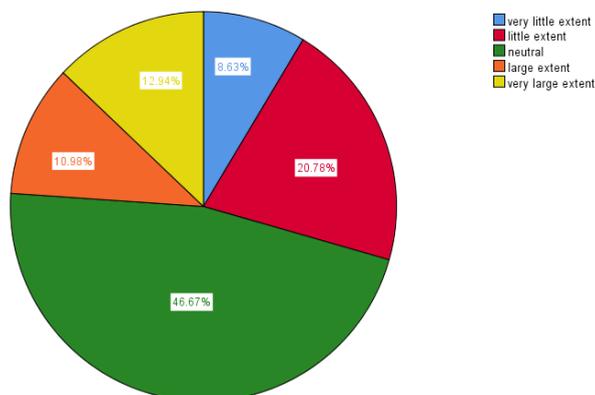


Figure 4. The frequency of responses connected to the influence of the lack/scarcity of rewards connected to reaching the established objectives on employee's activity

Source: Created by the author.

Likewise, in the previous two cases, the ratio of those who positioned themselves in a neutral position regarding the potential, influential factor in question is pretty extensive, representing almost 47% of the respondents' total number. Moreover, the employees who appreciated that the appropriate rewards offered by their manager would influence their work to a little or very little extent are quite many, statistically speaking, reaching a total of 29.41% out of the evaluated sample's members.

The percentage resulting after measuring the frequencies corresponding to the answers given to the present item can be easily interpreted as a high motivation of the military personnel to perform their daily or (sometimes) extraordinary duties at their best without expecting any additional recognition (reward) from their supervisors. Evaluating the whole corpus of data obtained after assessing the appreciated extent to which the proposed methods of enriching the individual/ organizational knowledge would influence the workers' activity, it can be easily noticed that the sum of those who selected either *large* or *very large extent* is the lowest for the last means suggested.

In my opinion, these outcomes show that the military institutions which were the object of this research work are already in a transition phase of managerial development (understood as an increasing degree of assessing and adopting the knowledge-based administrative model), as the motivation of the military personnel's majority has an intrinsic nature (the daily tasks seem to be performed at their best even in the lack of specific rewards). If interpreting the *neutral* answer corresponds to the last item this way, the study reveals a substantial total percentage of 76% of those who are *neutral* or have their work influenced little or little by the lack of additional rewards.

5. Conclusions

The research study succeeds in actively contributing to the scientific efforts to enrich the informational corpus of data evaluated regarding the methods proposed for enriching the individual/organizational knowledge and how these are perceived by the employees of the Romanian military units. Comparing the above-discussed results to the main means proposed in order to ease the knowledge management's implementation within a military organization by some national researchers (Iordache and Iordache, 2014, p. 174), we conclude that the managerial model currently in use within the military institutions from the region of Oltenia has made steadfast steps forward in adapting to the new realities and efficiently respond to the contemporary challenges (Burlea-Șchiopoiu and Ciobanu, 2005).

Analyzing the ways of perceiving several proposed knowledge-creating methods emphasizes that working in teams and collectively assuming the successes or failures of the group is considered the strongest influential factor on the employee's activity. On the opposite, rewarding the achieved outcomes of the workers proved to be outdated, as not even a quarter of the sample's members appreciated this approach as highly motivating. Finally, allocating additional time for either professional self-improvement activities or disseminating knowledge either way (providing or gaining) generated mixed feelings against the survey's subjects, the best-perceived method out of the three in terms of users being the effort made to self-improve.

There are also several scientific limitations of the present research work, as the results obtained showed a significant number of those who chose the answer to be *neutral* when it came to expressing their opinion regarding the subjects in question. Under these circumstances, the present study outcomes and conclusions can be completed and better outlined by future research works that would identify or more precisely define the actual meaning of a neutral positioning of the respondents towards the means and methods proposed to achieve/enrich the individual/organizational knowledge.

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