

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE CONDITIONS OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

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Abstract:

Perceiving organizational culture of an enterprise as one of the main factors supporting implementation and realization of knowledge management was the basis of elaborating this issue in the article. An attempt to determine cultural conditioning of knowledge management was taken.

A starting point to description of organizational culture supporting knowledge management was an overview of literature of the subject from the point of view of features of this culture. It allowed to select several dozen of characteristics creating convenient, for knowledge management, cultural environment. These characteristics reflecting determined patterns of thinking and behaving, were next identified as cultural values. These are: focus on people, low power distance, pro-innovation, status based on achievements, collectivism, external orientation and high tolerance of uncertainty.

Strengthening or promoting of selected cultural values would favour knowledge management. Formulated in summary on this basis suggestions may serve as practical hints in relation to directions of improving organizational culture of enterprise appropriate to needs of knowledge management.

Keywords: organizational culture, knowledge management, knowledge management culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the determinants of knowledge management is organizational culture of an enterprise. According to D.E. Leidner and T. Kayworth the social context is the "medium" for transmission of underlying values and beliefs into specific knowledge management behaviours (Leidner, Kayworth, 2008, p. 267).

Culture is expressed by patterns of thinking and artefacts. The basis of creating employees attitudes showing in their behaviours in particular situations are the assumptions, values and norms. This means that organizational culture describing enterprise is understood as shared by employees system of cultural values, bears contents having an influence on the possibility of knowledge management and this impact can be either strengthening or hindering. Therefore it is essential to identify the organizational culture conditions of knowledge management, defining favourable knowledge management cultural values. Knowledge of culture values appropriate to knowledge management may determine shaping and improving organizational culture.

2. THE ESSENCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE SUPPORTING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

The term organizational culture supporting knowledge management has its synonyms. These are the terms: knowledge culture (Oliver and Kandadi 2006), knowledge-centred culture (Janz and Prasarnphanich 2003), and knowledge-friendly culture (Davenport et al. 1998) to show the importance of cultural antecedents for organizational knowledge management (Mueller, 2012, p. 184). Apart from these terms there are other names in literature: culture appropriate to knowledge management needs, model of culture subordinated to knowledge, culture promoting the knowledge, culture generating new knowledge or culture knowledge sharing-oriented. Those last two terms generally narrow deliberations on culture to single stages of the process of knowledge management.

However, there are few definitions specifying the crux of the term in the literature. J.J. Brdulak perceives the culture supporting knowledge management as combination of factors creating such environment in company, in which knowledge will be actually created, spread and used (Brdulak, 2005, p. 29). For A. Glińska – Neweś special character of organizational culture creating conditions conducive to the implementation of knowledge management in organization (Glińska – Neweś, 2007, p. 230) is a knowledge culture. Ch. Evans uses the term culture subordinate to knowledge and interprets it as elements of organization structure providing perfect conditions for generating and sharing knowledge (Evans, 2012, p.57).

From the above expressions it appears that, in order for organizational culture to create favourable conditions of knowledge management, it must have some features.

3. CHARACTERISTIC OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE SUPPORTING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Among the descriptions of such culture, mentioned above Ch. Evans named: flexibility, fuzzy structures, extensive contacts, emphasis on learning, triggering creativity, smoothness of roles and job description, environment enabling working and learning in group, clearly defined values, openness to diversity, clearly defined requirements for employees, flexibility, ancillary leadership (Evans, p.59-70).

M. Przybyła describing organizational knowledge management gives the following ways of thinking and behaving describing it as: problem and unconventional perception of processes within organization, deep analysis of problems going beyond simple answers, continuous denial and questioning chosen strategy, examining different solutions often completely contrary to former manner of operation, experimenting with new ideas, introducing unconventional solutions, popularizing and promoting knowledge in the whole enterprise (Przybyła, 2001, p. 424 – 427).

Culture supporting knowledge management according to K. M. Wigg describes: aggressive aims of organization favourable knowledge management, proactive goals aiming at change of environment, strong and team culture favourable ideas exchange, effective leadership supporting changes and teams work, openness and honesty, high-trust culture for common learning, expanded need for education and creativity, general belief in the value of learning, belief that excellent customer service

must be accompanied by high level of knowledge, knowledge is the key element of sale, service and quality (Wiig, 1997, p. 3-36).

A. Sitko – Lutek in her thesis list many features which in her opinion decide about the fact that organization manages knowledge. These include: high tolerance of uncertainty ,acceptance of diversity of actions, reduction in power distance, mutual exchange of experiences, increase of employees knowledge autonomy, tolerance for mistakes, consistent system of management, creativity of individuals and teams, customer orientation and listen raptly to his needs, willingness to co-operate, collective problem-solving, willingness to increase competences and skills, search for new solutions and experiences, unconventional actions against common schemes in management, openness, informal ways of communication, flexibility, professionalism, courage in changes introducing and heterogenization of organizational culture in the effect of increasing complexity of organization relations to environment (Sitko – Lutek, 2004, p. 215 – 216).

In table No 1 the features of organizational culture supporting knowledge management according to different authors are presented.

Table 1: Features of organizational culture supporting knowledge management according to different authors

Author	Features of organizational culture supporting knowledge management
H. Obora	Equal treatment of all organization's beneficiaries, systemic thinking as the basis of environment perception, belief in the ability to influence the environment, monitoring of the environment, creating mutual vision, openness, honesty and full engagement in efficient communication, perceiving employee as an individual willing to learn, attention to diversity, climate for experimenting, belief in efficiency of team work, comprehensive support for learning
B. Mikula	Gaining positive results, wealth, creating shared vision of the future, comprehensive thinking, knowledge, gaining distinctive knowledge, team work, integration of a system, to be well-informed, unlimited access to source of information and knowledge, costs reduction, cost-effectiveness, high professional competences of people working for organization, co-operation, trust, creativity, complete use of possessed knowledge, striving after perfection, tolerate of uncertainty, openness, difference of opinions, focus on future, customer's satisfaction
D. A. Garlin, A.G. Edmondson, F. Gino	Favourable environment, precise processes, procedures and practices of learning as well strengthening them leadership
M. Czerska	Openness to experiments and new experiences, encouraging to proper decisions making, adjusting the process of learning to requirements resulting from adopted strategy of action, common attendance in planning organization's policy, using information to familiarize people with the most important issues of company activity and encouraging and authorizing people to take up tasks on their own initiative, very high level of internal exchange of knowledge and experiences, knowledge exchange with person from surrounding, environment facilitating learning, temporariness of roles, processes, procedures, flexible motivation system, self-governing, creativity
J. Liebowitz, T. Beckman	High efficiency, customer-orientation, development-orientation, orientation to pursue a perfection, flexibility, high level of knowledge and experiences, high level of learning and innovation, use of innovative systems IT, self-leading, pro-activity and attitude towards future, skills development, sharing knowledge
A. Glińska- Neweś	Creating strict external relations and honest communication, promoting success, emphasis on hidden and personalized knowledge, integration, loyalty, co-operation with surrounding, stimulating ambitions and creativity, creating sections connected with knowledge management, procedures enabling knowledge management, motivating system to creativity and innovation
Harvard Business Essentials	Acceptance within employees to take a risk, acceptance of new ideas, ways and methods of operation, free transfer of information, full access to sources of knowledge by employees, good ideas are supported by senior management, proper incentive system
W. Zheng, B. Yang, G.N. McLean	Adaptability, cohesion, mission, involvement

M. J. Donate-Manzanares, F. Guadamillas-Gomez	Trust, co-operation, pro-innovation, openness, decision autonomy
D. Wang, Z. Su, D. Yong	Co-operation, open relations between manager and subordinates, readiness to changes,

Source: own study on the base Obora, 2003, p. 51-53; Miłkula, 2007, p. 158 – 160; Garlin, Edmondson, Gino, 2009, p. 134-144, Czernska, 2001, p. 547 – 548; Liebowitz, Beckman, 1988; Glińska – Noweś, 2007, p. 193, Harvard Business Essentials, 2005, p. 148; Zheng, Yang, McLean, 2010, p. 763-771; Donate-Manzanares, Guadamillas-Gomez, 2010, p. 82–94; Wang, Su, Yong, 2011, p. 363-373.

Observations of many authors concerning the features of organizational culture supporting knowledge management coincide to a large degree. They are result of their theoretical thoughts and have a demand character. Some of them, on the other hand, are a result of empirical studies in determinants of knowledge management.

After analysis of the above list, cultural environment optimizing the management process can be described by using the following characteristics:

- Narrowing the distance from power
- Fluidity of roles and job description
- Participatory management
- Leadership strengthening learning processes
- Team work
- Co-operation
- Non-formalized ways of communication
- Possession of appropriate information
- Unlimited access to sources of information and knowledge
- openness
- tolerance of uncertainty
- right to mistakes
- difference of opinions
- acceptance of diversity of actions
- trust
- courage
- full use of possessed knowledge
- high professional competences
- striving after perfection, professionalism
- pressure on learning
- Increasing autonomy of knowledge employees
- Necessity for achievements
- Creativity
- Flexibility
- Customer's satisfaction

Analysed features of culture oriented on knowledge are also reflected in particular behaviours of organization members. Comment them as values enable to identify organizational culture supporting knowledge management.

4. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE VALUES OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Presented features of organizational culture subordinated to knowledge are reflected in employees behaviour, which may be treated as direct manifestation of employees attitudes in relation to different aspects and organizational solutions concerning knowledge management. Indirectly, employees behaviour may also be interpret as showing cultural values. Defining them will enable to know the values appropriate to implement initiative of knowledge management.

W table 2 identification of values supporting knowledge management was done by ascribing separate characteristics an adequate cultural model.

Table 2: Organizational culture characteristics supporting knowledge management and resulting from them culture values.

Organizational culture characteristics supporting knowledge management	Justification	Culture value
Narrowing the distance from power	Success of initiatives connected with knowledge management is conditioned by open relations between subordinates and superiors, awareness of mutual dependence, mutual exchange of information and experiences.	Low power distance
Fluidity of roles and job description	In an organization managing knowledge the employees must be prepared to realise different or partially changed job description, which causes demand for knowledge, need for constant learning and sharing the knowledge	Low power distance
Participatory management	Participation of employees in taking decisions give organization a chance to use their knowledge and involvement. On the other hand, it enables employees to fulfil their needs to self-realization. Increase in participation is accompanied by increase in responsibility for taken decisions, collective responsibility for organization fate arises.	Focus on people Low power distance
Leadership strengthening learning processes	Managers encouraging employees to take part in discussion, asking inquisitive questions, listening carefully, offering employees time, sources and conditions to find and solve problems of organization encourage employees to creativity and share of knowledge	Focus on people Low power distance
Team work	When work processes are team realised the flow of knowledge and its deepening come naturally.	Collectivism
Co-operation	Co-operation is the basis of teamwork and creating the networks of knowledge creation in every area of an organization, between organization employees and people from environment.	Collectivism Openness to environment
Non-formalized ways of communication	Free transfer of information between employees, possibility to direct communication with people possessing information, lack of emotional barriers in communication with superiors facilitate the flow of knowledge.	Low power distance
Possession of appropriate information	Employee to feel well informed asks, talks, especially in an open and direct way, develops communication skills.	Low power distance
Unlimited access to sources of information and knowledge	Full access to information needed for employees to fulfil their tasks, openness in communication processes, comfortable sharing of knowledge as well as creating by enterprise and employees the network of contacts give possibility to use it fully.	Low power distance External orientation
openness	Openness concerns easy access to all information necessary to fulfil the task, openness to changes and recognizing them as permanent phenomenon, openness to changeability of environment and openness to otherness and diversity. Promoting culture of openness favours exchange of thoughts, demand on it, innovation.	High tolerance of uncertainty
Tolerance of uncertainty	Employees treating changes, new events as a source of inspiration and development opportunities search for and use in a natural way the knowledge to find themselves in new situation and solving the problem.	High tolerance of uncertainty Pro-innovation External orientation
Right to mistakes and risk	Implementation of ne solutions and daily challenges at work are burden with possibility of making a mistake. Drawing conclusions from made mistakes is also a lesson.	High tolerance of uncertainty Pro-innovation
Difference of opinions	Differences arising from qualifications, skills of employees, perceived by them norms and values may cause constructive conflicts. Contradictions may be the basis of deliberations on problem from totally different points of view, which stimulates mind to work and is an occasion to deepen the knowledge.	Pro-innovation

Acceptance of diversity of actions	High level of freedom of employees in choice of working method, ways of operating equipment, features of results of actions etc. stimulates creative approach to task, learning, opinions and experiences exchange.	Pro-innovation
Trust	Trust concerns the relations between organization and employees based on mutual care. The effect of that is management trust in competences and skills of employees and resulting from that wide range of creativity freedom, self-control. On the other hand, employees faith in organizational leader, their authority, the reality of their goals and benefits from knowledge management are created.	Focus on people
Courage	Courage concerns readiness to introducing changes, presenting one's own opinion, participating in discussions, formulating constructive criticism, inquiring, establishing contacts and critical look on the state of one's knowledge.	High tolerance of uncertainty
Full use of possessed knowledge	Employees focusing on productive use of their information and knowledge as well as database, systems of documents circulation may outline vision, concept of operation of organization, products, services, technologies, and solving everyday problems.	Pro-innovation
High professional competences of people working for organization	When source of promotion, criteria for taking decision about employment or co-operation are professional competence and trainings of employees are treated as investments, the knowledge acquires significance.	Pro-innovation Status based on achievements
Striving after perfection, professionalism	Possessing specific knowledge and professional give employee higher sense of confidence in what he is doing and what solutions get, allows to keep objectivity in various organizational situations, make rational choice, influences on self-esteem, professional aspirations.	Pro-innovation Status based on achievements
Pressure on learning	Through learning employees gain the necessary knowledge to realize tasks, deepen it, develop competences and skills, activate creativity.	Pro-innovation
Increasing autonomy of knowledge employees	A demand for employees independence aims at binding employees with workplace, creating pro-effective attitudes, leads to humanizing working conditions, improving employees qualifications.	Focus on people Pro-innovation
Necessity for achievements	Achievements ambition favours very much searching, creating and using knowledge.	Status based on achievements Pro-innovation
Creativity	Stimulating creativity of employees influences on their readiness to introducing innovations, deep interest in problem and motivates to stand up to appearing challenges.	Pro-innovation
Flexibility	In relation to knowledge management a special significance is acquired to intellectual flexibility. It means openness of employee to new ideas, ability to adapt to new conditions or requirements of working process. In order for an employee is flexible he must master knowledge which level is higher than issued requirements by currently performed kind of tasks. This triggers an interest of knowledge, its deepening and using.	Pro-innovation High tolerance of uncertainty
Customer's satisfaction	Enterprise competes for a customer in the market. Focus on a customer, concentrating on his needs and satisfying them are the base for many strategic decisions made by management. Their accuracy depends on knowledge about current and prospective customer of products manufactured by organization. Knowledge management almost on every stage strengthens the decision-making process by providing information about customers.	External orientation

Source: own study

Availing of identified in Table 2 values a characteristic of organizational culture supporting knowledge management may be done. It is created by a system of the following values:

- Focus on people
- Low power distance
- Pro-innovation

- High tolerance of uncertainty
- Status based on achievements
- Collectivism
- Focus on exterior.

The system of values refers to system of thoughts which mutual sharing is the basis of success of every initiative in organization, including knowledge management. If the members of an organization managing knowledge, making a choice among alternatives, will be driven by mentioned values, a community of interest of an organization and employees will come into existence.

Focus on people, low power distance, pro-innovation, high tolerance of uncertainty, status based on achievements, collectivism, focus on exterior create a system, which determines also attitude of employees to management, other employees, own work and environment. Defining values favouring knowledge management is not enough to build up the culture of knowledge. Mentioned values must be strongly shared by employees. These processes on the other hand must be supported by complex changes of management system.

SUMMARY

Carried out analysis allows to indicate the values and their signs, which reinforcement or promotion would favour the process of knowledge management. Formulated on this basis suggestions may serve as practical hints regarding the direction improving organizational culture of an enterprise appropriate to knowledge management.

Shaping of organizational culture supporting knowledge management should take into consideration the following operations:

- Strengthening focus on people,
- Lowering the power distance,
- Strengthening status based on achievements,
- Strong presenting of pro-innovation,
- Confirm collectivism
- Demonstrating openness on environment,
- Use of knowledge management in dealing with changes.

Although shaping organizational culture is a difficult process due to its complexity, however knowledge management requires consideration for existing cultural factors in implementation of proper operational solutions and on the other hand – means the necessity of shaping proper culture values.

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