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The involvement of employees in knowledge management in the light of the research results

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The involvement of employees in knowledge management in the light of the research results

JEL Classification: D83 (search, learning, information and knowledge, communication, belief, unawareness)

Keywords: *employees involvement, knowledge management, process, activity, behaviour*

Abstract: The development of information technology, increase demand for mental work, shortening product life cycle and competing of the quality meant that knowledge is widely considered to be one of the most important resources of the organization. Taking into account activities related to the process of knowledge management (such as the acquisition of knowledge from the environment, identifying its in the organization, knowledge sharing) and their sources (internal and external stakeholders) can be noted that any knowledge management requires the involvement of employees. Based on the analysis of the employees engagement was found that managing knowledge should be supported by the affective commitment and focused on work organization and environment. They exhibit a specific behavior. Recognizing this problem for interesting the empirical research was carried out. Their goal was to identify the prevalence of involvement of employees in knowledge management and the desired employee behavior in the various activities of this processes. The study conducted among enterprises of Lubuskie province. The research used a survey method. It was found that the surveyed enterprises implement the activities related to knowledge management in a selective manner. In the light of the adopted criteria only one (out of 102) of the surveyed companies could be considered as knowledge management. It also seems that the attention is not focused on the creation of knowledge but its acquisition and protection. Taking into account the results of research on behavior conducive to knowledge management can be concluded that the climate for creativity exists at the level of teams but not the organization.

Introduction

Gaining a competitive advantage by the company largely depends on the effective management of knowledge in it. This process is directed to both the environment and the interior of the organization. It is related to the

acquisition of knowledge, which is possessed by external stakeholders (customers, suppliers, competitors) and its creation in the company, disseminating protection among the organization members, that is keeping knowledge in the company. It is interesting to decide which of the processes of knowledge management exist in the organization, what actions are taken to disseminate them. The results of the research conducted by A.K. Gup and V. Govindarajan (1991), proved that the effectiveness of actions connected with knowledge management depends on acquiring information, evaluating its value, sharing the knowledge, its absorption. These processes are participated by employees. That is them who reveal other types of behaviour in those processes, get involved in a different degree in completing activities, make an attempt of a different amount — (cf.: Saks, 2006, p. 602; Smythe 2009, p.634; Juchnowicz, 2010, p. 35). Let us observe that it is important both during each process related to knowledge management and among them – these processes integrate, depend on one another (the knowledge is protected by the new one, which is created on the basis of the acquired knowledge or becomes the result of the environment analysis).

Analyzing the forms of employee involvement it is possible to state that knowledge management is supported by the involvement in work, organization and the environment, that is undertaken in each area and affective involvement, i.e. resulting from the willingness to be part of the organization and therefore causing higher activity than the one resulting from responsibilities and established norms (see: Stankiewicz & Moczulska, 2014). It is worth learning the behaviour proving the forms of involvement mentioned and thus significant for knowledge management.

The purpose of the article was to determine the prevalence of knowledge management in the company and the employee behaviour important for the implementation of processes related to knowledge management. To realize it, the empirical research was carried out. The article presents the results.

. Employee behaviour essential for knowledge management

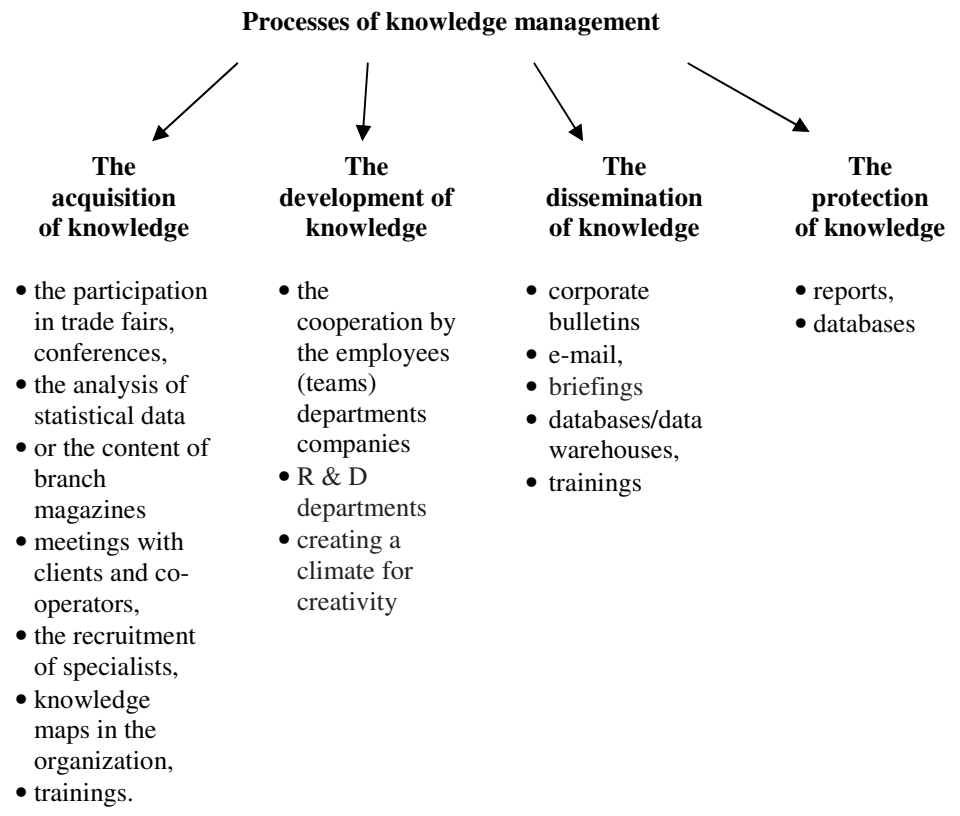
Knowledge management, is, according to K. Perechudy (2005, p. 64) "solving existing and anticipating future problem situations associated to some extent with the disposal of knowledge, due to which it becomes possible to efficiently generate and use it in order to meet the needs of increasingly demanding customers on a more and more competitive market". As pointed out by many authors, knowledge management, conducive to achieving a competitive advantage, includes various

processes. In the paper the classification after W. Karwowski (2010) is accepted, which distinguishes four basic: the acquisition of knowledge, its development, dissemination and protection. For the purposes of the further consideration we present the understanding of these processes.

The acquisition of knowledge is based on collecting information of the needs, expectations of external stakeholders on the one hand and assessing current activities of the enterprise and its representatives, on the other - the data on the functioning of competition (Jemielniak & Koźmiński (Ed.), 2012). The process involves the observation and making interaction with the environment. These actions can be implemented either as informal discussions during meetings with clients and co-operators, and can also include the participation in trade fairs, conferences, the analysis of statistical data or the content of branch magazines. Acquiring knowledge concerns the identification of the knowledge held by employees as well. Knowledge maps, created on its basis, can be used, among others, for the assignment of competent personnel for the new tasks, helping other members of the organization or choosing people to created teams (Eppler, 2001). The activities mentioned are related to another process - *the development of knowledge.* It should be complemented by organizing trainings and the establishment of cooperation by the employees of different teams, departments or companies. The first ones support deepening the possessed competence, the second - by sharing knowledge, exchanging and connecting it, contribute to the implementation of effective solutions in a various degree and/or to promoting the formation of new ideas, concepts and solutions. The consequence should be the awareness of the possessed knowledge (Jemielniak & Koźmiński (Ed.), 2012) the transition from tacit knowledge to explicit one (Nonaka & Takeuchi 2004) and from the basic to the innovated knowledge (see: Zack, 2002). Let us note that the effectiveness of knowledge management requires the *dissemination* of information obtained during the process of acquiring and developing it (Jashapara, 2006). It can take the form of a message sent by e-mail, published in corporate bulletins, submitted by the supervisor, as well as the data entered into computer programs (databases, data warehouses) and organized trainings. Their subject matter should concern not only issues related to the implemented solutions, the tasks performed (knowledge), but also to develop skills essential for knowledge management associated with sharing it, selection and transfer of information, teamwork, creativity and with the behaviour favouring the nondisclosure of knowledge to people outside the organization. The last of skills contributes to the implementation of the fourth of the processes - *the protection of knowledge*. It also involves the saving of created solutions,

archiving data and information. The actions that can be used in different processes of knowledge management were presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Measures used in the particular processes of knowledge management



Source: own elaboration based on:Probst, Raum & Romhardt 2004, Evans 2005, Jashapara 2006, Jemielniak & Koźmiński (red.) 2012

Analyzing individual knowledge management processes, it is necessary to notice in them the importance of technological systems (flow of information, data archiving and access to information), structural solutions (Zack, 1999; Grudzewski & Hejduk, 2004). At the same time, it is worth noting after Jashapara (2004) that the information and data is the basis for knowledge, and it belongs to the man and therefore it is an entity, as Falzgavić writes (after: Morawski, 2006), that its use, and due to it the quality, will depend on. It seems, however, that the technology can support knowledge management, but its effectiveness depends on the skills and

behaviour of employees. Among them the following ones should be mentioned (Evans, 2005; Jemielniak & Koźmiński (Ed.), 2012):

- conducting observation,
- searching for information and data, processing and selecting it,
- readiness to learn, learning,
- making decisions and taking over responsibility,
- providing information,
- sharing knowledge,
- focus on problem solving,
- openness to changes,
- openness to new knowledge and the views of others, including the ones differing from their own,
- the ability to listen,
- the ability to conduct a dialogue,
- breaking stereotypes, ways of thinking,
- willingness to experiment, take risks.

Let us note that the mentioned types of behaviour are related to the tasks assigned by the work station (the first four) and the running of the organization (the other of the above). They relationships with other employees - in the environment as well.

It should be emphasized that the types of behaviour are associated with the effort, which often exceeds the one resulting from the duties. They are based on patience, determination in the pursuit of the goal. They prove the positive attitude to the organization, a desire to be its member and not just an employee who works in the enterprise, as they must or think they should[1].

It seems that knowledge management is supported by affective commitment and focused on the work organization and environment. The supposition became the basis to carry out empirical research.

Methodology of the research

Due to the fact that knowledge management is a relatively new concept of management, and that has been a decline of employee involvement, the research identified knowledge management processes and employee behaviour for the acquisition, creation, dissemination and protection of knowledge in the enterprise. The first was identified by determining the

[1]Respectively presented: affective commitment (wants), normative (should) and duration (must) – Meyer & Smith, 2000.

activities carried out in the organization (Fig. 1), their themes, goals, which they were used for, (what they concerned) and frequency. The second one was referred primarily to such issues as: the flow of information, knowledge sharing, establishing cooperation, mentoring, listening to other people's opinions, attitudes toward: risk, emerging ideas and conflicts. The attention was paid to the perception of these types of behaviour among colleagues, superiors and to the values applicable in the enterprise and the rules adopted in the organization that have an impact on the effectiveness of knowledge management and the direction, level, intensity of involvement of members of the organization.

The research used a survey method, with the structured and standardized questionnaire. For the analysis one hundred and two companies in the Lubuskie province were qualified. These include companies of any size - micro (27%), small (26%), medium (20%) and large (25%). There were enterprises from the branch of: government (25%), real estate, renting and services related to business activities (22%), trade and repairs (16%) and industry (11%). Considering the object of the study it is worth noting that employees who completed the survey, regardless of the level of education (secondary - 60%, higher - 40%) and their position (serial - 45%, special - 40%) indicated that they continue to expand their knowledge.

Employee participation in knowledge management in the light of the research results

The obtained results of the research showed that the workers of almost all companies surveyed were aware of its mission (97%), ongoing objectives (96%), the direction of development (89%), expectations of the superior in terms of daily tasks (92%) and the objectives related to them (92%). Less, because in 75% of organizations, they knew where to get the necessary information - who and what for (in general) is engaged in the organization. Among the reasons for the situation it can be indicated, among others, that 55% of the enterprises encourage employees to "wander" between departments in order to exchange experience and the fact that although in 78% of the surveyed companies there is a database containing the information related to its operation, serial employees have access to all the data contained in it only in 12% of the organizations, and in the specified range – in about half of them (51%).

It was found that the surveyed enterprises analyzed various sources of knowledge. This is done mainly when the situation demands. Almost a third part of the companies (31%) constantly takes into account the views of customers and employees, quarter (25%) - the actions of competition, a

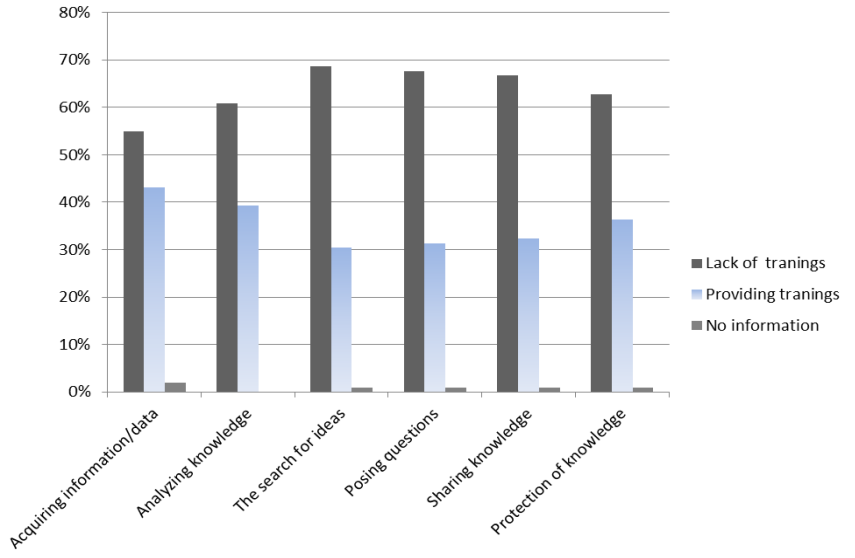
fifth (19%) – the opinions of subcontractors. Customers, employees, competitors and trends in technology are the source for acquiring new knowledge quarterly in 10% of companies surveyed. It is worth noticing that in several questionnaires of the surveys, at the same issue, information[2] was reported that the particular situation did not concern the company due to the nature of its business. These were companies from the branch of administration (library, government offices) and healthcare. Similar responses were granted in the enterprises operating in education and administration for such sources as: competition, suppliers and technology. Does the situation mean that these businesses are not focused on knowledge management? Do they not see the importance of interaction with the environment? Do they not really distinguish stakeholders (e.g. not recognize the company providing office supplies for a provider and a city dweller for a client)? Or maybe overconfidence is recognized?

The results of the research proved that the employees of more than half of companies participated in the training required by law (e.g. health and safety - 56%) and associated with the performance of the duties / responsibilities (52%) two or three times in the last year. It was also identified that such courses were not organized in 35% of the surveyed companies. The opposite situation can be described in terms of trainings aimed at developing the competencies essential for knowledge management (chart 1). The enterprises in which they were organized (usually up to three times a year - chart 2), the skills was shaped related to obtaining information, data (30%), analyzing the knowledge (25%) and its protection (25%).

Similar results were obtained for meetings concerning the functioning of the organization. Half of the companies (52%) did not organize those.

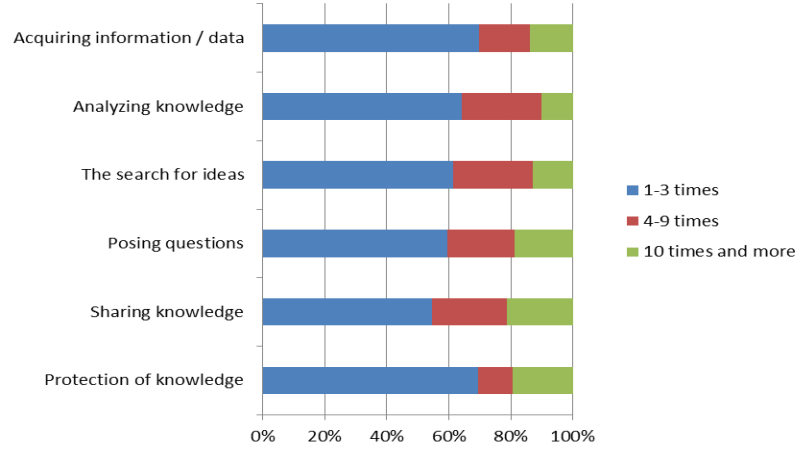
[2] These were handwritten annotations of respondents - in the questionnaire it was not possible to choose the "not applicable".

Chart 1. The subject of trainings organized in the surveyed enterprises



Source: own study based on the results of research

Chart 2. The frequency of trainings to develop competencies related to knowledge management in the surveyed enterprises



Source: own study based on the results of research

whose aim was to share knowledge, in the 42% - related to the business of the enterprise. The main objectives of the meetings in organizations in which they are held frequently (up to three times a year) were: necessary changes (39%), the ability of the company, problems, the implementation of goals (38%), company operations (37%), the methods of work performance (35%) and knowledge sharing (25%). The information on decisions taken at the meetings, the accepted solutions was distributed in the organization during meetings (60%), through messages sent by e-mail (38%) or publications placed in corporate brochures (27%). The consequence of the meetings was also to organize trainings (45% of the companies) and to update the database (30%).

Taking into consideration the results on meetings and trainings, it is worth awarding the results showing cooperation. It was mainly taken in order to achieve the objectives of the company (68%), improve the organization of work (66%) and to solve specific problems (59%). The creation of new solutions, services, products, became the essence of cooperation in the case of 38% of the surveyed companies. The indications on the frequency of making cooperation should be considered to be interesting – it was done 10 times or more, or from one to three times a year. The largest frequency (45%) was related to cooperation in teams, smaller (32%) – with people from different departments in the organization and the lowest (11%) with other companies. The second, much lower frequency (up to three times a year) was observed in the fourth part (23%) of the companies as undertaken in teams and at the enterprise level, and in sixth (16%) - with other companies. Similarly, as in the case of sources of obtaining knowledge, it was noted that in several administration and health care institutions cooperation is not only not organized, but its establishing is excluded. Does this prove the existence of competing climate in these organizations? Or maybe the groups of different status?

It should be highlighted that the results of cooperation were disseminated less frequently than the results of organized meetings. The main tools for transferring knowledge were identified as: e-mail (49%), a company newsletter (33%), updating the database (28%) and the methods of knowledge dissemination included: information meetings (26%) and trainings (22%).

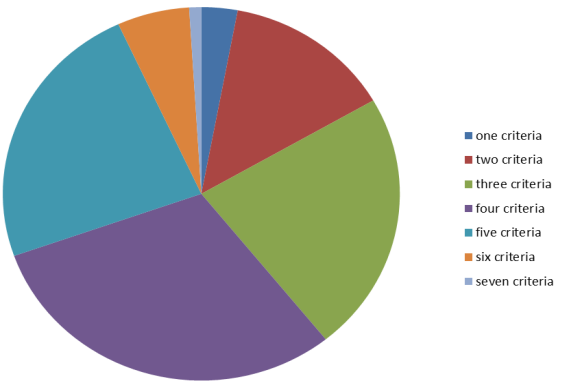
When analyzing the survey results - the subject of trainings, their frequency, the universality of cooperation, the use of sources of knowledge, and its dissemination, it seems that the surveyed companies are focused on the use of knowledge rather than creating it, and that they lack comprehensive knowledge management.

Since knowledge management refers to the implementation of specific processes, analyzing the data, we assumed that the company that manages knowledge is the one which uses them at least on a minimum level, i.e. meets the following criteria:

1. At least once a quarter obtains the information on the market from at least three different sources.
2. Organizes trainings, including at least once a year on the development of competencies essential for knowledge management.
3. At least four times a year organizes meetings related to the company business.
4. At least once a year allows the establishment of cooperation.
5. Shapes the climate of creativity, which means the presence of at least half of the accepted types of behaviour essential for knowledge management (concerning the participation of employees in decision making, communication, errors and creative thinking).
6. Disseminates knowledge, that is provides the results of the meetings and collaboration using a minimum of two of the five studied sources.
7. Protects knowledge by creating a database.

Chart 3 presents the universality of activities related to knowledge management in the studied companies. Only one of them can be described as managing knowledge.

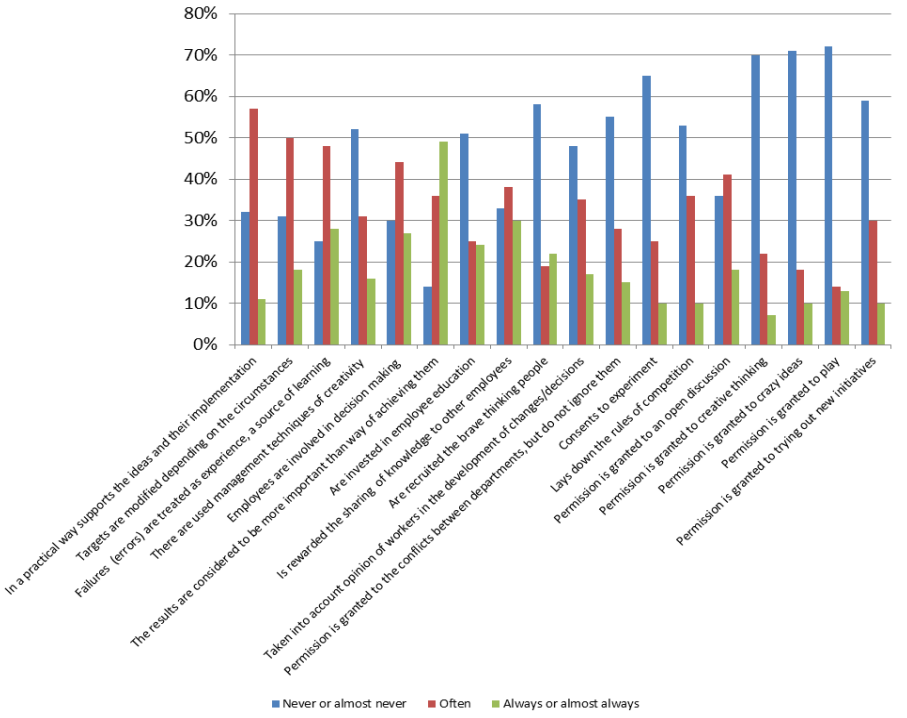
Chart 3. The number of knowledge management activities carried out in the surveyed enterprises



Source: own study based on the results of research

Taking into account the types of behaviour that were identified in the surveyed companies it is necessary to emphasize the difference in the activities relating to creativity. In approx. 40% of companies surveyed (chart 4) - always or almost always – the results are considered more important than the way to achieve them, boldly minded, brave workers are recruited (30%), and failures are considered to be a source of experience.

Chart 4. Types of behaviour existing in the organization



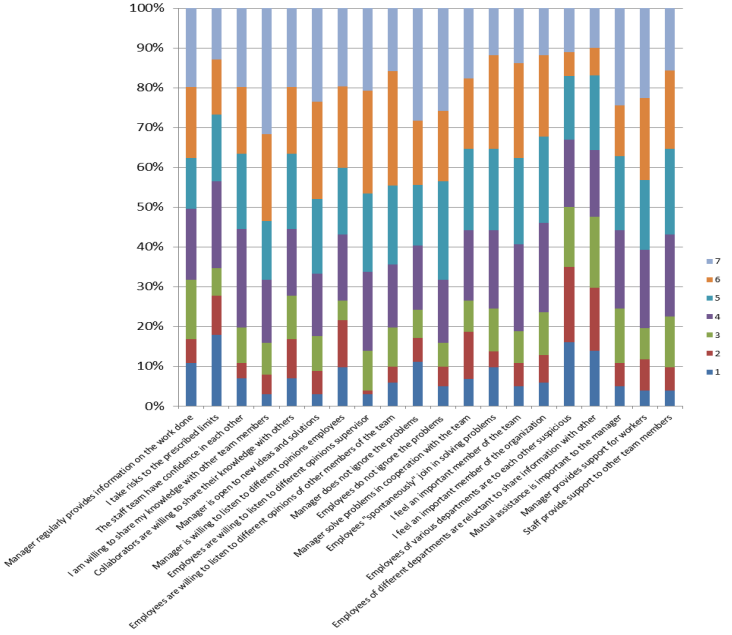
Source: own study based on the results of research

At the same time it is not allowed for: creative thinking, crazy ideas, experimentation, as well as knowledge sharing with others is not awarded, or defining the principles of competition is omitted. Let us note that this can cause cognitive dissonance among employees, and thus limit their creativity, grassroots and spontaneous presentation of ideas, solutions and undertaking relevant activities. The presented results of the research show that the majority of companies does not pay the attention to the consistency of actions between particular processes. This is evidenced by the results for

the preferred values in companies. Such values as: customer focus, their expectations, requirements, achieved satisfaction and a desire to succeed, honesty, commitment, quality of work were present at almost 80% of the companies. At the same time - taking into consideration the results presented so far - the preferred values were not reflected in the actions and types of behaviour. It is worth noting that the trust and effective communication with the "top-down" and reversely proved to be the values least indicated (58% of the surveyed companies) within the current values and also was the most common (37%) ones considered desirable.

Considering the identified types of behaviour that affect the relationships between employees it was found that (chart 5): employees are willing to share their knowledge with other team members (54%), perceive their co-workers in a similar way (37%), but are less likely to indicate the exchange of information between departments (30%). The respondents

Chart 5. The perception of the behaviour of colleagues and superiors



Source: own study based on the results of research

listen to different views of the members of the team (45%) and believe that this also done by their superior (41%). Many of them are considered a

manager as a person who does not ignore problems (42%), focuses on the provision of support (38%) and gives the same (44%). This leads to the conclusion about creating a climate of cooperation among teams.

Let us reveal the involvement of employees. It was defined on the basis of: (1) attitude to work, (2) exhibited activity and (3) expression of the behaviour. In every third surveyed company work was seen as pleasure (no compulsion or obligation), in every fifth there was a manifestation of at least two of the five following types of behaviour: knowledge sharing with others, risk-taking in the specified range, openness to feedback from others, establishing cooperation, and in every tenth the activity was demonstrated associated with the performance of tasks resulting from the work position and actions relevant for the functioning of the organization.

Conclusions

In the surveyed enterprises two important issues can be pointed to, observed in the field of knowledge management. The first one concerns the occurrence of paradoxes, described by G. Probst, S. Raubst and K. Romhardt (after: Evans, 2005), which include implementing the activities in a selective manner, and thereby often contradictory. For example, employees are trained, but at the same time they are not permitted to use their knowledge, experts are employed, but hiding what they know ahead of other employees. In the surveyed enterprises it seems to be a paradox to employ creative people, and then creating conditions restricting the release of their creativity, the limited dissemination of results of very often undertaken cooperation or considering knowledge sharing to be a value and the lack of appreciation of those who shape their behaviour on its basis. This is important especially that on the basis of the analysis of the results of the research it can be concluded that the surveyed enterprises carry out activities aimed at the acquisition of knowledge (trainings, environment analysis). Cooperation is the use of knowledge rather than creating it. These actions can contribute to the maintenance on the market, but it is unlikely that only due to them the market advantage is obtained.

An important issue is to support the processes of knowledge management with systems implemented in the organization. One of them is technology that - according to - K. Klincewicz (Jemielniak & Koźmiński (Ed.), 2012) when it is identified with knowledge management, can limit its effectiveness. The overestimation of information systems (including databases) can lead to problems in the form of restrictions of contacts, separation of knowledge from its use, the necessity of putting pressure on the sharing of knowledge and underestimation of the importance of tacit

knowledge. Although it is certainly not possible to consider if the indicated errors concerned the surveyed companies, let us note that for the desired value it was recognized in many of them communication and confidence, the behaviour associated with knowledge management was not appreciated, knowledge was rarely disseminated, especially representing the result of cooperation, and most of them used information systems (databases).

On the basis of presented results of the research it can be concluded that effective knowledge management requires treating it not as a set of different tools, methods, but through the processes constituting a coherent whole, requiring a comprehensive approach. The surveyed enterprises lacked it.

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