

INTERNAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE KNOWLEDGE CONTINUITY ENSURING

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Abstract

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The aim of the systematic ensuring of knowledge continuity is the continuity of an organisation's development, the quality of managerial positions and the continuity of decision-making. By ensuring knowledge continuity, organisations may gain a performance-enhancing factor. The objective of the article is to identify the level of impact of decisive internal factors determining knowledge continuity ensuring and contributing to the efficiency of the organisations. Knowledge continuity ensuring as an internal force, however, can together with the right employees, help adapt more quickly to external conditions that organisations can hardly control. Monitoring and ensuring knowledge continuity can contribute to a higher quality of processes in general, in particular processes exploiting knowledge, and thus help improve the level of management. The first part of the article presents theoretical views on the aspects of knowledge continuity ensuring in organisations while the second part analyses the findings of the surveys carried out among managers in organisations in the Czech Republic. Based on the summary of the outcomes obtained it is possible to say that internal factors influence knowledge continuity ensuring in organisations, however, the level of impact of individual factors is determined by their size. The findings regarding the impact of each of the factors show that the most significant barriers to knowledge continuity ensuring are those associated with the human factor.

knowledge continuity management, knowledge, factors, process, organisations, survey

The aim of the management process is to improve the performance of organisations and one of the ways to achieve it is high quality personnel management including efficient knowledge management (Wong, 2009; Shih, Chiang, 2005). Knowledge determines the way an employee works and has an impact on the efficiency of management and thus the success of the organisation (Linder, Wald, 2011; Altmeyer, Georg, 2002). If an employee decides to leave their position, it is necessary to prevent their knowledge from leaving too, in particular the knowledge that is indispensable for the organisation.

The competitiveness of individual organisations in a market economy is influenced by the state of their technologies, but what is currently considered to be a decisive general factor is the knowledge of individual employees of the given organisation and the efficiency of its application. The knowledge of knowledge employees therefore has to be

continuously activated, cultivated (enhanced) and, last but not least, shared and preserved, which is achieved by knowledge continuity ensuring, the level of which is dependent on a number of aspects (Levy, 2011; Luring, Selmer, 2011; Somaya, Williamson, 2008).

The objective of the article is therefore to identify the level of impact of decisive internal factors determining knowledge continuity ensuring and contributing to the efficiency of the organisation. In the event the issues of knowledge continuity ensuring are not dealt with, the loss of the knowledge of leaving employees creates a so-called bottleneck or a barrier (Goldratt, 2009; Beazley *et al.*, 2002) that leads to a decrease of the organisation's performance (hobbles its productivity). If the organisation manages to eliminate the bottleneck, i.e. ensures knowledge continuity and turns it into a performance boosting factor (which is

a performance-hindering factor in the event of non-ensuring), the efficiency of processes and thus of the organisation may be increased. It is therefore possible to say that knowledge continuity ensuring is a way to deal with the potential efficiency-hindering factor in the organisation.

The outcomes obtained and the conclusions of the article can be subsequently used in practice to preserve employee knowledge inside the organisation during personnel changes. Knowledge continuity ensuring means minimisation of deviations from the current state during personnel changes. Monitoring and ensuring knowledge continuity can contribute to a higher quality of processes in general, in particular processes exploiting knowledge, and thus help improve the level of management.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The first part of the article presents theoretical views on the aspects of knowledge continuity ensuring in organisations while the second part analyses the findings of the surveys carried out among managers in organisations in the Czech Republic. The article has been drawn up on the basis of the analysis of secondary data, induction, deduction, outcome synthesis and the evaluation of the results of the questionnaire survey.

The results of the article have been obtained by means of a quantitative survey which has respected the ethical aspects of research (Act No. 101/2000 Coll., on Personal Data Protection). It was aimed at determining the impact of internal factors on knowledge continuity ensuring. The selected group of organisations included in the survey has been chosen by means of quota random sampling among organisations situated in the Czech Republic and presented on the Internet (organisations were divided into homogeneous groups according to the criteria specified herein below) and their managers were contacted by e-mail with individual questionnaire internet address specified. The organisations that took part in the Czech TOP100 competition and the managers who had registered for the Manager of the Year for 2009 competition have been addressed the same way too. The questionnaire consisted of statements regarding influence of set of internal factors, which were confirmed or rejected, respectively amended by the respondents. The set of internal factors was identified by means of literature review.

In order to ensure the representativeness of the group of respondents (814 managers from 580 organisations¹) and in order to ensure that

the findings are evaluable and generalizable with respect to the sample group, the selection criteria for the survey have been set in a way to roughly reflect the proportional representation of organisations according to the sector of economy, organisations' size and middle and top managers' genders in compliance with the figures published by the Czech Statistical Office. The breakdown is as follows (the numbers of organisations and managers addressed are shown in brackets):

- According to the economic sector: 15% (85) from the primary, 15% (85) from the secondary, and 70% (410) from the tertiary sector.
- According to the organisations' size (number of employees): 65% (377) from small, 20% (116) from middle-sized, and 15% (87) from large organisations.
- According to the middle and top managers' gender: male 77.5% (654) and female 22.5% (160).

The selected sample chosen from the basic group is a characteristic sample in all respects and proportionally represents the groups of organisations as selected from the basic group. The overall questionnaire return was 20.52%, i.e. 167 respondents took part from 159 organisations (from 8 organisations returned two questionnaires). 55.1% of respondents hold a senior management position, 68.9% have university education, 45.5% are in the age group 46–62 years, 70.1% are employees of Czech organizations, 51.5% work in tertiary sector and 38.9% work in the primary sector. 76.6% of respondents were male.

The impact of monitored factors has been determined based on analysis of categorical data by the square of the association coefficient, i.e. based on the coefficient of association which shows the extent (percentage) to which the examined factor influences the variable.

Theoretical background of the work

The resource approach to gaining a competitive advantage is based on the determination of an organisation's resources and competencies, the evaluation of its profit potential, the selection of a suitable company strategy and the identification of resource shortcomings and renewal. The management itself then has to respect not only the organisational and managerial, but also economic, information and social-psychological resources (Wong, 2009; Johannessen, Olsen, 2003). A competitive advantage therefore lies in the combination of unique resources and competencies which serve as grounds for defining a strategy for the

1 Basic file = all organisations in the Czech Republic (a total of 2,651,571 in 2010 according to the CSO). Sample = 580 organisations operating in the CR. Cleaned sample = 159 organisations, from which he returned the questionnaire. The CR is a total of 2,654,571 of organisations, small 98.79%, 1.12% medium and large 0.09%). In the economy, employing a total of 4,885,200 people in the primary sector employs 4% of people (of which 76% men, 24% women) in the secondary sector 37% of people (74% men, 26% women) and the tertiary sector 59% people (46% men, 54% women).

best possible use of opportunities (differentiation from other organisations).

Knowledge possessed by all employees independent of the type of work they do is currently perceived as the most important and valuable resource of organisations and learning as the most essential skill of organisations. Knowledge can neither be compensated for nor substituted; therefore it becomes the most significant form of organisations' capital ensuring a competitive advantage (Bratianu, 2008; Cabrera *et al.*, 2006). Organisations' competitive advantage is primarily determined by the way their employees use their knowledge, experiences and skills through which they ensure the continuity (fluency) of processes (Beazley *et al.*, 2002; Davenport, Prusak, 1998).

Haldin-Herrgard (2000) lists a number of definitions and classifications of the term "knowledge" as presented by various authors and reflecting different perspectives. The most frequently used classification is that of Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) – explicit and tacit knowledge, which is also used, for example, by Harsh (2009) or Frappaolo (2006). According to Harsh (2009), Haldin-Herrgard (2000) and Skyrme (1997) tacit knowledge (of both types of knowledge) is the decisive organisational strength as it is, in the opinion of both Japanese authors, the key to knowledge management and the building of knowledge in organisations. Its strength lies primarily in the application of the human expertise in specific cases and its development in the course of human communication. Knowledge, according to Kachaňáková and Stachová (2011), is an activity, an act or an action while information is a symbolic description of the action. The difference between information (data to which the user assigns importance when interpreting it) and knowledge is therefore crucial and important (Skyrme, 1997). Eucker (2007) also states that a large amount of knowledge that is the most valuable is in people's ideas and is not recorded in an explicit form. He defines tacit knowledge as know-how, know-what and know-who. He finds it rare to solve a complicated problem without using a significant amount of tacit knowledge (Haldin-Herrgard, 2000).

It follows from the above said that by using knowledge, it is not destroyed or lost. On the contrary, the repeated use of knowledge can improve it, deepen it or develop it or encourage a generation of new knowledge. Tacit knowledge associated with an individual is more important for organisations as it contributes, from the organisation's point of view, to his/her uniqueness. Knowledge is a unique organisation's resource which, if efficiently used (in market terms it is original and rare) and applied (an employee applies it to carry out an original action not achievable by competitors), ensures success and an advantage with respect to its competitors (Hong *et al.*, 2011; Jeon *et al.*, 2011). This is due to the fact that it is a resource that is valuable, precious, inimitable and difficult to substitute.

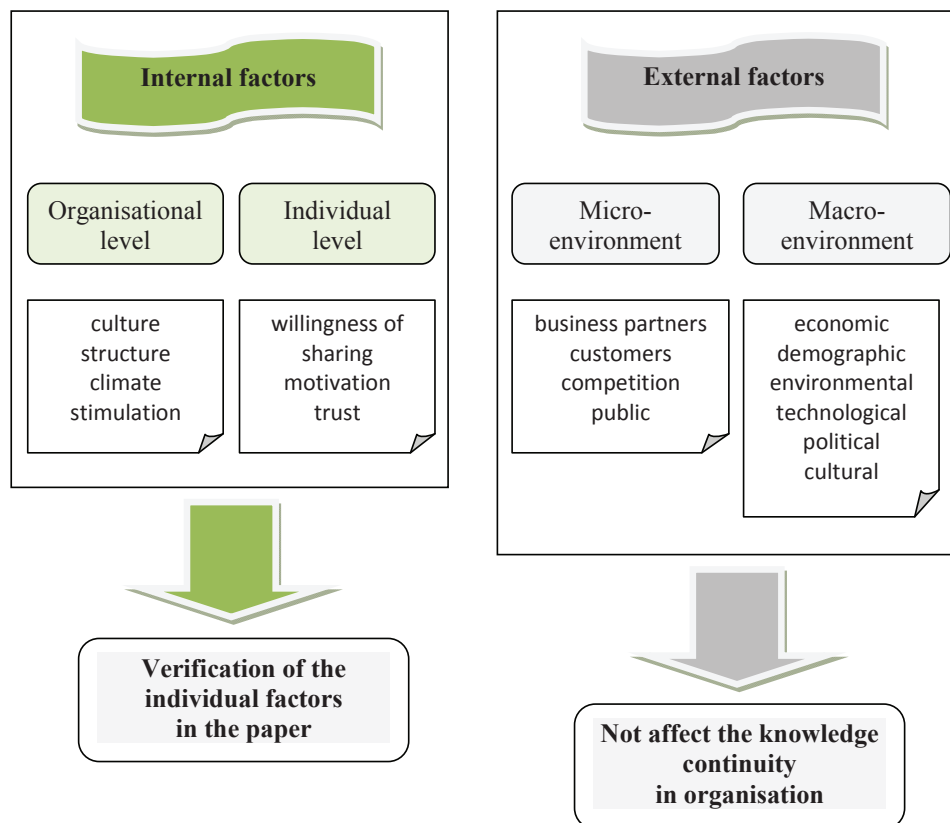
When employees leave organisations, they take vitally important knowledge with them (Levy, 2011). Without the right procedure aimed at capturing such knowledge and its transfer to their successors, organisations lose it. To prevent the loss of knowledge held by leaving employees, it is possible to apply knowledge continuity which is a branch of knowledge management. While knowledge management focuses on the capturing and sharing of know-how important for colleagues who have similar tasks in the organisation, knowledge continuity management is targeted at the transfer of crucial knowledge from departing employees to their successors (Beazley *et al.*, 2002). Critical knowledge is a minimal knowledge base and if knowledge drops under the level of this base it leads to the discontinuity of knowledge. Any level of a successor's knowledge base, if higher than that of the leaving employee, is better. An employee's knowledge base consists of the basic set of his/her knowledge necessary for the given position (Leonard, 2005; Beazley *et al.*, 2002).

According to Beazley *et al.* (2002) if adequate knowledge continuity between employee generations is not ensured, organisational "forgetting" occurs which leads to the outflow of intellectual capital and waste of knowledge assets. Organisations need to possess efficient means of know-how transfer, which means that they have to have a concept of knowledge continuity management. A narrow link between the term "continuity" and education is mentioned, with reference to other authors, by Wallace (2007). Dewey (in Wallace, 2007) summarises the core of education: "Education, in the most general sense of the word, is a way of social continuity of life." Dewey addresses both individuals and groups and mentions the importance of growth through education, which is a way to ensure the continuum of experience. It means that the transfer of experience through education is seen as a way to ensure a certain continuum of life. Despite the fact that these conclusions are rather philosophical, attempts to ensure life continuity by the transfer of experience are likely to be seen in individuals as well as groups, including organised groups – i.e. an organisation. To ensure knowledge continuity, organisations have to have suitable conditions (Levy, 2011; Luring, Selmer, 2011; Beazley *et al.*, 2002).

RESULTS

Based on the induction and theoretical overview of the issue has been compiled following overview of the factors involved in knowledge continuity management (see Figure 1).

Knowledge generation is determined by both internal and external factors. This article deals with the transfer of already acquired knowledge from the departing employee to his/her successor (i.e. transfer of knowledge depending on personnel changes). To ensure knowledge continuity



1: Factors influence on knowledge continuity management
Source: author's survey

which concerns organisations and their internal environment, internal factors are essential. For this reason external factors have been excluded from the survey and testing.

Other assumptions relevant for the selection of internal factors for testing include the following:

- Each organisation has its specific internal environment and it has to satisfy the basic organisational framework, i.e. the 7S model (strategy, structure, staff, systems of management, style of management work, shared values and skills), which analyses the internal environment of an organisation. These 7 basic interlinked factors determine and decide how an organisation's strategy will be fulfilled. A key to the success of each organisation needs to be sought in harmonious accord of these factors.
- Internal factors are those that can be directly controlled by the organisation and influenced by managers.
- An organisation's employees and their knowledge represent a specific potential of success of each organisation. These employees form the so-called organisational resources, similarly like organisational structure, organisational culture, organisational climate and ethics. The quality of these organisational resources plays an important role.

It is possible to say that the traditional development of an organisation (achieving competitiveness) is predominantly ensured by internal forces rather than external ones. Knowledge continuity ensuring as an internal force, however, can, together with the right employees, help adapt more quickly to external conditions that organisations can hardly control. It is possible to state that knowledge continuity ensuring forms part of the adaptation to external conditions.

Internal factors are divided into two categories – individual and organisational factors (Locke, Latham, 2004; Ramlall, 2004; Ipe, 2003; Teboul, 1991). Individual factors are associated with one specific employee while organisational factors are determined by the given organisation. To provide an overview of factors of both categories, a factor construct (group of variables) has been developed based on deduction and the summary of secondary data from literary starting points that comprises all factors, including their characteristics, that are included in the given category of internal factors.

Based on the background information obtained (frequency of responses, i.e. importance of individual factors according to respondents), the relationship between two quantities has been determined. If one of the quantities changes, the second changes as well and vice versa. According to the calculated coefficient of association which determines the percentage change of Y in the event

I: The values of coefficients of association of internal factors in all organisations

Level	Internal factor	Response rate	r ²
Organisational	1. Organisational culture	78	0.541
	2. Organisational structure	47	0.453
	3. Organisational climate	148	0.831
	4. Stimulation	93	0.612
Individual	5. Willingness of knowledge sharing	86	0.603
	6. Motivation	125	0.758
	7. Trust	62	0.517

Source: author's survey

of the x_{1-n} change between the set quantities, it is possible to say that the quantities are interdependent and the strength of dependency oscillates from 0.402 (middle strength) to 0.873 (very high strength); see tables No. I, II and III.

On the basis of the calculated coefficient of association it is possible to state that internal factors have an impact on knowledge continuity ensuring in an organisation. Knowledge continuity ensuring (Y) is dependent on internal factors (dependent variables) x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n , which means:

$$Y = f(x_1, x_2, x_3, x_n \dots),$$

where:

x_{1-n} means factors influencing knowledge continuity ensuring which are interlinked (they do not operate in an isolated way).

Knowledge continuity ensuring in organisations, regardless of their size, is to the largest extent influenced by organisational climate where the strength of dependency of the coefficient of association is very high. It is possible to say that the level of knowledge continuity ensuring is determined to 83.1% by the organisational climate, i.e. an internal factor at the organisational level. Organisational structure has the least influence on the level of knowledge continuity ensuring (45.3 %).

Knowledge continuity ensuring in organisations is influenced both at individual and organisational levels. At the individual level it is determined, for example, by trust in colleagues, previous negative experience with knowledge sharing, willingness

to share knowledge, and employees' internal motivation. For the majority of employees it is unlikely that they would share their knowledge and experience if they did not trust the given person. It is important to believe that people will not misuse such knowledge and also that the given piece of knowledge is reliable and accurate. Knowledge is power and may lead to position disbalances. Knowledge sharing may increase uncertainty in terms of job keeping and may also help employees to realise their powers within the organisation. The working environment in organisations is often characterised by fear which increases uncertainty in their employment and makes people less willing to share their knowledge.

The survey has shown that individual factors (internal motivation, previous experience with knowledge sharing and trust) have a positive impact in relation to the organisational culture of the given organisation. Simultaneously it can be stated that organisational factors (organisational climate, stimulation/remuneration system/, communication process, willingness to invest into employee education) have a positive impact in relation to the organisational culture of the given organisation.

Tables II and III below show the values of the coefficients of association of individual internal factors separately for small (up to 19 employees) and big (over 250 employees) organisations².

On the basis of the calculated coefficients of association it can be said that in small organisations knowledge continuity ensuring is influenced

II: The values of coefficients of association of internal factors in small organisations

Small organisations up to 19 employees			
Level	Internal factor	Response rate	r ²
Organisational	1. Organisational culture	15	0.559
	2. Organisational structure	10	0.402
	3. Organisational climate	41	0.873
	4. Stimulation	21	0.695
Individual	5. Willingness of knowledge sharing	31	0.733
	6. Motivation	36	0.828
	7. Trust	15	0.559

Source: author's survey

2 Size of organisations according to the CSO, i. e., small organisations up to 19 employees, large organisations of over 250 employees.

III: The values of coefficients of association of internal factors in large organisations

Large organisations over 250 employees			
Level	Internal factor	Response rate	r ²
Organisational	1. Organisational culture	30	0.739
	2. Organisational structure	17	0.502
	3. Organisational climate	46	0.820
	4. Stimulation	33	0.682
Individual	5. Willingness of knowledge sharing	21	0.661
	6. Motivation	38	0.775
	7. Trust	21	0.661

Source: author's survey

most by their organisational climate, where the strength of dependency of the coefficient of association is very high, i.e. 0.873. It can be stated that the level of knowledge continuity ensuring in small organisations is determined (from 87.3%) by their organisational climate, i.e. an internal factor at the organisational level. Organisational structure influences the level of knowledge continuity ensuring the least (from 40.2%) because organisational structure in small organisations is simple and therefore is not too significant.

The survey has revealed that based on the calculated coefficient of association, internal factors at the individual level (motivation, the willingness to share knowledge, trust) determine the level of knowledge continuity ensuring in small organisations more than factors at the organisational level, with the exception of organisational climate. In small organisations the strength of dependency for individual factors ranges from 0.402 (middle strength) to 0.873 (very high strength).

On the basis of the calculated coefficients of association for large organisations with more than 250 employees it can be said that knowledge continuity ensuring is predominantly determined by the organisational climate, as is the case for small organisations. The strength of the coefficient of association is very high, i.e. 0.820. It is therefore possible to say that in small organisations the level of knowledge continuity ensuring is determined (from 82.0%) by their organisational climate, i.e. an internal factor at the organisational level. Organisational structure shows the least impact on the level of knowledge continuity ensuring (50.2%).

The survey carried out demonstrates that according to the calculated coefficient of association internal factors at the individual level (motivation, the willingness to share knowledge, trust) determine the level of knowledge continuity ensuring in large organisations to a similar extent as factors at the organisational level. The strength of dependency of individual factors ranges from 0.502 (high strength) to 0.873 (very high strength).

Respondents from small organisations have univocally agreed that organisational climate is the most important factor influencing knowledge continuity ensuring. Provided there is a friendly atmosphere between colleagues and superiors

in organisations, it will encourage knowledge continuity ensuring. The second most important factor in small organisations is motivation. If an employee is motivated, this factor also increases the willingness to share knowledge with their colleagues. In smaller organisations the need for internal motivation to transfer knowledge is stronger than stimulation, which is confirmed by the outcomes of the quantitative survey, i.e. small organisations motivate employees the most while large companies stimulate their employees the most. Other factors that have the same impact are organisational culture and trust. It is possible to say that organisational culture in small organisations is to the largest extent based on loyalty to the organisation. The least influential internal factor in both small and large organisations is, according to respondents, the organisational structure.

In large organisations it is also organisational climate that influences knowledge continuity ensuring the most. It is followed by motivation and stimulation. Compared to small organisations, organisational culture is a more important factor for large organisations. In large organisations it is suitable to create a strong organisational culture with which all employees will identify. If knowledge continuity ensuring is embedded in organisational culture, it will increase employees' willingness to share knowledge and enhance trust in colleagues and superiors.

Based on the summary of the outcomes obtained it is possible to say that internal factors influence knowledge continuity ensuring in organisations, however, the level of impact of individual factors is determined by their size. In small organisations, internal factors at the individual level influence the level of knowledge continuity ensuring more than factors at the organisational level. In large companies the differences between factors at the individual and organisational levels are not so evident.

The findings regarding the impact of each of the factors show that the most significant barriers to knowledge continuity ensuring are those associated with the human factor, i.e. an employee is not willing to share knowledge and does not see the merits of knowledge and experience transfer for him/her and the organisation. In the event of a language barrier, external co-operation may be resorted to; to

obtain knowledge in a specific area it is possible to allow for job rotation within company departments. This should permit a broader understanding of the situation and developing a more accurate picture. Other barriers are on the part of the organisation and are connected with the lack of transfer of knowledge and experience on a continuous basis, as it is too late to transfer them when an employee decides to leave. Another important barrier is the lack of determination of employees' knowledge profiles which means that organisations do not know which of their employees are the holders of critical knowledge.

DISCUSSION

The findings support the conclusions of Beazley *et al.* (2002) and Sládeček (2006) and it is possible to say that the following applies to organisations that have successfully implemented knowledge management and knowledge continuity management:

- Knowledge in an organisation is optimally exploited and it is available whenever and wherever needed.
- Key knowledge is successfully projected in processes, structures, projects and patents.
- Knowledge is successfully used to develop innovative products, services and processes.
- Knowledge is shared and accessible for all employees who need it.
- Best Practices are utilized.
- Employees' critical knowledge (knowledge necessary to hold the given job position) is shared, transferred and preserved to the highest possible extent.
- Organisational strategy, organisational culture and organisational climate comply with the knowledge management and knowledge continuity management policy.

Knowledge has a relative significance with respect to the environment in which it is found and therefore the conditions for its preservation, sharing and transfer may differ. There are conditions for the transfer of explicit and tacit knowledge, but each type of knowledge is determined by different factors. The quality of transfer of explicit knowledge is influenced by the technical aspects of recording (for example IT) while the transfer of tacit knowledge is influenced by internal factors at the organisational and individual levels.

CONCLUSION

The primary survey carried out, the outcomes of which are presented in this article, determined the level of impact of decisive internal factors on knowledge continuity ensuring which encourages the efficiency of individual processes. Based on the survey carried out it has been determined that in organisations of all sizes the most influential factor contributing to knowledge continuity ensuring is organisational climate. The survey has positively identified this factor as the strongest one (at the organisational level). Other important factors are stimulation and organisational culture. The weakest factor is organisational structure. The most significant factor at the individual level is motivation, followed by the willingness to share knowledge and trust. It can be said that in large organisations factors at the organisational level play a more important role while factors at the individual level are more important in small organisations. Knowledge continuity ensuring determines individual processes in organisations, in particular company processes and processes relating to employees (e.g. enhancement of the knowledge base, faster adaptation). It is therefore possible to say that knowledge continuity is one of the efficiency-supporting factors in an organisation.

The aim of the systematic ensuring of knowledge continuity is the continuity of an organisation's development, the quality of managerial positions and the continuity of decision-making. By ensuring knowledge continuity, organisations may gain a performance-enhancing factor. It is also possible to say that an organisation's efficiency is also enhanced by so-called transformation management. Knowledge continuity ensuring is also important because an employee leaving the organisation where knowledge continuity is not ensured takes with him/her not only the know-how, but also the relationships established with his/her colleagues. This can significantly affect the flow of knowledge within the organisation. A leaving employee can also have external relationships with the surroundings that are, in many cases, crucial for the organisation. Knowledge continuity ensuring cannot be ensured solely through a knowledge database as good relationships among people, informal contacts with clients or the art of communication are knowledge and skills that cannot be entered into knowledge databases.

SUMMARY

The article deals with knowledge continuity management as a mean of supporting the quality of processes in organisations. In order to achieve the maximum quality of processes, it is necessary to eliminate the threat of loss of knowledge during personnel changes and to monitor factors that have a positive impact on knowledge continuity ensuring. This article deals with the transfer of already acquired knowledge from the departing employee to his/her successor (i.e. transfer of knowledge depending on personnel changes). To ensure knowledge continuity which concerns organisations and

their internal environment, internal factors are essential. The objective of the article is to determine the level of impact of individual internal factors influencing knowledge continuity ensuring in organisations. The data has been obtained through a questionnaire survey involving managers from organisations in the Czech Republic. The level of impact of individual factors has been tested on the basis of the coefficient of association. The results show that in all sizes of organisations the strongest factor influencing the knowledge continuity ensuring on the organisational level is the organisational climate ($r^2 = 0.831$) and on the individual level it is the individual's motivation ($r^2 = 0.758$). In large organisations are strong the factors at the organisational level in contrast with small organisations where are strong the individual factors. The purpose of the management process is to enhance an organisation's productivity and one of the ways to achieve this is high quality human resources management including efficient knowledge management. The knowledge of individual employees (teams) determines the productivity of the given department and in turn the productivity of individual departments determines the productivity of the organisation. Individual managers in organisations should realize this and should lead the individual teams in a way to encourage employees to share, transfer and preserve knowledge and thus contribute to the efficient management of the organisation as a whole. Knowledge continuity ensuring in organisations is a current topic of interest and is applicable for broader scientific and practical use. Managers in organisations should systematically ensure the knowledge continuity and support the internal factors. This leads to effective knowledge usage and increases the quality of organisational processes together with personal, employees and organisational development.

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