2024

ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT SERIES NO. 199

TRANSFER OF TACIT KNOWLEDGE: EXPLORING EFFECTIVE METHODS AND TECHNIQUES OF TACIT KNOWLEDGE ACROSS GENERATIONS IN CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS – A CASE STUDY

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Purpose: The objective of this paper is to synthesize literature on knowledge management, to investigate the effectiveness of traditional and contemporary knowledge transfer methods, and to conduct a comparative analysis of their advantages and disadvantages. Additionally, the paper will examine challenges associated with the transfer of tacit knowledge, using cultural institutions as a case study, such as linguistic barriers and generational gaps, and will propose strategies for improving the transfer of tacit knowledge. In this way, this article aims to contribute to the understanding of effective methods and techniques for transferring tacit knowledge across generations, while simultaneously highlighting its role in shaping organizational practices and strategies. Data for the article were collected through an analysis of the available literature, with reference to methods applied in a cultural institution context.

Design/methodology/approach: A comparison of knowledge transfer methods in a cultural institution was conducted using a structured interview. The literature analysis confirms the direction of the methods used in the institution.

Fingings: As a result of the literature analysis and the practical application of various methods of knowledge transfer, considering generational differences, the thesis was confirmed that young employees do not want to be instructed but prefer to explore the experiences of older colleagues and learn from them for the future. This provided ample room for the development of intergenerational knowledge transfer tools based on mutual trust, inspiration, stimulation, and long-term cooperation between young and older employees, particularly through mentoring.

Originality/value: The article can inspire state institutions to implement a platform for knowledge sharing and preservation.

Keywords: public sector, knowledge management, tacit knowledge transfer.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

In today's dynamic environment, knowledge constitutes a crucial element in the development and success of organizations. Learning and creating new knowledge, as well as disseminating it among employees, serves as a vital source of competitive advantage (Harris et al., 2013, pp. 49-61). Within the context of rapid technological advancement and socioeconomic changes, it becomes essential not only to understand the existence of knowledge but also to manage it effectively. A review of the literature, including the OECD classification, reveals the diversity of knowledge forms, whose strategic utilization requires viewing from multiple perspectives. This can be demonstrated through the four key levels of knowledge identified by the OECD: know-what, know-why, know-how, and know-who (Kobyłko, Morawski, 2006, pp. 21-22). "Know-what" is associated with data and facts, "know-why" encompasses understanding the principles governing reality, "know-how" refers to practical skills, and "know-who" describes a combination of information and social relations, particularly important due to an organization's internal human resources and the identification of knowledge holders. Hence, "know-who" can be described as internal, unmeasurable resources available in every organization that enhance its success. With reference to cultural institutions, identifying internal knowledge is fundamental to the preservation of cultural heritage for future generations, including knowledge on conservation and prevention methods for artworks, popularization, and education, in alignment with the institution's mission. In view of the aging human resources, it is worthwhile to focus on generational knowledge transfer, but also on the role of highly experienced individuals who are planning retirement.

2. Knowledge management of organizations

The very definition of knowledge transfer can be understood as the process of sharing and disseminating knowledge within an organization or between individuals. Knowledge management in organizations has become so critical that numerous approaches have emerged. In relation to generational knowledge transfer, one can distinguish (Nonaka, Takeuchi, 1995): explicit knowledge, which is clearly specified and can be presented through words, numbers, symbols, signs, easily accessible, transferable, and utilizable, mainly consisting of procedures, policies, documents, databases, and other types of recorded information; and tacit knowledge, of which we are aware and which we utilize in daily operations but cannot fully define, often referred to as informal knowledge, thus making its transmission to others difficult; it is challenging to imitate and transfer externally. Another approach by DeLong (2004) discusses explicit knowledge, implicit rule-based knowledge, implicit know-how, tacit know-

how, and deep tacit knowledge. Meanwhile, Kowalczyk & Nogalski (2007, pp. 26-27) speak of dividing knowledge into: key technological knowledge, key coordination knowledge, auxiliary knowledge, and market knowledge. Knowledge transfer can also be considered in the context of the enterprise and knowledge acquired externally. It is identified at various levels: individual, group, organizational, and inter-organizational (see Kumar, Ganesh, 2009, p. 165). Furthermore, active and passive knowledge transfers can be distinguished (Bendkowski, 2026, p. 19). Active transfer involves conscious actions aimed at knowledge dissemination, whereas passive transfer may result from daily interactions and observations. Other categories include serial, faithful (intuitive), remote (imitative), strategic, and expert knowledge transfer (Kania, Drygas, Kutkowska, Kalinowski, 2011, p. 23). Each of these types has its specific characteristics and applications. In an organization, knowledge flow is conditioned by many factors, among them (Skrzypek, 2013, p. 3):

- increased awareness of the necessity for development, wherein individuals within the organization must recognize the need for continuous improvement and learning;
- participation and involvement based on active cooperation among employees that facilitates the flow of knowledge;
- creativity as creative thinking that allows for the generation of new ideas and solutions;
- mutual trust, where employees must feel free to share knowledge;
- shared goals and interests, understood as the organization's common objective which fosters the flow of information;
- a willingness to seek and be creative, through openness to new ideas and experimentation;
- an awareness that today's market position is determined by intellectual wealth.

Thus, knowledge transfer is a dynamic process that requires time, a readiness to cooperate, depending on people, the quality of their knowledge and their openness and flexibility (Leszczyńska, Pruchnicki, 2017, p. 1199). The ability to adapt and the support from both colleagues and supervisors are determining factors for knowledge transfer (Junça Silva, Pinto, 2024, pp. 743-770). In each of these approaches, explicit knowledge is the tip of the iceberg, while beneath it lies the immensely valuable tacit knowledge, which is worth delving into. Several types of tools can be applied to support and encourage employees to share tacit knowledge. These tools will facilitate access to sources and ease its flow.

An interesting approach is sharing knowledge exclusively in person (Biloslavo, Lombardi, 2021, pp. 1747-1774), with attention focused on the time required for this process and the co-creation of an organizational space that enables and supports open discussion both within and between departments. Additionally, the authors highlight the introduction of non-financial incentives that aid in the transfer of tacit knowledge. This helps overcome employees' difficulties in recognizing the organizational knowledge base, which they primarily see in themselves. Another approach points to workplace training interventions (Dixit, Sinha, 2022,

pp. 513-531), where the authors emphasize the importance of using appropriate tools and techniques for knowledge transfer that ensure the highest return on investment in training and achieving business results through the desired change in employee behavior.

3. Intergenerational knowledge transfer, challenges

The basis for intergenerational knowledge transfer lies in interpersonal relationships which create the backdrop on which people measure, mark, and value their aging (Biggs, Lowenstein, 2011; Hagestad, Uhlengerg, 2005). These are understood as the entirety of relations between individuals or groups belonging to different generations, where these relations can be defined in terms of single interactions, social relations, and in terms of influencing the quality of these interactions, opinions, attitudes, and stereotypes (Szukalski, 2011). Generational differences pose the greatest challenge in knowledge transfer. Age diversity should be seen as a valuable resource, not a potential source of conflict. The theory of generativity is considered key to fostering intergenerational knowledge transfer in an organizational context (Noethem, 2011, p. 93; McAdams, 2001). Generativity is interpreted as the commitment to passing on values and supporting the development of younger generations (Mróz, 2010). It includes not only the ability to procreate but also productivity and creativity, i.e., the ability to generate new achievements and creative ideas. The importance of generativity in the context of intergenerational relations is also emphasized by Villar & Serrat (2014), highlighting the key role of late adulthood (40-65 years) as the seventh phase in Erikson's model, where productivity and stagnation clash. Adults in this life stage feel the need to create something lasting that will outlive them. It is also worth paying attention to mindfulness, which significantly facilitates the creation of an open environment and increases clarity of thought, aiding in the effective creation of knowledge (Izaak, Dhir, Christofi, 2024, pp. 264-286). Essential in intergenerational relations are the concepts of intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson, Roberts, 1991). Intergenerational solidarity is based on leveraging the potential of older persons, especially in terms of:

- life wisdom, drawing from life knowledge stemming from experiences and acquired competencies which are an undisputed attribute of late adulthood;
- social potential (social capital), encompassing social relations and interactions that contribute to interpersonal bonds;
- family life potential, through caring for grandchildren, or a sick family member, nurturing and passing on family traditions;
- psychological potential, utilizing knowledge conducive to experiencing success, a sense of efficacy, optimism, hope, and flexibility in difficult situations;

- cultural transmission potential, regional traditions, folk customs, and artistic craftsmanship skills which are invaluable contributions to the preservation of cultural heritage;
- expertise in profession, particularly in the context of professions considered "dying".

In this context, there is a need to implement various forms of employment for older people, develop senior volunteering based on professional competencies, or create innovative work models which should bridge the knowledge transfer between generations.

4. Stages of knowledge transfer: literature analysis

Research on knowledge transfer often utilizes a five-element model, based on the concept by Nonaka and Takeuchi. According to this model, the knowledge transfer process begins with the source whose key features are the value of knowledge and readiness to share it. The first stage is awareness, creating the need for knowledge, followed by the acquisition of data and information. The next step is transformation, where knowledge is converted. Absorption is the subsequent stage, where "knowledge utility" emerges, enabling its practical application by the recipient, who, in this context, is characterized by the ability to assimilate knowledge and the desire to acquire it. This model also includes feedback, where the recipient demonstrates knowledge and sends it back to the sender, thus starting another cycle of transfer. Another phased approach is presented by Leonard (2014), which includes: (1) determining the significance of knowledge lost at the time of an employee's retirement, (2) identifying "deep wisdom" crucial for the organization, (3) applying proven knowledge transfer techniques, (4) identifying and implementing long-term development programs, (5) configuring individual learning plans for successors, (6) evaluating undertaken initiatives. Mikuła (2011a, p. 30) indicates that the knowledge transfer process consists of the following stages: (1) knowledge acquisition - gaining knowledge from various sources (internal and external), (2) knowledge sharing - the process opposite to acquisition, i.e., transmitting knowledge directed at specific individuals, (3) knowledge dissemination - an advanced form of sharing knowledge aimed at creating a generally accessible resource, (4) knowledge sharing - in the communication process. It is noteworthy that tacit knowledge is a function of the environment, individual experience combined with explicit knowledge. People, their personal experience, and understanding of explicit knowledge are involved in the process, through which knowledge evolves. It is also important to note that not every knowledge needs transferring. Organizations should focus on knowledge that impacts their future and competitiveness. They should concentrate on key employees; usually in an organization there are a few people whose knowledge is particularly important for development (Leonard, Swap, Barton, 2014a; Martins, 2011). Hence, the knowledge transfer process is initiated by precisely defining the key skills and abilities of employees retiring, as well as identifying those who possess unique knowledge. Subsequently, it is necessary to create conditions that will enable the effective transmission of this knowledge. As a result of these interactions, new knowledge is generated, changes are made in existing knowledge, and this process should be maintained by the organization.

5. Methods and techniques for knowledge transfer

In the literature, mentoring is often cited as one of the most effective instruments in this area (Lesser, Rivera, 2006). According to the commonly quoted definition of mentoring by Clutterbuck and Megginson (Megginson et al., 2008), mentorship is defined as a form of support given to another person during the transformation of their work, knowledge, or way of thinking. It is non-hierarchical assistance, meaning it is not associated with direct reporting relationships between employees. Subsequently, Bergmann, Chamier-Ciemiński, and Michałek (2012, p. 9) define mentoring as a solution where an experienced employee with extensive professional background and practical knowledge acts as a teacher and practical vocational trainer. Their task is to support someone at the beginning of their career in a given organization, industry, or position, due to age or length of service. The mentor observes and assesses progress in the mentee's work. They define mentoring as a process of education and professional improvement that takes place in the strict context of the workplace and is aimed at benefiting both the employee and the organization. A common part of mentoring is a type of support resulting from the relationship between the mentor and the mentee. Mentoring is a significant tool for intergenerational knowledge transfer, especially in the context of tacit information (Appelbaum, Ritchie, Shapiro, 1994). However, it is not without certain limitations. Primarily, the mentoring process is time-consuming. Furthermore, establishing a mentor-mentee relationship requires overcoming generational differences, achieving mutual understanding between representatives of both generations, and overcoming stereotypical perceptions of the other side. If these barriers are not broken down, knowledge transfer may be hindered (Lesser, Rivera, 2006). Formal and informal mentoring can be distinguished, in various forms. Individual mentoring, based on a one-to-one relationship (one mentor, one mentee), includes individual face-to-face meetings. On the other hand, group mentoring assumes that the mentor works simultaneously with several mentees who work on a common problem or hold equivalent positions (Vandenberghe, 2013). In the one-to-one program, a more experienced employee can more quickly identify competency gaps among younger colleagues, which allows for training to be better tailored to their needs and shortening their implementation time (DeLong, 2008). Group mentoring has a definite advantage over individual mentoring through the possibility of interaction, mutual learning, knowledge, and experience exchange among young participants, contributing to the expansion of their professional contact networks. Additionally, this type of mentoring supports creativity development, creates favorable conditions for strengthening soft skills among all participants in this process. Another method is coaching. Some compare coaching and mentoring, treating them as identical, though both methods, achieving common goals, do so in distinct ways. Mentoring is based on a learner-expert relationship and usually takes place without external support, where the mentor is an employee within the organization. In contrast, coaching often uses external coaches whose role is friendly support of the employee, helping them develop, refine, and classify ideas (Substantive report..., 2011, p. 5). Moreover, coaching is based on more general principles that can be applied in both professional and personal contexts. Unlike a mentor, a coach does not need to be an expert; their support relies on asking the right questions, helping the learner independently develop solutions. Another form of intergenerational knowledge transfer that integrates elements of mentoring and coaching is tutoring. In this case, a direct relationship is established between a newly hired employee and an experienced specialist, often occupying a higher position in the organizational structure. The tutor not only transfers knowledge but also provides support to the younger employee in independent development of competencies (Jaros et al., 2010, p. 28). To retain knowledge in the organization along with the retirement of experienced employees, it is worth reaching for various tools among which especially important are (de Angelis, 2013, pp. 13-15; Ilmarinen, Lähteenmäki, Huuhtanen, 2003, pp. 30-31; Muukka, 2012, pp. 25-30):

- duplicating competencies, i.e., strategically dividing duties to allow mutual substitution of employees;
- job-sharing, i.e., dividing duties between employees planning to retire and those who will replace them;
- creating knowledge banks (repositories) by documenting completed tasks, which allows other employees to replace the retiring colleague if necessary;
- job rotation, i.e., systematically transferring selected employees between specific job positions, both older and younger;
- in-house training sessions conducted by experienced employees;
- moderated discussions (talks, storytelling), also using multimedia tools, such as audio/video interviews;
- communities of practice, i.e., social structures where people engage over longer periods in various activities around a common domain, sharing cognitive, emotional, and spiritual knowledge;
- delegating experienced employees for vocational training of students, implemented in a dual system or traditional vocational practices.

It is also worth noting other methods (Piktialis, Greenes, 2008; Muukka, 2012, pp. 25-30; de Angelis, 2013, pp. 13-15):

- the relay method, understood as the proactive recruitment of a new employee before the retiring person leaves the job;
- developing successors for key positions;
- gradual retirement;
- maintaining contacts with retired employees who possess expert knowledge;
- employing, if necessary, individuals from among the retired employees.

Another interesting work is Bridging the Gaps. How to Transfer Knowledge in Today's Multigenerational Workplace (Piktialis, Greenes, 2008), especially from a practical point of view. The authors point to various knowledge transfer methods. These methods include: action review, blogs, communities of practice, messengers, knowledge bases, workshops, mentoring, expert support, podcasts (audio or video podcasts - short instructional recordings), retrospection (analysis of past events), storytelling, and Wikipedia. It is worth emphasizing that blogs expand the perspective of learners, eliminating entry barriers to the network, lowering communication costs, facilitating the building of networks around common topics, establishing cooperation, and enabling teamwork.

An effective and economical approach is so-called reverse engineering in which an experienced employee prepares a training plan for a new team member who will replace them upon retirement. This detailed description of the activities required at a given position not only allows for the identification of the necessary skills and tasks for the successor but also defines the sequence in which the new employee should acquire these skills, and the required resources. With the application of such tools and methodologies, there is less risk of overestimating specialized knowledge, as well as a lower probability that the organization will fear the loss of valuable know-how in the future.

6. Case study of knowledge transfer in a cultural institution

The institution subject to this case study employs over 400 people and is one of the most significant cultural venues in Poland. Its mission encompasses dissemination, popularization, education, conservation, and being open to visitors. The most substantial challenge faced by the institution has been, and continues to be, the generational turnover of staff. Given the immense unique knowledge and scientific achievements, knowledge management has become critically important within the institution. It was evident that the institution's mission supports the management of explicit knowledge, which is found in publications, books, best practices, policies, and other documents. To manage tacit knowledge within the institution, several tools were applied. The implementation of new technologies became one of them, which helped

convert tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. In the process of creating a new technological solution, dozens of individual and group meetings occurred in a multigenerational environment. Best practices developed over years were documented, and new practices meeting legal requirements were established. In the creation of the new system, the following tools were applied (de Angelis, 2013, pp. 13-15; Ilmarinen, Lähteenmäki, Huuhtanen, 2003, pp. 30-31; Muukka, 2012, pp. 25-30): moderated discussions, creation of knowledge banks, and duplication of competencies. Another tool applied in the institution was mentoring. Within the monitoring program, employees planning to retire became mentors for newly hired staff, which was additionally financially supported a year before their retirement. Gradual retirement, the relay method, maintaining contacts with retired employees who possess expert knowledge (as mentioned by/in Piktialis, Greenes, 2008; Muukka, 2012, pp. 25-30; de Angelis, 2013, pp. 13-15) proved extremely valuable in transferring the legacy of both explicit and tacit forms of knowledge. The institution also adopted a comprehensive approach to managing tacit knowledge, as mentioned by Leonard (2014): determining the significance of knowledge lost at the time of an employee's retirement, identifying "deep wisdom" crucial for the organization, applying proven knowledge transfer techniques, identifying and implementing long-term development programs, configuring individual learning plans for successors, evaluating undertaken initiatives. In 2023 alone, over 20 individuals retired who were included in the planned retirement program.

Table 1.Comparison of knowledge transfer methods applied in the case of a cultural institution

Methods	Scope	Description of	Duration	% of Engaged
		Knowledge and		Individuals
		Experience Utilization		
Mentoring	Broad, open approach to developing multiple competency, providing advice and support towards ambitious goals	The mentor relies primarily on their rich experience and knowledge, analyzing various solution options together with the mentee	Long-term knowledge transfer relationship	40% of all individuals planning retirement (at least one year before retirement)
Coaching	Narrow, focused on specific competencies, current support	The coach meets with selected individuals to implement individual development plans (specific competencies)	Short-term	10% of individuals covered
Podcast Recording	Broad, applies to all retiring individuals	Conducting interviews, recording podcasts. The thematic range is very broad. Covers both technological knowledge and interpersonal relations	Long-term	100% of individuals planning retirements

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Participation in	Broad, covers all areas	Conducting	Defined time	100% of individuals
the project of	in the institution	intergenerational	in the project –	planning retirements,
creating a new		meetings divided by	1 year	40% of all
tool (knowledge		functional areas		individuals
base)		(Promotion, HR		in the institution
		Department,		
		Accounting,		
		Conservation, etc.)		
Relay Method	Narrow, based on	Working side by side	Long-term	100% of individuals
	essential areas to be	with the successor.		planning retirements
	transferred	Identifying areas for		
		transfer and		
		implementing according		
		to plan		
Retirement	Broad - based on	Assessing the risk of	Long-term	100% of institutional
Departures	managing the risk of	knowledge loss due to		employee departures
Program	knowledge loss	retirements is integrated		
		into the institution's		
		managerial control		

Source: own elaboration.

The intergenerational collaboration implemented in the institution was conditioned by fulfilling a series of key conditions, in accordance with the research of Tokarz-Kamińska (2013, pp. 45-46): openness to diversity, acceptance of differences in attitudes, experiences, and appearance, as well as curiosity about the other person, readiness for mutual listening and learning from each other, creating an atmosphere of partnership instead of instructive or educational stances, breaking age stereotypes and being vigilant about their presence and dominance, building engagement in interpersonal relationships and the environment, carefully creating common "spaces" and passions to enable the integration of experiences, ensuring full participation of all generations. In the context of professional relationships, it was crucial that intergenerational cooperation was not based on one-sidedness but on reciprocity. It was also important to understand that young employees do not want to be lectured, but are looking for opportunities to explore the experiences of their older colleagues and draw conclusions for the future. This provided the institution with a significant scope for the development of tools for intergenerational knowledge transfer, based on mutual trust, inspiration, stimulation, and longterm cooperation between younger and older employees, especially through mentoring. As B. Mazurek-Kucharska points out, the time has come for a new intergenerational solidarity in the workplace which ensures the use of the competency potential of mature employees and fosters intergenerational cooperation (Mazurek-Kucharska, 2011; Mazurek-Kucharska, Block, 2013). In summary, knowledge management in cultural institutions is crucial for the survival of cultural heritage, and the identification of tacit knowledge is one of the most important elements of culture survival for future generations. It is important to consider the aspect of generational differences, the selection of tools, and the creation of a work atmosphere conducive to the exchange of experiences and effective forms of communication.

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