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The current state of knowledge management activities in health facilities in Slovakia

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ABSTRACT

The research article compares opinions of domestic and foreign authors concerning the most important knowledge management aspects through the application of which a certain model of KM implementation in a health facility is affected. Knowledge management is a discipline with a high potential for development because of highly qualified work in the health care sector, and because of changes that occur in the science itself, as well as in the surrounding social environment, requiring creation and constant sharing of knowledge. The main goal of the article is to evaluate the current state of knowledge management activities in the health facilities in Slovakia. The attention is focused on knowledge management process and its dynamics. A questionnaire distributed to the management representatives of 89 health facilities in Slovakia was used for data collection. To evaluate the questionnaire, descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were applied, and statistical significance was examined at the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ using *t*-test. The health facilities in Slovakia that were surveyed use codification strategy, which assumes the utilization of database information. Explicit knowledge is utilized, and knowledge workers' priorities are not given emphasis in this strategy. Personalization strategy where knowledge is very closely linked to an individual and can only be disseminated by means of personal contact and the creation of a favorable culture is used very little and mostly in small-sized organizations. In the current health facility environment, the static model of knowledge management prevails, where the focus is primarily on existing knowledge, and on its ongoing use and replenishment using classic methods of acquisition and storage.

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Introduction

In the health care sector the importance of knowledge is obvious at first sight. It is highly qualified work where the pace of changes occurring in the science itself, as well as in the social environment, necessitates the creation and constant sharing of knowledge. One of the main principles of raising health care quality is knowledge-based care [1]. Knowledge is becoming one of the strategic resources in 21st century organizations that should provide for a stable pace of performance growth and global competitive advantage [2]. Knowledge management, however, does not involve only information technology and its implementation in an organization. KM is not only about health care sector electronization through the introduction of e-health (that is currently under so much discussion). It is more than that – it is something that gives information added value, transforming it into knowledge through mutual sharing, through the way individuals work, how they behave towards one another and how they enable and provide to each other access to relevant information sources.

Implementation of knowledge management leads to knowledge transfer into innovation activities, which, in turn, are the source of efficient performance of health facilities' preset objectives. The transfer of new knowledge into a successful innovation is accompanied by various problems that can be avoided by organizations if they can create in their inner environments conditions for an effective identification of knowledge, conditions for the application of effective procedures to overcome knowledge scarcity, as well as conditions for optimal exploitation of the carriers of necessary knowledge in creative teams. In the process of choosing an optimal knowledge management model in the context of innovative solutions that make organizations constantly move forward, it is necessary to search for what knowledge to use and how to obtain, store and transform such knowledge into an organization's know-how.

Knowledge occurs in organizations in various forms – as documents, procedures, standards, as well as employees' habits and practice. An important factor of an organization's sustainable development is on the one hand ensuring a balance between the existing knowledge and its use and on the other hand the effective creation of new knowledge. The above-mentioned characteristics are also related to the creation of knowledge management models in an organization that are based on an emphasis on either the existing knowledge or on the effective utilization of intellectual capital linked to implementation of changes in the organization.

The sector of large health facilities, like that of the public administration at large, has been traditionally associated with characteristics such as inflexibility, inefficiency, rigidity, bureaucratization and conservatism, which gives an impression that such organizations lag behind the business sector even in regards to knowledge management. The dynamics of the development of an organization's environment should be in keeping with the dynamics of the knowledge management process.

A number of research projects in knowledge management are being conducted that focus on diverse areas, such as suitability of knowledge management support tools, knowledge management application in a business environment, knowledge management development in various organizations, development of knowledge in society, etc. [3–5].

The basis for knowledge management analysis is the very definition of the examined concept in terms of purposeful management in the creation, acquisition, sharing and use of knowledge [6–9]. The analysis also involves explicit knowledge, which is apparent in most organizations, but the emphasis in knowledge management is placed on tacit knowledge, which is the means for an organization to obtain a competitive advantage. Thus tacit knowledge is what creates values and determines an organization's performance [10–12]. Edvardsson and Gurst [13] claim, that the tacit knowledge management process includes fewer elements than the explicit process. The prevailing form of knowledge determines the categorization of knowledge management strategy into codification or personalization strategy, which focus either on hard factor or soft factor-oriented approaches [14].

In addition to the afore-mentioned knowledge management strategies, Maybury and Thuraisingham [15] present two types of strategies, of which the first focuses on the existing and available knowledge using the best practice approach, and the second on creating new knowledge. According to Liao et al. [16] organizations should be proactive in combining existing and new knowledge.

Knowledge management is inseparably linked with intellectual capital [17–19]. Grublová and Franek [20] delineate various views of intellectual capital: innovation, customer and process views. An inevitable factor for knowledge management implementation is a synergic interconnection of intellectual capital and the social climate of an organization's internal environment.

The basis for an effective implementation of knowledge management is formed by critical factors of KM success in the organization. The definition of such factors has been explored by a number of authors. Skyrme and Amidon [21] identified 7 key factors involved in implementing knowledge management; Holsapple and Joshi [22] presented 3 main factor classes: managerial, resource and environmental, specifying key factors within each class. Chourides et al. [23] determined 5 factors that are crucial for a successful implementation of knowledge management. Wong [24], Chong and Choi [25], Wong and Aspinwall [26] identified as many as 11 key factors for a successful implementation of knowledge management and a great many other researchers provided their specifications of key factors as well [27,28]. Among the factors emerging in all of the above-mentioned studies were organizational culture and strategy, and the ability to lead people, which occurred most frequently, followed by organizational structure, human resources and information technologies. Truneček [29] recommends that an appropriate organizational structure that supports knowledge management, an appropriate type of organizational (knowledge) culture, and a specific method of working with knowledge be implemented in an organization.

In addition to the critical success factors of knowledge management, obstacles to its implementation are also defined. The most frequently stated obstacle is determination of the effectiveness of knowledge management implementation, and