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## **Practical dimensions of knowledge transfer in the diverse modern labour market – a research-based discussion<sup>2</sup>**

### INTRODUCTION

The modern world is governed by new economic conditions, which result from the transformations that have come with yet another technological revolution. Breakthrough technologies have been created, new branches of industry have developed, and the old dominant sectors have had to redefine themselves. These changes have had a global, economic and social significance as the network society has emerged. Nowadays we all function in an era of industries created by humans, based on our knowledge and the power of our minds. Moreover, the low innovation level of the economy and its poor ability to compete are usually assumed to be a consequence of inadequate support of the economy with knowledge and intellectual capital (Wiatrak, 2005, p. 19). As a result, analyses are currently conducted from the perspective of an orientation towards knowledge at all levels of economic life. The issues are discussed from both a global and national standpoint and from the point of view of a single organisation.

The dynamic transition to a knowledge-based economy has also led to transformations in the very nature of work and has organised it around the use of abstracts and notions. This, in turn, has resulted in significant shifts in employment structures – the working class has shrunk and the headcount in the service sector has increased. Furthermore, the results and efficiency of work have started to increasingly depend on the soft skills of employees (Solarczyk-Ambrozik, 2018, pp. 51–52).

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We are currently living in a “second” *belle époque*, where – just as in the original one in the 1872–1914 period – tremendous economic and social inequalities emerged, with wealth concentrated in the hands of a narrow group of the richest people (Gwiazda, 2015, pp. 26–27). It is not just the nature of the wealth that has changed – today it is knowledge and the possibility of controlling it. This is why a new dimension of social inequalities has been identified, i.e. access to knowledge (including digital inequalities) (Krot, Lewicka, 2016, p. 234). Organisations invest in the development of those employees who are the swiftest learners, which usually depends on their fundamental knowledge. And so the disproportions between employees and their knowledge resources keep growing geometrically.

In the new knowledge-based economy, only those with the highest qualifications have experienced actual pay rises; however, they are also let go once their skills become obsolete or too expensive or if there are cheaper employees with similar qualifications in another part of the world. The basic social contract is being destroyed, which is why key professionals, usually knowledge employees, are the first ones to quit their jobs once a new opportunity arises. So the possibilities of building a career for one’s whole life are vanishing, which stimulates the growing inequalities.

This is one of the reasons why the role of knowledge transfer keeps growing. After all, knowledge transfer is not only recognised as fundamental and essential for success in the area of knowledge management in organisations but it gains significance in the context of the diversification existing in the modern labour market. The weight and specificity of knowledge transfer encourages a multidimensional and multifaceted analysis, especially in terms of the diversity of employees and the circumstances of their work. Besides, solutions must be proposed for shaping the optimum conditions of such transfer, both universal ones and dedicated to specific employee groups.

The study is both theoretical and empirical. Its objective is to review the literature regarding knowledge transfer seen as a process with the participation of knowledge and to identify the dimensions of that process versus the existing diversification in the labour market. Critical analysis was used as the method to identify knowledge transfer determinants, to propose the tools to facilitate the process for particular employee groups and to establish the related primary values and principles.

The objective of the empirical section is to verify the assumptions that knowledge transfer differs for particular employee groups, with different dominant subprocesses and different instruments supporting its implementation.

#### SPECIFICITY AND DIMENSIONS OF KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DIVERSIFICATION OF THE MODERN LABOUR MARKET

Diffusion of knowledge has attracted the attention of researchers since the very beginnings of the knowledge management concept. It is currently treated as a factor in effective organisation management (Purgał-Popieła, 2017, p. 6; Sinell, Iffländer,

Muschner, 2018, p. 1460), a determinant of the innovation level of an enterprise and the limits of dynamic development (Tworek, Walecka-Jankowska, Martan, 2016; Luo, Lui, Kim, 2017, p. 2), a driver of the modern economy (Michalak, Zagórowski, 2017, p. 300), or a stimulus of the leverage effect in the creation of value by an organisation (Sveiby, 2005, p. 49).

Studies dedicated to the flow of knowledge often use the following terms as synonyms: knowledge diffusion, transfer, distribution, flow, exchange, and transmission (Intezari, Taskin, Puleen, 2017, pp. 499, 501). The term ‘knowledge diffusion’ should be treated as the broadest category, which also embraces knowledge creation as a result of its flow. Its essence is self-duplication of knowledge (Zhang, Li, Aziz-alaoui, Bertelle, Guan, Zhou, 2016, p. 2). When compared to transfer, the process is set strictly in a social context – it requires mutual interactions between its participants, it is determined by knowledge characteristics such as its viscosity and ambiguity (Klarl, 2014, p. 2), it is more closely connected with tacit knowledge and it highly depends on the organisational structure of the enterprise (Paliszkievicz, Svanadze, Jikia, 2017, p. 37). So knowledge diffusion takes into account the positive outcomes of knowledge transfer, along with the determinants and context of the process.

Knowledge transfer is usually defined in process terms and as such it should be described as a process involving knowledge that is the basis of organisational learning. It is described as flow of tacit or explicit knowledge between knowledge agents for the primary purpose of communicating knowledge of appropriate content and set in an appropriate context (Kim, Kang, Wang, 2016, p. 960) (Figure 1).

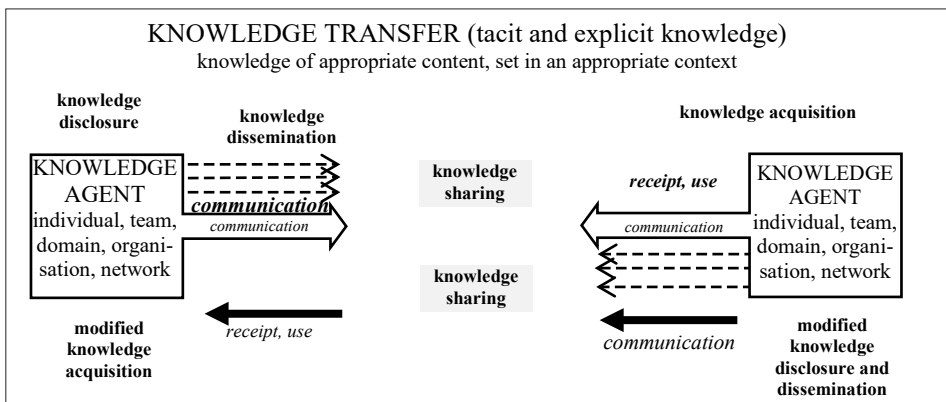


Figure 1. Knowledge transfer as a process involving knowledge

Source: (Pietruszka-Ortyl, 2019, p. 21).

B. Mikuła (2011, s. 64–65) brings the process involving knowledge down to activities that consist of 4 subprocesses: knowledge acquisition (gaining knowledge from various external and internal sources), knowledge disclosure (knowledge

communication to specific people), knowledge dissemination (a wider range of disclosure, aimed at turning specific knowledge into a generally available resource) and knowledge sharing (mutual provision of knowledge between people in a communication process).

The modern labour market is highly diversified. This diversity has resulted in certain inequalities. First of all, its clear dichotomy can be observed.

On the one hand, its main actors are highly qualified employees – new-era professionals, enjoying the safe position of specialists with the key competencies required by employers and as such desired by employers and dictating their terms in those relations.

The other perspective focuses on workforce with low qualifications. In that case, issues characteristic of the employer market prevail, related to dysfunctional flexibilisation of an organisation, sometimes resulting in the waste of qualifications of young people, employees at a mature age or socially excluded population.

So one may conclude that this diversity of the labour market is what generates the inequalities in that market and creates the dimensions for its analysis, especially from the perspective of effective implementation of knowledge transfer by organisations.

Considering the inequalities in the modern labour market, a knowledge transfer analysis must be multifaceted and it must address:

- transfer in hierarchic systems (between employees representing different organisation management levels or various places in the organisational structure of the enterprises or its various international branches),
- intergenerational transfer,
- intercultural transfer,
- interorganisational transfer (between employees, teams of particular enterprises or between individuals, groups and specific partnership enterprises),
- transfer between professionals,
- transfer between specialists and employees with lower qualifications.

Each of the above knowledge transfer analysis levels has different challenges. They apply in particular to issues related to the strategic value of transferred knowledge, its type or the most common knowledge diffusion subprocesses and the optimum tools to stimulate knowledge circulation, depending on the dimension that is being considered (Table 1).

In terms of knowledge transfer between professionals, the key efficiency factor is concentration on the knowledge sharing subprocess. It is most important for this group of employees as prominent individuals since they have the resources of the key – usually tacit – knowledge which is very hard to communicate. In their case, interpersonal relations and personal contacts that create a context of trust and reciprocity are of essence (Ensign, Hébert, 2010, p. 80). The level of trust and mistrust affects attitudes and behaviours, such as: entrepreneurial behaviours, behaviours in the labour market, relational behaviours, risk acceptance, and controlling behaviours (Krot, Lewicka, 2016, p. 238). Professionals' individual

motivation to become actively involved in knowledge transfer is shaped through reputation (i.e. a set of characteristics or capabilities recognised by the environment) and altruism stemming from the wish to satisfy such needs as acceptance, prestige, identification, status and appreciation and intended to draw satisfaction from helping others. Reciprocity is manifested through the attitude that each member of a community should help others and may expect the same or a favour in return (Taylor, Murthy, 2009, p. 162).

**Table 1. Selected knowledge transfer aspects and the dimensions of their analysis in the context of labour market diversification**

strategic value of knowledge			type of knowledge dominant in the transfer		the main subprocess for the knowledge transfer implementation				recommended tools and methods assisting knowledge transfer										analysis dimension
high	medium	low	tacit	explicit	Knowledge acquisition	Knowledge disclosure	Knowledge dissemination	Knowledge sharing	Specialised publications	Seminar speeches	Documentation disclosure	On-the-job training	Managerial training	Creative thinking techniques	Psychological workshops	Coaching	Mentorship	Meetings and briefings	
	X	X		X	X	X	X			X	X	X					X	X	hierarchic
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	intergenerational
X	X			X	X			X	X	X	X		X		X			X	interorganisational
X	X		X		X	X		X					X	X	X	X		X	between professionals
	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	intercultural
	X	X		X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X			X	X	between specialists and their co-workers

Source: (Pietruszka-Ortyl, 2019, p. 21).

In the case of knowledge transfer in a multicultural and intergenerational aspect, and partially an interorganisational aspect, the efficiency of the process involving knowledge depends on some special elements, the leading one being the frequency of contacts – the more frequent, the better for knowledge transfer. In this context, problems connected with different mental models, metaphors and analogies arise. So it seems that the dominant factor simulating efficient knowledge exchange in this case is the ability of particular employees to learn at a universal level.

Intergenerational knowledge transfer gains special significance due to its increasing range. Contemporary living conditions have resulted in longer life expectancy and coexistence of many generations. Both traditionalists and Generation Z can function in the labour market simultaneously, which is a challenge for company management. Organisations need both the youngest generation – proficient users of IT tools, born in the era of digital economy, and the older generation – a carrier of knowledge (Godlewska-Majkowska, Lipiec, 2018, p. 9).

The issue of proper knowledge transfer between the organisation management and the reporting employees, also with regard to global operations, is an intriguing issue. This is where problems emerge in connection with proper communication and implementation of the strategies adopted without adjustment to the requirements of local markets or other peculiarities of specific individuals. In such cases, the alertness and vigilance of managers is emphasised as it determines the transparency of the message and the selection of knowledge diffusion tools suitable for the recipients and it eliminates the use of mental shortcuts, cultural simplifications or hermetic language (Ishihara, Zolkiewski, 2017, p. 840).

#### EMPIRICAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

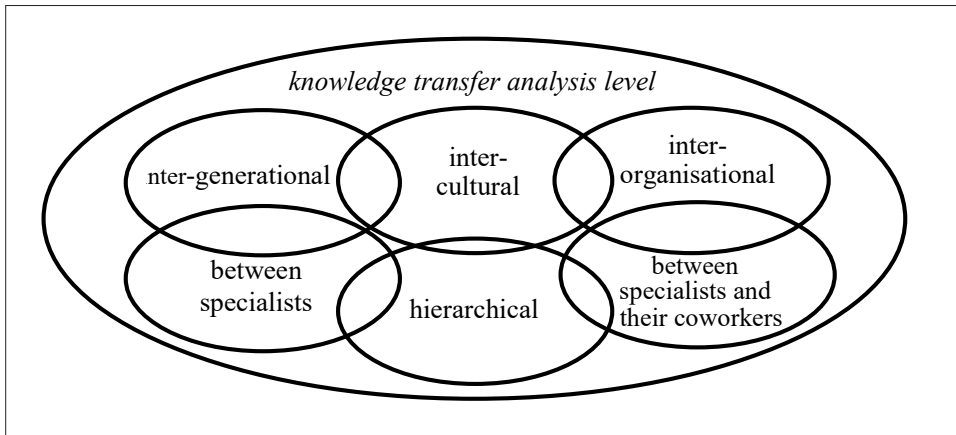
The main hypothesis was developed before the pilot empirical research aimed at preliminary analysis and diagnosis of knowledge transfer conditions in the perspective of the diversification of the modern labour market, and it assumed that the knowledge transfer process depended on the knowledge agents involved. The main hypothesis was complemented by the following detailed hypotheses:

- the group of knowledge agents determines the dominant subprocess in a specific knowledge transfer process,
- various groups of knowledge agents use different instruments supporting the implementation of particular knowledge transfer subprocesses.

Thus phrased theoretical assumptions led to specific questions and, by extension, to research tasks involving identification of:

- the knowledge transfer subprocess dominant in the group of knowledge agents,
- the methods and tools supporting each of the identified knowledge transfer subprocesses used with regard to specific groups of knowledge agents.

The research hypotheses were verified and the research objectives were pursued based on a survey held in spring 2019. The research tool consisted of 15 closed, mostly multiple choice questions. Eighty-eight surveys were fully completed.



**Figure 2. Knowledge transfer analysis dimensions versus labour market diversification**

Source: (Pietruszka-Ortyl, 2019, p. 21).

The respondents were of different ages (the average age was 38.5), had mostly higher education (89.7% respondents) and moderate professional experience, they were connected through various forms of cooperation, they formed a collaborative network, they had 14 years of service on average, they represented various groups of knowledge agents and participated in knowledge transfer processes at various levels according to the pattern presented in Figure 2.

As a result, the respondents were concurrently assigned to several groups of knowledge agents and they took part in knowledge circulation processes at several different levels of knowledge transfer analysis. 21 (23.9%) respondents were senior executives, 58 (65.9%) represented middle management, and 9 (10.2%) were operational managers. 23 (26%) of the respondents were specialists in their field. Considering the generation diversification, 46 (52.3%) respondents were from Generation X, 33 (37.5%) were from Generation Y and 9 (10.2%) represented Generation Z. The first group was homogeneous in terms of gender (men) and diverse in terms of nationality (19 (21.6%) Ukrainians, 11 (12.5%) UK citizens, 9 (10.2%) Germans, 49 (55.7%) Poles).

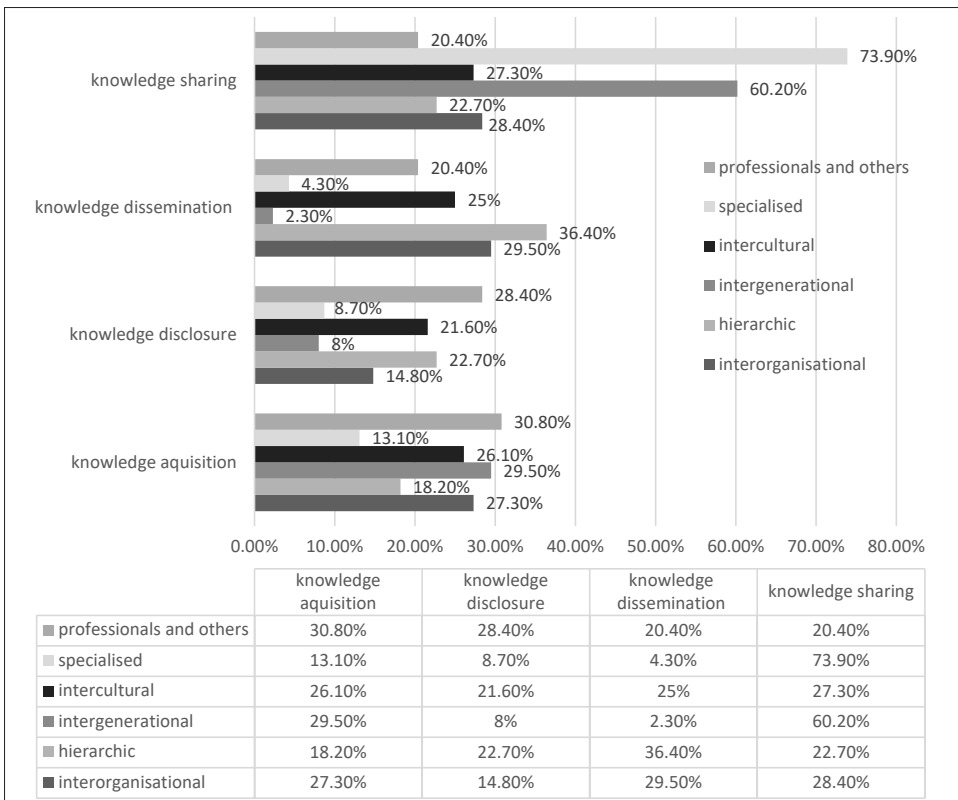
#### DETERMINANTS OF THE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PROCESS DEPENDING ON THE CHARACTERISTICS OF KNOWLEDGE AGENTS

##### – RESEARCH RESULTS

In search of arguments to verify the correctness of research assumptions, the answers given by the respondents to particular survey questions were addressed.

First, every respondent group was asked to specify which of the four subprocesses was the most common, the most preferred and, in their opinion, the most important for effective implementation of knowledge transfer (Figure 3).

For knowledge transfer carried out by specialists, the respondents specified knowledge sharing as the dominant and the most important subprocess (73.9%). This reflects the professionals' high awareness of the significance of such actions as they lead to the creation of new knowledge and involve the most valuable tacit knowledge. Knowledge acquisition was also a fairly popular response (13.1%), which reflects attitudes characteristic of professionals, entailing determination in learning on their own, directly from others, as a result of functioning in communities of practitioners. The orientation towards knowledge dissemination (4.3%) and knowledge disclosure (8.7%) was noticeably low. Such results may suggest low motivation of specialists in this respect and adoption of an orientation that knowledge is power.



**Figure 3. Significance of particular knowledge transfer subprocesses depending on analysis dimensions**

Source: own compilation based on empirical research results.



**Table 2. Knowledge transfer instruments by knowledge transfer subprocess and knowledge agent group**

identified tool	hierarchical	intergenerational	between professionals	intercultural	between specialists and their co-workers	inter-organisational
on-the-job training	48.2%	61.3%	23.7%	65.7%	58.6%	13.2%
presentation	28.5%	27.3%	45.3%	43.2%	48.1%	63.7%
e-mail	29.3%	23.1%	28.7%	29.1%	38.2%	88.8%
demonstration and display	38.2%	43.3%	43.9%	44.8%	42.1%	59.7%
marketing research	33.8%	12.3%	21.8%	32.6%	19.8%	48.3%
knowledge disclosure						
on-the-job training	62.4%	74.2%	43.5%	64.2%	69.8%	46.3%
meetings and briefings	68.3%	63.8%	43.5%	65.2%	69.1%	38.2%
product manuals	43.2%	38.3%	39.5%	48.3%	48.6%	58.2%
training	38.3%	58.9%	56.8%	56.3%	68.3%	48.5%
documentation disclosure	48.3%	39.5%	38.9%	47.9%	55.8%	56.1%
knowledge dissemination						
organisation websites	28.3%	34.5%	28.3%	38.2%	49.3%	89.2%
advertising of the company and its products	38.2%	46.2%	57.4%	39.6%	46.2%	86.3%
specialised publications	36.6%	43.1%	61.8%	41.8%	49.8%	73.1%
speeches in the environment	42.8%	44.2%	62.3%	38.5%	38.3%	65.8%
knowledge sharing						
meetings and briefings	63.2%	48.3%	48.9%	45.3%	67.2%	25.6%
training on group work	43.2%	58.3%	46.9%	44.2%	66.6%	38.2%
mentorship	38.2%	58.2%	45.8%	41.8%	74.2%	35.3%
coaching	35.8%	48.6%	51.3%	41.8%	77.2%	35.3%
communities of practitioners	28.9%	48.6%	64.2%	51.3%	24.6%	45.6%

Source: own compilation based on empirical research results.

As a result, it seems advisable to re-design incentive systems to make them stimulate these subprocesses and the use of appropriate instruments to catalyse these activities and thus transform tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge and human capital into the company's structural capital.

In the answers given by the respondents, interorganisational knowledge transfer seems to make equal use of all four subprocesses. However, one may notice clear trends in applying the knowledge protection strategy (low percentage of answers for knowledge disclosure – 14.8%) and the determination to consciously shape the image of the organisation outside (knowledge dissemination 29.5% of responses).

Hierarchical knowledge transfer shows low orientation towards feedback (knowledge acquisition 18.2% of responses) and suggests high formalisation of activities, which limits knowledge disclosure and knowledge sharing (both subprocesses had 22.7% responses each).

Intergenerational knowledge transfer, according to the respondents, makes the greatest use of knowledge sharing (60.2% of responses) and knowledge acquisition (29.5% of responses). They appreciate the mutual benefits from cooperation with those who represent different systems of values and communication methods. There is an established openness to cooperation, stemming from the appreciated reciprocity.

As far as intercultural knowledge transfer is concerned, the responses confirm the need for and awareness of the significance of that variant of knowledge transfer but they also show how complex and difficult it is. Knowledge sharing in this case fails (27.3% of responses), limited essentially by differing mental models and cultural inclinations regarding the communication process.

The results obtained for knowledge transfer between professionals and their co-workers are questionable. They may arise from the high disproportion between the number of specialists and the representatives of other employees (23/65). As a result, the characteristic attitude is knowledge acquisition on the part of other employees (30.8% of responses), the willingness to disclose professional knowledge to co-workers (28.4%) and a clear reluctance to disseminate and share knowledge (20.4% of responses).

For the most commonly used and preferred tools specific for particular knowledge transfer subprocesses, the research results reveal the following patterns (Table 2):

- in the majority of knowledge agent groups, knowledge acquisition takes place through on-the-job training and demonstration and display; the level between professionals is an exception as it is dominated by specialised presentations and interorganisational transfer, where the acquisition takes place also via presentations and e-mails;
- knowledge disclosure essentially takes place through on-the-job training and meetings and briefings; different responses were given for the professional dimension of knowledge transfer, which uses mostly training, and the interorganisational level, with on-the-job training and documentation disclosure being popular tools;

- knowledge dissemination takes place through tools that are more varied for specific groups of knowledge agents; advertising of the company and its products is used for all knowledge transfer subprocesses; speeches in the environment and development of specialised publications are also relatively common; the tools used in the professional and intercultural dimension include primarily speeches in the environment, and in the intercultural level – company websites,
- knowledge sharing takes place based on the most diverse tools, which is an outcome of the significance and specificity of this subprocess; in the hierarchical dimension, meetings and briefings and training of group work are most frequently used; the most popular tools for intergenerational knowledge sharing are training of group work and mentorship; professionals usually use communities of practitioners and coaching, and representatives of various cultures – communities of practitioners and meetings and briefings; specialists usually share their knowledge with other employees through coaching and mentorship; the interorganisational level of knowledge sharing is based on communities of practitioners and group work training.

## CONCLUSIONS

The principles of the “good society” by T. Piketty suggest that attempts should be made to eliminate social inequalities arising from the accumulation of wealth (Drabowicz, 2016, p. 79). Considering the negative consequences of inequalities for economies and organisations in connection with society ageing and talent deficits, it is emphasised that their eradication could help improve general prosperity (Krot, Lewicka, 2016, pp. 234–235). Since nowadays, in the era of knowledge-based economy, wealth concentrates around knowledge, conscious control of its diffusion among various labour market groups gains special significance.

This is why the paper attempted to identify particular dimensions of knowledge transfer and capture their specificity from the perspective of particular groups of knowledge agents. Efforts were made to determine, based on the empirical research, the basic knowledge transfer subprocesses followed by specific groups of knowledge agents and to establish the instruments used in their course.

The results discussed should be treated as indicative only due to their considerable constraints related to the size of the sample. The research should be construed as pilot studies that confirm the diversity of knowledge transfer across various groups of knowledge agents and may justify undertaking proper multidimensional scientific studies.

Nonetheless, it shows that knowledge sharing is a subprocess that is reserved for professionals and for intergenerational exchange of knowledge. Knowledge acquisition most often takes place between specialists and their co-workers and at the intergenerational level. Knowledge disclosure is the

domain of specialists and it usually happens during their contacts with their co-workers. Whereas knowledge dissemination is the primary subprocess of hierarchical knowledge transfer.

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### Summary

Nowadays knowledge has clearly gained the attribute of domination and has been widely recognized as the one from intangible resources, which has great importance for shaping competitive advantage. Knowledge, therefore, has become a new foundation of organisations' well-being, and in the future the property will be the ability to gain control over knowledge. At present, we are pointing to a new dimension of social inequalities, the base of which is access to knowledge. Therefore, one of the ways of bridging these inequalities can be the conscious and controlled shaping of knowledge transfer between groups of knowledge agents, representing diverse, often overlapping, social and organizational categories.

The study has a theoretical-empirical character. Its purpose is to synthesize a work on literature devoted to the transfer of knowledge and to indicate the dimensions of this process in view of the existing diversity in the labour market. The aim of the empirical part is to check in which groups of knowledge agents and by using which instruments, which sub-processes of knowledge transfer are implemented.

The general research hypothesis is the assumption that the course of the knowledge transfer process depends on which groups of knowledge agents it concerns. It caused the emergence of detailed hypotheses and specific research questions.

In order to find answers to these, the method of critical analysis and empirical research, based on a questionnaire based on in-depth interviews, was used.

The results obtained from empirical research prove that sharing knowledge is the domain of professionalists and the dimension of the intergenerational exchange of knowledge. Acquiring knowledge is most often carried out at the level of specialists' relations with other employees and between generations. Sharing knowledge is the domain of specialists and is usually and most often

performed during their contacts with other employees. Dissemination of knowledge, in turn, is the chief subprocess of the hierarchical dimension of knowledge transfer.

*Keywords:* knowledge transfer, diversification of the labour market, knowledge agents.

## **Praktyczny wymiar transferu wiedzy w warunkach zróżnicowania współczesnego rynku pracy – refleksje z badań**

### *Streszczenie*

Współcześnie wiedza bezspornie zyskała atrybut dominacji i została powszechnie uznana za ten z zasobów niematerialnych, który ma naczelną rolę dla kształtowania przewagi konkurencyjnej. Wiedza zatem stała się nową podstawą dobrobytu, a w przyszłości majątkiem będzie właśnie umiejętność sprawowania nad nią kontroli. Obecnie wskazuje się więc na nowy wymiar nierówności społecznych, jakim jest dostęp do wiedzy. Dlatego też jednym ze sposobów niwelowania tych nierówności może być świadome i kontrolowane kształtowanie transferu wiedzy między poszczególnymi grupami agentów wiedzy, reprezentującymi zróżnicowane, często nakładające się, kategorie społeczne i organizacyjne.

Opracowanie ma teoretyczno-empiryczny charakter. Jego celem jest dokonanie syntezy dorobku literaturowego poświęconego transferowi wiedzy oraz wskazanie wymiarów tego procesu wobec istniejącego zróżnicowania na rynku pracy. Celem części empirycznej jest sprawdzenie, w jakich grupach agentów wiedzy i przy użyciu jakich instrumentów, które z subprocessów transferu wiedzy są realizowane.

Ogólna hipoteza badawcza sprowadza się do sformułowania przypuszczenia, że przebieg procesu transferu wiedzy uzależniony jest od tego, których grup agentów wiedzy dotyczy. Spowodowała ona wyłonienie się hipotez szczegółowych oraz konkretnych pytań badawczych.

Aby znaleźć na nie odpowiedzi wykorzystano metodę analizy krytycznej oraz badania empiryczne, zrealizowane w oparciu o kwestionariusz ankiety wsparty wywiadami pogłębionymi.

Uzyskane wyniki badań empirycznych dowodzą, że dzielenie się wiedzą to domena profesjonalistów oraz wymiaru międzypokoleniowego wymiany wiedzy. Pozyskiwanie wiedzy jest najczęściej realizowane na poziomie relacji specjalistów z innymi pracownikami oraz międzypokoleniowym. Udostępnianie wiedzy jest domeną specjalistów i dokonuje się zwykle i najczęściej podczas ich kontaktów z innymi pracownikami. Rozpowszechnianie wiedzy z kolei, to naczelną rolę subprocessu hierarchicznego wymiaru transferu wiedzy.

*Słowa kluczowe:* transfer wiedzy, zróżnicowanie rynku pracy, agenci wiedzy.

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