

INTERGENERATIONAL COOPERATION AT THE COMPANY AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

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Abstract: Interpersonal relations are vital in the company's operations. The connection between generations is designed and created in this way. Interpersonal cooperation includes two essential elements, and this is connection and coexistence between the generations. Various conflicts come between generations many times which results from intergenerational differences and arises from differences in the goals and interests most often. Intergenerational cooperation has a significant role because of the transfer and exchange of knowledge in the company. When we talk about knowledge transfer, old people transmit their experiential knowledge to young people, and the latter in many cases lack this knowledge. Young people acquire experiential knowledge in such way in a company either in the case in which a mentor transfers work instructions and guidelines or with the help of a practical implementation of activities. Employees are aware that the acquisition of knowledge, experience, and skills are a crucial element for business success which represents a competitive advantage for companies. For this reason, companies invest a significant proportion of their revenues in training and knowledge of their employees. Knowledge is in the innovation, technology, documentation and minds of people in companies.

Keywords: intergenerational cooperation, knowledge, knowledge transfer.

1. Definition of the problem

Relations between generations are fundamental to the human living conditions, and they are connected with key human experience (Pihlar, 2012). To ensure the success of the company an inseparable guide relationship between generations and care for quality ageing should be considered by introducing and consolidating a new solidarity between them (Kidrič, 2006).

With good relations, we create the conditions for intergenerational cooperation in a company which established the employees of companies and this is very important for the transfer of knowledge. Problems arise between generations many times and they are often rooted in intergenerational differences. Generations have different opinions on many activities

and operations of the business which may lead to disagreements and problems that can cause intergenerational differences. Intergenerational relations and cooperation are important to learning about the needs of different generations (Podnar, 2009).

Intergenerational Cooperation is the basis for the exchange of knowledge between generations in the company where knowledge management plays an important role. Here we are talking about knowledge transfer through mentoring and work experience, which young personnel successfully engage in work. Young personnel connected with professionals who have specific knowledge, this is characteristic of mentoring (Sitar, 2006).

We know more definitions of concept knowledge. Knowledge is the sum of beliefs and truths that this is the whole of our perceptions, discoveries, and experiences. Knowledge is comprised of created and organised skills, experiences, and values which we can prove by action and successful solving of problems. We have been focused mainly on the expertise inside the company which is crucial for the operation, development, and good business results. Companies acquire theoretical knowledge with new employments, with hiring external consultants and with the organisation of seminars, courses, and similar education for employees. This knowledge becomes practical knowledge when it is used for detecting and solving problems (Gomezelj Omerzel, 2008).

Knowledge is a mixture of experiences, information, and professional knowledge in the company (Gomezelj Omerzel, 2008). The process of knowledge exchange is done through formal and informal mechanisms. Social capital is important for knowledge transfer. This capital covers a developed social network, a high degree of confidence, and a certain degree of common norms and values of the individual. (Podmernik, 2008).

Transfer and sharing of knowledge depend on of knowledge which the company possesses, which includes knowledge of the organisation and the basis of communication which constitutes the grounds for knowledge transfer. The methods of cooperation between employees are a very important addition to communication (Nonaka, and Takeuchi, 1995).

Investments are the most important element of the development of the economy. Investing in knowledge includes learning, knowledge and creativity or innovation, which is the key element of competitiveness. Competitiveness is most dependent on the ability of continuous learning of the society and ability of commercial use of the latest technologies. Companies compete internationally in the global niches by their unique strategies and skills (Možina, and Kovač, 2006).

2. Knowledge in the company

“Knowledge is a cluster of data, skills, information or context that allow the quality decision and problem-solving” (Walczak, 2005, p. 331).

“Knowledge is the ability of the man which enables it to resolve the known problems. Knowledge helps a person to solve problems with known solutions no matter where and how it has been obtained” (Ivanuša-Bezjak, 2006, p. 52).

Knowledge is the source of the performance of the company, and the main part of the investments are investments in knowledge into successful companies. This knowledge is in the innovation, technology, documents, and minds of the personnel. Personnel is constantly prepared for perfecting the benefits of this knowledge into practice in companies where a big emphasis is placed on knowledge, education, and preservation of knowledge in the company. Knowledge is useful regarding usability of the social and development perspective in the company (Možina, 2002).

Knowledge represents the competitive advantage of the company, one of the most strategic company resources and the main factor of success. We need to put constant attention to knowledge, which is seen as an essential resource in the company. We must not forget that knowledge has a big impact on the innovative company. Knowledge should be a foundation on which a strategy of the company is built and the most important source of profitability in the company. The role of knowledge varies depending on the activity in which the company is engaged. The most important economic resource is knowledge, no longer the natural resources, the workforce, and capital in a time when we enter into a knowledge society. The company develops the knowledge, but this is not enough. It is important to take care of the knowledge transfers between employees and with this the amount of knowledge increases. We are currently in a fast-changing environment that is unpredictable and tense. We can take advantage of this environment to promote learning and creation of new knowledge in the company. A company has a task to create an environment for free thinking to find new solutions at all levels (Gomezelj Omerzel, 2008). Implicit or tacit knowledge has much power for the competitive advantage of the company (Krogh, Ichijo, and Nonaka, 2000).

Sharing of knowledge, implicit and explicit, is the most common division from the perspective of knowledge management. Explicitly expressed knowledge is transferred by various media, implicit knowledge is transmitted only directly between employees (O'Dell, and Grayson, 1998).

Implicit knowledge is the knowledge of the individual obtained from working and living experiences. This knowledge is difficult and very demanding to access, document, edit, and forward. For this type of knowledge it is characteristic that we can transmit it through education and mentoring. Mentoring is typical for the company, so it is necessary to provide to employees a connection with specialists who have specific knowledge. Unlike tacit knowledge, explicit knowledge is written in documents, books, databases, or manuals. We can recognise this knowledge, store, transfer, and define it (Sitar, 2006). Implicit or tacit knowledge is the most important source of information in the company (Krogh et al., 2000), so it is difficult to directly recognise it (Paavola, Lipponen, and Hakkarainen, 2004). Tacit knowledge is the key to innovation capacity of companies. This knowledge enables the development of close relations

with other companies, which enables the acquisition of tacit knowledge from external companies (Cavusgil, Calantone, and Zhao, 2003).

We pointed out three definitions of knowledge, which we are faced with in business. We divide the knowledge into six parts in the first definition (Gomezelj Omerzel, 2008):

- »Know-how« – this is the developmental stage of knowledge that helps us to transfer the theoretical principles into real results.
- »Know-what« – knowledge acquired in school, which is insufficient for creating a competitive advantage.
- »Know-why« – there is a transition from information to knowledge.
- »Know-who« – we can consider it as knowledge about relations. In the case of this knowledge, we know who has which knowledge and whom we can call for help.
- »Know-when« – a feeling for a right moment.
- »Know-where« – this is the skill of people who find the right information in the right place.

Another division of knowledge is specific to the individual company and represents a competitive advantage (Gomezelj Omerzel, 2008):

- Conceptual knowledge, when individual knowledge is based on the capacity for understanding theoretical concepts.
- Experiential knowledge is tacit knowledge and comes from experiences.
- Systemic knowledge where go for a set of tacit knowledge which we find in the company in system routines and accepted rules.
- Written knowledge which includes written rules, procedures, instructions, and the like.

The third division includes all knowledge at the company level covering four types and these are as follows (Gomezelj Omerzel, 2008):

- Inter-organisational knowledge where learning is used for integration of the internal knowledge with the external one.
- Organisational knowledge, which allows the flow of knowledge across an enterprise.
- Collective knowledge, where learning enables connecting various forms of knowledge with the help of communication.
- Individual knowledge which is acquired by learning and with this it facilitates obtaining information.

3. Intergenerational cooperation and ways of knowledge transfer

Lasting activities of every man are an entry into the interpersonal relationships, their design, transformation, and disconnection. They are the fundamental signs of human social nature. This corresponds to a need for socialising, which is one of the basic human needs. This need is developed differently in humans, but no one can live without it (Ule, 2004).

Intergenerational cooperation is a connection between the generations and coexistence between young and older people. This cooperation is a conscious decision in a society that is ageing. That includes the exchange of experience and knowledge, to create, maintain, and expand the social networks. We must stress cooperation and mutual respect and reinforce solidarity between the young and elderly. Experience and knowledge of the older people are a very important social capital. We have to make sure that their knowledge is transferred to the younger generation because this is very important for social development (Kralj, 2009).

Generations must be complementary to each other, which is a fixed asset of human development (Ramovš, 2000). A way of life in modern society, which glorifies productivity, productivity and a hunt for profits, reduces the importance of relations between the generations. Very fast development of science and knowledge relegates experience and knowledge of the older people and thus reduces the standing of age (Mali, 2009).

Older employees are aware that they have an advantage over young people because of the experience and they can affect their behaviour. Older is identified with experience. An attack on their knowledge and experience means an attack on their identity (Brečko, 1998).

Older employees are a source of knowledge and experience. Employers see a good knowledge and social skills at them. A transfer of past achievements onto young people is important for the society. If we compare the older with the young, older people have mostly experiential knowledge, which over the years has obtained a certain width. Older people are a source of knowledge, but to them, it is running low because of the rapid evolution and changes. Older people should be awake and curious in order not to land on the social edge (Kralj, 2009).

The knowledge transfer process is a process where knowledge is transferred to other employees or groups within a company. Communication plays an important role in exchanging and knowledge transfer (Dermol, 2008/2009). Here we are talking about the transfer of knowledge through mentoring and work practices which young personnel may successfully engage in their work. Mentoring is characterised by young personnel connecting with professionals who have a specific knowledge (Sitar, 2006).

We can explain the transfer of knowledge with five variables (Gomezelj Omerzelj, 2008):

- culture in the company which promotes the development and spreading of knowledge,
- employees hide own knowledge because they think that this increases competitive advantage over employees,
- the company does not enable the transfer of knowledge between departments,
- employees do not understand the importance of spreading and sharing knowledge,
- employees have too few communication skills which are necessary for the transfer of knowledge.

4. Research questions

We mentioned intergenerational relations, which are very important for the transfer of knowledge between generations, where older people transfer experiential knowledge to the younger ones. Knowledge is the competitive advantage of every good company and it is very important that companies invest in employee knowledge. For this reason, it is necessary to encourage the employees to constantly learn and share their knowledge. In the companies there are older people who are full of experiential knowledge. Moreover, there are young people who have come in the company full of fresh knowledge, but with a lack of experiential knowledge. If these two groups establish good relations between themselves the desired transfer of knowledge and experiences will take place, which is very important for good business and the future of the company.

We determined two research questions:

- RQ1: Young people are aware of the importance of knowledge and experience of older people in the company.
- RQ2: Good intergenerational relations have a positive impact on knowledge transfer.

We wanted to check whether the young people are aware of the importance of knowledge and experiences of the elderly because the elderly are one of the best sources of knowledge in the company. Both groups have their advantages and disadvantages in the field of knowledge. If we make a comparison between older and young people, we find that older people have an experiential knowledge, but the development of technology is slowly overtaking them. They are less apt in the field of knowledge of foreign languages, project work, and teamwork. Young people are more familiar with the modern information technology, computer science, and use of the Internet, and they know foreign languages, they are familiar with teamwork and know how to use different communication possibilities. Along with the establishment of relations all the necessary knowledge will be acquired to achieve the objectives set.

4.1. Answer to research question No. 1

We found that young people are aware of the importance of knowledge from the experiences of older people. They know that older people are one of the best sources of knowledge in a period of deployment of training and internships in the company, where they acquire knowledge through mentoring. Because young people do not have experiences, they want to get more knowledge from old people and in turn, forward their own fresh knowledge which they obtained during their studies.

Young people have an advantage related to computer skills, management of the Internet, communication skills, teamwork, mastering foreign languages, and project work, in contrast to the older people. However, young people are aware that they do not have enough knowledge which they acquired during education, and they have to continually improve their knowledge (Pečar, 2002). They have one big imperfection. Young people are full of fresh theoretical knowledge on graduation, but they do not have experiences in the specific workplace (Počivavšek, 2005). They see that older employees are a source of knowledge and experience and are aware that the transfer of the previous achievements onto the young is important for company's success.

“Companies are encouraged to be aware of the importance of knowledge of older people. Older people say that they are adept and proficient in their work, they are reliable in work and don not demonstrate panic reactions. They are a good source of knowledge transfer, which they have at their workplace”. What “they know is high-quality knowledge. We cannot avoid intergenerational cooperation, so companies invest a lot of money in knowledge and good human resources, which provides for good mentors or groups of mentors who teach young personnel and introduce them into work. Moreover, only respect for the older people and awareness of their knowledge leads to good cooperation, transfer of knowledge, and good results” (Urška Valjavec, 2014).

4.2. Answer to research question No. 2

The basis for the transfer of knowledge is good interpersonal relations. So, knowledge transfer takes place with good communication, where knowledge management intervenes. They are aware that conflict between generations impedes the transfer of knowledge and this impacts the company's operations. Even the leading companies are aware of the importance of intergenerational relationships and they want to prevent conflicts or resolve them as quickly as possible.

We conducted an interview for the survey in company X, on the theme of intergenerational relations and knowledge transfer. We were interested to find out how young people establish their relations with older people, what kind of interpersonal relationships they have and or between the transfer of knowledge in the company, where we conducted the interview. The company shall provide a mentor for younger employees. Mentors are their employees,

but the company makes a careful selection. That colleagues have positive characteristics, they are surrounding their knowledge; they are responsible and reliable. Leadership promotes the transfer of knowledge between generations, and they have an opinion that mutual assistance and transfer of knowledge between them and very good go on the company. Even to older people are open to young people and are not rather sparse in providing information and knowledge.

The company gives a big focus on interpersonal relationships which is defined by their code of ethics. They prepare lectures for all employees every year on this theme. The management tries by their own example to promote friendly relations and team spirit. The company tries to teach young colleagues that they will be provided with a little more patience and considerateness to older people. Likewise, they motivate their older colleagues to give a positive energy, calmness and to lead their younger colleagues with wisdom. They believe that this is a very good proceeding.

Intergenerational transfer of knowledge must come from active cooperation and communication between generations in the workplace. The red thread is mutual respect and trust and acceptance of differences between different generations of employees in the company, which is mostly born and developed through cooperation and teamwork (Žezlina, 2011).

5. Findings and discussion

Older people transmit their knowledge, experiences, and skills onto young people and the older people develop further. Knowledge of the older people can be a very good basis for further development, with this when the company adopts their knowledge and experiences they actively participate in improving the life of the entire society (Pavlin, 2012).

Again, we can mention the experiences. Older employees are aware that they have an advantage over young people precisely because of experiences, which surely affects their behaviour. Older people identify with the experience, which means that suppression of their knowledge and experiences is an attack on their identity (Brečko, 1998).

We must point out that experiential knowledge of older people is extremely important. Young people without experiences are eager to make use of their knowledge, however, the lack of experience is the main problem in the labour market, with the introduction of the work and enforcement in the company. It is very important that young people know the value of knowledge of older people since they are the best source of knowledge and young people must build good interpersonal relationships with them. However, young people have their fresh knowledge which they transmit to the older people in return.

Company X is one of the best companies in Slovenia. The company has established a personnel policy and they want improvement and best people. Their results tell us that in order

to achieve good results good interpersonal and intergenerational relations and knowledge transfer are necessary. Such a company has the objective of a long-term strategic cooperation with their customers and suppliers. Their business policy is based on mutual respect as this is the factor which brings the best results.

This article focuses on the topic which deals with the importance of knowledge and knowledge transfer.

In company X emphasis is placed on knowledge and education. The director of the company says: "Continuously learn to represent the competitiveness". The company collaborates with primary, secondary, and higher education schools in their region. They give an opportunity to primary school children to get to know the professions, they provide traineeships for students, later give them vocational work and after graduation they include them actively in the business. Their personnel policy aims at obtaining a large number of most responsible professional and managerial personnel with the vertical mobility of staff within the company. They expect innovation, responsibility, and loyalty to the company of all their employees.

6. Conclusions

We focused on knowledge, transfer of knowledge, and importance of intergenerational cooperation for the transfer of knowledge in our research work. Knowledge and investment in the acquisition of knowledge are crucial for the successful development and operation of the company in the future. Employees should be aware that knowledge is a competitive advantage.

We know several type of shared knowledge. The most frequent is the division into implicit and explicit knowledge. For the company, know-how knowledge is very important, which with intergenerational transmission remains in the framework of the company and is upgraded and adopts newer and more modern trends and makes use of modern technological equipment.

Transfer of knowledge is very important, for which knowledge management is arranged. In the case of this transfer, we are talking about the experiential knowledge of older people and fresh knowledge of young people who completed their studies. We are confronted with the problem of knowledge transfer which arises because of a conflict between the generations. Conflicts arise due to differences between generations, different interests and objectives.

For all these reasons, it is very important to highlight the good intergenerational relations and promptly resolve conflict situations in the company. Thus, the company will ensure the necessary transfer of knowledge, which is crucial for its success. The leaders must be aware of the importance of good intergenerational relations, which have the greatest impact on the internal organisational conditions and climate, while they are in direct contact with their colleagues and can affect fast and skilful resolution of the conflict.

In companies where the business policy is based on mutual co-operation, there is less chance that the intergenerational clashes would hamper the transfer of knowledge between them. Employees should be aware of their knowledge and acquired skills, and they must be favourable to the transfer of skills and multidisciplinary approach to solving these problems in the company. Companies which will provide appropriate working conditions and the environment in which it will be possible to implement intergenerational cooperation and knowledge transfer, will post high results and have a competitive advantage on the market.

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