

## Abstract

Empirical exploration of economic sciences in the field of knowledge management was initiated nearly 30 years ago, yet this sub-discipline of management science still requires scientific development, especially in terms of setting new dependencies and expanding existing research. Based on the materials and publications available, the author found that a cognitive gap is present. Therefore, the key cognitive problem of the present dissertation consists in the intersection of issues in the areas of knowledge management, enterprise competitiveness, innovation and comparison of economic entities in the field of small and medium-sized service enterprises.

The author of the present work decided to carry out studies with the sole goal to determine how the competitiveness of small and medium-sized service enterprises in Poland affects knowledge management in these enterprises. At the same time, the study was deliberately focused on the services sector, which is considered to be a measure and indicator of the level of economic development. The discussion arrangement required the following:

- to diagnose small and medium service enterprises in terms of knowledge management,
- to confront theoretical assumptions regarding the issues discussed with the realities of the Polish market of small and medium-sized service enterprises,
- to discover the essence of competitive advantage of the service sector of SME,
- to analyse the process of knowledge management in small and medium-sized service enterprises at the level of specific elements affecting the competitiveness of enterprises, including barriers to effective implementation of knowledge management

Exploration was conducted, including personal observations and experience, which made it possible to verify the hypotheses, as well as to create an opportunity for answers to earlier research questions.

The results proved that small and medium-sized service enterprises in Poland make a too declarative use of knowledge management, which does not translate into business practice.

It was shown that, among the companies which achieved competitive advantage while contributing to the development of the service sector, a significant part declares a positive effect of knowledge management on the improvement of business performance.



It was also found that knowledge management in small and medium-sized service enterprises in Poland is limited mainly to information management, the application of a staff training system and the use of basic IT tools.

Additionally, the empirical exploration conducted by the author showed low awareness of the individuals employed in small and medium-sized service enterprises in Poland which implement systemic knowledge management, as well as inadequate organisational culture. These factors were found to be the main barriers to knowledge management.

The whole discussion is contained in four chapters whose arrangement is motivated by the implementation of the dissertation aim. The theme which is present throughout the paper refers to two issues. The first part of analysis describes knowledge as an intangible asset and knowledge management in an enterprise as a process of company strategy implementation. The second part, in turn, concerns the competitiveness and functioning of the sector of small and medium-sized enterprises in Poland, whose representative, i.e. the service sector, was tested in terms of knowledge management.

The first chapter of the dissertation presents the concept of knowledge management in an organisation. The next chapter is a synthesis showing the competitiveness of the SME sector and its profile as dependent parts. However, the last section focuses on the competitiveness of the service sector of small and medium-sized enterprises and demonstrating its crucial importance in the development of the national economy.

The third chapter is devoted to the creation of a research model based on case studies of twelve selected service companies within the SME sector. The studies were conducted by the author. The research model created is the starting point for quantitative studies which were described in detail in the last, fourth chapter of the present work.

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