

Exploring Intergenerational Knowledge Sharing in Organizations

Potentials and Limitations of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Helene Brinken, Helena Kock

University of Hildesheim, Germany
helenebrinken@gmail.de, hmk@kockmail.de

Abstract

This thesis deals with an interdisciplinary approach of intergenerational knowledge sharing (IKS) from an information scientific perspective. As part of the KNOWISH project the research is embedded in an international cooperation of University of Hildesheim and the Åbo Academy in Turku, Finland. It aims at answering the questions: How does IKS unfold? Which systems are used in its context and how suitable are they? Two case studies have been conducted in two medium-sized German companies. At the same time, an additional study has been conducted by two Finnish students. Semi-structured interviews and a qualitative content analysis of the data considered generational aspects, knowledge sharing as well as ICT. This study finds that experience and work environment atmosphere are important influencing factors. Both, young and old employees can be knowledge carriers who share knowledge mutually. Another important outcome shows that Organizational Generations of Knowledge exist within the companies. These are defined by chronological and professional age.

Keywords: intergenerational; knowledge sharing; generation; organizations; information and communication technology; tacit knowledge

In: M. Gäde/V. Trkulja/V. Petras (Eds.): Everything Changes, Everything Stays the Same? Understanding Information Spaces. Proceedings of the 15th International Symposium of Information Science (ISI 2017), Berlin, 13th–15th March 2017. Glückstadt: Verlag Werner Hülsbusch, pp. 285–289.

1 Introduction

IKS becomes more and more crucial while industrialized countries are facing the demographic change and the potential loss of many knowledgeable employees. This master thesis aimed at answering the questions: How does IKS unfold? Which systems are used in its context and how suitable are they?

2 State of the art

Several areas of research have to be considered such as generation theories, aspects of knowledge and the state of the art of IKS.

In generation theories, three factors contribute to differences in values and attitude: The Generation Effect meaning differences in socialization, the Lifespan Effect due to private living circumstances and the Age Effect including aging processes (Klaffke, 2014). Mostly, generations are classified into Veterans, Baby Boomers, X, Y and Z differentiated by birth year (Hüppe, 2014; Klaffke, 2014). As the transition from one generation to another is gradual this research only differentiates between older and younger to mark tendencies which appeared in the data. Dealing with knowledge sharing it is important to consider different types of knowledge such as tacit (unconscious) and explicit (conscious) knowledge (Frey-Luxemburger, 2014; North, 2016). According to Kock (2016) different disciplines such as economic science and computer science provide research with widely varying focuses. However, an integrating approach is missing.

3 Methods

Case studies have been conducted in two medium-sized German companies based on ten semi-structured interviews in each case. Respectively older and younger employees were asked questions about social aspects, age issues, systems, generational aspects and workplace-related learning. A qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (2015) included the inductive creation

of categories. Reviewing and discussing the data in teamwork turned out to be particularly helpful and ensured intersubjectivity and comparability.

4 Results

Experience and work atmosphere emerged as important influencing factors as team spirit and social ties enable IKS. Young and old employees can be knowledge carriers. Being digital native young employees have experience with ICT. Due to their life experience old employees possess social competences.

According to Kuyken (2012) the approach to consider only generation by birth year is limited. Our analysis confirms this result. Other factors such as professional age and experience have to be considered. Both case studies revealed that organizational age leads to experience with organizational processes and professional age leads to expertise. These are learned through asking questions and performing daily work.

Considering these aspects, a new approach of IKS appears necessary. Therefore, we propose the hypothesis of the concept “Organizational Generation of Knowledge” (OGoK). This term means that within an organization generations divided by the nature of their knowledge coexist. On the one hand each OGoK is characterized by shared values and characteristics of its socialization. On the other hand it is characterized by specific knowledge about the professional environment they are working in based on similar professional and organizational age.

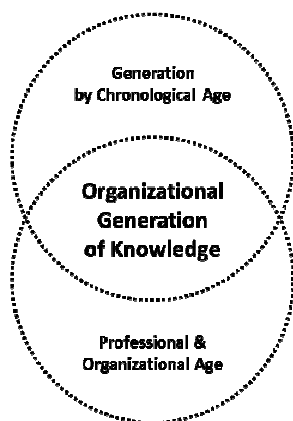


Fig. 1 Organizational Generation of Knowledge

The following example illustrates this concept: Each OGoK deals with the introduction of new social software differently.

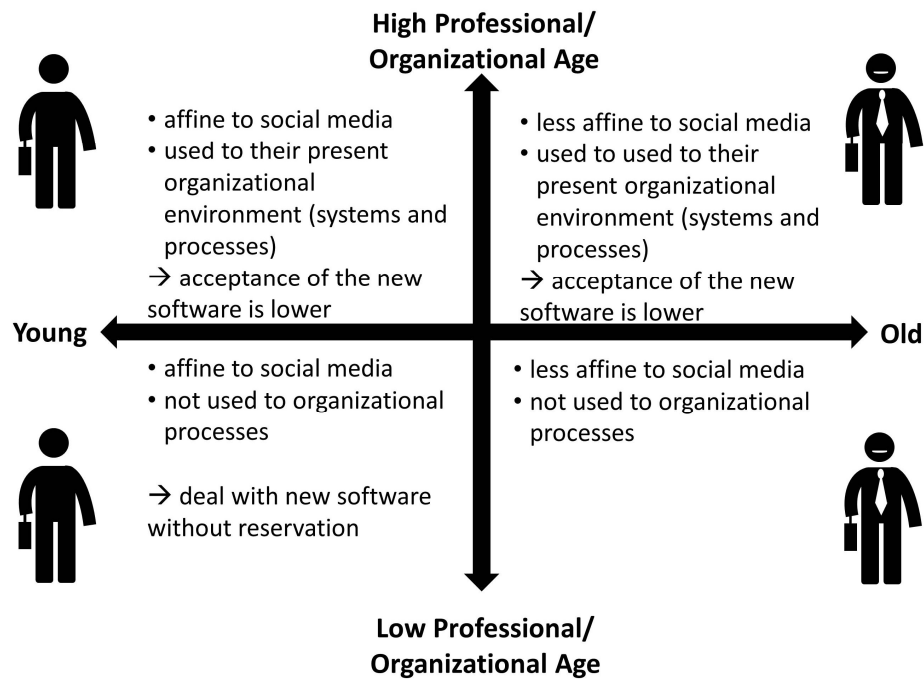


Fig. 2 Illustration – Organizational Generation of Knowledge

A variety of generations coexisting in organizations can be valuable due to different competencies of each OGoK. According to Kuyken (2012) IKS is a source of innovation. We can now specify that IKS between OGoK leads to innovation. Especially young OgoK with a low organizational age set corresponding impulses. Consequently, there is a demand for IKS between these OGoK.

In addition, the study outcomes show that the choice of ICT depends on the urgency and complexity of a problem as well as the availability of resources and knowledge carriers. As the use of ICT differs between generations, the risk of unidirectional IKS was observed.

References

- Frey-Luxemburger, Monika (2014): *Wissensmanagement – Grundlagen und Praktische Anwendung: Eine Einführung in das Management der Ressource Wissen*. 2nd ed., Wiesbaden: Springer Vieweg, Springer Fachmedien.
- Hüppe, Sebastian (2014): *Weiß ein Unternehmen, was es weiß bzw. an Wissen zu verlieren droht? Die Bedeutung von Wissensmanagement vor dem Hintergrund des demografischen Wandels*. PhD thesis, Ruhr-Universität Bochum.
- Klaffke, Martin (2014): Erfolgsfaktor Generationen-Management: Handlungsansätze für das Personalmanagement. In M. Klaffke (Ed.): *Generationen Management: Konzepte, Instrumente, Good-Practice-Ansätze*. Wiesbaden: Springer Gabler, Springer Fachmedien, pp. 3–26.
- Kock, Helena Margaretha (2016): *Intergenerational Knowledge Sharing: State of the Art*. MA thesis, Universität Hildesheim.
- Kuyken, Kerstin (2012): Knowledge Communities: Towards a Re-thinking of Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer. In: *VINE* 42 (3), 365–381.
- Mayring, Philipp (2015): *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse: Grundlagen und Techniken*. 12th ed., Weinheim, Basel: Beltz.
- North, Klaus (2016): *Wissensorientierte Unternehmensführung: Wissensmanagement gestalten*. 6th ed., Wiesbaden: Gabler Verlag, Springer Fachmedien.