

# SPECIFIC MEANS AND METHODS OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT CONSIDERED WITHIN ROMANIAN MILITARY UNITS\*

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**Abstract:** *Knowledge management (KM) is unquestionably one of the most promoted branches of scientific management. As the term itself suggests, this particular administrative model directs attention towards knowledge, understood as one of the most important resources within an organisation. The main objectives of the current article are to discuss and analyse some of the most frequently proposed managerial means and methods of surpassing certain difficulties within the military organisations from the region of Oltenia. The paper was conducted with the aim of evaluating the traditional techniques used to facilitate the implementation of KM within such organizations. The assessment was carried out based on the answers given to a specific questionnaire, which was addressed to the current or former workers of the military units within the counties of Dolj, Gorj, Olt, Vâlcea and Mehedinţi. The outcomes of the research suggest that one of the most efficient managerial techniques used in order to increase group cohesion and, thus, organizational productivity, is organising teambuilding activities. Other managerial methods that a knowledge-based administrative model encourages are organizing constant informal group meeting or promoting post factum analysis as a common manner of evaluating any experience. The conclusions revealed some quite strong connections established between the degree of success underlying a managerial model built on knowledge as the main resource and the proposed peculiar techniques used with the aim of improving the organisational goals and results.*

**Key words:** *knowledge management; knowledge creation; traditional managerial method; group cohesion; managerial challenges.*

## 1. Introduction

The starting point of the current research work consists of a short review, followed by a comparative analysis between knowledge management and a typical military administrative model, especially in regard to their main principles and characteristics.

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Geopolitically speaking, the latest events that have taken place within our society and its daily routine, as well as the global confusion of the last decades have spurred the military commanders to reconsider the classical approaches in managing the resources at hand, in order to obtain improved results and strategic positions.

One of the most reliable specialists within the domain (Drucker, 1993, p. 45) advanced the idea that the military systems needed to be adjusted by implementing a managerial model based on knowledge even since a few centuries ago. Following the intrinsic evolutionary stages of the continuous changing process that actually has had an essential role in assuring the compliance of the organizations to the new geopolitical and economic realities, there were also voices of the system that signalled the opportunity of changing the paradigm initially adopted within the world of intelligence. Thus, the originally employed model based on the “need to know” principle was gradually converted in a more suitable one, founded on the “need to share” (Coldea, 2016).

The latter part of the paper acknowledges the conclusions drawn in regard to the methods and techniques that the survey’s respondents considered useful for improving the teams’ or individuals’ professional activities and connections. With the aim of providing a better understanding of the functioning mechanism of the referred administrative model, as well as of offering solutions to the potential struggles that may turn out within the process, the second half of the study will stage a number of opinions meant to alleviate KM’s implementation within a military unit.

## **2. Literature Review**

The scientific dimension of the managerial process was firstly established and outlined when Frederick Winslow Taylor (1911, p. 36-37) delimited the main four principles of administrating the available resources in order to obtain optimum results. The researcher summarized his work into the following fundamental ideas: 1) consider each individual or collective activity as a scientific process itself, so that its accomplishment can bear the best results; 2) establish the responsible person for each task that has to be accomplished accordingly to their expertise and abilities; 3) assure the best cooperation between the managerial board and the operational teams in order to provide a fair and exhaustive training process and 4) assign proper activities and responsibilities to each member of the team, so that the managers could make sure to follow the working plan and methodology, whilst the workers strictly follow the phases that were planned.

The evolution of the science or rather the art of management (as it has been called over the centuries) had a modest starting point, but an unstoppable breakthrough ever since. The unceasing process kept bearing certain distinct managerial patterns, which are in a state of continuous improvement. Peter Drucker (1959, p. 52) appreciates that any organization represents both a decisional and informational system, where the ideas, questions, pieces of information or data having the sole role of completing the explanatory picture can be obtained either from the external environment or from within the company. The internal main resource is undeniably represented by the active personnel, through the means of whom the organization can develop a highly significant input - the intellectual capital.

Knowledge management became therefore one of the most suitable administrative pattern to be followed within the companies; at first it was adopted within the organizations which were performing purely economic activities and subsequently the managerial model was gradually implemented in institutions with a non-economic profile of activity. Moreover, the 21<sup>st</sup> century's geopolitical and economic harsh realities and increasing challenges impelled managers to develop and adopt medium and long-term business planning strategies, while trying to stay responsive to any unexpected events that may take place (Burlea-Șchiopoiu, 2008, p. 32).

Davenport (1998, p. 6) explains the whole process of knowledge creation as a simple sequence of stages through which the data and information at hand are transformed into knowledge - the main organizational resource of the proposed managerial model. The method proposed by the American researcher is also called „the four c's”: compare (the informational corpus to previous experiences); consequences (analyse the potential implications of the decisions made); connections (with the other organizations that activate within the same field) and communication (exchange data and information regarding the opinions others have on the knowledge created).

Some more recent research studies carried out within the domain of interest (Ichijo and Nonaka 2007, p. 3; Nakamori, 2020, p. 64) have revealed the fact that knowledge itself can be divided into three different types, respectively: 1) implicit (or social), explicit (or rational) and tacit (or intuitive) knowledge. Thus, the managerial act founded on knowledge implies the simultaneous observance of several actions of: incorporating the high volume of knowledge existing within the society (it is not concretely expressed in words, but can be clarified by using them), efficiently managing human resource that possesses tacit knowledge (which is difficult to be expressed in words, as it is based on the intuition of each individual), respectively the exploitation of the explicit knowledge through information technology (approachable through specific terms).

### **3. Research Methodology**

The main scientific methodology used in order to conduct the proposed research study is represented by the questionnaire method. Thus, the main research tool was an explicit survey containing 30 items in respect to the main aspects of interest regarding the activity carried out within the institutions under the coordination of the Ministry of National Defence, and of those with responsibilities in maintaining the state of national security, respectively. The population eligible to answer the given questions was represented by either retired or active military personnel from the South-Western part of the country, precisely the ones residing in the counties of Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt and Vâlcea.

The sample's members were randomly selected, with their own consent. Moreover, they were not asked to deliver any personal information, since the referred procedure was thoroughly scientific and the collected answers have a purely statistical role. All the employees within the military units from the region of Oltenia had equal chances to become potential subjects of the research study, while the survey's items could be completed either in physical (printed) version or online format (by sending the link to each individual).

#### 4. Results and Discussions

Between October 2021 and February 2022, 257 employees of the military units from Oltenia deliberately agreed to take part in the research study carried out in regard to the way the knowledge-based managerial model is perceived within this type of institutions. The subjects were either active or retired from several military systems in the service of national defence or having certain legal responsibilities in maintaining the state of national security within the five counties mentioned above.

As highlighted in a prior intermediary research study conducted on knowledge management and how this innovative administrative pattern is perceived and understood within Romanian military organizations (Pîrşoi, 2021), the military personnel seems to be familiar with the concept at a relatively high extent. Even if there are certain limitations in terms of the decision-making process within a military organization, the results obtained after gathering and validating the raw data reveal the fact that both managers and operational employees are likely to improve their expertise and know-how in terms of KM and ways of making it work.

The evaluated subjects claimed that the first three traditional methods of stimulating group cohesion and, in close connection with it, work efficiency ranked first in the hierarchy were: the scenario-based analysis, pros and cons analysis and brainstorming sessions (Pîrşoi, 2022). In the given context, the present research aimed to go even further and seek on answers regarding other methods or activities proposed in order to improve labour productivity, as well as to facilitate the implementation process of KM.

As illustrated in the figure below, the former or active employees gave several additional options to improving group cohesion and labour efficiency, out of which we can easily extract a few main categories, based on the following factors:

- 1) Trust, respect and professional appreciation – seem to be the most important dimensions of one's success and motivation to achieve their goal. A large number of the subjects who participated in the present research study confessed that the main factors that keep them going are: the direct manager's objectivity when it comes to appreciating their efforts and commitment, the respect they show to their people and tolerance towards any potential mistakes that were made in the process. Last, but not least, the military personnel representatives appreciated that supportive managers should assume trusting the members of their teams and constantly offer several rewards (material or professional recognition).
- 2) Collective/ group activities – the category that is best represented quantitatively, since the evaluated employees claimed to be willing to participate in a lot more workshops, informal group meetings and teambuilding activities. In addition, plenty of them expressed their appeal to be working with people with whom they have affinities. On the other hand, the sample's members emphasized the fact that it is almost mandatory for a manager to equally engage all the team members within a certain activity or process and

make sure that by these means they would underline everyone's individual skills and importance within the whole.

- 3) Individual activities – mainly represented by individual discussions engaged between the direct supervisor/ manager and the worker, or by developing/ carrying out post factum analysis of their work, so that they can easily identify aspects that can be improved and constantly optimize the working methodology and, implicitly, the outputs of their efforts.

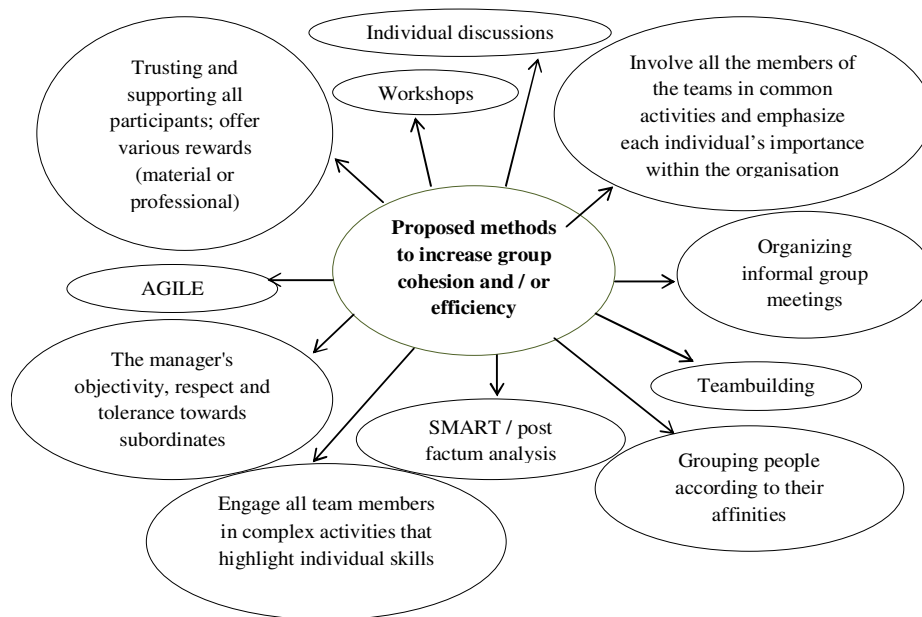


Fig 1. *Methods and activities proposed in order to increase labour efficiency within military organizations*

Source: *created by the author*

In a concerted effort to identify not only the potential difficulties that may be encountered while implementing KM within the military organisations, but also possible solutions to overcome them, the current research study is completed by integrating some of the most frequently proposed promising key-factors which were recommended to be kept in mind during the process.

The second figure below - *Potential solutions to KM's implementation's possible difficulties or deficiencies* - summarizes the main recommendations that were suggested by the survey's respondents on this issue. Their diversity has an essential role in ensuring the complexity dimension of the primary analysis performed in respect to what the implementation of KM would realistically mean. Introducing a new managerial model without establishing a preceding action plan or a work strategy or without first familiarizing employees with the basic concepts and methods that are characteristic of

the particular administrative pattern are only few of the factors that could contribute to the failure of the aforementioned initiative.

Communication is considered to be another indispensable factor in succeeding to adapt an administrative model to the new realities and constantly improve not only the results, but also the team cohesion. The evaluated sample's members claimed that a good communication should be assured not only on the vertical axis, but also horizontally. In addition, their majority felt that the interactive discussions should be followed by coercive measures when needed, so that the identified mistakes that were made could be corrected and easily avoided in future similar situations.

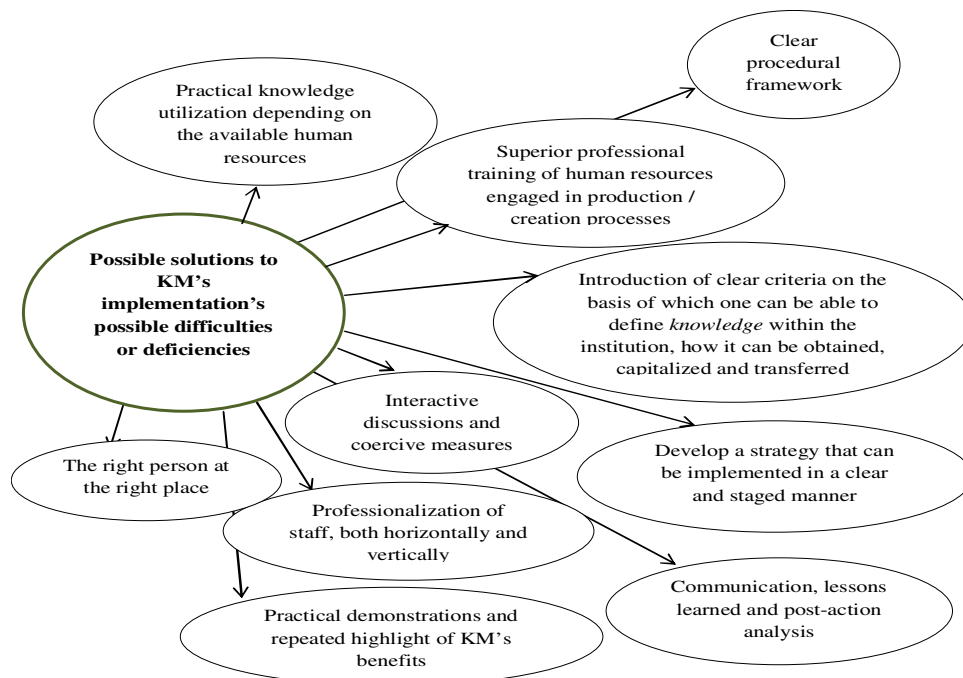


Fig 2. *Potential solutions to the possible difficulties or deficiencies of KM implementation.*

Source: Created by the author.

*The right person in the right place* practice has a more significant meaning here, as it refers not only to the need of carefully selecting both the team leaders and working personnel, but also to have the resources to closely accompany their evolution. As any other modern managerial pattern, when implementing KM, one should constantly have in sight their employees' skills, expertise and motivation triggers, so that their efforts would count at a maximum level (either individually or within the organization as a whole).

Since the theoretical challenges usually represent the easy part, but putting their patterns into practice always comes harder, a few demonstrative iterations of how the specific KM stages should be implemented were also considered very convenient within

the process. Some voices underlined the importance of carrying out such trainings at first at the decision-making levels, so that the top and middle managers could flawlessly establish a fair procedural framework for the operational staff members.

## 5. Conclusions

Although the classical military management pattern has historically been founded on strict internal orders and regulations, nowadays military commanders tend to persuade towards a slightly different administrative approach. The change perceived within the units that constitute the national defence system is nothing but a normal phase, a response to the new realities that evolve around us from the geopolitical point of view. Encouraging the development of better communication channels (inside and outside the organization), as well as promoting a more transparent way of carrying out some of the most important activities that are directly connected to maintaining the state of national security implies being half way closer to meeting the objective established on the “need to share” paradigm.

Teambuilding activities, informal group activities or individual discussions with the direct manager are generally believed to be substantially helpful in improving the team’s cohesion and, therefore, labour efficiency. Another significant factor considered of vital importance in ensuring a favourable performance and evolution of the organizational system in the long run is a well-structured multidimensional communication system. The survey’s results also suggested that the intrinsic KM trainings should be accomplished on a hierarchical basis, so the specific procedures would be acknowledged at first by the decision-making responsible people and then transmitted downwards to the operational teams.

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