

# **MARKETING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN STRUCTURAL APPROACH. COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE IN MICROSOFT – INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON**

## **1. Marketing knowledge – definition of research category**

Marketing knowledge is defined as company knowledge about its customers and competitors<sup>1</sup>. Broadly speaking it is customer knowledge, consumer knowledge and market knowledge<sup>2</sup>. Information about market environment, about the customers in particular, is a stimulant of company knowledge<sup>3</sup> and the mainspring of market-oriented strategies<sup>4</sup>. Huber, Morman and Miner similarly identify marketing knowledge with information about market that is acquired, transferred, interpreted and stored<sup>5</sup>. Jaworski, Khol, Slater and Narver define marketing knowledge as orientation towards market<sup>6</sup>. Srinivasta defines marketing knowledge as a phenomenon combining three various marketing processes: product development management, value chain management and management of relationships

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<sup>1</sup> G.S. Day: *The Capabilities of Market – Driven Organizations*. “Journal of Marketing” October 1994, 58, pp. 37-42.

<sup>2</sup> M.J. Shaw, C. Subramaniam, G.W. Tan, M.E. Welge: *Knowledge Management and Data Mining for Marketing*. “Decision Support System” 2001, pp. 127-137.

<sup>3</sup> G.S. Day: *The Capabilities...* op. cit., pp. 37-52; I. Nonaka: *A Dynamic Theory of Organizational Knowledge Creation*. “Organization Science” 1994, 5, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> N. Prakash: *Managerial Representations of Competitive Advantage*. “Journal of Marketing” April 1998, 58, p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> G.P. Huber: *Organizational Learning; the Contributing Processes and the Literatures*. “Organizational Science”, 1991, Vol. 2, pp. 88-115.

<sup>6</sup> B.J. Jaworski, A.K. Khol: *Market Orientation: Antecedents and Consequences*. “Journal of Marketing” July 1993, Vol. 57, pp. 53-77.

with customers<sup>7</sup>. According to Davenport's view, relationships with customers are formed through adjustment to their needs in the process of their effective satisfying, while managing the customers' knowledge at the same time<sup>8</sup>. Establishment of interactions between an individual and an organisation, as well as lateral relationships between functional units allow for transformation of information into knowledge<sup>9</sup> that is necessary to make decisions in the enterprise.

## 2. Marketing knowledge management in structural approach

Knowledge is a social product and it is disseminated in social processes. Within sociological concept, relationships between various types of knowledge are social relationships between individuals and groups that possess and develop this knowledge. As a result, creation of new knowledge represents creation of new social relationships or new ways of combining existing relationships and managing them<sup>10</sup>. According to this concept, creation of new knowledge is a consequence of dynamic interactions between participants in some relationship, and according to Nonaka and Takeuchi they make three groups of players: knowledge practitioners, constructors of knowledge and knowledge leaders<sup>11</sup>. Thus, in structural approach, marketing knowledge management consists in management of people and their competences. It is both the basis of knowledge about the customers and co-operants, and exchange of information between the enterprises and customer/cooperants, realised to acquire them, satisfy them and sustain them.

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<sup>7</sup> R.K. Srinivasta, T.A. Shervani, L. Fahey: *Marketing, Business Process and Shareholder Value: an Organizationally Embedded View of Marketing Activities and Discipline of Marketing*. "Journal of Marketing" 1999, Vol. 63, special issue, pp. 168-179.

<sup>8</sup> T.H. Davenport, J.G. Harris, A.K. Kohli: *How do they Know their Customers so well?* "MIT Sloan Management Review" 2001, Vol. 42, No. 2, pp. 63-73.

<sup>9</sup> R.S. Achrol, P. Kotler: *Marketing in the Network Economy*. "Journal of Marketing" 1999, Special issue, pp. 146-163.

<sup>10</sup> M. Sawhney, E. Prandelli: *Communities of Creation: Managing Distributed Innovation in Turbulent Markets*. "California Management Review" 2000, 42, 4, p. 24-52.

<sup>11</sup> I. Nonaka, H. Takeuchi: *Kreowanie wiedzy w organizacji [Knowledge creation in organisation]*. Poltext, Warsaw 2000, pp.184-185.

### 3. Knowledge communities as a form of implementation of marketing knowledge management

Communities in action or communities of practice are a group of entities correlated with each other most often in an informal way, with common skills and interests in joint ventures<sup>12</sup>. Groups may develop naturally or may be specially created in on-line form or in actual reality for the purpose of knowledge development. This phenomenon was described for the first time by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in 1991<sup>13</sup>, and the notion of “communities of practice” was defined by Wenger in 1998<sup>14</sup>. It is a specific area of activity, a common venture undertaken by its participants, that is constantly re-negotiated on common grounds<sup>15</sup>, and that constitutes the platform for information exchange. This is the notion that combines three terms: mutual involvement, common venture and common result. Through participation in a community, its members define standards of creation of relationships based on cooperation. These relationships unite community members in a social entity. Common ground is formed through interactions between members, and this, as a consequence, allows for creation of common resources<sup>16</sup>. In successive works, Wenger also indicates that communities of practice are groups of people participating in a community activity that experiences constant creation of their common identity through involvement and contributing to development of a specific practice for their community<sup>17</sup>. What is more, Wenger states that communities are characterised by three elements: knowledge domains that include a set of issues, communities of people that develop these domains, activities/practices that serve development of domains.

Success of knowledge community depends on the target, involvement and resources of community members. In relation to this, PKM concept (Personal Knowledge Management) is a corresponding idea that indicates a collection of

<sup>12</sup> C. Kimble, P. Hildreth, P. Wright: *Communities of Practice: Going Virtual*, Chapter 13. In: *Knowledge Management and Business Model Innovation*. Ed. Y. Malhotra. Idea Group Publishing, Hershey (USA)/London (UK), 20, pp. 220-234.

<sup>13</sup> J. Lave, E. Wenger: *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991, pp. 45-59.

<sup>14</sup> E. Wenger: *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, pp.45-49.

<sup>15</sup> H. Clark, S.E. Brennan: *Grounding in Communication*. In: L.B. Resnick, J.M. Levine, S.D. Teasley: *Perspectives on Socially Shared Cognition*. DC: American Psychological Association, Washington 1991, pp. 127-139.

<sup>16</sup> E. Wenger: *Communities of Practice...*, op. cit., pp. 77-79.

<sup>17</sup> E. Wenger, R. McDermott, W.M. Snyder: *Cultivating Communities of Practice* (Hardcover). “Harvard Business Press” 1 edition. 2002.

processes that a person applies to collect, classify, store, search for, receive and implement knowledge in everyday activities<sup>18</sup>. At the same time it verifies the position of an individual in knowledge community. PKM integrates management of information / personal knowledge (Personal Information Management) with knowledge management, takes into consideration extended approach to cognitive abilities of an individual and their absorption by organisation<sup>19</sup>. According to Wright, PKM model includes analysis, information, socialisation and learning. Analytical competences include interpretation, prediction, application, creation and contextualisation. Information dimension includes acquisition, assessment, organisation, aggregation and transfer of information. Social dimension (information socialisation) concerns searching for, and cooperation with people, development of close and distant relationships and dialogue. The dimension of learning / education assumes extension of recognition of patterns and possibilities, development of new knowledge, improvement of skills and their expansion. On the basis of Nonaka and Takeuchi model of SECI, Smedley developed PKM model in which an expert (leader, promoter) predicts a direction and support for knowledge community, in which the entity creating personal knowledge is the participant<sup>20</sup>. Zhang combines personalised and organisational approach to knowledge management in OAPI model (organizationalize, aggregate, personalize and individualize), where organisational knowledge is perceived as personalised and individualised knowledge, and personal knowledge is a sum and result of operationalization of processes in an organisation.

Because of virtualisation of the environment of functioning of entities, the concept of knowledge community or community of practice, finds its place in concepts that are developed with respect to CoP. They are NoP (Network of Practice), oCoP (Online Community of Practice) and VCoP (Virtual Community of Practice) concepts.

Network of Practice is a concept, the creators of which are John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid. It was formulated on the basis of J. Lave and E. Wenger's Community of Practice. Brown and Duguid's NoP model (Network of Practice) is called a model of quick diffusion of knowledge and its assimilation in a broad environment. It refers to the set of various types of informal social relations that is

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<sup>18</sup> J. Grundspenkis: *Agent Based Approach for Organization and Personal Knowledge Modelling: Knowledge Management Perspective*. "Journal of Intelligent Manufacturing" 2007, 18(4), pp. 451-457.

<sup>19</sup> W. Sheridan: *How to Think Like a Knowledge Worker*. United Nations Public Administration Network, Ottawa Canada 2008.

<sup>20</sup> J. Smedley: *Modelling Personal Knowledge Management*. "OR Insight" 2009, 22 (4), pp. 221-233.

conducive to information exchange in virtual or electronic way. The reason for network emergence is a NoP distinguishing quality. It is information exchange for the purpose of execution of task/work (and not because of common interests, hobby, etc.), by entities working in various professions. Brown and Duguid define communities of practice as NoP subnetworks, where relationships between the entities are of a very close character mostly because of predominant face to face relationships<sup>21</sup>. Much more casual relationships occur between NoP entities in electronic and virtual reality<sup>22</sup>. Coordination of such relationships takes place by means of blogs, electronic mailing and bulletins. One of the features that distinguish NoP from workgroups formed in organisational structures of an enterprise is the lack of control mechanisms resulting from, for example, organisational hierarchy. Another quality of NoP is their composition. It may be composed of several people but it can also include thousands of participants in electronic networks, whose membership is not formally limited. In NoP, participation is defined individually. Neither explorers of knowledge, nor its authors are sure about the scope and durability of the relationships.

Online Community of Practice - OCoP, also called Virtual Community of Practice, is a community of practice developed as based on the Internet, however it has a more predictable and structuralised character. According to CoP definition by Lave and Wenger, OCoP must include active participants who are practitioners and experts in a particular sphere<sup>23</sup>.

Members acquire knowledge in the process of learning and through relationships with the group as a result of synchronic interactions<sup>24</sup>. CoP provides virtual space in which people participate, without language, geographical or cultural borders<sup>25</sup>. With respect to the level of participants' activity, regular and peripheral activities are distinguished. Peripheral activity consists in reception of information and personal learning rather than in co-creation of values<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> S.J. Brown, P. Duguid: *The Social Life of Information*. "Harvard Business School Press" 2000, pp. 198-213.

<sup>22</sup> E. Vaast: *The Use of Intranets: The Missing Link Between Communities of Practice and Networks of Practice?* In: *Knowledge Networks: Innovation Through Communities of Practice*. Ed. P. Hildreth, C. Kimble. Idea Group, London 2004, chapter 18.

<sup>23</sup> E. Wenger: *Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction*. 2007, <http://www.ewenger.com/theory/> (access: 24th March 2013).

<sup>24</sup> E. Wenger: *Supporting Communities of Practice: A Survey of Community-oriented Technologies*. 2001, <http://www.ewenger.com/tec> (access: 23rd March 2013).

<sup>25</sup> B. Gray: *Informal Learning in an Online Community of Practice*. "Journal of Distance Education"/*Revue de l'enseignement à distance* 2004, 19(1), pp. 20-35.

<sup>26</sup> S. Riverin, E. Stacey: *Sustaining an Online Community of Practice: A Case Study*. "Journal of Distance Education" 2008, 22(2), pp. 45-58.

## 4. Research methodology

The method used in this research is an in-depth case study analysis. This consists in a comprehensive presentation of a real situation occurring in a particular company or in regard to one of the functions realized within the company (e. g. management, marketing ), which is treated as an individual case. It involves seeking for all necessary data enabling its in-depth analysis, formulating possible choice options and making the best possible decision, accompanied by a proper justification<sup>27</sup>. Application of this method seems well founded, considering the following:

1. The research concerns contemporary, dynamic phenomena and the process of knowledge formation, pertaining to these phenomena.
2. The research refers to investigating actual contexts of these phenomena, concerning significant ambiguity of boundaries between the very phenomena and their contexts.
3. The object of the research is too complicated, to explain cause and effect relationships with the help of methods such as poll or experiment<sup>28</sup>.

The unit of analysis/the subject of the case investigated are „complex situations”, i. e. groups of economic subjects (particularly leaders of network structures and clients) and their marketing behaviour. The case reflects changes that are new and to some extent critical for the investigated subjects, particularly in Polish conditions. The selected cases provide both literal and theoretical replication<sup>29</sup>. The investigated IT company is one of representatives of a convergent sector (telecommunication, IT, media) and offers various products for business, public, home, entertainment or universal purposes. Its common feature is strong engagement in creating knowledge communities and cooperating in this field.

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<sup>27</sup> J.W. Wiktor: *Studium przypadku. Istota, funkcje i procedura analizy przypadku [Case study. Substance, functions and procedure of case analysis]*. In: *Zarządzanie i przedsiębiorczość. Studia polskich przypadków [Management and entrepreneurship. Polish case studies]*. Ed. J. Altkorn. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw-Cracow 1996, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Ch. Perry: *Case Research in Marketing*. “The Marketing Review” 2001, No. 1, p. 305. In: *Zarządzanie marketingowe [Marketing management]. Koncepcje marketingu a praktyki zarządzania. Aspekty teoretyczne i badawcze [Marketing concepts and practice in management. Theoretical and research aspects]*. Ed. T. Żabińska, L. Żabiński. Wydawnictwo UE, Katowice 2007, p. 305.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 314-315.

## 5. Microsoft communities of knowledge – international comparison

Microsoft Company<sup>30</sup> forms communities of knowledge and creates target markets, while participating in the programs for the benefit of prospective participants in knowledge network and global community.

Within knowledge community Microsoft distinguishes:

- Microsoft online community which is a space on the Internet for programmers, IT specialists and enthusiasts, where knowledge can be acquired, solutions to problems can be found and new people from the IT world can be met.
- Offline community which is first of all composed of Groups of Users that gather Microsoft company technology enthusiasts but also prospective participants / cooperants in network relationships. Their often regular, direct meetings are a wonderful ways of common knowledge acquisition, discussion on technical subjects and knowledge sharing. The group offers specific, practical knowledge concerning Microsoft technology.
- Microsoft Most Valuable Professionals (MVP) which is an international Microsoft program for IT computer programmers and specialists. MVP title is awarded to those who, through their activity, significantly influence technical community in a positive way and are its main core.

Marketing reasons for formation of knowledge communities can be grouped into customer-related, product-related and enterprise-related, that express their marketing orientation (Table 1).

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<sup>30</sup> Microsoft Company is a leading enterprises working in software products not only in American market but also all over the world. Since its beginning it has operated in computer software business. A series of software under Windows name was its first large success. It has been a leader in software market for years and the company has been improving their product. In this way successive improved versions of Windows program have been developed.

Table 1

Marketing reasons for formation of knowledge communities

Customer-related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the way to get aware of the needs, and acquire the customer through contacts within the community</li> <li>- the way to intensify the needs and accelerate the replacement demand</li> <li>- the way to take over the customers of the competitors</li> </ul>
Product-related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- place where product concept is generated</li> <li>- place where product concept is tested</li> <li>- place where the prototype and final product are tested</li> <li>- place where directions for modification and / or selection of products is determined</li> </ul>
Enterprise-related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- customer in the centre of interest of the enterprise; the form of partnership marketing implementation</li> <li>- community as the source of information about the customer and directly from the customer; element of marketing research system</li> <li>- community as an integral element of value formation system in the enterprise</li> <li>- community as a tool of the strategy of influencing the customer, competitor and partner</li> </ul>

Within knowledge community, Microsoft activities implemented on various markets in international dimension are differentiated with respect to tools and degree of relationship divergence (Table 2). This diversity results from different levels of technological involvement of studied countries expressed by for example SII index and NRI index. Microsoft communities of knowledge are definitely active on markets of Eastern Europe where we deal with broad substantial scope of knowledge domains and practices that serve development of these domains.

Table 2

## Community of practice Microsoft online – international comparison

Specification	Russia, Ukraine, Belarus	Poland	United States
1	2	3	4
Online tools	FAQ Chat, from 8.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. on workdays and Saturdays MicrosoftTechNet blog The Exchange Team blog	FAQ Microblogs Blogs	FAQ / e-mail expert professional advice Chat Telephone
Community networks	– Facebook – Twitter@MSHelpsRU – official help desk page for online Microsoft users, from 8.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. – You Tube	– Facebook – You Tube – Wykop.pl – service created by Microsoft users	– Facebook – Twitter – News Center
Communities by segments	Microsoft for everybody - web page with information about benefits of Microsoft new technologies application available for all users	Microsoft Community – principles of conduct Imagine Cup 2013	Forum for CodeGuru programmers
	Microsoft for students - Microsoft University – Microsoft conferences and competitions – lectures for product managers speciality divisions, IT specialists, business coaches, IT producers and advisors – Technology Days 28.10.2013 Sank Petersburg – Student Day – IMAGINE CUP - international technological competition	Microsoft for students – IT Academic Day – Student apprenticeship – Student Partner Program – MSDN Alliance/Dream Spark – IT Academy	Forum for WSS IT specialists
	Microsoft Youth Spark (segment for 6 to 13 years old , segment for 13 to 17 years old, segment for 18-24 years old) – Software for schools – Partnership for improvement in the system of education – Skype for schools – Shape the future - access to Internet for children and their families – Trainings, for example security in the net	Faculty connection for lecturers and research workers	Forum for customers and home users

Table 2 contd.

1	2	3	4
Microsoft Partner Network	Knowledge community of experts, coaches and Microsoft partners	Knowledge community of experts, coaches and Microsoft partners	Knowledge community of experts, coaches and Microsoft partners
Summary Innovation Index according to the Report of European Innovation Scoreboard 2011 (adopts the value 0-1; value close to 1 represents high innovation level)	0,29-0,33	0,25	0,55
Networked Readiness Index 2012 according to The Global Information Technology Report 2012; World Economic Forum 2012 (the most favorable value is 7,0)	3,85-4,02	4,16	5,56

A number of community undertakings are devoted to peripheral groups that learn. Attention is drawn to participants of regular and peripheral activity. They are often just the recipients of information. Significantly greater importance is attributed to the group of elementary and active knowledge community, in case of Microsoft market in the USA, but also in Poland as a representative of Central Europe. Microsoft Partner Network program is quite standardised, global apprenticeship that supports development of technological knowledge among experts and practitioners as well as existing and prospective cooperants.

Apart from other business activities, involvement in formation of knowledge communities undeniably offers measurable results. Microsoft Company came 1 in 2012 CSR RepTrak™ – the world ranking of companies of the best reputation in the sphere of CRS (Corporate Social Responsibility) in 2012<sup>31</sup>, and it also got the highest rates in general ranking. What is more, Microsoft brand is worth 54.7 billion dollars and is on the second position among the most expensive brands, right after Apple Company<sup>32</sup>. And that is why knowledge communities, because of their character, are often treated as a form of CSR implementation and the tool of image strategy.

## Conclusion

Communities of knowledge formed to create knowledge environment and to re-use knowledge allow an organisation to acquire, store, transfer and apply knowledge in, and outside, an organisation. Marketing knowledge is acquired from the customer/partner, about the customer/ partner and it serves satisfaction of their needs. Communities of knowledge serve construction and development of knowledge domains, desirable from the point of view of specificity of functioning of a promoter of knowledge-based relationships. People/participants appointed or acquired for the community develop knowledge domains with the use of established activities and practices. Because of involvement and substantial contribution in community, the participants play the role of leaders that are usually entities that have key knowledge resources at their disposal. Microsoft Company is, without any doubts, the leader in the studied case. An active group is made of knowledge constructors who regularly participate in undertakings and programs of the community. The group of peripheral participants who are often learning informa-

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<sup>31</sup> The ranking was prepared by Reputation Institute, one of the world leading consulting companies that operate in reputation management. 47 000 opinions of customers from 15 countries were studied. They assessed 100 world brands on the basis of the following criteria: citizenship: „Company” is a good citizen – supports areas that are important for the country and takes care of environment protection; Corporate order: “Company” is managed in a responsible way – it undertakes ethical activities, is open and transparent in all business areas; Work place: „Company” is an attractive workplace.

<sup>32</sup> Microsoft came first in global research performed by consulting companies Landor Associates and Penn Schoen Berland in 2012. The research covered 130 brands and there were two thousand respondents who participated in the study. Within the categories of innovation or quality, Microsoft was on a particularly high position in the categories of “investment in consumers” and “response to my unique needs”.

tion recipients, yet they are prospective participants of active knowledge circle, are also important.

Forming knowledge community, Microsoft Company takes, among others, obligations to eliminate information exclusion. This results in diversification of activities within knowledge communities on studied markets. For this purpose, new products and programs are developed. They offer opportunities of social and economic development in the areas of low level of technologisation at low pace of absorption of new technologies. The company intensifies previous activities that consist in the use of technology and trainings in partnership with entities and organisations all over the world for the purpose of transformation of educational systems, cultivating the local innovativeness and creation of workplaces and opportunities of development. As a result they are to maintain continuity of the cycle of social and economic development to create educated target markets and first of all co-creators of a new value that is knowledge-based.

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## MARKETING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN STRUCTURAL APPROACH. COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE IN MICROSOFT – INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

### Summary

The idea of knowledge management, marketing knowledge management and knowledge transfer occurred as a consequence of the process of transformation of traditional business relations into collaboration of industry, services and their partners, due to the fact that information has become a production resource, especially in net-product sectors (for example IT sector). The intellectual value (information, knowledge) is created by enterprises, their co-competitors (co-operators, competitors) and customers to satisfy target markets. Global, innovative firms have been using new tools to create relations based on knowledge-changing, because global customers are more exacting and they take decisions more knowingly. The client knowledge communities constitute an integral subsystem of the business network structures – the marketing knowledge subnet. Observing the activity of IT leaders and their customers in community of practice we can state, that they are more and more involved. Also the opinions of the IT leaders and the figures show that this tool of knowledge management is successfully used in global markets. The method used in this research is an in-depth case study analysis. This consists in a comprehensive presentation of a real situation occurring in a particular company or with regard to one of the

functions realized within the company, which is treated as an individual case. Internet resources, particularly the websites of selected subjects, have been identified and critically analysed. Detailed, continuous observation of the Internet sources has been applied since 2000. The paper will contain the example of practices in marketing knowledge management of IT-leader (Microsoft) in community of practice area in global market in international comparison.

**Keywords:** marketing knowledge, international comparison