The Influence of Employees' Values on the Acquisition of Knowledge in Organizations

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Abstract
In this paper, we focus on the importance and influence of employees' values as an essential element of organizational culture in the acquisition of knowledge. Based on empirical research, we studied the influence of employees' values in Slovenian organizations on the acquisition of knowledge, enabling us to identify the core values that exert the greatest effect on the acquisition of knowledge. The results of the analysis confirmed the positive impact of employees' values on the acquisition of knowledge. We found that the more employees are dedicated to personal development and the more they feel connected and loyal to the organization, the more they are inclined to the development and acquisition of knowledge.

Keywords: organizational culture, employee values, developing knowledge, acquiring knowledge.

1 Introduction

Global competition, shorter life cycles of products and services, and users' increasingly complex and subjective requirements require organizations to continuously develop new and update existing knowledge. Organizations must take into account a number of new scientific findings about learning, thereby benefiting from the support of the learning offered by new information and communication technologies. In such an environment, as Nonaka (1991) pointed out, only those organizations that constantly develop new skills by spreading them throughout the organization and quickly transforming them into new products, services, and technologies can be successful. The process of developing knowledge consists of extracting, encoding, storing, transmitting, and applying knowledge (Davenport & Prusak, 1998), including its protection (Schultze & Leidner, 2002). The successful advancement of knowledge in organizations is largely dependent on many factors, such as appropriate organizational culture and structure, information technology, and organizational behavior, referring in particular to the motivation of employees, mutual communication, and management style (Conley & Zheng, 2009; Davenport, DeLong, & Beers, 1998; Zheng, Yang, & McLean, 2010). Many authors (Alavi, Kayworth, & Leidner, 2006; DeLong, 1997; DeLong & Fahey,

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2000; DuPlessis, 2006; Leidner, Alavi, &Kayworth, 2006; McDermott & O'Dell, 2001; Zheng et al., 2010) have highlighted the organizational culture as a fundamental priority or obstacle to the successful advancement of knowledge. An organizational culture is commonly defined as a set of beliefs, values, assumptions (Schein, 2004), symbols, heroes, and rituals (Deal & Kennedy, 2000; Hofstede, 1991) that are shared by members of an organization indicating "how we deal with things" (Deal & Kennedy 2000). Employees' values represent the specific element of organizational culture that determines the extent to which employees are willing to acquire, transmit, and apply knowledge (Alavi et al., 2006; DuPlessis, 2006). Researchers have generally focused on the study of the impact of organizational culture on the process of developing knowledge while relatively little empirical research focuses directly on the study of the impact of employees' values on the acquisition of knowledge.

Therefore, in this paper we focus on in-depth research examining the importance and influence of employees' values on the acquisition of knowledge. To this end, we first present the theoretical starting points, followed by an empirical survey of Slovenian medium and large organizations, thereby providing a response to the following fundamental research questions: (1) Do employees' values affect the acquisition of knowledge? (2) What are the key values that exert a largely positive or negative impact on the acquisition of knowledge within an organization? The results of the empirical research will allow us to test the null hypothesis (H_0: The values of employees do not affect the acquisition of knowledge) and the research hypothesis (H_1: The values of employees affect the acquisition of knowledge), thereby providing a critical opinion on the importance and role of employees' values in the acquisition of knowledge while enabling us to develop guidelines for further research of the issues addressed.

2 Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Organizations gain knowledge through internal development and the acquisition or rental of necessary knowledge whereas a sustainable competitive advantage is achieved in particular through the internal development of knowledge. Davenport and Prusak (1998) underscored the importance of the following types of internal development of knowledge: (1) fusion or unification of knowledge, which refers to the pooling of employees with different knowledge and skills, thus leading to the "creative chaos" necessary to induce new ideas, knowledge, and solutions; (2) adaptation or adjustment, which refers to the continuing changes in the market (new products, new services, new technologies, etc.) that are forcing organizations to adapt through the acquisition of new knowledge; and (3) knowledge networks, which involves the integration of individuals who share common interests—as they interact, the networking of skills occurs, leading to the creation of new knowledge. Whether the mentioned forms of knowledge occur is largely dependent on employees' beliefs and values.

Musek (1993) defined values as the value categories to which we strive that represent a kind of goal or ideal. According to DeLong (1997), values indicate what organization believes is worth doing or having. They indicate preferences for specific outcomes or behaviors or what the organization aspires to achieve. With the aim of categorizing values based on groups' and individuals' interests, experts (e.g., Denison, 1990; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991; Rockeach, 1973; Schwartz & Blisky, 1987) have developed various questionnaires. Although Hofstede (1991) noted that answers to questionnaires should not to be taken too literally as people will not always act as they have scored on the questionnaire, they are still a good indicator of the prevailing values of an organization. They largely determine whether the advancement of knowledge will be successful or unsuccessful (Alavi et al., 2006). Research confirms that the values of an organization, such as trust (Al-Alawi, Al-Marzooqi, & Mohammed, 2007; DeLong & Fahey, 2000; DuPlessis 2006; Lee & Choi, 2003; Machuca & Martinez Costa, 2012; Park, Ribière, & Schulte, 2004), transparency (DuPlessis, 2006; Machuca & Martinez Costa, 2012), sharing of information freely, ability to work closely with others, friends at work (Park et al., 2004), flexibility, commitment, honesty, professionalism (Machuca & Martinez Costa, 2012), collaboration (DeLong & Fahey, 2000; Lee & Choi, 2003; Machuca & Martinez Costa, 2012), and learning (Lee & Choi, 2003) have a statistically significant impact on the advancement of knowledge. On the other hand, Davenport et al. (1998) warned that the lack of such values may lead to the inhibition of the advancement of knowledge, as the employees do not want to develop and—above all—share it because it is associated with their own competitive advantage and, consequently, to employment security. A specific characteristic of knowledge is that it can only be evaluated in conjunction with the implementation of other values, yet it is also a value in itself—namely, an epistemic value (Weiner, 2009).

Pascale (1984) carried out a somewhat different research of values, wherein the importance of values is linked to the process of socialization, and found that the more (new) employees familiarize and identify themselves with the values of the organization through the process of socialization, the easier it is for them to make the necessary effort and be included in the working environment in order to achieve their goals. For the purposes of research, Pascale drew up a questionnaire with 16 claims that primarily measure the

strength of the organizational culture; however, the claims are formed in a way to reflect certain values that can be linked to the acquisition of knowledge. Therefore, we summarized the questionnaire, adapted it to our research objectives, and used it for primary data acquisition.

3 Methodological Background of Empirical Research

3.1 Data Collection

For the purpose of data collection, we performed quantitative research and used a structured questionnaire containing semi-closed and closed types of questions, which were related to three areas: (1) general information about the participants and the organizations that participated in the study (gender, age, level of education, current employment status of the respondents, place of employment, working period in the organization, size of the organization, status or legal organizational form, and ownership structure of the organization), (2) a set of statements about the values of the organizational culture, and (3) a set of claims on the acquisition of knowledge.

Development of the questionnaire was carried out in several stages: (1) review of the literature in the field of research, (2) formation of the questionnaire, (3) pilot testing of the questionnaire in five organizations, (4) completion of the questionnaire, and (5) conversion of the questionnaire to a web form.

During the first phase of developing the questionnaire, we thoroughly studied a variety of established qualitative and quantitative methods for obtaining data on the existing organizational culture and process knowledge development. We used Pascale's (1984) questionnaire for measuring organizational culture. We did not find a measurement instrument applicable to the acquisition of knowledge, which would fully meet our research objectives, in the relevant literature; therefore, we developed our own set of arguments related to the acquisition of knowledge based on theoretical considerations. All claims were formulated in such a way that respondents express the degree of agreement or disagreement with each statement. To this end, we used a five-step Likert scale, where 1 indicates strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4 partly agree, and 5 completely agree. In the next stage, which occurred in November 2014, the questionnaire was pilot tested in five selected organizations. Based on recommendations to ensure clarity, some statements were only partly changed and customized. The finalized structured questionnaire was converted to a web format to allow simpler and faster completion of the document using the LimeService online tool. Data collection took place in November and December 2014.

3.2 Statistical Population, Sampling, and Sample

The statistical population consisted of medium and large Slovenian organizations. The number of organizations that met our criteria in 2013, according to the latest data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, was 2,318, of which 1,988 were medium and 330 large organizations. Questionnaires were submitted to 300 medium and 300 large organizations. We used stratified sampling because we wanted the sample to include a sufficient number of medium and large organizations as well as the appropriate relationship between the legal-organizational and ownership structure. Within the planned deadline, 144 survey questionnaires were submitted to the LimeService online database, of which three were incomplete and had to be eliminated from further research. The realized sample included 141 companies, resulting in a 23.5% response rate. The obtained answers from the LimeService online database were then entered into the IBM SPSS and Excel computer programs, whereupon they were appropriately processed and analyzed.

3.3 Data Analysis

The statistical data processing was performed using IBM SPSS version 20.0. For this purpose, we performed univariate analysis through frequency distribution for the analysis of general data and descriptive statistics for the analysis of data related to a set of statements about employees' values and the process of acquiring knowledge. Checking the hypothesis was performed using factor analysis and multiple regression. Employees' values were expressed in the form of 16 statements. We carried out a factor analysis in the first stage to identify some factors that would enable us to further verify the hypothesis using multiple regression. The rationale for the use of factor analysis was verified with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity.

To carry out the factor analysis, principal axis factoring was used, which is not sensitive to the abnormalities, while the rotation of factors was implemented using the Equamax method. In this way, we managed to obtain a simpler and more comprehensible insight into the structure of employees' values. Once we identified the variables describing the same construct, based on the factor analysis, we were able to combine/reduce them into new variables—the main components—by using principal component analysis (PCA). Consequently, we reduced the number of tests, because the result obtained on the main component is the same as the

result that would be obtained if we analyzed each variable separately. In addition, we assumed that the interpretation of the main components would be simpler and more sensible. The advisability of the method of the main components was also monitored by the KMO measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity.

In the last step, we tested the hypothesis using multiple regression analysis, which measures the relationship between the dependent and several independent variables. In the context of multiple regression, a stepwise regression was used. The advantage of this method is that it takes into account only those variables that have a statistically significant effect, while variables that have no effect are not included.

4 Main Findings

4.1 Brief Analysis of the Studied Organizations

The realized sample included 85, or 60.28%, of medium and 56, or 39.72%, of large organizations. In regard to the legal form, limited liability companies prevailed, with 55, or 39.01%, of all the organizations, while 37, or 26.42%, represented joint stock companies; furthermore, 42, or 29.79%, were public institutions, and 1 organization, or 0.71%, was a company with unlimited liability. Six organizations, or 4.26%, were labeled as limited partnerships. The structure of organizations according to ownership showed that the realized sample included 62 organizations with state ownership, or 43.97%, 52 organizations with private ownership, or 36.88%, and 27 with mixed ownership, or 19.15%.

The structure of respondents according to gender shows that, out of 141 respondents, 84, or 59.57%, were women and 57, or 40.43%, were men. Most of the respondents were between 31 and 40 years old, while in regard to the level of education, university education, or the second cycle Bologna study program, prevailed. Most of the respondents were employed as independent professional associates, and they had predominantly worked in an organization for 15 to 25 years. Respondents were employed in human resources, administration, or management of the organization.

4.2 Influence of Employees' Values on the Acquisition of Knowledge

Hypothesis testing used factor analysis and multiple regression. Before implementing factor analysis, we assessed the normal distribution of variables, determining the method to use for factor analysis. With all the variables, the characteristic proved less than 0.05 (sig. = 0.000); thus, the hypothesis of normal distribution was rejected. Principal axis factoring (PAF) is the most appropriate for performing the factor analysis because it is not sensitive to the abnormalities. The factor analysis included all 16 variables, which expressed employees' values. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.883, which shows the optimal adequacy of the data for the implementation of the factor analysis. The values of KMO measure have the following meaning: (1) KMO> 0.80 optimal adequacy of the data, (2) KMO> 0.70 average adequacy of the data, KMO> medium adequacy of the data, KMO> 0.50 sufficient suitability of the data, and KMO <0.50 inadequacy of the data for the implementation of factor analysis (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). The rationale for using a factor analysis was verified with the Bartlett's test of sphericity, which was less than 0.05 (p<0.05), thereby confirming that the matrix is not a unit and that the information is relevant for the implementation of factor analysis. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.883
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	970.981
	df	120
	Sig.	.000

Source: author's research, data obtained via the IBM SPSS program.

Using factor analysis, we wanted to specify a smaller number of factors, such as the number of variables. When selecting factors, we took into account the intrinsic value and proportion of explained variance. The first factor was too strong (intrinsic value of 6.062, 37.89% of the variance); therefore, it was necessary to introduce rotation, after the implementation of which the value of variance was evenly distributed (Table 2). We obtained three factors (latent variables) that might reasonably be understood as follows: (1) selecting the best employees—careful selection of new employees by trained recruiters using standardized procedures to look for specific features of the new employees, which contributes to the success in an organization and enables individuals to identify with the values of the organization (Pascale, 1984); (2) personal development—the willingness of individuals to pursue personal development through additional learning, education, and training; and (3) integration and loyalty to an organization—the involvement of employees in achieving the objectives of the organization and belonging to the organization through the acquisition of common organizational values.

The next step for each of the factors was to carry out the method of unifying using the PCA, a statistical technique

Table 2 Rotated Factor Matrix

Items	Factor		
	1	2	3
In our organization, the new employees must undergo at least one week of additional training.	*.748*	.102	.112
In our organization, the new employees are included in an intensive training program or they are granted undemanding tasks during their first month.	*.697*	.205	.238
In our organization, the potential candidates for employment undergo at least four very detailed interviews	*.629*	.218	.129
In our organization, we actively accelerate the selection procedure during the process of recruiting in a way that reveals its good and bad side.	*.594*	.287	.171
When selecting new staff in our organization, we pay special attention to those characteristics of the employees that are important for the success of the organization.	*.525*	.210	.160
In our organization, remuneration systems, incentives for the efficient execution of work, criteria for promotion, and other important benchmarks reflect a high degree of compliance.	.355	*.727*	.239
In our organization, the remuneration system is designed in a way to consider promotions within the raise of the remuneration.	.168	*.626*	.199
In our organization, all experts in individual fields start as new employees in a particular position at the input level regardless of previous experience or promotions.	.147	*.595*	.234
In our organization, the career path for professionals is relatively consistent over the first five to ten years of their employment in the organization.	.214	*.583*	.228
In our organization, we encourage mentoring.	.268	*.476*	.206
In our organization, in the event that conflicts arise from the discrepancy between short-term and long-term interests of the organization, we make decisions that emphasize the strengths of the organization.	.194	.124	*.643*
In our organization, there are only a few cases in which the instructions of the top managers are contrary to the values of the organization.	.096	.314	*.595*
In our organization, all employees are able to express values that are accepted within the organization.	.181	.207	*.568*
In our organization, employees often relinquish their own personal values, in favor of those that are common in the organization.	.108	.169	*.533*
In our organization, it is possible to notice numerous details among the capable employees in each area.	.288	.105	*.498*
In our organization, the range of experience necessary to be included in specific groups creates cohesion (integration) among colleagues in each of these groups.	.182	.149	*.494*

**Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring. Rotation Method: Equamax with Kaiser Normalization. a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations*

Source: author's research, data obtained using the IBM SPSS program.

that linearly transforms an original set of variables into a substantially smaller set of uncorrelated variables that represent most of the information in the original set of variables. Its goal is to reduce the dimensionality of the original data set. A small set of uncorrelated variables is much easier to understand and use in further analyses than a large set of correlated variables (Dunteman, 1989, p. 7). The results of PCA show the relevance of the factors generated by the factorial method. Even after the implementation of the PCA, three main factors dominated, which are stored as (1) the selection of the best employees, (2) personal development, and (3) integration and loyalty to the organization.

Questions related to the acquisition of knowledge consisted of three variables; therefore, we re-implemented PCA. It makes sense to implement this method if variables are correlated. Bartlett's test of sphericity (p<0.005) and the KMO measure of sampling adequacy (KMO = 0.657) confirmed that the data were relevant for the implementation

Table 3 Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.181	72.683	72.683
2	.574	19.119	91.802
3	.246	8.198	100.000

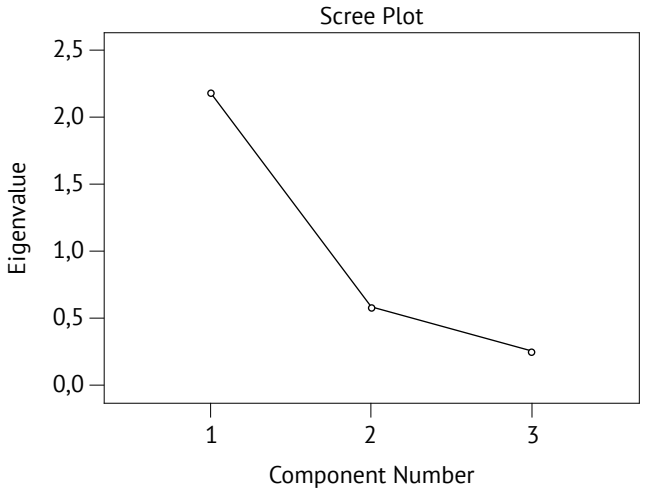
**Extraction Method: PCA*

Source: author's research, data obtained using the IBM SPSS program.

of the PCA. The number of main components included in the survey was defined based on the calculation of eigenvalues and a screen plot diagram. The calculated eigenvalues confirm that we managed to obtain one main component explaining 72.683% of the total variability in the underlying variables (Table 3). In addition, the diagram of eigenvalues (Figure 1) shows that the choice of one of the main

components is correct, as the break occurs at k = 2. The line is almost horizontal from the breakpoint onward, which means that further factors contribute very little to clarifying the underlying variables variance.

Figure 1 Scree Plot



Source: author's research, data obtained using the IBM SPSS program.

Data were prepared to carry out the multiple regression, enabling us to examine both the null and research hypotheses.

- *Null hypothesis H_0: The values of employees do not affect the acquisition of knowledge.*
- *Research hypothesis H_1: The values of employees affect the acquisition of knowledge.*

The regression model is shown in Figure 2. The dependent variable in the regression model is represented by the variable obtained from the PCA, which we called the acquisition of knowledge, while the independent variables are the three main components acquired from the factor analysis: (1) selecting the best employees, (2) personal development, and (3) integration into and loyalty to an organization.

In the last step, we performed a multiple regression analysis using the method of gradual integration (i.e., stepwise). In stepwise multiple regression, the predictor variables are entered one variable at a time, or step, according to particular statistical criteria. The first predictor to be considered for entry at the first step is the predictor that has the highest correlation with the criterion. This predictor on its own will explain the most variance in the criterion. The second predictor to be considered for entry on the second step is the one that explains the second highest proportion of the variance. The process of integration of variables is complete when none of the other variables are significantly associated with the dependent variable (Norris, Qureshi, Howitt, & Duncan, 2014).

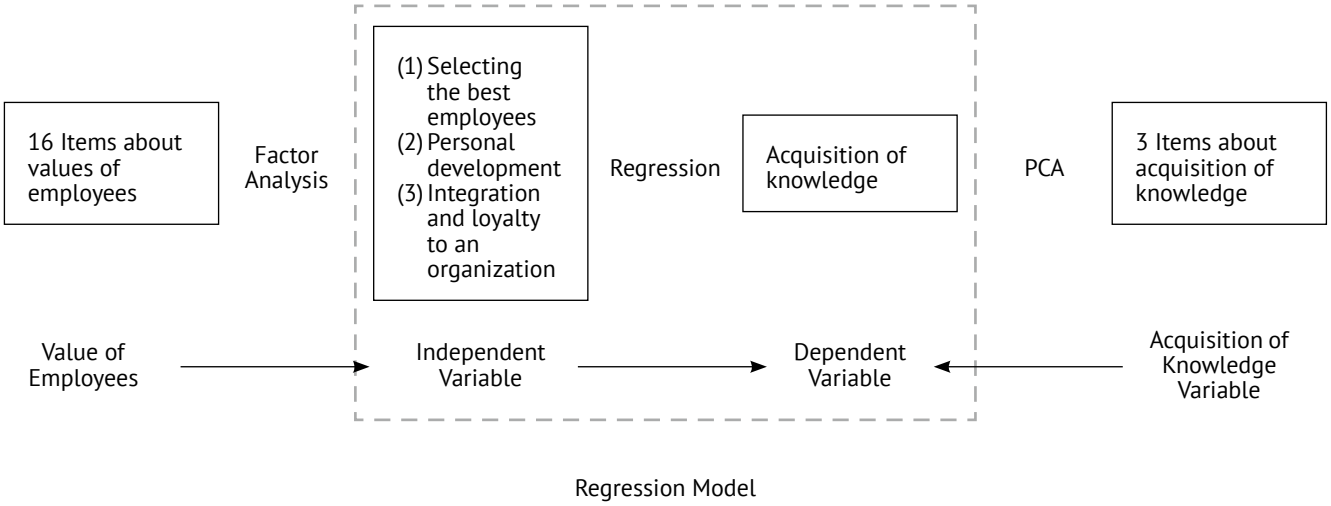
Table 4 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.686	.470	.466	.73052875
2	.779	.607	.602	.63112696

*Independent variables: personal development, integration and company loyalty

Source: author's research, data obtained using the IBM SPSS program.

Figure 2 The regression model



Regression Model

Source: author's research

Table 5 Coefficients

Coefficients[a]							
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics
		B	Std. Error	Beta			VIF
2	(Constant)	5.685E-17	.053		.000	1.000	
	Personal development	.453	.063	.453	7.187	.000	1.395
	Integration and loyalty to an organization	.438	.063	.438	6.945	.000	1.395

[a] Dependent variable: Acquisition of knowledge

Table 4 shows that the clarification of the model is very good, as 60.2% is explained by the dependence of the variability of the dependent variable (i.e., the acquisition of knowledge), and a higher proportion of 46.6% is represented by the contribution of personal development, while the contribution of cohesion and loyalty to the organization is smaller, at 13.6% (0.602–0.466). The third component, selecting the best employees, is excluded from the model because it does not have a statistically significant effect.

Next, we were interested in whether the influence of values on the acquisition of knowledge is positive or negative. Table 5 shows that both coefficients were positive; therefore, it can be concluded that the more employees are dedicated to personal development and the more they feel connected and loyal to the organization, the greater the influence on the acquisition of knowledge.

The analysis results confirm our assumption that employees' values influence the acquisition of knowledge; therefore, we were able to reject the null hypothesis and accept the presumption of research.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, we dealt with examining the importance and influence of the values of employees as an essential element of organizational culture on the acquisition of knowledge. The theory confirmed the importance of the organizational culture for the successful acquisition of knowledge in organizations. Based on this, we have come to the conclusion that the stronger, more flexible, and more accepted by the majority of other organizations that the organizational culture is, the greater impact it can exert on the acquisition of knowledge. Researchers prioritize values and beliefs of employees as an element of the organizational culture, with largely positive or negative impact on the acquisition of knowledge (Alavi et al., 2006; DuPlessis, 2006). Only values such as trust, transparency, free information sharing, close work with others, flexibility, commitment, honesty, collaboration, and learning will create an environment in which employees are willing to acquire knowledge.

The empirical research conducted in the Slovenian medium and large organizations confirmed the influence of employees' values on the acquisition of knowledge. Using multiple regression analysis, we examined the influence of individual factors/values—(1) selecting the best employees, (2) personal development, (3) integration into and loyalty to the organization—on the acquisition of knowledge. Results of the analysis showed that employees' values affect the acquisition of knowledge because the more the employees are dedicated to personal development and the more they feel connected and loyal to the organization, the greater the influence on the acquisition of knowledge.

In empirical research, we were faced with substantive time and methodological limitations. Within the process of developing knowledge, we only studied the impact of employees' values on the acquisition of knowledge as an input stage in the process of developing knowledge. We used data from questionnaires that were returned within the agreed time period. The data obtained reflected the current state in the Slovenian organizations and were dependent on respondents' subjective perceptions; therefore, they do not necessarily reflect the objective situation in the analyzed organizations. The methodological limitation was conditioned by the choice of instrument, research sample, and data analysis.

This paper also provides opportunities for further research, as it would be advisable to explore the influence of values of employees on the other stages of advancement of knowledge and to apply other forms of analysis in addition to the factor and regression analysis (e.g., canonical correlation analysis).

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Vpliv vrednot zaposlenih na pridobivanje znanja v organizacijah

Izvleček

V prispevku se osredotočamo na raziskovanje pomena in vpliva vrednot zaposlenih kot bistvene sestavine organizacijske kulture na pridobivanje znanja. Na podlagi empirične raziskave smo proučevali vpliv vrednot zaposlenih na pridobivanje znanja v slovenskih organizacijah in ugotavljali, katere so ključne vrednote, ki najbolj vplivajo na pridobivanje znanja. Rezultati analize so potrdili pozitiven vpliv vrednot zaposlenih na pridobivanje znanja. Ugotavljamo, da so zaposleni bolj naklonjeni razvoju in pridobivanju znanja, če se bolj posvečajo osebnemu razvoju ter če čutijo večjo pripadnost organizaciji in močnejšo povezanost z njo.

Ključne besede: organizacijska kultura, vrednote zaposlenih, razvijanje znanja, pridobivanje znanja.