

# Chapter 4.22

## Meeting Czech Knowledge Management Challenges Head-On: KM-Be.At-It

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the Czech Republic, Knowledge Management-related problems occur at all knowledge stages with difficulties more predominant at an organisational level. In principal, they originate from the lack of an utilisable and detailed KM implementation methodology; varying perceptions of KM coupled with the notion, that KM equates and is limited to information technologies and the like. As a reaction to these problems, the Faculty of Informatics and Management at the University of Hradec Králové (FIM UHK) developed a new KM implementation methodology. It aims to provide interested parties with a set of ground rules distributed among a number of phases. Further

development is underway to elaborate the method by integrating project management tools, benchmarking exercises and critical success factors. Despite this endeavour, there is an on-going need for further research given the reality that small and medium sized enterprises constitute the majority of organisations in the Czech Republic.

### INTRODUCTION

Knowledge Management (KM) as a managerial discipline emerged over twenty years ago. Globally, both practitioners and academicians have adopted it and the Czech Republic is not an exception. Its acceptance has been complicated as it holds a wide range of descriptions and interpretations that

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are reflected in the various existing KM narratives. Therefore, several analyses on KM perceptions such as those formulated by Bureš (2005), and Wallace (2007) are available. In general, before analysing the situation in the Czech Republic, one considers KM as defined by the expert Karl Wiig “KM is the systemic, explicit, and deliberate building, renewal, and application of knowledge to maximize an enterprise’s knowledge-related effectiveness and returns from its knowledge assets (Beckman, 1999). It is common to experience problems connected with KM at the conceptual and operational levels. The Czech Republic as a nascent market-economy and transitional society in Central Europe is not an exception. Moreover, there are certain specifics related to the Czech cultural and commercial environment. It is possible to identify several problems. In addition, there is a general lack of information on the state of KM in the Czech lands due to infrequent surveys. Moreover, even current KM resources lack a connotation of the cross-cultural differences and are not readily available in the Czech language. This chapter describes the situation of KM in the Czech Republic and provides an insight to the long-term effort in this field based on the essential features of a particular methodology. Equally, it exposes the measures undertaken to ameliorate research.

From both a practical as well as a research perspective, one raises the question as to the role of cross-cultural differences and the unique character of the Czech Republic. Some KM critics may cite the Czech failures as additional fodder to the statement, “...like many a business concept, KM has evolved from a hot buzzword to a phrase that now evokes more scepticism than enthusiasm” (Frappaolo, 2006). Have our Czech colleagues widely abandoned a notion that they perceive as inept and an imported fad consciously or do cultural constraints and framework render the question moot.

Overall, the discussion that follows addresses three primary issues relative to the Czech KM experience: KM specifics from a purely Czech

perspective, the KM methodology developed by the University of Hradec Králové - a work in progress introduced as KM-Be.At-It and lastly, Cross-Cultural Management issues associated with the further development of KM in the Czech Republic.

## **KNOWLEDGE-RELATED ISSUES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

Bureš and Čech (2008) identify four knowledge levels depicted in Figure 1. It describes the overall environment wherein knowledge-related activities arise. Each level differs from the other in many aspects. An increase of the resolution of any one level permits the discovery of another. Exemplars of this refinement are particular economic sectors (tourism, engineering, telecommunications, and education), or clusters that have different knowledge needs, utilisable tools, techniques and procedures. They are frequently uncovered between the national and the organisational level demonstrating that the demarcation between levels is ambiguous.

### **Supranational Level**

This level is both the broadest and the most general. It operates by means of concepts of the Knowledge Economy (KE) and Knowledge Society (KS) in which tangible knowledge does not play a role. Many forces such as, international affairs; cultural and technological developments; political circumstance; cross-border amalgamates and institutions (the World Bank, the OECD, the United Nations) shape this level.

Within a Czech context, this level distinguishes itself particularly through numerous strategic documents issued by the European Union (EU). Recently the European Council published the “Lisbon Strategy.” The report emphasises KE as a strategic and fundamental objective. The document states that the EU desires to become a

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