KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN DIPLOMACY. FROM A THEORETICAL TO A BEST PRACTICE POINT OF VIEW

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*Diplomats need to have a hundred abilities, but
strictly controlled in many different ways.
Their **knowledge** should agreeably surprise and
perhaps impress those with whom they are speaking,
but never embarrass, offend or shame them.*
Ivo Andric, Nobel Prize Laureate for Literature (1961)

ABSTRACT

It is now widely recognized that the age of knowledge management has come and many private, but also public organisation are changing their style of work, organisation and culture. Knowledge management plays a very important and complex role in the public sector because its effectiveness determines the society's culture, quality of life, success and viability. A competent public administration it is the key of a healthy society, but an incompetent one leads into severe decline of society. Diplomatic services have been included in this process to some degree, but remain close to the end of the list of government sectors to embrace a knowledge management perspective. Knowledge management offers great potential in the areas of knowledge transfer and training. It is important to keep in mind that diplomacy both uses and produces knowledge.

In this paper I aim to provide a comprehensive view about the topic of knowledge management in the public administration and to underline the characteristic of knowledge management in diplomacy. Then, I consider some important questions about the real possibility of implement knowledge management in diplomacy and I finish with a best practice example and some conclusions.

KEYWORDS: *public administration, knowledge management, diplomacy, best practice*

1. Knowledge management in the public sector

"The concept of KM is not new to the public sector, and whether intentionally or unintentionally, KM initiatives have always been integrated in government tasks, inseparable from strategy, planning, consultation, and implementation" (Riege and Lindsay, 2006). A competent public administration it is the key of a healthy society, but an incompetent one leads into severe decline of society. The society that I am referring to it can't be created jus by having an efficient public administration, but it is crucial a permanent citizens participation to create and maintain the success of a society. "An ignorant citizenry is a poor public policy partner" (Wiig, 2002).

"Through public policy in particular, politicians and public service workers use knowledge to shape their domestic environment and try to make a difference" (Bridgman and Davis, 2004). Examples of studies done in public sector organisations include benchmarking of knowledge management (Syed-Ikhsan and Rowland, 2004), knowledge sharing (Liebowitz and Chen, 2003) knowledge management initiatives (Shields et al., 2000) and knowledge management practices (Wiig, 2002).

During the past ten years, a large number of national governments, departments and agencies "have embraced KM practices with a quest to creating more innovative and complex systems that connect people to information and knowledge" (Riege and Lindsay, 2006). Since 2002, for example, the OECD has been publishing an annual survey of KM practices for ministries, departments, agencies of central government in OECD member countries; and there are over 200 KM cases accessible via their web site (see www.oecd.org).

Public administration entities have broad responsibilities in pursuit of societal objectives. To obtain this, public institutions need to "prepare effective policy partners, building and maintaining a capable and competitive work force" (Wiig, 2002). Fig. 1 indicates example of KM actions to be taken into consideration by public entities:

■ assure competent and effective public services using different types of procedures, organisation of work, work aids, etc. Creating and maintaining competent public services is not simple and it is not new because this is the role of the PA;

■ prepare effective policy partners. KM methods provide opportunities to prepare the citizenry to be more effective policy partners. To be effective policy partners, citizens need to understand the consequences of there decisions;

■ build and leverage public and private IC (Intellectual Capital). PA influences knowledge – related mechanisms for building and leveraging IC assets in many ways: patent policies and legal support for value realization and protection enforcement of IC, international trade agreements and targeted support for individual export or import contracts;

■ develop capable knowledge workers by using educational program, training or other supportive services.
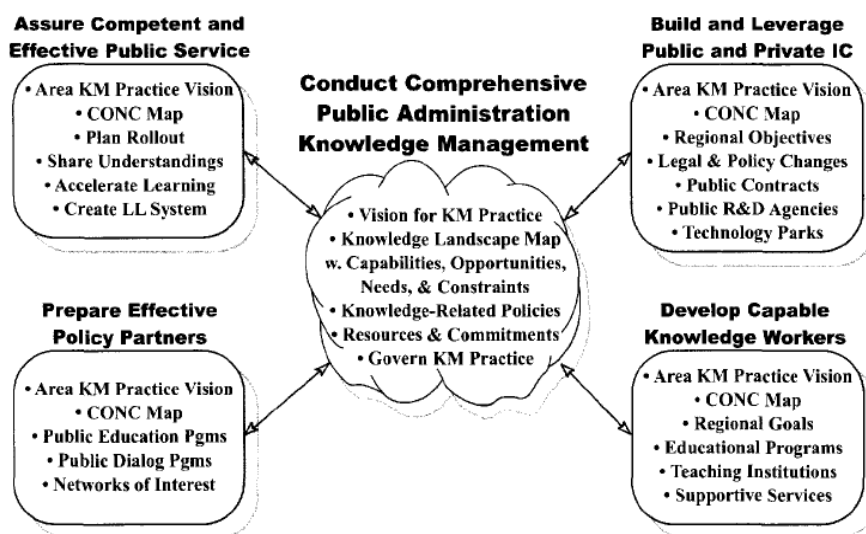

Figure 1 Elements of public administration knowledge management practice (Wiig, 2002)

Furthermore, the responsibility of public institutions includes also creating and governing the overall vision, perspective and strategy for the society's general KM practice.

2. Knowledge management in diplomacy

With the end of the cold war, the high level of certainty and predictability in international and national environments has been replaced with dynamic and very complex international relations. Diplomats deal with situations for which they cannot prepare in advance, for which they cannot find instructions in diplomatic manuals and they need to adapt quickly and to find the best solution analysing the impact of their decision in local, national and international context. Knowledge management offers great potential in the areas of knowledge transfer and training, but it can be used also to build an institutional memory.

Knowledge management is now a part of the diplomatic field al well, but remains the question if this is new for diplomats or if it is something that already existed and doesn't have a name. I believe that knowledge management is a part of diplomacy for a long time because knowledge is the main or maybe the unique resource that a diplomat has to do his job. But what is new in this field for a diplomat is the use of IT&C.

Some years ago, knowledge had been analysed from individual point of view and less from work process and organizational mechanisms perspective. There were just a few researches about "invisible work" and especially about the way employees think and use knowledge at work. In diplomacy, knowledge has a more general importance. It is the basis of organisation and is more often used indirectly, for reacting to new situations, than directly, to deal with expected situations. Knowledge—a combination of information, training, experience and intuition—is what enables a diplomat to act appropriately in unpredictable situations (Kurbalija , 1999).

A diplomat's use and need of knowledge seems in many ways obvious, but proves difficult to explain and define. The knowledge used in diplomacy appears in a variety of forms, starting from the general knowledge gathered in the course of regular education, knowledge of particular subjects such as international relations and international law gathered through specialised diplomatic training, and ranging to knowledge gained through experience, such as knowledge of regions, tacit knowledge of how to react in particular situations, and knowledge of procedures. Tacit knowledge is very common in the diplomatic system and it is very difficult to transfer it from experienced diplomats to young diplomats. That why, mentoring technique is very popular and very efficient in diplomacy. Knowledge management offers great potential in the areas of knowledge transfer and training. It is important to keep in mind that diplomacy both uses and produces knowledge. Diplomats use knowledge in order to perform their function; simultaneously they produce new knowledge. In this sense, diplomacy is "knowledge perpetum mobile"(Kurbalija, 1999). It can be said that diplomats are "knowledge workers" because they are creating, producing, using and transferring knowledge during their career. Fig 2 presents a general model of knowledge transfer used in the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in other ministries of foreign affairs, using training methods.

There are a lot of points of views about knowledge management significance. Nicolescu, L & Nicolescu O. considered that there are 3 categories of definition of knowledge management, from 3 point of views: informatics, consultants and mangers. Michael Lester opinion, cited in Nicolescu, L. & Nicolescu O (2005) is that knowledge management is key process, that through the capitalization of changes determined by both digital technologies and internet, contributes to the obtaining of economic performance in

the countries, companies and the involved industrial branches, thus determining an increase of the life standard of the population. This approach shows the vision of the IT staff and gives a great importance to knowledge and innovation, the analysis of the managerial problems being tightly connected to the top information technologies. Knowledge management is not just about the automation of the thinking process but is also about the use of technology to assist the normal thinking process (Dreyfus cited by Kurbalija, 1999).
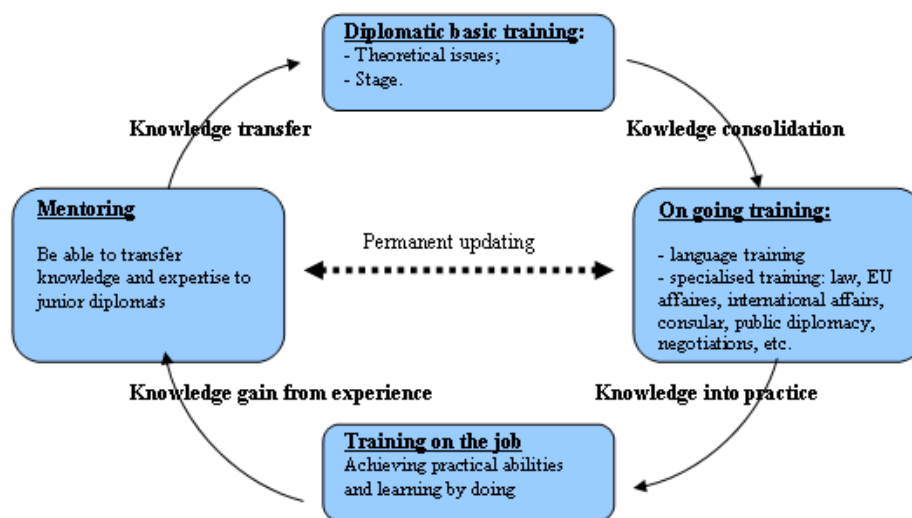

Figure 2 Training methods of obtain, improve and transfer knowledge in the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Kurbalija (1999) considers that there are some specific elements of knowledge management in diplomacy:

● *introduction of intelligent access to information*. Information is increasingly available and the key question is becoming how to use it in order to gain value-added elements. For example, today you can find much information about international conventions including texts, information about signature and ratification, etc;

● *automation of procedures through the use of workflow*. The increased capacities of IT have provided an opportunity to shift some business and administrative processes from traditional methods to IT-based procedures;

● *automation of routine activities*. For example, the process of issuing visas, passports and other documents can be automated to a large extent through IT;

● *recognition and appreciation of knowledge as an institutional resource*. Knowledge can be identified both as the knowledge employees bring with them to their work, and the knowledge generated through the activities of an institution.

From my point of view, there are also other elements of knowledge management in diplomacy, from human resources management perspective:

1. *Recognition of training importance for a diplomat*;

For a long time it has been told that to become a diplomat you need to be born with special abilities and that you can't learn form a training to be a diplomat. This is partial true, but in our days when international relations are changing very fast it is necessary for a diplomat to be permanently updated and to have access to information very

quickly. New methods of training are being use with success also in diplomacy. Computer – assisted and computer – based training are such an example and allows trainees to participate in their own formation. For example the Canadian Foreign Service Institute has developed over 70 training programs that are incorporated into a "virtual campus" for their diplomats and other, home-based staff, as well as local personnel working in the embassies and consulates (Rana , 2005);

2. *Flexible recruitment and selection procedure*;

This means that a lot of ministries are changing their contractual policy by hiring temporary staff, especially for administrative activities and also for consular issues. These techniques are still at the beginning in the diplomatic field but it will be more and more popular in the future.

3. *Different organisational culture* characterized by:

● the influence of external stakeholders. Multistakeholder diplomacy is a new concept in diplomacy – "creation of networks, embracing a range of state and non-state actors focusing on the management of issues that demand resources over which no single participant possesses a monopoly" (Kurbalija & Katrandjiev, 2006). The national foreign policy is now influence not just by the government decisions, but also by other factors like: parliament, local authorities, private sector, media, civil society, NGO's. Although their status is different from that of diplomats, in practice NGO's often participate in the diplomatic process, in particular in promotions and discussions regarding human rights and environmental protection. The parliament is also an important factor. For example parliamentarians all over the world had created global and regional structures and they are claiming a role in diplomatic meetings which was traditionally reserved for the executive branch (Kurbalija, 1998);

● a diplomatic services more open to the public. This is a another new concept in diplomacy - public diplomacy that "deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies" (Waller, 2007);

● creating internal systems of talent management;

● a more pragmatic diplomacy involved in permanent changes in a world of globalisation.

While knowledge management should be needs driven rather than technology driven, it is still important to follow developments in the technological field. These developments can stimulate new ideas and provide tools for solutions to traditional problems. The requirements of diplomacy for spontaneous human involvement are usually presented as one of the key arguments for the limited possibilities of the use of IT in diplomacy. Without arguing that IT based communication is better or worse than face-to-face communication, we can think of certain situations where it may be a benefit if the "noise" of normal human communication is replaced with dry electronic communication. Some negotiation exercises conducted via the Internet demonstrated that in certain situations the simple conveyance of messages without the trappings of body-language, tacit communication, intentionality, etc. can be very effective in the process of achieving diplomatic breakthroughs. In terms of trade, knowledge diplomacy will largely supplant industrial diplomacy, whose agenda has largely been realised, and will provide the agenda for international trade policy cooperation well into the next century (Ryan, 1998). From a management point of view the most important component of knowledge management is human resources component.

There are some limitations of implementing the knowledge management in diplomacy. The key condition for the successful implementation of knowledge management in diplomacy is the acceptance of the new techniques by diplomats themselves. The introduction of knowledge management must be carefully planned and implemented, with continuous adaptation based on the responses of diplomats. In order to succeed, knowledge management projects must address the specific features of diplomatic professional culture in which the possession of knowledge and information is jealously guarded.

3. Knowledge management – from theory to practice

This presentation focuses on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malta experience in implementing a knowledge management system, but is analyzing this transformation process from an ICT (Information and Communications Technology) point of view. This initiative is part of a complex process developed in the entire public administration of Malta that had the main objective to achieve a higher level of utilization of ICT. In the MFA of Malta this process took into consideration the possibility of using ICT technologies to a better response to the organisational needs and ways of analyze and disseminate information quirkier. The main activities developed are:

➢ a specialised electronic library;

➢ a Country Profile Application where diplomats can access file profiles of the various countries that Malta deals with;

➢ an electronic scholarship system were any person can see all the scholarships offered by the public institution and international entities and also can apply for it;

➢ DiploWizard system – knowledge management tool for diplomats that is installed as the intranet application in the MFA of Malta. the key results and benefits of this system are:

- easy access to information database;
- fast, flexible, efficient programs;
- expandable;
- up-to-date information (Kurbalija, 1999).

This is a successful example of promoting knowledge management through IT&C resources and systems. IT support is necessary but not sufficient to implement KM. MFA of Malta made in important step in becoming knowledge based organisation by implementing this systems and by promoting them inside the ministry and it was important for diplomats to understand the importance of IT in a world of globalization. What is missing in this project is a "knowledge map" that would help them to know what knowledge the MFA posses and how can preserve and permanently improve them. Another aspect to be taken into consideration is to create a "knowledge management office" and identify the "key diplomats" by developing a talent management system.

4. Conclusions and future research

Knowledge management is at his beginnings in diplomacy and future research in this domain should be made. Most diplomatic services, like other institutions, are not aware of the knowledge and information they possess. The first step in introducing knowledge management should therefore be to activate this knowledge. Although this task is primarily organizational, technology can help.

I hope that this paper will create interest and willing to other public management specialist in Romania to do more research in the field of knowledge management and more specific in the human resources domain. This will permit also to discover and implement new methods the will help increasing efficiency of Romania local and central administration activity in the context of Romania joining The European Union.

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