

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN ESTONIAN REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION – BACKGROUND, OUTPUTS, UNUSED RESOURCES

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Abstract

Very few treatments link knowledge management to governmental institutions. It is rather seen as added value for managing business organizations. In the present paper the author tries to prove the importance of the role of knowledge management in building trust among citizens.

The author focuses on the analysis of the Websites of Estonian county governments, analyzing their content, structure, link system and intertextuality by discourse and content analysis. The results of this study, a detailed list of proposals to make knowledge and communication management in local governments more effective, can be profitable for all governmental institutions.

1. Introduction

Taking into account that connection of communication and knowledge management and the principles of participation democracy (which is a basis of trust building) have been very little studied in Estonia both in theory and in practice, the following questions cropped up: What is the so-called critical knowledge of governmental institutions? Where and how has it to be gathered, preserved and distributed?

As the local government is a very important link in the communication chain between the government and the civil society (ordinary citizen), the present study examines communication and knowledge management in this level.

Taking into account that other channels no longer satisfy sufficiently the interests of an ordinary citizen in today's context – only a very small number of citizens can be included in direct communication and mass media conveys information selectively and in one-way direction, the key for the state authorities should just be seen in new media.

Generally the theoretical perspective of the present study is based on the putting the peculiarities and possibilities of new media in the context of knowledge and communication management theories.

It is a well-known fact that as for the spread of the Internet in Estonia, it is one of the fastest in Eastern Europe. The Estonian governmental institutions have been comparatively open to new ideas and Information and Communication Technologies. Also the legislative basis is in favor of users in Estonia. However, my point of view is that not all information on the Internet is valuable information. On the contrary, according to public opinion polls, in the situation of overload of information the untrustworthiness among citizen towards governmental institutions rise.

The question is not how much information we “hang” on the Internet but how much *knowledge* there is. The author considers the conceptions of internal communication and KM in context of governmental institutions to be the same. Information has to form knowledge for an organization and for society.

Within this study all the 15 Estonian county governments' Websites have been analysed by discourse and content analysis; the background information about the establishment of communication and knowledge management structure was gathered through personal experience³ and observation and

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questionnaire among communication specialists. Moreover, heads of county governments have been interviewed’.

The present paper also aims at pointing out that the role of knowledge management is still considered to be very low in public sector, promoting human resources management instead of Information Communication Technologies (ICT).

The paper proceeds as follows: First, it discusses the theoretical framework employed for this empirical research. The second section presents the methodology, objectives, hypotheses for the analysis and the analysis of websites, and the final section reports the main results and conclusions and provides recommendations on how local governments should approach their technology regarding new media possibilities and knowledge and communication management theories.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Communication and Knowledge Management in Public Sector

First, the author would like to define the concepts of knowledge and knowledge management. Prusak and Davenport (in Evans 2003:13) pointed out one of the most summarizing concepts of *knowledge*: “Knowledge is a fluid mix of framed experiences, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the minds of people. In organizations, it often becomes embedded not only in documents or repositories but also in organizational routines, processes, practices and norms”.

The notion *knowledge management* involves information management, learning organization, strategic management, changes management, human resources management and innovation management (Quintas 2001)

However, knowledge management is seen as more than a phenomenon (or method) of a business organization to raise its effectiveness, reputation etc. The importance of the present study is that it is very little studied which technological possibilities support knowledge management in the public sector organizations. The author sees this as a process by levels - knowledge of an organization forms a part of the knowledge of a system (other governmental institutions etc), which is a part of societal knowledge. According to the Japanese concept of knowledge management the author insists on focusing on soft values and informal methods including focusing on internal communication processes of the organization.

According to the communication and branding theorists Vos and Shoemaker (Vos *et al* 1999) the outer picture of an organization is nothing else than just a reflection of internal tendencies, activities including internal communication.

The topic is that technologies inevitably have an enormous role to play, but they play it only to the extent that they respond to the social context. A good deal of new technology attends primarily to individuals and the explicit information that passes between them. To support the flow of knowledge, within or between communities and organizations, this focus must expand to encompass communities and the full richness of communication. (Brown *et al* 2001, Fayard 2002, Walsham 2002).

According to Brown (Brown *et al* 2001) the technology cannot deliver first knowledge repositories independent of human knowledge ability. What these databases contain are the sense-giving efforts of the contributors, which is not the same as the deep tacit knowledge of the giver. The database entries are only valuable if they connect effectively to the sense-reading processes of their users. A second outcome that cannot be delivered by computer systems is the shared norms and values within the communities.

According to Nonaka (Nonaka *et al* 2001) the following knowledge resources can be differentiated: First, experimental resources, which mean tacit knowledge, shared through common experiences. In the context of county governments it means personal and common know-how, skills, synergy. Second, conceptual resources, explicit knowledge articulated through images, symbols and language. It means design and layout of websites, booklets etc. of a county government.

Third, systemized knowledge and packaged explicit knowledge like minutes of all meetings, Strategies and other strategic documents, activity plans, economic statistics, projects, regional and national projects, programs etc.

The fourth type of knowledge can be called routinized knowledge, while it is tacit knowledge routinized and embedded in actions and practices and is presented in organizational culture.

This above-mentioned knowledge has to be presented on the intranet and the internet. The intranet is also the main channel for organizational learning.

Communication and learning have some very strong conceptual links. The assessment of organizational learning represents an assessment of a subset of communication processes in an organization. The goal of auditing organizational learning is to provide a basis for moving from traditional bureaucracy to a learning organization, thereby improving the way in which an organization functions (Pace 2002).

The concept of knowledge management was popularized in the 1990s at a time when the dominant organizational metaphor was “organizations as computers”. Consistent with that metaphor, knowledge management was conceptualized as creating and maintaining a stand-alone repository for capturing organizational expertise. The explosion of the Internet and World Wide Web has made this view obsolete and transformed the metaphor into the one of “organization as network” (Contractor *et al* 2002). It means that power, effectiveness and also intelligence resides in the network as a whole.

Criado points out that differnets reports by OECD (1998) and the European Commission (1994, 2002) have recommended the use, promotion and delivery of information and communication technologies within public organizations, addressing their relations with other actors, especially citizens and businesses. In spite of this reality, studies about the social and political impact of the Internet and ICTs on management are usually focused on private sector organizations, with major contributors to the literature being consultants (Criado *et al* 2003).

E-government is defined as the different ways in which government is defined as the different ways in which governments and public managers contact and interact with their citizens through their Websites, but also other Internet uses (e-mail or IRC), and different tools, like video conferencing, CD-ROM etc (Criado *et al*, 2003). Taking the above definition into account the present author tackles only one part of the concept of e-government – this paper focuses on the possibilities offered by new media (the Internet and Intranet) in the Estonian local-level administration.

2.2 Making use of New Media’s peculiarities in Public Sector. Estonia’s case

As Lauristin (2001) points out, the realization of the opportunities provided by the Internet depends on the availability of technical means, on the quality of providing information (exhaustiveness, promptness, level of analysis) and on the ability and desire of receivers to use the information, as well as the conditions, in which they do this.

It is possible to draw parallels between the activities of a county government and the activities of the Estonian Parliament being described by Lauristin (2001).

At the same time, it is necessary to ensure that both all citizens and also NGOs would become more active users of the information available about the work of the county government. The home pages of Estonian governmental institutions also provide access to draft acts, shorthand records of the sessions of the county governments, and minutes of their committees. The bringing of one’s proposals and ideas to the knowledge of the community is possible only if one is informed of the draft acts in the legislative proceedings of the local government, of the procedure of the work of a local government, and of the terms and deadlines which must be observed. It is also important to be informed about the activities of the members of the county government, as this allows one to find an appropriate partner in the local government for defending one’s interests and expressing one’s ideas.

To ensure that the Internet culture would become part of the democratic political culture, well-planned efforts should be made, aimed at making the Internet an open forum of dialogue between the city government and the public. It is not less important than the development of ways of giving information to educate people in the framework of civil education, with the skills of using the Internet.

Technologies are not a new thing in public management. But, as Castells points out: “ Technology does not determine society, it shapes it. At the same time, society does not determine technology, it uses it. It exists as a dialectic interaction between society and technology” (Castells 1996:35).

Rapid technological innovation and widespread dissatisfaction with the current status of governance and public sector performance in all countries, not just transition societies have sparked a lively debate concerning the likely effects of advanced ICT on democratic governance and public administration (Hale et al, 1999; Fountain, 2001; Criado et al, 2003)

In the policy sphere the E-government issue in Estonia is supported by the following legislative acts: Public Information Act, very many local acts, national strategic plan on electronic government support etc.

According to different polls⁴ Estonia is well internetised – about 92 % of the population finds the Internet has become very approachable. Also, the legal framework of Estonian governmental institutions is well developed. There are several laws providing the framework for the public institutions on how to collect, maintain and provide information, Databases Act (1997), Official Statistics Act (1997), Archives Act (1998), Public Procurement Act (2000), and Public Information Act (2000). The principles of Estonian Information Policy (1998) set out the aims of the state in the development of information technology and the related infrastructure.

The last one obligates the institutions to have their own webpage and sets very strict prescriptions on them. The websites should contain forms-applications, drafts of local regulations, information about services and register of documents.

But, administrative culture and reality do not support the aims stipulated by laws. The meliorating of administrative culture is noted only by 51% of the population.

The author agrees with Criado (Criado *et al*, 2003), that the potential of ICTs to transform public governance and management is not as extreme as predicted by enemies and friends of new media.

In the case of websites it means that quite moderate changes in technological aspects are needed in comparison to inevitable changes in the logic, content, linkage system etc.

3. Website – the main communication channel of County Governments

3.1 Methodology, objectives and hypotheses

This paper is the result of empirical research based on the study of Estonian county governments' Websites. The methodology of this study implies the analyses of institutional sites that governments consider official. Data were gathered during January 2003 through direct observation of Websites of all 15 Estonian county governments⁵. For the present analysis the combined method was used containing elements both of discourse analysis⁶ and qualitative content analysis. The main categories for the analyses were: *attention* (what is presented and what is not?); *accentuation* (what is important?); *structure* (what is linked to what? What is said? How? When?); *target groups* (What themes are treated? What messages are communicated?). On the bases of mentioned categories, questions and also with consideration of the legislative bases of the present institution an observation plan was drawn up/prepared.

The primary objective of this study is to track the orientation to the citizens of the Websites analysed and create a list of recommendations for creating these Websites in the framework of communication and knowledge and new media theories.

The created observation plan is also applicable for analyzing the orientation, content, layout etc. of Websites of other public sector organizations.

Given these general objectives, some hypotheses needed to be tested throughout the observation of the Websites.

The main general hypothesis was related to the type of information available on the Websites. It was assumed that the information in Websites was focused on information, rather than on the necessities of

⁴ Public Opinion's Polls, Faktum, Tallinn 2003, see more on this issue <http://www.faktum.ee/>

⁵ Estonian County Governments' Websites can be found on address <http://www.riik.ee/en/>

⁶ See on this issue Fairclough (1992)

the citizens and would hardly refer to the core political and managerial functions of county governments and limited interaction with the citizens was expected. Also, the author presumed ignorance to legislative acts, first of all Public Information Act from the part of county governments. In addition, the linkage system, the logic of websites, and the language of the content were assumed to be too complicated for citizens.

3.2 Analysis, main results

In this section the author presents data from direct observation of the websites of all county governments in Estonia. Results of this analysis are presented according to the categories mentioned in previous subsection.

Conformity to Public Information Act

As the result of the analysis showed there was no single Website among the 15 harmonized with Public Information Act. In disharmony with the mentioned Act county governments present Website inadequate, incomplete, poor and obsolete data in their Websites.

The most essential disadvantage in the context of integral strategic communication management is insufficient presenting conceptions, development plans, programs and other documents of general importance, although there is a clause in Public Information Act according to which the mentioned documents should be presented in Websites before approval. This is the aspect, which greatly expresses the mission, vision and values of a county government as an organization. The Website should not reflect it only in order to observe the law.

According to Nonaka (Nonaka *et al* 1995) a knowledge vision created by top management (in the context of city government – heads of departments etc.) helps to foster a high degree of personal commitment from middle managers and frontline workers. It provides a meaning to the daily tasks they are performing on the job and a sense of direction to the kind of knowledge they ought to be seeking. A knowledge vision also helps to restructure an existing knowledge system, which may be particularly useful during periods of transition.

To foster a high degree of commitment from members of the organization, a knowledge vision should purposefully be left equivocal and open ended. A more equivocal vision gives members of the organization the freedom and autonomy to set their own goals, making them more committed to figuring out what the ideals of the top really mean.

Only 9 county government Websites enable to fulfil an electronic information request form and forward it either electronically, as a print-out or in some other way.

Structure

In addition to user friendliness the structure of a Website, as emphasised in the project “Direct state” (Vallner *et al* 2000), shows two important aspects – the organisation’s direction of approach “*from inside towards outside: we are these and these and we deal with the following things.*”

The structure of Websites, its linkage to Websites of counties is in several cases unreasonably complicated and unelaborated. For instance, the institutions administered by county government can be found under the link *County*. The framework is very well arranged in the Ida-Viru Website, for example, where the opening page of the county government gives a possibility to link to the site of the county, which comprises the insignia, researches, county-level rewards, etc.

The opening pages of Websites usually present the so-called discourse of news, which is often overshadowed by abundance of links.

As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, the peculiarity of communication over the Internet is that the receiver is the active party who makes his of her choice and forms his/her own associations from among the information presented, including such associations not wished by the source. From this angle it is important from the point of view of communication management to think through the link system of the Website. Thus, the communication manager can direct the seeker of information in the direction suitable to the former. For instance, the role of county government as an informant on the field of economy could take advantage by adding enterprise centres to the list of partners.

Presenting and detailing information

In forwarding county government information two discourses can be distinguished between.

First, there is the so-called practical information discourse for the citizen of the county, distributing information about the main activities concerning the citizens as well as training courses, project applications deadlines, etc.

Second, there are information products, for an ordinary citizen the benefit of consuming these is more indirect, at least more difficult to understand, but naturally they have to be reflected in the Website. Examples of these are an announcement of a meeting of the head of county government and city mayors of the Baltic Sea region. Such information should, according to its target group, be respectively visibly defined.

A lot of information can be found that should be cast aside from county government communication, e.g. links like *Other institutions in the building*, etc.

A good example of presenting news is provided by the Website of Viljandi County Government, where the press releases of the opening page have attractive headlines and content of general interest. Both in the cases of preliminary information as well as press releases the preliminary information system are applied. Also, there is a thoroughly elaborated block of European information (clearly expressed purpose of activities in the EU framework, project management textbooks, etc.). The presentation of European information should be emphasised in the communication of county government, as the role of county government takes guidance from the existing mission description in integrating the county into the EU. As for presenting the European information, the best of the Websites observed was that of Viljandi County Government. It included contact data, purposes of activities, a programme of events, a county network, references, facts of general interest.

One of the few possibilities for the county government what to carry out on the field of economy is informing local small and large enterprises as well as potential foreign investors of the county as potential entrepreneurial environment and improve the county's respective reputation. For this purpose it is also important to present the Website in the English, Russian, German and other languages. The Websites of 11 county governments are now only in Estonian. Possibilities of archive search are offered by seven Websites.

Content and form

In the case of Websites of state authorities their content and informative qualities are important. These do not have to flatter with multicoloured images, like those of business enterprises; however, form has to be taken into account with the abundance of information. Its simplicity, user-friendliness are essential.

The most important, observed under this subject, is definitely the treatment of development plans and other materials related to development and visions (also briefly tackled above with evaluating the observance of Public Information Act). Here the author leads from the treatment of Eden & Akermann (1998) that it is the so-called strategic information, which should express the target groups of an organisation, messages, views of subdivisions of an organisation, specific character on county level and nuances in communication management and activities caused by these.

It can be notified that the text of Websites is presented as anonymous in most cases. It is understandable in the case of an introduction of functions, but disturbing if development plans or research works containing subjective opinions, attitudes are presented. So for example the authors of an interesting research work presented by Rapla County Government remain unknown as well as methods, thus creating distrustful attitudes towards the results (although the research "What is Rapla County Government seen like" comprises interesting and vivid materials about the organisation).

Another important aspect that is worth stopping at when treating content and form is whether Websites contain references (substantive as well as formal) to the target groups of the message. Only in the composition of some single Websites more specific definition of the target group can be noticed. The examples may be presentation of development plans in Russian and English, probably directed to potential investors from the west and Russia (Website of Ida-Viru County Government). The Website of Jõgeva County Government serves as a positive example of definition of the target group, where practical training places and vacant jobs have been expressed as information directed to the young. Direction towards ordinary citizens is reflected in the form of questions-answers for example on the Website of Hiiu County Government. The heading *Where to get money from?* On the Website of Viljandi County Government is directed to small entrepreneurs, project writers.

In development plans and Websites as a whole inadmissibly much legal language can be found. An example from Järva County Government Website: *The purpose of designing the development strategy of Järva county is, on the bases of agreed principles, to plan the strategic directions of activity which direct the development of the county and set frames for further activities*".

Thoroughness of treating themes on county governments' Websites varies a lot. There are Websites, which are hard to use because of excessive details and lack of generalisation. There are Websites which consist of some links only with a couple of sublinks which consist in giving the names of officials and statutes of departments, e.g. Lääne County Government Website. The most deeply tackled parts of Websites are usually the functions of departments. A positive example is the Website of Jõgeva County Government, where, according to the functions of every department, the information has been detailed – health promotion projects are a "product" of social and health department, support programs for entrepreneurs serve as information on economic development, etc.

Feedback

An important aspect of the Internet as compared to all other communication channels is interactivity. Fawkes (Fawkes *et al* 2000) also stress that in communication management it is important to implement interactive channels, the Internet provides excellent opportunities for that.

Here a question arises, how competitive the Website of a county government is at the moment as compared to information products of other institutions, would an ordinary citizen wish to apply his or her rights in participation democracy through this.

One of the main aims of communication of such an institution like county government is, according to the author, to achieve the involvement of citizens and guarantee trust.

Leading from this assumption the feedback possibilities of Websites were observed.

Six Websites lack the feedback possibility. The most wide-spread feedback facilities of the Websites are a guest book or a forum. Three Websites arrange questionings, but their implementers and aim remain unclear.

So for instance Harju County Government Website expresses interest about what the Website reader expects from the year 2003. The choice variants read: "Results of elections of the Riigikogu", "Results of the Referendum of EU accession and amending the constitution", "Eurovision Song Contest in Latvia", "sustainable economic growth", "work results of new local government leaders", "personal or family event", "do not expect anything good", "do not expect anything good or bad".

In the Lääne-Viru Website a questioning was carried out about the reason for visiting the Website, offering the answer variants: "out of curiosity", "I need information", "my boss told to".

Valga county portal is interested in: whether Martinmas (figures from Estonian folklore) came by? "What do you remember from TV-broadcast of the Eurovision Song Contest", "Did Kristina Šmigun use doping?"

So it remains totally unclear who organises questionnaires on county government Websites and what are the results used for. Instead of that there could be a questionnaire about the activities and communication of the county government with the aim of improving the latter.

Strategic associations and projects

In this point it was observed who is presented as a partner of the organisation and which cooperation projects are brought forward.

From the Websites of county governments one can predominantly find only local governments inside the county and institutions administered by the county government as partners. Presumably the partners of county governments should also be enterprise support centres and other support structures located in the county.

In several cases undefined associations are presented, like B7, Eurohaus, CPMR, the aims and activities of these are often not explained. Everyday projects influencing local life directly (e.g. drug addiction prevention and other topics) are often not reflected or difficult to find. However, these would deserve more importance as they show the organisation in operation.

Research

The choice of research works presented creates a lot of questions. A county government Website should include research reflecting strategic information, like the one concerning the structure of citizens of the respective county, etc. Information like statistics of fires in 1999 – 2001 in Ida-Viru County probably interests nobody, except for the specialists of the respective area.

Intranet

Three county governments have an operating Intranet, two Websites hint at their Intranet approaching completion.

3.3 Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the questions raised before the research the analysis of Websites can summarise the following:

- The Websites of county governments are not in conformity with Public Information Act.
- Both the relation of Websites of county governments as well as the integral Websites' linkage system is unreasonably complicated and unelaborated. Abundance of links on opening pages overshadows the important information. Giving practical information to the citizen of the county should be prioritised; information products with more indirect impact on an ordinary citizen should be in the background. The link system for differentiating and presenting information should be common for all county government Websites. Presentation of European information should be valued in the communication of county governments as the role of county government takes guidance from the existing mission description in integrating the county into the EU.
- The message of Websites presented in anonymous form and not directed to a specified target group cannot compete in the vast flow of information.
- Local government does not regard itself as inviter of foreign investors into the region. Websites are mainly in Estonian. The strategies and conceptions concerning the development of the county are missing from the Websites.
- Too much legal language usage, metalanguage and repetitions conveying no substantive value can be found on the Websites. The important is not distinguishable from the unimportant. The main stress should lie on news. In this respect the best example is the Website of Jõgeva County Government where the emphasis of the opening page is on the news with attractive headlines and contents. On the Website of Tartu County Government, for example, the development of formulising the motto of Tartu county can be followed through comments.
- The possibilities of new media for interactive communication are made regrettably little use of.

Just to name a few proposals for the Intranet, which is like the gateway every member passes every day. :

- Organization's problems and solutions page - best action practices for every kind of problems met in county government
- Intranet as a means for evaluating personnel - the on-line questionnaire, which makes it possible for everyone to answer the questions about his or her skills and then others can complete the databases.
- For example, two times a year everyone has to publish his or her own story on the Intranet about what he/she is expecting from his/her colleagues, what bothers him/her, what kind of changes are expected and so on.

To sum up it can be said that every target group has its own channels. Even the yearbooks on paper, which, unfortunately, have been discarded by many county governments, possess a secure niche in the communication of a county government.

In the context of knowledge management and new media theories the author states that if one can be satisfied with the presentation of explicit knowledge in the communication of county governments, then the tacit knowledge transfer processes are little focused on by county governments.

By tacit knowledge of county governments the author means such knowledge, which is shared on the level of the director and a couple of executives in the currently observed county government. These are conference presentations, short memos about interesting events, etc. which should stand in a place (the

Internet) accessible for the whole agency, being important from the point of view of the activities of the organisation and memory as well as identity.

Relying on authors' personal experience she regards the absence of a program of left experienced employees as a problem. Every employee leaving the organisation takes along some of the tacit knowledge, crucial for the organisation (and bought for taxpayer's money). A proposal for better arrangement of knowledge management is the elaboration and application of the so-called "old employee-leaving program". Every employee could have his or her own floppy for fixing the most important operations, and why not thoughts about better organisation of his or her work. When leaving the employee passes it to the management. This should be regulated and made obligatory.

County governments have problems with organising and sharing responsibility in activities, communication and knowledge management. Managing every employee's tacit knowledge is ideally to be shared by a public relations officer and personnel manager. Several county governments do not employ either one. Both functions have often been distributed between many people as additional duties, which actually means that nobody takes responsibility. In many cases county governments do not value the above-mentioned functions.

All the problems cited above, according to authors' strict but hopefully fair estimation, come from unwillingness and incompetence of the management – the latter rather – to value knowledge management. Encouragement and a mechanism motivating to express thoughts freely should come from the highest management.

In public sector, unfortunately, it often occurs that the leaders are unable to evaluate knowledge management. From background studies preceding the Websites analysis it become clear that many county governments do not employ a communication manager.

But the communication manager of a county government is at the same time the maintainer of knowledge of the county government, the so-called "yellow page" who has to be able to identify beforehand what knowledge is possessed by each member of the organisation. E.g., he or she keeps an eye on gathering feedback from officials after training or giving a speech, recording it in a generally understandable way on the Internet. The communication manager should definitely have the skills and authorities to critically assess the experience and bind it to new knowledge and understandings.

It is important to enable feedback that can also be treated as *After Action Learning*. The last-mentioned method definitely can and must be applied when organising knowledge management of county governments, according to the author of the paper. Relying on her experience, the author knows that county governments organise a lot of development conferences, etc., important from the point of view of regional development, but the activities following those are not directed to what has been learned from the things done. The things done are not analysed or recorded. At the same time in the following year they practically start from scratch and then it is already difficult, if not impossible, to fruitfully analyse the failure or success.

As for possible further research the present author is interested in the aspect of knowledge management of governmental institutions, particularly local government institutions, which turns especially topical in the conditions of politicising.

If several posts (county elders, heads of boards, inspectorates, etc.) become political, it means that with each change of the government all higher state officials change. Application of principles of knowledge management becomes very important in this context; a constant changing of heads and officials also makes the strategic planning of general activities and communication of those institutions extremely complicated.

As Val Hallmond points out in *Managing for Knowledge* (Evans 2003) most authors and speakers of knowledge management focus on the computer systems that assist with the collection of knowledge more accurately, information. In this study the focus was more on the need to manage for knowledge.

In the race to get a handle on managing knowledge many organizations are investing too much energy in developing formal systems, often IT systems, to facilitate knowledge sharing, at the expense of capitalizing on the benefits that come from informal processes (Evans 2003).

Public sector organizations are under pressure to become more performance orientated, which includes adopting a more customer-oriented approach. This requires a different mindset, skills-set and the way of working and implementing technology.

The author concludes that the participation in the activities of a county government is not connected only to technical solutions, but demands from local government skills and willingness to use these possibilities in a right way in a right place.

The aim of this paper was to stimulate a debate about the role of knowledge management in helping county governments move forward on their way of becoming an efficient and valuable work environment for their members and raise their reputation and trust among citizens.

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