

CONTINUING LEARNING AND LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY. SIGNIFICANT ASPECTS IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: Continuing learning is regarded as one of the most important sources of competitive advantage for organizations. Organizations with a culture of lifelong learning are organizations focused on quality and performance and a high degree of flexibility and adaptability. A learning organization is one that seeks to create its own future and one that develops, adapts, and transforms itself in response to the needs and aspirations of contemporary society.

The purpose of this article is to highlight the significant aspects related to the continuing learning in accordance with the new requirements and needs of the organizations based on knowledge. We will also present some of the effects that continuing learning could have upon competitiveness of Romanian organizations. The main conclusion of this study is that organizations that actively promotes, facilitates and rewards the continuing learning have recorded an obvious success.

Keywords: continuing learning, learning organization, society based on knowledge, Romanian organizations.

JEL: I21, I25, P46

1. Introduction

The continuing learning is a reality and an inevitable direction for the future in society based on knowledge. The rapid pace of the occurrence of new information, of new qualifications and activity domains, which become more and more specialized and interconnected, leads to the need of the professional adaptation to new knowledge and competences. The continuous training of the human resources as a support for the economic growth

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represents the application of the principle of lifetime learning. This is represented by all the learning activities throughout lifetime, aiming at the improvement of knowledge, abilities and skills, both personally and socially.

The society based on knowledge presupposes the stimulation of continuous learning through the assimilation of knowledge of science and technique and its transformation, by virtue of use, into competitive advantage. Modern societies, which are deeply affected by globalization, need lifelong learning to progress in the context of worldwide changes such as the technological progress, technologies of knowledge and communication technologies and regional economic integration (Nicolescu, L., 2012, p. 125). In order to remain competitive, each country must develop adequate continuing learning. Most developed societies became learning and knowledge societies in which education plays an important role by being transformed into a mass process at initial stages and by emphasizing lifelong education (Green, 1997). The European countries have a special interest for the continuous formation of the human resource and the humans are more and more interested in professional development throughout their lives. Nowadays, continuing learning and continuous formation represents the most important aspect in all educational projects of developed countries. These states promote and facilitate continuing education to achieving the objective of establishing a knowledge-based community of states by promoting social cohesion, active citizenship, personal and professional fulfillment. The European Council underlined repeatedly the role of education and training regarding the long-term competitiveness of the European Union, as well as the social cohesion. Seen from this perspective, The European organizations have to develop the ability to permanently learn for to be able to respond promptly, efficiently and responsibly in front of real, concrete issues of society. We all, as individuals, have to develop the ability to permanently learn, which offers us the choice to adapt to a society that is constantly changing (Abrudan, D., Năstase, M., 2012, p. 127). Today, the offer regarding continuing learning programs is generous and aims at promoting the development of each individual's knowledge and abilities so that they can adjust themselves to the society based on knowledge. It is about innovation and creativity, independent thinking, the capacity for learning.

2. Considerations regarding lifelong learning. Significant aspects in Romania

The traditional education cannot face the knowledge amount, qualifications, jobs and activity domains, which become more and more specialized and interconnected. Contemporary society requires the formation of new attitudes and capacities for new jobs which means the development of a professional continuing education which provides new knowledges and competencies and equal opportunities of success.

Transition from school to the labor market is based on continuing education by offering the possibility to achieve and to refresh all types of abilities, interests, knowledge and qualifications, starting with the years after the initial education and finishing with the post-retirement period (Iatagan, M., 2008, p. 338). European Union defines the concept of lifelong learning as “all purposeful learning activity, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence”, as well as “all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences personal, civic and social” (<http://eurlexeuropa.eu>). Lifelong education is a form of learning and training through continuing education, e-learning and programs for those who want to improve their qualifications and their skills. This mainly means the pass from the education focused on school to the one focused on permanent learning, through programs of professional reconverting and of professional continuous training.

Up to 2007, Romania has not pay much attention to continuous training programs and these was not considered as priorities. After this period, continuous formation and the programs of professional reconverting have become a priority for many organizations. The importance of continuing learning has determined a higher interest in creating a suitable legal background, in the establishment of specialized institutionalized structures, in the diversification of offers and also in the development of a market for continuous educational programs. As a consequence of this fact, modern educational policies aim to the expansion of the continuing education concept on individual and organizational level.

Today more than ever, we are witnessing a strong need for school to be more open and close to real life from the perspective of the role that education has in the development of a socially active and responsible behavior, adequate to a society that suffers continuous change (Abrudan, D., Năstase, M., 2012, p. 139). The educational system need to permanently

adapt to demands in the work market and to develop the competencies required by a very dynamic business environment. The Romanian educational system has a educational component, addressed specially to adults, and whose purpose is lifelong learning, thru: professional training courses, master and doctoral studies. Most of the activities specific to continuous training are done by the institutions of the formal educational system (high schools, public and private accredited universities, specialized institutions). Other categories of educational services providers in lifelong learning are: professional associations and other specialized units, that are offering their services to other companies. On the other hand, within the companies that were adaptability in the relationship to the knowledge-based society, there is the idea that the only way to long term success is to involve the whole organization in creating, obtaining, accumulating, understanding and using the knowledge. On an organizational level, the objectives of the continuous training programs have targeted:

- improvement of professional competencies in accordance with all technological changes and new challenges of the society based on knowledge for the employees of the organizations that work with a highest-level technology;
- professional reconverting for the dismissed employees to get new jobs with a different qualification. If an adult learns a new skill, he will find a job and thus the unemployment rate will be reduced;
- higher qualification for the employees that do not yet work in order harmonization the knowledge and the competencies with labor market requirements. This will allow them to obtain a job more easily.

According to recent dates, the Romanian companies spend annually approximately 350 million euro for training of employees. However, Romania has still the weak performance in EU for the continuous formation of the human resource. Romania's wish to catch up with global phenomena such as economic integration, globalisation and technological progress. These phenomena require the achievement of a knowledge society supported by lifelong learning. Such a new learning culture is emerging with a new generation and it will be generalised when decision-making will be transferred in their hands, as usually new jobs, new mentalities require new people (Nicolescu L., 2012, p. 132) The investments in training and professional education of human factor represent the categorical solutions

for competency, performance and durable development of Romanian organizations. The investment growth in education and forming as well as a rethinking process of the educational programs are mandatory for rising quality and relevance of adult continuing education and of professional forming system. Romania must involve more responsible into the process of education and training human resources lifelong, in order to be able to actively participate in developing of knowledge based society. Today, the organisations have require higher and higher levels of knowledge for their employees. The labour must be prepared to be flexible and companies' survival depends on their ability to develop the knowledge and skills of employees. For this reason, the firms should focus more on fostering creative ideas, on facilitating interactions and information sharing among their employees (Dragomir, C., 2013, p. 82).

Future belongs to companies that have focused on the values of permanent training, because such companies know how to manage their intellectual capital by generalizing the process of lifelong learning and permanent training. It is about innovation and creativity, independent thinking, the capacity for learning. Knowledge and continuing learning are the key to our future life standards, Romania, therefore, need to be more inventive, innovate more and react better to market trends (Tîtu, M., Oprean, C., Răulea, A., 2016, p. 176).

3. About learning organizations in contemporary society

The capacity of organizations to adapt to the requirements of the future economy depends largely on the stimulation of continuous learning and development of knowledge. The changes imposed by the dynamics of the new requirements of the knowledge based society lead to the development of a new organizational model, capable to develop and use the creative potential of employees, to structure new responsibilities regarding the creation, management and dissemination of knowledge. Today the organizations require higher and higher levels of knowledge for their employees. The concept of learning organization is linked of the organizations that experimented new ways of conducting business in order to survive in turbulent, highly competitive markets (Izvercianu, 2002, p. 158). The development of this type of organization, preoccupied with the investments in educating and continuing training of the personnel, is imposed by the contemporary society which confronts with a continuously

increasing demand of qualifications, specializations, abilities and high competencies in all activity areas. Moreover, we need the learning organizations because we want superior performance and competitive advantage and to increase our ability to manage change (Figure 1).

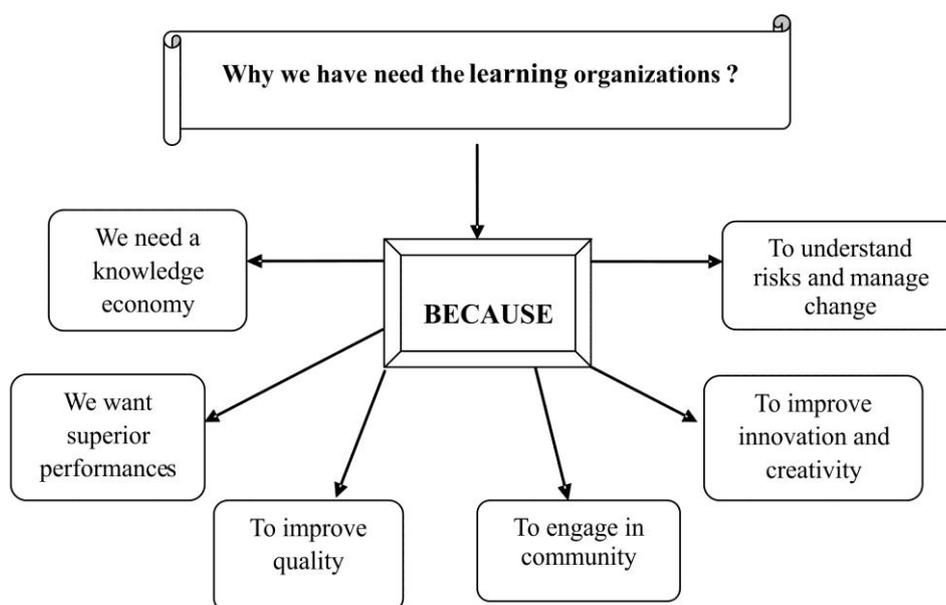
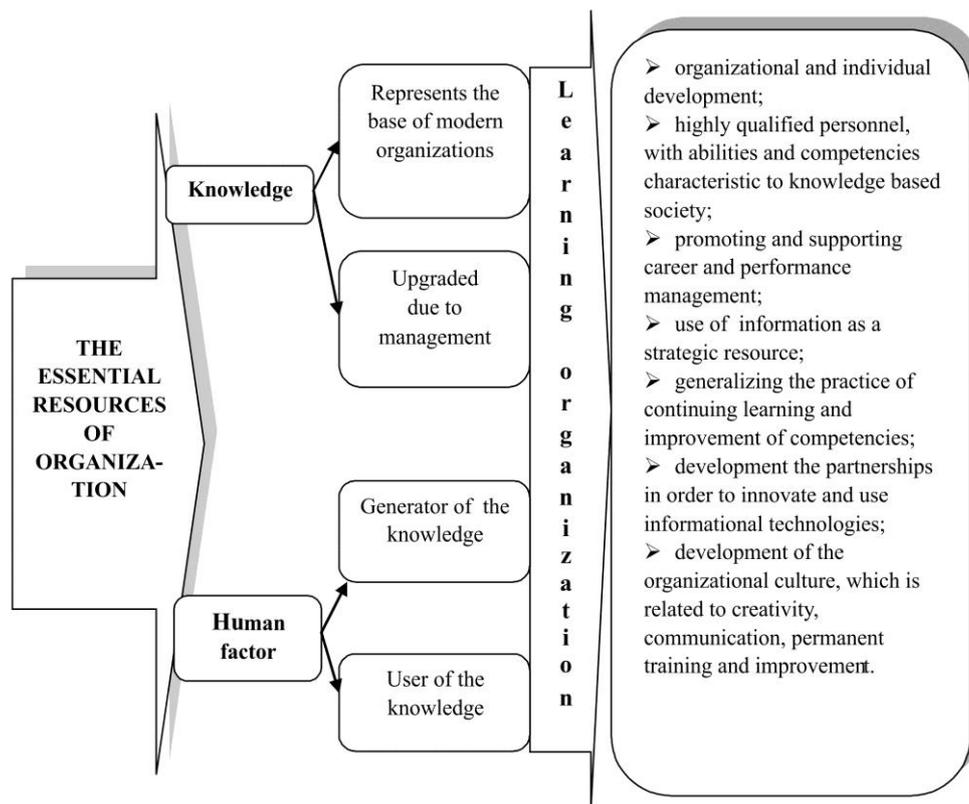


Figure 1. The need for learning organizations

A learning organization actively promotes, facilitates and rewards the continuing learning. This type of organization goes through of changing processes with immediate effects on its capacity to create, bring about and use efficiently the new information. All these changes exert a supplementary pressure upon the organizations, because they trigger solid investments in education in order to improve the professional standards. The managers of such organizations are highly aware of the role and the value of the continuing training in the market competition and they are interested in creating, bringing in and using of the knowledge and advanced technologies within their organizations (Dragomir, C., 2013, p. 85). The features of learning organizations are complex and refers to permanent training, to the utilization, development and partition of knowledge in order to innovate and use the

informational technologies etc. On the whole, the characteristics of the learning organizations are presented in Figure 2.



Source: Dragomir, C., *Review of General Management*, vol. 17, issue 1, 2013, p. 79

Figure 2. Characteristics of learning organizations

Today, the organizations require higher levels of knowledge for their employees. Regarded from this perspective, continuing education and professional training is a good investment as it leads to higher productivity of the employees and their harmonization with all structural and technological changes that appear throughout the lifetime of an organization. The learning organizations know how to manage their intellectual capital by generalizing the process of education and continuing

training and assimilating of new knowledge and their transformation, by virtue of use, into competitive advantage. One cannot promote and develop this type of organizations without developing permanent continuing learning and training programs. They are very complex actions, but absolutely necessary for the functioning of a competitive economy.

The ability of the organizations to adapt to the society based on knowledge is given by their attitude towards knowledge and education, as an essential condition of success. The employees will learn to express ideas, to assume learning as an continuing process (Popa, B., 2008, p. 118). A learning organization is one that seeks to create its own future and one that develops, adapts, and transforms itself in response to the needs and aspirations of people.

Romanian organisations must have the capacity to adapt to the requirements of society based on knowledge, by developing the new methods of instruction, by lifelong learning, permanent training and improving the specialized knowledge. With few exceptions, in the Romanian organizations is not a motivation for a culture of lifelong learning. There is no doubt that it is required a mentality change as far as the professional formation, in the sense of increasing the awareness level towards the importance of continuing learning, of the motivation degree for knowledge expansion and the development of the people competencies (Abrudan and Nastase, 2012, p. 134). With all these aspects taken into account, the future belongs to companies that focused on the values of permanent training, because such companies know how to manage their intellectual capital by generalizing the process of lifelong learning and permanent training. Creative ideas and innovative solutions are found to be crucial for attracting new investment.

Conclusion

The contemporary society, that permanently changes and renews itself, confronts with a continuously increasing demand of qualifications, specializations, abilities and competencies in all activity areas. In order to face these challenges even the best organizations have to change, to become learning organizations.

A learning organization can exist only with improvement of professional competencies in accordance with all technological changes and new challenges of the society based on knowledge. The labor must be prepared to

be flexible and the companies one cannot develop without promote the continuing learning and training programs. Therefore, the continuing learning is a reality and an inevitable direction for the future in economy based on knowledge.

Regarding of the Romanian organizations, the rethinking process of investment growth in continuing education and professional formation is obligatory. As we have already shown, Romania must involve more responsible into the process of continuing education and training human resources lifelong, in order to be able to actively participate in developing of knowledge based society. The process of change is still in progress. Although the capacity of development depends on a great many factors, the innovation and harnessing creativity are by far the most important. These requires investments in development of new knowledge and competencies that can bring new and sustainable solutions and benefits to our organizations. Learning organizations know how to manage their intellectual capital by generalizing the process of education and continuing training and assimilating of new knowledge and their transformation, by virtue of use, into competitive advantage. Romanian organizations, therefore, must be prepared In order to face the new challenges, to be more inventive, innovate more and react better to contemporary society trends.

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