

LIFELONG LEARNING: STRATEGIC KEY IN HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

PhD. Student **Radu STOIKA**
National Agency for Community Programmes
in the Field of Education and Vocational Training

ABSTRACT

New millennium brings with it a series of lawsuits prefigured at the end of last century, but now receives special amplitude. Among these we could identify: the process of globalization, high professionalism of the human resources, informatization of society, post-industrialization, growth in the scale of the services of health, etc. If you follow the evolution of prestige scales in developed countries, we can see a change in the way of assessing the contribution of functional occupations as a result of the focus that was placed in a different time or on a specific direction for the development. 'Knowledge management' and 'life-long learning' are terms which highlight the increasing importance in developed economies of creating, sustaining and sharing knowledge. Many studies show that in the future one from three employees in Europe will work directly in the production and propagation of knowledge across both the manufacturing and service sectors.

KEYWORDS: *lifelong learning, knowledge, management*

The notion of the knowledge society is used today to represent the ongoing changes to the economic base of industrialized countries. Knowledge is regarded as the new dominant economic resource, emphasizing the fact that an organization's most valuable asset is intangible, namely its human and social capital, and that within this knowledge and creativity are key factors.

Taking into account that there are many definitions of -knowledge management-term, I consider that, in this context, it can be defined as a concept in which an enterprise consciously and comprehensively gathers, organizes, shares, and analyses its -knowledge-in terms of resources, documents, and people skills. Put more simply, knowledge management seeks to make the best use of the knowledge that is available to an organization, creating new knowledge in the process. At company level, three main areas of action emerge, namely:

- the management of information and communication technologies,
- the research and development domain and
- competence management (including initial occupational training and corporate continuous training).

These three fields of action will in future determine the competitiveness of companies, and national and supranational economic regions. At the level of global marketplace where knowledge is a valuable commodity, organizations should give consideration to their own knowledge needs.

In the human capital market place, companies must recognize the importance of in sourcing for example encouraging the flow of knowledgeable labor into an organization and then using it appropriately.

Intellectual capital incorporates the intangible assets of an organization. It is the product of interactions between three components: human capital, organization-related capital (structural capital) (processes, procedures, culture, databases) and relationship capital (customer relationships, supplier relationships, other external stakeholder relationships). Still organizations need to consider how to supply the roots of intellectual capital within them, rather than concentrating everything in obtaining immediate profit. In this analogy, organizational culture is the growing medium in which knowledge can develop, be shared and sustained, and organizations must recognize that it is very important to maintain a renewal or innovation process or else knowledge and afterwards the organization will disappear from the market.

The importance of cultivating human capital and knowledge within an organization is becoming increasingly well understood. However, if an organization have developed an intellectual capital, it is not enough if it did not have accurate processes in place which enable that knowledge and human resource to be well supported at every moment. Regarding all that presented before it results that knowledge development have a greater significance and importance than knowledge management. An important concern in this kind of society is the growing number of adult people without formal educational qualification.

The concept of lifelong learning encompasses the totality of all formal, non-formal and informal learning over the whole life-cycle of an individual and is seen as an individual, corporate and social investment. In the corporate environment lifelong learning starts with initial vocational training, then continues with ongoing training and includes all informal kind of learning processes within the framework of every day work organization.

Important instruments for ensuring that the time-related conditions for life-long learning after initial induction can be created are "learning time accounts". Institutions in which are introduced "learning time accounts" have a high level of participation in training.

These two concepts -knowledge and learning - can operate effectively and efficiently in the corporate environment if they are aligned to the corporate goals and targets and they are a part of the general management process. Taking into account the outcomes of the social and economic changes of the preceding periods, the -lifelong learning- as a theory which could improve human resources came into focus at the end of the 20th century. In contrast to the new education, which emphasizes personality and self-definition, the interpretation of lifelong learning theory stresses the process of adaptation to different socio-economic and political changes. The requirements for lifelong learning are explained by the new economical and technical development and the permanent changed demand on the market of human resources. Following the conditions of the new market economy it is identified a very important need: human resources of adequate quality. These will allow creating and maintaining full social employment. This quality of the work force needs to be evaluated and developed lastingly according to the demands of the economic system.

In the creation of a learning society, knowledge is the indispensable condition of the exploitation of the reserves residing in human resources. These targets can be achieved only by the realization of lifelong learning. By now the role of knowledge has become incontestable in economic development. This role will grow even more important in the future, and knowledge is the key that will become the essential one in production at the expense of the classical work and capital. The idea of lifelong learning was first outlined in 1973 by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development in the concept Recurrent Education - a strategy for lifelong learning as the most important factor of social well being. According to this strategy, work education and learning are said to play a

double role: on the one hand they are the driving power of economic growth; on the other hand they are the tools for achieving it.

Taking into account the strong relationship between lifelong learning and human resources development, described by the proportion of knowledge-intensive products and production process increases continuously; the investments in human resources play an increasing role as opposed to leveraged investments; the demand for a highly educated workforce increases; the ability to actively and independently gather and process information becomes a key competence, leads to an increased level of prosperity in the whole society. Finally this will result in a brand new, growing demand for highly qualified manpower which in turn will make constant education – learning indispensable. To remain in this view, we can appreciate that in this future knowledge based society, only those who are ready to learn permanently and process good learning abilities will be able to remain competitive. According to the concept of lifelong learning as a human resource developer, individuals will be able to adequately react to the social, political and economic changes through continuous learning.

However, education policy concepts promoting lifelong learning have set as their objective not only the development of the individual ability to accommodate themselves to various change, but the active formation of economic and political changes, and preparation for influencing their direction and speed.

According to the European Commission, the scale of current economic and social change, the rapid transition to a knowledge-based society and demographic pressures resulting from an ageing population in Europe are all challenges which demand a new approach to education and training, within the framework of lifelong learning.

Lifelong learning is defined as “all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective.”

Lifelong learning is therefore about:

1. Acquiring and updating all kinds of abilities, interests, knowledge and qualifications from the pre-school years to postretirement. It promotes the development of knowledge and competences that will enable each citizen to adapt to the knowledge-based society and actively participate in all spheres of social and economic life, taking more control of his or her future.
2. Valuing all forms of learning, including: formal learning, such as a degree course followed at university; non-formal learning, such as vocational skills acquired at the workplace; and informal learning, such as inter-generational learning, for example where parents learn to use ICT through their children, or learning how to play an instrument together with friends.

The European Commission specifies that learning opportunities should be available to all citizens on an ongoing basis. In practice this should mean that citizens each have individual learning pathways, suitable to their needs and interests at all stages of their lives. The content of learning, the way learning is accessed, and where it takes place may vary depending on the learner and their learning requirements.

Lifelong learning is also about providing second chances to update basic skills and to offer learning opportunities at more advanced levels. All this means that formal systems of provision need to become much more open and flexible, so that such opportunities can truly be tailored to the needs of the learner, or indeed the potential learner.

Taking into account also the severity of the actual financial crisis adds an exceptional degree of unpredictability about the future of the world’s economy – yet in order to put Europe on the road to recovery it is essential to enhance human capital and

employability by upgrading skills. But upgrading skills is not enough: ensuring a better match between the supply of skills and labor market demand is just as necessary. Skills upgrading is critically important for Europe's short-term recovery and longer term growth and productivity, for its jobs and its capacity to adapt to change, for equity, gender equality and social cohesion.

In the context of an increasing competition for buying up highly qualified workforce in general, the crystallization of an education system at European level and its correlation with the development demand of the labor force is necessary as the sole alternative.

References

1. Kealey, D.J., Protheroe, D.R., MacDonald, D, Vulpe, T. Instituting a Competency-Based Training Design and Evaluation System, *Performance Improvement*, Vol. 42, no.5, May/June 2003;
2. Detailed Work Programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe – “Council of the European Union”, Brussels, 20 February 2002; COM (2001) 501 final;
3. European Commission (2007), From Bergen to London -The contribution of the European Commission to the Bologna Process, Brussels,7 May 2007;
4. Rudiger, K and McVerry, A (2007), Exploiting Europe’s Knowledge Potential: “Good Work” or “Could do Better”. Knowledge Work and Knowledge Workers in Europe. *The Work Foundation*, London, 9 November 2007.
5. European Commission (2008), New Skills for New Jobs Anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs, Brussels, 6 December 2008.