

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – A PREREQUISITE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ORGANISATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

Carmen SANDU (TODERAȘCU)

Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iasi, Romania
carmenoderascu@gmail.com

Bogdan Constantin NECULAU

Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iasi, Romania
bogdan.neculau@yahoo.fr

Motto:

Every individual's lifetime is a school from the cradle to the grave.

(Jan Amos Comenius)

Abstract: *The option for a knowledge-based society requires investment in the development of human resources so as to encourage employees to acquire new skills and accept occupational mobility. At the same time, it is important to promote work quality during recruitment and develop learning strategies and continuing professional development ones for the benefit of the many. The work shows the most important results of the analysis conducted on the topic of continuing professional development – as a sine qua non condition for the development of organizations. By using a complex methodology that included various research instruments and by investigating multiple categories of actors, we aimed at a theoretical analysis of the policy framework, the means to implement them and the impact categories of continuing professional development in the context of a knowledge-based society. Our approach particularly focuses on the formation experience of employees (public and private institutions) and will be further completed by the perspective of other types of beneficiaries. At the moment, the problem of human resources competitiveness is a main area of intervention on the short term against the background of Romania's efforts to counteract the effects of the world crisis.*

Keywords: *professional development, continuing education, knowledge society, organisation, public and private institutions*

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INTRODUCTION

Instruction or professional training is essential for the success of any productive modern organization, irrespective of the field of activity. It is widely acknowledged by all social actors that school, as main factor responsible for the achievement of systematic and continuing

education, can no longer ensure sufficient training for the individual (both at personal and professional level) during his/ her entire life. Initial training is no longer enough.

We encounter more and more often the idea of continuing professional development, a concept that does not have a tradition in the Romanian society (Neculau A, 2004). However, to tackle it at a conceptual level and in action is natural for the individual that needs to face the greater and greater challenges of the society of knowledge; this is a society that grows rapidly, with an unprecedented rhythm of change that needs to be understood; within it, people often face complex situations so they require training, adaptability and decisional ability.

The volume of knowledge acquired by the individual in school is no longer enough for his/ her entire life and s/he needs to acquire new skills and professional, cultural and scientific abilities in agreement with the developments of science and technology, as well as the new social requirements.

In what follows, we will present three of its major features, features that continuing professional development should consider as they led to its emergence:

- the boom of information and technology, the complexity of the phenomena of modern society which require the most varied knowledge and skills. The individual needs to acquire memorizing, assimilation and selection skills.

- Contemporary society is dynamic and under constant innovation. Thus, we speak of a so-called social dynamic that requires adaptability and no reluctance to the new situations that occur.

- There is the need to train individuals with skills, abilities, cognitive-applicative-practical competencies capable to think, solve problems in a rhythm characterized by efficiency and effectiveness.

Permanent education which includes initial and continuing development has two main components: a general and a professional one which are strongly related between them, with the role of improving the standard of life (Dave, R.H., 1973). Moreover, as an essential condition, self-education (Gr. “autos” –oneself and Lat. “educatio” – self education) mean activity, man’s desire to continuously develop his/ her personality, creativity and the professional and decisional ability. The desire, skills and self-education skills have to be implemented and developed in school.

Lifelong learning – attribute of the society of knowledge

We often asked ourselves whether we have a social and organisational culture that is appropriate for the implementation/ development of lifelong learning. Probably not, if we consider the fact that Romanians are the EU citizens with the lowest level of lifelong learning based on the study of European Lifelong Learning Indicators, particularly since EU allocated less than 7 billion Euros for it 2007-2013. It is very clear that the approach of lifelong learning (under all its shapes)in the Romanian society is a priority.

Lifelong learning has multiple benefits: psycho-social, educational, moral, etc. According to the legislation, this type of education aims at the development of the person and of the sustainable society to their full extent (Law of National Education no.1/2011, art.329, par.1). In other words, lifelong learning brings benefits not only to the individual, but also to the society as a whole. The idea is not new. Even since the antiquity, Aristotle drew attention to the fact that

education needs to be one of the main concerns of law makers. In fact, the provisions of the Memorandum on lifelong learning drafted by the European Commission in October 2000 that continues the initiative of the European Council and Lisbon to implement lifelong learning for all remind us of the need for a significant increase of the level of investment in human resources in view of valuing the most important European resource, namely its people.

Certainly, continuing education needs to consider the dynamic and ever changing interests of the individual, of the community and professional organisation. Each has its profile (needs, resources, addressability) and needs to learn to develop his/ her own potential. Development culture and change management should be adjustable to reach performance. It seems that in times of change and instability, people are more aware of the need of continuing professional development to face new challenges and contribute to the stability of the workplace and the improvement of professional activity (Gherguț, 2007, p.165). To support our arguments, we will quote Nicolae Iorga who claimed that “an educated man is the one that constantly learns and teaches things to others” and “it is really dangerous to be satisfied with your progress”.

We often deal with a clash of values seen as that “way of being or acting that a person or a group acknowledges as ideal and that makes people, groups or behaviours who have it to be considered good or respectable” (G. Ferréol, Jucquois, 2005); this is because we need guidelines, competence and performance to help us become noticed in a globalising world. We should also keep in mind that a respectful system does not only pass on values, but also purports to change attitudes, mindsets, behaviours for a better personal, social and professional life (Neculau, 2004). (Continuing) education is the key to success in this social and organisational competition. This education that interdependently comprises all aspects and dimensions of education, the resulting whole being more than the sum of its parts, that sum of influences exerted on the individual that accepts them and makes the best of them. In fact, a main feature of education is the one that only deals with the positive dimension of learning.

To reach performance in the knowledge-based society also means not to have the ambition to give up, to go further, to overpass limits and have an organisational culture with a vision towards performance and development. To support these desires, continuing development is a reality that cannot be avoided. This is a reality we wish to encounter beyond the rigour of laws, regulations, methodologies which are more or less efficient, in other words, beyond the constraints given by the obligation of doing something. Continuing professional development should be the concern of all those that respect their profession and themselves.

However, we plead for a value selection of the opportunities for continuing development according to the peculiarities of the target group, the employer’s needs, the gaps (i.e. improvement and amelioration as purpose for training activities), and availability. At the level of strategies and contents, professional development should have in view the significance and reconsideration of methods, means, ends, the needs of the organisation and individual, contents included. We also speak of a reform at the level of continuing development according to social, political, economic, legislative changes and the need of education for all and every individual in part; this encourages suppliers to come with a wide range of options, and motivate the individual for his/ her permanent development.

Organisational culture needs to consider continuing development which may lead to increased professional performance, success and we well know that success makes in

individual's level of aspiration (Sălăvăstru, 2004, p.82). The effect will show in personal performances and implicitly in the organisational ones.

Also, investments in human capital are considered as "allies" of the policies needed to ensure sustainable economic growth. They help mitigate the worst consequences of poverty: disease and malnutrition, and provides opportunities for individuals to improve their living conditions (Petrisor, MB, 2014).

Stages of continuing professional development

The internalisation of commerce, the global context of technology and, above all, the knowledge-based society increased the possibilities to gain access to information and knowledge. At the same time, their consequences showed in the change of the way work and required competencies are organized. This tendency led to higher uncertainty for all people and for an intolerable situation of exclusion for some of them.

Professional development is financed from the following sources: employees' personal funds, the budget of unemployment insurance for the unemployed, sponsorship, donations, external sources, taxes for people taking part in continuing development programmes.

Companies and other institutions may incur expenses with employees' professional development that are deduced from profit or income tax (Cigu E., 2014, p.87). Participation to professional development may occur at the employer's or employees' initiative. The concrete means of its establishment is agreed by and between the parties when an addendum is signed to the employment agreement.

The employer needs to ensure the participation to professional training programmes for all employees at least every two years if they have at least 21 employees and once every three years if the number is below 21.

In case the participation to courses or professional development is initiated by the employer, all participation expenses are supported by him and the employee will gain seniority in work; all incurred expenses are supported by the employer and the employee will also be paid the salary.

The employee that benefited from a course/ professional development training whose expenses were incurred by the employer cannot terminate the employment agreement within the definite period stipulated by the addendum. In case the provision is breached, the employee will incur all his/ her costs of professional training corresponding to the period during which s/he has not worked according to his/ her employment agreement. Moreover, the employee that was fired will incur these costs for disciplinary reasons for the period set by addendum.

If the employee has the initiative to take part in professional development training with suspension, the employer will analyse the request along with the union/ the employees' representative and will reply within 15 days, informing the employee on the conditions s/he will incur with the professional training, if necessary. According to the law, the employer is not compelled to agree to the request, yet a refusal with no grounds may be qualified as an abuse that may give the employee the right to claim damages.

CONCLUSIONS

Each company may have its own options with respect to the means of investment in the human resources it has at its disposal in view of their development from a professional viewpoint within the conditions of the legislative framework. A major influence factor in adapting the company's policy to the field of professional development is its capacity of investment which is directly related to the number of employees, the type of capital invested, the field of activity, human resources management and the personnel's availability and motivation for personal development. To identify the companies' position towards the support of employees in view of their personal development, it is necessary to account for the attention given to the evaluation of the needs for formation, the strategies of development and the priorities of continuing professional development of employees. Evaluating the employees' needs of professional development is a must, but this is not enough for their professional development and the increase of company productivity and competitiveness.

Training or instruction that is inadequate and misplaced does not serve anyone; it is neither good for the employer, or to the organization. The organization decides for the most appropriate approach which, at a certain time, is to employ experienced professionals and not to invest in continuing development. But any decision taken on the strategy of continuing professional development needs to be considered to a maximum extent so that is part of a systematic and planned programme and not left to chance.

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