



## CONTEMPORARY APPROACH TO EDUCATION IN ORGANIZATIONS<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract:

In order to successfully meet the requirements of the knowledge-based economy, organizations turn more and more to the knowledge they possess, its application at the right time and in the right way, and all that with the aim to improve their business processes, achieve efficiency and quality in business and customer satisfaction. The topic of this research are organizations that strive for change and that rely on their knowledge and skills in order to become competitive, fast, and innovative, to create efficient knowledge to maximize their success, respond to the challenges of the knowledge-based economy and transform into a knowledge-based organization.

### Key words:

knowledge,  
knowledge-based organizations,  
knowledge sharing,  
education.

## INTRODUCTION

The modern world is facing an ongoing progress of education requirements from the standpoint of work. If we start from the fact that an organization is a social system with a structure, consisting of groups and individuals who work together to achieve a certain goal, it is obvious that an organization consists of structured social units, such as individuals and groups that are trying to achieve a common goal that is unreachable without additional education, trend monitoring. Generations of adults are inferior to generations of upcoming young people with different, and more customized education. The demand for specialization, that is, for a specialist as

a carrier of certain work, is growing ever more. We may speak of a transition from mandatory education to mandatory learning. Mandatory learning as an intellectual need and stimulus implies a certain level of education and competencies in the technology of individual learning and intellectual work in general. According to Peter Drucker (2004), knowledge is becoming the only significant resource and the traditional factors of production – natural resources, workforce and capital – have not disappeared but have become secondary as they can be easily obtained when there is knowledge. Excellent organizations are those that are constantly learning and they are very interested in education and invest enormous funds in order to provide education and training to as many employees as possible.

Education is no longer a privilege of those in higher positions and professionals, but it is gradually becoming a responsibility for everyone. Radical changes demand generative learning, which means abandoning old and introducing new competences. If we want to be ready for the future, we must build a partnership between education and economy, be-

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tween education and market economy. Due to international competition, organizations must be very efficient and aware of quality issues. The lesson for the future is: merely good quality is not the same as good enough (Grinberg and Baron, 1998). The question is how to train the employees to enable them to successfully respond to the challenges they face, and how to motivate them to produce or offer high quality goods and services. Constant education is becoming one of the most important ways to manage and develop human resources. It is noted that it is necessary to constantly improve knowledge and competencies as an organization builds its capacities through active and continuous learning. All members of an organization must improve and develop themselves, for it is a rule that the organization advances together with the development of its employees (Babić, 2009). Learning increases knowledge as a prerequisite for effective and efficient actions. It is important and necessary that the organizations and individuals in those organizations develop mechanisms for storing and retrieving information on what they have learned for the well-being of the organization.

The aim of this paper is to examine the relations between education and success of modern organizations. Therefore, we shall start from the strategic significance of education for organizations; then we shall attempt to describe knowledge-based organizations, how to manage the flow of knowledge, and which methods of knowledge sharing are in use. Finally, we shall present a model of education management in an organization and the results of research that imply the significance of education and knowledge sharing in an organization.

## EDUCATION AS A STRATEGIC GOAL

Continuous learning is becoming the only path to change, innovation and development. Education in an organization should be based on a systematic way of acquisition and development of knowledge, skills and attitudes that employees should have so that they could do their job in the working environment in an adequate or in an improved manner. (Latham, 1988). Education has a greater impact when it is related to the business strategy of an organization (Tharenou *et al.* 2007). This indicates that an organization should function as an integral organism in which every process makes sense only as a part of a whole. A demand for an organization

to function as a unified whole is also confirmed by the results of the research that the effect of education is more pronounced when it is paired with the overall human resource management policy (Guerrero and Barraud-Didier, 2004).

Scientific organization of work is increasingly more accepted in both science and practice. The traditional organization of work, which emerged under the wings of the industrial revolution, is exceeded and a flexible organization which influences flexible education is being made. Modern European society is exposed to technological, demographic and political pressures that require changes, which creates potential learning situations for everyone. In order for an organization to be focused on learning, it must implement the following recommendations:

- ◆ learning is an integral part of the work;
- ◆ skills of executors in other work activities are also learned, in order to achieve the flexibility of work;
- ◆ communication between employees is empowered as a prerequisite for learning from each other;
- ◆ learning becomes an integral part of communication between employees, and managers are increasingly assuming the role of a coach

## KNOWLEDGE-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

An organization can be described as successful if it is competitive, ready to change, flexible, global by its very nature and future-oriented. Creating a strategic advantage in the field of knowledge-based economy requires a new organization that is able to create knowledge in order to maximize organizational competitiveness and strategic success. Modern organizations view knowledge as a key resource for organizational existence and success in the global market (Gupta and Sharma, 2004). Experience has shown that a knowledge-based organization must have four basic characteristics that are related to process, position, purpose and perspective (Zack, 2003). Process is related to all business activities that take place within the organization, some of which are directly included in production or service providing, while the others are ancillary activities. In this sense, the organization pays special attention to the efficient application of knowledge that already exists in the organization and the creation of new knowledge. Position refers to organizational boundaries which, in order to share and create knowledge, often



exceed traditional boundaries of the organization. Organizations are becoming more and more aware of the fact that knowledge is created and shared in daily interactions with clients, sellers, partners and even competitors.

Organizational boundaries are today vague, flexible and dynamic. Organizations are seeking knowledge, wherever it may be. The purpose includes the mission and the strategy of an organization, or the way in which an organization will successfully and profitably serve its clients. Perspective refers to social and cultural impact that influences decisions and activities of an organization and relies on knowledge as a standpoint. In order for an organization to be successful in the knowledge economy and obtain its competitive advantage, it must constantly increase its value using the knowledge it possesses. The potential of an organization to create additional value, so called *KnoVa* – knowledge value factor, in the economy of knowledge depends on two crucial elements: level of service an organization provides and the intensity of knowledge usage; and the level in which an organization uses knowledge to produce a product or provide service. In that sense, for an organization to be characterized as an *KnoVa* organization, it must have six main abilities (Tisen *et al.* 2006): ability to produce, ability to respond, ability to predict, ability to create, ability to learn and the ability to last. The *KnoVa* factor is important because it shows that an organization is directed towards service level improvement as well as the improvement of current knowledge regarding the activities it offers. The success will depend on the bi-directional activity in which service level as well as the level and content of knowledge are increased in order to enable the organization to achieve higher quality of services.

Based on the foregoing, we can reach the conclusion that the basic skills of knowledge-based organization are:

- ♦ innovation;
- ♦ the ability to adapt to new surroundings by adopting feedback from its clients and partners, *ie.* responding fast to the wishes of a client by transferring information into knowledge that will be used in a way to bring new value to the client;
- ♦ applying best practices and implementing ideas of employees which may improve the decision- making process and contribute to organizational efficiency;

- ♦ adopting team work as a main way of doing business and a way of learning and knowledge sharing;
- ♦ reducing time cycles, if and when possible, *ie.* eliminating unnecessary processes, and maximizing those that may contribute to the improvement of their efficiency;
- ♦ using technology that will improve efficiency and knowledge sharing, along with the improvement of service quality;
- ♦ establishing balance between management and team work, but also the autonomy and control.

## MANAGING THE FLOW OF KNOWLEDGE

In order to understand the significance of knowledge for doing business in a modern organization, one must start from understanding the flow of knowledge inside the organization and regularities of such movements. This also implies greater possibilities for successful knowledge management within the organization in order to improve its efficiency. The concept of knowledge chain (Koulopoulous *et al.* 2006) is crucial for understanding the movement and development of knowledge within an organization. According to that concept, there are four links in the knowledge chain that affect the uniqueness, specificity and efficiency of an organization. Those are: internal awareness, internal responsibilities, external responsibilities and external awareness.

Internal awareness is the ability of an organization to assess skills and competences it has in a short period of time. This includes being familiar with the talents organization has, know-how, processes, and common practice. The strong internal awareness is focused not only on the challenges of what has been done, but also on what is possible to do in the future. Internal responsibilities include the ability of an organization to use its internal awareness. An organization may be aware of its strengths and the requirements of the market, but if it is not able to make adequate changes within itself in order to meet the ever changing market requirements, its competences are disputable. Internal responsibilities discuss how quick an organization can turn its competences into action in order to respond to the demands of the market and customers. External responsibilities represent the ability of an organization to meet the market requirements in the best possible way. External responsibilities are measured



by the ability to respond to external chances and threats efficiently and on time. External awareness is the reflection of internal awareness and it represents the ability of an organization to understand how the market perceives the value of its products and services, to become conversant with the customers and service users, consider their demands, determine the market trends, government regulations and other market forces that exist beyond the organization

The chain of knowledge in an organization is always a blend of positive and negative attributes. In those organizations that are guided by knowledge management, all of the listed links are flexible and allow knowledge transfer among each other. Actually, the importance of a knowledge chain is that through its interactions it leads to series of innovations in an organization. The greater the permeability between the links, the greater the speed of innovations within an organization. Also, the success of an organization is measured by the speed of knowledge flow through all four links of knowledge chain within the organization.

## KNOWLEDGE SHARING METHODS

But what happens in practice? What is the knowledge flow within an organization like and what problems may occur if the links in the knowledge chain are not permeable enough? There are numerous situations. For instance, a greater number of employees, groups or departments can deal with same problems, but none of them is aware of the actions of the other. As a result, they face the issue of duplication of work, or it may happen that one team has developed a highly effective system for handling the certain issue, but the employees in other parts of the same organization are not familiar with this method because there is no official knowledge transfer policy. As a consequence, the knowledge cannot be used and is quickly forgotten. Another example is the situation when the employees failed in negotiations with a potential client, but the reason for such failure has not been documented. As a result, other employees cannot learn from this experience. A very frequent situation is that the customer has some complaints about services quality, but at the same time he gives suggestions for their improvement. This kind of information is neither stored nor accessible in an adequate way, and thus, there is no way for it to be transferred to appropriate departments within the organization.

As a result, information obtained in this way cannot be used to improve the business processes. Situation that most often concerns the employers and managers is certainly the one in which an employee leaves the organization. His knowledge has not been saved, nor transferred to other employees, and thus, it becomes permanently lost.

In order to avoid the above mentioned situations, it is necessary to apply some of the numerous methods of knowledge management which are being more and more used in practice. Namely, knowledge management is the concept that puts special emphasis on the knowledge within an organization and it consists of phases of creating, acquiring, saving, sharing and applying the knowledge (Sydänmaanlakka, 2002). This paper puts special emphasis on the phase of sharing and the methods we believe can provide formal implementation of knowledge management programme, or at least, inspire the listed participants of this process to share their knowledge and improve business in their work fields using their creative ideas. We highlight the following methods:

- ◆ Communities of Practice (CoP) is a network of people who share common interests or problems in a specific area of competences and who are ready to work together for a certain period of time, and to learn, develop and share that knowledge. Briefly, communities of practice represent a group of people who share the same passion for their field of business and cooperate in order to learn to do their job in the best possible way. In the field of public administration, this form of connecting and sharing is very useful if certain conditions are met: active members who are actively interested in CoP and their topics; the existence of a specific thematic orientation that should be relevant and important for the members; connection to members' own practice; personal motivation and informal structure. Even though this method of knowledge sharing usually implies using the Internet, it sometimes appears in practice in a form of direct meetings of participants.
- ◆ After Action Review (AAR) is a very simple process used in teams to enable them to learn from some previous experience or project, with the aim to improve the overall results. Most commonly, it is a discussion about the project or activities conducted in the appropriate area. This method gives team members an opportunity to review a





project, activities that have been conducted, tasks that have been done, so that they could be more efficient in their future projects. This method enables the participants involved in a project to learn from their own experience and discuss what happened and why something happened, what they can learn from that and what should be improved. The main characteristics of this method are openness and learning, rather than problem solving and determining the guilt.

- ◆ Yellow Pages is a method of knowledge sharing that is supposed to provide an answer to the following question: Who is the person that has the knowledge I need? This method helps the employees to find other employees in their own or some other institution, in this case public administration that have the knowledge and skills needed for a certain task or project. Experience has shown that the electronic form is far more better than the written form. It enables the organizations to “know what they know”. Along with the data on employees, such as their name and surname, position in the company, contact information, this database should also include information on their knowledge, skills, experiences, interests, and even social and professional associations they belong to. This method provides clear, concise and simple communication between employees, which is the foundation of knowledge-based organizations.
- ◆ Exit Interviews. Employee’s departure represents the common way of losing knowledge in an institution. This method implies an interview with the “departing employee” as a way of keeping his knowledge. If well-planned, this interview can be a win-win situation for the organization and the former employee – the organization keeps the knowledge of the departing employee and makes it available to others, and the former employee manages to define his unique contribution to the organization and leave “his signature”. This is a relatively fast and not so expensive method. The recommended form is “face to face”.
- ◆ Mentoring. A mentor is a person with experience who is willing, capable and in the mood to teach and train a person with less knowledge in a certain area – due to the age, experience in another irrelevant area, *etc.* The purpose of this method is to develop skills, improve the organization and its culture and enable career development. The sole presence of mentorship in practice, not only in organizations but in the whole society, thro-

ughout the history, confirms its good sides as a very efficient method of knowledge sharing.

- ◆ Wikis. More and more organizations use the so called “wikis” as a means of knowledge sharing. Wikis are on-line databases that can be complemented and changed easily by using any of the existing web browsers. The most famous wiki today is, certainly, the on-line encyclopedia Wikipedia. However, a large number of organizations, from Microsoft to FBI, use wikis to collect the knowledge of their employees and create a space where they can meet and cooperate on various issues, from planning the meetings, documenting the best practice, to brainstorming new products and processes. The strength of this method is in the simplicity of its use and the fact that it allows everyone to make their contribution to upgrading this database (Krabina, 2011).

## EDUCATION MANAGEMENT IN AN ORGANIZATION

Education management in an organization should be guided by objective data that could be gathered only by using the appropriate scientific techniques (Babić *et al.* 2010). All relevant phenomena that are being examined should be clearly defined, well-operationalized and instruments to measure them should be found. When doing research on education in an organization, it is necessary to prepare a model that management would use to collect the necessary data in the most objective way. This paper presents a proposed model that emerged based on the research results (Babić, 2009) and that can be used in practice to manage education by resolving the following issues:

- 1) Specify the position that education assumes within an organization – compatibility with the strategy, relations with the human resource management policy.
- 2) Adjust the education programme to the needs of employees.
- 3) Prepare the educators to meet the expectations of managers, as well as the expectations of the employees.
- 4) Monitor the effects of education on the employees, in particular on their:
  - a) knowledge and skills,
  - b) attitudes, values and beliefs,
  - c) behaviour (roles).



- 5) Monitor the effects of education on:
- a) organizational climate,
  - b) organizational behaviour,
  - c) organizational performance.

Through applying this model, the management would have access to measurable data on different aspects of the education process in different periods of time and could monitor the relation between certain forms and contents of education and its effects. For instance, it could happen that education has excellent results in terms of expanding knowledge and mastering skills, but that it has no impact on the attitudes and behaviour of employees regarding the use of new knowledge and skills, which is the main goal of education. Without changes in the behaviour, there are no effects on the organizational level. Therefore, one must take care of three traits that best reflect the effects of education on the human resources level (Ostroff and Bowen, 2000), and those are:

- a) attitudes and motivation of employees,
- b) behaviour, and
- c) human capital expressed through their knowledge, skills and competences.

It is assumed that the effects on the individual level, which are relevant for the organizations' business, will also have impact on the organizational level in terms of improving organizational performance (Becker and Huselid, 1998). Owing to the quantitative monitoring, one can clearly determine the efficiency of additional education of employees in certain aspects of the overall operations of the organization. That includes the effects on the work itself (quality and efficiency), business ethics (employee's behaviour), team work (greater cohesiveness in the collective), education management (better choice of educators, contents and methods), and management (greater security in managing and making strategic decisions). Quantification enables the comparison of current results with prior measurements. Thus, it is possible to monitor the human resource development, development of organizational behaviour and the effects on the overall operations of the organization.

## RESEARCH ON EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN ORGANIZATIONS

Research has been conducted on the sample of employees in two public organizations in order to examine education management in organizations

(Babić, 2009). Out of 488 subjects examined, 39.8% were not trained for their current position, while 47.1% did not attend any of educational trainings for professional development. When asked about the usefulness of those trainings they attended, 33, 6% give no answer or are not able to estimate them, obviously because they did not attend any of such trainings, while the majority of the remaining subjects think it was very useful to participate in such programmes. These data alone indicate a significant lack of continuous education at workplace, as well as the positive outcome regarding the participation of employees in educational programmes.

These initial findings are supported by the results obtained from the questionnaire on education in an organization. Majority of employees would like to join programmes of professional development and they believe that such programmes truly enable the participants to do their work more efficiently. Education is considered to be the best way to get ahead at work. We assume that the main reasons for employees to perceive education as the path to advancement lie in the possibilities to use education to meet other various needs, such as the need for improvement, curiosity, socialization, exchange of experiences, affirmation *etc.* Along with the positive attitudes that employees have about education, we list the negative attitudes that employees have about education discovered in this research. Namely, a significant number of employees are not satisfied with educational programmes they are being offered. They consider them low quality, they perceive the lecturers as not sufficiently conversant with the organization problems, and they do not awake their curiosity. The results show that the way of implementing education does not increase the motivation of employees to learn, because it does not increase their curiosity. This is relevant information for managers, as it is well-known that managing the motivation of employees represents the key to managing human resources.

The attitudes regarding the effects of education in an organization have also been examined. Most of the subjects think that the education is directed towards practical problem solving, and thus, it can be used in practice and it shows its effects in work. However, it is interesting that, along with the positive perspective of additional education, most of the subjects believe that they have merely wasted their time participating in its various forms. This information is also connected with the issue of motivation as well as the conclusion that motivating participants



in seminars is crucial for obtaining knowledge and skills and their implementation in practice. Surely, it is assumed that the content of the seminars is well-planned regarding the needs and usability of knowledge and skills in the professional practice of employees in an organization.

The second research, conducted on a sample of 131 subjects, examined the issue of knowledge exchange among employees in organizations (Đorđević Boljanović, 2009). The participants included the members of top management, middle-level management and operative management from ten organizations on the territory of the Republic of Serbia. Organizations are highly technology oriented and operate in the field of telecommunications, postal traffic, information technology and software. If we start from the ascertainment that successful knowledge sharing among employees should lead to forming additional values for the organization itself, then the crucial results for this paper are the ones concerning the way in which employees share knowledge with their colleagues and other employees within or outside the organization, the level of knowledge exchange in their organizations, the formal ways of rewarding knowledge sharing, and also the types of problems they encounter while sharing knowledge at their workplace. When asked about the measures they use to update their knowledge, most subjects decided to choose informal way of knowledge sharing with colleagues (31%) and knowledge sharing within the organization with the experts in the same field (31%), which confirms in theory the frequently mentioned attitude about social nature of knowledge. Visiting seminars, conferences and etc, was the choice of 16% of the subjects, while 15% of the subjects preferred formal ways of learning. The most common situation in practice in which there is a need for implementing management programme is the departure of an employee (retirement, transfer to another company *etc.*), and the loss of information that should stay within the organization. It is particularly interesting to determine whether organizations in Serbia are aware of this problem and if they have been in similar situations. A large number of subjects (47%) rarely encounter themselves in such situations, 20% often find themselves in such situations, while the same number of subjects have not been in similar situation. As far as the level of knowledge-sharing in organizations in Serbia is concerned, 56% of the subjects say that knowledge sharing in their organization is at a very high level, while 42% consider it very low. However, when asked about formal rewards

for knowledge sharing, 46% of the subjects said that there is no such reward system in their organizations.

The fact that the implementation of knowledge management programmes is necessary in organizations in Serbia is also confirmed by the results of the research that shows that there are situations in practice in our companies that make the process of knowledge sharing difficult or impossible, which considerably slows down the daily work performance. The problems of this kind that the subjects recognized include as follows:

- ◆ The issue of duplicating work (44% of subjects rarely encounter this kind of a problem, but 29% have them often).
- ◆ Situations in which knowledge cannot be used and is forgotten in a short period of time (41% of subjects rarely encounter this kind of problems, while 27% of subjects deal with them often).
- ◆ The inability of employees to learn from the experience of others is rare in practice according to 47% of subjects, but is quite often with 33%.
- ◆ According to 44% of the subjects, the situations in which the information and knowledge obtained from the customers cannot be used to improve the business process are rare; while 33% consider these situations quite frequent.
- ◆ Situations in which important conclusions and knowledge from completed projects cannot be transferred to other projects are rare according to 40% of subjects, 24 % consider them frequent; while 31% have never encountered them. Lost knowledge is a rare phenomenon for the 53% of subjects, very frequent for 17%, while 25% of subjects have never encountered such problem.

## CONCLUSION

Organizations should be perceived as knowledge-based organizations. This implies that we should take into consideration two issues; the first issue refers to knowledge sharing as a necessity in modern business, and in this sense, using methods and techniques that could lead to creating more liberate flows of knowledge within an organization; the second issue is related to managing employees' education within an organization as a strategic issue.

With respect to knowledge sharing, a necessary prerequisite for the efficient business of modern organizations is certainly the assessment of skills and competencies of an organization, as well as the ability of an organization to use its knowledge in a proper way. We put special emphasis on the importance of





assessing the knowledge and skills of employees, recognition of the necessity to improve the efficiency of business processes, the use of best practices, implementation of innovations, etc. In order to avoid duplication of knowledge, insufficient use of the existing knowledge within the organization, obsolescence or permanent loss of knowledge, it is necessary to introduce knowledge sharing as one of the core values in an organization.

The second issue of great importance for improving public administration is employees' education management as a strategic issue. When education is connected to business strategy, it has a greater influence and can be monitored on the level of organizational climate, organizational behaviour and organizational performance. The contemporary approach to management is based on the use of scientific methods that guarantee precise monitoring of certain processes, including the education, and their outcomes. It is important to provide the connection between education and human resource management policy, which can be monitored through the influence of education on an individual. Namely, education shows its effects on the employees through changes in their knowledge and skills, their attitudes, values and beliefs and their behaviour and performance within their work roles. Through measuring the effects of education, one can monitor the development of human potentials and plan additional training as the basic method for human capital formation, which is finally shown through the effects on the overall business of an organization.

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## SAVREMENI PRISTUP OBRAZOVANJU U ORGANIZACIJAMA

### Rezime:

U cilju uspešnog suočavanja sa izazovima koje nameće ekonomija znanja savremene organizacije se sve više okreću znanju koje poseduju, njegovoj adekvatnoj primeni, a sa željom da unaprede svoje poslovne procese, postignu što veću efikasnost i kvalitet u poslovanju, kao i da izađu u susret svojim klijentima. Predmet ovog rada su organizacije koje teže promenama oslanjajući se na sopstvena znanja i veštine kako bi postale konkurentne, brze i inovativne. One nastoje da razviju delotvorno znanje pomoću kojeg će uvećati sopstveni uspeh i uspešno odgovoriti na izazove koje postavlja ekonomija znanja.

### Ključne reči:

znanje,  
organizacije zasnovane na znanju,  
razmena znanja,  
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