

Knowledge Based Society - Relevance and Impact on Educational Policies and School Organizations

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Abstract: *The changes within the contemporary societies have conditioned concerns and efforts in order to reform and update the educational systems all around the world. This process of modernization has given rise to the apparition of various theories concerning the new educational policies aiming at quality education and offered different perspectives, policies and established programs for the change of the educational system. The extent to which the new educational policies will succeed to promote and apply the principles of the knowledge based society will be provided by the structure and the power of controlling the changes. From this perspective, the difficulties and the challenges encountered at the beginning of the century are given by the specificities of the educational organization, which, in comparison with other types of organizations, stems from the fact that it vested with the function to produce learning, and as a result it structures all its other organizational aspects in this direction.*

Key words: *knowledge based society, educational policies, school organizations*

The changes within the contemporary societies have conditioned concerns and efforts in order to reform and update the educational systems all around the world. This process of modernization has given rise to the apparition of various theories concerning the new educational policies aiming at quality education and offered different perspectives, policies and established programs for the change of the educational system.

Schools have to adapt to new requirements which are sometimes contradictory and constrain, due to a social context characterized by diversity, complexity, dynamism. It is therefore justified the emphasis on the educational policies change from the perspective of quality education assurance, direction which should be taken on by all the factors involved in the educational-informative activities. The new established conditions facilitate the educational preoccupations which approached the problematic educational change, in view of framing practical and constructive models which can be used both by the school manager and the teaching staff, in order to create and administer both personal development and organizational strategies. The impact of the changes and of the new social requirements on the Romanian educational system is felt both theoretically and practically through the imperative of the adaptation process concerning the development strategies of the Romanian schools to the basic principles of human resource investment and of quality education.

The extent to which the new educational policies will succeed to promote and apply the principles of the knowledge based society will be provided by the structure and the power of controlling the changes. From this perspective, the difficulties and the challenges encountered at the beginning of the century are given by the specificities of the educational organization, which, in comparison with other types of organizations, stems from the fact that it vested with the function to produce learning, and as a result it structures all its other organizational aspects in this direction. It can be asserted that to some extent, the whole "organizational architecture" of a school complies with the logic of the educational processes – of producing learning. As a result, the projects for change and development, involve interventions in two major and interrelated plans - the structural one and the one concerning

¹ This paper was made within The Knowledge Based Society Project supported by the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development (SOP HRD), financed from the European Social Fund and by the Romanian Government under the contract number POSDRU ID 56815

the behaviour of the members of their organization. This requires an extensive effort related to social or organizational learning, issue on which we will make further references.

Why precisely a learning organization in the knowledge based society?

Because school organizations must adapt to new challenges of contemporary education, such as:

- The development of new effective approaches to creating and assessing learning in terms of diversity and dynamic change – an exquisite way of challenge at the level of the educational substance
- To recognize the importance of the problem with which we are facing: the inefficiency of schools as learning organizations and other agencies and institutions outside the school.
- To be aware of the fact that alliances and partnerships outside the school are vital in order to make a substantial progress.
- You can not have students who learn permanently and collaborate effectively if there are no teacher endowed with the same characteristics; moreover, a series of objectives for students – to develop the sense of responsibility to achieve a goal, the development of the habits, investigation skills, capacity of team work and adaptability to change – are precisely the skills required by the change agents. (Sarason, 1990)

Because “School is not a learning organization. Irregular waves of change, episodic projects, fragmentation of effort and overload form the destiny of the majority of schools.”(M.Fullan, 1993, p.1). The new issue concerning the change, precisely consists in what should be necessary to transform the educational system in an organization willing to learn – which knows how to deal with change as a normal part of its activity, not only in connection with the new policy, but as a lifestyle. The reason why we need organizations capable of learning is related to the discovery of the fact that in complex systems change is non-linear – full of surprises, and finding new way of thinking would help us cope with the unknown.

C. Handy (1989) and as well as other authors develop this idea and provide two definitions for "learning organization" ("learning organization "):

1. Learning organization - refers to the ability of the school to change through organizational learning processes seen as the principal mechanism for school development, "the school as a learning organization can be considered a system where people continuously expand their capacity to produce the results they want, where they can learn new global patterns of thinking, where collective aspiration is free and where people continuously learn how to learn together "(J.C. Bayne, P. Holly, 1994). Learning organizations are organizations that have a sense of direction and a firm grasps of current reality by scanning their contexts, schools that plan effective, efficient, and flexible, organizations in which continuous change and development are integral parts of their culture.

2. The organization which encourages learning - represents the organization that promotes and produces individual learning among its members - teachers and students. School is a resource for development, training and education of pupils and students. The organization serves the individual. Students and pupils only indirectly serve the needs of the school. The focus is not on the organizational learning, but on the individual. This double feature of the school - to learn and produce learning - produces a number of features - synthesized by E. Paun (1999, p. 75) - knowledge of which we consider as influencing the successful development of school organization:

- The presence and development of two basic activities, while distinct and interrelated, the activities which are structured by two different logics management

activity - administrative - governed by an organizational logic - and instructive – educational activity governed by a logic teaching;

- The presence of more informal and expressive aspects ;
- The status and the exercise of managerial functions in the school has certain peculiarities;
- The presence of several categories of members each with a specific culture.

The same imperative approach can be found in the research conducted by B. Garratt (1987) which states that for an organization to survive and grow, *the rate* of learning within the organization must be greater than the rate of change in the external environment. Therefore, in order for a school to be effective, it must become a learning organization.

What does a school organization learn in a knowledge based society?

Nowadays organizational learning is considered the first factor in producing beneficial and lasting changes. The process of *learning* takes the form of a process of assimilation and application of knowledge, values and modes of action, which are elements of school organization culture. Most of the elements of a culture are understood by the organization members themselves who are the bearers and creators of cultural and mental models created by social processes, which are nothing but social and cultural learning processes.

When a person acquires the membership of a school organization, she or he learns the rules from the outset, the modes of action and adopts the appropriate mental models. The cultural pressure of the other members is exerted on the new members of the organization, so their involvement and cultural integration is even deeper. The *learning rate* is initially slow, since it requires the identification of subjective meanings, understanding and practice when applied in the life of the school organization. Then the *learning rhythm* becomes fast and in a short period the cultural models are assimilated and then reinforced by the combination of subjective and organizational meanings, since it is considered that the new members share its culture and considers it a given.

Organizational learning occurs through individual learning done by individual members of the school organization. So, whether we refer to the individual or the organizational plan, in the implementation process of changes there are undergone two phases:

- The weaning, namely the renunciation of traditional cultural patterns
- Learning new models proposed by the changed educational plan.

Performance results of the process of learning are dependent to weaning results, namely the imposition of new modes towards the old. The difficulty of the first phase results from the psychological character, subjective, of the association of the weaning process with anxiety and resistance to change and learning. New cultural models are perceived with scepticism and the limitation to simply imposing these constraints for the organization members to adopt, has only surface effects. The weaning process in these cases is shallow, and the forms of restraint must be permanently multiplied to oversee the implementation of new models. As a result, the weaning process and learning must start in parallel.

How does a school organization learn in the knowledge based society?

The fundamental mechanism is that of changes, changes that must begin in an organization deemed by the fact that the dynamism, complexity and unpredictability are not the only things that stand in their way, they are normal! Substantial change involves complex processes where the spirit of openness and research is needed to solve problems. Change is learning.

In a learning organization the dynamic focuses on open questions and testing views. People use the debate and conflict to discuss and reach consensus without it becoming a norm. It can not be otherwise, if people always looking for new opportunities. A group engaged in complex learning is not dominated by reliance on the authority or expert. The group varies between conflict and consensus between confusion and clarity.

Stacey R. (1992, p.112) explains this view stating that "a profitable and innovative organization must contain groups of people that can make learning complex spontaneously. Because in uncertain situations no one can know what the group is trying to learn, learning must start without a clear statement of what will be taught and how. "People learn in a group developing a controlled behaviour. Ties range from the discovery of individuals to change, to disruption, and finally to the possibility of choice that comes from reflection and dialogue. Behaviour is constrained in part by cultural differences of individuals and misunderstandings that prevent domination by one opinion. *Constraint is* thus a consequence of the tension between understanding and difference. As I have mentioned in the first part, most modern approaches to support the thesis according to which the problems, authentic paradoxes are those that produce learning. Here are some of the paradoxes faced by school organizations, in the learning process:

- development involves both change and continuity, the fundamental paradox of school development argues that necessary changes in deep structure of education are offset by powerful forces that emphasizes continuity in education;
- creative tension between individual and group development, between containment and cooperation, between individualism and collectivism, learning organizations determine collaborative educational changes involving overcoming isolation;
- contemporary school organization is involved in a smooth transition from an excessively centralized political school at a new approach, decentralized, but maintaining a structure and a centralized mode;

The essence of contemporary organizational learning is presented by M. Fullan (1993, p.1): "the secret of growth and development consists of learning how to fight the forces of change, using positive forces to our advantage, and also reducing the negative influence. The future world is a future of learning... We learn that it is not possible to resolve the issue of change, but we can learn to coexist with it in a more active and productive manner. "

Planned changes are a process of individual and group learning. School organization presents itself as a learning organization, which would not be possible without the full involvement of individual members and groups in which it fits.

The education system and school organizations do not change for the sake of change, but they are part of a wider development process and must respond to new changes in the environment, requirements, opportunities and constraints that arise in social occasions. In turn, while in the process of adaptation to organizational change, people should change too: they have to acquire new knowledge, to tackle new tasks, to improve their level of competence and, very often, to change their work habits, values and attitudes towards mode of organization. Education and success will depend on understanding and coordination of the individual development and organizational mechanism, changing values and attitudes being essential in this context, where change is not effective without a change of attitude.

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