ASPECTS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract: *The world is constantly changing, and it seems that in the day-to-day life of organizations, uncertainty is increasingly encountered. From this perspective, the traditional problem-solving approach (which reduces the world and its challenges only to solvable and manageable problems) has become ineffective. Consequently, it is evident that leaders, managers and practitioners cannot address sustainable development as a problem that needs to be solved and managed in a simplistic way. It needs to go from „doing things better" (as in the traditional problem-solving approach) to „doing better things". This change requires the adoption of objectives that help the organization to develop sustainably. Sustainability competence includes the capabilities and qualities that individuals, teams, and organizations need to have in order to effectively address the organization's internal and external sustainability challenges.*

Key words: sustainable development, learning organization, human resource.

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations contribute to the shaping of our lives and are of increasing importance in society because they reflect, as complex social systems, several culturally accepted needs and values, they use living together, being the place where people spend the most part of life and where they form a career. Therefore, human society can be compared to a system composed of clear, different organizational structures within which people perform various activities. Although organizations are different in size, activities, methods and technologies used to achieve goals, their main purpose is to serve society by making it better and safer, contributing to improving people's living conditions.

2. ORGANIZATION - CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTUAL COMPONENTS

The organization, as a part or element of the system consisting of distinct organizational structures, is „*the social framework or social unit in which each member of the society fits and integrates and is constituted to achieve a set of predetermined objectives*" (Cornescu *et al*., 2003, p. 35). In general, there is a variety of forms of social structure of organizations, but also „*a specific of the definitions given to organizations according to the discipline represented by different authors or the perspective from which the organizations are analysed*" (Vlăsceanu: 2005, p. 39).

Being a complex social entity, the organization is hard to define. The difficulty of defining the concept of „organization" is determined both by the many perspectives from which the organization is being analysed and by the fact that the organizational analysis, thanks to the theoretical and practical research, has devoted new ways of defining it. Psychologists tend to analyse and define organizations based on the needs of the individual, sociologists and political scientists are interested in adapting the individual to social needs and focus on social and political relationships, and economists approach organizations in the light of individual efforts within the organization to grow its capital.

The simplest definition of the organization is „*a social invention designed to achieve common goals through common effort*." (Johns: 1998, p. 4). The definition can be supplemented by the following elements, characteristic of all organizations:

a) the organization has a certain location and performs a certain type of activity;

b) the organization is always specialized; it has a mission to which certain goals are associated. Differentiation of missions and objectives is associated with technical specialization;

c) the organization is autonomous in its constitution and functioning;

d) the organization is made up of members who can enter or leave the organization on their own decision;

e) relationships are established between the members of the organization; they interact structured with each other;

f) each member of the organization has set several of its own goals. Achieving these goals will directly determine the actions the member will perform within the organization;

g) to achieve the goals of an organization, all members of that organization will make their contribution, as they will also fulfil their personal goals.

The emergence, existence and development of an organization are determined by limiting people to achieve their goals only by their own forces, because they have limited physical and intellectual capacities. This makes organizations grow when the accomplishment of the goals pursued exceeds the individual's ability to complete de job, which requires his/her training and integration into the community.

All organizations, irrespective of their type, are based on at least two common elements:

a) people with experience and their level of training;

b) the resources necessary for the optimal development of the specific activity of the organization (Cornescu *et al*., 2003, p. 36).

Any organization, no matter how valuable its resources are, if it does not adapt to changes that happen in the external environment, cannot cope with these changes and is eliminated by competition.

3. LEARNING ORGANIZATION - MODERN AND COMPETITIVE ORGANIZATION

Due to the pressures faced by modern organizations in their attempt to remain competitive on the market, as well as to the transformations that have taken place over time in organizational theory, the phrase „learning organization", is used more frequently in the sense of an organization that facilitates the learning of its members and is continually transformed (Pedler *et al*., 1997).

This concept was first used by Peter M. Senge in his book *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, the first edition of which appeared in 1990, and refers to an organization in which employees share to each other their acquired knowledge, learning from each other.

According to his definition, learning organizations are „*organizations in which people continuously expand their capacity to create the results they really want, in which new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, collective aspiration is set free,*

and people are always learning how to learn together." (Senge: 2012, p. 24)

Although the concept of a „learning organization "has been defined in various ways, all definitions share a few key terms: *organization, collective aspirations, personal and/or professional skills, lifelong learning and/or jointly, achievement of goals, organization development*.

Peter M. Senge asserts that a learning organization bases on changing the mentality „*from seeing us as entities separate from the world, seeing us connect to it, from seeing the problems as being caused by someone/something „from outside", to seeing how our own actions create the problems we experience*" (Senge: 2012, p. 24).

In the learning organization, the fact that managers and leaders challenge employees to think creatively and steadily about the organization's needs, increases the employees' intrinsic motivation.

A learning organization should have to:

a) use employees' training to achieve its objectives;

b) constantly offer employees learning opportunities;

c) find the connection between the individual performance of the employees and the organizational performance;

d) use creative tensions that arise among employees as an incentive in getting new ideas;

e) encourage dialogue within the organization, creating an environment that encourages employees to express their opinions and take risks;

f) always be aware of the link between it and the environment in which it operates.

For the organization that learns to develop sustainably with a positive impact on society and the environment, it must set certain objectives specific to the sustainable development that it can achieve.

4. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Organizations are increasingly challenging their sustainable development and the fact that employees need to develop capacities and behaviours that will enable them to contribute to the adoption of a sustainable lifestyle

at the individual and collective level. (Naudé: 2012)

Like other organizations, the learning organization operates in an environment characterized by a strong link between the three pillars of sustainable development - economic development, social development, environmental protection - and therefore it is imperative that, in addition to economic and financial objectives, to adopt a range of social and sustainable development objectives.

Sustainable development of an organization in general is a complex process influenced by the organization's internal and external environment, but especially by the organization's employees who come with their own beliefs, needs and values. The learning organization has more chances to respond faster and more effectively to the challenges of sustainable development due to the direct involvement of employees by stimulating their creativity, using the knowledge they have acquired, and teamwork.

For an organization that learns to develop sustainably, it must take into account a number of issues that are considered as real challenges for strengthening the learning capacities of individuals from the organization and of the organization. These include (Peters & Wals: 2013):

– it is impossible to predict what is the best way to solve a particular problem;

– the influence of organizational values on organizational behaviour;

– it is not possible to reach consensus among all concerned and involved parties;

– it is not possible to predict precisely the outcome of the impact of a chosen strategy or action;

– the complex mode in which the variables involved interact.

Each of the above issues is a challenge for the learning organization and the people who make it, but it helps the organization to grow sustainably, become more resilient, able to anticipate change and respond appropriately to the crises that may emerge.

In order to develop in a sustainable way, a learning organization needs to set goals to help them grow economically, taking into account employee development and environmental protection. Of the objectives the organization can set, we mention:

– reducing the environmental impact of the organization's activities;

– setting realistic environmental objectives that can be achieved;

– adopting environmental policies that ensure the sustainable use of the organization's resources;

– modernizing the production process for the efficient use of the organization's resources;

– reducing the amount of waste resulted;

– high-level recovery and recycling of waste from activities at the organization level;

– upgrading utility networks to reduce consumption and losses, but also to lower costs;

– encouraging employees' involvement in finding solutions for sustainable development of the organization;

– making use of employees' experience in adopting the best solutions for the organization to grow sustainably;

– encouraging employees to develop professionally and to use their accumulated knowledge in time for the sustainable development of the organization;

– promoting teamwork and encouraging the development of group vision;

– establishing a department for environmental protection and sustainable development, a department whose main objective is the determination and implementation in the organization of all measures to prevent the deterioration of environmental factors and environmental protection, as well as channelling efforts to achieve sustainable development of the organization.

There are also shortcomings in the sustainable development of the learning organization. Among these shortcomings we recall (Naudé: 2012);

– from a practical perspective, within the organization, sustainable development is not always clearly defined. This increases confusion and frustration of employees towards managers who want to implement the principles of sustainable development;

– some aspects of sustainable development can only be evaluated by direct observations;

– in an organization, depending on the stakeholder interests, there may not be a clear orientation for the adoption or implementation of sustainable development goals.

5. CONCLUSIONS

A learning organization can grow sustainably not only by

achieving purely economic objectives but also by addressing social and environmental goals. The sustainable development approach within the organization is based on the creation, modelling and introduction of sustainable development objectives, followed by their effective implementation.

As the learning organization continually offers lifelong learning opportunities and professional development, the organization can achieve its sustainable development goals.

The sustainable development of a learning organization is a dynamic process that is continually being developed and is based on the development of new systems and processes that allow and encourage permanent adaptation to change and the challenges of sustainable development.

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