Chapter 19

Knowledge Management as Driving Force to Organizational Learning and Innovation: Case Study in Romania

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ABSTRACT

The genuine and actual conditions of operation of public institutions in Romania should determine the creation of behaviors oriented on development of organizational learning culture. The objectives of the chapter are focused on identifying the use of knowledge management concept in local public institutions in Romania, as well as its importance and impact in transforming them into innovative learning organizations. The theoretical part of the chapter comprises the analysis of the field literature, presentation of the definitions and characteristics of the notions of knowledge management, learning organization, the concept of innovation, presentation of the importance of developing interrelations triggering efficient and effective organizations. Concerning the case study, the chapter aims to identify the extent to which the knowledge management concept exists in three local public institutions in Romania, how knowledge is managed, if there is organizational learning, if they are learning and innovative organizations, as well as the interdependencies.

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INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management is focused on creating, acquiring, capturing, sharing and using knowledge to enhance performance. Knowledge management tends to emphasise content and views knowledge as an asset or a resource, which individuals and organizations can acquire. Knowledge management includes both the theoretical understanding of how knowledge is created and transformed and the development of systems and processes through which to handle and use it effectively (Aarnoudse and Hill, 2010, p. 24).

There are important reasons for considering learning and knowledge transfer in public service organizations. Firstly, the scale of public sector organizations is of sufficient significance to warrant attention from organizational and management researchers (Ferlie et al. 2003 apud Rashman, Withers and Hartley, 2009). Secondly, in recent decades, public organizations have undergone significant reform, driving the need to create and share organizational knowledge, but they remain underrepresented in literature on organizational learning and knowledge. Thirdly, the literature on organizational learning and knowledge makes frequent reference to contextual analysis but tends to focus on internal context, whereas the review of the literature on public organizations calls for increased attention to distinctive external contexts of organizations. Fourthly, attention to the specific features that influence learning and knowledge in public organizations may help to expand knowledge about the field across all types of organizations (Rashman, Withers and Hartley, 2009, p. 464).

The success of knowledge management is substantiated on a series of organizational elements (Dalotă, 2009, pp. 113-114). The human resource represents a strategic pillar in creation of competitive advantage through the value of knowledge, skills and training. At the same time it is important a solid infrastructure of information technology in the organization.

The knowledge management strategies of the public institutions should be open and comprehensive, exploiting the individual and collective knowledge of the staff, should prepare and plan actions and not just react, should innovate when the policies are not leading to the desired outcomes and should continuously learn.

There is no single formula to organise the knowledge management strategy for the public institutions. It could be led by teams and departments specialised in strategies, specialised groups and commissions created for a task; it could be shaped further the discussions and collaboration in networks, exceeding the borders of departments and organizations; it could have roots inside the political parties or public services (Mulgan, 2010, p. 4).

Knowledge management plays an important role in creation of a working climate able to support creativity, organizational learning and innovation.

In a continuous changing environment, challenges such as social, economic, political and financial crises determine the public organizations in Romania to be more tactic than strategic in their actions. Especially for the public organizations, the need for change derives usually from the external environment. The pressures for change are constant. The initial objectives are facing resistance from the environmental factors, so that new objectives should be developed while the innovations designed to solve a certain problem often lead to creation of other problems (Blau & Scott, 1962, p. 250).

The research methodology is quantitative, based on the analysis of a questionnaire applied in three local public institutions in Romania, questionnaire designed by Bruce Britton (1998) “The Learning NGO”, adapted to public institutions.