ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING: SOME BASIC QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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Abstract

The term "organizational learning" raises a broad range of questions, specifically with regard to its contents. Following the thoughts of eminent philosophers, such as Aristotle and Confucius, the contribution of scientists in any research field to the corpus of human knowledge should also be based on the proper governing of the use of language. Therefore it is, first, of serious importance to be aware that organizational learning is just one dimension or element of the learning organization and not vice versa; second, a good comprehension of basic categories related to the organizational side of (formal) social units' functioning is an imperative part of organizational learning process.

In writing this paper, the author started from his experiences acquired in his role as a lecturer on the subject "Theory of Organization", in which the goal of lecturing was explained to students as gaining knowledge about cooperation and competition of people in the entities of rational production of goods. To generalize the presented questions and answers regarding the use of term "organization" in the field of management, certain similarities and comparisons were sought and found in other fields of science and, more generally, in life itself.

After more detailed explanations of other relevant categories for the organizational learning process, the process itself is defined by its goals and steps where the overlapping of the learning process with the organizational change process and the process of increasing organizational capital is shown. Finally, it is also emphasized that the idea of improving internal relationships – as the substance of organization – between employees in a formal social unit through organizational learning could and should be exploited in external relationships between formal social units.

Keywords: formal social unit, organization, learning, organizational learning, relationships, connectivity

1. INTRODUCTION

When we read about organizational learning, decidedly different definitions of it can be found. Therefore, regarding the title of our paper, finding the roots of this phenomenon is recommended.

Consequently, whenever we talk about learning we should provide to ourselves or to others clear answers to the next three questions:

1. What is learning?
2. What is the expected result of a particular kind of learning?
3. What is the proper way of learning to achieve the expected result in the particular field?

Looking for an answer to the first question, we are in favor of the definition by which learning is any transformation of a system that enables it to solve problems in an easier way than before. Although there are many divisions and subdivisions of types of learning, it is obvious that any type of learning should bring a particular result in the sense mentioned in the previous sentence. Looking at the division of learning into exploitative and explorative (Room and Wijen, 2006: 238-239) learning, it can be perceived that each of them has the goal of gaining more knowledge in general or in a particular aspect of life and/or work. These authors say that exploitative learning includes single-loop, adaptive, operational, first-order, evolutionary, frame-taking, reactive and incremental aspects of learning. In contrast, double-

loop, generative, strategic, second-order, revolutionary, frame-breaking, proactive and radical are aspects of explorative learning.

In connection with human resource development, Sofo (1999) made the following list of learning (in alphabetical order): active or action learning, adaptive, anticipatory, collective, communicative, continuous-loop, deep-level, deutero-learning, double-loop, generative, instrumental, organizational focus, quadruple-loop, self-directed, single-loop, tailored and triple-loop. The list of learning types given here should remind the reader that any narrowing of discussion about learning probably contributes to the better understanding of a particular type of learning while simultaneously inevitably damaging the general picture of this phenomenon.

Therefore, the purpose of the paper is to offer employees in social units a better comprehension of basic categories related to the organizational side of their work in enterprises, institutions, etc. by directing them to more reasonable learning of essential organizational contents important for efficient cooperation and creative competition in their working surroundings. Consequently, the goals are, first, to awaken in the reader the consciousness needed about the importance of language when he/she intends to use the word "organization", and direct him/her to meaningful placement of the same word in the context of "organizational learning". Second, by giving an adequate definition of organization, applicable in the broad span of disciplines, we expect to focus the reader's attention on its comprehensive meaning, which must be taken into consideration when we talk about organizational learning.

2. ORGANIZATION AS THE BASIS OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Change, learning, and novelty cannot emerge without challenging unreflective (unexamined) practices. Aristotle (384–322 B. C.) places at the outset of learning the discipline governing the use of language and the operations of the mind, skills conferred by the study of grammar and logic. The initial work in the corpus of Aristotelian writings is called the "Organon", which consists of treatises that deal with the use of words, the interpretation and analysis of statements, the rules of reasoning, the methods of science, and the devices of argumentation. Competence in such matters is preparatory for all further learning.

Given the long list of learning types mentioned above, it is not possible to give an answer to the second question in the first chapter without understanding and explaining the type of knowledge that must be acquired and/or it is necessary to increase the ability of the system in solving particular types of problems facing the system. Furthermore, it means that the proper definition or scope of chosen learning type should be previously given to enable us in seeking the proper answer.

Discussing organizational learning requires clarifying what the relation or link between the organization and organizational learning is. Consequently, it is not possible to offer the contents of expected result of organizational learning until we decide what is understood by the term "organization". In contrast to the usual practice, when users of this expression are satisfied if this word is sufficiently suitable to a certain situation or context, e.g. a particular type of social unit or association like United Nations Organization (UNO), or North Atlantic Organization (NATO) or any firm, school, hospital etc., our ambition is greater. Being aware of different fields of life and science, making an effort and finding the definition of the organization acceptable for a broader variety of disciplines is worthwhile.

We were especially prompted to do so after we had read the report on scientific background for the 2013 Nobel Prize Winners in Physiology or Medicine Dr. James E. Rothman, Dr. Randy W. Schekman and Dr. Thomas Südhof. Their discoveries of the mechanism regulating vesicle traffic, a major system in cells, represents not only a paradigm shift in our understanding of how the eukaryotic cells, with their complex internal compartmentalization, organize the routing of molecules packaged in vesicles, but indirectly offers also an urgent message to social scientists in the field of organization. "Vesicle transport and fusion operates, **with the same general principles, in organisms as different as yeast and man** (bold by the author). […] Without this exquisitely precise organization, the cell would lapse into chaos." (www.nobelprize … 2013, accessed January 23, 2014).

It is necessary to mention that the pioneers in the area of understanding intracellular organization were Albert Claude, George Palade and Christian de Duve, who received the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1974 for their discoveries concerning **the structural and functional organization of cell** (bold by the author). They have shed light on how the cell is organized and compartmentalized. This accomplishment "is now a system of great organizational sophistication with units for the production of components essential to life and units for disposal of worn out parts for defense against foreign organisms and substances" (www.nobelprize … 1974, accessed January 23, 2014).

If (after these two citations) we look at definitions of the organization in the literature on organization and management studies, the dominating definitions in this field do not fit Nietzsche's thoughts about basic principles that dictate the behavior of particles in the animate as well as inanimate world (Nietzsche, 1980). Under the presumption that biological laws apply to humans just as they apply to any other living beings, we are justified in expecting that there must be the definition of organization that sufficiently fits the animate world. As, during his trial in ancient Athens, Socrates famously stated: "an unexamined life is not worth living". This statement is the most succinct advocacy of philosophy, science and democracy (EGOS, 2013).

Are we right in our deliberations? Let us look for the answer by presentation of dominant definition in the field of management indicated in one of previous paragraphs. It is mainly based on the understanding that "an organization" is "a group of people acting together". The phrase "a group of people" directly implies that there must be more than one person to form an organization, which we call a "social entity" or "social unit" (Argenti, 1993: 31; Morabito, Sack & Bhate, 1999: 50). Similarly, in case of UN or NATO, we imply that there are more states acting or cooperating together.

We will try to explain why heeding this definition creates a problem unsolvable on its own terms for meaningful understanding of the term "organization", applicable to all the animate world. Here, I will use an explanatory approach similar to that employed by some organizational theorists in deriving the proper meaning of this term. First, it is necessary to recall that the word "organization" derives from the Greek word *organon*, meaning a tool or instrument to aid in the performance of some kind of goal-oriented activity (Morgan, 1986: 21). In addition, the same term also expresses a connection between two things, such as that between a hand and a hammer.

Second, according to Robbins (1984) there is a definition (in the field of management) that an organization is a formal structure of planned coordination, involving two or more people for the achievement of some common explicit purpose or goal, characterized by authority relationships and a division of labor. That is to say, in a modern (formal) social unit, two or more individuals act together in order to achieve the objectives set by the company, the owner(s) of the firm, or by other individuals who claim rights to the results achieved by the formal social unit (FSU).

Consequently, within an FSU (i.e. in that area that is largely imperceptible from the outside) along with the structure of members, due to ongoing interactions, a structure (or set or network) of not only formal but informal relationships also begins to develop among its members. Coase (1937: 386–405) spoke not only about the internal organization of productive groups or establishments, which can easily be compared with firms as a type of FSU, but also adds that a firm consists of a system of relationships that comes into existence when the direction of resources is dependent on the entrepreneur.

One way to a similar conclusion is the assumption that a firm is not only an economically oriented social unit, producing and selling products and services for profit, but is also, as a rule, an internally connected social organism. Schmerhorn, Hunt and Osborn (cf.: 1991: 15) stated that a well-defined social unit (in our opinion, this should mean a well-organized social unit) is based on a quality chain of available and/or collected resources and individuals' goals that clearly connect the efforts of individuals and groups to the common purpose and objectives of the social unit. Furthermore, it has not been difficult to come to the view that "organizing is the process of prescribing formal relationships among people and resources to accomplish goals" (Gordon,

Mondy, Sharplin & Premeaux, 1990: 6). However, the same authors hesitated to take a further decisive step and said that a formal organization is a set of formal relationships between the members of an entity. Instead (as with Kast and Rosenzweig (1985: 234), who argued that "structure may be considered as the established pattern of relationships among the components or parts of an organization"), they preferred to avoid the only logical conclusion to register structure, defined in this way, as the organization itself. They rather took refuge from such a step by insisting only that "the formal organization must take into account the informal organization, which is the set of evolving relationships and patterns of human interactions within the organization that are not officially prescribed" (Gordon, Mondy, Sharplin & Premeaux, 1990: 6).

The quoted citations prove that Western academics are very close to taking the importance of relationships into consideration with regards to organization. However, they avoid defining relationship as being central to organizations. From the structural point of view, they prefer to emphasize people and place relationships in a subordinate place. It is rather worse when the dynamic aspect is in question: specifically, they do not perceive the distinction between business and organizational process(es), and (in this way) lose the valuable element of observing what is happening in formal social units, especially firms. With full awareness of this, the Slovenian organizational theorist Filip Lipovec identified (1974, 1987) "the [intentional] organization (of an FSU) as a structure of interpersonal relationships between individual members of the unit that ensures the persistence and development of the special characteristics of the unit, as well as the proper realization of the unit's goals harmonized within the structure."

Lipovec's definition of organization implies that there are two aspects, structural or static, comprising the construction of a structure of interpersonal formal relationships, mostly visible through many organizational structures, and functional or dynamic, expressed through organizational processes, when observing events in FSUs. From this point of view, Lipovec's definition of organization strongly approaches the potentially implied understanding of organization by both groups of mentioned Nobel prizewinners and in this way makes his definition a possible candidate for a general definition of organization, independently of any scientific or practical field.

However, we must not forget that the actual internal organization of FSU is always an artifact of not only formal but also of informal relationships within an FSU. Simultaneously, it is necessary to also call the reader's attention to the fact that any cell or social unit not only has its internal but also its external organization.

3. ORGANIZATION AND ITS CONTENTS

I believe that the critical reader already noticed that at least an approximately uniform understanding of some basic terms – as Aristotle proposed more than two millennia ago – is necessary if the author should expect to persuade readers that his/her approach to the theme is correct. In other words, terminology is a constitutive part of any science. Therefore, scientists in particular should make an agreement about the unified use of scientific language.

In addition to this, there are six terms in this paper about which the mutual consensus of their meaning should be established between the author and the reader in order to assure that at least the proper deliverance of the author's message to the reader will be conveyed. Of course, such a consensus is simultaneously required *sine qua non* to increase the possibility that the message of paper will also be accepted by the latter.

Two of those terms, i.e. "formal social unit" and "learning", have been previously mentioned and elaborated upon. However, another of those four terms, i.e. "organization of formal social unit", "relationship(s)", "learning process" and "organizational learning", need further explanation.

We agree with the view of Pringle, Jennings and Longenecker (1988: 67), who argued that organizational design is a broader concept than organizational structure. This is so because we would like to draw not only organizational structure(s), but also organizational networks, processes, systems and roles under the blanket term "organizational de-

sign". It could not be denied that the majority of sound organizational theorists understand under the term "organization" most of these categories. However, the acceptance of this position requires that we adapt Lipovec's definition of organization into a form that satisfies such an understanding of the organization without losing anything of its essence. Consequently, we extend his definition and define the (intentional) extended organization of an FSU as the intertwining of the dynamic (dimensions of) relationships and, alongside them, the connected (regulated) contents between members of the FSU, which come into being, are transformed and disappear within the processes of connecting, cooperating and competing, expressing themselves in forms of organizational structures or networks, roles and systems to assure the existence, the development of desired characteristics, and the rational achievement of the FSU's goals.

Going to the second term, we cite Boczko (2007: 303-304), who defined a relationship – in a decidedly formal way – as an association between two entities and/or entity types. Traditionally, a relationship as a social concept (Simmel, 1950) is defined as a sequence of interactions between two people that involve some degree of mutuality in that the behavior of one member takes some account of the behavior of the other (Hinde, 1979). In Kahn's view (2007: 189), working relationships are sufficiently central to organizational life to deserve consideration in their own right as a primary factor in people's attitudes and behaviors. When Ford, Gadde, Hakansson & Snehota (2003: 38) describe a relationship as "the pattern of interactions and the mutual conditioning of behaviors over time, between a company and a customer, a supplier or another organization [sic] [recte formal social unit]", they inadmissibly (in the opinion of this author) narrow its meaning to only the external relationships of the FSU. To avoid this trap and broaden its application to internal relationships, we define a relationship as a state and/or process of enduring interdependence of the entities with specific content, conditioned by the contextual factors and attitudes of those involved in interactions.

For the purpose of our paper, it is necessary to emphasize that the learning process is composed of all the aspects of a person's learning experience.

From this perspective, it includes basic things such as understanding, skills and behaviors. It "consists of activities: acquisition, codification and storage, sharing and use of knowledge" (Sitar, 2012). The learning of individuals in formal social units – if it tends to become a part of organizational learning – has to be connected and coordinated in an organizational sense. "Individuals should learn in connectivity to their jobs and follow the tasks in the business process" (Sitar, 2012), being simultaneously aware of their integral roles (responsibilities, authority, and accountability) in an FSU's organizational process.

If we refer to Aristotle's thoughts of learning the discipline governing the use of language, it is obvious that the term "organizational learning" must find its place in comparison with similar terms in other fields of human life. As a simple example of such term in one of other fields, we chose the definition of musical learning styles (learning disabilities, Internet, accessed January 28, 2014). It is said that "the musical learning is one of eight types of intelligence defined in Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences (Theory of multiple intelligences, accessed January 29, 2014). By this definition, a musical learning style refers to a person's ability to understand and process sound, rhythm, patterns in sound, relationships between sounds, and ability to process rhymes and other auditory information. Following the implicit logic of this definition, e.g. citing the certain elements of musical learning (style), it is correct to determine whether it could be a meaningfully similar definition of organizational learning.

Taking into consideration the discussion about previous five terms, let us allow ourselves to start with the element "relationships between sounds" because relationships are – by our extended definition of an FSU's organization – building and/or binding blocks for creating structural and functional organization of any living unit starting from the cell to human society as a whole. Continuing further, we are able to say that "organizational learning (style)" and/or "organizational intelligence" refers (in an FSU) to employees' and groups' ability to perceive, accept, use, suitably transform, transfer (or proceed) and control information regarding relationships between them and their working fellows and

among (some of) the other working fellows. These relationships, although indirectly formally defined by organizational rules, are mostly actuated – usually also by the influence of informal interpersonal interactions between employees– in visible forms of organizational structures, networks, processes, roles and systems.

According to Gardner, individuals who have high interpersonal intelligence – in our opinion, one of the essential parts of organizational intelligence – are characterized by their sensitivity to others' moods, feelings, temperaments and motivations (mutuality, as previously stated) and their ability to cooperate in order to work as part of a group. Those with this intelligence communicate effectively and empathize easily with others and may be either leaders or followers. They typically learn best by working with others and often enjoy discussion and debate. This means that fostering or even gaining this sensitivity is, therefore, unquestionably one of the (sub)goals within the process of organizational learning or learning about the organization. Consequently, the following question arises: if it is only one of (sub)goals, what are the main goals?

4. EXPECTED RESULTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

There is no doubt that the achievement of any of sub(goals) must contribute to the achievement of the main goal in a particular field/action. At the first glance, in case of an FSU, it is the improvement of organizational support to the business process of the FSU. However, there are many possibilities to express what organizational support in fact actually is. It could be expressed at least in forms of organizational order, organizational climate, organizational infrastructure, organizational culture, organizational health, organizational readiness, organizational ability, organizational excellence, organizational capital or organizational assets and, of course, as the organization itself.

Looking at – from the organizational learning aspects – this long list of possible forms of "organizational support", and regarding their measurability of their contribution to more effective business process, it is useful to search for the very that of

cited terms, which could be quantified as much as possible. It is noticeable that the cited organizational support forms are quantifiable to varying degrees. Observed from this angle, the primacy goes with no doubt to the form of organizational capital or organizational assets. Although in the organizational and/or management literature, the term "organizational capital" heavily prevails against the term "organizational assets", the authors, professionally based in economics and especially in accountancy, in this dilemma would consciously choose the term "organizational assets" as the proper one. Being strongly aware of this noticeable deficiency in the management and organizational literature, we will continue with the use of term "organizational capital" only due to the reason of its being more understandable to the international readers in this field of literature.

For further explanation, it is necessary to locate the place of organizational capital within the intangible capital (or assets) – alongside the tangible, natural or physical and financial, capital – possessed by FSU's. Here, we use Tomer's approach to the parts of intangible capital. Tomer (2008: 24) splits intangible capital, first, into intellectual capital, and, second, into human capital, embodied in people. He divides the later into "human capital in individuals" and "human capital in relationships". A part of the latter, which is less intangible and consists of structures, networks, and hierarchy, is "organizational capital", regarding above all internal relationships in an FSU. In contrast to Tomer, Tóth and Jónás (2012: 318) divide intellectual capital into human capital (employee's intelligence), relational, and structural (organizational) capital. According to them, the latter includes, in addition to structure, processes, and systems, also databases and learning, which means that it is defined somewhat more broadly than organizational capital by Tomer.

Because organizational capital as a part of capital, embodied in people, undoubtedly consists of structures, networks and hierarchy between and among people, it is also simultaneously social capital. The origin of social capital as a concept can be traced back to the 1960s when Jacobs (1961) described it as relational resources within a community and family. Social capital is broadly conceptualized by scholars as consisting of re-

sources embedded in the social structures and relationships (Coleman, 1988). A question arises regarding whether human capital should be narrowly focused, by only concentrating on the individual investment (e.g., on education) and the returns on this investment (Suseno & Ratten, 2007: 7) or whether it should be observed more broadly. We argue for the broader concept of it, including capabilities embedded in network relationships, whose patterns provide weaker or stronger access to beneficial resources (cf.: Nahapiet & Ghosal (1998). When Hitt & Ireland (2002: 5) define internal social capital as "the relationships between strategic leaders and those whom they lead as well as relationships across all of an organisation's [sic] [*recte* formal social unit's] work unit, they in fact talk about organizational capital in Tomer's sense.

If we have declared the improvement of organizational capital – derived from increased organizational knowledge – as the main goal of the organizational learning process and the increase of organizational intelligence as one of its sub(goals), let us cite some other possible sub(goals), which should contribute to the achievement of the main goal. Because research in this direction is not the central theme of our paper, we will not go deeper into the explanation of them, although there is no doubt that trust between members of an FSU, individuals' understanding of FSU' purpose and objectives, transparency in an FSU's functioning, equity of participants in activities etc., are worth mentioning in this context. Rather than expand our deliberation to the broader list of (sub)goals, we will concentrate our expectation, related to the results of organizational learning process, on the basic units of organizational analysis (as we see it) – relationships. Considering the quality of organizational relationships as the joint denominator in all mentioned sub-goals leads to the logical conclusion that gaining and properly using knowledge about relationships in all of the derived forms (structures or networks, processes, roles and systems) should be – as previously mentioned – the essence of organizational learning. Alternatively, as Drew (2008: 504) proposed, "real learning involves preparedness to be unsettled (from preconceived notions, habitual behaviors), to question, be creative, and to brook a wider span of possible options in organizational life".

5. ORGANIZATION AND ITS CATEGORIES AS BONDS OF FSU'S COMPONENTS

We are aware that readers who are used to considering an "organization" as "a group of people acting together" could have a problem with the previous deliberations. Therefore, in the Figure 1 we present basic components affecting the functioning of an FSU, emphasizing in this way that organization in our sense of meaning is the very component that binds this functioning together.

Here, it is no room and no need for more detailed explanation of the "black box", unimportant and unworthy of economic science's attention, that economists considered organization to be until 50 years ago (cf.: Stiglitz, 1991). For the purpose of this paper, it is necessary only that readers accept the definition of the (intentional) extended organization of an FSU as the intertwining of the abovementioned dynamic (dimensions of) relationships. As Suseno and Ratten (2007: 16) say, besides relationships with external parties, it is also "the internal network ties and linkages within the firm further provide an effective mechanism to building the firm' competitiveness". "Relationship outcome" (let us term it an FSU's (internal and/or external) organization) "is the operationalized construct that capture the costs and benefits of maintaining the relationship, compared to the expected outcome value of relationship"(Anderson & Narus, 1990).

6. LEARNING ABOUT (INTERNAL, EXTERNAL) RELATIONSHIPS AS THE CENTRAL SUBJECT OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

6.1 Looking for the (best) way of (effective) organizational learning

"Through the economic, behavioral and relational approaches, there is a variety of explanations offered as to why firms are motivated to form and develop relationships" (Clements, Dean & Cohen, 2007: 57). However, these explanations do not include the educational approach of what exactly to learn and how to learn (the 3rd question in Chapter 1), when they undertake (organizational) activities of forming and developing relationships. As previ-

ously stated in this paper, we believe that an approximate answer has been already given about what to learn, so the next task of ours is to show a way of (organizational) learning to gain the necessary knowledge about the organization.

Figure 1: The model of interdependency of components determining the functioning of a formal social unit.
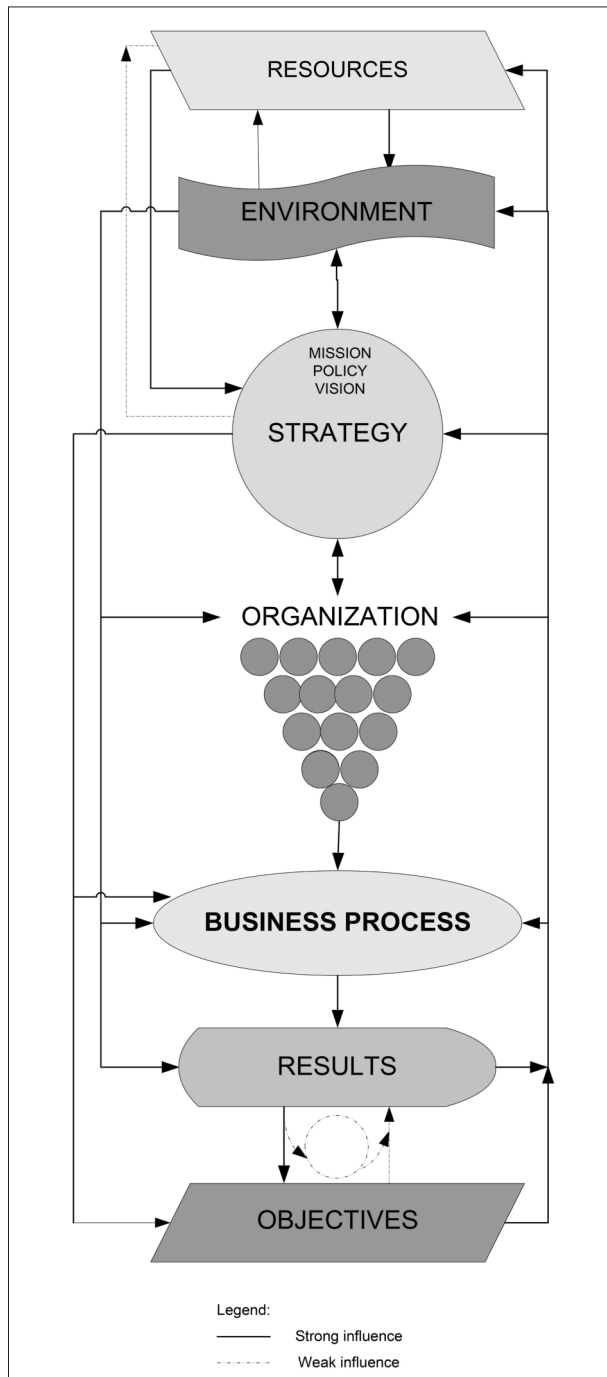
6.2 Establishing a general picture about the quality of organization

Whenever people, (including managers and other organizers) attempt to learn something in order to solve problems easily, it is recommended that provide for themselves a general picture of the subject they intend to change. Therefore, when we talk about organizational learning, it has been crucial, first, to offer a proper definition of an FSU's organization, and, second, then it is necessary to provide a general picture of FSU's organization characteristics with the impact on its quality as a whole and those of its particular elements that could be objects of learning.

Following Conti (1999: 36), who said "what you cannot measure, you cannot improve", it is obvious that a useful general picture of the organization must have a certain system of metrics. In the literature, we can find the long list of methodologies of assessing the organization quality, e.g. Capability Snapshot, Mass Excellence, Earthlink, Watson Wyatt, ASM, organizational perfection, balanced scoreboard, Matejko's method, Kobayashi's method, and, of course, the European Model of Business Excellence. Some of them are parts of methodologies, assessing the functioning of FSUs; other ones are strictly designed to assess the organization quality of FSUs (cf.: Pregeljc, 2002: 69-96).

In addition to the aforementioned extended definition of organization (Chapter 3) as the intertwining of dynamic (dimensions of) relationships, it has been meaningful to create a new assessment method, known as MUKOZ (Mihelčič et al. 1988, 1989) It stands for the methodology (*Metodologija* in Slovenian) of assessing (*Ugotavljanja*) quality (*Kakovosti* in Slovenian) of the organization (*Organizacije*) of the formal social unit (*Združbe*) (Pregeljc, et al, 2012a; Pregeljc, 2012b: 5). Within this method, through many years of research, an extensive list of aspects of relationships was developed as distinct expressions of organizational events, acts, and consequences of activities. Using the method provides information of relationships aspects' quality on a scale from 0 to 5, like was later implemented in a model from European Foundation for Quality Management. An average mark from all of its "organizational relationship" aspects, provided

by the questionnaire self-assessment survey, reflects the full spectrum of organization quality (cf.: Dutton & Raggins, 2007;3), which is expressed in the form of six indicators in the MUKOZ method: the organization's *value or worth* indicator, the organization's *reliability* indicator, the organization's *orientation* indicator, the *organizational commitment* indicator or level of identification, the *organizational consistency* indicator and the *informational supply or information provision* indicator (see in detail: Pregeljc, 2012b; 4-10).

6.3 Identification of the most "prioritized" organizational problems

Organization quality expressions in the form of indicators, although giving a user a clear general picture of FSU's organization quality, are (as has been explained) the results of relationships aspects' marks, indicating different organizational problems scattered throughout an FSU's organization, tackling its organizational structures, processes, roles and systems. It is impossible to solve all of them neither instantaneously or rationally without a proper approach, taking into account a) their sensitivity (acuteness), and b) economics (cost and benefit analysis).

As Dahlgaard-Park & Dahlgaard (2010: 153) said, after data collection, data analysis and diagnosis, there is a time for prioritizing improvement areas. Although they based their work on the 4P Excellence Model adapted for innovation (Dahlgaard-Park & Dahlgaard, 2010; 154), their approach in which they combine importance of interactions, interrelationships, processes, contingency and integrative aspects between various parts of a system on one hand, and agreement of respondents, e.g. managers and other employees, about particular statements regarding organizational topics on the other, is also entirely useful as a tool of organizational learning. In the view of MUKOZ method, it means that the greatest priority should be given to those aspects of relationships (= problems) that obtained the lowest marks, and the highest level of importance by the opinion of respondents, because the yields or benefits of solving these problems (= improvements) through the organizational learning process, which causes higher costs, will be greater.

6.4 Learner's self-questioning

Using the presumption that the respondents engaged in the questionnaire self-assessment survey are simultaneously an FSU's employees and participants in the organizational learning process, it is expected that a satisfactory level of uniformed understanding about the relevancy of observed organizational problems will be reached among them.

Before going to the group discussions, e.g. in quality circles, in which the concrete decisions about future measures and actions should be brought, it is recommended that members of group(s) commit some of their time to self-questioning. Exploiting the idea of the circle-sub-theses and self-questions by Ovsenik (2001), we propose that any member of the group confronted with the list of announced organizational problems' topics ask himself or herself: a) Does the considered problem concern my position (duties, authority, responsibility, relationships with others, income etc.) in the FSU and to what extent?; b) Is my knowledge relevant to contribute to the solution of the problem?; c) Is my idea about solving the problem less or more relevant for the future of a certain organizational department and for the whole of the FSU's functioning and results?; d) In what way does my idea affect my position, the positions of others, and relationships between me and others and among others?; e) How should I present my idea to other members in the group?; f) How I should react to presented ideas of others, if I feel jeopardized in my future position, when some of the proposed ideas will be accepted as expected organizational measures?; g) Will I be capable of exploiting my skills, knowledge and experience less or more than now?; h) Will my motivation for work in the FSU be higher or lower after the proposed changes take place?; i) Will my value system and understanding of organizational life in the FSU will be affected and how?; j) How I will cope with the new reality?

As implied by this list of questions, the participation of individual in a group established to solve organizational problems distinctly differs from individual learning to gain additional knowledge in other fields. While there are no particular difficulties in obtaining more technical, administration, business etc. knowledge by individual study, in the or-

ganizational learning process the participant must be always aware that efficient results of this type of learning almost always can be reached primarily through sharing not only knowledge and ideas but also attitudes and feelings.

6.5 Using the concept of action learning in resolving organizational problems

The belief that participants, who are mature adults, generally learn best when provided with *appropriate* opportunity to engage their inbuilt solution-seeking endeavors is an assumption of one prominent type of learning: action learning, which is essentially a concept of learning from action and experience or learning by doing. Action learning assumes that organizational problems can become a vehicle for learning as they are tackled and resolved (Patrickson, 1999: 289).

According to Revans (1982), the original developer of the concept, there are three essential components of action learning: real world action, involving a number of individuals, with an emphasis on learning from the shared experience. It will not necessarily lead to learning unless the action is accompanied by significant and continuous reflection throughout the entire solution journey. There is no doubt that in the abovementioned way of organizational learning, with its emphasis on the self-questioning of learner, an FSU's employee satisfies all these demands.

According to Patrickson (1999: 294, 295), action learning is especially appropriate in resolving problematic situations where the nature of the problem and its dynamics are unclear at the outset, where there are a number of participants, and where there are differences in the way the various participants perceive the issue. Like all process-based methods (the MUKOZ method is one of them), action learning has potential pitfalls. Without commitment from both top managers and learners, the process is unlikely to survive its initial phases.

In the FSUs' environment, action learning operates in two areas: the field of action where problems exist, and the small group of individuals who form it to analyze, reflect, and share experience as they strive to tackle problem, developed a shared

view and subsequently implement a shared solution. The group of people is the medium for the critical evaluation, questioning, sharing of views, mutual support, and challenge of new ideas (Patrickson, 1999: 290). Such an approach "would provide a valuable 'check and balance' effect to ensure that group members reflect more deeply on issues, and on their interpersonal behaviours" (Drew, 2008: 518). In this way (i.e. by previously mentioned connectivity), it is a logical complement to abovementioned learner's self-questioning.

Within this concept it is emphasized that, since the selection of a course of action will depend on how problem is perceived, time taken in gathering and analyzing information is often crucial in facilitating subsequent success. Regarding the MUKOZ method from this angle, we can – with no hesitation – say that it is not time consuming.

After the learning group plans certain actions, some planned practices choices must be indeed implemented before the learning group monitors outcomes, and an evaluation of critical organizational problems is made.

6.6 Overlapping of processes and their effects

Being aware that implementation of an action choice will provide further learning experience, we can expect effects not only on individuals' increased organizational knowledge but also broader acceptable and verified organizational measures, improvement of organizational culture and climate, better relationships and the increase of intangible organizational capital.

It is because, if we are looking deeper into characteristics of organizational learning process, supported by the MUKOZ method and the action learning method, we are able to recognize that there more processes and that the supplementing of learning's effects are simultaneously overlapping. Within the learning process, the organizational change process and the process of increasing organizational capital are also continuing.

There is no particular need to emphasize that review of organizational learning process results must be a constant part of the process. Along with the iterative nature of the process, the loop of the

aforementioned steps becomes re-engaged and the learning activity can begin again until a longer-term outcome is achieved.

At the beginning of the new loop with the first step of an FSU's organization quality assessment, the effects of previous loop should be visible primarily through un(changed) marks for considered relationships' aspects, given by the same individuals. With the comparison of their past and present marks, the facilitator of group, e.g. senior manager with experience in the organizational field, will be able to assess the difference in organizational knowledge of group's members and properly address weak issues, either in their knowledge or in an FSU's organization.

6.7 Learning should also be applied to external relationships

The effects, expressed in the form of better internal relationships and greater intangible organizational capital could have consequences not only for internal social capital but also for external social capital. Specifically, the improvement of internal relationships is also a reasonable ground for expanding gained relevant experience within an FSU to the process of improvement of external relationships with other FSUs.

For Hitt & Ireland (2002: 6: in Suseno and Ratten, 2007: 8) external social capital is defined as "the relationships between strategic leaders and those outside the [sic] organization [*recte*: FSU] with whom they interact to further the firm's interest". Essentially, "this form of social capital reflects the relationships between firms and the individuals representing these firms with external stakeholders" (Yli-Renko et al., 2002: in Suseno and Ratten, 2007: 8). Accordingly, social capital facilitates knowledge becoming available to the firm through its network of relationships with partners (Yli-Renko, Autio & Sapienza, 2001 in: Suseno and Ratten, 2007: 8). Similarly, Park-Dahlgaard (2009: 11) adds, that "partnership also includes external stakeholders such as suppliers, customers, society and community stakeholders".

Consequently, the question arises regarding what are similarities and what are differences be-

tween internal and external organizational learning. This question should to be addressed in another paper.

7. CONCLUSION

Understanding organization in the way described is also essential for understanding organizational learning in connectivity. When dealing with the term "organizational learning", academics and consultants should be aware that it is irresponsible to teach others about this type of learning if answers regarding basic questions in this field are not provided. It is argued that if the proper use of language is one of the cornerstones for all sciences then it is also valuable for basic terms in the field of organizational learning.

Consequently, a theoretical effort has been made to explain following terms: formal social unit, learning, organization of formal social unit, relationship(s), learning process and organizational learning, in their interdependencies. Through exploitation of these explanations, where certain direction and directives regarding how to approach the process of effective internal organizational learning were presented, the importance of the connectivity of an FSU's employees during the learning process as a necessary practical implication for effectiveness of this type of learning was highlighted.

Finally, it was emphasized that there are some other organizational processes, i.e. organizational change process and the process of increasing organizational capital that are simultaneously overlapping with organizational learning process, and enabling multiple effects of the latter.

EXTENDED SUMMARY / IZVLEČEK

Izraz »organizacijsko učenje« odpira širok razpon vprašanj. Odgovor na eno od njih je povezan z umestitvijo organizacijskega učenja v okvir učenja združbe kot širšega pojma, taka umestitev pa seveda pogojuje razlikovanje med pojmoma »združba« in« »organizacija«. Zato avtor v skladu s priporočili filozofov, kot sta Aristotel in Konfucij, najprej določi namen in nekaj ciljev, nato pa se na primeri obeh pojmov posveti njuni opredelitvi.

Namen članka je zagotoviti boljše razumevanje temeljnih organizacijskih pojmov za smotrno učenje bistvenih organizacijskih vsebin. Med cilji so izpostavljeni potreba po večjem zavedanju pomena rabe pravilnega izrazja, predstavitev nekoliko razširjene Lipovčeve opredelitve organizacije združbe in utemeljitev odgovorov na troje vprašanj: 1. Kaj je učenje? 2. Kaj je pričakovani učinek posamezne vrste učenja? 3. Kakšen je ustrezen način učenja za dosego pričakovanega učinka na določenem področju? V zvezi z drugim in tretjim vprašanjem gre seveda za usmeritev le k odgovorom, povezanim z organizacijskim učenjem.

Glede na kar preveliko zmedo, ki vlada med akademiki glede vsebin posameznih organizacijskih pojmov, je ob primerih razmišljanj nekaterih med njimi dano posredno opozorilo na misel filozofa Seneke, da »je vsak človek o nečem veliko raje prepričan, kot da bi se potrudil o tem temeljiteje razmisliti«. S tem gre za opozorilo, da je pri razpravi o določeni vsebini potrebno enotno razumevanje uporabljenih izrazov, če naj sporočilo učinkovito doseže bralca.

Sklicevanje na Lipovčevo opredelitev organizacije kot izhodišča za opredelitev organizacijskega učenja je povezano tudi z Nietzschejevo mislijo o temeljnih načelih, veljavnih tako za živo kot neživo prirodo. Zato so predstavljena tudi razmišljanja nekaterih Nobelovih nagrajencev za fiziologijo ali medicino, ki na pojem organizacije gledajo z vidika, ki ga Lipovčeva opredelitev organizacije vsaj okvirno zajema. Posledično je pojem združbe opredeljen z »zakonito organizirano skupino ljudi, ki trajneje delujejo za uresničitev postavljenih ciljev«, organizacija kot sestava razmerij med temi ljudmi pa po Lipovčevi opredelitvi ohranja združbo skupaj.

Učenje je opredeljeno kot vsako tako preoblikovanje sistema, npr. človeka ali združbe, ki mu omogoči rešiti problem na lažji način. Ob tem, ko je s tako opredelitvijo dan okvir pojmu »proces učenja«, je ta dodatno opredeljen s koraki ali aktivnostmi, ki jih je treba izvesti na poti do povečanega znanja kot učinka učenja. Tako je dan tudi odgovor, kaj je pričakovani učinek organizacijskega učenja: povečano znanje o organizaciji, razumljeno v skladu z nekoliko razširjeno Lipovčevo opredelitvijo, torej o organizacijskih razmerjih, sestavah, procesih, vlogah in sistemih.

Sama vsebina organizacijskega učenja je posledično povezana s sposobnostjo posameznih zaposlencev in skupin v združbi za dojemanje, sprejemanje, ustrezno preoblikovanje, prispevanje, prenašanje in kontrolo informacij, povezanih z navedenimi organizacijskimi pojmi, zlasti z razmerji med sodelavci, saj se razmerja odražajo tudi v kakovosti drugih organizacijskih pojmov. Teoretično izhodišče za razumevanje mesta organizacije v združbi je podano s sliko modela medsebojne odvisnosti sestavin, ki določajo delovanje združbe.

Ob takem teoretičnem izhodišču – v njem se organizacija pojavlja kot pomemben dejavnik podpore poslovnemu procesu združbe – je prvi pričakovani konkretizirani učinek organizacijskega učenja izboljšanje organizacijske podpore poslovnemu procesu. Iz tega učinka se še kot bolj konkretna ciljna oblika povečanega organizacijskega znanja ponuja povečanje t.i. organizacijskega premoženja ali kapitala v obliki kakovostnih organizacijskih razmerij. Ob tako predstavljenem glavnem cilju so podani še nekateri spremljajoči cilji organizacijskega učenja.

Oblikovanje odgovora na tretje vprašanje je grobo podano z naslednjimi štirimi koraki: 1. Oceno dejanskega stanja organizacije združbe, pri čemer je na razpolago več metodologij, med drugim tudi slovenska metoda MUKOZ. 2. Prepoznava najbolj žgočih organizacijskih problemov. 3. Priprava sodelujočih v razpravi o problemih s predhodnim samoizpraševanjem vsakega sodelujočega o njegovi/njeni vlogi v povezavi s sodelavci. 4. V delu skupine mora biti poudarek na povezanosti njenih članov, saj ne gre le za izmenjavo znanja in zamisli, ampak tudi stališč in občutkov do sodelavcev in do združbe kot celote.

Navedene štiri korake lahko prepoznamo že v Revansovi metodi akcijskega učenja. Poudarjeno je, da ta zasnova oziroma pristop zahteva privrženost metodi tako najvišjih ravnateljev kot drugih učečih se. Ker je izbira ukrepov po učenju pogojena z dobrim poznavanjem organizacijskih razmer, je čas, porabljen za zbiranje ter analiziranje podatkov in informacij o značilnosti organizacijskih problemov, zelo pomemben dejavnik uspeha te metode.

V zaključku je najprej izpostavljen pomen pravilnega dojemanja organizacijskih vsebin sodelujočih tudi z uporabo pravih poenotenih izrazov. Tu kaže ponovno opozoriti na povezavo med organizacijo in poslovnim procesom združbe. Povezanost kot sodelovanje med učečimi se v konkretnem okolju in v primernem času je podana kot praktičen napotek ne le v zvezi z izboljševanjem notranje, ampak tudi zunanje organizacije združbe. Sodelujoči v tem procesu pa se morajo zavedati, da se proces organizacijskega učenja hkrati prepleta tudi z drugimi organizacijskimi procesi, zlasti s procesom spreminjanja organizacije združbe in procesom povečevanja organizacijskega premoženja združbe.

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