Chapter 8

Teacher Professional Development through Knowledge Management in Educational Organisations

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ABSTRACT

Professional development has mainly centered around training processes that involve updating knowledge, yet it has made little headway as a construct that includes both the professional and personal characteristics and working conditions. It has also focused more on developing training programmes than on analysing the tools for continuous training. This chapter analyses the relationships between professional development, organisational development and the creation and management of collective knowledge. These three concepts can be interrelated and contribute to change when we place ourselves within the framework of autonomous organisations with collective projects focused on lifelong learning. It also outlines the Accelera experience of knowledge creation and management in communities, describing the model and process used. This article examines some of the findings and future prospects of the methodology presented.

INTRODUCTION

The knowledge society, and we would add the learning society, is taking shape as a new scenario with its own characteristics and requirements that differentiate it from the preceding models of society. Developing the knowledge society in

education requires new curricular, didactic and/ or organisational strategies, as well as an optimal development of educational professionals (teaching staff, directors, social educators, pedagogues and educational psychologists, social integrators, etc.) if we want to contribute to increasing the competitiveness and quality demanded by the educational systems.

In this setting, what is needed is changes in the organisation of educational efforts and in the role of the agents, which in turn requires a revision of teaching competencies within the framework of the most autonomous school, characterised by carrying out institutional projects and teamwork. In the words of David Hargreaves:

To improve schools, one must be prepared to invest in professional development; to improve teachers, their professional development must be set within the context of institutional development. (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 436)

Compared to traditional, widespread prescriptions for hiring, training and uniform working conditions, we are witnessing ever more contextualised processes and the use of new professional development strategies.

In view of these changes, this chapter presents a strategy for the continuous training and development of education professionals based on a model of knowledge creation and management.

After a brief description of today's society and an analysis of the aptness of the continuous training applied in its organisations, we interrelate knowledge management, organisational development and professional development, describing the framework in which educational organisations can be seen as learning communities. After that, we present the Accelera proposal for professional development by means of knowledge creation and management processes (henceforth KCM) which combines the creation of online learning communities (henceforth OLC) and the philosophy and technology of what is known as social software – "tools for content creation and sharing and for developing networks" (Graham, 2007, p. 6)-, along with several examples and some findings.

BACKGROUND

Constant societal changes, globalisation, increased competitiveness and technological development, as principal factors, require us to reconsider our systems and policies of training and professional development. Organisations, and not just educational ones, are required to be more innovative, creative and efficient, which entails many changes, including changing in training processes (Rubio, 2007). A changing society requires organisations that adapt and revise their coherency and ways of acting according to the needs of the environment. Innovation, which was a trait of only creative, cutting-edge organisations, has become a widespread need and a problem that is constantly being examined at different levels (a more adapted society, more adapted organisations, more adapted individuals) and with different strategies. Innovation is a change that takes place because society is changing, organisations are changing and people, their relationships and their actions and results must change.

Some necessities to be taken into account are in line with the analysis of the new training trends in 21st century organisations (Figure 1) conducted recently by the consultancy firm Overlap.

The aforementioned characteristics of the knowledge society clearly reveal the fast obsolescence of knowledge and the need for constant updating, in turn justifying the development of policies of compulsory continuous training and professional development in organisations. They contribute directly to increasing the intellectual capital of organisations, making possible educational improvements related to higher student performance and a response that more closely fits their educational and training requirements and needs.

Professional development in organisations must therefore shed its adaptive and retroactive nature and instead push for proactive actions that are one step ahead of the social and workplace changes and the advent of new technologies.

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