

LIFELONG LEARNING AS AN INCENTIVE OF LEADERSHIP: KEY ELEMENT IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Lifelong learning is an important factor in leadership development. This article addresses the relationship between lifelong learning and leadership. There were asked 60 participants about lifelong learning. The obtained findings of the study contribute to theory of leadership, lifelong learning and could help in the process of improving the society. A leadership development program can incorporate the findings of theories of learning and improve implementation of the knowledge in everyday life.

Key words: lifelong learning, leadership, leadership development, society



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INTRODUCTION

People have been learning all their lives means to confirm the facts. Individuals learn every day, more or less intensively. Sometimes they do it on purpose while sometimes the learning processes are unplanned; very often inevitable. Life without continuous learning is unthinkable. Even organizing daily activities involves continuous learning. In fact, learning process is more and more often than people know. The less obvious assumption is that lifelong learning can be promoted or organized in some way, a thesis that is often implicitly in favour of lifelong learning as a promising idea in educational policy and educational approaches.

Lifelong learning covers many fields, from general education to vocational training, from the needs of the young to the needs of the elderly as well as the needs of the employed and the unemployed. Lifelong learning involves different levels of learning, formal, non-formal, informal, and covers many fields: coaching, basic skills, integration of information and communication technologies, investment efficiency, foreign language learning, lifelong guidance, system flexibility to make learning accessible to all, mobility, civic education, etc. One of the reasons that lifelong learning has become very important is the accelerated scientific and technological development. Despite the length of primary, secondary and university education, which ranges between 14 and 18 years depending on the country, the knowledge and skills acquired on this occasion are not sufficient for a professional career spanning three or four decades. In October 2006, the European Union adopted a document entitled "It's never too late to learn." This document recommends lifelong learning as the essence of the ambitious Lisbon 2010 project, on the basis of which the entire European Union should become a learning area.

How do individuals keep up with the rapidly changing world, a world where information flow is increasingly difficult to follow, where it is difficult to follow the acceleration that generates new knowledge? Searching for the answer to this question is most important in raising awareness of the process and importance of learning for both personal growth and the advancement of learning communities. Learning has always been an integral part of human existence, and today it is a continuous process of progression. Simple, learning means changing.

Nowadays, individuals live in a world where everything is changing and learning: organizations, cities, communities, smart apps, etc.

The peculiarity of creativity in lifelong learning practices is manifested in two tenets: problem solving strategies (external development) and self-realization in the learner (internal development) (Goff, 1992; Maslow, 1968; Marsiske & Willis, 1998). Creativity and lifelong learning are important factors in achieving a sustainable development of a society.

Leaders are required not only to be more educated about their own expertise, but also to handle specific tasks and challenges, while intensity of work and time limits are escalating.

The concept of lifelong learning is an appreciation of adults' lifelong development needs. By facilitating a continuous learning process, individuals contribute to economic growth, greater competitiveness and lasting employability. Also, this concept is based on developing active citizenship and individual potential of individuals. The difference between lifelong education and lifelong learning still needs to be borne in mind. Namely, education is a process that covers only organized learning, while learning is a broader term that includes every opportunity to acquire knowledge throughout life.

Merriam & Caffarella (1999; according to Allen, 2007) highlight a number of adult learning theories. Allen (2007) in his article focused on four: behaviorism, cognitivism, social learning and constructivism. Behaviorism's primary purpose is to elicit behavioral change in a new and desired direction. While behaviorists are concerned with behavioral change, cognitivists focus on developing "capacity and skills to learn better". Proponents of social learning examine the intersection of the social context and the learner. Lastly, constructivists are concerned with the learners' construction of reality and how individuals make meaning from experiences. Allen (2007) provided a brief description of each theory and links its application to leadership development. Also he discussed "transfer of learning" – an important element in any leadership development initiative.

LEADERSHIP

The common definition of leadership emphasizes the fact that leadership is the process by which one person influences other members of a group to achieve the defined goals of the group or organization (Grinberg & Baron, 1998). By this definition, leadership is a process that involves influencing, changing the actions or attitudes of group members. There are multiple techniques for influencing, and leadership relies on influencing techniques without the use of coercion, above all on the positive relationship and feelings between leaders and followers. A leader who manages to be followed by the others is successful. Further there is great number of definitions for leadership; Northouse (2008) extracts four key components, the leadership is a process, influences, happens in a group context and presupposes certain goal. Based on these components, could determinate a definition: the leadership is a process which influences the group to achieve certain goal. Pettigrew (1988; according to Winston, & Patterson, 2006) includes the understanding of employees' skills and the accurate deployment of employees based on these skills as a strategic tool of the leader. Skills are the function-related knowledge and physical skills that contribute to the success and efficiency in completing tasks. Winston, & Patterson (2006), assumed that many researchers (Giblin (1986), Waitley (1995), and Deming (1986); according to Winston, & Patterson, 2006) support the notion of both the leader and the follower need to achieve higher levels of knowledge.

It is obvious the importance of the role of leaders and managers in civil society organizations, and this study is significant for developing knowledge to improve better understanding of the relationship between these concepts, leadership, lifelong learning and creativity.

METHOD

Participants

60 participants were included in the study all of them are at the top positions as politicians, rectors, deans, members of parliament in The North Republic of Macedonia. Average age is 42.7 (SD=8.93), 50 were male and 10 female.

Instruments

Participants were asked questions about reading, knowledge of foreign languages and use of IT technologies.

Results

The results of this study showed that 87% of participants said they read constantly, and 13 % said that they don't prefer to read. One of the characteristics of a great leader is making a obligation to being a lifelong learner.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

According to results it is obvious that leaders constantly read. They make decisions that want to grow and learn, therefore can find different ways of resolving problems and set immediate decisions. Learning is a personal process, whereas social context and adult life style shape what adult learns and wants to know. Conger (1992, according to Allen, 2007) outlines four types of leadership training. Based on his qualitative research, leadership development programs or aspects of programs, fall into four categories, as personal growth, conceptual understanding, feedback and skill building. Personal growth programs are “based, generally, on the assumption that leaders are individuals who are deeply in touch with their personal dreams and talents and who will act to fulfill them”. Conceptual learning is based on theoretical material, which is occurred basically in universities. Feedback instruments are used in an effort to help individuals locate areas for improvement. The fourth category skill building is the most common method utilized in leadership development training and has grown increasingly difficult to teach as their thinking about leadership has progressed.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study is relevant because set the relationship of leadership and lifelong learning. It has limitations because there are not used instruments to research lifelong learning, only simple questions. Nevertheless, it clarifies the importance of learning, and set the key characteristic of leader the willingness to learn and grow in their professional development. In today's dynamic information age, leaders need to continue learning

throughout their lifetime in order to retain and enhance their competence. Consequently, leadership development nowadays is in the state of confusion. Nanus (1989) defines leadership skills as embodying a vision, not just as applying a particular style of behaviour. According to the idea is that leaders are made, not born, leaders should inspire others, to achieve clearly articulated, shared goals.

Continues learning and reading are essential for producing the inventions and problem solving that is expected by leaders, needed to address the many challenging problems that our society faces. To find their way in societal shifts, leaders cannot rely on static maps, nor can they hope to manage complexity through fixating on the details (Mikkelsen & Jarcho, 2015). By seeking, sensing, and sharing, everyone in a society can become part of a learning entity, listening at different frequencies, scanning the perspective, recognizing arrangements, making better decisions on an informed basis and solve problems.

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