

Lifelong learning in the context of professional competence requirements

David Vorel¹, Petr Sládek²

Abstract

Lifelong learning is an essential part of everyone's professional life. One of the ways to equip employees with the required professional competencies is through professional training. However, vocational training must be based on the needs of companies and institutions, the requirements of executives and must be based on existing professional competencies of the staff. High-quality and well-timed training in the organization will enable better mastering of the newly required competencies. Vocational training must prepare employees for the changes that each sector is bringing in the development. The article deals with the issue of creating professional education with an emphasis on its effectiveness in shaping the professional skills of workers.

Lebenslanges Lernen im Kontext beruflicher Kompetenzanforderungen

Lebenslanges Lernen ist ein wesentlicher Bestandteil des Berufslebens aller. Eine Möglichkeit, die Mitarbeiter mit den erforderlichen Fachkompetenzen auszustatten, ist die Berufsausbildung. Die Berufsausbildung muss jedoch auf den Bedürfnissen von Unternehmen und Institutionen sowie auf den Anforderungen von Führungskräften und auf den vorhandenen beruflichen Kompetenzen des Personals beruhen. Eine qualitativ hochwertige und zeitlich gut abgestimmte Schulung in der Organisation ermöglicht eine bessere Beherrschung der neu erworbenen Kompetenzen. Die Berufsausbildung muss die Mitarbeiter auf die Veränderungen vorbereiten, die jeder Sektor in die Entwicklung bringt. Der Artikel befasst sich mit der Frage der Schaffung einer Berufsausbildung, wo der Schwerpunkt auf deren Wirksamkeit bei der Gestaltung der beruflichen Fähigkeiten der Arbeitnehmer liegt.

Keywords:

Lifelong learning
Competence requirements
Employer

Schlüsselwörter:

Lebenslanges Lernen
Kompetenzanforderungen
Arbeitgeber

1 Introduction

The individual's learning process is never completed, although it may occur at certain nodal points (eg Final exams, Graduation exams, State final examinations at universities). After passing the final examinations at schools, the individual enters a job where he / she is professionally educated and acquires specific professional competencies. This training supplements knowledge, skills that the employee did not acquire during intentional training. Vocational training is based on updating previously acquired knowledge, skills and habits and reflects current trends in practice.

Access to professional training for workers varies from one organization to another. These differences depend on the size of the organization or its focus (nature of the activity) of the technologies used, etc. In organizations using new technologies or which are dependent on legislative changes, the frequency of vocational

¹ DTI University, Sládkovičova 533/20, 018 41 Dubnica nad Váhom, Slovak Republic

² Masaryk University, Faculty of Education, Department of Physics, Chemistry and Vocational Education, Poříčí 7, 603 00, Czech Republic

training courses is higher than in other sectors. Staff training is related to personnel activities. Otherwise, professional education would not be effective. Recruiters know how many workers need to be hired and what employees and candidates have qualifications. Subsequently, they can plan suitable and targeted educational activities based on these requirements.

An educated employee is beneficial to the organization because his / her qualification (knowledge) potential increases the value of the organization. Increasing the work skills of workers by changing the employer's requirements and enhancing their working abilities is essential for employees to be able to carry out activities within their job title (Koubek, 2015, p. 253). Thanks to vocational training and competence development, employees gain new up-to-date knowledge in their field. The objective of vocational training is to give the employee the competencies they apply not only to their current position, but also to other positions in the organization. The development of professional skills is an individual matter. As in school education, vocational training shows the individual's cognitive peculiarities and their value settings. Some of them can be successfully expanded. Employees who are flexible in terms of lifelong learning will find jobs easier and better placed in the labour market.

2 Development of professional competences in education

2.1 Definition of lifelong learning

The phenomenon of lifelong learning is closely related to adult education, as it has been with individuals throughout their lives. Each organization forms the professional competencies of its employees according to their specific requirements and ideas. For this purpose, it creates a system of educational and training activities. Billet (2007) distinguishes between lifelong learning and lifelong education.

According to Koubek (2008, p. 254), it is an important part of shaping a person's working abilities and shaping an employee's working abilities. The formation of human and its working abilities can be viewed from two perspectives.

A person's work possibilities are formed in a functional influence on a person's personality during his or her life. The employee's ability to work is reflected in the intentional influence on the personality of the person within the organization. The intentional formation of a worker is influenced not only by the organization but also by the activities he / she performs. The actual formation is supported by the educational activities the employees undergo. Vocational training activities can be compulsory or optional (voluntary). As part of the training and acquisition of professional competencies, the organization must have a clear plan of the professional competencies it wishes to equip its employee. Therefore, it is important that the organization knows the clear criteria for the professional competencies that an employee should have at the start of employment and what competencies he / she will retrofit during employment. Competency issues are also addressed in Rupert & Wilson (2008, p. 2572) where they define key competences that are important for lifelong learning.

2.2 Professional training

The core area for the organization is basic preparation. Here, the employee acquires the main competencies for carrying out activities. It acquaints with the operation of the organization and issues of activities. Passing basic training is necessary to enable the worker to perform elementary activities and to understand the basic correlations within the organization.

Specialization preparation for Koubek (2008, p. 256) is seen as a deepening of qualifications. Sometimes specialization training is referred to as - in-service training. Within the scope of specialization preparation, the employee expands his / her competencies in the professional field. The organization can approach its qualifications for new workers who are preparing to carry out their activities, as well as for existing workers who will extend their competencies with new knowledge in the field (change of legislation, new methods of access to work, new discoveries, introduction of new technologies etc.) .). Dissemination of knowledge has a positive impact on the functioning of the organization. The work performance of employees increases, and their competitive position improves. A separate chapter is the retraining of workers. Retraining or requalification is closely related to the performance of a new activity, when the employee moves to a new job position and does not have the required competencies. This situation may arise either voluntarily, when an employee has a need for change or if his or her job is cancelled.

2.3 Competence

Armstrong (2002, p. 280) lists competences as a term indicating that a worker possesses the necessary professional qualifications, competence, and ability to perform the activity. It should be noted that no graduate of the school has such competences that immediately after his studies he / she can carry out the studied issue without any training. In the case of graduates, the acquired professional competencies must be supplemented by further practical knowledge. From the employer's point of view, we are talking about key competencies, i.e. competencies that are essential for a worker to be able to carry out his activity successfully. Key competences are essential for job seekers in the labour market Maclean & Wilson (2009, p.2229).

Mužík (2010, p. 80) lists key competencies as a summary of knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, and values important for the personal development and employment of each member of society. According to Salganik & Rychen (2003, p. 66), the key competencies are not only related to the individual's job market, but also to life.

The European Commission has also addressed the issue of key competences in relation to lifelong learning. Based on a Commission proposal, the Council adopted a Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning. The Recommendation identifies the eight key competences needed for personal fulfilment, a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, employability, active citizenship and social inclusion.

2.4 Defining training needs

Proper setting of vocational training needs is problematic. Koubek (2008, p. 261) states that qualifications and education are difficult to quantify human characteristics. It is very difficult to set requirements for education in relation to the knowledge with which workers come to the organization. The possibility of finding out what knowledge job seekers possess can be from the documented evidence of the highest completion of education, the length of work experience or from the activities they performed. However, all these options are very difficult to quantify.

The correct determination of the vocational training area, depth and frequency will depend on the needs identified by the competent manager in relation to the number of employees based on their needs. Requirements and planning of vocational training can also be made with regard to in-house research. Efficiency is essential to properly set up the education system. Plamínek (2014, p. 18) mentions the benefits of education to better utilize the potential of employees, equipment, and systems, improve performance, reduce turnover, and increase customer satisfaction. Every training needs to be in the form of feedback, both from participants and from managers. Subsequently, it is ascertained whether the completed education is beneficial for the organization and the funds are effectively spent by the organization. Looney (2008, p. 22) mentions how important the correlation between teaching, learning, and rating is.

2.5 Research

The starting point for proper planning of a quality education system is the determination of educational needs in relation to personnel planning and staff stabilization. As part of the research carried out by Vorel (2018) in customs staff, it was found that a well-designed education system had a positive effect on staff retention in the organisation. The same investigation was carried out for employees of the Municipal Police in Brno, where the quality of the education system as an important factor for staying with the employer was not confirmed. The differences in the data could be caused by the offer of educational opportunities.

Another survey was the diversity of training activities offered for employees, when the customs administration provided much greater opportunities compared to the Municipal Police in Brno. Educational activities of employees of the Municipal Police in Brno were determined, what kind and quantity only to those stipulated by law. While the offer of training activities at the customs administration was much wider. The offer of education and the overall sophisticated system can serve as a motivational element and thus stabilize the personnel organization.

One of the other indicators was to find out how the quality of education affects the willingness of workers to take courses and to look for them independently. In both investigations at both the Customs Administration and the Municipal Police in Brno, it was found that the quality of educational activities has a significant impact on employees' willingness to attend courses and to seek them. Based on the findings, it is necessary for the training activities to carry out a retrospective evaluation of the courses by the participants.

The research also examined how the frequency of educational activities affects the performance of workers. The investigation revealed that the frequency of training activities does not affect the performance of employees, both for the employees of the Brno Municipal Police and the customs administration. Based on these surveys, it is necessary to have well-planned and well-prepared educational activities. The absence of employees in the workplace brings pitfalls in shift planning and is not necessarily an asset in education. The effectiveness of education is given by the correct timing, frequency and appropriately chosen content (quality) of the courses.

Correct timing of education is related to personnel planning, when it is necessary that all employees acquire the necessary competences in the required time period, i.e. before performing their own activities. It is also necessary to consider the length of the course or the frequency of training, when the employee is not in the workplace and, finally, the content.

If employees need to perform a specific activity in the organization and do not have the appropriate competencies, they can either use the internal education system (if the organization offers it) or participate in training at an external educational institution. During the research, Vorel (2018) addressed the question of whether there is a link between the offer of training courses in the organization and university studies. The investigation revealed that the employees of the Customs Administration prefer to complete internal educational activities at the organization over studying at the university. While the Brno Municipal Police staff did not show this dependency.

The difference in the result in the survey can be perceived as follows. Many customs respondents have higher education. Graduation from another university is not immediately necessary for the position held. Employees can acquire new competencies within the offered courses of organizations. Acquiring new competencies by completing courses is more effective for employees, not only in terms of time, but also in financial terms. Studying at a university is more difficult and time consuming. It should be noted that the outcome of the survey is conditional on a suitable offer of training courses, because if the set education system were insufficient, workers would look for the possibility of supplementing the relevant competencies outside the organization or in extreme cases might consider leaving for another employer.

The situation of employees of the Municipal Police in Brno is different. There was no evidence of dependence between the offer of courses and the interest in studying at a university. The result of the survey is given by the set education system. The employer provides the courses that workers need immediately to perform their duties with the municipal police. Graduating from a university is time consuming, but successfully completed studies do not affect further necessary education because employees, regardless of their qualifications, must regularly train and take appropriate examinations.

2.6 Planning of education

When planning training, it is necessary to ensure the competencies that the employee should acquire and do not possess. These competencies have not been acquired by the employee during their studies or they are new competencies that they have to perform in the organization due to the newly defined activities. Vodák & Kucharčíková (2011, p. 96) mentions three basic phases in the planning of education, the preparatory, implementation and improvement phases. The important basic phase is to find out what are the specific educational needs, to what extent, who will teach, to analyse the participants, to determine their knowledge, to develop the objectives of the educational project.

The second, implementation phase presents the development and processing of the individual stages of the educational project. It defines the way the training will take place, the possibilities of participants (absence at workplaces), individual priorities and conditions in the organization.

The final improvement phase aims at continuous evaluation and subsequent improvement of individual stages in relation to the defined objectives. The feedback from the participants, the quality of education and the benefit to the organization are evaluated. Other ways of improving and streamlining education are being sought. The aim is to harmonize the system, so it is recommended that both executives and organizers as well as participants and lecturers participate in this final phase.

3 Conclusion

Obtaining professional competencies for carrying out work activities during study is very important. Extensive and purposeful competences will enable workers to easily enter the workflow and consequently reduce the need for extensive training for novices. Given the acquired knowledge of graduates and the subsequent requirements

of organizations, it is necessary to adjust the education system not only within the organization, but also within the educational institution. In the case of dialogue between employers and educational institutions, it is better to prepare graduates for careers and save time for employment.

Research has shown that a well-designed education system motivates employees to stay with their employer. This will reduce staff turnover, stabilize the organization, and better plan for any activities. The diversity of educational activities is another factor that positively motivates employees. We consider it insufficient if the organization focuses only on the necessary area of education, which it needs to provide by law. When acquiring professional competencies, employees preferred to take advantage of vocational training within the organization, provided that this offer was allowed by the employer. The reason was the time and difficulty of external study, such as university studies. While acquiring the necessary competencies in internal courses at the employer will significantly save time.

References

ARMSTRONG, Michael. *Human resource management*. Praha: Grada, c2002. Expert (Grada). ISBN 80-247-0469-2.

Billet, S. (2017). Distinguishing lifelong learning from lifelong education. Mount Gravatt, Brisbane, Australia.

Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning: Key competences [Online]. Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning: Key competences [Online]. Retrieved April 21, 2020, from European Commission: Education and Training website: https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/council-recommendation-on-key-competences-for-lifelong-learning_en

KOUBEK, Josef. *Human resources management: basics of modern human resources management*. 5., updated and extended edition Praha: Management Press, 2015. ISBN 9788072612888.

LOONEY, Janet. *Teaching, learning and assessment for adults: improving foundation skills*. Paris: OECD, c2008. ISBN 9789264039902.

MACLEAN, Rupert a Wilson DAVID. *International Handbook of Education for the Changing World of Work: Bridging Academic and Vocational Learning*. Springer, 2009. ISBN 978-1-4020-5280-4.

MUŽÍK, Jaroslav. *Educational process management: andragogical didactics*. Praha: Wolters Kluwer Česká republika, 2010. Adult education (Wolters Kluwer). ISBN 978-80-7357-581-6.

PLAMÍNEK, Jiří. *Adult education: a guide for trainers, participants and sponsors*. 2., extended edition. Praha: Grada Publishing, 2014. ISBN 978-80-247-4806-1.

SALGANIK, Laura Hersh a Dominique Simone RYCHEN. *Key competencies for a successful life and a well-functioning society*. Toronto: Hogrefe & Huber, c2003. ISBN 0889372721.

VODÁK, Jozef a Alžbeta KUCHARČÍKOVÁ. *Effective employee training*. 2., updated and extended edition. Praha: Grada, 2011. Management (Grada). ISBN 978-80-247-3651-8.