A PILOT STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING, CHANGE, AND SUSTAINABILITY IN A RESPONSIBLE ROMANIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

Sorin-George Toma*
University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract
The complexity of the 21st century is highly determined by an incessant change at a global, international, regional, national and local scale. Faced with unpredictable changes at various levels all types of organizations are operating in a turbulent and fiercely competitive environment. Today’s successful organizations are learning organizations that embrace the sustainability paradigm. The aims of our paper are to render the theoretical approaches related to the concepts of organizational learning, change, sustainability, and to the relationships among them, and to analyze the results of a pilot study regarding professors’ opinions on these relationships within a responsible Romanian higher education institution. To such ends, a set of two hypotheses was tested during our research. The data gathered were processed through the SPSS software. The results of our research, limited by its purpose and the size of the sample, show that professors appreciate that team learning and empowerment are the main drivers of change and sustainability in a learning organization.

Keywords: organizational learning, learning organization, change, sustainability, higher education institution

JEL Classification: D83, I23

Introduction
The complexity of the 21st century is highly determined by an incessant change at a global, international, regional, national and local scale. Change is all powerful and all around us. It is occurring more and more frequently in a knowledge-based society. On the one hand, the rapid expansion of globalization has brought a high level of interdependence between nations and therefore, many social, economic and political transformations around the world. On the other hand, humanity has entered the “century of the environment” and sustainability has become step by step one of his fundamental concern. All human beings have to join their efforts in order to found a sustainable global society based on respect for

* Author’s contact: e-mail: tomagsorin62@yahoo.com
nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace (The Earth Charter Initiative, 2000).

The human society has already planted the seeds for new ways of living on Earth. Due to the fact that both individuals and organizations all over the world are aware of the need to live and act in present without jeopardizing the future, many sustainability initiatives have flourished (e.g., The World Commission on Environment and Development- WCED). In order to create a sustainable future the following three guiding ideas stand out as fundamentals (Senge, et al., 2008, pp. 9-10):

1. There is no viable path forward that does not take into account the needs of future generations.

2. Institutions matter.

3. All real change is grounded in new ways of thinking and perceiving.”

In spite of the fact that the capitalist system has undergone major changes in its 200 years history and is facing now with crucial challenges such as the financial crisis or the delocalization of work force, it is likely to remain the dominant social order in the world (Heilbroner, 1994). As an evolutionary system, whose economic principles and political rules are subject to profound changes, the capitalist system reinvents and reinvigorates itself through crises.

Today’s capitalism has to answer to difficult questions. The defiances of the global warming, water scarcity and extreme poverty have led to the idea that sustainability issues have become central to the capitalist system. As human society is confronted with “the convergence of three interrelated crises: economic recession, energy insecurity and the overarching climate crisis”, people need a long-term and responsible form of capitalism called “sustainable capitalism” (Gore and Blood, 2008, p. 1). Sustainable capitalism can help companies save money by reducing waste and increasing energy efficiency (Gore and Blood, 2011). The conventional capitalism saw priorities in economic, social, and environmental policy as competing. The new capitalism, the “natural capitalism”, aims to integrate all of them together (Hawken, 1999).

That is why sustainable development represents the primary driver of economic change in the future. This means that human society needs a true paradigm shift to a more sustainable economy, a “green economy”. According to the Kyoto Protocol, which is the first step towards reversing the global trend of rising gas emissions, “building the low-carbon economy that is needed to prevent dangerous climate change will stimulate innovation in clean technologies such as renewable energy and energy efficiency” (European Commission, 2011, p. 2) Therefore, an economy focused mainly on “providing social and environmental solutions where governments and markets failed”, a “Phoenix Economy”, is called to address effectively the actual challenges (Elkington, et al., 2009, p. 1).

In late January 2012, participants at the World Economic Forum’s 42nd Annual Meeting agreed that capitalism needs a redesign in order to serve society better. They pointed out that “not only is capitalism the best system yet devised for enhancing the well being of the greatest number of people, but that it is also immensely supple and flexible” (Frederick, 2012, p. 1). The neo-liberal capitalism seems to be challenged by a rising state capitalism, in which states use the power of markets for political gains. An old trend, the state capitalism has become much more important in a period of financial and economic turmoil.
The crisis of Western capitalism “has been rendered more serious by the rise of a potent alternative: state capitalism, which tries to meld the powers of the state with the powers of capitalism” (Wooldridge, 2012, p. 3). In this respect the best example is China, the leading practitioner of state capitalism. The world’s most populous country, China achieves one of the highest economic growth rates and is one of the least indebted countries.

Faced with unpredictable changes at various levels, all types of organizations are operating in a fiercely competitive and turbulent environment within the capitalist system. As global competition increased continuously, they have witnessed the emergence of a new world order. In order to perform well in an increasingly complicated global landscape political leaders and corporate managers are struggling to find the best ways to cope with multiple challenges.

At the macro level, “some countries or sectors may need more market and less government in a particular historic context while others need less market and more government” (Kaletsky, 2010, p. 10). In order to improve the competitiveness of their countries and to achieve the sustainable development governments have understood the need to create, implement and coordinate strategies designed to support longer-term economic, social and environmental performances. For example, in Australia water conservation has become a key issue in the national debates. As a result, Australian investments in innovative alternative energy technologies (e.g., wind) have soared in the last years.

A successful economic strategy relies upon various elements of the knowledge societal infrastructure as education or research and development (Toma, 2011). Thus, many of the current changes experienced by the national economies are closely related to key factors driving the productivity enhancements that support social welfare (e.g., knowledge, technologies, training, education and health). One of the main pillars of competitiveness, “quality higher education and training is crucial for economies that want to move up the value chain” (Sala-i-Martin, 2011, p. 5) as knowledge has become the core commodity in the knowledge era. The development of technology, existence of a global market, and need for unceasing innovation, have led to a higher demand for educated people.

At the micro level, organizations, either public, private or non-governmental, are also under pressure to continually change. Why do organizations have to change? The massive economic volatility, the global warming, the rapid pace of technological evolution and the rise of population, especially in the emerging countries, are only some the main reasons of the need for organizational change. Change is the rule and not the exception in today’s increasingly unstable environment.

Many organizations, mainly businesses, do not survive the upheavals of change. More and more companies die prematurely because their management focuses on the economic activity and forgets the humane nature of their organizations. Long-lived companies are different: sensitive to their environment, cohesive, tolerant and conservative in financing. The sensitivity to the environment represents “a company’s ability to learn and adapt” and the tolerance constitutes the symptom of “a company’s awareness of ecology” (De Geus, 2002, p. 9). That is why a good company marries “social responsibility and economic efficiency” (Samuelson, 1996, p. 3). Successful companies are “invariably committed, conscientious learners” (Garvin, 2000, p. 8) that adopt the sustainability paradigm.
Also, this highly successful type of company survives for a long/very long period of time in a turbulent global environment due to the fact is good at change management. They are visionary companies that “display a powerful drive for progress that enables them to change and adapt without compromising their cherished core ideals” (Collins and Porras, 2000, p. 9).

What is the purpose of learning in these long lasting companies? For shaping a sustainable world (a world driven by knowledge) which represents “the greatest learning challenge humans have ever faced”, a challenge that requires “extraordinary leadership from institutions of all sorts” (Senge, et al., 2008, p. 12).

In a period when knowledge is the critical production factor, effective learning lies at the core of successful organizations. In order to become enduring organizations they have to constantly reinvent themselves by adopting a life-long learning organizational culture and implementing sustainable strategies. Moreover, in the race to attract high calibre people, “being a socially responsible and environmentally sustainable company is also essential in recruiting and retaining global talent” (Monck, 2012, p. 1). As the most valuable knowledge resides largely in its best employees, actual organizations are compelled to make investments for acquiring, generating and disseminating knowledge. That is why the 21st century organization is developing “knowledge marketplaces, talent marketplaces, and formal networks to stimulate the creation and exchange of intangibles” (Bryan and Joyce, 2005, p. 23).

In the age of discontinuity the ability of an organization to learn more and faster than its competitors may be the main source of sustainable competitive advantage and a determining factor in business performance (De Geus, 1988; Lopez, et al., 2005). As organizational learning always includes some performance, so performance always includes some organizational learning (Hurst, 2002). In order to successfully compete in the long run in the global market, organizations should aim to become learning organizations within a knowledge-based society. In a highly interconnected environment learning involves the organization as a whole because “…work must become more “learningfull”. It is no longer sufficient to have one person learning for the organization... it’s just not possible any longer to figure it out from the top and have everyone else following the orders of the “grand strategist”. The organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap peoples’ commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization.” (Senge, 2006, p. 4). A key vehicle for creating knowledge within organizations, learning has to be generalized in and embraced by the whole organization.

Higher education institutions have proved to be effective organizations at creating, acquiring, and interpreting knowledge, but not so successful in implementing them to their activities. Although there are many studies examining the relationships between organizational learning, change and sustainability, relatively few researches investigate this issue in relation to higher education institutions (Axelsson, et al., 2008; Boyce, 2003). From our standpoint professors’ opinions regarding these relationships constitute an important research field.

Arising from the above discussion emerge the following questions for which we do not have adequate evidence yet in the Romanian higher education institutions. These are:

- Which is the relationship between organizational learning and change in a Romanian faculty?
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- Which is the relationship between organizational learning and sustainability in a Romanian faculty?

In order to obtain data for these questions the methodological approach was based on an exploratory research (Cătoiu, et al., 2002; Rotariu and Iluț, 1997).

The aims of our paper are to render the theoretical approaches related to the concepts of organizational learning, change, sustainability, and to the relationships among them, and to analyze the results of a pilot study regarding professors’ opinions on these relationships in a responsible Romanian higher education institution. To such ends, a set of two hypotheses was tested during our research.

The paper is organized as follows. The first chapter of the paper presents the relationships among organizational learning, change, and sustainability. The second chapter deals in details with the research methodology. The findings are analyzed and interpreted in the third chapter of the paper, which relates to the two questions that have driven our study. This is followed by final conclusions.

1. Conceptual framework

Over the past decades, a steady stream of research has developed concerning the concepts of change, learning, and sustainability in organizations. A review of the literature reveals different definitions, interpretations and conceptualizations of these notions.

Change represents an elusive concept, hard to measure in an accurate manner. In essence, change is an alternative of the way something is carried out. R. M. Kanter considered that change “involves the crystallization of new action possibilities (new policies, new behaviours, new patterns, new methodologies, new products, or new market ideas) based on reconceptualized patterns in the organization” (Kanter, 1984, p. 279).

Organizations are changing by using a variety of methods (e.g., participative, authoritarian), not all of them being regarded as desirable by the people involved. The choice of methods is often determined by the source of the pressure for change. Organizational change is stimulated both by the pressure sources from internal (e.g., leadership, employees) and external environment (e.g., competition, new technologies).

According to J. P. Kotter and D. S. Cohen, two approaches can be used in change efforts: analysis-think-change and see-feel-change. The first one is based on logic and the second one on emotions (Kotter and Cohen, 2002). They divided the organizational change process into three major phases as follows (Cohen, 2005):

- creating the organizational climate for change,
- engaging and enabling the whole organization,
- implementing and sustaining the change.

Strong leaders create a vision of the organizational future. They have to institute change so that it becomes a routine within organizations. As change masters, they are “the right people in the right place at the right time”, people with “the ideas that move beyond the organization’s established practice, ideas they can form into visions” (Kanter, 1984, p. 306). In order to manage organizational change they use creative and interactive intellectual
methods and techniques (e.g., brainstorming, active listening), and implement learning-oriented tactics and strategies (e.g., designing learning workplaces, developing communities of learning), capable to produce self-sustaining change. Their change initiatives are connected with real processes, are intended to increase people’s performance, both individually and collectively, and are focused on learning (Senge, et al., 2000).

Without learning about the business or about the competition, managers and employees can not bring their full contributions to building a successful organization. They learn and share information from a wide range of diverse sources. Moreover, learning helps people embrace change and, therefore, they will know better how to react when the environment modifies. One of the most natural activities, learning has always constituted an essential part of the human experience. Learning in organizations means “the continuous testing of experience, and the transformation of that experience into knowledge-accessible to the whole organization, and relevant to its core purpose” (Senge, et al., 2003, p. 49).

Knowledge refers to something that people possess, whereas knowing means putting knowledge to work. Knowing is a prelude to learning, which encompasses the processes of acquiring and/or creating new knowledge.

Many studies on learning insisted on the need for organizational learning to occur both at individual, team and organizational level (Sydanmaanlakka, 2002). Some researchers considered that there is no organizational learning without individual learning (West, 1994). Arguing that people can not learn in isolation, other researchers highlighted that organizational learning has to be an activity of interdependent people (Stacey, 2003).

Late 1950s and early 1960s brought the debate between behaviourists and economists regarding organizational learning. R. Cyert and J. G. March conceived the firm as an adaptive system and launched the concept of “learning cycle”. In his attempt to find solutions to reduce the manufacturing costs, K. Arrow revealed the importance of the concept of “learning by doing.”

In the mid 1970s, C. A. Lave and J. G. March connected organizational learning with performance and success. Others, such as C. Argyris and D. A. Schon, showed that organizations have different levels of learning and created therefore the single and double-loop-learning (Fig. no. 1). The single-loop learning uses only the previously generated knowledge to produce new knowledge about specific events and conditions whereas the double-loop learning involves the process of finding solutions to problems by creating new governing knowledge. Later, Argyris considered organizational learning as a process of detecting and correcting errors. On his turn, D. Kolb launched the experiential learning cycle. In his view, learning involves a four phases-cycle as follows: experiment, experience, reflection and concept development. Only a complete cycle enables learning.

In the 1980s, B. Hedberg launched the concept of “unlearning”, expressing the fact that sometimes it is difficult even for organizations to forget the way things are done. From this point of view unlearning constitutes one of the major barriers to organizational learning and change. E. Schein contended in the mid 1980s that the role of leaders in modern organizations is to create and sustain a learning culture. The learning leader helps the organization’s member to “achieve some degree of insight and develop motivation to change” (Schein, 1992, p. 390). At the end of 1980s, C. Handy stressed the importance of information, ideas, and intelligence in the organization of the future. In his opinion,
corporations will come to resemble universities. On the other hand, B. Levitt and J. G. March considered organizational learning as recording of organizational knowledge.

In 1990, P. M. Senge pointed out that learning organizations are “organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (Senge, 2006, p. 3). In other words, a learning organization is “an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future” (Senge, 2006, p. 14). K. E. Watkins and V. J. Marsick also postulated that learning organizations are those that learn continuously and transform themselves. In a similar manner, P. Woolner asserted that learning exists at all levels in this type of organizations.

In the mid 1990s, I. Nonaka and H. Takeuchi launched the term of “organizational knowledge” as a type of knowledge stored into rule systems, practices, artefacts, routines and patterns. Later, C. Argyris identified the enablers of productive organizational learning such as the flat organizational structures, continuous learning and measures of organizational performance. In late 1990s, M. Easterby-Smith, J. Burgoyne and L. Araujo made the distinction between organizational learning, as a process of individual and collective organizational learning, and learning organization, as the organization’s focus on tools and methods used to evaluate and improve the quality of the learning processes.

In the beginning of the 2000s, D. A. Garvin stated that a learning organization is “an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, interpreting, transferring, and retaining knowledge, and at purposefully modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights” (Garvin, 2000, p. 11). Similarly, A. Rylatt defined a learning organization as “a living and adaptive system that embraces change by building a community of understanding across multiple networks and realities, rather than relying on one corporate viewpoint or answer” (Rylatt, 2001, p. 3).

On his turn, D. K. Hurst made the distinction between learning organizations and performance organizations: the former are young businesses that has begun their live as informal organizations, the latter are successful businesses that has become formal organizations. He showed that in a performance organization “learning is always possible,
but is limited because it takes place within the framework that the organization provides and that makes performance possible” (Hurst, 2002, p. 33).

In the same period, L. Edvinsson asserted that organizations are collections of ideas. Having more and better ideas means gaining of competitive advantage. Thus, “the company, which leads in thought processing, leads in the market place” (Edvinsson, 2002, p. 26). That is why developing people through learning represents a crucial business concern. In this respect, some authors identified a wide variety of sources of organizational learning such as past experiences, experiences of others or experimentation (Schulz, 2002).

By the first decade of the 21st century the term “sustainability” has been integrated into the current language of learning organizations (Ramirez, 2012). The most pressing problem for the actual global society, sustainability refers to the development that meets the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987). A definition of sustainability relevant to learning organization might be the following: “the result of the activities of an organization, voluntary or governed by law, that demonstrate the ability of the organization to maintain viable its business operations (including financial viability as appropriate) whilst not negatively impacting any social or ecological systems” (Smith and Sharicz, 2011, pp. 73-74).

Therefore, a sustainable learning organization “would be an organization with enough sustainability knowledge, would act according to, and would be considered as a role model to prevent, eliminate and/or reduce the environmental and occupational risks associated with its operations while enhancing and strengthening its profitability” (Velazquez, et al., 2011, p. 36). In order to become sustainable, the learning organization have not only to meet the requirements of sustainability (e.g., social), but also to learn how to embody them in its practices even during the times of turbulence (Edwards, 2009).

The links between organizational learning and sustainability have shown an increasing convergence of the two concepts and led to the emergence of a new term, “sustainability focused organizational learning” (Molnar and Mulvihill, 2002). Moreover, an organization “whose sustainability (in every sense) is cherished by its employees and its stakeholders” and that develops “a sustainable strategy which struggles, ultimately, for the betterment of all those involved” becomes a wise organization (Rowley and Gibbs, 2008, pp. 364-365).

Learning organizations have the capability to meet the challenges of sustainable development by using suitable methods and tools to integrate natural environment issues into their activities (Nattrass and Altmor, 1999). For example, the adoption of social responsibility initiatives and/or the implementation of the International Standards for Environment ISO 14000 provide tangible and intangible benefits for the learning organizations such as increased public trust, ensuring environmental friendly policies etc. By embracing the sustainability approach, the learning organizations take into account in a holistic manner the economic, social, and environmental aspects of their activities. If they have proved their honest commitment towards sustainable development they become sustainable learning organizations.

In sum, there are clear connections among the three concepts previously analyzed. Today's organizations act in a turbulent environment in which unrelenting change is the only certainty. As open and living systems, organizations adapt to continuous changes by implementing and integrating learning at all their levels. Driven by the complex learning process, learning organizations anticipate and embrace change because learning demands
openness and requires action. Also, they understood that the best way to handle on-going change is through a sustainable approach that addresses all of the relevant aspects in a holistic manner.

2. Research methodology

There are relatively few studies in the literature regarding learning organization, organizational learning and change, organizational learning and sustainability or the role of knowledge within the Romanian higher education institutions (Dinu, 2011; Toma, 2011; Lefter, et al., 2011; Anton, 2009; Brătianu, 2007). From our standpoint, professors’ opinions on these issues constitute a valuable topic that can contribute to the improvement of the performance of the Romanian faculties, congruent with the requirements of sustainable development.

Our research was based on a pilot study, an explanatory research method which allowed us: a better understanding of the coordinates of the relationships among organizational learning, change and sustainability, the elaboration of a set of hypotheses and the identification of new research directions (Cătăiu, et al., 2002). The pilot study represents a pre-study of our future fuller study and was carried on a smaller sample.

The purpose of our research aimed to find out the professors’ opinions about the features of the relationships among organizational learning, change, and sustainability in a responsible Romanian higher education institution, namely the Faculty of Administration and Business (FAB), University of Bucharest. These features were established on the basis of the literature review (Watkins and Marsick, 2003; Marsick and Watkins, 1999; Watkins and Marsick, 1996). A valuable tool for our research was the Dimensions of Learning Organization Questionnaire (DLOQ) designed by Watkins and Marsick in the 1990s. We used the DLOQ with 43 items, organized in three sections addressing individual level, team level and organization level learning. Also, we added other 11 items in order to identify the relationships between organizational learning and change, between organizational learning and responsibility, and between organizational learning and sustainability.

In this respect we betook a pilot study carried out among the professors of FAB through which they indicated their degree of agreement or disagreement on various statements regarding to the following 10 dimensions of the questionnaire: creating continuous learning opportunities, promoting inquiry and dialogue, encouraging collaboration and team learning, creating systems to capture and share learning, empowering people towards a collective vision, connecting the organization to its environment, providing strategic leadership for learning, connecting organizational learning with change, connecting organizational learning with responsibility, connecting organizational learning with sustainability. The first 7 dimensions are the same with those of the DLOQ. The following two hypotheses were formulated:

- Professors consider that organizational learning stimulates change.
- Professors appreciate that organizational learning leads to sustainability.

In order to validate/invalidate the research hypotheses a pilot study based on a questionnaire was carried on in a specially arranged place at the FAB headquarter in the period 16-23.01.2012. The total population consisted of 34 professors within the FAB, full
time employees. 31 professors (91% of total population) were interviewed: 12 men and 19 women. With the aim of measuring the data, the author used a Likert-type scale of measurement (strongly agree, agree, neutral/neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree, do not know/do not answer), which is relatively easy to construct and administer (Cătoiu, et al., 2002). After their completion the questionnaires were introduced in a database.

3. Data processing and interpretation

The data gathered were statistically processed by using the SPSS software. The results of the research are presented hereinafter:

Starting from the conceptual framework, organizational learning was studied at the individual level, team level and organizational level. Taking into account the 7 dimensions of the DLOQ, we constructed accordingly 7 scales (each scale comprises several items) as follows: the scale of continuous learning, the scale of dialogue, the scale of team learning, the scale of empowerment, the scale of learning dissemination, the scale of connection to the environment, and the scale of strategic leadership. The degree of accuracy of the scales was tested by applying the Cronbach’s Alpha methodology. The following values of the Cronbach coefficients were obtained: 0.794; 0.848; 0.883; 0.834; 0.895; 0.904 and 0.894. Combined with the strong correlation between items, these values proved the high degree of accuracy of the above mentioned scales. Also, the statistical analysis showed that there are significant positive correlations among the 7 scales, a logical result that validated the dimensions of the questionnaire.

The responders perceive the academic space as an environment which favours organizational learning and dialogue among professors. The continuous organizational learning process is mainly based on the professors’ capability to anticipate the needed competencies for successfully achieving their professional tasks and on their personal desire to acquire new knowledge.

The responders appreciate that the academic environment facilitates collaboration and the functioning of team learning. However, learning in team, as individual learning, is not stimulated enough from a financial point of view.

Professors consider that learning at the organizational level is highly influenced both by the capability of faculty to know and evaluate professors’ abilities and competencies, and by the external environment. Also, they agree that organizational learning supports empowerment.

Most of the responders state that the organization does not fructify enough its past experiences. On the other hand, they appreciate the high degree of leadership involvement in creating and implementing learning strategies at the organizational level.

Finally, each of the 7 scales of the questionnaire was statistically analyzed in connection with the concepts of change, responsibility and sustainability by calculating the Spearman correlation coefficient. The results obtained after applying the questionnaire indicate that there is a positive correlation between organizational learning and change (Table no. 1). On the one hand, the responders understand that learning triggers organizational change. On the other hand, they perceive the learning organization as a change agent. These opinions
are associated with higher scores obtained in correlation with the scale of team learning and with the scale of empowerment. In other words, there is a significant positive correlation between learning at the team level and the organization’s capability to anticipate and embrace change.

Table no. 1: The relationship between organizational learning and change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The correlation between change and …</th>
<th>Spearman’s rho coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>… the scale of continuous learning</td>
<td>0.170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… the scale of dialogue</td>
<td>0.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… the scale of team learning</td>
<td>0.407*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… the scale of learning dissemination</td>
<td>0.223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… the scale of empowerment</td>
<td>0.321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… the scale of connection to environment</td>
<td>0.198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… the scale of strategic leadership</td>
<td>0.273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p<0.05

Regarding the relationship between organizational learning and the organization’s capability to act in a responsible manner, the results obtained indicate that there is also a positive correlation (Table no. 2). There are significant positive correlations among organizational learning and the scale of team learning, the scale of empowerment, the scale of dialogue, and the scale of learning through strategic leadership. In other words, a responsible organization is that one that facilitates learning at individual, team and organizational level, and encourages collaboration and working in team.

Table no. 2: The relationship between organizational learning and responsibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The correlation between responsibility and …</th>
<th>Spearman’s rho coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>… the scale of continuous learning</td>
<td>0.255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… the scale of dialogue</td>
<td>0.455*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… the scale of team learning</td>
<td>0.648**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… the scale of learning dissemination</td>
<td>0.305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… the scale of empowerment</td>
<td>0.475*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… the scale of connection to environment</td>
<td>0.314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… the scale of strategic leadership</td>
<td>0.449*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p<0.05; ** p<0.01

As concerns the relationship between organizational learning and sustainability, the results obtained indicate that there is also a positive correlation (Table no. 3). There are higher positive correlations among organizational learning and the scale of empowerment, the scale of team learning, and the scale of strategic leadership. In other words, empowerment represents the dimension that is the most significant associated with sustainability. This means that the delegation of responsibilities and the increase of the individual autonomy support sustainable development on a long term.

Table no. 3: The relationship between organizational learning and sustainability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The correlation between sustainability and …</th>
<th>Spearman’s rho coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>… the scale of continuous learning</td>
<td>0.181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… the scale of dialogue</td>
<td>0.198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… the scale of team learning</td>
<td>0.370</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The correlation between sustainability and … | Spearman’s rho coefficient
---|---
… the scale of learning dissemination | 0.231
… the scale of empowerment | 0.529**
… the scale of connection to environment | 0.272
… the scale of strategic leadership | 0.362

Note: ** p<0.01

Without any doubt, a responsible higher education institution constitutes a fertile ground for the development of a strong and enduring learning organization. The idea of organizational learning at individual, team and organizational level is well received by professors. Given that for many academics learning and research are daily activities it seems that their involvement in organizational learning would represent both a significant motivator and a driver of professional development.

The majority of professors appreciate that there are evident connections among organizational learning, change and sustainability within the FAB, a responsible higher education institution. On the one hand, organizational learning represents a stimulus for change at organizational level in a responsible higher education institution. On the other hand, organizational learning leads to sustainability. Paradoxically, change and continuity are both features of higher education institutions because they are not only long-standing institutions, but also responsible and adaptable ones as learning organizations. These results obtained within the pilot study partially confirm the results of other researches carried out in the Romanian higher education system (Anton, 2009; Ilie, 2009; Stăș and Colceag, 2008).

Conclusions

The results of our research demonstrate that professors are taken up with the topic of organizational learning in a knowledge-based society. The research has validated the two initial hypotheses. Most professors appreciate that team learning and empowerment are the main drivers of change and sustainability in a responsible learning organization.

Our pilot study was designed and carried out on a small scale, as an exploratory research. The paper constitutes a preliminary stage for the deployment of an ulterior research on a larger scale. However, it aims to make a specific contribution to the exploration of the relationships among organizational learning, change and sustainability in learning organizations. Also, the paper seeks to expand the debate on these relationships in higher education institutions.

The paper, limited by its purpose and the size of the sample, represents a starting point for a further research related to the study of the professors’ opinions about the relationships among organizational learning, change and sustainability within the Romanian faculties. Through a better formulation of the problems and the generation of new ideas, the results of the study might constitute work hypotheses for researching on bigger and more diversified samples of professors from different Romanian higher education institutions.
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