



СУЧАСНИЙ МЕНЕДЖМЕНТ

Joanna Moczydtowska, Ph.D.
University of Finance and Management in Bialystok. Poland

LIFELONG LEARNING AS THE ELEMENT OF IMPROVING THE COMPETENCIES OF MANAGERS A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EDUCATIONAL OFFER OF POLISH AND ITALIAN SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary times are characterised by a dynamic increase in knowledge as well as its considerable significance for functioning and development of various types of organizations. It is estimated that only within five years knowledge available to humans doubles. Intellectual capital along with the knowledge capital is growing in importance to become the major factor in organizational value and its source of competitive advantage. This entails that every human who wants to do their job in a professional way must constantly improve themselves by updating their knowledge resources and abilities. This particularly concerns those on whom the organizational success depends most, i.e. managers. That is why educational offer of colleges and universities should cater for the developmental needs of management. Courses, trainings and postgraduate programmes which provide specialized knowledge and facilitate the development of social and personal competencies are a response of colleges and universities to educational needs of active professionals who want to maintain a high level of professionalism and strengthen their position on the labour market. Educational offer for management has become a standard at colleges and universities in most European countries; however, it is worth pointing out that it is implemented in a variety of ways.

This article shows the management education system from the perspective of lifelong learning. It contains a comparative analysis of educational services offered in Poland and in Italy, exemplified by the Bocconi University in Milan and the School of Finance and Management in Bialystok. Both those schools, however different considering their location, history and educational tradition, pose a good example of the system of formal longlife learning adopted in the countries of their location.



THE ESSENCE AND AIMS OF LIFELONG LEARNING

Lifelong learning is associated with the idea of education obtained during the whole course of life. It is a multifaceted concept comprising both formal and informal learning and taking place all life long. It entails the attitude marked by constant acquisition and updating of knowledge in order to ensure continuous personal, social and professional development¹. It forms the base for the development of the modern society, which lives in the era of the knowledge-based economy. It enables systematic broadening of intellectual abilities, staying level with civilizational changes, as well as the development of creativity and abstract thinking. However, there is more to lifelong learning than its utilitarian dimension. Its major aim is to create a human being with a creative and dynamic attitude to life and culture, who is capable of improving himself and changing life conditions for public benefit². Lifelong learning, thus, comprises not only practical education but also **emotional education**, closely related to the issue of dealing with stress, **intellectual education**, meaning improvement in broadly understood thinking and the ability to understand the environment, **inter- and intrapersonal educational**, essential in understanding oneself and other people, **cultural education**, enabling better understanding of other cultures, and **political education**, crucial for building a civil society³. This is why the 1996 report on education prepared for the UNESCO contains the proposal to base lifelong education on four pillars:

- education towards knowledge
- education towards action and skills
- education towards the search of meaning of life
- education towards understanding the others⁴.

Despite the differences arising from national characteristics, there are several common **qualities of lifelong learning**:

1. Diversity of places where education takes place (frequently these are places independent of the system of formal education).
2. Treating a workplace like an educational institution which stimulates all the employees to self-development in various circumstances.
3. Changeability of the nature and patterns of work.
4. Close relationship between the way of acquiring education and the development of media and software.

¹ Cf. B. Suchodolski, *Edukacja permanentna. Rozdroża i nadzieje (Permanent Education. Crossroads and Hopes)*, Wydawnictwo Towarzystwa Wolnej Wszechnicy Polskiej, Warsaw 2003, p. 64-72.

² Cf. T. Wujek, *Kształcenie ustawiczne w świetle Raportu Jacques'a Delors (Lifelong Learning in the Light of the Report by Jacques Delors)* (in: *Wokół problemów kształcenia ustawicznego (Around the Problems of Lifelong Learning)*, collective work, ed. H. Bednarczyk, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Technologii Eksploatacji, Warsaw-Radom 1999, p. 39

³ Cf. A. Holmes, Lifelong learning, "Live & Work" 10.06.2002.

⁴ Cf. Raport Międzynarodowej Komisji ds. Edukacji dla XXI wieku pod przewodnictwem J. Delorsa (The Report of the International Committee for Education for the 21st Century Presided by J. Delors), *Wydawnictwo UNESCO, Warsaw 1998, p. 99-113.*



5. Flexibility of the offer of the lifelong learning institutions so that it responds to the needs of the market along with the growing significance of practical and useful knowledge.
6. Blurring the boundary between the period of study and professional life, formal and informal education.
7. Impact of partnership between colleges/universities and enterprises on the success of the knowledge-based economy.
8. Increasing commitment of schools to moral and civil education⁵6.

All participants of the process benefit from lifelong learning. Those learning enjoy greater opportunity to develop professional career, obtain increased salaries and experience self-fulfilment. Employers use competencies of their employees to raise innovation of their offer of products and services. Moreover, they gain the possibility of more flexible employment and 'levelling' of organizational structure. The society profits from general development of knowledge and abilities resulting in increased competitiveness of economies.

MANAGERIAL COMPETENCES

Having synthesised a variety of definitions of the notion of 'competencies', it is proposed that we understand 'competencies' as *"the total of qualities and rights of employees and organizations, which are used and developed in the process of work and lead to the achievement of organizational aims as well as personal aims of employees coherent with them"*; while professional competencies are perceived as: *"a group of qualities of an individual comprising such elements characteristic of a given person as motivation personality, skills, self evaluation connected with living in a group and knowledge acquired and used by that person"*⁷. Competencies are grouped according to various criteria.

One of the typologies indicates universal, specific and personal competencies, with universal competencies divided into universal competencies of employees and managers. *Universal competencies of management* comprise:

- the ability to shape and effectively implement an organizational mission, vision or strategy;
- the ability to achieve one's aims;
- the knowledge and skills enabling professional performing of managerial functions;

⁵ Cf. A. Kuklinski, *Gospodarka oparta na wiedzy - wyzwanie dla Polski XXI wieku (Knowledge-based Economy - a Challenge for Poland in the 21st c) „Polska w Europie” 2004, no 2 (46), p. 41.*

⁷ following: T. Rostkowski, *Kompetencje a jakosc zarzadzania zasobami ludzkimi (Competencies and the Quality of Human Resources Management) (in:) Jakosc zasobow pracy. Kultura, kompetencje, konkurencyjnosc (The Quality of Human Resources. Culture, Competencies, Competitiveness), collective work, ed. A. Sajkiewicz, Wydawnictwo Poltext, Warsaw 2002, p. 89*



- efficient, rational and ethical organizational resources management (human, financial, capital), skillful time and information management;
- competencies at PR and external relations^{8 7} .

Another group of competencies are *specific competencies*. These may also refer to an organization as a whole (they arise from the range of production, the market on which it operates, the majority of its customers). Specific competencies of employees and managers are a compilation of competencies specific of a given organization and professional competencies.

The last group in this division comprises *personal competencies*. An employee, and also a manager, displays them while working, but the group also includes their other strengths which are not used in connection with doing the job. Thus, personal competencies are always broader than those related to the job or position⁹ .

When referring to managerial competencies, two types of competencies are isolated: **hard** and **soft** competencies. The former refer to the knowledge and practical usage of methods, techniques and tools useful for management, including mathematical and statistical methods, operational research; the latter mean social and personal competencies (e.g. management style, leadership, empathy)¹⁰.

LIFELONG LEARNING OF MANAGERS IN POLAND

The description of managerial competencies leads to the conclusion that acquisition and development of knowledge, skills and managerial predispositions requires an outstanding intellectual and social ability as well as openness to lifelong learning.

The vast majority of those taking managerial positions in Poland are graduates at least at the bachelor level. Approximately 85% of the graduates of first-degree programmes continue education at two-year complementary master programmes.

Both the master and bachelor degree entitle to start postgraduate studies. There is no diversification of the levels of postgraduate programmes. With the exception of special cases provided for by law (such as postgraduate qualification studies for teachers), postgraduate programmes usually last two semesters. The number of teaching hours is not specified by any law. The exception are the programmes for educational and social care

⁸ T. Oleksyn, Zarządzanie potencjałem pracy w polskim przedsiębiorstwie (Human Resources Management in Polish Enterprise), Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Zarządzania i Przedsiębiorczości im. B. Jańskiego, Warsaw 1998, p. 157-164.

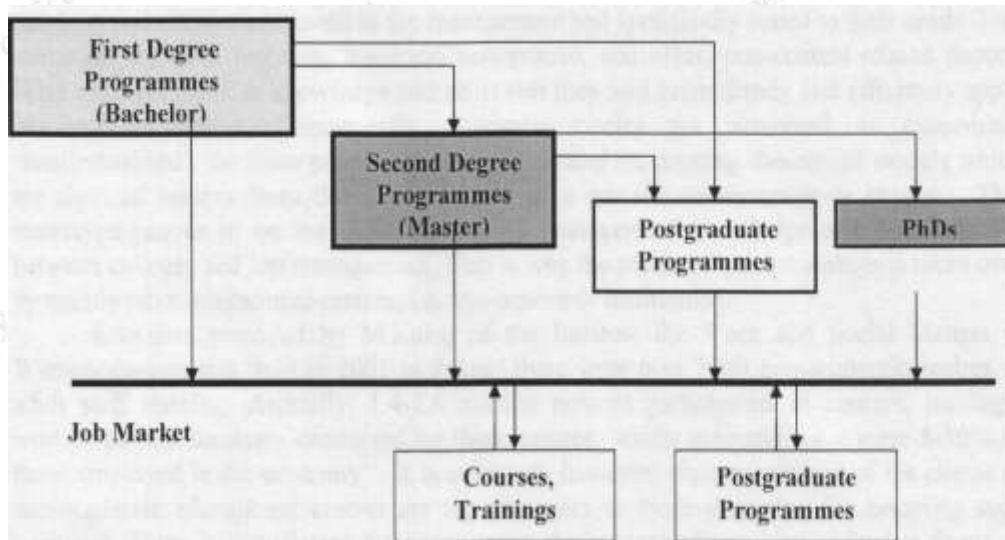
⁹ T. Oleksyn, Zarządzanie kompetencjami. Teoria i praktyka (Theory and Practice of Competencies Management), Oficyna Ekonomiczna, Krakow 2006, p. 29.

¹⁰ Cf. T. Oleksyn, Zarządzanie a kompetencje w organizacji - refleksje i propozycje (Management and Competences in an Organization-Reflections and Suggestions) „Zarządzanie i Edukacja” 2003, no 4 (40), p.11



managers, in which the regulations of relevant ministers specify the framework of the teaching content and the number of teaching hours.

Chart 1. The Model of Managerial Education at Colleges and Universities in Poland



Lifelong learning at different colleges and universities usually assumes the form of postgraduate programmes run by either specific departments/faculties (e.g. the Warsaw School of Economics) or by separate organizational units, such as the Postgraduate Education Centre at the School of Finance and Management in Białystok. Postgraduate programmes are a part of the educational offer of the vast majority of Polish colleges and universities and their branches¹¹. A good example of an outstandingly rich offer of postgraduate programmes is the educational offer of the School of Finance and Management in Białystok and its branch in Elk. In the parent school in Białystok, managers can improve their qualifications and develop their skills within MBA and postgraduate programmes: Financial Analytics, Public Administration, Internal Audit, European Funds Audit, Stock Market and Capital Market Investment, Spatial development, Economic Information Systems and e-business. Enterprising, Accounting and Finance, Public Procurement and European Funds, Health and Safety and Work Management, Property Management and Sales, Human Resources Management, Customer Relations Management, Management in Education, Business, Investment Risk Management, Health Care Management, Integrated Management Systems. The Elk Branch of the School of Finance

¹⁰ Cf. J. Moczyłowska, *Szkolnictwo wyższe jako czynnik rozwoju Polski północno-wschodniej (University-level Education as the Developmental Factor for the North-East of Poland)*, II Regionalna Konferencja Młodych Pracowników Nauki „Czynniki rozwoju regionalnego Polski północno-wschodniej” (2nd Regional Conference of Young Scientist Developmental Factors for the North-East of Poland), collective work, ed. B. Plawgo, Wyższa Szkoła Administracji Publicznej, Białystok 2005, p. 353-363.



and Management offers the following postgraduate programmes: Theory and Practice of Internal Audit, European Funds Audit, Health and Safety at Work, Theory and Practice of Quality Management Systems, Social Care Management and Organization, Finance and Accounting, Human Resources Management and Personnel Counselling, Negotiations and Mediations. Despite such an extensive offer, the total number of students of these programmes fluctuates around 200 each year. The obstacle preventing managers from participating in this form of developing competencies is not only the lack of time but also the tuition fee. Seldom do employers refund the costs of acquiring education in Poland.

Another form of implementing the idea of lifelong learning at universities and colleges is inviting managers to conferences and scientific seminars. However, due to organizational issues, it is the form addressed only to a narrow group of top management.

Rare do colleges and universities implement lifelong learning through specialist trainings and courses addressed to top management and specifically suited to their needs. This stems largely from tradition, historical background, and other, non-content-related factors. What managers seek is knowledge and skills that they will immediately and efficiently apply in their companies. Concurrently, academic circles are perceived as excessively 'intellectualised', far from practical economy, focused on creating theoretical models which are short of useless from the point of view of a specific entrepreneur or manager. This stereotype proves to be the main obstacle to management knowledge and skills transfer between colleges and top management. That is why the sector of quick trainings is taken over by mainly other educational centres, i.e. non-academic institutions.

Estimates provided by M.Kabaj of the Institute for Work and Social Matters in Warsaw suggest that only in 2001 in Poland there were over 2000 non-academic centres of adult staff training. Annually, 1.4-1.6 million persons participated in courses, trainings, workshops and seminars conducted by these centres, which accounts for a mere 8-10% of those employed in the economy¹². It is unknown, however, what percentage of the clients of non-academic educational centres are top managers or those preparing for assuming such positions. There is insufficient data concerning the content of trainings and other forms of education offered by the institutions described above.

The dynamic growth of lifelong learning began with Poland's accession to the European Union. In the years 2004-2006, European Social Fund financial resources which were allocated in Poland for the

¹² Following: T. Kowalewski, Fundamentalne znaczenie kształcenia ustawicznego w gospodarce opartej na wiedzy (Fundamental Meaning of Lifelong Learning in Knowledge-Based Economy) (in:) Gospodarka oparta na wiedzy (Knowledge-Based Economy), collective work, ed. I.K.. Hejduk, J. Korczak, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Koszalińskiej, Koszalin 2006, p. 124.



development of professional competencies amounted to € 406 676 000. They were spent on the development of personnel of modern economy (2.3 SOP PIRD), development of skills related to the local labour market needs and regional needs for lifelong learning (2.1 IROP), vocational reorientation for those threatened by restructuring processes (2.4 IROP), regional innovation strategies and knowledge transfer (2.6 IROP). In the next planning period (2007-2013), the funds allocated for implementation of developmental activities under Human Resources Development Sectoral Operational Programme and Regional Operational Programmes are even more considerable totalling at € 6 140 557 980¹³. The strategic aim defined in the National Strategic Relevance Framework for the years 2007-2013 is increased competitiveness of knowledge-based economy leading to increased employment and increased social, economic and spacial cohesion. The projects being implemented both regionally and nation-wide, considering the amount of financial resources allocated for their implementation, allow to assume that a 'competitive' leap awaits Poland, which will enable achievement of major aims related to competencies management.

Considering the title of this article, enormous significance is attached to the analysis of absorption of funds for development of lifelong learning services by colleges and universities. It is exemplified by the Podlaskie province, which is, according to research, representative of Polish colleges and universities activity in acquiring European funds¹⁴. The data stored by the Marshall Office in Bialystok show that in the years 2004-2006 state universities implemented projects of the total value of PLN 30 388 987, while the non-state ones PLN 17 412 174. 25% of the funds acquired by state schools were allocated to training and counselling projects, whereas in non-state schools this value amounted to as much as 92,25%¹⁵. A considerable majority of the beneficiaries of lifelong learning projects were jobless or threatened by unemployment due to restructuring processes, as well as the employees of labour market institutions. The educational offer addressed to managers was rather modest. Only one school in the Podlaskie province ran two projects for free postgraduate programmes covering modern management methods, techniques and systems. Top managers

¹³ Cf. J.B. Gotčbiewska, *Mozliwosci rozwoju kapitalu ludzkiego przedsiebiorstwa w swietle funduszy strukturalnych Unii Europejskiej (Human Resources Development Opportunities in the Light of European Structural Funds)* (in:) *Zarządzanie wartosciami organizacji (Organizational Value Management)*, collective work, ed. E. Orechwa-Maliszewska, J. Paszkowski, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Finansów i Zarządzania w Białymstoku, Białystok 2007, p. 240-241.

¹⁴ Cf. S. Filkiewicz, *Skuteczność wykorzystania programów operacyjnych współfinansowanych ze środków Unii Europejskiej przez uczelnie wyższe na Podlasiu (Efficiency of Using Operational Programmes Co-financed by the European Union by Colleges and Universities in the Podlasie region)* (in:) *Pomoc finansowa Unii Europejskiej dla Polski. Doświadczenia i perspektywy (European Financial Aid for Poland. Experiences and Perspectives)*, collective work, ed. A. Kopczyk, M. Proniewski, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Finansów i Zarządzania w Białymstoku, Białystok 2006, p. 307-308

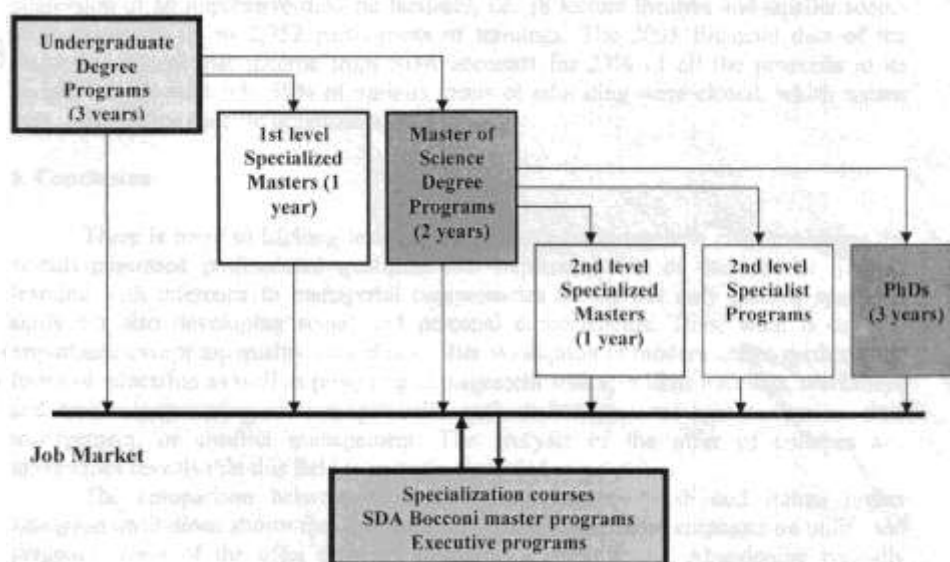
¹⁵ Following: *ibidem*, p.301

participated in other specialist trainings, e.g. in law, information technology, language courses; however, these educational forms were not specifically aimed at managers but at various groups of employees.

Lifelong Learning of Managers in Italy

An example of Italian educational developments is the offer of the Bocconi University in Milan, one of the oldest and most respected schools specialising in economic, social and legal sciences. The structure of education presented in Chart 2 allows to conclude that the Italian offer differs significantly from that of Poland, despite the fact that both countries, as the EU members, meet the requirements of the Bologna strategy.

Chart 2. The Model of Managerial Education at Colleges and Universities in Italy



Source: the author's own study based on La Bocconi oggi, Bocconi Publishing House, Milan 2006, p. 13.

In both Italy and Poland, the higher education system comprises two levels (bachelor and master), with a three-year doctoral programme. The discrepancies concern postgraduate programmes and specialised trainings. The educational 'route' covered by a student in an Italian school is more diversified and gives the possibility of choosing a more individualised way of gaining qualifications. There is a significant distinction between postgraduate programmes covered before starting a professional career and those for active employees within master programmes. The importance of postgraduate studies is much higher in Italy than in Poland.

This form of education is perceived as a way to specialist knowledge, which is highly recognized on labour market. The author's research reveals that only 15% of 1st level graduates continue studying at master programmes. A prevailing majority prefers to spend these two years



completing two different Specialized Master programmes. Second-level master programmes are viewed as typically academic and connected with scientific career, whereas postgraduate programmes are regarded as more specialised and better preparing for professional activity on labour market in the sector of the economy and public administration. Unlike in Poland, in Italy a distinction is made between first-level postgraduate studies (for graduates of bachelor degree programmes) and second-level postgraduate studies (for graduates of master degree programmes). Apart from specialized masters, specialist training programmes (for graduates of master degree programmes only) are conducted.

In the context of lifelong learning issues, an interesting solution is the unit created at Bocconi University in 1971 and called SDA Bocconi. It provides specialised educational services to both junior and senior management in the form of a great variety of trainings, postgraduate programmes, and educational projects. They comprise issues related to economics, law, management, marketing and social communication, health care, public administration, finances, and banking. The data from 2004 prove a great popularity of the SDA Bocconi; 16,255 participants from 54 countries took part in various forms of education. This success is conditioned by the top quality education and flexibility in adjusting educational programmes to participants' needs. The unit also is in a possession of an impressive didactic facilities, i.e. 38 lecture theatres and smaller rooms of the capacity up to 2,752 participants of trainings. The 2005 financial data of the University reveal that income from SDA accounts for 27% of all the proceeds to its budget¹⁶. Approximately 50% of various forms of educating were closed, which means they were run for specific organizations.

CONCLUSIONS

There is more to lifelong learning than simply acquiring new and developing the already-possessed professional qualifications. Implementation of the idea of lifelong learning with reference to managerial competencies entails not only gaining specialist skills but also developing social and personal competencies. Thus, what is of vital importance except top quality educational offer is adoption of modern active methods and forms of education as well as providing management with specialist trainings, workshops and courses concerning soft competencies such as interpersonal communication, time management, or conflict management. The analysis of the offer of colleges and universities reveals that this field is unjustly discarded.

The comparison between educational practice of Polish and Italian higher education institutions shows that it is vital for Poland to put more

¹⁶ La Bocconi oggi, Bocconi Publishing House, Milan 2006, p. 10, 21, 51.



emphasis on utility and pragmatism of the offer targeted at adults in employment. Abandoning typically academic and theoretical courses taught by teachers with no practical experience in favour of active education rooted in practice may result in increased interest of managers in postgraduate programmes offered by Polish colleges and universities. This would bring benefits to both sides, i.e. also schools. In view of the downward demographic trend, which will lead to decreased numbers of students at both bachelor and master level, developing an offer of lifelong learning for adults in employment will soon become a necessity for the majority of colleges and universities in Poland. The analysis of the Italian example shows that the way to success is the introduction of more variety to educational offers but also lifelong and tedious work on creating the image of a school whose certificate or diploma - similarly to the Bocconi University - guarantees the quality of graduates' competencies.

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