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ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING MANAGEMENT: CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MEASUREMENT MODEL

- DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY -

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In the doctoral thesis, the development of a measurement model for organizational learning is aimed, the approach being from an *integrative* perspective. We have focused on universities, as a particular typology of organizations.

In the introductory part – **Preliminaries** – we have presented that *organizational learning* is a relatively new concept, the perspectives in the literature being diverse. Organizational learning is often treated, within the literature, in relation to organizational performance, thus we have taken into consideration the notion of *organizational performance* within the conceptual model. Organizational learning has been treated as capability and as a process.

Universities represent a central element of a society, the academic environment being responsible for preparing specialists in different areas, and also for the creation of knowledge and its dissemination at the level of society, and for generating knowledge that is useful both at a theoretical level and in practice.

Organizational learning is opportune and even necessary at the level of universities, in order for these organizations to have better performances, to hold competitive advantages and to innovate.

Research aim: developing and testing a conceptual model aimed at measuring organizational learning.

The model is centered on the notion of „organizational learning", the central concepts being those of *organizational learning capability* and *organizational learning process,* correlating the latter one with another relevant concept for the thematic of the thesis, namely *organizational performance.* Performance can be regarded as a finality of the organizational learning process, being considered an outcome that can be partly obtained through organizational learning. The model also aims other relevant concepts, such as: the management of the relationship between the organizational learning process and organizational performance, the value of human capital, the uniqueness of human capital, practices/tools for the facilitation of organizational learning and other concepts. Thus, the approach is integrative.

Research objectives:

1. Critical and in-depth analysis of the literature, in order to:
- Clarify the concept of „organizational learning"; identify the processes of organizational learning in different acceptations.
- Identify and analyze the facilitating, and respectively, the inhibiting factors for the organizational learning process.
- Analyze the ways of measuring organizational learning, identify instruments that can be used as models in the present research.
- Analyze approaches regarding organizational learning management, analysis that is necessary for identifying practices and tools to facilitate organizational learning.
- Define a precursory frame for the development of the conceptual model that treats organizational learning, the applicative research being focused on universities.
2. Proposing an instrument for measuring organizational learning, correlating organizational learning with organizational performance, and testing the proposed instrument.
3. Presenting the results obtained, after applying the principal components factor analysis, regarding the components (the factors) of the constructs that we are considering: organizational learning capability, the organizational learning process, organizational performance, practices/tools for the facilitation of organizational learning, management of the relationship between the organizational

learning process and organizational performance, the value of human capital, the uniqueness of human capital, the interest and the intention for organizational learning.

4. Interpretation of the obtained results (descriptive analysis).

5. Testing the research hypotheses.

The first chapter, „Organizational learning and particularities in universities”, delineates and treats the concept of „organizational learning”. Among the aspects treated in this chapter we mention: presenting and analyzing different ways of defining organizational learning, putting organizational learning in relation to individual learning and to learning at group/team level, presenting the processes of organizational learning in different acceptations, these aspects being treated with the purpose of outlining the concept of „organizational learning”. The following are also considered: types of organizational learning, the role that organizational learning has in gaining competitive advantages and performance, placing the concept of „organizational learning” in relation to the concept of „the learning organization”, presenting notions about knowledge-intensive organizations and analyzing universities in terms of the knowledge-intensive character, and, finally, treating the problematics of organizational learning in the case of universities.

Within **chapter II, „Factors of organizational learning”,** we address the facilitators and inhibitors for organizational learning, the concept of „organizational learning capability” being also treated. We suggest a classification of the influencing factors of organizational learning. We present particularities regarding the treated factors, at the level of universities.

In **chapter III, „Organizational learning management”,** measuring organizational learning, organizational learning systems and organizational learning management are approached.
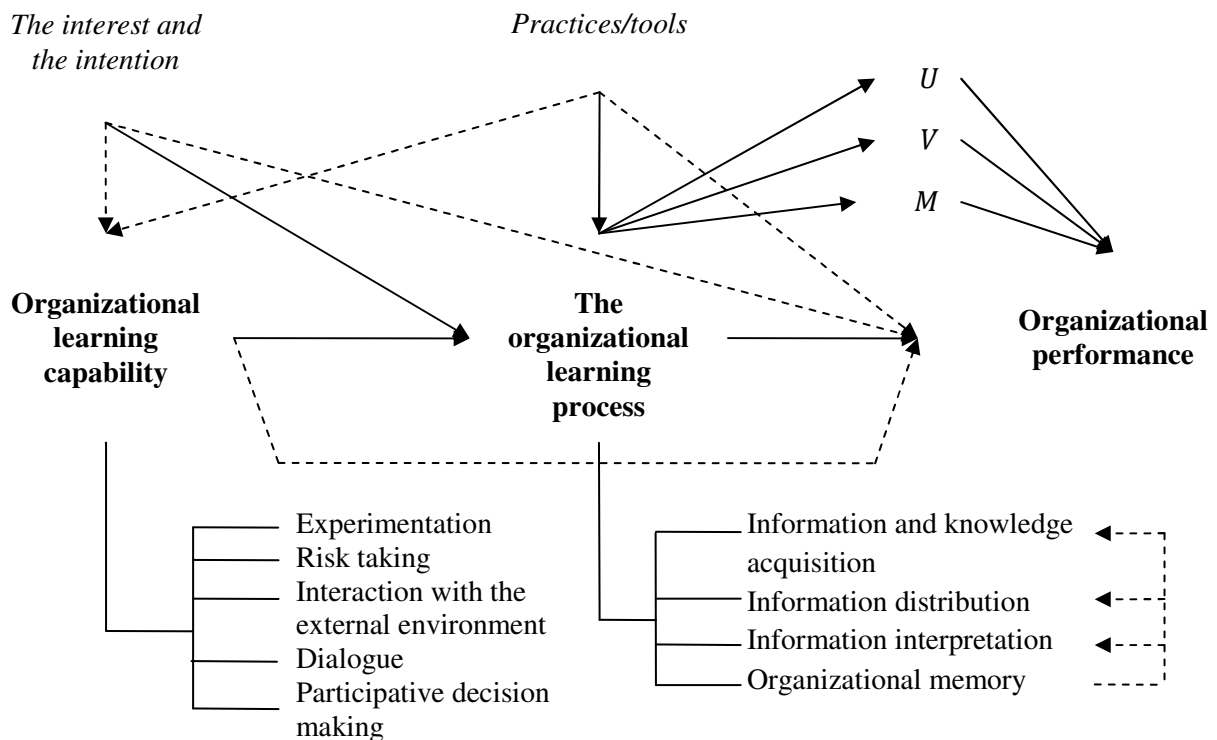
In this chapter, the problematics of measuring organizational learning is concentrated on measuring the organizational learning process and on measuring organizational learning capability. Measuring organizational performance, which can be considered partly an effect of organizational learning, was also taken into consideration.

The second part of this chapter concentrates on organizational learning systems and on organizational learning management. Thus, exemplifying some organizational learning systems (for example, Chen, 2005a, b; Jyothibabu *et al.,* 2010) was taken into account and organizational learning management elements have been treated: practices and tools from Chen's (2005b) research; human resource management practices (from López-Cabrales *et al.*, 2011).

Chapter IV, „Contributions to the development of a conceptual model for measuring organizational learning”, presents, in a first phase, the proposed conceptual model.

Most of the constructs included in the research are taken from the literature. Also, in the case of the *organizational learnig capability* and of the *organizational learning process,* we took into consideration particular perspectives identified in the literature, regarding their components. For *organizational learning capability* we have started from five dimensions from Chiva *et al.* (2007). For *the organizational learning process* we have considered Huber's (1991) perspective, with the mention that for *acquisition* we also took into consideration *information acquisition*.

The conceptual model and the considered links are detailed within the following figure (the solid lines represent the links that presented interest for the research):

The interest and
the intention

Practices/tools

U

V

M

**Organizational
learning
capability**

**The
organizational
learning
process**

**Organizational
performance**

Experimentation
Risk taking
Interaction with the
external environment
Dialogue
Participative decision
making

Information and knowledge
acquisition
Information distribution
Information interpretation
Organizational memory

M= Management of the relationship between the organizational learning process and organizational
performance

V = The value of human capital

U = The uniqueness of human capital

Figure no. 1. Conceptual model regarding organizational learning
**Source: Guță (2013b), p. 553 (only the sequence organizational learning capability – the process of
organizational learning – organizational performance and M, V, U); Guță (2014c), p. 260 (only the
sequence the organizational learning process – organizational performance – the value of human capital
and practices and tools)**

The second part of chapter IV points out the fact that the study undertaken is descriptive and exploratory and that the approach is deductive. Detailed explanations regarding the way in which the questionnaire was designed are provided, this being the instrument used for collecting the data.

In the last part of the chapter the sample at the level of each of the two stages of the empirical study is described: *the stage of the initial testing* (carried out on universities and companies) and *the extended study* (carried out on representative universities from Romania). In the first stage we had a number of two universities and two companies, the respondents being employees from those organizations (133 valid questionnaires in total). In the final study (the extended study) stage 13 representative universities from Romania have been targeted, the questionnaire being sent, in order to be completed, to teachers/researchers from those universities. From over 6200 teachers/researchers to whom the questionnaire was sent (real delivery to over 5600 persons), we received 437 answers (from 12 universities), from which 357 valid questionnaires remained (from 11 universities).

Chapter V, „Validating the model for measuring organizational learning – study conducted on Romanian universities", presents the techniques and analyses used, followed by a presentation in a synthetic manner of the results obtained in the initial testing stage, a stage in which the study was undertaken by inclusion of two universities and two companies (the questionnaire was applied to employees from the four organizations, with the specification that in the case of universities we took into consideration teachers/researchers). After that, the results for the extended study, which is carried

out by including representative universities from Romania (the questionnaire being applied to teachers/researchers from the universities), are interpreted: the internal consistency of the utilized instrument is analyzed, the components that have been extracted for the constructs in the research (the technique used is the principal components factor analysis) are presented, a descriptive analysis is carried out and, in order to test the hypotheses, the correlation and regression analysis is carried out. It must be mentioned that, in the case of universities, we also took into consideration detailing performance on the educational activity, and respectively on the research activity, but only at descriptive level, and not also within the conceptual model.

Conclusions, contributions, research limitations and future research directions

In the doctoral thesis we took into consideration developing a conceptual model targeting the measurement of *organizational learning,* by adopting *an integrative perspective. Organizational learning* has been treated, in the thesis, as capability and as a process, the link between *the organizational learning process* and *organizational performance* also being targeted.

We have appreciated that the process of organizational learning is essentiallly a *social* process (also see Tetrick and Da Silva, 2003, in Curado, 2006) and we have considered that organizational learning is more than the sum of what individuals within an organization learn (also see Crossan *et al.*, 1999; March and Olsen, 1976; Simon, 1991, in Casey, 2005).

I. *Theoretical and methodological conclusions. Contributions to the organizational learning theory*

Further, the contributions made in the field of organizational learning are selectively presented:
- *Developing and testing a conceptual model* regarding *organizational learning,* based on models from the literature and also including, within the model, links – between concepts/components of the concepts – that have not been found in other conceptual models.
- Developing a *measurement instrument for organizational learning*: for a part of the concepts that were aimed the scales are by our own design; one scale is generated based on two instruments identified in the literature (through adaptation); a part of the scales are taken from the literature, the items being taken from the literature either as such, or adapted.

An element of novelty is given by the *integrative* manner of addressing the problematics of organizational learning.

In the thesis, *the measurement of organizational learning* and of relevant aspects for this problematics has been considered and, at the same time, there have been considered some elements related to *organizational learning management* (possibilities, ways of achieving organizational learning management).

The context in which the research is undertaken (Romanian area) and *the typology of organizations* upon which we have focused our attention within the extended study (universities) are elements of novelty.

All the utilized scales turned out to be reliable (they present *internal consistency*).

II. *Conclusions based on the empirical research*

1. *Conclusions regarding the results of the factor analyses*

Referring to the most important constructs within the conceptual model, *organizational learning capability, the organizational learning process* and *organizational performance,* the following components have resulted at the level of the extended study, that was carried out on universities from Romania:

Table no. C.1. Synthesis of the results from the factor analyses for the most important constructs within the model

No.	Name of the construct	Components
1.	Organizational learning capability	▪ Participative decision making ▪ Experimentation and risk taking ▪ Dialogue ▪ Interaction with the external environment
2.	The organizational learning process	▪ Internal information/knowledge acquisition and information distribution, or, in short, internal acquisition and distribution ▪ Information interpretation and organizational memory, based on a personalization strategy, or, in short, interpretation and organizational memory (personalization) ▪ Organizational memory, based on a codification strategy, or, in short, organizational memory (codification) ▪ External information/knowledge acquisition or, in short, external acquisition
3.	Organizational performance	▪ Organizational performance (only one component)

Also, in the case of the practices/tools, two typologies have been delimited: practices/tools *based on cooperation, collaboration and reflection*, and respectively practices/tools *based on searching*.

2. *Conclusions regarding the descriptive analysis*

A selection of the *conclusions* regarding the results of the descriptive analysis – at the level of the extended study – reveals the following:
▪ Based on the opinions that have been expressed by the respondents, *dialogue* has emerged as being the aspect that best captures *organizational learning capability* at the level of universities, considering the fact that it obtains, on average, based on the opinions expressed by the respondents, the best mean.
▪ The particular aspects that record the best results in the case of *the organizational learning process*, without taking into consideration the component from which they are part of, are: the existence of collaborations with universities, companies, experts from different fields, for knowledge acquisition; communicating the mission statement and the objectives of the organization to the employees; the existence of a consolidated research and/or development policy; searching and acquiring from outside the organization of knowledge that is particularly necessary and does not exist within the organization; once the employees know who they have to contact in the organization, in the situation in which an opportunity or problem arises, they can have access to that person in an easy way; gathering information about potential changes in the environment in which the organizations operate; transmitting vital information quickly to all the employees.
▪ Referring to the two typologies of *practices/tools*, the results are slightly better in the case of the practices/tools based on *searching,* compared to the practices/tools based on *cooperation, collaboration and reflection.*
▪ *Organizational performance* obtains the best mean in the case of the fact that *the organization is successful.*

3. *Conclusions regarding the testing of the hypotheses and of the conceptual model. Validating the hypotheses and the model*

After carrying out the corellation and regression analyses, all the hypotheses have been *validated* in the case of the extended study, that was carried out on Romanian universities. The results are presented in the following table.

Table no. C.2. Results regarding the hypotheses – centralizer

No.	Hypothesis	Result
1.	*Hypothesis 1:* Between *the components of organizational learning capability* and *the components of the organizational learning process* there are positive and significant correlations.	Validated
2.	*Hypothesis 2:* Between *the components of the organizational learning process* and *organizational performance* there are positive and significant correlations.	Validated
3.	*Hypothesis 3:* Between *the management of the relationship between the organizational learning process and organizational performance* and *the components of the organizational learning process* there are positive and significant correlations.	Validated
4.	*Hypothesis 4:* Between *the management of the relationship between the organizational learning process and organizational performance* and *organizational performance* there is a positive and significant correlation.	Validated
5.	*Hypothesis 5:* Between *the value of human capital* and *the components of the organizational learning process* there are positive and significant correlations.	Validated
6.	*Hypothesis 6:* Between *the value of human capital* and *organizational performance* there is a positive and significant correlation.	Validated
7.	*Hypothesis 7:* Between *the uniqueness of human capital* and *the components of the organizational learning process* there are positive and significant correlations.	Validated
8.	*Hypothesis 8:* Between *the uniqueness of human capital* and *organizational performance* there is a positive and significant correlation.	Validated
9.	*Hypothesis 9:* Between *the components of the practices/tools through which organizational learning may be facilitated* and *the components of the organizational learning process* there are positive and significant correlations.	Validated
10.	*Hypothesis 10:* Between *the interest and the intention for organizational learning* and *the components of the organizational learning process* there are positive and significant correlations.	Validated
11.	*Hypothesis 11: The components of the organizational learning process* are significant predictors for *organizational performance*.	Validated

Note: Hypotheses 2, 5, 6 and 9 can be found in the paper entitled „Measuring organizational learning. Model testing in two Romanian universities" (Guță, 2014c), paper in which a part of the conceptual model and of the instrument have been considered; the paper is based on data collected from two universities in the stage of the initial testing.

In the following table the results of the correlation analysis (the correlations and their intensity) between the components of *organizational learning capability* and the components of *the organizational learning process*, and respectively between the components of *the organizational learning process* and *organizational performance* are presented, these being the most important constructs in the conceptual model.

Table no. C.3. Results – correlation analysis

Name of the component	Participative decision making	Experimentation and risk taking	Dialogue	Interaction with the external environment	Organizational performance
Internal acquisition and distribution	.753[**]	.612[**]	.609[**]	.582[**]	.656[**]
Interpretation and organizational memory (personalization)	.728[**]	.572[**]	.581[**]	.491[**]	.646[**]

Organizational memory (codification)	.580**	.464**	.468**	.466**	.605**
External acquisition	.515**	.458**	.477**	.533**	.522**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: Dark gray colour means positive, strong and statistically significant correlation; light gray – positive, moderate and statistically significant correlation.

All the hypotheses were validated, thus appreciating that the conceptual model for the measurement of organizational learning is valid. The correlations that were aimed have emerged as being positive and statistically significant (in the case of the components and, additionally, in the case of the constructs; the results are detailed in the doctoral thesis).

III. *Managerial implications of the research*

Based on the results obtained in the extended study, we have considered a series of *managerial implications of the research* – the practical relevance of the conceptual model and recommendations based on the results obtained for *organizational learning capability,* for *the process of organizational learning*, for practices/tools, for the *interest and the intention* and for *the management of the relationship between the organizational learning process and organizational performance.*

The conceptual model and the instrument proposed and tested within this research are usefull for making a *diagnosis at organizational level.*

Further, some of the recommendations that were made are selectively presented, based on the results that were obtained and that are detailed within the thesis:
- Paying increased attention, at the level of the universities management, regarding *the adoption of decisions in a participative way* would be necessary and opportune.
- Among the aspects for which we appreciated that improvements would be usefull at the level of *internal acquisiton and distribution*, in the case of universities, we mention: dedicating time to discussions regarding the future needs of the organization; holding regular meetings between departments in order to integrate the existing information; experimenting new ideas and approaches regarding the way of doing things; the existence of responsible persons for collecting the proposals made by employees, in order to reunite and distribute them internally; the existence of systems and procedures at the level of universities that facilitate innovation.
- For *interpretation and organizational memory – personalization* we mention some of the aspects for which we have considered that improvements would be necessary: sharing and commitment of the employees to the mission of the organization; attempting to obtain a unitary interpretation of the information that has significance for the organization; thorough analyzing different alternatives, before a decision is made; the existence of an atmosphere of trust between employees, in order to cooperate when problems or opportunities that need solving appear; putting into discussion the information that the employees receive.
- Increasing the frequency of using the practices/tools based on *cooperation, collaboration and reflection.*
- Regarding the *interest and the intention,* a proactive atitude is necessary.
- Regarding *the management of the relationship between the organizational learning process and organizational performance,* we consider that it would be necessary, opportune, recognizing of the fact that learning is not always beneficial and also of the fact that performance might initially suffer a deterioration before improving, when changes at cognitive or behavioral level appear. *Orienting organizational learning* also gains relevance. In the case of universities, it would be usefull for learning orientation to be considered, in order for organizational learning to be beneficial for the organization, and capitalizing the cognitive and behavioral level changes, even if they can initially lead to a deterioration in performance.

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IV. *Research limitations and future research directions*

Among the *research limitations* and *future research directions* we mention: some problems regarding the representativeness of the sample, which leads to the opportunity of undertaking a future research on a sample in which it could be tried to obtain comparable response rates between universities, another research direction can be given by extending on a larger number of universities at the level of Romania; the way of measuring, at the level of the respondents' perception, of the concepts within the research – although this approach is appropriate, we consider that a comparison of the obtained results with those that could result from an objective measuring (for example, in the case of organizational performance) is a desirable aspect in the future. The study is not longitudinal, and, as a consequence, the causal relationship between the concepts that were taken into consideration can not be determined, limiting within the research to an examination of the correlations.

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