

Relationships between knowledge management, organizational learning and corporate education

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ABSTRACT

Brazilian companies have demanded new skills from their employees. To this end, new models of management, learning and education have been adopted, in order to harmonize the interests of people and their careers with the strategic objectives of corporations. This article aims to identify relationships between knowledge management, organizational learning and corporate education. From the approach of the concepts in academic texts produced on the topics, the subjects were articulated in order to bring greater understanding on the theme. As a result, it was possible to analyze how knowledge is obtained, stored, disseminated and used by companies, which promotes learning in the corporate environment, enabling the planning and implementation of education programs that not only qualify employees, but also help them to exercise leadership in the various working groups of organizations, which brings several benefits to individuals, groups, companies, communities and to society.

KEYWORDS: Knowledge management. Organizational Learning. Corporate education.

Relações entre Gestão do Conhecimento, Aprendizagem Organizacional e Educação Corporativa

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RESUMO

Empresas brasileiras têm exigido novas competências de seus colaboradores. Para isso, novos modelos de gestão, aprendizagem e educação têm sido adotados, a fim de harmonizar os interesses das pessoas e suas carreiras com os objetivos estratégicos das corporações. Este artigo tem o objetivo de identificar relações entre gestão do conhecimento, aprendizagem organizacional e educação corporativa. A partir da abordagem dos conceitos em textos acadêmicos produzidos sobre os tópicos, os assuntos foram articulados de modo a trazer maior compreensão sobre o tema. Como resultado, foi possível analisar como o conhecimento é obtido, armazenado, disseminado e empregado pelas empresas, o que fomenta a aprendizagem no ambiente corporativo, viabilizando o planejamento e a implantação de programas de educação que não apenas qualificam os colaboradores, mas também os ajudam a exercer a liderança nos diversos grupos de trabalho das organizações, o que traz diversos benefícios para indivíduos, grupos, empresas, comunidades e para a sociedade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Gestão do conhecimento. Aprendizagem Organizacional. Educação corporativa.

Relaciones entre la Gestión del Conocimiento, el Aprendizaje Organizacional y la Educación Corporativa

RESUMEN

Las empresas brasileñas han exigido nuevas habilidades a sus empleados. Para ello, se han adoptado nuevos modelos de gestión, aprendizaje y educación, con el fin de armonizar los intereses de las personas y sus carreras con los objetivos estratégicos de las corporaciones. Este artículo tiene como objetivo identificar las relaciones entre la gestión del conocimiento, el aprendizaje organizacional y la educación corporativa. A partir del abordaje de los conceptos en los textos académicos producidos sobre los temas, se articularon las asignaturas con el fin de aportar una mayor comprensión sobre el tema. Como resultado, fue posible analizar cómo el conocimiento es obtenido, almacenado, difundido y utilizado por las empresas, lo que promueve el aprendizaje en el entorno

corporativo, possibilitando la planificación e implementación de programas educativos que no solo capacitan a los empleados, sino que también los ayudan. Ejercer el liderazgo en los distintos grupos de trabajo de las organizaciones, lo que aporta diversos beneficios a las personas, grupos, empresas, comunidades y la sociedad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Conocimiento administrativo. Aprendizaje organizacional. Educación corporativa.

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Introduction

The new organizational structures of Brazilian companies increasingly demand the performance of their hired professionals, in terms of agility, flexibility, social skills, proactivity and creativity. This is reflected in the area of training and development (T&D), in which some concepts related to human learning reveal new perspectives regarding concepts such as information, instruction, training, development and education (ESTEVEES; MEIRIÑO, 2015).

Considering that people are able to learn through various ways (reading, observing, researching, talking, traveling, classroom, virtual means, etc.), it is understood that renewal in the areas of T&D and management (of people and knowledge) is indispensable, since it is not enough to train individuals. Thus, new ways of thinking and working emerge, so that individuals can develop their skills and competencies through teaching and learning programs in organizations, in which continuous learning demands the increase of more comprehensive qualifications. This leads to the growing commitment of companies to learning and education (ESTEVEES; MEIRIÑO, 2015).

Taking as a starting point this increase in the interest in the treatment of knowledge in companies, this article aims to identify relationships between the concepts of knowledge management, organizational learning and corporate education. For this, the concepts already mentioned will be approached, analyzing how they are articulated in the social practices adopted by the companies that

demonstrate focus on the results of the organizational strategic objectives from the investment in the skills of their employees.

Methods

The work carried out from reading and reviewing other works already developed, with analytical content, is valued for contributing to the development of scientific knowledge, as it lends itself to compact and compare the knowledge present in different sources. It points to the existence of possible specializations and areas of interest, directing the conduct of future research, in addition to serving as a source of consultation for both experienced scholars and beginners in the academic world (ANTONELLO; GODOY, 2009).

Considering the initial proposal of this article - to identify relations between knowledge management, organizational learning and corporate education -, a bibliographic research was carried out, in order to outline in a more specific way the concepts that made up the object of the research, with the purpose of appropriation of knowledge for deeper understanding of issues (TOZONI-REIS, 2009).

The descriptive review, in order to summarize previous knowledge, was the methodological strategy adopted for the literature review, in order to support or reveal structures and trends regarding the pre-existing propositions and theories (PARÉ et al., 2015). The collection of qualitative data, the organization of said data, its analysis and interpretation were the steps through which the textual production went. This resulted in the elaboration of the discussion and considerations on the relationships between the investigated parties.

Thus, objectives were proposed to contribute to the textual production and the study of selected academic texts, with efforts made to systematize the work of reading, interpretation and discussion.

Knowledge management

Innovations depend on pre-existing levels of knowledge and understanding. The greatest source of knowledge is outside the confines of a corporate organization, and in order to access external knowledge it is essential that the company has the capacity to locate, understand, assimilate and internalize it (PATON; PETERS; QUINTAS, 2007).

Knowledge management (KM) has been seen as a resource for organizations to maintain their competitiveness. It is a process that enables the flow of knowledge between people and groups in companies, described as a sequence of four major stages: acquisition (absorption of knowledge), storage (identification and location of knowledge), distribution (learning at all levels of the company) and use (search for best practices) of knowledge (NEVES; CERDEIRA, 2018).

The absorption of knowledge by organizations can occur through the learning of people in organizations, and it can occur through formal training, educational schemes and research and development programs. Other types of learning are due to the acquisition of technologies, which have the necessary knowledge embedded in the company (PATON; PETERS; QUINTAS, 2007). An organization can also absorb knowledge from professionals hired to compose its staff.

Hiring specialists as consultants that transmit specialized knowledge can be efficient to promote the absorption of knowledge from the organization, provided that the company has strategies to maximize learning from such consultants. Another way to enable the internalization of knowledge in organizations is the selection and hiring of managers and collaborators who have knowledge and skills consistent with the strategic organizational objectives.

The selection processes for hiring are not dedicated to just filling vacancies, but also to adapting professionals to the organization's staff.

The results achieved in a shorter period are shown in the quantitative reduction of indicators, such as: turnover rate, absenteeism rate, investment costs in hiring, training expenses, time and cost of integration and adaptation of candidates (ESTEVEES; MEIRIÑO, 2015). Considering these effects, it is not enough that knowledge is absorbed (acquired) by companies. It is also necessary to guarantee its storage.

Efforts to preserve existing knowledge in organizations involve referencing relevant knowledge and identifying its location within the corporate environment. It is not possible to create mechanisms for obtaining and storing knowledge if it is not located and identified, which are KM's first challenges. Many organizations do not have information about the nature and location of their collaborators' knowledge, which consequently makes it difficult to obtain knowledge and use it properly. (NEVES; CERDEIRA, 2018). Having overcome the storage phase of the KM process, it is necessary to ensure that knowledge is properly distributed throughout the organization.

Under the KM logic, learning must occur at all levels of an organization, as this transforms knowledge into competencies, through mobilization, learning, participation and commitment of all managers and collaborators. The distribution of knowledge among people in the organization can occur with information technology resources, as well as by promoting practices of interaction between people and groups in the company. The use of communication technologies for storage implies the codification of knowledge, which can be done only by people (NEVES; CERDEIRA, 2018).

People's role is very relevant in KM. Therefore, it is necessary that the employees of the organizations willingly share the knowledge, so that they can demonstrate its value and meaning for the different organizational processes. While knowledge is inherent to the individual, it is the company's duty to support creative employees to create and transform knowledge (ESTEVEES; MEIRIÑO, 2015).

With assistance and encouragement from the organization, the individual can always be looking for continuous learning to embrace new roles and responsibilities. Competence is the term that qualifies someone to perform activities with excellence, knowledge, skill and attitudes satisfactory to one's performance. The dissemination of competences occurs within the organization, which enables the sharing of knowledge through management that prepares individuals for new challenges, expanding the intellectual, emotional and moral aspects of their competence in a process that continuously allows knowledge in the organization to be not only accessible and shareable, but also usable (ESTEVEES; MEIRIÑO, 2015).

The set of knowledge acquired, stored and distributed by corporate organizations is a form of map with large amounts of information about past experiences, which use allows companies to avoid making the same mistakes, ensuring the continuous search for best practices based on collective wisdom (NEVES; CERDEIRA, 2018). The use of knowledge helps in the development of corporations, allowing to concentrate efforts in reaching their expectations.

The focus on results is one of the skills most targeted by corporate organizations. It is the ability to meet objectives and goals when mobilizing people to achieve the strategic organizational vision, with the performance of creative and effective attitudes to obtain results, as well as the anticipation of opportunities for competitive advantage for the company (ESTEVEES; MEIRIÑO, 2015).

KM, therefore, is a tool that enables organizations to identify, store, transform and employ information and specialized knowledge. From the need for the involvement of employees and managers in the KM process, organizational learning practices arise, which occur according to the dynamics of organizations in which knowledge is built and take different forms depending on the specificities of the companies.

Organizational learning

Organizational learning (OL) can be conceptualized as a way in which companies build, provide and organize their knowledge and activity routines, within their cultures, with adaptation and development of organizational efficiency through improvements in basic skills of their workforces (PATON; PETERS; QUINTAS, 2007). Its purpose is to reach new, multiple and continuous knowledge about corporate dynamics and demands, both directly and indirectly, inside and outside the organization. This provides a starting point for some considerations on the subject.

As a rule, six variables allow OL to foster the integrated development of organizations: culture, structure, focus on the group, strategic vision, integrated management of human resources and communication. The implementation of initiatives aimed at improving OL and transforming organizations into learning organizations encompasses four subprocesses: knowledge acquisition, interpretation of information received, information distribution and organizational memory (SANTANA, 2005). These sub-processes are articulated in the macro-process that promotes teaching and learning in companies.

The OL has a procedural nature. The current perspective on learning processes values the tendency to continuous changes in organizations, as well as employing levels of individual, group and organizational analysis. According to Antonello and Godoy (2009, p. 278):

OL, in its history, has been characterized as an increase/improvement in performance over time, as a behavioral, cognitive, sociocultural phenomenon, a phenomenon with reflective and emotional dimensions, an experiential phenomenon. What is perceived, in some cases, is that the studies and theories proposed for the OL fail to take into account the lessons

derived from the experience and from the several studies already developed in the area of knowledge in learning [*our translation*].

For the authors (ANTONELLO; GODOY, 2009), there are five characteristics whose discussion needs to be deepened, both to understand the phenomenon and to outline an OL concept that underpins empirical studies. The following aspects are identified:

1. **Learning level:** it is possible to consider learning as an interpersonal phenomenon. OL uses both the individual and his group, intergroup, organizational and even interorganizational interactions. A reason is needed to separate OL from individual learning, as well as a mechanism to explain how groups and organizations learn. However, one can also consider learning connected with both levels - individual and organizational.

2. **Goal neutrality:** learning can be seen as positive or negative. With the redefinition of the relationship between OL and the performance results of groups and organizations, a positive relationship is commonly assumed, either by the definition of learning or by its operationalization, which makes the concept of OL trivial.

3. **Notion of change:** not all learning leads to change in behavior. The notions of learning and organizational change must be separated (a process to which it is often related).

4. **Procedural nature of learning:** learning is a process and should be studied as such. With the recovery of the learning process dimension, it is possible to obtain an interesting development of the concept of OL and its research.

5. **Political nature of learning:** it is necessary to consider the power relations intrinsic to the OL processes, since its practice presents complex notions embedded in social structures that involve power relations.

Considering the five aspects presented and transferring the notion of a change process to reality in organizations, it is noticeable the emergence of a process that connects actors, systems, articulated

activities and artifacts. Such perspective highlights that the OL cannot be seen only as an individual process, but seen from the relationships and interactions of people with the social and material elements of the particular contexts of organizations, their work divisions, power relations, culture, language and other similar elements (ANTONELLO; GODOY, 2009).

The individual learning cycle is a process, in which individual beliefs change and are encoded in people's mental models. These cycles affect the OL through its influence on the mental models shared between employees and managers of the organization. However, individuals can learn despite the lack of incentive from the organization, and individual learning may or may not be relevant to the organization's learning (SANTANA, 2005).

The parts of individual learning relevant to the OL constitute the active memory to which the organization pays attention, influencing the organizational way of acting and becoming part of the mental models of shared experiences that make the organizational memory usable. That said, individual learning depends on the ability of individuals to improve their mental models, and the explanation of these models is essential for the development of shared mental models. This process marks OL's independence from specific individuals (SANTANA, 2005).

In this way, the notion of OL as a process to achieve knowledge related to the reality and needs of organizations contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of companies, enabling flows of change in social systems. The learning process in which changes are implemented and disseminated in companies is materialized and evaluated through the corporate education programs developed by organizations.

Corporative education

Corporate education (CE) is an organizational initiative, with the purpose of ensuring a continuous and structured learning process, which must be linked to strategic objectives. It is a people development system, based on competency management. Its role is to connect individual improvement to the company's operating strategy. It is a smart way for organizations to dominate the education and training business, with better use of resources and linking educational programs to the development of the skills required by business strategies (CRUZ, 2010).

The CE emerged in Brazil at the end of the 20th century, through the coordination between people management and KM as a work in progress, in order to include in the organizational strategies the educational development of the various stakeholders (employees, suppliers and customers), through the expansion of individual and organizational skills for training (ESTEVEES; MEIRIÑO, 2015), which sets it apart from the training programs in vogue until then.

Unlike business training or labor qualification, the CE relates to a new way of thinking and working, “shaping the vision of continuous learning, setting goals for the organization, adding value to the business [*our translation*]” (ESTEVEES; MEIRIÑO, 2015, p. 4), configured as a strategic umbrella for the development and education of a community, with the intention of fulfilling the organization's strategies, which constitutes a model based on the *knowledge society* - transformation of the social individual through knowledge, which imposes countless challenges to traditional school education.

Under the perspective that the Brazilian State does not offer qualified labor or academic excellence, corporate organizations assume this responsibility, directing educational projects, internalizing the school in companies and considering the real expectations of workers. This provides a satisfactory return, since the speed with which

information and knowledge is obsolete. CE enables learning systems that bring together those interested in reaching the business goal - employees, customers and the production chain (ESTEVEES; MEIRIÑO, 2015), aligning the possibilities of individual development of careers and interests with the organizational strategy, and not with the accumulation of professional qualifications.

According to Esteves and Meiriño (2015), CE programs currently cooperate so that concepts such as qualifying the functions of managers and/or employees are overcome, given that investments are needed to develop new profiles for an unusual way of acting and thinking when it comes to the functional frameworks of organizations. In order for the competitive advantage between companies to be achieved from the performance and the anticipation of differentiated changes, the CE must provide greater support to human capital, occupying new spaces in corporate organizations.

CE is not restricted to classroom space. Rather, it is linked to organizational processes of continuous learning and continuing education, influencing the intellectual and personal resources of companies, as well as the emergence of new management policies aimed at sharing experiences, actions and information, with the purpose of solving problems, learning to relearn together with the team. This view demands from the manager/collaborator faculties such as: dealing with unforeseen circumstances, demonstrating proactivity and developing organizational learning (and not only individual learning) (ESTEVEES; MEIRIÑO, 2015), as noticeable reflexes in the ability to lead people.

On the behavior appropriate to leadership in the corporate scenario, Esteves and Meiriño (2015, p. 2) state:

The new leader no longer behaves as the controller, but as a motivating agent involving the entire organization, whether through group dynamics, meetings, seminars, creating an environment of motivation and awareness, where everyone involved in the organizational strategy understands the

importance of continuing education in conjunction with business goals [*our translation*].

The strategic vision of companies is best understood by a faculty formed by managers, leaders and executives from corporate institutions, in order to add value to the production chain, employing the company's own workforce to bring benefits to organizational knowledge. For this and the following reasons, CE is different from traditional school education (ESTEVES; MEIRIÑO, 2015):

- a) In CE, physical space is more a concept than a reality;
- b) Learning through virtual (electronic) environments in CE brings flexibility, with freedom of choice as to the best time for activities;
- c) Less CE learning time provides cost savings;
- d) Knowledge meets the individual in CE, so there is no need to be absent; and
- e) At CE, the target audience is managers/employees, customers, suppliers and the community in general, whose service is provided through actions based on social and environmental responsibility.

Due to the difficulties in certifying courses (since such certifications and diplomas can only be issued by bodies accredited by the Ministry of Education), companies have invested in partnerships with public and private universities to validate certifications or to develop CE courses. Due to the involvement of individuals, work groups and even the community in which the company is located, CE programs can be considered an “evolutionary process in the area of people management, aiming at the quality of the workforce, in strategic management education and training [*our translation*]” (ESTEVES; MEIRIÑO, 2015, p. 5).

Considering the information presented so far, it is possible to discuss them and establish relationships between them that enable the systematized understanding of the subjects.

Discussion

Technical knowledge is important for success, but competencies needed for positions are also sought by companies. Knowledge has an expiration date and it is precisely for this reason that it must be continually renewed, which relates the career of employees to their skills, abilities, attitudes, experiences and pursuits in order to achieve their goals and organizational strategic objectives (ESTEVEZ; MEIRIÑO, 2015).

To ensure that the skills of managers and employees are aligned with the goals of companies, it is necessary that KM enables the flow of knowledge between individuals and groups in organizations. This knowledge must be acquired by the company, identified and coded by people responsible for its storage. Once this is done, the knowledge can then be distributed among the different levels of the corporations, which results in its use for the achievement of the companies' finalistic processes.

KM then requires the company to have the OL in perspective, as it is through learning that the knowledge collected and stored by the organization will be adapted to its culture, disseminated among its collaborators and managers, adapted and employed in the continuous improvement of the skills of the various individuals members of the working groups. For OL to be a reality, organizations are required to plan and develop CE programs, in order to systematize and foster the culture of continuous learning of the various stakeholders involved in the production chain and business practices (employees, suppliers, customers, community and others) (ESTEVEZ; MEIRIÑO, 2015).

Studies based on organizational practices start from the notion of an emerging reality and knowledge as a material activity connected to material artifacts. Thus, the social is not only related to people, but also to symbolic and cultural artifacts. The notion of practice articulates the notion of space-time in the making of actors, that is, of practices located in companies,

which implies uncertainties and conflicts in teaching and learning practices in companies (ANTONELLO; GODOY, 2009).

The new notions involved in the OL process bring considerable understandings about its nature, which contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of organizations and the flow of change in these social systems. For these understandings to be obtained, it is necessary that the teaching and learning methods are constantly rethought, due to the interpretative and temporal nature of the KM and OL processes, which are reflected in the planning, teaching, learning and evaluation of results of CE programs (ANTONELLO; GODOY, 2009).

CE, in turn, can contemplate several teaching modalities: technical courses, basic education, postgraduation and others. In other times, the learning process had a beginning, middle and end, and when the cycle was completed, the individual stopped learning, since the focus was on developing isolated qualifications. However, organizations today realize the need for constant renewal to foster a culture of continuous development of people, with broader qualifications.

This new paradigm of continuous learning in companies, of organizations' commitment to education and the increase of individual competences ensures that the sharing of innovations corroborates the achievement of the results outlined in the business strategy (ESTEVEZ; MEIRIÑO, 2015), which gives great relevance to KM, OL and CE.

In the current KM landscape, OL is a process based on competences, skills and attitudes. Human capacity and knowledge, vital for companies, are intangible and not measurable assets, although they produce benefits for organizations. Thus, the CE programs developed in corporations seek the survival of organizations in the competitive market, adding value to the business and applying knowledge strategies to improve operational efficiency, leveraging competitive advantages by learning faster than competing companies (ESTEVEZ; MEIRIÑO, 2015).

CE makes it clear that the T&D model no longer satisfies the challenge that companies face to develop and retain intellectual capital, in order to increase competitiveness in the era of knowledge and the use of knowledge with a focus on results, being, therefore, the attribution of people management renewal in the T&D area (ESTEVEES; MEIRIÑO, 2015).

Final considerations

CE programs in organizations must adopt mechanisms to evaluate and measure organizational results, placing KM and OL in the same relevance of the evolution and development of the organizational strategy (ESTEVEES; MEIRIÑO, 2015). However, there are still problems with the regulation of courses and the emancipation of corporate universities, which are still difficulties in the practice of CE, with still room for the emergence of new teaching modalities and partnerships for the achievement of continuous learning in companies.

Organizations that support the knowledge initiation process, which prepare the individual for learning and reflection about the world and about themselves, must be recognized as basic institutions of CE, whose process takes place due to the involvement of managers and leaders, agents changes provoking the constant search for knowledge and the evolution of human capital, filling the gap left by the State in traditional education by covering the preparation/training of professionals for superior production and performance, consistent with the objectives of the corporations (ESTEVEES; MEIRIÑO, 2015).

Just as there are different types of organizations, there are several models of CE and OL, which can function as repositories of learning carried out by companies. The different models create opportunities that justify those responsible for KM and scholars of corporate organizations, communication and information systems to

become aware of the work done by researchers from other areas of study, who can present new solutions and approaches to the challenges faced by organizations (SANTANA, 2005).

The various corporate organizations can also draw on existing research on CE modeling in order to refine models in line with their own institutional and cultural characteristics. This refinement of CE allows the development of new and better tools for intra and interorganizational analysis.

The dissemination and sharing of knowledge among organizations can exponentially increase the benefits of KM, OL practices and CE programs. This possibility corroborates that good practices are even more widespread in society, contributing for new research to be developed, to identify new career opportunities for people, to bring greater social benefits to communities and to enhance the success of Brazilian companies.

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