

CURRENT TRENDS IN CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL TRAINING. LITERATURE REVIEW.

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ABSTRACT

Human resources are strategic tools of organizations. The COVID-19 pandemic, the digitalization and the outbreak of war in Europe have led to massive changes in organizations. Employers are increasingly concerned with maintaining and developing their workforce so that they can solve current problems. In recent years, training and continuous development have changed radically through the transfer of activities online and the reshaping of learning processes. This paper aims to present a literature review of current relevant work on this topic. Next, in order to highlight the importance of this issue, we also developed a study of the literature based on an analysis of the works indexed in the Scopus database. In our paper, the extracted database will be refined with the help of bibliometric analysis. In this way, we will identify the most common topics studied when discussing training and learning activities in current scientific research.

KEYWORDS: *continuous training, professional development, e-learning, human resources, COVID-19.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Training and professional development is a fundamental activity in the field of human resources management. The concepts of training and professional development have their origins in the first part of the twentieth century. Today, organizations face new challenges in terms of employee training as the coronavirus pandemic, the emergence of new technologies and rising citizens' expectations for the quality of public service delivery are growing. Bhartiya (2015) considers training as a strategic tool, which helps the organization to create a smarter force capable of coping with any situation and challenge. The competitive advantage of an institution is the human resources within it. Thus, to achieve performance, the organization needs human resources that have skills, abilities, high quality knowledge. All these are acquired through the processes of training and professional development, as integrated stages of human resource management.

Digitalization, the global market economy and all the challenges that have arisen in recent years make organizations need flexibility, adaptability and a lot of creativity (Christopher, Holweg, 2011). The market turnover caused by the pandemic and the war on Europe's border have created unique problems that need quick answers. Thus, new technologies and rapid market changes make the ability to innovate and continuous learning a pressing need (Rollof et al, 2011). Romania does not make a discordant note in this landscape. In our country, vocational training is defined as that process of continuing education that complements studies, is regulated by law and is the property of the Ministry

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of Education and Research together with that of Labor and Social Justice (Popescu, R.R. 2016). Although the direction to be followed was established by a programmatic document- "The strategy of vocational education and training in Romania between 2016-2020", it seems to have, moreover, a theoretical character and its applicability is missing, especially in the public system. If private organizations (especially those with a large number of employees) have an assumed concern in creating training programs and evaluating their results for employees, in the case of public institutions it is not the same. (Gheorghe, 2010). The continuous professional training of civil servants is the guarantee of an efficient administration but this statement from the "Statute of the Civil Servant" remains only at a declarative level in the absence of the development of specialized, coherent programs. (Groza, A, 2018).

Both companies and public institutions in Romania need a strategy for employees to become familiar with technology, to understand and accept its role in our lives so that they are prepared for the economic contexts that will come. A national, unitary approach to improving and updating the vocational training system can serve to increase productivity, managerial efficiency and can avoid increasing the unemployment rate and declining labor productivity.

In this context, an analysis of scientific trends in continuing vocational training is required. The aim of this paper, based on the study of the literature is to establish a solid theoretical basis to identify the most current trends in training strategies in organizations. At the same time, through this analysis, we will see how global companies have adapted to new challenges and how learning strategies have evolved in a context based on major changes. The knowledge that emerges from the study of specialized literature will be refined with the help of a bibliometric analysis based on the changes that appeared in the training strategies after the pandemic crisis. The results of this study can be used by Romanian organizations so as to increase their overall performance and contribute to increasing the performance of the Romanian labor market through the professional and personal development of employees.

2. MANUSCRIPT

2.1. Theoretical background

Training has been considered an important mechanism to cultivate the mentality of continuous development among employees, especially because it is oriented towards self-efficiency (Ahmed et al, 1999; Bevilacqua et al, 2017, Aloini et al, 2011). Companies recurrently use training initiatives, at all organizational levels, to implement structural methods of development and build an environment and culture of continuing education (Anand et al, 2009). The coronavirus pandemic, by limiting social contact, has redefined the entire area of training, learning and development in organizations. The learning and development departments of the organizations tried to approach the online training even before the pandemic started, but there is a strong reluctance towards this subject both at the level of top management and at the level of employees. However, the health crisis has brought an acute need for digitalization and the vast majority of learning activities have been transferred online. "Acting while recognizing and taking into account the psychological needs of team members can significantly increase their motivation and effectiveness in the undertaken development processes" (Mikołajczyk, 2021). Also, the conclusions of the analyzes carried out by the Association for Talent Development in August 2020 confirmed this aspect. Regarding e-learning, we see a significant increase in its use in companies. In total, 99% of organizations offer e-learning to their employees, compared to 76%, just five years ago. Over the next five years, 100% of the organizations participating in the survey state that they intend to provide e-learning in HRD activities (ATD Research Report, 2020). Although it is a good time for organizations to create and implement hybrid learning processes, the great challenge for human resources specialists is that of efficiency. Of course, the future is of self-training and personal development, of course online activities reduce the costs of companies, but their design must be particular and very well focused on the needs of organizations

and staff. Otherwise, problems may occur such as: the trainer's lack of connection with the audience or the loss of participants' attention as well as the misuse of technology. The moment of transfer to online and digitization is good but the challenges are appropriate. The goal is to effectively use the potential of e-learning activities so as to create personalized content. "Perhaps this pandemic is a good time for L&D departments to create in consultation with development tools providers, the so-called Learning Ecosystem, i.e. a coherent and transparent infrastructure covering all (internal and external) systems, tools and educational sources used in the company" (Johnson, 2019; Chang, Guetl, 2007) The radical changes required by the economy and society need a reassessment of the necessary skills. Human resource management has been particularly impacted by the pandemic crisis. This situation is unprecedented and specialists have not been trained to manage such a problem. There are many concerns that need solutions, more than ever. (Nutsubidze, Schmidt, 2021) The pandemic has brought to light issues such as morale and employee involvement, identifying methods to ensure their mental health or underpaid employees. (Wenham et al. 2020).

Lifelong learning is becoming more important than formal education (Maheshwari and Vohra, 2018). Today, individual development is a key area that has grown in importance in organizations. Training activities should have specific and current objectives in the following three categories: increasing the personal efficiency of employees, increasing the added value that human resources achieve and generating future value (expertise and development of personal potential). The objectives of training are to develop skills, competencies and the global potential of employees. In order to achieve them, the latest research says that organizations, as a whole, must develop their processes and knowledge so as to succeed in supporting the development of individual productivity and the varied potential of each employee (Nan-Nan and Sanamthong, 2019). Following this idea, paradigms change radically. If conservative theories of human resources put performance (or lack thereof in the employee), today, researchers show that any individual has the potential for development and knowledge needed by the organization, but development processes within the organization are limited and fail to enhance people's capacity . (Diesel and Scheepers, 2019).

Today, the discussion on vocational training of human resources is that it goes beyond that formal framework that involved the organization of a series of learning activities. Change refers to the construction of an organizational culture through which to pursue the development of the individual for his entire life (Jarvis, 2010). This paradigm shift encourages the processes of continuous professional training, training through learning, teaching and re-learning, throughout the career (Bersin, 2018). It is a time of learning, more than ever before, and researchers suggest that reflective training and empirical training through experiments are necessary to have appropriate reactions to such radical environmental changes (Rollof, 2011)). At the same time, Gibson et al (2003) point out that training sessions are more successful in organizations that encourage autonomy and freedom of expression compared to traditional ones based on strict control of employees. training is an important factor in the successful implementation of quality management. At the same time, training practices combined with those of employee engagement are considered to be methods by which human resources become more efficient and motivated to deliver and improve their performance (Jurburg et al, 2017). "With a growing rate of change, human factors such as engagement, motivation, and learning become increasingly important. For sustainable production and a sustainable working life, the work environment needs to ensure learning and development, from the perspective of both individuals and companies".(Kullberg et al, 2022). An involved employee who has completed training workshops tends to work more efficiently and become more efficient, while the lack of these factors causes development processes to fail (McLean et al, 2017). "When employees have the impression that the company-wide improvement method is being forced and training is predominantly used to strengthen it, or when employees consider the common improvement method as too rigid, then the adherence to the use of a common improvement method and training for continuous improvement becomes counterproductive "(Van Assen, 2021). Researchers show, in recent studies, that the role of continuous training is a major one in the qualification of human resources and has a

positive impact in improving the performance of teams, in particular and the organization in general. Therefore, they invest considerable budgets in continuing vocational training, but the lack of clear evidence of the added value of these activities makes their financial support difficult to justify

2.2. Methodology

As the literature has shown us, vocational training is a key element in the success of organizations.. The massive economic turmoil (caused, in particular, by the coronavirus pandemic) has once again underscored the massive need for employee development. This analysis aims to observe the new training trends in organizations. . In order to highlight the importance of this topic, we also developed a study of the literature based on an analysis of the works indexed in the Scopus database. We chose this database because Scopus and Web of Science are the most relevant databases and they sum up reference works in the field of management. With the help of the bibliometric map, we will identify the main keywords used when talking about human resources training in recent years. At the same time, we will be able to conclude which are the most relevant clusters in this field and which is the level of expansion of the specialized literature dealing with the subject of continuous professional training. to generate, define and visualize bibliometric networks. In our paper, the extracted database will be refined with the help of bibliometric analysis. Technological advancement is the main argument for which we used this program in our research. IT innovation gives us advantages in using such programs already recognized at the academic level.)

The steps are as follows: defining the research methodology, evaluating the data obtained, loading the database into the bibliometric analysis software, presenting the research results and analyzing and interpreting the data.

In the Scopus database, we initiated a search based on the word "training" and we selected the years that followed the coronavirus pandemic (2020-2022) precisely so that, in the dense literature written on this topic, we can narrow the search by focus on current trends. It is well known that the pandemic has been a "game changer" for the entire economy. In this sense, we consider the criterion to be a relevant one. Next, we selected the research area: business, management and accounting and we limited the results to texts written only in English. The search in the Scopus database resulted in 2777 papers (journals, conferences, articles or books). These values were taken into account respecting several criteria that ensure the relevance of the identified databases. Thus, we selected the complete publications that have the title, keywords and abstracts available in English. From the Scopus database, the identified works were exported in Excel (CSV) format. The VOSviewer version 1.6.18 program allows us to outline maps based on several criteria: co-citation, author or keywords. For this paper, we chose a keyword matching analysis. In this way, we will identify the most common topics studied when discussing training activities in current scientific research. In the following pages, we will present the findings resulting from consulting the indexed papers in the Scopus database. To perform the bibliometric analysis, we determined the clusters and the distribution of terms, and the name of each cluster was determined by the highest score in terms of the frequency of that term.

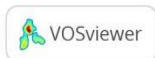
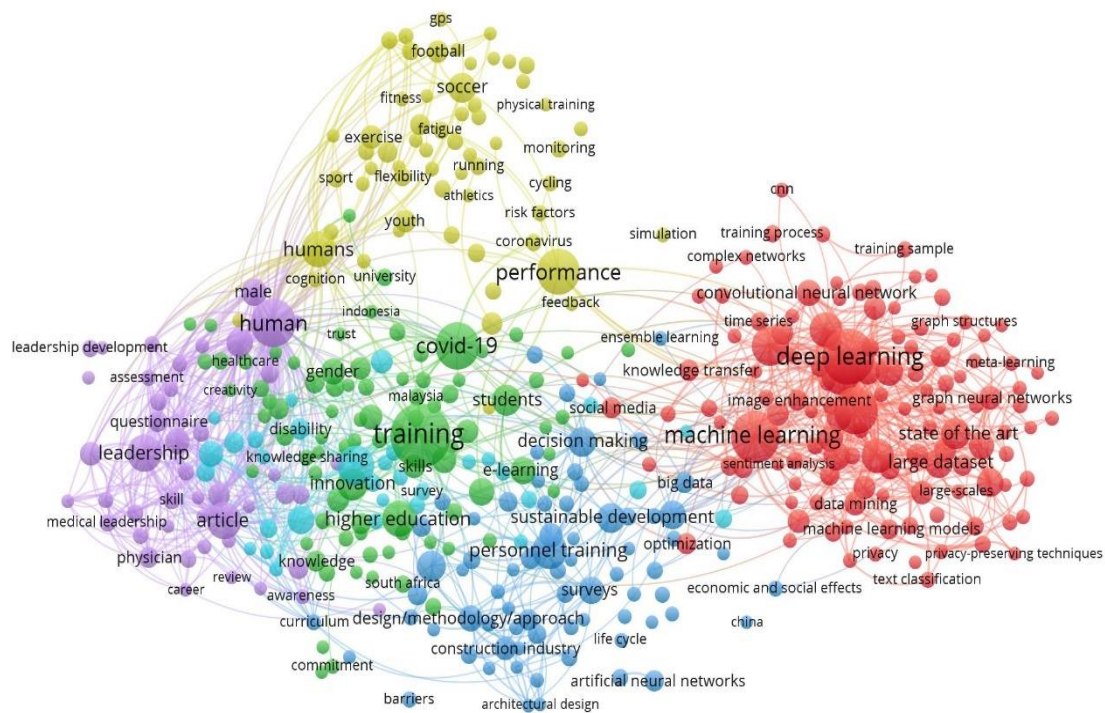


Figure 1. Keyword matching map from publications extracted from the Scopus database
 Source: author’s own research

2.3. Results and interpretation of data

As we can see from the figure presented above, cluster 1 (red) is centered around the word "deep learning". Other common topics refer to "knowledge management" and "machine learning". This shows us how relevant and current technology is in human resource management during this period. "Machine learning describes the capacity of systems to learn from problem-specific training data to automate the process of analytical model building and solve associated tasks. Deep learning is a machine learning concept based on artificial neural networks "(Janiesch et al, 2021). For many applications, deep learning models outperform shallow machine learning models and traditional data analysis. Therefore, traditional training activities must take into account more and more and insert more and more technology in employee management.

Table 1. Keyword analysis cluster 1

Keyword	Cluster1	Link	Link strenght	Occurrences
Deep learning		131	346	82
Machine learning		110	216	74
Knowledge management		119	271	59
Learning systems		105	226	46
Classification (of information)		91	181	33

Source: author’s own research

The second cluster (green) is outlined around the word "training". Although this cluster was anticipated, other topics with high incidence such as "coronavirus pandemic" or "mental health" are interesting to follow. Again, the Vosviewer bibliometric analysis software confirms that the last three years have reset the economic field. The training activities were transferred, mostly, online and had to be remodeled both as a structure and as the chosen theme. The physical but, above all, mental health of the employees has become a priority topic on the agenda of all HR departments.

Table 2. Keyword analysis cluster 2

Keyword	Cluster 2	Link	Link strenght	Occurences
Training		376	302	109
Covid 19		94	141	60
Education		94	158	43
Mental health		38	47	14

Source: author's own research

The third cluster (blue color) has as central theme "personal training" and the fourth (yellow color) performance area. Organizations need to ensure that training activities are carried out effectively. This translates into a correlation between the expectations of the training beneficiaries and those of the companies or institutions. In this regard, the challenge for any organization is to create an objective database to assess and improve the impact that continuing education has on employees. (Flegl et al, 2022).

Table 3. Keyword analysis cluster 3

Keyword	Cluster 3	Link	Link strenght	Occurences
Personnel training		97	170	37
Sustainable development		63	87	24
Continuous improvement		26	16	7

Source: Author's own research

Table 4. Keyword analysis cluster 4

Keyword	Cluster 4	Link	Link strenght	Occurences
Performance		111	153	56
Humans		104	282	34
Motivation		29	31	14
Strenght		20	24	12

Source: Author's own research

The word "human" is the one that dominates the fifth cluster (purple). The bibliometric analysis suggests an increasingly emerging trend in the practice of human resource management. This refers to the creation of a bilateral relationship between the employee and the organization, a relationship in which professional training meets the needs of both parties. Moreover, training processes must become more and more applied to the individual as a person and less to the employee, in general. Every organization has a difficult mission to grind and highlight the potential of each individual and this can not happen without taking into account their needs, aspirations, desires. The last cluster is centered around the word "education".

Table 5. Keyword analysis cluster 5

Keyword	Cluster 5	Link	Link strenght	Occurrences
Human		149	540	63
Leadership		74	197	37
Mindfulness		24	27	8

Source: Author's own research

The results of this research highlight the importance of continuous professional training in the success of an organization, whether we are talking about a public or private one. The growing interest of publications on this topic shows us that the methods of employee development are in a continuous dynamic and that research on this topic is necessary. The keywords identified from the research show that, in the context of the emergence of new technologies and as a result of the pandemic, organizations need to support employees with development programs that bring them satisfaction and better involvement in the workplace. The keyword matching map clearly shows this. The hypothesis that requires more attention is that both the interaction with the public, customers and the individual performance of employees is impacted by the way in which engagement and vocational training programs are built. With regard to the direction of research for the future, a conceptual map can be defined that takes into account the in-depth understanding of the phenomena investigated and the concepts identified with the help of the concept map in this report. The concept map presented in this report represents a research point for the second stage, a qualitative research based on in-depth interviews with employees from public and private institutions in Romania so as to identify the training methods and skills desired in the future.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The initial conclusions resulting from the study of the literature were refined using an analysis that we performed using the VOSviewer program. In this way, we have shown what are the key concepts that have been addressed in the literature when we refer to how the process of continuing vocational training has changed in recent years. The results show us the importance of implementing a coherent training policy correlated with the expectations and values of the staff employed, a policy adapted to new technologies. Also, our research confirmed to us that employee development has an important role in the performance of the organization, but it requires a careful assessment of how resources are spent in this area. Furthermore, with the help of the keyword coincidence map, we presented the distribution of the concepts approached in the literature indexed in the Scopus database. In this way we highlighted the main directions of current research and future directions indicated by the authors in order to have an overall picture as relevant as possible. Certainly, the study presented has limits given by the nature of the research. I only analyzed the Scopus database and ignored the rest of the publications on this topic. Certainly, papers have been published to address the topic discussed in other journals that are not indexed in these databases. Another limitation of this report is that the subject is very current and there are still no very well documented empirical studies.

The association between employee training and organizational performance is an area that requires more attention from researchers. A learning organization is one that allows and stimulates the organization and its members to experiment, to learn from past experiences, and to be able to adapt quickly to changing requirements (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). While Senge (1990) describes the importance of developing core learning abilities (i.e. building a common vision, developing and testing mental models, and developing systems thinking) for reputation building, Jamali (2006) concludes that organizations should have specific learning characteristics. (eg learning culture, team building and shared vision). However, these studies are predominantly theoretical. It is not clear what training mechanisms should be addressed for employees to develop skills in this direction. This is the direction we will explore next.

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