Chapter 8
Lifelong Learning of Civil Servants in COVID-19:
The Pandemic That Changed Lifelong Learning in Civil Servants

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, a number of international developments in the economic, technological, social, and cultural fields make it necessary for more and more healthcare professionals to acquire a variety of knowledge and skills, adapted to the changes that take place, especially in information systems. To be able to meet the demands of our time, civil servants working in the field of health need to have a variety of interconnected qualifications on information systems, which must be renewed every now and then, especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This means that there is a need for continuing education, which will help to acquire knowledge, develop their skills, expand the prospects in the field of health information systems and at the same time will contribute to tackling the pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

The distance training of civil servants in the field of Health is a practice that until recently was not particularly used in Greece . Before the outbreak of COVID- 19, the only organizations that used technological means for modern and asynchronous distance education were universities and some multinational companies that had the necessary infrastructure and know-how. (Huang et al., 2020)

However, from the very first week of the implementation of the government measures to deal with the pandemic, with the forced exclusion of the population and work from home (to those who had the opportunity), many organizations began to think of alternative ways of training their employees. As a result, questions such as how to continue developing and training their human resources, how employees

can utilize teleworking tools and processes, and how to train management staff to effectively manage their teams remotely became burning issues for companies and organizations. (Reimers et al., 2020)

The pandemic era created the need for distance learning programs obvious and immediate, and many organizations rushed to the various trainers and training institutes in search of solutions. Therefore, in response to new data, the Human Resource Development Authority of Greece adapted operation for the first time ever in April 2020 to grant distance learning programs. This development is certainly welcomed and is imperative as it facilitates the implementation of programs that are not possible to be done in person in the classical form of class and contributes to the modernization of Cypriot organizations, providing them with the opportunity to take advantage of alternative and more flexible forms of education. (Huang et al., 2020)

At the same time, it highlighted the value of e-skills (digital skills) that are required for all adults. After all, the nature of work has undergone profound changes due to technological advances, macro-economic fluctuations and other internal and external factors. According to the report of the European Political Strategy Center, technology and new business models have changed the very concept of work, turning it into an umbrella concept of tasks performed in different functional and geographical contexts (European Commission, 2019). As technology and digitalization permeate all sectors of the economy and society, most jobs require at least some basic digital skills. Indicative of the fact is that in 2016 half of European workers needed basic digital skills to perform their tasks (EC, 2017). However, in 2017 35% of the active workforce in the European Union (employed and unemployed) still lacked basic digital skills (Digital Economy and Society Index, 2019). (Watkins, 2020)

In addition, it is important to note that both distance workers and their managers need digital skills for good communication and collaboration. In particular, skills such as adaptability, interaction, communication and collaboration through digital technologies and performance management in remote workgroups should be at the heart of human resource trainers and executives. (Savkov et al., 2020)

As a result, and given the circumstances, educators and training centers should focus on distance learning skills, as this type of training requires a different methodology and way of teaching. As a part of this effort, they can make use of technology tools and video conferencing platforms, such as Zoom or WebEx . (Reimers et al., 2020)

The training of employee wellbeing is also considered extremely important, especially in this period of forced social distancing. The well-being of all people is vital in times of fear, insecurity, uncertainty and in many cases a lack of human contact. Employers who really care about their workforce, but also the employees themselves, need to realize the importance of investing in their mental health so that they can manage new data and maintain their efficiency and productivity. (Androniceanu, 2012)

Therefore, the necessary measures must be designed and taken by human resources managers in organizations to promote training in the development of digital skills in the workforce, enhancing well-being, health and productivity. In addition, training should be provided to acquire leadership skills for managing the performance of remote employees through digital media as well as knowledge of techniques and approaches to motivate them. The revival of morale and the effective management of employees through the new leadership skills required by the modern era will bring about an improvement in productivity, and consequently the survival and development of organizations. (Savkov et al., 2020)

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