Learning organization and knowledge management in the public sector. Case study

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ABSTRACT

For the time being, "the organizational and managerial practice has become more focused on knowledge"1), for example comparative analyses, transfer of the best practices, which triggers to understanding the importance of organizational knowledge and intangible assets2).

Within a continuous changing environment, the challenges such as social, economic, financial and political crises faced by the organizations of the public sector in Romania are outstanding, determining them to be rather tactical than strategical in their actions. These operating conditions of public organizations in Romania should determine the creation of behaviours aimed at developing the culture of organizational learning, such as creativity, involvement, responsibility, openness to changes and lifelong learning which represents the condition for efficient innovative operations as well as effective implementation of innovation. The learning process in the framework of an organization should be created in view to develop better roles, to enhance the quality of work and involvement, to better use of human resources, synergy etc.

The objectives of the paper are focused on: 1. Identifying and analysing the key defining elements of the learning organization and knowledge management; 2. Identifying the use of the concept of learning organization in the organizations of the public sector in Romania in local governments from rural areas, as well as the importance and impact of the learning process in the development of an organization.

KEYWORDS: *learning organization, knowledge management, local government, rural environment, city hall.*

1. Introduction

In a learning organization, the activity takes place in a dynamic and stimulating environment, and the employees of this organization are engaged in a continuous activity

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[1] Alavi, M., Leidner, D., *Review: Knowledge management and knowledge management systems: conceptual foundations and research issues.*, in MIS Quarterly, 25(1), 2001, pp. 107-136.

[2] Spender, J., *Making Knowledge the Basis of a Dynamic Theory of the Firm*, in Strategic Management Journal, 17, 1996, pp. 45-62; Shankar, R., Singh, M., Gupta, A., Narain, R., 2003, *Research methods for business: a skill-building approach*, New York, NY: Wiley.

of creating, acquiring or transferring the knowledge. Thus, the organization could adapt faster to unexpected situations. However, for many organizations, the concept of learning organization and the benefits deriving from its successful implementation have a utopian feature leading to reluctance towards the learning organization. Garvin David, Edmondson Amy and Gino Francesca[3] identified a possible reason why learning organizations are too little present in the contemporary society. The reason is expressed as the lack of knowledge among managers concerning the stages in view to substantiate the pillars of a learning organization. Moreover, the three authors continue this idea, identifying another shortcoming of managers, namely the lack of instruments in view to assess the extent of learning by their teams as well as the degree to which the learning process is beneficial to the organization. Identifying those problems, the authors also proposed a solution. The managers and their employees should be familiar and completely understand the three basic pillars of a learning organization:

– A favourable climate;

– Clear and concrete learning processes and procedures;

– Leadership encouraging learning.

The organizational learning is defined as the ability of an organization to create, acquire, transfer, integrate knowledge and change the behaviour in view to improve performance. The concept of organizational learning is based on the idea that organizations can learn as independent entities. There are three types of organizational learning: adaptive, when the organization reacts to environmental changes in order to adapt; generative, when the organization is learning proactively new knowledge, behaviours and skills, and transformative, when the organization interacts in a fundamentally different way with the environment[4].

2. Learning organization and knowledge management

2.1. Learning organization

2.1.1. Definitions and characteristics

The term "learning organization" was firstly used in the relationship between corporate private organizations. According to Bruce Britton[5], the search for a single all-encompassing definition of the learning organization whilst attractive is frustrating and, in the end, may even be misguided. It can be argued that the most useful definition of the learning organization is the one that each organization develops for itself.

The concept of learning organization emerged during a period of unexpected growth of completeness in most organizations, and it was not surprising the fact that management authors tried to identify what allows organizations to cope or even develop in a world

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[3]   Garvin, D., Edmondson, A., Gino, F., *Is yours a learning organization?,* in Harvard Business Review, March 2008, pp. 109-116.

[4]   Bălan, C., Ioniță, D., *Cercetare exploratorie privind învățarea organizațională în întreprinderile mici și implicații pentru învățământul superior economic*, in Amfiteatru Economic, vol. XIII, nr. 30, 2011, p. 384, București, ASE, available at: https://www.amfiteatrueconomic.ro/temp/Articol_1057.pdf (accessed on 20 August 2020).

[5]   Britton, B., 2002, *Learning for change: Principles and practices of learning organizations.* Swedish mission council, p. 11.

of changes. The concept of the "learning organization" has become shorthand for an organization which is "skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights[6]. Peter Senge[7] provided one of the first definitions, describing the learning organizations as "places where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is shared, and where people are continually learning how to learn together".

The concept of learning organization could be defined by an organization that constantly learns and adapts to any situation, the place where employees constantly develop their ability to generate the best results in view to perform their tasks. It is also the place where new ways of thinking are encouraged and where people work and wish to learn together.

According to another important definition, the learning organization is an organization that facilitates the learning of all its members, and which is constantly changing. This definition corrects the misconception that any company that does many training programmes is a learning organization[8].

Gareth Morgan[9] highlights that organizations cannot, themselves, learn; it is the individuals within them who learn. However, a learning organization involves more than just a group of learners. Swieringa and Wierdsma[10] define organizational learning as "the change of organizational behaviour" that emerges through a collective learning process. The authors highlight that an organization can only learn because its individual members learn. Without individual learning the issue of organizational learning cannot be approached. On the other hand, an organization does not automatically learn when individuals learn something. Individual learning is necessary, but it is not sufficient for organizational learning.

The learning organization is the organization that "actively incorporates the experience and knowledge of its members and partners through the development of practices, policies, procedures and systems in ways which continuously improve its ability to set and achieve goals, satisfy stakeholders, develop its practice, value and develop its people and achieve its mission with its constituency"[11].

The learning organization is an organization in which employees are continually acquiring and sharing new knowledge and are willing to apply that knowledge in making decisions or performing their work[12].

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[6] Garvin, D., *Building a Learning Organisation*, in *Harvard Business Review*, 1993, July-Aug: 78-91 apud Britton, B., 1998, *The Learning NGO.* United Kingdom: INTRAC, p. 2.

[7] Britton, B., 2002, *Learning for change: Principles and practices of learning organizations.* Swedish mission council, p. 11 apud Senge, P., 1990, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization.* London: Century Business.

[8] Pedler, M., Baydelland, T, Burgoyne, J., 1991, *The Learning Company. Studies in Counting Education.* United Kingdom: McGraw Hill.

[9] Gareth, M., 1986, *Images of organization.* Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.

[10] Britton, B., *The Learning NGO,* Occasional Papers Series No: 17. Oxford: INTRAC, 1998, p. 3 apud Swieringa, J., Wierdsma, A., 1992, *Becoming a Learning Organisation: Beyond the Learning Curve,* Wokingham: Addison-Wesley.

[11] Aiken, M., Britton, B., 1997, *The Learning Organization and the Voluntary Sector*, in Janice, C. et al., 1997, *The Learning Organisation in the Public Services*, Gower Pub Co, apud Britton, B., 1998, *The Learning NGO,* Occasional Papers Series No: 17. Oxford: INTRAC, p. 3.

[12] Templeton, G. L., Bruce, R., Snyder, C. A., *Development of a measure for the organizational learning construct*, in Journal of Management Information Systems, 19(2), 2002, 175-218.

Other definition of learning organizations states that they should adopt "strategic approaches for long-term organizational security, continuity, viability and effectiveness"[13].

Bruce Britton[14] asserts that the learning organization is that organization that "facilitates the learning of all members and undergoes continuous transformation", being an organization that creates, obtains and transfers knowledge. At the same time, it involves "changing its behaviour in view to reflect new knowledge and perspectives".

Organizational subsystems, people, knowledge and technology are necessary in light to enhance and intensify learning. These are indispensable subsystems in creating and maintaining organizational learning and productivity. They are dynamically interconnected and complement each other. If one subsystem is weak or absent, the others will be significantly compromised[15].

The learning organizations achieve their mission through activities such as: systematic problem solving, experimentation, learning from their own experience, learning from the experiences and best practices of other organizations, as well as rapid transfer of information within the organization.

The concept of learning organization in public sector organizations highlights "the complexity of growing public affairs" and the "need to search more efficient ways to manage the public affairs"[16]. It is especially important for public organizations to become familiar with the sources and ways of learning. At the same time, "it is necessary to determine how the acquired knowledge could improve the quality of decision-making processes and how they could contribute to more efficient public problem solving"[17]. The practices of a public learning organization are used to eliminate existing inefficiency as well as to enhance the administrative capacity in light to fulfil its mission.

In view to understand better the term of "learning organization", one should consider its key characteristics.

The learning organizations present the following characteristics[18]:

– Recognises the need for change.
– Provides continuous learning opportunities to its members.
– Explicitly uses learning to reach its goals.
– Links individual performance with organisational performance.
– Encourages inquiry and dialogue, making it safe for people to share openly and take risks.
– Embraces creative tension as a source of energy and renewal.
– Is continuously aware of and interacts with its environment.

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[13] Pettinger, R., 2002, *The Learning Organization*, Oxford: Capstone Publishing, p. 5.

[14] Britton, B., 1998, *The Learning NGO,* Occasional Papers Series No: 17. Oxford: INTRAC.

[15] Marquardt, M. J., 2002, *Building the Learning Organization: Mastering the 5 elements for corporate learnin*g. 2th Edition. Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publishing, p. 24.

[16] Asderaki, F., Samul, J., *The Acquisition of Knowledge in Public Organizations: The Perspective of Employees*, in International Journal of Contemporary Management, 14(2), 2015, pp. 23-32.

[17] Asderaki, F., Samul, J., *The Acquisition of Knowledge in Public Organizations: The Perspective of Employees*, in International Journal of Contemporary Management, 14(2), 2015, pp. 23-32.

[18] Britton, B., 2002, *Learning for change: Principles and practices of learning organizations,* Swedish mission council, p. 12.

An important feature of learning organisations is that they are organised so that learning happens at five levels[19]:

– individual learning.
– team or work group learning (sharing lessons between individuals working together in permanent work groups or temporary teams).
– cross functional learning (sharing lessons between departments or sections e.g. between fundraising and operational staff).
– operational organisational learning (focusing on improving practice, increasing effectiveness and efficiency).
– strategic organisational learning (learning to deal with significant changes in the environment which affect the overall strategy of the organisation).

2.1.2. Functions of a learning organization

Britton (1998) identified eight key functions necessary to a learning organization and developed the instrument to identify a learning organization – the questionnaire.

The functions of learning organizations are as follows[20]:

1. "Gathering Internal Experience". The process focuses on sharing and exchanging experience and, at the same time, requires awareness of the impact on the organization. Therefore, it is necessary to monitor, review and evaluate, at the same time, the process of sharing and exchanging experience within the organization. "Accumulation of internal experience" could be accomplished through annual reports, evaluation studies, research plans, documentation information systems, as well as meetings and workshops.

2. "Accessing External Learning". Learning in an organization is achieved on the basis of two principles, namely: „what the organization does and what others do". Thus, the learning process should be achieved not only within the organization, being necessary for the learning process to take place also from external sources. It is possible only by opening the organization and sharing the own learning process. The use of benchmarking is necessary in this situation, the organizations having the opportunity to approach other learning practices from a wide range of private or public organizations.

3. "Communication Systems" – it means that information flows easily throughout the organization no matter the number and location of departments. At the same time, the organization has the competence to ensure the exchange of experience of staff from different teams and departments.

4. "Mechanisms for drawing conclusions". The process of concluding transforms the information accumulated over time into knowledge and then into the wisdom in view to draw a conclusion.

5. "Developing an organizational memory" is the sixth function and requires the organization to develop a database comprising information regarding the experiences of some activities, both from present and past.

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[19] Britton, B., 2002, *Learning for change: Principles and practices of learning organizations,* Swedish mission council, p. 12.

[20] Britton, B., 1998, *The Learning NGO,* Occasional Papers Series No: 17. Oxford: INTRAC, pp. 12-20; Britton, B., 2002, *Learning for change: Principles and practices of learning organizations,* Swedish mission council, pp.14-29.

6. "Integrating Learning into strategy and policy",

7. "Applying the Learning", represents the last test of the learning process, namely applying everything that has been learned.

8. "Creating a Supportive Culture". This function is important in order to integrate the learning process into the organizational culture. In other words, the learning process will be found in the set of values, ideologies and hypotheses that leads and shapes both the individual and group behaviour of its members.

Creating a supportive culture includes the seven functions because, without an organizational culture that supports learning, it is unlikely that the organization is committed to achieve the other functions[21].

Figure 1. Functions of a learning organization
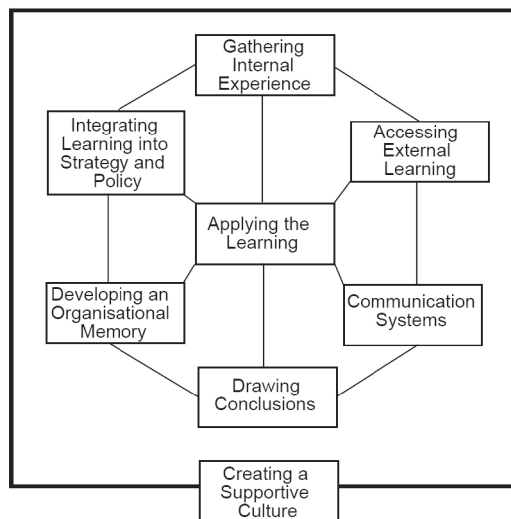
Source: Britton, B., The Learning NGO. INTRAC, Occasional Papers Series No: 17, 1998, p. 13

There are several reasons to create public organizations that operate as learning organizations[22]. Firstly, a workforce with outstanding knowledge determines the "institutional capacity and sustainability" of the public organization. Thus, these organizations should invest in infrastructure and culture in view to support lifelong learning. Another reason focuses on the fact that the public organization, as a learning organization, "will produce more than by implementing new programmes and initiatives". In this way, the problems of the society will be analysed and new ways of "approaching and providing services" will be searched. Thirdly, it is assumed that public organizations are not at the level of private organizations concerning "adaptability and use of technologies". Therefore, the staff who will continue to learn "will enhance the ability of government

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[21] Britton, B., 1998, *The Learning NGO,* Occasional Papers Series No: 17. Oxford: INTRAC, p. 41.

[22] Rush, R. B., 2011, *Learning Organization Principles: The Impact on a Midwest State Government as Perceived by Its Employees,* Kalamazoo, PhD. Dissertation, MI: Western Michigan University.

agencies to respond quickly to challenges and opportunities, to adapt and keep pace with rapid changes and frequent organizational restructuring". Other reason refers to the traditional bureaucracy within public organizations. An organization that "promotes cross collaboration could generate increased and efficient productivity and could trigger the response capacity of citizens".

2.2. Knowledge management

Knowledge is seen as a key component of organizational learning, cognitive, experiential, context-specific and relational[23].

Knowledge management represents an important pillar by which organizations can better manage knowledge. Knowledge provides value to an organization by "improving the environment for new developments and using experience to solve problems"[24]. Their creation, storage and use within an organization provide the network that supports the growth and development of the organization through learning. Knowledge management plays an important role in creating a work climate able of supporting the organizational learning.

The aim of knowledge management is to valorise the knowledge, information and resources of the organization in view to enable it to learn and adapt to changes in the environment.

Knowledge management should approach the social and situational contexts of knowledge use – knowledge is given by the meaning and purpose of sharing opinions between participants in a group involved in solving problems in unclear situations. Conceptually, knowledge management could be considered as a set of processes that support and are symmetrical with the learning activities of the organization.

Knowledge management is defined by Uit[25] as a strategic oriented approach, in order "to motivate and facilitate the involvement of the members of the organization in the development and use of their cognitive abilities, by valorising, subordinated to the overall objectives, the sources of information, experience and skills of each of them". Knowledge cannot be driven, so that the strategy wants to make activities possible, not to command or control them[26].

Knowledge management includes the generation of new knowledge, acquirement of valuable knowledge, codification of information in documents, databases and software, enabling the development of knowledge, transfer of knowledge etc[27].

The efficient knowledge management includes the following characteristics[28]:

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[23] *Chiva, R.,* Alegre, J., *Organizational learning and organizational knowledge – towards the integration of two approaches*, in Management Learning, 36, 2005, pp. 49–68.

[24] Nonaka, I., Takeuchi, H., 1995, *The knowledge-creating company: How Japanese Companies Create the Dynamics of Innovation*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

[25] Uit Beijerse, R. P., *Questions in knowledge management: Defining and conceptualising a phenomenon*, in Journal of Knowledge Management, *3*(2), 94–11, 1999, p. 350.

[26] Munteanu, I., Ioniţă, V., 2005, *Managementul cunoştinţelor,* Chişinău: Cartier, pp. 33-34.

[27] Matei, A., Antonovici, C., Săvulescu, C., *Knowledge Management as Driving Force to Organizational Learning and Innovation: Case Study in Romania*, Chapter 19 in Yousif, A. A , Al-Alawi, A.I., Al-Bassam, S.A., 2019, *Handbook of Research on Implementing Knowledge Management Strategy in the Public Sector, p.* 349.

[28] Munteanu, I., Ioniţă, V., *Managementul cunoştinţelor,* Chişinău: Cartier, 2005, pp. 33-34.

- the exchange of knowledge and information among the staff of the organization, this process being oriented towards the optimization of the results;
- introducing navigation tools, automation, filters, databases, data search in order to facilitate the exchange of information;
- identifying the problems.

3. Research methodology

As research method, I selected the mixed research method, more precisely I used both the qualitative method – document analysis and interview, and the quantitative method – respectively the questionnaire developed by Bruce Britton[29] – adapted for the public administration. The questionnaire was adapted by the author to public institutions, without affecting the basic functions that support to identify the characteristics of the public institution as a learning organization. Both research instruments were applied in the local government in rural areas – in two commune city halls. I aimed to identify if they are learning organizations, more precisely what is their approach to the learning process, if this process is applied, if they have the necessary resources and desire to develop continuously, to adapt to any situation in view to achieve their goals.

The quantitative approach by means of the questionnaire I consider that is appropriate in this paper as the statistical data could establish numerical results that allow the comparison of statistical answers. And, in response to one of the biggest limitations of the questionnaire, namely the impossibility of obtaining detailed information, I used the interview.

The questionnaire comprises forty closed questions corresponding to the eight key functions presented in Table 1, providing to respondents the opportunity to choose an answer, and the interview was realised on the answers given in the questionnaire by respondents in view to find out details regarding the eight functions of the learning organization. The respondents of the questionnaire were asked if they want to answer the interview questions and so their data was taken to be contacted.

Table 1. Correspondence between the functions of the learning organization[30] and the number of questions in the questionnaire

Function	No. of question in the questionnaire
Creating a Supportive Culture	1, 16, 17, 32, 33
Gathering Internal Experience	2, 15, 18, 31, 34
Accessing External Learning	3, 14, 19, 30, 35
Communication Systems	4, 13, 20, 29, 36
Mechanisms for drawing conclusions	5, 12, 21, 28, 37
Developing an organizational memory	6, 11, 22, 27, 38
Integrating Learning into strategy and policy	7, 10, 23, 26, 39
Applying the Learning	8, 9, 24, 25, 40

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[29]   Britton, B., *The Learning NGO,* Occasional Papers Series No: 17, Oxford: INTRAC, 1998.

[30]   Britton, B., *The Learning NGO,* Occasional Papers Series No: 17, Oxford: INTRAC, 1998, pp. 12-20.

Both the questionnaires and interviews were online applied, by means of e-mail in the framework of City Halls of Vlădeşti Commune–Vâlcea county and Sadu Commune–Sibiu county, aiming to identify their "learning profile". 13 questionnaires and 4 interviews were applied within Vlădeşti City Hall, 10 questionnaires and 3 interviews were applied within Sadu City Hall. 9 questionnaires and 3 interviews for Sadu City Hall and 11 questionnaires and 2 interviews for Vlădeşti City Hall were validated. The questionnaire was applied both to management and executive civil servants and to contract staff in these institutions.

I selected City halls as I wanted to research the process of organizational learning in the rural environment, in small institutions, with a budget below the national average, with small population where human resources are quite difficult to find and train.

The questionnaire ensured the anonymity of the respondents. The condition imposed to respondents in view to complete the questionnaire was the length of service of at least one year in the institution to ensure that they know the mechanisms and the instruments of the organization. The data collection was achieved online during 10 August and 10 September 2020.

From a methodological perspective, as limitations in research, I mention the impossibility of applying questionnaires and conducting face-to-face interviews because of the COVID-19 pandemic – which has led to incomplete answers to questionnaires and interviews and implicitly to the invalidation of 3 questionnaires (one in Sadu City Hall and two in Vlădeşti City Hall) and 2 interviews (one in Vlădeşti City Hall and one in Sadu City Hall). At the same time, applying online without an operator could in some cases lead to different understanding of the questions.

Another limitation was the lack of response to questionnaires on behalf of the authorities. The questionnaire was sent to several city halls, more precisely to 15 commune city halls, but only two answered.

In view to demonstrate that the two organizations are learning, it is important to find out, at the highest possible level, the eight key functions.

The research questions of the current case study are as follows:

1. To what extent do the public institutions at the local level in rural areas from Romania use the learning process in view to develop the organization?

2. Are the public institutions analysed learning organizations?

4. Results

The analysis of the research results is presented below.

Vlădești City Hall
Table 2. Results of questionnaire for Vlădești City Hall

Creating a Supportive Culture		Gathering Internal Experience		Accessing External Learning		Communication Systems		Mechanisms for drawing conclusions		Developing an organizational memory		Integrating Learning into strategy and policy		Applying the Learning	
Question		Question		Question		Question		Question		Question		Question		Question	
1	2	2	2	3	2	4	2	5	3	6	2	7	2	8	2
16	2	15	2	14	2	13	2	12	2	11	2	10	3	9	2
17	2	18	2	19	2	20	2	21	2	22	2	23	2	24	2
32	1	31	2	30	2	29	2	28	1	27	1	26	1	25	2
33	1	34	2	35	2	36	2	37	2	38	2	39	2	40	2
Total	**8**	**Total**	**10**	**Total**	**10**	**Total**	**10**	**Total**	**10**	**Total**	**9**	**Total**	**10**	**Total**	**10**
Av	1,6	Av	2	Av	2	Av	2	Av	2	Av	1,8	Av	2	Av	2
SD	0,5477	SD	0	SD	0	SD	0	SD	0,7071	SD	0,4472	SD	0,7071	SD	0

Average Score	9,63
Average II	1,93

(Av = Average; SD = Standard Deviation)

Scores	
Not true	0
Rarely true	1
Sometimes true	2
Often true	3
Very true	4

Source: Author

85

Figure 2. Vlădeşti City Hall Leaning Profile
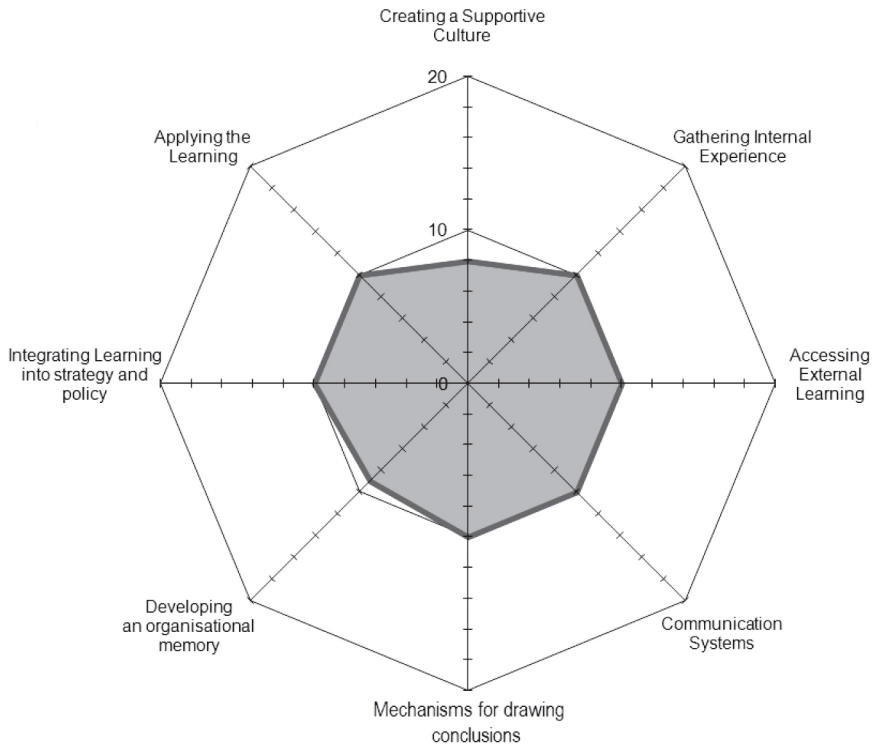
Source: Author

Sadu City Hall
Table 3. Results of questionnaire for Sadu City Hall

Creating a Supportive Culture		Gathering Internal Experience		Accessing External Learning		Communication Systems		Mechanisms for drawing conclusions		Developing an organizational memory		Integrating Learning into strategy and policy		Applying the Learning	
Question		Question		Question		Question		Question		Question		Question		Question	
1	3	2	3	3	4	4	3	5	3	6	3	7	3	8	3
16	4	15	3	14	3	13	3	12	3	11	3	10	3	9	2
17	3	18	3	19	3	20	3	21	3	22	2	23	3	24	3
32	3	31	3	30	3	29	3	28	3	27	2	26	3	25	3
33	3	34	3	35	3	36	3	37	3	38	3	39	3	40	3
Total	16	Total	15	Total	16	Total	15	Total	15	Total	13	Total	15	Total	14
Av	3,2	Av	3	Av	3,2	Av	3	Av	3	Av	2,6	Av	3	Av	2,8
SD	0,4472	SD	0	SD	0,4472	SD	0	SD	0	SD	0,5477	SD	0	SD	0,4472

Average Score	14,9
Average II	2,98

(Av = Average; SD = Standard Deviation)

Scores	
Not true	0
Rarely true	1
Sometimes true	2
Often true	3
Very true	4

Source: Author

Figure 3. Sadu City Hall Leaning Profile
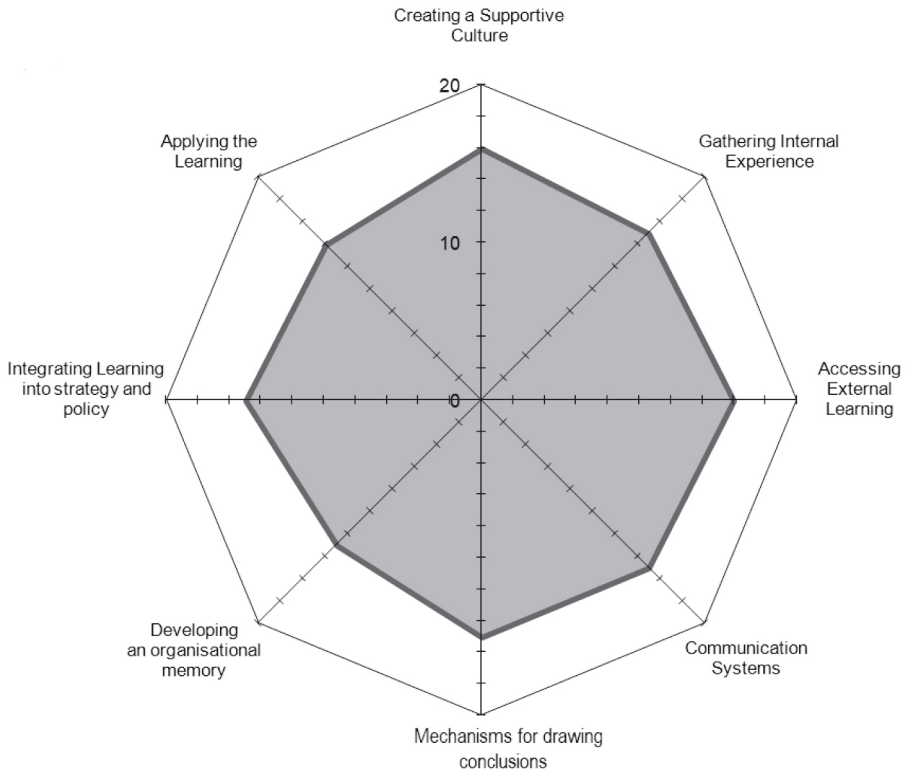
Source: Author

The results of the questionnaires reveal that Sadu City Hall applies more the elements incorporated in the functions of the learning organization, than Vlădesti City Hall.

We remark that the degree of the use of the learning concept in view to support and facilitate the employees' development, the institutions and local community is quite low in Vlădesti City Hall and medium to high in Sadu City Hall. Both institutions deliver activities specific to learning organizations to some extent, but we cannot consider that they are successful in transforming them into genuine learning organizations as, according to the results of the interviews, they are largely based on isolated events and examples and not on systems and processes in order to support those activities and to integrate them into the daily structure of operations. Concerning the eight functions of the learning organization, Vlădești City Hall has those on *Creating a Supportive Culture* and *Developing an organizational memory* as the least developed ones. Sadu City Hall has developed all the functions to the same extent.

Neither of the two institutions could be considered a learning organization in the genuine sense of the word.

Further the interviews, the employees mentioned as obstacles within the transformation of public institutions where they work in genuine organizations: insufficient financial resources that lead to project interruption and implicitly to lack of consistency and continuity of the organizational objectives, legislative gaps that hinder institutional development, politicization of the organization, bureaucracy (strict focus on the system and compliance with procedures), strict hierarchical control.

5. Conclusions

Awareness of the application of the notion of learning organization in local government is very important for managing the public organizations, improving management functions, implementing changes, innovations and reforms so necessary for the public sector in Romania in view to meet the interests of citizens. The managers and employees of public organizations should engage in the effort to implement the elements of learning organizations, otherwise there is a possibility that the public service will no longer meet the needs of citizens, being unable to reinvent or adapt to the current challenges.

The managers and employees in public organizations should constantly develop new knowledge management skills through a lifelong learning process, should develop a learning culture, should lead changes with a positive attitude and have a clear vision of what is going to be achieved. The interviews revealed that it is especially important for employees to agree together with managers concerning the learning organization strategy.

Analysing the research results, we remark that within public administration from rural areas the concept of learning organization is present in different ways.

The impact of learning concept on the public organizations, if these would change into learning organizations, could mean[31]:

– increased adaptability – the organization could face more easily the challenges and impredictibility;
– increased efficiency and efficacy – the organization could make better use of its resources;
– increased personnel motivation – the employees could feel more valued and more influent;
– capacity to keep highly trained employees and their knowledge – better systems to reward the employees' contribution to the organizational development;
– increased capacity to initiate change – learning offers confidence and the necessary information to initiate projects and to take risks.

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