Organizational learning: cognitive and behavioural changes and implications in higher education institutions

Alexandra Luciana GUȚĂ*

Abstract

Many facets of the concept of "organizational learning" and many ideas about it have been debated in the literature. One of the issues raised is whether organizational learning necessarily needs to encompass changes at both cognitive and behavioural levels in an organization or if one of these two types of changes is enough. The issue is even more complicated because changes in behaviour could be also related to adaptation and not learning. There is also the question if learning has really occurred if there is no change in behaviour, but only in cognition. Also, are organizational learning and changes in cognition or behaviour always beneficial for an organization? Therefore, the paper explores and expresses our position in the matter of the cognitive and behavioural dilemma regarding organizational learning. We are approaching these issues, as well as presenting some implications in the case of higher education institutions.

Keywords: organizational learning, cognitive/ behavioural changes, higher education institutions
JEL classification: D83

Introduction

Information has been of high significance since very distant times. Some very interesting insights that support this idea are: "[t]he Cro-Magnons...got to know the habits of the animals they hunted and knew where to lie in wait; and different bands shared information, so hunting parties could be forewarned of migrations days in advance." (Tudge, 1998, p. 25 in Oxley *et al.,* 2008, p. 26). Thus, human evolution over time and the need to reach certain common goals have led to the emergence of organizations, which are generally defined as "a deliberate arrangement of people to accomplish some specific purpose" (Robbins and Coulter, 2009, p. 30).

We appreciate that the occurrence of organizations, the evolution of the concept of "organization" and the increasingly alert rhythm of changes in society and, implicitly, in the markets, have led to appreciate knowledge as constituting a competitive advantage for an organization.

* Alexandra Luciana GUȚĂ is Teaching Assistant at "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași, Iași, Romania, e-mail: luciana_guta@yahoo.com.

Organizational knowledge can be obtained through organizational learning, hence the increased significance of learning. Also, the association between learning and performance is a subject that has been widely treated in the literature. Crossan *et al.*'s (1995) research is a very relevant example of a thorough analysis on the relationship between learning and performance.

Organizational learning is a deeply complex concept. According to Shrivastava (1983), research on organizational learning has its bases on research on individual learning. The literature on organizational learning that is based on individual learning (and also on psychology) is, according to Chiva-Gómez (2003, after Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 1998; Easterby-Smith and Araujo, 1999) one of the two categories of literature, called the cognitive perspective (Chiva-Gómez, 2003 mentions the following researchers oriented towards the cognitive perspective: Argyris and Schön, 1978; Cyert and March, 1963; Huber, 1991; Levitt and March, 1988; Simon, 1991). The second perspective that Chiva-Gómez (2003) mentions is the social perspective (according to Chiva-Gómez, 2003, researchers oriented towards this perspective are: Blackler, 1993; Brown and Duguid, 1991; Cook and Yanow, 1996; Gherardi *et al.*, 1998; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Weick and Westley, 1996). The social perspective "is based on sociology and has a more relational orientation" (Chiva-Gómez, 2003, p. 102). Unlike the cognitive perspective, the social one wants to explain "what kind of social context is the most suitable for organizational learning and focuses on the group, community and organization rather than on the mind of the individual" (Chiva-Gómez, 2003, p. 102, after Gherardi *et al.*, 1998).

Both the cognitive perspective and the social perspective are useful when undertaking research in the field of organizational learning, since each of the two perspectives helps us understand different facets of the concept of "organizational learning". A holistic approach on organizational learning ought to consider both the social and the cognitive perspectives on organizational learning research.

Referring now to the concept of "organizational learning", first and foremost we need to mention that organizational learning is a multi-level concept, occurring at the following levels: individual, group, organizational and inter-organizational (Škerlavaj *et al.*, 2010, after Sanchez, 2001; Holmquist, 2004; Ibarra *et al.*, 2005; Boh *et al.*, 2007). Also, in order to better understand the notion of "organizational learning", we ought to mention that, in literature, there are certain views regarding the constructs to which organizational learning is related or of which it is composed of. Two models that are of reference regarding the processes associated with organizational learning are those from Huber (1991) and Crossan *et al.* (1999). Thus, Huber (1991) has associated four constructs with organizational learning: knowledge acquisition; information distribution; information interpretation; organizational memory. Crossan *et al.* (1999) have adopted a perspective on organizational learning through four processes (intuiting, interpreting, integrating and institutionalizing), by linking the individual, group and organization levels. Without further analyzing these perspectives on

organizational learning, since this would exceed the scope of this paper, it is useful to have an overview of the processes related to it, for a better understanding of organizational learning as a process.

Being a broad concept, organizational learning has been defined in several ways, from different points of view. Further, we are making reference to part of the diverse ways in which the concept of "organizational learning" has been defined, focusing on those definitions that are related to our core issue – the cognitive and/or behavioural changes that may be needed in order to be able to talk about the occurrence of organizational learning. For a definition of the concept of "organizational learning" to be selected, it had to contain ideas that relate to: cognition; behaviour; cognitive and/or behavioural changes, this being our criterion of selecting papers which contain definitions for organizational learning.

One way of defining organizational learning relates to knowledge or insights development: "At its most basic definition, organizational learning is the development of new knowledge or insights that have the potential to influence behaviour" (Slater and Narver, 1995, in Bontis *et al.*, 2002, p. 439). Considering that this definition makes reference to knowledge or insights that can influence behaviours, we appreciate this definition as being essentially given from a cognitive perspective (from this point on, when we refer to the cognitive perspective/approach, we refer to organizational learning as changes in cognition and not in a broad sense to one of the two types of literature on organizational learning). However, behaviours are brought into discussion, which means, from our point of view, that an implicit reference to the behavioural perspective is being made. The perspective highlighted within this definition of organizational learning is one with which we agree. Our arguments are as follows: interpreting this definition, we can see that a possible meaning is that organizational learning does not necessarily imply changes in behaviour; also, the potential to influence or modify behaviours would be enough in order to talk about organizational learning. Certain behaviours need certain contexts to manifest. Therefore, as long as new knowledge or new insights that are gained through organizational learning have the potential to influence the mode of behaviour within an organization, we can talk about the occurrence of organizational learning. The actual manifestation of new behaviours is a matter of appropriate context.

Considering now the behavioural approach on organizational learning, here are two definitions that fit into this approach: "Organizational learning is defined as increasing an organization capacity to take effective action" (Kim, 1993, in Bontis *et al.*, 2002, p. 439) and "Organizations are seen as learning by encoding inferences from history into routines that guide behaviour" (Levitt and March, 1988, in Bontis *et al.*, 2002, p. 439).

To delineate the cognitive approach (or perspective) from the behavioural one, we are considering the two following definitions: "Learning as manifesting action and behavioural change, linked to a stimulus and a response" – the behavioural approach; "Learning as a complex process involving skills like mental mapping, use of intuition and imagination, and problem solving" – the cognitive approach (Yeo, 2002, p. 117, after Glynn *et al.*, 1991).

Organizational learning has also been defined considering both types of changes – in cognition and behaviour. Therefore, another definition given for the concept of "organizational learning", which is one of the most complex definitions and possibly the most comprehensive definition given to this concept, is the following: "Learning is a process of change in cognition and behavior [sic!], and it does not necessarily follow that those changes will directly enhance performance." (Crossan *et al.*, 1995, p. 353). This definition refers to both types of changes – organizational learning as implying both cognitive and behavioural changes. We share the idea that learning does not always lead to improvements in performance, as will be later discussed in another section of the paper. The perspective adopted in this paper is that learning can refer to changes at both cognitive and behavioural levels; however, our point of view is that changes are not necessarily needed at both cognitive and behavioural levels to consider that learning has occurred, as we are further going to see.

Škerlavaj *et al.* (2010, p. 190, after Argyris and Schön, 1978; Fiol and Lyles, 1985; Huber, 1991; Day, 1992; Crossan *et al.*, 1995) consider that "Organizational learning is a process concerned with transforming information into knowledge and knowledge into action" and that this "is reflected in accompanying behavioral [sic!] and cognitive changes" (Škerlavaj *et al.*, 2010, p. 190, after Kim, 1993; Crossan *et al.*, 1995). This is a definition that also involves both the cognitive and the behavioural approaches.

In this section of the paper we concentrated on the delimitation of organizational learning as a process, focusing on approaches from literature that contain references to: cognition, behaviour and/or changes in at least one of these two levels (cognition, behaviour). The definitions included in this section cover a whole range of possibilities, either referring to changes at cognitive level, behavioural level or both levels.

1. The cognition – behaviour dilemma

There is no doubt that organizational learning is a complex concept. It is, at the same time, a concept that has many facets and that has been widely debated in the literature. As we are further going to discuss, organizational learning implies changes at cognitive and/or behavioural level.

The dilemma that we are going to explore in this paper refers to whether both cognitive and behavioural changes are needed in order to talk about the occurrence of organizational learning or whether changes at only one of the two levels – either cognitive or behavioural – is enough in order to talk about the occurrence of organizational learning.

This issue is even more complicated, because changes in behaviour could also be related to adaptation and not learning. While Crossan *et al.* (1995) state that adaptation can have its roots in either cognition or behaviour, Bapuji and Crossan (2004, p. 399), referring to Fiol and Lyles's (1985) work, appreciate that the latter authors have suggested that <<learning is primarily 'cognitive' while adaptation is primarily 'behavioural'>> (the definitions from Fiol and Lyles, 1985, are included in another section of the paper).

Thus, our main objective, in this paper, consists in exploring and positioning ourselves in the matter of the cognitive - behavioural dilemma regarding organizational learning. In addition, we aim to analyze whether organizational learning and changes in cognition and/or behaviour, are always beneficial for an organization or not. Since higher education institutions have an important role in society, it is useful to present some implications in their case. Thus, we are including in the paper - in a concluding manner - some implications that cognitive and behavioural changes may have on education and research activities within higher education institutions.

2. Cognitive and behavioural changes. Perspectives from the literature and personal considerations

Organizational learning is a complex concept, that has been viewed and analyzed from different points of view in literature. This section of the paper contains different perspectives from the literature regarding cognitive and behavioural changes implied by organizational learning and also our personal considerations regarding the ideas/definitions found in the literature.

Fiol and Lyles (1985, p. 803) state that "Organizational learning means the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding." In our opinion, the mentioned definition would make reference to organizational learning from a cognitive perspective, given the fact that the researchers equate organizational learning to better knowledge and better understanding. However, the authors consider organizational learning to be a process through which actions are improved. Thus, if we were to look at this definition from a wider point of view, we may consider that it also includes a behavioural perspective.

However, a significant aspect that needs to be mentioned is that Fiol and Lyles (1985) make a distinction between learning and adaptation. The researchers refer to learning as "The development

of insights, knowledge, and associations between past actions, the effectiveness of those actions, and future actions", while adaptation is seen as "The ability to make incremental adjustments as a result of environmental changes, goal structure changes, or other changes" (Fiol and Lyles, 1985, p. 811).

Our point of view regarding adaptation is very well reflected in the above mentioned definition. Thus, we link adaptation with adjustments that are incremental in nature and that are a result of changes in environment and so on. We also consider adaptation to be different from learning. Our argument is as follows: organizational learning is mainly proactive (organizations seek to improve themselves and the processes within them in order to have competitive advantages or better organizational performance; organizational learning is not proactive if organizations do not learn consciously/intentionally), while adaptation is mainly reactive (organizations adjust to changes in the business environment; adaptation can be proactive in some cases – for example, when organizations chage their goal structure, since this is a case when changes in behaviour are driven by internal changes and not changes in the business environment).

A different point of view is that of Shrivastava (1983). The researcher has included adaptation within the frame of organizational learning, taking into consideration four perspectives on the phenomenon of organizational learning: adaptation; assumption sharing; development of knowledge of action-outcome relationships; institutionalized experience. Referring to organizational learning as adaptation, Shrivastava (1983) mentions that Cyert and March (1963) appreciate that organizations manifest, over time, adaptive behaviour and also that they call this behaviour "organizational learning".

Thus, in literature, either while seeing adaptation as something different from learning, or by considering adaptation as being directly related to organizational learning, we can see that adaptation has been linked with changes in behaviour. From our point of view, changes in behaviour that are an outcome of organizational learning have a permanent nature, while changes in behaviour that are a consequence of adaptation are directly related to a certain context, they disappear when the context disappears and they have a mainly reactive nature (when a certain situation imposes a particular behaviour needed for the survival of an organization, the organization will change the behaviours within it, but that organization can return to the old behaviours within it when that context is no longer present). Given these arguments, we consider that adaptation is different from organizational learning.

Considering the two types of changes that we are interested in – cognitive and behavioural – in the following we are referring to perspectives found in literature.

Returning to the main issue of this paper – the cognitive and/or behavioural changes implied by organizational learning, another useful idea from Fiol and Lyles (1985, p. 806) if the following: "it is essential to note the difference between cognition and behavior [sic!], for not only do they

represent two different phenomena, but also one is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the other." Fiol and Lyles (1985) refer to the idea that it is possible to have changes at behavioural level, but without an association between these changes and developments in cognition, and, also, that acquiring knowledge without related changes at the behavioural level is possible. Another idea that Fiol and Lyles (1985) make reference to is the levels of learning: lower-level learning and higher-level learning. Lower-level learning involves, according to Fiol and Lyles (1985, p. 807), "association building", while higher-level learning occurs through things such as insights or development of skills. The researchers consider that higher-level learning is, compared to lower-level learning, "a more cognitive process" (Fiol and Lyles, 1985, p. 808). The researchers specify that both levels of learning fit into the idea of cognition development. However, Fiol and Lyles (1985, p. 808) mention that what is desired through lower-level learning is "a particular behavioral [sic!] outcome or level of performance".

Referring to the cognitive and the behavioural views on learning, Crossan *et al.* (1995) mention that the researchers who have a cognitive view on learning presume that "an adjustment or change in the way organizations or individuals process information, develop shared meaning, and interpret events" (Crossan *et al.*, 1995, p. 348) means the occurrence of learning, while the researchers who have a behavioural view link the occurrence of learning with changes in actions or behaviours.

Crossan *et al.* (1995) conclude that the researchers who are focused on the cognitive perspective on learning appreciate that learning takes place if there are changes in the processes of thought. This is something that Crossan *et al.* (1995) mention is unobservable. From this perspective, adjustments in behaviours, which are, according to Crossan *et al.* (1995), observable, are not a required condition to say that learning has occurred.

Crossan *et al.* (1995) also mention that the researchers who are focused on the behavioural perspective appreciate that the occurrence of learning is linked to changes in behaviour - changes that are noticeable -, even in the cases where those changes do not follow certain changes in thinking that would be the explanation for the new behaviours.

Our consideration is that, in order to talk about learning, we do not necessarily need to have changes at both the cognitive and the behavioural levels, but, if we have changes only at the behavioural level, we need to make sure that those changes are indeed a learning outcome and not a consequence of other phenomena in the organization or of other external causes. These ideas are explored in this section of the paper.

Huber (1991, p. 89) states that "An entity learns if, through its processing of information, the range of its potential behaviors [sic!] is changed." Although Huber's (1991) perspective is (mainly)

behavioural, one of the ideas that Huber (1991) puts forward, which is somehow apart, is that learning does not necessarily need to "result in observable changes in behavior [sic!]" (Huber, 1991, p. 89).

We appreciate that learning can translate in changes at either of the two levels - cognitive or behavioural, thus we are adopting a point of view that combines the two levels of learning. Therefore, we partially agree with the idea advanced by Huber (1991). We believe that the perspective is a plausible one, if we consider that learning can involve developing the capability to also act, when and if necessary, in ways which are different than those previously known. We also appreciate that this idea does not necessarily imply the existence of situations/contexts in which the potential behaviours could actually manifest, but only the existence of modifications in potential behaviours that are going to manifest when needed. However, our point of view adheres to the perspective according to which we can talk about learning also in the case of changes at only the cognitive level, even without having implications on behaviours, and regardless of whether they are potential or are actually manifested.

Referring to behavioural changes, Argyris and Schön (1996) consider that, although changes in behaviour are not a sufficient condition for organizational learning - because they can occur as a consequence of forgetting or through other ways that can generate behavioural changes -, they are a necessary condition. This perspective is partially different from the one that we have adhered to. Our consideration is that changes at the behavioural level can be either related or unrelated to learning so, from this point of view, the perspective adopted in our paper is similar to Argyris and Schön's (1996). However, the perspective adopted in our paper is as following: changes occurring at behavioural level are a sufficient condition (to say the organizational leanring has occurred) as long as they have not occurred as a consequence of other determinant factors (for example, forgetting or adaptation). To further outline our perspective, we need to mention that we appreciate that learning has occurred in the case of changes at cognitive level, even if they are not accompanied by changes at behavioural level. Thus, we do not consider that behavioural changes are absolutely necessary to say that learning has occurred.

Our latest expressed idea is reflected in the following statement: "Change resulting from learning need not be visibly behavioral [sic!]. Learning may result in new and significant insights and awareness that dictate no behavioral [sic!] change." (Friedlander, 1983, p. 194 in Huber, 1991, p. 89). We can consider that this idea falls mainly into the cognitive perspective of learning. From the above idea resulted a consideration from Huber (1991), that has been previously mentioned, regarding the change in the range of potential behaviours, through information processing (with the mention that Huber, 1991, highlights that his perspective is more behavioural).

To further outline our perspective, we are including, in the following, another point of view from the literature. Chen (2005) considers that organizational learning has two dimensions: a

cognitive dimension, meaning new knowledge acquired, and a behavioural dimension, meaning adjustments to change. Regarding this perspective, our opinion is that the behavioural dimension should not include adjustments to change (which would mean adaptation; and we consider adaptation to be different from learning), but the changes in behaviour that result from a process of learning. Changes in behaviour that appear through organizational learning are those that can lead, for example, to more effective and efficient achievement of tasks. Although Chen (2005) refers to dimensions of organizational learning, we need to note that his perspective has some similarities with the ones previously discussed, given that the two dimensions that the researcher mentions are cognitive and, namely, behavioural.

To conclude, the perspective that we are adopting and that we see as the most plausible one is that learning can imply changes at either cognitive or behavioural level and that, in the cases where changes have appeared at only one of the two levels (cognition, behaviour), this is enough in order to talk about learning (with the mention that in the case of behavioural changes we need to make sure that they are related to learning and not to forgetting or other factors).

3. Organizational learning and organizational performance. Managing the relationship between organizational learning and organizational performance

Until this point, we analyzed the concept of "organizational learning" from the perspective of cognitive and behavioural changes. In this section of the paper we are going to link the organizational learning process to organizational performance. We need to ask ourselves: is learning always beneficial for an organization? Will organizational learning always lead to better organizational performance? In what follows, we are going to address these issues.

Every organization ought to be interested in its organizational performance. Increasing organizational performance may be a finality of the organizational learning process, hence the importance of organizational learning. According to Fiol and Lyles (1985, p. 803) highlight that "In all instances the assumption that learning will improve future performance exists." Also, Crossan *et al.* (1995, p. 353) highlight that a general assumption is that "learning is good and can be influenced to enhance performance". However, learning is not always beneficial and does not always equate to better performance. These ideas are going to be explored and discussed in this section of the paper.

As Huber (1991) states, entities can learn correctly but learn something that is incorrect or they can learn incorrectly. Learning may lead to knowledge that is not veridical (see Huber, 1991). Huber (1991, p. 89) also mentions that "learning does not always increase the learner's effectiveness, or even potential effectiveness."

It can thus be seen that organizational learning is not always beneficial for an organization. If learning is not beneficial for an organization it implicitly can not lead to better organizational performance; on the contrary, it may lead to poorer performance.

Even more, if we want to address the relationship between organizational learning and organizational performance, Crossan *et al.* (1995) mention that, on a short term basis, learning may have a negative impact on performance, because individuals and organizations make use of ways of operating that are unfamiliar or new, while abandoning the familiar ways of doing things. This can lead to declines in performance on short terms. If organizations have a perception according to which there is a strong link between performance and learning, they may "prematurely abandon projects that are not performing" (Crossan *et al.*, 1995, p. 353, after Inkpen and Crossan, 1995).

It can thus be seen that organizations need to have a long term thinking if they are interested in improving their organizational performance through orgnizational learning.

Crossan *et al.* (1995) highlight that the relationship between learning and performance, although a complex one, can be managed if the probability to obtain improvements in performance is to be increased.

In a theoretical paper, Guță (2013) makes an assumption, according to which the concept of "management of the relationship between the process of organizational learning and organizational performance" would be a mediator in the relationship between the organizational learning process and organizational performance.

We are proposing an operationalization of the construct "management of the relationship between the process of organizational learning and performance", considering that the idea of a concept referring to the management of the relationship between the organizational learning process and organizational performance could be useful, especially for organizations that would be interested in making attempts to manage the relationship between the organizational learning process and organizational performance. Also, taking into consideration that learning is not necessarily beneficial for an organization, orienting what an organization learns can be very helpful.

Operationalization of a concept is useful if we intend to measure a concept. The items that we are going to propose can be used in a questionnaire. Thus, in a different study (since the following ideas mentioned in this paragraph would exceed the scope of the present paper), by including a measurement scale for the concept of "management of the relationship between the process of organizational learning and performance", alongside scales for measuring the organizational learning process and, respectively, organizational performance, the three concepts can be measured and then the relationship between them can be analyzed – for example correlations or testing the mediation

effect of the management of the relationship between the organizational learning process and organizational performance.

We have identified in literature very few ideas about the possibility of managing the relationship between learning and performance. Although the relationship between learning and performance is complex, Crossan *et al.* (1995) appreciate that this relationship can be subject to a process of management in order to increase the probability of obtaining improvements in performance, as mentioned earlier. An example in this regard, provided by Crossan *et al.* (1995), is recognizing or being aware of the fact that performance can undergo a deterioration process before it improves. From the previous idea, we have generated two items. The other two items have also been developed based on theoretical approaches on organizational learning.

In order to build the operationalization of the concept of "management of the relationship between the process of organizational learning and performance" we have focused on two "pillars": awareness (propositions no. 1 and no. 3 from the following table) and orientation (propositions no. 2 and no. 4 from the following table).

We are particularizing the management of the relationship between the organizational learning process and organizational performance through the above two mentioned pillars: awareness, and, respectively, learning orientation.

Awareness refers to the idea of realizing that, in the event of changes at the cognitive or the behavioural level, performance may initially suffer a deterioration, before it improves. Awareness also refers to realizing that organizational learning is not always beneficial for an organization. The other part of the operationalization, namely orientation, implies capitalizing on change, following the awareness, and, respectively, orienting what an organization learns, in the idea that learning is going to be beneficial for the organization.

Table 1. Operationalization of the construct of "management of the relationship between the organizational learning process and organizational performance"

No. crt.	Proposition	Theoretical support
1.	Being aware that, in the occurrence of changes at cognitive or behavioural level, performance may initially deteriorate, before it improves.	Based on Crossan *et al.* (1995): Although the relationship between learning and performance is a complex one, Crossan *et al.* (1995) appreciate that it can be managed so that the probability of performance improvement to be higher. Such an example, offered by Crossan *et al.* (1995), is the recognition or the awareness of the fact that performance may go through a process of deterioration before it improves.

2.	The changes at cognitive or at behavioural level, that may initially lead to a deterioration in performance before a potential improvement, are capitalized.	This is an item that has been developed based on the idea of Crossan *et al.* (1995), but by going further than the initial idea exposed by the researchers.
3.	Being aware of the fact that organizational learning is not always beneficial for the organization.	Learning may influence an organization's performance either in a positive or a negative way (Crossan *et al.*, 1995; Hawkins, 2005, after Crossan *et al.*, 1995).
4.	Trying to orientate what the organization learns, so that learning will be beneficial.	We took the idea from the previous item one step further.

Source: Author's own research.

Concluding, according to literature, organizational learning is not always beneficial, not does it always lead to improvements in organizational performance.

However, through awareness and learning orientation – which are the two aspected that we have considered for defining the concept of "management of the relationship between the organizational learning process and organizational performance", organizational learning can be better tied to orgnanizational performance, hoping for better organizational performance.

4. The case of higher education institutions: Implications of the cognitive and behavioural changes

Higher education institutions have a major role in the development of a society. In this context, it becomes relevant that higher education institutions need to perform well. Although the occurence of organizational learning does not always lead to better performance, it is a process through which performance can be improved (as a finality of the process).

Also, nowadays, organizations need to increase their pace of learning in order to thrive on the market. Higher education institutions, as a particular type of organizations, do not make an exception to this rule. Organizational learning is currently majorly important for organizations, including higher education institutions.

In a globalized world, we may think that the educational process becomes more and more standardized. As mentioned in the literature, "The new global educational orthodoxy together with competition-based education policies has led to over-standardization of teaching and learning" (Sahlberg, 2004, p. 79, after Hargreaves, 2003). However - and focusing strictly on higher education institutions -, we believe that, in order to have better competitive advantages, higher education institutions should differentiate themselves (e.g offer customized products to their clients – the

students –, in addition to a wide range of standardized products). In order for differentiation to be achieved, our opinion is that organizational learning is needed. Considering the challenging world in which higher education institutions operate, organizational learning emerges as an opportunity, and, even more, a necessity.

In this section of the paper we are presenting some implications in higher education institutions, from our point of view. For this, we are taking into consideration two types of changes - cognitive and behavioural. For highlighting the implications of these two types of changes, we are separately considering the two main types of activities in a higher education institution: research and education. The potential implications that we are taking into consideration reflect cases when the cognitive and/or behavioural changes would be auspicious.

Table 2. Implications in higher education institutions

	Cognitive changes	Behavioural changes
Research	New insights on different topics of research. A better understanding in the matter of the research process. New ways of approaching research at organizational level (reformulation of policies, strategies).	More innovative research. A more efficient way of approaching the process of research, based on a better understanding and better policies or strategies.
Education	A better understanding, at organizational level, regarding what the process of education means, in terms of the skills and knowledge that students need to acquire. A better understanding in the matter of students' selection and development.	New/innovative ways of approaching the educational process: more appropriate ways of conducting courses, seminars and so on. A more effective way of selecting students; better ways to develop their abilities, knowledge and/or talent.
Better organizational performance – through awareness (that organizational learning is not always positive) and orientation (of organizational learning). This is an outcome at the institutional level.		

Source: Author's own research.

In higher education institutions, the educational and research activities need to be interconnected. Through organizational learning, universities may understand and perform better the processes that are related to research and, respectively, education, and thus may integrate better the education and research activities, which may lead in the end to better performance at institutional level.

Conclusions

Learning can have both a cognitive side, reflected in changes at the cognitive level, and a behavioural side, reflected in changes at the behavioural level. We have considered that learning has occurred in the case of changes at either of the two levels. More precisely, the perspective that we have adopted in this paper is that if there are changes in at least one of the two levels – cognitive and behavioural – this is enough in order to say that a process of learning has occurred. However, if changes are present at the behavioural level without being accompanied by changes at the cognitive level, we need to make sure that they are linked to learning and not to adaptation or to other triggering factors.

Regarding the effects of learning and of changes at cognitive and/or behavioural level, we need to take account of the fact that learning and, implicitly, changes at the cognitive and/or behavioural level are not always beneficial or positive.

Furthermore, learning does not always lead to improvements in performance. However, the relationship between the organizational learning process and organizational performance can be managed. We have proposed an operationalization of the construct of the "management of the relationship between the process of organizational learning and performance". The proposed items in the operationalization may be used in empirical research. For example, if an organization is interested in making improvements in the matter of managing the relationship between the organizational learning process and organizational performance, the concerned organization can focus on awareness and orientation regarding the process of organizational learning.

References

Argyris, C. and Schön D. A. (1996), *Organizational Learning II. Theory, Method, and Practice*, Addison Wesley.

Bapuji, H. and Crossan, M. (2004), "From questions to answers: reviewing organizational learning research", *Management Learning*, 35(4), pp. 397-417.

Bontis, N., Crossan, M. M. and Hulland, J. (2002), Managing an organizational learning system by aligning stocks and flows, *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(4), pp. 437-469.

Chen, G. (2005), Management Practices and Tools for Enhancing Organizational Learning Capability, *S.A.M. Advanced Management Journal*, 70(1), pp. 4-35.

Chiva-Gómez, R. (2003), The facilitating factors for organizational learning: bringing ideas from complex adaptive systems, *Knowledge and Process Management*, 10(2), pp. 99-114.

Crossan, M. M., Lane, H. W. and White, R. E. (1999), An organizational learning framework: from intuition to institution, *Academy of Management Review*, 24(3), pp. 522-537.

Crossan, M. M., Lane, H. W., White, R. E. and Djurfeldt, L. (1995), Organizational learning: Dimensions for a theory, *The International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 3(4), pp. 337-360.

Fiol, C. M. and Lyles, M. A. (1985), Organizational Learning, *Academy of Management Review*, 10(4), pp. 803-813.

Guță, A. L. (2013), Organizational Learning and Performance. A Conceptual Model, *Proceedings of The 7th International Management Conference „New Management for the New Economy"*, 2013, Editura ASE, Bucharest, pp. 547-556.

Hawkins, A. (2005), „Leaders as Facilitators of Organizational Learning", PhD Thesis, Regent University, *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, viewed 01 October 2016, http://search.proquest.com.am.e-nformation.ro/docview/305379821/B80C0D1D38CA4E8DPQ/1?accountid=136549.

Huber, G. P. (1991), Organizational Learning: The Contributing Processes and the Literatures, *Organization Science*, 20(1), pp. 88-115.

Oxley, L., Walker, P., Thorns, D. and Wang, H. (2008), The Knowledge Economy/Society: The Latest Example of "Measurement Without Theory"? *The Journal of Philosophical Economics*, 2(1), pp. 20-54.

Robbins, S. P. and Coulter, M. (2009), *Management. Tenth Edition*, Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Sahlberg, P. (2004), Teaching and Globalization, *Managing Global Transitions*, 2(1), pp. 65-83.

Shrivastava, P. (1983), A Typology of Organizational Learning Systems, *Journal of Management Studies*, 20(1), pp. 7-28.

Škerlavaj, M., Dimovski, V. and Desouza, K. C. (2010), Patterns and structures of intra-organizational learning networks within a knowledge-intensive organization, *Journal of Information Technology*, 25(2), pp. 189–204.

Yeo, R. (2002), Learning within organisations: linking the theoretical and empicial perspectives", *Journal of Workplace Learning,* 14(3), pp. 109-122.