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Training of Transversal Competences Involved in Success in Career

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of a research study that aimed to validate a transversal competences training program, which applies techniques specific to humanistic psychotherapies. The first two steps were to develop an Assessment Scale with Behavioral Anchors for evaluating the technical and contextual performance and a competence-profile the graduated young person needs in order to attain success in career, in the context of Romanian organizational environment. The research sample included a number of 120 young adults with no basic qualification, aged between 18 and 20. We used three measures: California Personality Inventory (6 scales: sociability, responsibility, communality, achievement via independence, intellectual efficiency, and flexibility), Revised NEO Personality Inventory, and Assessment Scale with Behavioral Anchors. The transversal competences training program for young adults with no basic qualification targets the personal development of the individual, its personal growing, by adapting its life philosophy to the requests of the organizational environment; these achievements have the quality of motivating the young adult to go back to school and achieve a professional qualification.

Keywords: transversal competences, success in career, training program, humanistic psychotherapies;

1. Introduction

On the basis of studies emphasizing the distinction between technical performance and contextual performance, the study goes beyond the boundaries of traditional models in vocational counselling or organizational psychology and outlines a research direction that focuses on optimizing and developing competencies involved in success in career using techniques derived from humanistic psychotherapies. Regarding the competences, literature-review about psychological and social competencies suggest that the category of psychological competencies includes both cognitive elements (academic intelligence level, the characteristics of the knowledge base, information-processing mechanisms and so on) and affective ones (emotional stability, empathy, stress tolerance, an optimal self-image and

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so on). As for the social competencies, we name: the capacity to assert oneself, verbal and nonverbal communication abilities, empathy, and self-presentation and so on. The affective elements can be included in the concept of emotional intelligence, that's why we can assert that training someone's psychological and social competencies means to develop his/her emotional intelligence (with regard to both intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects) and implicitly the optimization of his/her cognitive structure (regarding both content and knowledge organization manner). Acquisitions in the sphere of emotional intelligence are susceptible of facilitating acquiring contextual performances, whereas cognitive acquisitions will contribute to attaining technical performances, although the distinction is purely theoretical. In the context of a solid professional knowledge-base, such an approach is susceptible of generating an adapted and efficient behaviour. In the context of the rapid changes an organization must go through nowadays, a high level of emotional intelligence has become an important factor for success, sometimes even more important than the professional technical competence. Godek and Murray (2008), confirmed by means of two experiments that, when people are oriented to the future, they tend to use rational processing, and when they turn to the past, they tend to use experiential processing. The starting point was the adaptation they made to the Epstein's (1991) characteristics for both types of processing. They described the experiential system as holistic, automatic, affective, more rapid, and action oriented, encoding reality in concrete images, metaphors and narratives. On the other side, rational processing is analytic, intentional, logical, but also slower, encoding reality in abstract symbols, words and numbers, generating behaviour mediated by conscious appraisal of events. They didn't, though, elucidated the mechanisms that link the time orientation to a certain processing type, experiential or rational. They mentioned the hypothesis from a previous study, conducted by Schul and Mayo (2003), who believed that the future orientation determines self- detachment. Marks, Hine, Blore and Philips (2007) came with an instrument to assess the dominant processing type, showing that rational scores were associated with openness to experience, conscientiousness and open minded thinking, and experientialism correlated positively with emotional expressivity in adolescents with ages between 13.1 and 18.8 years. Previously, Pacini and Epstein (1999) found that experiential processing was associated with conscientiousness and openness to experience on an adult sample. Experiential learning helps students focus on the personal way of solving specific tasks over and over again so that they learn how to stimulate growth in others, and also they benefit from the experience themselves. Mergenthaler (2008), starting from the interactions between client and psychotherapist, proposed a dynamic in four steps clients use when faced with a problematic situation: relaxation, experience, connection, and reflection, in what he called the theory of "resonating minds". A person goes through the whole cycle to solve a life problem in a different period of time, from minutes to months. The stages are differentiated according to the level of emotion and abstraction: relaxation is characterized by lower emotional and abstraction levels; experience by a higher emotional level, either positive or negative, and still a lower abstraction level; connection implies a lot of emotion and higher abstraction; and, finally, reflection comes with low emotional level and high abstraction. Mergenthaler's model transcends the dichotomy between rational and emotional processing, showing that it is their interplay that characterizes human development, with emotions guiding the appropriate cognitive processing: negative emotions allow recalling autobiographic material deepening processing in the present, and positive emotions stimulate insight. Experiential learning is based on the synergistic effects emerging from interactions between five polarities: apprehension and comprehension, reflection and action, epistemological discourse and ontological recourse, individuality and rationality, status and solidarity. A particular form of experiential learning, conversational learning, is efficient in training managers. It was defined as "a process whereby learners construct new meaning and transform their collective experiences into knowledge through their conversation" (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2005, p.412), while experiential learning is creating knowledge through transformation of experience. Using perceptions and theoretical knowledge alone is not as helpful as combining them with internal reflection upon them in a process of extending them and self-knowledge (Kolb, 1984). Taking these ideas as a starting point, the project launches a new direction of research; this direction capitalizes the results of two distinct approaches in contemporary psychology (Organizational Psychology and Psychotherapy) and applies techniques specific to humanistic therapies in areas specific to Organizational Psychology and Human Resources Management. Thus, the research goes beyond the theoretical approaches and lecture-like training programs that aim especially at the surface level of success in career and targets the personal development of the individual, it's personal growing, adapting its life philosophy to the requests of the organizational environment specific to a society in transition.