

CRAFT DEVELOPMENT IN LEARNING ORGANIZATION (LO): ECONOMIC APPROACH

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Purpose: The aim of the study is to show that the craft is a form of learning organization, which in its activity takes into account the aspect of continuous training of employees and improvement of all functional areas.

Design/methodology/approach: The main approach and subject of the analysis was the level of knowledge and general theoretical and state-legal findings of the information available in the literature about the craft sector and the possibilities of developing and supporting enterprises in the SME sector. The basic research method was the use of desk research, and on the basis of the information collected in this way, an analysis of the possibilities and impact of support programs for the craft sector in Poland was conducted.

Findings: The article presents the idea of a learning organization from the aspect of craft enterprise development, the process of knowledge building, and the assumptions and principles of using the Polish Craft Incubator Program. The main result of this study is to illustrate the situation with regard to craft enterprises and the possibilities of their development in the current socio-economic conditions.

Research limitations/implications: The data and conclusions were drawn up on the basis of an overall assessment (analysis of secondary sources) and not on the basis of facts (primary studies). The prepared applications should be a prerequisite for further research in the field of crafts in Poland.

Practical implications: An additional practical result is to indicate the possibility of using the Polish Craft Incubator program as a source of obtaining financial resources in the learning process.

Originality/value: The value of the paper is to increase the awareness of owners of craft enterprises, by showing them the possibility of using new organizational concepts and government programs. The article has primarily educational value and is a general concept of stimulating creative action towards building learning organizations. The content of the article is addressed to craftsmen and all cooperating entities operating in the field of supporting crafts.

Keywords: Learning organization, learning orientation, organizational learning, economic development, sustainable craft.

Category of the paper: General review.

1. Introduction –the concept of a learning organization

In today's economy, craft companies have a great opportunity to gain new markets for the products and services they provide. There is a novel trend towards the individualization of customer needs, which is an opportunity for craft enterprises as more flexible market entities in terms of structures and management from global corporations. The adaptation to environmental conditions, technological changes, new customer needs, requirements of employed employees forces companies to change the way they operate on the market - craft companies react much faster to changes of this kind. They are focused on raising qualifications, developing skills, implementing innovative ideas, stimulating creativity to meet the individual needs of customers.

Therefore, it is important to create the right conditions for employees to show a desire to innovate, acquire knowledge, to want to influence the development of the company through knowledge, skills and motivation. This is related to the learning processes of individual employees as well as the entire organization.

In this respect, the continuity of the "craft experience" and the centuries-old model of acquiring qualifications based on professional preparation in the form of "learning through work" and a process of continuous learning are important (Polish Craft Incubator Program, 2022).

The craft is the key element of cultural heritage, the artefact of the master's consciousness, found expression in the transmission of knowledge, skills and craft culture to the next generation of craftsmen. Education in craftsmanship is based on both the trust in the master and on the social commitment of the master. The master's commitment is primarily used by young people who gain qualifications in craftsmanship (Bielawska, 2016).

In order to strengthen the position of craft, it is therefore necessary to cooperate, communicate and be open to change, building a culture that is characterized by the fact that (Zimniewicz, 2009):

- is open to experiments and new experiences,
- encourages responsible decision-making,
- is ready to accept mistakes and constantly learn.

Consequently, from the perspective of a craft organization, the learning process and learning orientation are very important. As learning is a fundamental tool in the organization, learning orientation forms a foundation for explorative learning and is about the direction and intensity of learning (Alerasoul et al., 2022).

The aim of the paper is to show that the craft is a form of learning organization, which in its activity takes into account the aspect of continuous training of employees and improvement of all functional areas. The pursuit of masterful execution of the task is the priority of each subject and the essence of the craft profession. Currently, support programs that teach and

develop various craft areas are coordinated by the government program Polish Craft Incubator. The article presents the idea of a learning organization from the aspect of craft enterprise development, the process of knowledge building and the assumptions and principles of using the Polish Craft Incubator Program.

2. Learning organization, learning orientation, organizational learning – theoretical approach

A learning organization is one that builds its advantage on the basis of unique knowledge and special competencies and is able to push the boundaries in value creation to a more perfect degree than traditional companies do (Malara, 2007). In this approach, learning processes are treated as key processes of the organization (Malone, 2002) and are intended to enable building and maintaining a competitive advantage in the market. This approach is very appropriate to the importance of craft in the modern world. The concept from 1988 is still valid and contains the most important statements (Mikuta et al., 2002), namely:

- learning is a fundamental value in the organization,
- all members of the organization participate in the learning process,
- the learning process is planned and organized,
- the organization knows not only how to learn, but also how to innovate,
- learning should be continuous and conscious.

Since learning is a fundamental tool in the organization, learning orientation forms a basis for exploratory learning (i.e., proactive, generative, or two-track) and concerns the direction and intensity of learning (Alerasoul et al., 2022). Direction appears to be influenced by the presence of a shared vision within the organization, as is learning intensity, defined as the motivation determined by commitment and open-mindedness toward knowledge creation and use (Sinkula et al., 1997).

In addition, the learning orientation represents a set of values that affect the extent to which an organization is satisfied with the theories (Argyris, Schön, 1997), mental models, and dominant logics it uses, which may or may not have a basis in the marketplace (Baker, Sinkula, 1999).

Thus, the learning orientation can be viewed as a dimension of strategic alignment that provides a foundation for both internal knowledge creation and external knowledge generation, e. g. from market, technology, competition, or socio and economic system (Calantone et al., 2002).

The aim of the learning orientation is to transfer the learned knowledge to the workplace and create capabilities that are both effective and efficient (Song, Chermack, 2008).

Basically, organisation should have the culture that fosters the organizational learning climate in order to facilitate the path for the intuiting of individuals and team members, and the interpreting and integrating of information (Cook, Yanow, 1993). In this way an organizational culture is characterised by crucial values (Bui, Baruch, 2010) such as a long-term vision, corporate-level systemic thinking, interactive communication, trust, respect and diversity encouragement, teamwork, collaboration, personal empowerment, tolerance of ambiguity, uncertainty and errors, and continuous improvement (Alerasoul et al., 2022).

On the other hand, the innovative organization can be developed from the foundation of the educational organization. To create a truly innovative organization, people should share the same vision of innovation. They should work closely together and find synergies in teams, as the team is stronger than the total (Ng, Pak Tee, 2004).

Generally, scholars have proposed a variety of definitions of learning organizations. Table 1 shows selected definitions of learning organizations.

Table 1
Selected definitions of learning organizations

| Author | Definition |
|---------------------------------|--|
| P. Senge | A learning organization is a place where people are constantly expanding and developing their abilities to achieve the desired results, where people are constantly learning how to learn together, and a place where people are constantly discovering that they are creating reality and how they can create it. |
| M. Pedler, K. Aspinwall | A learning organization is a company that facilitates learning for all its members and is constantly transforming. |
| W.M. Grudzewski, I.K. Hejduk | An intelligent organization is a learning and self-improvement organization in which people at all levels individually and collectively are constantly working to achieve the results and knowledge they really care about. |
| A. Zaliwski | An organization that acquires and implements knowledge into organizational structures, products, processes, and practices (and wherever possible). |
| Cz. Sikorski | A maximally flexible organization in which routine, habits and stereotypes do not replace dynamic reality |
| K. Perechuda | The learning organization and its essence boils down to continuous investment in human resources oriented to the internalization of internal knowledge. |
| D.A. Garvin | A learning organization is an organization proficient in the implementation of the tasks of creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge, and in modifying its behavior in response to new knowledge and experience |
| B. Wawrzyniak | A learning organization means the renewal of the enterprise, the internationalization of the board, changes in technology and technology, increasing social responsibility. |

Source: Karaś E., Piasecka-Głuszak A., *Nowy wymiar organizacji – organizacja ucząca się a organizacja inteligentna*, Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Bankowej we Wrocławiu, No. 3(41), 2014, p. 3.

Within this view of organizational learning, the research examines, among other things, how organizations learn from direct experiences, how organizations learn from the experiences of others, and how organizations develop conceptual frameworks or paradigms for interpreting those experiences (Levitt, March, 1988).

Organizational learning (OL) is critical to organizational survival and has led to a considerable number of conceptual and empirical studies (Alerasoul et al., 2022). A clear definition of learning has proven difficult over the years. Organizational theorists have long been concerned with learning. Most scholars view organizational learning as a process that

unfolds over time and associate it with acquiring knowledge and improving performance. However, they differ on other important issues.

The concept of LO focuses on learning as a tool, a lever, and a philosophy for sustainable change and renewal in organizations in a rapidly changing world (Bui, Baruch, 2010).

Organizational learning means the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding. It is argued that behaviour change is required for learning to occur. Some scholars cite information processing as the mechanism by which learning occurs. Others suggest shared cognitions, organizational routines, and even memory. And some suggest that organizational learning is common, while others believe that erroneous, self-serving interpretations are the norm (Stata, 1991).

Moreover, OL as a dynamic capability plays an important role in the acquisition and transfer of relevant knowledge, strategic flexibility, competitive strategy implementation, and innovation performance of organizations (Hung et al., 2011).

The learning organization can be defined both in terms of the outcomes that can be used to judge whether the organization has learned or not, and the process that the organization must change to embed learning (Watkins, Marsick, 1992).

In general, a learning organization is one that is able to create, acquire, and transfer knowledge and change its behaviour to incorporate new knowledge and insights.

This definition assumes a simple truth: New ideas are essential to learning. Sometimes they arise de novo, through flashes of inspiration or creativity; sometimes they come from outside the organization or are shared by knowledgeable insiders. Regardless of where they come from, these ideas are the catalyst for organizational improvement. But they alone cannot create a learning organization.

In general, learning organizations master five major activities: systematic problem solving, experimentation with new approaches, learning from their own experience and the past, learning from the experiences and best practices of others, and rapid and efficient transfer of knowledge within the organization. Each of these areas goes hand in hand with a particular mindset, set of tools, and patterns of behaviour. One such example appears to be the craftsmanship.

One of the studies to characterize the learning organization was made during the fourteenth seminar of the European Advisory Committee of the CEIES, which distinguishes several indicators to characterize the learning organization of the twenty-first century (Tabor, 20002):

- it can be a company, an association, a college, a school, a city, a nation, or any other small or large group of people who feel the need to improve themselves through learning,
- the learning organization invests in its future through the education and training of its members,
- creates opportunities and incentives for skill development for all members in all positions,

- shares with them the vision of tomorrow and encourages them to face challenges, change and participate in development,
- connects work with learning,
- mobilizes talent by focusing on learning and planning education and training,
- gives all members the opportunity to broaden their horizons in line with their own preferred learning styles,
- uses modern technologies in education,
- actively responds to the broader needs of the environment and communities in which it operates, and encourages its members to do so.

It should be noted that all the factors listed are important for the development of the craft and its potential. Continuous learning in the crafts is the basic method of acquiring skills and professional qualifications. In this process, craft organizations such as guilds, chambers of crafts and the Polish Craft Association play an important role.

The aim of craft vocational training is to provide young people with the practical skills and theoretical knowledge they need for responsible work, both as employees and in the context of self-employment. Craft vocational training for young workers involves school-based and out-of-school occupations and is linked to vocational training that ends with the award of a journeyman's certificate. Therefore, one of the most important tasks of craft organizations is to teach the profession. This process includes the following stages: acquisition of knowledge, then dissemination and sharing of knowledge, and its use.

The main subject of the concept of a learning organization is a person. In the case of craftsmanship it is a master of craft as well as individual employees who acquire knowledge in the organization, which leads to the formation of organizational memory. In this way, through the learning process, craftsmen are looking for new solutions to improve the functioning of the company on the market. As a result, craft enterprises are characterized by an increase in creativity, development of products and services, more effective customer service, dynamization of changes and implementation of innovations. They build a whole specific culture and continuity of craft heritage. In this way, they create key values in the region.

Craft has been stereotyped for years through the prism of rare, unique or disappearing professions such as: blacksmith, shoemaker, watchmaker, hatter or goldsmith-jeweller. Mass production with the help of new technologies has supplanted extraordinary craftsmanship made using qualified own work with the use of craft qualifications professional. Some craft professions are disappearing, but new ones are also being created according to the needs of society and the economy.

In order to strengthen the organization of economic self-government of crafts in the field of human and social capital and institutional potential, the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology established the Polish Craft Incubator. Its main goal is to strengthen the organization of the economic self-government of crafts in terms of human and social capital,

as well as institutional potential in order to implement statutory activities, including the development of entrepreneurship and dual education. The Government Program for Supporting the Development of Craft Organizations for 2020-2030 implements one of the basic assumptions of the National Institute of Freedom – Civil Society Development Centre, which is the coordination of cooperation between central administration bodies and non-governmental organizations.

The program aims at emphasizing the strategic role of craftsmanship in Poland, as well as the importance of its support provided by Polish authorities. This article analyses the content of the program in terms of strengthening the organization of the economic self-government of the craft.

At the turn of 2019 and 2020, there was a noticeable increase in interest in crafts and its local government structures by the Ministry of Development, Labour and Technology. In mid-2020, the Ministry appointed a team to work on the draft law on crafts and dual education.

Craftsmanship remains an industry that is important in the context of activities carried out by the Ministry of Labour Development and Technology. This is evidenced by the creation of a dedicated unit in the form of the Department of Crafts in the Department of Dialogue and Social Partnership, whose main task is to take action to improve the conditions for craft activities.

This department is engaged in the development of a draft of a new law, for which the name "Act on Crafts and Dual Education in Crafts" was adopted. It was also responsible for coordinating work related to the preparation and implementation of the government support program for craft organizations for the years 2021-2030 under the name "Polish Craft Incubator". Its task was also to coordinate work related to the preparation and implementation of the government program to support craft organizations for the years 2021-2030 under the name "Polish Craft Incubator".

In addition, the Ministry has established a team to work on the draft law on crafts and dual education. The team is an ad hoc body supporting the work of the ministry on the development of a draft of a new law on crafts and dual education in order to develop dual education through the introduction of systemic regulations regarding vocational training in the workplace.

3. The Polish Craft Incubator Program

Craftsmanship is an important link in the economic structure, it is a model for initiating and taking actions that contribute to the development of the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises. For this purpose, the government program of the Polish Craft Incubator was created.

The government program called "Polish Craft Incubator" concerns craft organizations and assumes support for their development as strategic partners of the state in the development of entrepreneurship and professional dual education. The program emphasizes the strategic role of crafts in Poland and the importance that Poland attributes to its development. The need to adopt the program is due to the fact that at the moment there is no government document strictly devoted to the promotion of crafts and dual education as well.

The main objective of the program is to support the organization of economic self-government of crafts, which will have a positive impact on the development of their human and social capital and institutional potential. Financial resources from the program will help to achieve the statutory objectives of craft organizations and will have a positive impact on the development of their entrepreneurship and dual education.

Dual education, or alternating education, should be treated as a natural investment in the future, in order to build a new base of future professionals who will power the potential of companies. Craft apprenticeship is an example of the classic dual vocational training system. It combines learning from a craftsman in the work process. Learning in crafts is a well-known and common method of acquiring skills and professional qualifications. In this process, an important role is played by craft organizations such as guilds, chambers of crafts and the Polish Craft Association.

The aim of learning in crafts is to obtain by the young person practical skills and theoretical knowledge necessary for the responsible exercise of the profession (Polish Craft Incubator Program, 2022) model of obtaining qualifications based on professional preparation in the form of "learning through work". This type of skills profile is widely used in the labour market, which is confirmed by the results of research indicating that craft skills are used in both creative and other sectors of the economy (Craft Council, 2022).

The program consists of operational tasks aimed at supporting the current activities of economic self-government:

- Task 1. Institutional and infrastructural support for craft organizations.
- Task 2. Development and promotion of dual education in crafts.

According to task 1, namely the institutional and infrastructural support for craft organizations, the statutory tasks of the economic self-government of crafts include conducting educational activities for members. The task provides for the financing of technical resources, including IT resources for the statutory activities of craft organizations related to the administration of apprenticeship in crafts, carried out on the basis of a dual education system, supervision over its course and the implementation of professional examinations and vocational training of adults.

In turn, as part of task 2, i.e. the development and promotion of dual education in crafts, support for competitions concerning craft professions is provided, as an activity aimed at familiarizing children and young people with the offer of learning and working in crafts. The aim of the competitions is to shape a positive image of professional work and promote

knowledge about the labour market, and their particular value is the early promotion of education in professions and respect for professional work.

In order to meet the needs of primary school graduates regarding the choice of educational paths by increasing the prestige of the offer of vocational training in craftsmanship, the task includes the possibility of financing prizes by craft organizations as part of both competitions for professions for children and youth addressed to kindergartens and primary schools and vocational competitions for young people studying in craft enterprises.

Moreover, as part of the competition announced by the government program "Polish Craft Incubator" edition 2021, two paths were provided - only task 1 was carried out (National Institute of Freedom – Civil Society Development Centre, 2022):

- Path 1. Development of the infrastructural potential of craft organizations.
- Path 2. Development of organizational potential of crafts and building local partnership.

The first path provided for the financing of technical resources for the statutory activities of craft organizations related to the administration of apprenticeship in crafts, implemented on the basis of a dual education system, supervision over its course and the implementation of professional examinations and vocational training of adults. The maximum grant amount in each of the two paths was PLN 20 000.

The second path provided support for organizations local partnerships with craft organizations and campaigns fundraising craft organizations. This task was important because of the need to increase the involvement of craft communities in cooperation with external entities, i.e. related to career counselling.

It is worth noting that the following craft organizations could apply for a grant under the competition (National Institute of Freedom – Civil Society Development Centre, 2022):

- Polish Craft Association.
- Chambers of Crafts and Entrepreneurship.
- Features of crafts and entrepreneurship, registered in the register of associations of the National Court Register.

In total, the funds allocated for grants in the first edition amounted to PLN 4 800 000 of which the following paths were allocated for the implementation of individual paths:

- PLN 2 400 000 – Path 1. Development of the organization's infrastructure potential craftsmanship.
- PLN 2 400 000 – Path 2. Development of the organizational potential of craftsmanship and building local partnerships.

In general, a total of 487 bids were submitted in the competition. Three of them received a negative formal assessment, the others were sent for substantive assessment.

As part of path 1: „Development of the infrastructure potential of craft organizations” generally 135 offers received funding, whereas as part of path 2: „Development of the organizational potential of crafts and building local partnerships” the amount of 139 offers received funding.

On May 2022, a new call for proposals as part of the second edition of the competition began. The call ended on 20 June 2022. Projects may be implemented from 1 June 2022 to 31 December 2023. In the second edition of the competition, two tasks are carried out. As part of the second edition of the competition, the maximum amount of the grant is (National Institute of Freedom – Civil Society Development Centre, 2022):

- Task 1. Institutional and infrastructural support for craft organizations: PLN 30 000 per year (PLN 60 000 for the entire task).
- Task 2. Development and promotion of dual education in crafts: PLN 60 000 per year (PLN 120 000 for the whole task).

It is very important that the second edition of the competition will implement task 2, i.e.: Development and promotion of dual education in craftsmanship. In the first edition of the competition, this task was not implemented.

Indeed, the priority for the European Union is to help young people enter the market. working and staying on it and in acquiring and developing skills that will allow them in the future to find a job. It turns out that countries where attractive vocational education and training systems exist, especially those with stable apprenticeship systems and extensive opportunities for learning through practice (e.g. Germany or Austria), perform better in facilitating the transition from education to employment and maintaining low levels of youth unemployment.

The dual system of vocational training in crafts prepares a young employee to immediately take up work after graduating from a stage I sectoral vocational school, because in this system the juvenile employee gains theoretical knowledge, practical skills and professional experience at the same time.

4. Key economic benefits of the Polish Craft Incubator Program

From an economic perspective, there are many benefits of the Polish Craft Incubator Program, especially those resulting from dual education, mainly:

- maintaining relatively low unemployment among young people,
- increase in the level of education of young people and acquired competences (in the context of knowledge, experience and skills),
- adjusting the educational offer of schools and continuing education institutions to the needs of entrepreneurs,
- shaping an effective vocational training system that prepares young people for a specific profession and at the same time provides the basis for acquiring new qualifications or specializations,
- the existence of a systemic solution that facilitates the employment of graduates of vocational schools and continuing education institutions,

- making the labour market more flexible,
- undertaking cooperation between entrepreneurs and educational institutions in the field of defining directions and forms of vocational education in accordance with the current demand on the labour market,
- creating a civil society (functioning of local partnerships and activity of medium-order structures – economic self-government of enterprises) and increasing the level of social capital.

The added value resulting from the idea of implementing the concept of a learning organization in the craft environment is building social and intellectual capital in the region. The subject of introducing the Polish Craft Incubator Program and concept is man, his potential and experience. There are individual employees who acquire information in the organization, which leads to the creation of specific organizational knowledge. In this way, through the learning process, they are looking for new solutions to improve the functioning of the organization on the market.

As a result, these organizations are characterized by increased productivity, development of products and services, more effective customer service, dynamization of changes and implementation of market innovations.

On the other hand, the economic policy of the government takes into account the need to develop local enterprises. Consequently, government programs, such as Polish Craft Incubator, are needed, because in the face of economic changes in recent years, only small and medium-sized companies have a chance for quickly adaptation to the expectations of local customers. The government's support policy in this area is extremely important.

There is no doubt, that it is a long-term process, but now is the best time to combine tradition with modernity - and the assumptions of the concept of learning organizations can be very useful in the process of these changes.

5. Conclusions

The main effect of this paper was to illustrate the situation with regard to craft enterprises and the possibilities of their development in the current socio-economic conditions. An additional practical result is to indicate the possibility of using the Polish Craft Incubator program as a source of obtaining financial resources in the learning process.

The value of the paper is to increase the awareness of owners of craft enterprises, by showing them the possibility of using new organizational concepts and government programs. The article has primarily educational value and is a general concept of stimulating creative action towards building learning organizations.

Generally, craft companies as learning organizations, adapt to the factors of the immediate environment, constantly acquire new competences and skills. They are based on knowledge and experience that build the organizational identity of the company and determine the quick adaptation to economic changes. Craft companies, therefore, are organizations that notably influence the development of the small and medium-sized enterprise sector and play a key role for the sustainable economic development of the region.

In addition, emerging craft businesses seek greater financial and environmental sustainability. Emerging craft enterprises are important in balancing the processes associated with globalization, especially in the area of environmental protection. In this way, crafts can contribute to the transition to a circular economy that avoids waste, keeps materials and objects in use, and regenerates natural systems.

Craft offers not only a way of making, but also a way of thinking - one that is collaborative, inclusive, and responsive to the changing natural environment. It seems essential in the context of moving away from our current production model of "take, make, and waste" to a more circular model (Crafts Council, 2022). Traditional forms of knowledge and practice should therefore also be central to the debate about the planet and climate change.

Yet crafts people's knowledge is often pushed back in favour of technological solutions and the priorities of global corporations. For this reason, it is so important to support and protect emerging craft businesses, even in the context of globalization.

In general, all these changes can be translated into sustainable development of the region, especially in economic, social, educational and environmental terms. This, in turn, favours the improvement of the economic situation in the long term through economic synergy effects, taking into account the cooperation of various market entities in the region.

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