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The Role of Economic Chamber in Response to the Educational Needs of its Members

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Abstract

The present study investigates the role of the Economic Chamber of Greece (E.Ch.G.) in the fulfillment of its members' educational needs. Continual training is the result of the necessity to follow the financial developments and as a consequence the E.Ch.G. decided that it was urgent to be active in the field of lifelong learning carrying out both training courses and instruction programs as well. The methodology of the study was based on the combination of the qualitative and the quantitative research, as it includes five (5) individual interviews of the E.Ch.G. organizers and other five (5) interviews coming from members of the Regional Sections (R. S) of the E.Ch.G. Furthermore, the study includes a questionnaire which was addressed to a hundred and nine members who took part in an educational course sponsored by the E.Ch.G. The distribution of the questionnaires was necessary in order to gain more objective results. On the one hand, the main findings have shown the importance of the educational courses while on the other hand the possibility of improvement as regards the organization, the design and the accomplishment of educational courses by the E.Ch.G. throughout Greece and especially in the remote R.S. Members' fulfillment is necessary as their knowledge level is concerned and it is obvious that any training program ought to be more intensive especially in a period of crisis and growth. The present study sets as a purpose the improvement of the E.Ch.G. through the development of educational programs which follow the main principles of the lifelong learning.

Keywords: Adult Learning, Adult Education, Lifelong Learning, Educational Need, Continuing Training

Introduction

In recent years, the increasing level of knowledge in the field of economics has led to the improvement of knowledge levels. The improvement of knowledge aimed at the increasing demands of the personal and professional lives of people and in the context of lifelong learning. One of the main pillars of lifelong learning is adult education, which seeks to address some important labor problems.

Among the most important labor issues are the economic changes and the new legislative framework of the Ministry of Finance, which is constantly changes. The poor

knowledge of economics, the new logistics and taxes and the great penetration of new technologies in the workplace require continuous learning. In order to overcome these problems, the E.CH.G. employs programs to upgrade the expertise of its members. Furthermore, there are educational and training programs on fiscal and economic issues in order to improve the knowledge base of its members, to facilitate their work and enable them to cope with the new requirements.

The E.CH.G. focuses on the following areas

- Counseling, while implementing training courses for the improvement of the educational level of its members;
- Organizing and coordinating in the context of provision of services, occurring in all Regional Sections (R.S.) of Greece;
- Researching, in order to achieve better satisfaction of its members.

The subject of the present research is not random. It stems from the fact that the professional development of E.CH.G.'s members is inextricably linked to the organization itself. It is of utmost importance to emerge through this work in order to connect the needs of the members with the role played by the institution itself.

More specifically, the research topics that emerge are the following

- The difficulties in organizing and planning the programs by the Central Administration and the Directorate of Studies and Activities of E.CH.G.
- The implementation of the training programs of the E.CH.G. and the adopted learning styles.
- Support of more seminars in remote areas based on informal learning (i.e. e-learning).
- The contribution of E.CH.G. in improving the educational needs of its members.
- The reliability and validity of knowledge provided by the educators.

Through the investigation of these issues it is intended to clarify the role of E.CH.G. when implementing educational programs and to recorded their effectiveness in relation to the educational needs of its members.

Through the data arising from research, it is attempted to achieve critical assessment of the educational actions and propose qualitative suggestions new for the effective response to members' educational needs.

The Role and Goals of the Economic Chamber of Greece (E.CH.G.)

The E.CH.G., since 1980, is a body of scientists in economics, which provides knowledge of economics. This is essential in every professional activity of its members and, furthermore, it is required to operate as an executive of the state in the legislative framework. Main aim of this organization is to enable its members, through their participation in formulating economic policies of general or special interest. Consequently, the subject of E.CH.G.'s seminars is to conduct internal and external audit to improve the specialization of its members.

The general purposes of the institution in the education area are

- Proposing suggestions through the education and the training of its members in general and specific economic issues in the financial sector.

- The processing and presentation of issues via the relevant government authorities, (general economic and specific budgetary accounting audit costing trade and other authorities) for the appropriate training of its members.
- The awarding of a special upgrade license (logistics- tax advisor) to its members, when using their degree.
- Active participation in scientific and professional associations of economic science.
- Assistance to organizations through lifelong learning in order to upgrade the skills of their members and to achieve their goals.

One of the most common approaches used by the E.CH.G. for the implemented programs is the collaborative education. The educational methods and techniques have experiential features, cooperative of its members, using questions and answers and implementing the project method. Therefore, it is an open-learning process without strictly defined limits and processes according to the interests of its members (Frey, 1986: 11).

The formal training of E.CH.G. relate to official vocational education and training and target in the implementation of the national policy in lifelong learning

- Certification of training offered by economists to acquire professional qualifications.
- Further training of economists.

Literature Review

The methodology in this research is based on the study of scientific literature and empirical research of international and Greek scientists on the role played by the E.CH.G. in addressing the educational needs of its members (Antaki and Rapley, 1996; Bailey, 1978; Bird, & Co, 1999; Blease, 1990; Bujra, 2001; Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Cohen & Manion, 1997; Cresswell, 2003; Faulkner & Manion, 1999; Maycut & Morehouse, 1994; Morse, 1991; Noye & Priveteau, 1999; Silverman, 1993).

This research attempts to highlight the extent of contribution of E.CH.G. in the training provided by its members. E.CH.G. is the body that contributes to this effort through adult education, updating the knowledge of its members with information and training seminars in response to the continuous economic changes during the economic recession

The main objective of this research is to record the existing situation regarding the E.CH.G. in regards to the educational knowledge offered to its members. That is, if the members (economists, accountants, tax consultants) use the acquired knowledge from E.CH.G.'s seminars, if they derive useful information on the financial aspects and if they make them sufficiently equipped to respond to the profession of the accountant. Continuous training which take place within the E.CH.G. provide knowledge and strengthen the position of its members in the workplace.

Methodology of Research

In order to achieve a complete understanding of the matter, we selected both a qualitative and quantitative approach, hence a mixed survey model.

The qualitative approach dictates the understanding of the role of E.CH.G. Furthermore, it focuses on the personal experience of E.CH.G.'s members answering the questions of "how" and "why". The combination of structured and semi-structured individual interviews was selected as the methodological tool (Cohen et al., 1997: 307-308).

The views of the members which are associated with the corresponding training seminars are very interesting. Therefore, we employed a quantitative research, using the questionnaire tool. Through the quantitative research the researchers are able to approach

and focus on a specific research area (Cohen et al., 1997: 413). Thus, through the quantitative approach the needs of the members are investigated.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative research was chosen as a research technique because it aims at making the so-called "triangulation". The analysis of qualitative data and their verification through quantitative findings leads to a theory which is based on inductive method (Morse, 1991: 121).

This study addresses the following research questions:

1) What is the role of E.CH.G. in the field of education and how it treats the educational needs of its members?

2) Does the E.CH.G. provide the ability to organize and design educational programs that meet the needs of its members?

3) Whether the E.CH.G. can help to correlate the validity and reliability of knowledge acquired from seminars to cover the educational needs of its members?

Sample

The sample was selected by the method of directed representative sampling, which divides the population into groups with homogeneous characteristics based on the subjective judgment of the investigator (Cohen & Manion, 1994: 170).

The three categories in which the survey sample is divided are:

1. The Directorate of Studies and Activities of the Central Administration, which is composed by organizers of training seminars.

2. The recipients of the Regional Boards who are involved in the planning of seminars in their regions.

3. The members of the E.CH.G., which attend seminars to the Regional Board of Central Greece.

The first and second categories are related to qualitative research, which is conducted through individual interviews (Faulkner & Manion, 1994, 124). They consisted of ten (10) participants. The interviews were conducted via telephone due to the distance. It should also be noted that for achieving the privacy of interviewees, they remained anonymous.

In the third category of the sample the participants were given questionnaires. The reason we selected this Regional Board is that "research using relatively small local populations and samples (as was the Regional Board of Halkida), it is possible to better detect the educational needs" (Faulkner et al., 1999: 30). The survey involved 107 participants.

Findings

The quantitative research was conducted in a particular sample members of the Regional Board of Halkida (Greek district). The participants in quantitative research were 107 members of the E.CH.G. and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

The satisfaction of educational needs of members of the role of E.CH.G.

THE ROLE OF GREECE'S ECONOMIC CHAMBER IN ADRESSING THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF MEMBERS	Very Bad	Bad	Neutral	Good	Very good
	%	%	%	%	%
The satisfaction of members from the role of E.CH.G	2,8	6,5	31,8	53,3	5,6
The topics covered the needs of its members	1,9	1,9	57,9	34,6	3,7
The prerequisites of members.	2,8	8,4	35,5	42,1	11,2
The topics of training programs	2,8	1,9	39,3	48,6	7,5
Training programs meet the educational needs	0,9	10,3	38,3	43,9	6,5
Seminars' attendance frequency	0,9	2,8	46,7	43	6,5
The adequacy of the frequency of training programs	2,8	46,7	43,0	43,0	6,5
Improvement of knowledge by attending seminars	0,9	4,7	32,7	56,1	5,6
The training satisfaction by digital technology	1,9	4,7	43,9	45,8	3,7
The influence of the elections in the educational development space	0,9	3,7	46,7	43,9	4,7

Table 2 shows the distribution of answers about the perceptions of members regarding the organization and planning of programs by E.CH.G.

Table 2

The satisfaction of educational needs of members of the role of E.C.G.

DEGREE OF SATISFACTION OF EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF THE ORGANIZATION DESIGN & PROGRAMMES DESIGNED BY GREECE'S ECONOMIC CHAMBER	Very Bad	Bad	Neutral	Good	Very good
	%	%	%	%	%
The organization of E.CH.G. in conducting the seminars	1,9	1,9	48,6	37,4	10,3
The design of training seminars in relation with the E.CH.G	0,9	3,7	49,5	36,4	9,3
Satisfaction in the notification of the seminars	1,9	0,9	48,6	41,1	7,5
The training techniques, methods and means of the educator	1,9	3,7	50,5	40,2	3,7
Knowledge after attending programs	2,8	2,8	37,4	48,6	8,4
Digital learning for knowledge in the digitization of educational material	1,9	2,8	38,3	50,5	6,5
The overall evaluation of the educator	1,9	1,9	51,4	37,4	7,5
The evaluation of the educator regarding the teaching methods	1,9	7,5	35,5	49,5	5,6
The evaluation of the educator in educational material	1,9	1,9	36,4	51,4	8,4

In Table 3, below, presents the responses of members of the E.C.G, who participated in training seminars on the degree of satisfaction with the intention of E.C.G associate credibility with the validity of the training of members (Annex III p 206).

Table 3

The intention of E.CH.G in connection to the reliability and the validity of training of its members

The E.C.G's INTENTION IN PROVIDING RELIABLE & VALID TRAINING TO MEMBERS.	Very Bad	Bad	Neutral	Good	Very good
	%	%	%	%	%
The degree of cooperation with E.CH.G members to utilize their knowledge in the workplace	1,9	1,9	36,4	56,1	3,7
The degree of authenticity of knowledge (update) the E.CH.G on the work of its members	2,8	0,9	61,7	34,6	0
Easy access to educational material at the site of E.CH.G and the utilization to the daily work of its members	0,9	49,5	42,2	7,3	0
The importance given by the E.CH.G to address the educational needs of its members	2,8	47,7	45,0	4,6	0

Conclusions

The research has highlighted some important conclusions which are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Results from qualitative research

	1st research question <i>The role of E.C.G in the training needs of its members.</i>	2nd research question <i>The ability to organize and design training programs.</i>	3rd research question <i>The way the validity and reliability of knowledge to meet educational needs.</i>
First goal. The role of E.C.G in education of members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Amending, •Therapeutic, •Counseling •Collaborative •Educational •Informative • Significant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Regular, pre-calculation • Community resources • Expenditure of the Community framework • Proposals from Regional Boards •Appropriate infrastructure, • Appropriate teaching aids • Well-operation in education • Poor organization and planning • Lack of seminars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Modern Method •Informal learning •Non-formal learning •Modern forms of learning • Monitoring system after the end of the seminars •Deepening knowledge •Application e-learning,

2nd objective. The contribution of the E.C.G at enhancing professional knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intrusive, • Flexible, • Active, • Updating of knowledge • Interpersonal learning • Self-awareness • Learning practical needs • Hot topics • Global Update • Re-establishing relations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced educators • Regulatory instruments (panel, projector) • Enriched recommendation • Basic themes. • Methodology • Teaching experience • Transferability • Lack of evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-discipline • Will to act, • Evaluation of the educators • Transfer of valid knowledge • Training and education relevance to labor market needs • Space for improvement • Producing educational material
3rd goal. Connecting the E.C.G to meeting members to lifelong learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globalization • Legal changes • Internationalization • Updating knowledge • Improvement of the existing situation • Continuous training • Enable learners • Self-awareness, empowerment, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training seminars, training • Ensure knowledge • Design methodology diagnostics and tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expertise • Troubleshooting • High level management capacity of officers • Tackling unemployment • Preparation for employment integration

Table 5

Coding findings in quantitative research on closed questions

	1st research question The role of E.C.G in the training needs of its members.	2nd research question The ability to organize and design training programs.	3rd research question The way the validity and reliability of knowledge to meet educational needs.
1st goal The role of E.C.G in education of members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate members' satisfaction in training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive attitude to educational techniques and methods, • Lack of digital technology • Moderate accomplishment in the organization and design of E.C.G in P.T • Lack of satisfaction in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low degree of influence in the elections in education

	1st research question <i>The role of E.C.G in the training needs of its members.</i>	2nd research question <i>The ability to organize and design training programs.</i>	3rd research question <i>The way the validity and reliability of knowledge to meet educational needs.</i>
		subjects training programs	
2nd objective. The contribution of the E.C.G at enhancing professional knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate renovation contribution to satisfying knowledge. • Updating knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate satisfaction in post-monitoring programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good validity and credibility of the teaching material.
3rd goal. Connecting the E.C.G to meeting members in lifelong learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate cooperation in connection E.C.G 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade to digitization processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enough room for improvement.

Suggestions

1) Considering the existing literature, the recorded opinions of the interviewees, the experience of executives of E.CH.G on the training needs of its members, the opinion of experts in education, the conditions in the area of the body as well as existing structures, it is important to create practical suggestions for the training of members, which include innovative features and will be based on the following principles and conditions:

2) Reforming the existing legal framework training. For this reason special attention should be paid to delimitation of the role and responsibilities of the E.CH.G for proper organization, planning and coordination of training activities for the implementation of seminars.

3) Employing experienced and qualified staff. It is therefore necessary to set up the Register of Certified Trainers and control of knowledge and teaching aids to provide timely and continuously updated education.

4) Establishment of infrastructure network and adopting practices that can ensure the quality of the training process.

5) A set of online services designed to improve the quality of education and training.

- Creating Integrated Application Digital Library of the Economic Chamber of Greece to service its members (e- library).

- Single Information System Development for the Provision of Integrated Digital Services using innovative information and communication technologies (e- government).

- Internet access to economic studies, financial magazines, books and surveys which have been digitized and are available online through the new digital library.

6) Creation of website where members of the E.CH.G will have the opportunity to be informed about the educational activities of all actors and where they can indicate their interest in the activities of all operators, which want to participate.

7) Utilization of modern and flexible training models (e-learning, distant learning, synchronic and asynchronous education etc.), in order to contribute as much as possible. Hence, there will be no limitation of distance or because of financial failure of members.

8) Strengthening of continuing education-training and introduction of a mentor.

9) Design and implementation of training programs that respond realistically and effectively to the training needs and take account of local circumstances and of the trends emerging in the context of European Union. The design of training actions should necessarily include the costs in relation to sustainability.

10) Use active-participatory training methods that are consistent with the principles and practices of adult learning for the culture of lifelong learning skills in undergoing training.

11) Production of reliable educational and training materials (printed and digital), which is controlled by statutory certification processes.

12) Investigation of educational needs of members in each Regional Boards

13) Intensification and specialization of research issues in education.

In summary, the role of E.CH.G in the training of members, today in Greece, has an evolving scope of activities which, are unfortunately characterized by liquidity, insufficient institutional framework and, in many cases, doubtless quality services. It is obvious that in order for the institute to be in tandem with the Community guidelines on lifelong learning the immediate development of a national strategy with the cooperation of all stakeholders in improving the quality of adult education systems of members is required. To achieve the improvement of knowledge the E.CH.G should pursue the promotion of measures regarding the country's economic policy and motions relating to the profession of the economist. But in order for the provided knowledge to be credible, the educational role of E.CH.G should be institutionalized taking into account that it aims at professional and personal development of its members and at responding to labor market requirements.

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