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E-LEARNING AND THE KNOWLEDGE-BASED SOCIETY

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Abstract:

Knowledge-based society represents the society based on the human and intellectual capital, a society which develops in an ever changing economic and political dynamics. Knowledge-based society refers to societies rely on the knowledge of the citizens necessary to drive the innovation and the development of that society's economy. Since knowledge is the most important resource that can drive economic and social development, knowledge society is that society where education goes beyond its traditional borders and technologies become basic elements for the learning process. Over the past several decades, the theme of knowledge-based economy (KE) has become increasingly important, knowledge being seen as a source of economic growth and competitiveness in all economic sectors, however such development cannot occur and cannot be separated from educational development and IT&C.

Key words: knowledge, technologies, e-learning, society, development

1. Introduction

Over the past several decades, since the popularization of the term *knowledge economy* in 1996 in Drucker's book "Age of Discontinuity", chapter 12, (Drucker attributes it to Fritz Machlup) the theme of knowledge economy (KE - the use of knowledge to generate tangible and intangible values) has become increasingly significant when analyzing the prerequisites of economic growth and social development. As a spin-off of this development, it appeared the increased usage of modern resources and investments and developments in IT&C which factors are perceived as intrinsic and indispensable for KE and knowledge society (KS).

The hidden forces behind of KS are technologies, the internationalization and technological advancement shaped the contemporary economy into what we call now "knowledge society" (KS). Under the auspices of this new state of affairs, a new form of organization appeared, demanding a rapid development of skills, solid and always up to date knowledge.

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2. Knowledge society and education

Knowledge Society is based on greater responsibility and requirements, society nowadays is an evolutionary society, continuously adapting to the new developments and the social and environmental challenges. Therefore, the educational system must aim at the formation of people able to develop of their own competencies through personal efforts in order to fully integrate in present day environment so, mastering a skill is not enough anymore, honing, refining it is always required.

KS is characterized by a plenitude of resources, material as well as intellectual, contrary to how the traditional society used to be. The technological development brought about the elimination of the necessity a specific time frame and venue because the activities transferred into the virtual space and became worldwide through the usage of technology. Globalization influenced work reorganization, caused the compression of space, time and helped fasten the distribution of information, data, and knowledge through the means of technology. Knowledge became the central point of production therefore, the relation between gained higher importance.

Knowledge and its usage within an organization has become the core source of competitive advantage. The organizations that understand that the usage of their members' knowledge is a source of competitive advantage and encourage their learning are called "learning organizations". Inside KS, knowledge is the enhancer of economic results laying down the premises of a better social development. Based on the characteristics regarding knowledge economy presented by Don Tapscott in 2014 [1], we can conclude that the main characteristics of KS are as presented in figure 1.

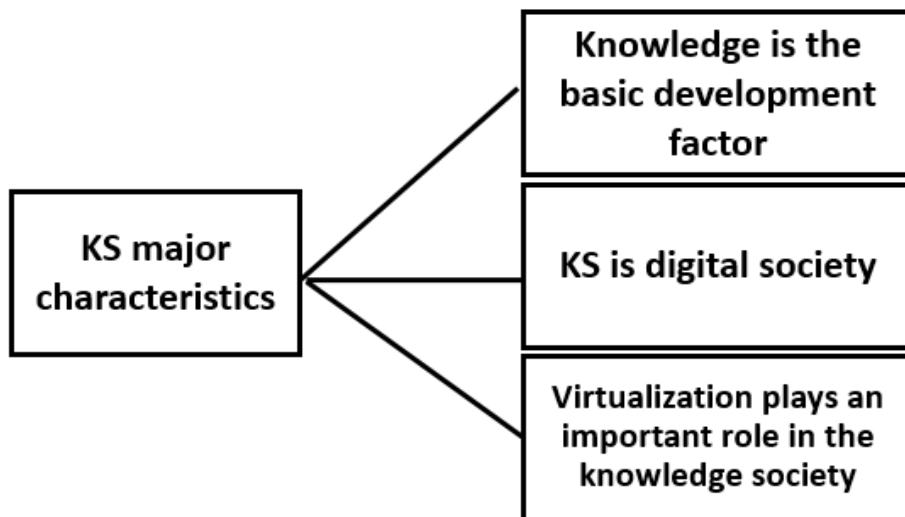


Fig 1. KS main features

The production of knowledge through research and education and the manner it is used and disseminated has as main outcome social development.

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Since knowledge is at the basis of evolution, power, development, the intellectual capital, which represents the knowledge the organization members share and put to use, is a key element upon which the competitive advantage can be built. Nowadays, intangible assets like knowledge, have gained higher importance becoming a source of power and profitability. However, in order to gain such capital there is the necessity of permanent self-development without the limitations set by the traditional training methods in other words, on demand learning.

As we can see in the figure below, education is one of the main elements of KS, but not any kind of education, we are talking here about a an educational process able to satisfy the requirements of the new society, education that can be named: on demand education.

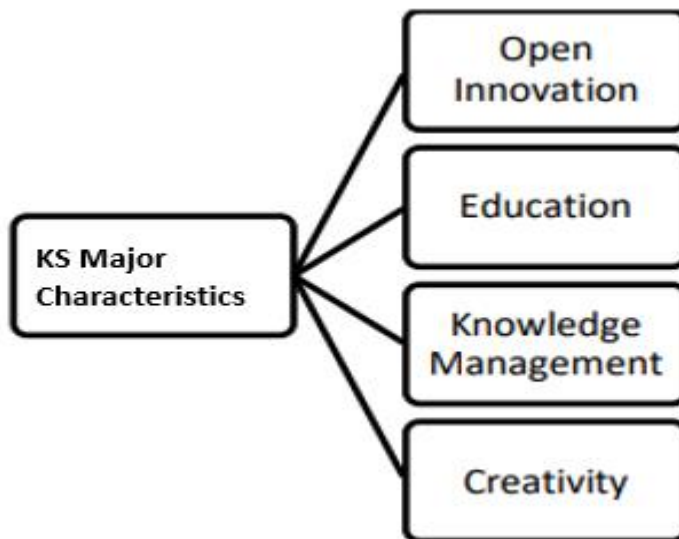


Figure 2. Major KS characteristics adapted after to White et al. [2]

On demand learning [3] is characterized by learning and training accessible to anyone, no matter the time or location and adaptable to individual requirements and interests. Therefore, we can say that KS has had a strong impact upon the educational process as well as upon the student. Formal, non-formal or informal education grows as a necessity, a consequence of social, economic, scientific, cultural and political changes. Since knowledge society includes the information and technological society, it is obvious that all the continuous learning programs will be linked to IT&C developments. Thus, e-learning is the most facile learning form and instrument. E-learning allows students to learn at their own pace, access information, evaluate and communicate it, solve complex problems regardless of limitations given by social or ethnic group, religion or nationality, time or space.

Through the means of technology, the new educational process is being developed around the student's necessities objectives, background, style and needs, it offers flexible access to information and it is a continual process, rather than a distinct event; it facilitates the integration of training on workplaces and provides effective methods for meeting

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training needs of very diverse groups of people. Online learning takes more of a learner-centred approach to education, because the virtual learning environment is more easily adaptable to the learner, rather than the traditional educational environment. Here, the individual learner is responsible for his/her approach to education and training, technology becoming the most needed assistant. Under this perspective, e-learning provides all the answers to “anyone, anytime, anywhere” requests.

3. Conclusions

The society transformations occurring in the social environment stressed the necessity for major reforms in education and training. The e-learning system does not try to restructure the education system, it offers an alternative by increasing the capacity to adapt to the requirements and possibilities of those who are formed, given the rapid pace of changes in our society. Meanwhile, there will be a continued need for traditional training that meets specific learning outcomes especially for the first stages in the educational process however, distance, informal or social learning where learners can network, share, collaborate, and exchange ideas on problem-solving will continue to grow. Through the e-learning system, which combines direct communication, distance learning, visual and audio interaction, the dynamics of teaching and learning changes, the human potential develops without any restrictions.

This learning system will foster to the shift from a society of information where information and information systems flourished to the knowledge society where people started to capitalize on the information accumulated, ideas and knowledge became commodities.

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