

Competence-based training for career development

It is with pleasure and at the same time with sorrow that we, Riccardo Sartori and Arianna Costantini, present this second special issue about competence-based training for career development. The first special issue, with the same title, was edited by one of us and Giuseppe Tacconi, the third editor of the present special issue (Sartori and Tacconi, 2017).

The pleasure is linked to the publication of an issue that took about two years of work and allowed the collection of a significant number of contributions, of which we are very proud. The sorrow is linked to the death of our colleague Giuseppe Tacconi, prematurely occurred at the beginning of 2020 due to a bad illness. Giuseppe was a pedagogist attentive to the issues of competence-based training and development, both as a researcher and as a professional (<https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-03-2020-0041>; Sartori and Tacconi, 2015). The previous special issue was composed of six papers. This one is composed of nine papers.

But before presenting the papers of the present special issue and to provide readers with an overview of the choices that have led to this outcome, let us make an introduction that deals with training and development, especially in relation to career development and the COVID period we are living in, which brought out new training and development needs (Mikołajczyk, 2021).

Training and development are labels commonly found together to define those educational activities implemented in organizations to empower the skills of workers, employees and managers in the lifelong learning perspective of improving their performance, as it is focused in the opening contribution to this special issue by Ceschi *et al.* (2021), (<https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-07-2019-0126>) titled “Foster employability and fight social exclusion through the development of lifelong learning (LLL) key-competences: reviewing twenty years of LLL policies.” In this respect, training and development are ways to adapt to, and produce and manage change (Sartori *et al.*, 2018), also at a social level.

As for organizations, it is well-known that their survival, growth and competitiveness in the turbulent labor market depend on their ability to adapt to, and produce and manage change, both in the internal and external environment (Weick and Quinn, 1999; Sartori and Rolandi, 2013). Think about the dramatic changes caused by the pandemic that forced organizations to reorganize themselves and rethink the organization of work both internally and externally, for example, by means of some form of remote or smart working (Bolisani *et al.*, 2020).

In this framework, a unitary concept such as “training and development” plays a recognized role for both professional and personal improvement (Sartori and Tacconi, 2017), as it is regarded as a suitable response to changes (Gibbs, 2007) and a key lever for adaptation and growth (Smidt and Sursock, 2011), both individual and organizational (Roland, 2010; Western, 2010). The investments that an organization puts into training and development activities contribute to creating a climate for continuous learning; and this kind of climate, as stated in Lau and Ngo (2004), stimulates a virtuous knowledge sharing, that is to say, a virtuous flow of information and ideas across workers, employees and managers.

Sharing knowledge is an activity that involves the transfer and dissemination of knowledge that significantly improves organizational effectiveness (operational efficiency). Therefore, it is a practice that should be increasingly promoted and encouraged within organizations from the perspective of training and development. Sharing knowledge should be related to leadership too, with the aim of motivating workers and employees to act in that



direction (interactive efficiency). Research presents various studies aimed at investigating the behavior of organizational citizenship regarding the sharing of knowledge (Lin and Hsiao, 2014). Research also shows the perceived value of knowledge on the knowledge sharing intention and behavior in leaders and collaborators in organizations (Castañeda and Ignacio, 2015).

Over the years, scholars have coined different expressions for “training and development,” witnessed by such labels as *organizational learning* (Senge, 1990; Argyris and Schön, 1992; Fulmer and Keys, 1998), *knowledge-creating learning* (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Gherardi *et al.*, 1998), *learning climate* (Cortini *et al.*, 2016), *action learning* (Jones, 1990; Mumford, 1997; O’Neil, 1999), *transformative learning* (Mezirow, 1991; Hobson and Welbourne, 1998), *implicit learning* (Reber, 1993; Stadler and Frensch, 1998), *reflective learning* (Boud and Walker, 1991; Williamson, 1997), *self-directed learning* (Candy, 1991; Merriam and Caffarella, 1991), *flexible learning* (Lundin, 1999; Jakupcic and Garrick, 2000) and *lifelong learning* (Moreland and Lovett, 1997; Oliver, 1999; Maehl and William, 2000).

All these types of learning, achievable through different forms of training activities, make particular sense from the perspective of career development. Indeed, career development typically refers to the process people may undergo to try to evolve their occupational status and foster their employability (Arulmani *et al.*, 2014). Apart from training interventions, this process usually involves such procedures as assessment and development centers (Sartori and Ceschi, 2013).

Career development can also be considered the process of making decisions (Ceschi *et al.*, 2017) for long-term learning (Derouin *et al.*, 2005), to align personal needs and desires with career advancement opportunities (Chudzikowski *et al.*, 2020) and thus improve both operational efficiency (good job performance) and interactive efficiency (good organizational climate). In this case, the process may involve psychosocial training and job crafting interventions (Costantini *et al.*, 2020).

Finally, career development can refer to the total encompassment of people’s work-related experiences, leading up to the occupational role they may hold within the same organization or in other contexts.

Against this background, with the first paper by Ceschi *et al.* (<https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-07-2019-0126>), we are in Europe. Their article provides an overview of the past two decades of lifelong learning (LLL) policies for enhancing employability and reduce social exclusion in young people of European countries through the development of the so-called LLL key-competences. In addition, the authors propose a strategy of implementation of the LLL programs that facilitates the institutions’ decision processes for policymaking through the use of decisional support systems.

Thanks to the second article by Cunha de Araujo (2020) (<https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-02-2020-0038>), we fly to Brazil and get an overview of an expanded, workable conception of rural youth and adult education that, according to the author, will move Brazil closer to a fair, egalitarian society focused on human development. The author claims that providing high-quality, customized training for the teachers who teach the vastly diverse body of rural students is essential in terms of empowering and recognizing young and adult peasants’ right to learn.

With the third paper, we come back to Europe, precisely to Lithuania and Italy, to deal with Vocational Education and Training (VET). The article by Tacconi *et al.* (2020) (<https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-03-2020-0041>) aims to reveal common and diverging trends in the development of pedagogical competences of VET teachers and trainers in Italy and

Lithuania. Results show that there are still challenges and problems in the development of pedagogical competencies of VET teachers and trainers in both countries.

The fourth article is set in Italy. Sartori and Costantini (2020) (<https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-03-2020-0044>) test the effectiveness of a training intervention based on the psychology of perception, delivered to young Italian workers and employees, with low education, hired with an apprenticeship contract and involved in a compulsory training course whose aim was to let them develop such relational competencies as communication and cooperation with others.

The fifth article by Ngayo Fotso (2021) (<https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-04-2020-0078>) broadens the gaze towards the Western world and, through a review work, deals with the competencies necessary to assume leadership roles. Interestingly enough, the paper identifies 18 groups of leadership competencies required for the 21st century.

With the sixth paper, we fly to Taiwan. Chung and Chen (2019) (<https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-07-2018-0060>) explore the capabilities required by entry-level human resources professionals based on job advertisements by using text mining techniques. The study revealed four critical success factors (specific skills, educational level, experience and specific capabilities), five clusters and ten classifications which you can discover by reading the article.

Also, the seventh article by Bellini *et al.* (2019) (<https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-04-2018-0034>) deals with human resource management activities, proposes an explorative metamodel of the key organizational competences management and presents a Web-based tool (Co.S.M.O.; Competences Software Management for Organizations) for all-around assessment of the identified competences.

The eighth and penultimate article of the special issue, entitled “An empirical study of displaceable job skills in the age of robots,” introduces us to the world of automation and addresses issues regarding the influence of skill-polarized workplace on jobs, human capital and organization from human resource development perspective (<https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-10-2019-0183>). The research carried out by Chuang (2020) identified 30 displaceable skills from endangered jobs and examined 423 adult employees’ awareness and level of technological redundancy based on the displaceable skills.

Finally, to continue in the wake of automation and digital support for learning and work activities, the ninth and final article by Tommasi *et al.* (2021) (<https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-11-2020-0169>) aims to empirically compare the degree to which two technological interventions, based on the computer-supported collaborative learning and the technology acceptance model, were associated with a different incidence of financial biases.

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