

# TRANSFORMATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS INTO “LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS”

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## ABSTRACT

*Military and civilian higher education institutions play a particularly important role in training future specialists. Changes in society, globalization, competitiveness, increased competition for human and financial resources are some of the factors that drive change within civilian higher education institutions and increase the pressure to achieve performance at an increasingly higher level. In the case of military higher education institutions, the pressure to achieve higher and higher performance is higher because, in addition to the factors that determine changes within civilian higher education institutions, there are also factors specific to the military environment, a dynamic environment, in constant transformation. In order to cope with change, to develop and increase the quality of the educational act, military and civilian higher education institutions must become “learning organizations”, becoming flexible, adaptable, involving teachers in achieving the proposed goals, using creativity, and their knowledge.*

## KEYWORDS:

*Higher education institutions, learning organizations, transformation*

### 1. Introduction

Higher education is important parts of education because without it the education system would not be complete, it would be lacking in firmness and it would not withstand all the changes that are taking place in politics, economy and society. It also plays an important role in opening new horizons to those involved in the training of future specialists and, at the same time, provides well-founded development models.

### 2. Methodology

The paper addresses the issue of transforming military and civilian higher education institutions into “learning organizations”.

Based on the specialized literature and own observations, the criteria for transforming military and civil higher education institutions into “learning organizations” are presented and analyzed.

### 3. Transformation of civil higher education institutions from “knowledge organizations” into “learning organizations”

According to the National Education Law, higher education has the mission “to generate and transfer knowledge to society through: a) initial and continuous training at university level, for the purpose of personal development, professional insertion of the individual and meeting the need for environmental competence socio-economic; b) scientific research, development, innovation and technological transfer, through individual and collective creation, in the field of science, engineering, arts, letters, by ensuring performance and physical and sports development, as well as the capitalization and dissemination of their results” (National Education Law, No. 1/2011, article 117) being “organized in universities, study academies, institutes, higher education schools and the like, hereinafter referred to as higher education institutions or universities” (National Education Law, No. 1/2011, article 114, paragraph 2).

Higher education institutions (hereinafter referred to as HEI) are “state, private or denominational, [...] have legal personality, are non-profit, are of public interest and are apolitical” (National Education Law No. 1/2011, article 114, paragraph 3) and “provides the necessary means for the continuous realization of an organizational framework conducive to the development of culture, education and knowledge as basic foundations of society” (Oprean, 2002, pp. 8-9).

Civil higher education institutions (hereinafter referred to as CHEI) are those that, through the scientific research activities carried out, anticipate, anticipate and react to the changes that take place in the current society, which is in a permanent transformation. These institutions are those whose mission is both to create standards and benchmarks for society, and to train professionals to help implement them.

An organization to survive in a competitive environment is necessary to be flexible, adaptable, to use the knowledge and creativity of employees, to involve them in achieving the goals of the organization coming up with new ideas, in other words to become a learning organization. In our opinion, the same is true for the CHEI who want to develop, become competitive in the education market, and be prepared to face new challenges. Globalization, university classification systems, changes in society, people's thinking, digitalization and technology, innovation, competitiveness, fierce competition for human capital and financial resources, put pressure on the performance of higher education and lead to profound changes within his.

Some authors argue that although the CHEI “focuses on learning processes in the development of students' skills and minds, it is not implicitly a learning organization” (Brătianu, 2018, pp. 546-555). In our opinion, there are CHEI that have started to take steps towards their transformation into “organizations that learn and transmit learning”. Starting from David Garvin's (1993, pp. 78-91) article “Building a Learning Organization” we will further present the arguments that support the previous statement.

To transform an organization into a learning organization, Garvin recommends mastering (excelling in) five activities / criteria:

- systematic problem solving;
- experimenting with new approaches to work;
- learning from past experiences;
- learning from other organizations and clients;
- knowledge transfer throughout the organization.

In Table no. 1 we applied the CHEI criteria set out by Garvin.

**Table no. 1**  
*Criteria for transforming IISC into “learning organizations”*

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Argument</b>
<i>Systematic problem solving</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– reviewing university curricula and specializations by adapting to new social and economic realities, making them more flexible;</li> <li>– adapting education to present and future needs;</li> <li>– adapting to external changes and future trends.</li> </ul>
<i>Experiencing new approaches to work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– encourages existing teachers to develop professionally taking into account the skills they have and can turn into strengths;</li> <li>– recruitment of innovative teachers, open to the challenges determined by the increase of the competitiveness and the quality of the educational act, by the changes that appear, able to work in interdisciplinary teams;</li> <li>– focus on inter- and multidisciplinary research, with teams of teachers and students.</li> </ul>
<i>Learning from past experiences</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– adopting strategies that stimulate organizational learning;</li> <li>– the use of that “learned lessons” baggage as a basis for building a university environment based on excellence.</li> </ul>
<i>Learning from other organizations and clients</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– collaboration with other HEI in the country and / or foreign countries;</li> <li>– involvement of students in more and more activities (scientific, research, recreation, volunteering, etc.);</li> <li>– ERASMUS + program;</li> <li>– regular consultation with employers to update and improve the content of the educational process, so as to meet their needs.</li> </ul>
<i>Knowledge transfer throughout the organization</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– promoting interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary, but also multiculturalism;</li> <li>– support professional development based on creativity, learning, flexibility, adaptation and collaboration / cooperation.</li> </ul>

(Source: Author)

#### **4. Military higher education institutions – from “strongly standardized organizations” to “learning organizations”**

One of the important investments of the military organization is the investment in military education, education being “*one of the main factors in forming and maintaining an educational culture in organizational development*” (Rațiu, 2011, p. 193). A strong, professional military organization can be formed only if the human resource is well prepared, qualified. An important part of human resource training, the military education system is a component part of the national education system, being “*responsible for initial training and continuing professional development*”

(General Directorate of Human Resources Management, 2020). From a legislative point of view, the initial and continuous training of human resources is carried out in accordance with the national legislation on higher education and with the specific regulations of the Ministry of National Defense.

The transformation of the military organization and former military schools of active officers into the academies of the existing force categories did not take place linearly, but the evolution was irreversible. This transformation, which had in view both the modernization of the military organization and the military education, began in 1991 when, by the Romanian

Government Decision no. 190 of March 22, 1991, the former military schools for active officers are restructured, being transformed into military educational institutes, subordinated to the Ministry of National Defense. Military educational institutes were higher education institutions (Romanian Government Decision, no. 190, 1991, article 1) and had the mission of training “*officers necessary for the Romanian army, as well as other internal or external beneficiaries, in accordance with the requirements of the doctrine of Romania, military professionals with scientific, psycho-pedagogical and moral-civic knowledge to ensure a socio-professional status recognized by society by virtue of the competence and conscious attachment to the interests of the Romanian people and the values of the rule of law*” (Ministry of National Defense, 1993, Articles 1 and 2). Along with the transformation into military educational institutes and the transition of the officer profession among the professions that require university level training, the opening to the civilian environment takes place. Military institutes “*develop, in specific forms, links with other military and civilian institutions of higher education and scientific research that lead to the engagement of military education in multiple directions of modernization, including scientific research, teaching quality and material base will occupy a priority place*” (Ministry of National Defense, 1993, Article 3).

In 1995, the Military Education Reform began to be implemented in military institutes, with the aim of “*training qualified military personnel and training students in specific military institutions*” (Zulean, 2008, p. 43) by “*modernizing and increasing the performance of the military organization and military higher education in accordance with the evolutions of the Romanian Army, of the Romanian society and of the world*” (Sfârlog, Baboș &

Rizescu, 2006, p. 8) and “*the realization of an education system compatible with those of the armies of the NATO member countries*” (Sfârlog, Baboș & Rizescu, 2006, p. 8). The first step in carrying out the reform and in reconfiguring the education of future officers was the transformation of military institutes into academies of force categories.

Military higher education is “*the most important and valuable segment of formal military education*” (Rațiu, 2011, p. 211). Due to its specificity, “*military education has a series of features that give it uniqueness and is subject to the general rules of formal university education, but also to the specific rules of the military field to which it is addressed*” (Ghica-Radu, Chețe & Rațiu, 2010, p. 94).

Because the officers “*represent the elite corps of the Romanian Army*” (General Directorate of Human Resources Management, 2021) and are “*soldiers who have graduated from university and perform functions with command / command or execution*” (General Directorate of Human Resources Management, 2021), in the training of future officers military higher education must take into account the link between individual instruction, education and the reality of the dynamic environment, in continuous transformation, in which graduates will work. Therefore, the training programs of future officers are based on three components: academic training, military training, physical training. While education has, predominantly, theoretical contents, the instruction has an applicative character, the theoretical contents helping to understand the activities, operations and other processes related to the implementation of military action.

According to the National Education Law, “*military, intelligence, public order and national security higher education is state education, an integral part of the national education system and includes: university*

education for the training of officers, police officers and other specialists, such as and postgraduate education” (National Education Law, No. 1/2011, article 176).

Currently, higher military education is carried out (General Directorate of Human Resources Management, 2020) in the academies of force categories (“Nicolae Bălcescu” Land Forces Academy in Sibiu, “Henri Conadă” Air Force Academy in Braşov, “Mircea cel Bătrân” Naval Academy in Constanţa), in the “Ferdinand I” Military Technical Academy from Bucharest and in the “Carol I” National Defense University from Bucharest. All military higher education institutions (hereinafter referred to as MHEI) carry out their activity according to the national legislation in the field of university education and the specific regulations of the Ministry of National Defense, being accredited.

Since 2007, most military academies have become part of the ERASMUS

mobility program. Even if the beginning was “with many restraints and question marks regarding the capacity of our institutions and those of the partners to fulfill the contractual terms” (Bârsan, 2018, p. 12), in time we reached “sustainable and solid partnerships, a relationship of mutual trust [...] and true military communion at European level” (Bârsan, 2018, p. 12). Interaction with students from other cultures leads to “the development of working skills and competences in an international environment, [...] the development of communication skills in English” (Bârsan, 2018, p. 12).

In our opinion, even if IISM is based on the rigorous way of thinking and action specific to the military environment and respects the regulations, norms and military hierarchy, in recent years they have begun to turn into “learning organizations”. In Table no. 2 we present the arguments that support this statement.

**Table no. 2**  
*Criteria for transforming ISIS into “learning organizations”*

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Argument</b>
<i>Systematic problem solving</i>	– the university curriculum and specializations are permanently adapted to the needs of the Ministry of National Defense and of other beneficiaries for whom the schooling is done.
<i>Experiencing new approaches to work</i>	– encourages military and civilian teachers to develop professionally, turning their skills into strengths; – recruitment of innovative military and civilian teachers, open to the challenges determined by the increase of the competitiveness and the quality of the educational act, by the changes that appear, able to work in interdisciplinary teams; – the exchange of ideas between teachers from the same institution or from partner, military and civilian institutions is encouraged; – emphasizes inter- and multidisciplinary research, with teams of military and / or civilian teachers and students.
<i>Learning from past experiences</i>	– stimulates learning from past actions and activities (“lessons learned”).

Criteria	Argument
<i>Learning from other organizations and clients</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– collaboration with other HEI in the country and / or foreign countries;</li> <li>– involvement of military students in more and more activities (scientific, research, recreation, volunteering, etc.);</li> <li>– involvement of military students and young graduates in ERASMUS+, EMILYO (European Young Officers Exchange Initiative) programs;</li> <li>– organizing an international semester in which military and civilian students from other countries participate;</li> <li>– participation of military students in activities carried out in partner military institutions (International Week, sports activities and competitions, military exercises, etc.);</li> <li>– regular consultation with the beneficiaries in order to update and improve the content of the instructive-educational process, so as to respond to their needs.</li> </ul>
<i>Knowledge transfer throughout the organization</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– promoting inter- and multidisciplinary;</li> <li>– supporting professional development based on creativity, learning, flexibility, adaptation and collaboration / cooperation;</li> <li>– adopting strategies that stimulate organizational learning.</li> </ul>

(Source: Author)

### 5. Conclusions

The transformation of the IISC into a “learning organization” will not happen instantly, because an organization’s culture cannot be changed “overnight” and not all members of the academic community react positively to change. A parallel can be drawn between the transition of IIS from the “knowledge-based organization” to the current “learning and transmitting learning organization” with the period in which computers were introduced to support teaching activities. A time when many teachers did not use computers and were reluctant to use new technologies in the teaching process, considering that they

were not helpful in the teaching process. Today, most teachers use new teaching technologies because they allow them to transform the learning environment in line with progressive pedagogies (Manlow, Friedman & Firedman, 2010, pp. 47-64). The usefulness of new teaching technologies has proved its effectiveness in the last year, when online education was the one that helped academic teachers to carry out their teaching activities, and HEI to conduct admission competitions (bachelor’s, master’s, postgraduate or doctoral), bachelor’s, dissertation, certification or doctoral dissertation exams (Ministry of Education and Research, 2020).

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