

The importance of training for the development and strengthening of a company's competitive position

Značaj obuke za razvoj i jačanje konkurentske prednosti preduzeća

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Abstract

The development and achievement of a 21st century company's desired market positioning is primarily based on innovation, creativity, education, and the functional knowledge of employees. The goal of this paper is to emphasize the relevance of training for the development and strengthening of a company's competitive position, and therefore a primary survey was created in order to look at the attitudes and opinions of employees regarding employee training for different positions in companies working in the Republic of Serbia. The data was collected via the direct survey method while participation in the survey was voluntary. The research sample was a purposive sample of employees from small and medium-sized enterprises holding managerial and non-managerial positions. One hundred and twenty-three respondents (n=123) participated in the research. The data was collected from May 2022 until November 2022. Despite the fact that a statistically significant difference was not detected during the assessment of satisfaction with training programs in a company, the impact of training on the motivation of non-managerial staff, in relation to employees in managerial positions, was significantly expressed.

Keywords: training, motivation, development management, development

Sažetak

Razvoj i dostizanje željenog tržišnog pozicioniranja preduzeća u 21. veku zasnivaju se prevashodno na inovativnosti, kreativnosti, obrazovanju i funkcionalnim znanjima zaposlenih. Cilj rada je da se naglasi relevantnost obuke za razvoj i jačanje konkurentske pozicije preduzeća, te je stoga kreirano primarno ispraživanje kako bi se sagledali stavovi i mišljenja zaposlenih o obukama zaposlenih na različitim pozicijama u preduzećima u Republici Srbiji. Podaci su prikupljeni metodom neposrednog anketiranja, a učešće u anketi bilo je dobrovoljno. Istraživački uzorak bio je namerni uzorak zaposlenih u malim i srednjim prduzećima na pozicijama menadžera i nemanadžera. U istraživanju je učestvovalo 123 ispitanika (n=123). Vreme prikupljanja podataka bilo je od maja 2022. godine do novembra 2022. godine. Uprkos tome što nije detektovana statistički značajna razlika u proceni zadovoljstva programima obuke u kompaniji, uticaj obuke na motivaciju nemanadžerskog osoblja je značajno izraženo u odnosu na zaposlene na menadžerskim pozicijama.

Ključne reči: obuka, motivacija, upravljanje razvojem, razvoj

1. Introduction

Intellectual capital is one of the most essential factors in Education is seen as an existential investment that implies a strategic approach in order to ensure adequate knowledge and skills. Considering that formal education is not sufficient, it is necessary to continuously plan and organize trainings. The development of the Internet and related technologies has contributed to the accelerated

demand for innovative ideas, creative solutions and personalized products and services.

Organizations that prioritize knowledge and creativity as fundamental drivers of profit focus on fostering teamwork and well-being to facilitate the generation of fresh insights (Crnčević, Ateljević, 2011). The progression towards a knowledge-based and creative economy widens the disparity between the wealthy and the underprivileged. In

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the context, the presence of local talents plays a crucial role in advancing a knowledge-based and creative economy (Weiming, 2000).

Human resources management requires a whole range of knowledge and skills. Already in the planning phase, it is expected to emphasize the knowledge and skills that are necessary for employees. Bakić (2002) emphasizes the importance of development, training, and education for achieving and maintaining competitive ability, appreciating that, for human resources, continuous professional development is required in addition to formal education. Therefore, the claim that the success of an organization is primarily based on the education and functional knowledge of employees is no longer questioned (Šekarić et al., 2015). Continuous training and education appear as an imperative for building and maintaining competitiveness, and the lack of alignment between employee education and training and real needs can generate dissatisfaction and reduced productivity. Therefore, human resources management is expected to harmonize actual competencies and the required level of employee education (Karaman-Aksentijević, Vujić, 2010).

There is an inextricable link between training and development while the acquired knowledge and skills are also reflected in human resources management. The necessity of significant investment in knowledge and modern cultural patterns has been accepted as confirmation of a cost-effective approach for everyone, from employees, organizations to the social community (Zjalić, 2009).

Another relevant dimension of activity, that is directly related to recruitment and selection, is often pointed out regardless of the methods used (Mathis & Jackson, 2011): in order for recruiters and managers to be able to successfully respond to the obligations placed before them, they need to be provided with appropriate training and coaching on topics related to recruitment, communication skills and job-specific activities.

2. Literature review

Employee instruction and training

Training and development are valued as relevant HR activities: the first step is to identify training needs, followed by the selection of an appropriate program. The use value of knowledge is being increasingly shortened, which imposes the need and motivates employees to invest in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, which means a key competitive breakthrough for a company.

Training should contribute to changes in specific knowledge, skills, and abilities, as well as in attitudes and behavior, and should pertain to the existing workplace. Training is not a continuous process but is linked to current activities. In this sense, training combines numerous activities, and is based on four phases (Buble, 2006: 405): determination of the real need for organizing

training, planning, implementation, and evaluation of the success of training. Training of employed staff is an opportunity for the organization to monitor market changes, as well as to harmonize activities with the requirements of the environment, taking into account its own needs and the needs of users (Đorđević Boljanović, Pavić, 2011).

Training is recognized as an organization's planned activity in order to improve the performance of staff at the workplace (Bogićević, 2003). In this respect, after identifying training needs, it is necessary to determine who the training is intended for, *i.e.*, identify the target group, then determine who will perform training, which programs will be performed and which type of skills should be developed (Bogićević Milikić, 2006). On the other hand, development is oriented towards the time yet to come and represents a platform for acquiring new knowledge, skills and abilities, without neglecting the improvement of current jobs.

The central theme in the human resources management process, apart from the development of key competencies, should be directed towards the evaluation of the effectiveness of investing in human resources. Measures of the intensity of investment in human resources can be visualized through the length of training, dedicated funds, diversity, availability, and number of trainings, then through the rate of return on investment in human resources and the correlation between estimated and required knowledge and skills (Đuričin, Janošević, 2009). The development of human resources in Serbia, and countries in the region, corresponds to a greater representation of multinational companies, which have brought not only their production and services but also modern human resources management practices. Training programs have been started with the aim of building the necessary competencies, *i.e.*, training of employees to use new technologies, but also to develop new skills such as leadership development, communication skills, teamwork, emotional skills, and other activities (Svetlik et al., 2010).

Employee education

There are significant differences in the number of those who go through job-related education and training. Career development greatly strengthens the links between the interests and needs of each individual and the organization, which does not require matching the needs of employees for career development with the needs of the organization for qualified personnel, while pointing out the difference between a job and a career. Namely, a job is something that an employee does at a workplace for the sake of earning, while a career represents a fruitful, research activity that brings satisfaction (Bahtijarević-Šiber, 1999).

Čerović (2013) points out that the educational functions in a company are realized through the learning of employed staff, the organization of professional-specialist instruction and training, continuous education during the work process, as well as through professional training and

staff development. The quality of overall employee education in an organization is important for innovative and creative work. However, all employees are not and cannot be innovators and rationalizers. Authors Kulić and Đurić (2014) state that this does not mean that other qualified workers, who have acquired the necessary knowledge, skills, and competences, and who are oriented towards education and learning, do not represent development potential and a competitive market advantage. The more employees improve and project their professional development, the more visible the reflections of that improvement and development will be, that is, the greater the chances that human capital will be based on knowledge, ideas, competences, and creativity. As Đurić and Janošević (2009) point out, permanent education affects the possibility of a faster transfer to other workplaces, while it is important to stress the positive reflections on the career development of employees, which makes this one of the reasons that organizations have a strong influence on the motivation of employees undergoing an education process (Spector, 1997).

Employees are expected to be efficient and productive, as well as to stand out with their innovation and creativity, and to achieve these goals they must possess a number of abilities, knowledge, personality traits, skills, and motivation (Stefanović et al., 2012). In this sense, Čačić (2014) points out that employees who possess knowledge and expertise want to improve themselves and have an open path to advancement, while managers have the task of protecting them from the competition.

Education is a process that requires a lot of personal investment and sacrifice, with positive implications for economic-social and overall social development. The connection between family and education is becoming

more and more important, especially considering that education offers the possibility of economic independence and autonomy (Bošković, 2013). Continuous employee education is an effective way of achieving a competitive breakthrough, but also a fundamental assumption for participation in market competition with competition for favor and customer loyalty (Marušić, 2006).

Employee development

The process of employee development is a permanent activity within all organizations that have ambitions to win and maintain positions ahead of the competition. Employee development is an important business link in an organization's aspiration towards improving overall work, responding to numerous global and social challenges, incorporating the offered innovations into the work environment, *i.e.*, managing talents in an efficient and fair manner (Đorđević Boljanović et al., 2017). At the foundation of employee development, we find the need for knowledge, abilities and skills needed to take on responsible and complex positions and jobs, which indicates that development expands overall individual potential and creates prerequisites for successful performance of existing and future jobs and tasks (Jovanović Božinov et al., 2008). Recognizing that development is future-oriented, it involves learning that is not necessarily related to the current work performed by employees. However, it should be pointed out that although there are similarities between training and development, there are also important differences. Training is traditionally aimed at improving performance, while development paves the way for other jobs in the organization and strengthens the ability to move to new jobs (Noe, 2010).

Table 1. Differentiating development and training

EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT	EMPLOYEE TRAINING
Development is directed towards the individual	Training is role-based
The essence of development is its long-term orientation and constant and open goals	In most cases, training is organized in a shorter period of time with a clearly defined goal
Development emphasizes wholeness and emphasizes overall individual progress	Training refers to a specific job or defining individual tasks
Development jobs are oriented towards the future	Training is aimed at meeting current business requirements
Development emphasizes advancement and career building	Training contributes to improving knowledge and skills for a specific role or job
Developmental business steps trend towards an individual experience based on a personalized development plan	Training programs are group, for example seminars, workshops or classes.
Development emphasizes individual responsibility for the development and implementation plan and implies personal self-assessment	The organization is responsible for the scope and quality of the training

Source: GyrusAim LMS, 2016.

Although both training and development should contribute to the acquisition of new knowledge and increased productivity, there is a clear difference in definition. Based on workplace requirements, organizations create training programs, while development is not directly related to job requirements, *i.e.*, it is observed in a broader time context where its goal is the generic development of employees.

Investing in the development of human capital can be viewed analogously to physical capital. Consequently, HR managers evaluate investment in training and education of personnel in a similar way as when deciding to invest in new technology. The common denominator for the above decisions is that they contain an investment in order to benefit in the future (Popov, 2014).

3. Data, methodology and research results

In order to assess the attitudes and opinions of employees about training for different positions in the organization (managerial, non-managerial) related to the development of human resources, motivation and requirements of a specific workplace in the organization, a primary survey was created. Through this approach, the authors emphasize the necessity of achieving the strategic goals of the organization and improving the organizational culture. In this context, the following research questions were created:

Q1. In what way and to what extent do training programs affect employee motivation?

Q2. Was knowledge in the organization managed in a planned manner and to what extent?

Q3. In what way and to what extent did the trainings determine the performance of the employed staff, in order to achieve the strategic goals of each individual and the organization as a whole?

Data collection was organized through direct survey on a voluntary basis, exclusively for the purposes of this work. The research samples consisted of purposefully selected employees from small and medium-sized enterprises in the Republic of Serbia, encompassing both management and non-management positions. The pilot survey involved 20 respondents, while the final number of participants was 123 ($n=123$). The survey was conducted between May 2022 and November 2022.

Respondents were required to express their attitudes and opinions in response to open questions, and qualitative were employed to address their expectations. The questionnaire comprised closed-type questions categorized as scale, ordinal, and nominal for measurement purposes. Respondents rated their attitudes and opinions on a scale ranging from 1 to 7, where 1 - I denoted complete disagreement, and 7 – represented complete agreement. To answers the research questions, measures of central tendency, dispersion, symmetry, and correlation analysis were computed. For hypothesis testing, parametric and non-parametric techniques were used (T-test of independence, Test of independent samples), Mann-Whitney U test, and Kruskal-Wallis's test).

4. Research results

123 respondents participated in the research: 59 (48.0%) women and 64 (52.0%) men. Thirty-one (25.2%) respondents were employed in managerial positions, of which 16 were women and 15 were men, and 92 (74.8%) respondents were employed in non-managerial positions, of which 43 were women and 49 were men. The highest percentage of respondents have a completed secondary education, 46.3% and 32.5% college. See Table 2.

The average age of the respondents was 36.15 years, the median was 36 years, the mode was 35 years, Q1 was 31 years, Q3 was 40 years (IQR=9) and the coefficient of variation was 16.93%. For respondents holding a

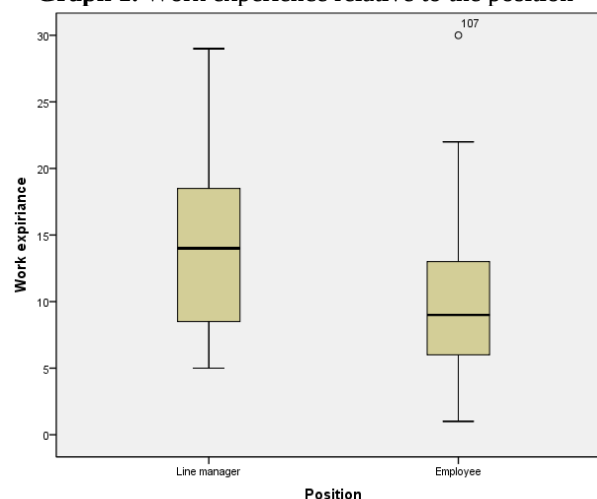
managerial position, the average age was 39.68 years, the median was 38 years, while the respondents holding non-managerial positions had an average age of 35.18 years, and the median was 35 years. The average work experience of the respondents was 11.15 years, the median was 10 years, the mode was 6 years, Q1 was 6 years, Q3 was 15 years (IQR=9) and the coefficient of variation was 56.63%. The average work experience of respondents holding managerial position was 14.52 years, the median was 14 years, while the average work experience of respondents holding a non-managerial position was 9.88 years, with a median of 9 years.

Table 2. Demographic structure

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	64	52.0
	Female	59	48.0
	Total	123	100.0
Education of the respondents	Secondary education	12	9.8
	College	40	32.5
	Faculty (university)	57	46.3
	Master	13	10.6
	PhD	1	.8
	Total	123	100.0
Position in the company	Managerial	31	25.2
	Non-managerial	92	74.8
	Total	123	100.0

Source: Authors' calculation

Graph 1. Work experience relative to the position



Source: Authors' calculation

Satisfaction with received training was rated by the respondents with an average score of 5.15, the median was 5, the mode was 6, the minimum score was 3 and the maximum was 7, the variable had no outlier data and showed a mean negative asymmetry, *Skewness* was -0.360 with relatively weak variability, the coefficient of variation was 20.19%.

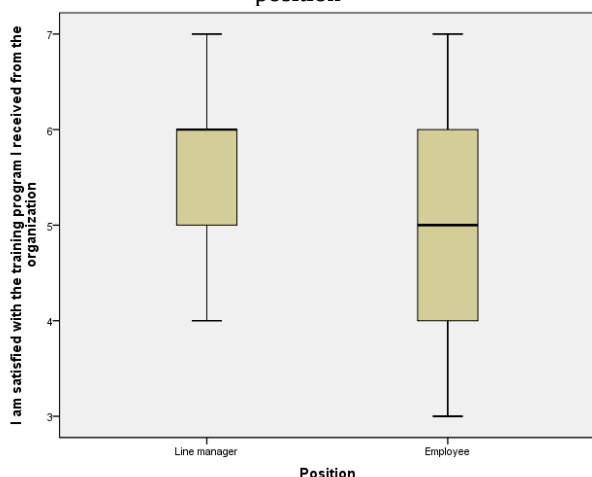
The Mann-Whitney U test did not reveal a statistically significant difference in the evaluation of satisfaction with the company's training programs for managers ($Me=6.0$, $n=31$) and non-managers ($Me=5.0$, $n=92$), $U=1213.00$, $z=-1.300$, $p=0.193$. The Mann-Whitney U test also did not reveal a statistically significant difference in the

assessment of satisfaction with the company's training programs for women ($Me=5.0$, $n=59$) and men ($Me=5.0$, $n=64$), $U=1811$, 50 , $z= -0.406$, $p=0.685$. The 1.5IQR interval for both groups of respondents (women and men) ranged from 3 to 7, and the variable had no outlier data for any of the groups.

The Kruskal Wallis Test did not reveal a statistically significant difference related to the assessment of satisfaction with training programs for the four educational level groups (Gp1, $n=12$: Secondary education, Gp2, $n=40$: College, Gp3, $n=57$: Faculty (university), Gp4, $n=13$: Master), $\chi^2(3, n=122) = 2.983$, $p=0.394$.

Given that only one respondent had the highest level of education and the title of Doctor of Science, that group of respondents was excluded from the analysis.

Graph 2. Satisfaction with training programs relative to position



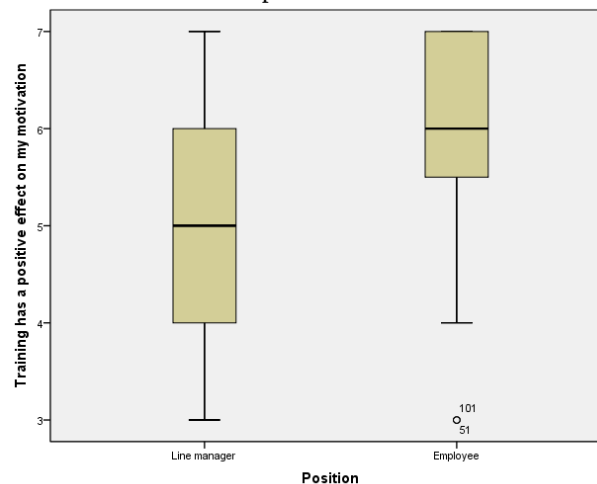
Source: Authors' calculation

The respondents evaluated the impact of training on their own motivation with an average score of 5.80, the median was 6, the mode was 7, the variable showed relatively weak variability (the coefficient of variation was 20.83%), with a strong negative asymmetry ($Skewness=-0.707$). The 1.5IQR interval ranged from 3 to 7, and the variable had no outlier data. If we look at the impact of training on motivation, according to the position held by the respondents within the company, managers evaluate the impact of training on motivation with an average score of 4.94, with a median of 5, a mode also of 5 and a very small positive asymmetry ($Skewness=0.130$), while respondents in non-managerial positions gave an average score of 6.09, a median score of 6, and a mode of 7 with a strong negative asymmetry ($Skewness=-1.038$).

The Mann-Whitney U test revealed a statistically significant difference in the evaluation of satisfaction with the company's training program for managers ($Me=5.0$, $n=31$) and non-managers ($Me=6.0$, $n=92$), $U=695.00$, $z= -4.440$, $p<0.001$, impact size $r = \frac{z}{\sqrt{N}} = \frac{4.440}{\sqrt{123}} = 0.40$, i.e., it can be said that the impact is great (Cohen, 1988). The variable was on average higher (with a higher Mean Rank)

among the group of respondents employed in a non-managerial position.

Graph 3. The effect of training on motivation relative to position

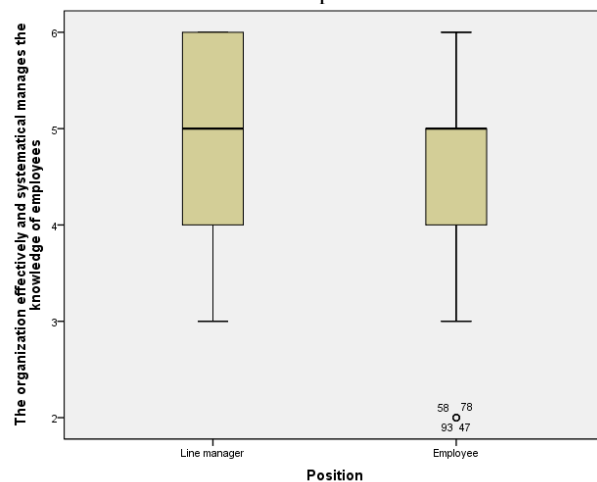


Source: Authors' calculation

The Mann-Whitney U test did not reveal a statistically significant difference in the evaluation of satisfaction with the company's training program for women ($Me=6.0$, $n=59$) and men ($Me=6.0$, $n=64$), $U=1831.50$, $z= -0.298$, $p=0.766$.

The Kruskal Wallis Test did not reveal a statistically significant difference related to the assessment of satisfaction with training programs for the four educational level groups (Gp1, $n=12$: Secondary education, Gp2, $n=40$: College, Gp3, $n=57$: Faculty (university), Gp4, $n=13$: Master), $\chi^2(3, n=122) = 0.689$, $p=0.876$. The group with a Doctor of Science degree was excluded from the analysis given that only one respondent had that level of education.

Graph 4. Knowledge management in the organization relative to position



Source: Authors' calculation

Knowledge management in an organization was evaluated by the respondents with a not very high average score of 4.54, the median was 5, the mode was 5, the interval 1.5IQR ranged from 3 to 6 and the variable had outlier

data. Respondents in a non-managerial position rated knowledge management with an even lower average rating of 4.46, the median was 5 and the mode was 5, compared to respondents in a managerial position who gave an average rating of 4.81, a median of 5, and a mode of 6. The variable for the group of non-managerial positions had outlier data.

The coefficients of variation for both groups of respondents are almost the same. For managerial position, the coefficient of variation was 24.26% and for non-managerial positions it was 24.96%, i.e., the variable for both groups showed a relatively weak variability. Respondents estimated the connection between training and education and the workplace with an average score of 5.76, with a median and mode of 6, and a 1.5IQR interval ranging from 4 to 7.

The independent t-test was used to compare the results of the assessment of the connection between training and education and the workplace of the respondents in managerial and non-managerial positions. There was no significant difference in the results of managers

(*Mean*=5.77, *SD*=0.884) and non-managers (*Mean*=5.76, *SD*=0.843); $t(123) = 0.075$, $p = 0.940$ (mutual). The difference between the mean values of the variable by group (mean difference=0.013, and 95% *CI*: -0.338 to 0.364) was very small $\eta^2 = \frac{t^2}{t^2 + (N_1 - N_2 - 2)} = \frac{0.075^2}{0.075^2 + (31 + 92 - 2)} < 0,001$ (Choen, 1988, 284-287).

In Tables 3 and 4, we can see that among all the variables: I am satisfied with the training program I received within the organization; Training has a positive effect on my motivation; Within the organization, knowledge is managed effectively and in a planned manner, and training and education are connected with the requirements of the workplace, there are very weak linear connections. For the group of respondents in managerial positions, some of those connections are even invasive, which should not be, given that the respondents in the position of manager are the ones who create (plan) and organize training, instructions or education, in general, within an organization.

Table 3. Correlation - position Manager

Items	Mean	St. Dev.	1	2	3	4
I am satisfied with the training program I received at the organization.	5.38	0.882	-			
Training has a positive effect on my motivation	4.94	1.237	-0.007	-		
Knowledge is managed effectively and in a planned manner within the organization	4.81	1.167	0.172	-0.217	-	
Training and education are related to the requirements of the workplace	5.77	0.884	0.073	0.169	-0.205	-

Source: Authors' calculation

Table 4. Correlation - position non-managerial

Items	Mean	St. Dev.	1	2	3	4
I am satisfied with the training program I received at the organization.	5.08	1.082	-			
Training has a positive effect on my motivation	6.09	1.055	0.129	-		
Knowledge is managed effectively and in a planned manner within the organization	4.46	1.113	0.153	0,218*	-	
Training and education are related to the requirements of the workplace	5.76	0.843	0.044	0.011	0.223*	-

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Authors' calculation

5. Conclusion

The primary research results show the great importance of training for a company: respondents of all groups, appreciating the job position, gender, and level of education, assessed that planning and organizational training is significant for the development and strengthening of the competitive position of an organization, which is exposed to constant and often unpredictable changes. The importance of motivational training was rated highly by both groups of respondents, but respondents in a non-managerial position gave a slightly higher importance with 50% of them giving a score of 7. When observing satisfaction with the training programs and the training itself, conducted within an organization, the group of respondents holding a non-managerial position showed greater satisfaction, which is contrary to expectations because managers are the ones

who make decisions and are responsible for the selection and implementation of all conducted training programs. What is important to note is that both groups of respondents estimate that the connection of training and education with the workplace is at a high level and a statistically significant difference in the results between the groups was not observed. Both groups of respondents gave a low score to an assessment of knowledge management, while the respondents in non-managerial positions gave a slightly lower average score for this item. In addition, managers and employees in non-management positions showed a low level of response, which constitutes a significant link between the goals of organizational change, on the one hand, and training, on the other hand, which should contribute to business changes. Respondents holding managerial positions had a lower level of results for certain answers. Such results may be the result of a weak connection between the

purpose and the goals of changes, or the goal being aversely supported by training, which can create resistance to the changes that the organization itself was striving for. Research has confirmed that if the management team of an organization does not prepare all aspects of a change, it is not possible to expect a significant contribution from employees in non-managerial positions who participate in that process.

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