

Social Sciences Today

Social Sciences Today:
Between Theory and Practice

Edited by

Georgeta Rață and Maria Palicica

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P U B L I S H I N G

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CHAPTER NUMBER

HIGHER SCHOOL INFORMATIONAL SYSTEM IN
THE INTERNET ENVIRONMENT

PREDRAG PRTLJAGA

Introduction

Industry and technology we know, grounded on mechanics, i.e. machines controlled by man or facilitating manual production, underwent significant changes in the end of 20th century with the accelerated development of informational technologies. IT development was followed by the development of laser and nuclear technologies, biotechnology, genetic engineering, technology of new materials, space technology, consequently imposing the need for highly educated, as well as professionally educated staff. Starting from so broadly set facts we can notice that, apart from industry and technology, there are simultaneous social changes influenced by the above mentioned developments. Accordingly, conclusion can be made that the sphere of education, as an important element of contemporary society, is also facing changes. This very fact points to the need for education to develop and adjust according to the latest tendencies. To position education in its place and in accordance with the spirit of our time, it is necessary to thoroughly deal with the current and anticipated changes, inevitably changing the dimension of knowledge, or, to be more precise, the dimension of knowledge acquisition. The necessity to perceive future changes conditions education to prepare a student for easy acceptance of change, adaptation and readiness for continual change. The task of education is therefore visionary, based on the latest theoretical insights, and in our case it is possible to build it according to the experience of more developed countries.

Theoretical Background

One of the prominent change theorists, Peter Draker (2003) points to some changes we have to be prepared for in the age of knowledge:

- demographic changes;
- increased numbers of years to be spent in service;
- division into two groups of workers, those under 50 and those above 50;
- birth rate fall;
- great migrations;
- knowledge capitalism (knowledge workers become new capitalists);
- breakthrough of women into business world.

These facts are closely related and interrelated with higher life quality significantly influencing life prolongation. Breakthrough of women into business world, as well as other factors, indisputably influences birth rate, as well as aging of population. These factors contribute to the fact that there are two groups of workers around the age of fifty: with working energy and general physical predispositions for working longer hours to be used in the first group, consisting of workers under fifty, and the dimension of experience and gained knowledge to be used in the second group of workers who are above fifty. Due to the concentration of specific industries and infrastructure migration continue, not characterized by rural areas desertion, but commuting between towns.

Considering the future of organizations, Draker (2003) emphasizes the demand

...to use **knowledge**, i.e. to develop the next generation of knowledge application according to its own success.

and

...to learn to **innovate** and organize innovation as system process.

These two demands bring the terms of knowledge and innovation together into powerful connection, becoming first omens of the direction in which to develop, organize and concise education.

The futurists, J. Cetron & Owen Davies (2005), have also been dealing with contemporary trends among which we are to find guidelines for educational development. They have concluded that

...the term of **technology** in its broader meaning implies – knowledge.

with

...**research** and **development** playing significant role in economics.

and

the **Internet** growing both logarithmically and geographically.

With the eventual introduction of the term **informatics** we come to terminological confusion and at the same time to terminological freedom, representing both the current and future periods as a “new age”, “post-industrial age”, “informational society”, “both society and age of knowledge”, etc. It is beyond dispute that all these terms refer to the period of domination of informatics and knowledge, i.e. to the period of change of industrial character of production. In the domain of knowledge acquisition, before all informational knowledge, there are also versatile terms in use: “informatics teaching methodology”, “educational informational technology”, “informational education teaching methodology”, etc, opening various questions. Before all, can all this knowledge be condensed into a pattern of informational education, should we educate in order to understand informatics, or should we teach informatics, should it be understood as a support to education or as an essence of the process...?

Without an intention to explicate the terminological problem further, it is possible to draw a conclusion that for the generations to come solution lies in **new comprehension of education**. Rather than being characterised by traditional transfer of knowledge, which has to survive as a starting point in any knowledge acquisition, educational system has to change the personality of a student.

The fast development of informational technologies has brought to the inevitable presence of informational means in education, as well as introduction of subjects dealing with studying informatics at primary and secondary school level, as well as at higher education. However, the use of informational means has to a great extent been conditioned by the economic status of a school, which is often too low. The second important factor is unwillingness of teaching staff to reject classical methods of teaching. Of course, the role of the state is not to be neglected, having in mind that it does not express readiness to get involved into the latest trends thus preventing more significant presence of computers and additional equipment in schools, very often due to inadequate distribution according to political and many other non-transparent criteria.

Informatics teaching is also under the influence of non-existence of adequate teaching means, inappropriate teaching staff, and maybe even to greatest extent under inflexibility of the curricula which are often far behind current technological achievements, which used to be and still are in the field of informational technologies of crucial importance.

To overcome these difficulties and harmonize education with current trend means to **introduce informational systems** in education. Therefore it is necessary to define the term in general, as well as its meaning in the field of education. In order to define the term it is before all necessary to understand its purpose in the light of informational technologies in general. As a part of business, technical and social systems, IS enables qualitative and efficient gathering, processing and distribution of information, their transfer by the means of computers and informational technologies – networks, as well as the final use of information in any place and any moment. At the same time, informational systems are complex technical systems having available different pieces of information according to their type and origin. Consequently, the essence of processing in such a system is a selection of valid pieces of information, noticing and rejection of similar and unnecessary ones, and finally, the display of the needed pieces of information in adequate form.

As complex systems, IS are divided so that in the same place they demand interaction of hardware and software (to put it simply – computer, operational systems and applications). On the other hand, they are also linked into networks which can be local at the level of a room or object or within or between towns and states. On the top of this pyramid there is the Internet as a spatially unlimited – global network.

Systems described in such a way have been defined by the authors D. Branković & D. P. Mandić as

...systems whose aim is to provide at minimal costs the necessary pieces of information to all the users at any moment. (Branković & Mandić 2003)

According to V. Sotirović, IS implies

...split, heterogeneous technical system, representing knowledge of various types and origin, processing these knowledge representations in the form of data and programs and, making their appropriate forms available to final users. (Sotirović 2000)

The definitions of these authors, as well as many others, are in agreement on the point that the outcome of informational systems is a “useful and

timely” piece of information, while all other differences arise from the author’ research aspect and approach.

Analysis and the Results of the First Phase of High School Informational System Construction

It is beyond dispute that informational systems have very complex structure possible to build in two ways: from bottom to top, or from top to bottom. At the level of a state, for example, educational system could look like the following: there would be the ministry of education on the top, which is in linear connection with other ministries, indirectly involved in education (e.g. ministry of finance); sub-systems could be established centres for gathering information in the field of pre-school, primary school, secondary school, and finally, higher education; branching could further go directly to individual institutions, or, in a better case, to regional or district centres on the way to the systems of basic educational units (kindergarten, school, faculty, etc). If the system was established from top to bottom, information demanded from, for example a college in the system of higher education, which will be dealt with in the paper, would be clearly defined. Shortcomings of the “state” system make us assume which pieces of information would be necessary to send as “final” to higher level of the system for gathering of information. On the other hand, such a situation provides us with a certain amount of freedom to concise an IS of a professional college, when structuring and organization is in question, so that the system is adjusted to the current functional sub-systems of the college.

To determine the existent sub-systems would be the first assumption of IS projection. In first attempt, sub-systems are classified according to their “visibility”. It has been assumed that the deeper analysis would probably point to the existence of others, at the moment not involved systems. At the same time, the result of the analysis could be depletion of two or more subsystems into one.

Respecting the current organization of the college, the following subsystems have been isolated:

- the principle;
- the accountant (finances);
- library;
- secretariat;
- students service;
- departments;
- students.

The analysis of the stated subsystems, documents and information involved should enable its connection into a unique organized system, aiming at provision of not only timely availability and purposefulness of valid information, but also their protection within and out of the college.

At the moment of writing this paper, the first step has been made in the attempt to build an IS of a professional college, implying gathering of documentation in the stated subsystems. As a basic carrier of information, documentation has been classified into two categories: documents remaining within a subsystem and documents “travelling” between two or more subsystems. The paper will not deal with the techniques of gathering and processing of the data. Instead, two outcomes of this phase will be emphasized: revelation of an important and all-pervasive component – knowledge, as well as boiling the system down to only three essential subsystems: administration, teaching staff and students.

An important conclusion made in this phase of building an IS of a professional college was to perceive knowledge as a separate component and to make an attempt to make **knowledge management** possible through the introduction of an IS. It is necessary to put those possessing the component (teachers, students) in the first place and to subsequently in the process of building the system put them in interaction with the outer systems, identified as sources and generators of knowledge.

The starting point in the study of knowledge component in our system was the statement made by Peter Draker:

...the key (for knowledge revolution) is not electronics but cognitive sciences. (Draker 2003)

Consequently, to be connected with the term of knowledge management are the following:

- informational sciences;
- socio-cultural sciences;
- philosophy;
- organizational sciences.

It is obvious that the professional college whose IS we deal with owns at least some, if not all the elements necessary to competently cope with **knowledge management**, leading to a system which could be comprehensive both in its cognitive sense and in the spirit of **new understanding of education**.

Procedures and the Assumptions of the Second Phase of High School Informational System Construction

Initially anticipated classification to subsystems has undergone a change, in such a way that all the subsystems will be considered to be interest groups within the college. As the base of research, the defined group “teaching staff” will, apart from having the role of knowledge carrier, be the most significant factor of organization and information management. The “administrative” group will be organized as a part of the system designated for gathering and partial processing of data and their archiving. The interest group “students” will be defined as a component of the IS which is both the source and the greatest user of information (Table 1). According to this organizational scheme, basic circulation of information will be determined; sources will be defined, as well as spots of gathering and, finally, their users. As one of the results, the places of data processing within the IS will be emphasized.

Having in mind the new assumed organization of the informational systems, there will be no sample in the group of “administration”, but all its members will be involved in the analysis. In the group of “teaching staff” the sample will be based on those who are fully employed at the college, due to their availability, and before all, their insights into activities going on at the college. At the same time, a smaller number of teachers who do not belong to the above category will also be included, if there are closely connected with the work of the college. The sample in the group of “students” will mostly consist of full-time students, financed by the state, but special attention will be paid to self-supporting students, having in mind that these students are often employed, not living in the place where the college is located, etc. Thus they represent a more demanding group in comparison to all the time present (full time) students, especially when we are talking about organizational information.

The research within the group “administration” will be based on an interview, which will be basically the same for all the subjects, but will be adapted to concrete service during the interview, according to the given answers. The “teaching staff” will be subjected to two phases of the research. The first step will involve questionnaire, the same for all the members of the group. Having processed the obtained data, we would be in a position to perceive those participants whose interviewing would enable better organization, processing and concretizing of information, before all knowledge, i.e. it would be possible to make knowledge management possible. The group “students” will be polled, according to a questionnaire aiming at defining those pieces of information which are

necessary for students in the process of their education, but also in the sense of preserving a continual connection with former students who continued their professional carriers in the institutions they were educated for. Consequently, the group will consist of in-service training students working in educational institutions, as well.

Table 1. The comparison of the conclusions of the second phase of the analysis

Identified components of high school IS in the present paper	ITS components
Teaching staff	Classes Subjects Exams
Students	Students and studies
Administration	Finances Marketing

The Demands of the Third Phase and the Analysis of Other Information Systems for Education

The next phase would involve the processing of the obtained data. In the scope of “administration” represented by the director, secretary, accountancy service and the referent for student matters, the following would be defined: general information, professional information and information **to** and **from** other relevant factors (professors, students). “Teaching staff” would be the group with the most intense flow of information and at the same time the greatest “producer” of information. Apart from the flow of information “students” → “teaching staff” (processing of information – departments) → “administration” and vice versa, particularly significant component would be “production” of knowledge. As an important factor of this group, as well as the group “students” the library will be responsible for organization of knowledge, its processing and making it available to all the interested users of the system.

“Students” would in the anticipated IS be the most important users of the information, while in the sense of a source they would mostly be viewed in the domain of feedback (achievements in order to evaluate the fulfilment of obligations, as well as the level of their satisfaction with the available information). The work of the student parliament would to a certain degree be a generation of the pieces of information relevant for the work of

“administration”, although it has been assumed that it would mostly be boiled down to their reaction (feedback) to the existing circumstances. Systematization and flow of information would enable us build a proposition of a model of professional college information system. First of all, it is necessary to compare the obtained data with the stated assumption, harmonize them and modify so that they meet the needs of the existing stated of the system, or offer concrete suggestions for their modification. In the steps to come in the process of IS design, it would be purposeful to build a simplified graphic model or models. In case of models, there is a need to subsequently connect them at the level of the college. The model would then be analysed and explicated in detail, in the sense of functionality, information flow and the assumed (or obtained) results. The next phases of the construction of IS would put emphasise on openness of the system, the presence of the Internet, the possibility to connect to school, state, educational or other similar system. This implies harmonization with the demands of the Bologna declaration regarding standardization of education, and before all documentation and unlimited mobility of both knowledge and student population. At the same time, the stability and safety of the system would be considered in the light of its openness.

As a necessary element of this phase the need for analysing the existing informational systems in education imposes itself, as well as for insights into positive experiences implementation. It has already been stated that there has been a lack of “state” informational system in the field of education. Consequently, it is possible to consider only individual cases of informational technology application in this field of our society. At this level, the analysis will be directed to high professional schools, before all due to the structure of curricula and duration of studies. Closer look of IS of faculties of universities would certainly be of great use, but it would go beyond the scope of the present paper.

Searching for information of the implementation of informational systems in the field of higher education, it has been found that two themes dominate: distance learning and the application of IS for planning of teaching process in higher education institutions (schedule of classes, consultations and exams). It has also been noticed that almost every higher education institution has its own Internet site, which can also be considered an implementation of IT in education. This is the main reason why the author of the present paper has undertaken a research dealing with the analysis and comparison of the contents of ten sites of higher professional schools for preschool teacher education. The paper named *Internet sites – new face of the new school* will be published in the Book

of collected articles from the 5th Symposium *Preschool teacher in the 21st century*, held between March 27th and 28th 2009 in Sokobanja. For the purpose of the current paper only two valid conclusions are to be emphasised. Three out of ten analysed sites fall into the category of dynamic sites (allowing application for exams, sending seminar papers, etc..), while only two include detailed information on the available library funds and to an extent allow book reservation.

On the other hand, speaking of the full implementation of IS in the category of high professional schools the only available data refers to the High Professional School for IT in Belgrade. For the needs of the mentioned school the software firm SoftLink from Belgrade has made complete Software (abbreviated ITS), and thanks to the engagement of the employed and the students, the system functions. We shall now try to offer a brief comparison of the conclusions of the second phase of the analysis made in the present paper and the above mentioned program.

In making an effort to connect according to a certain analogy the assumed components in our case and the components (modules) in the real example, it is noticeable that all the elements referring “teaching staff” are at the same time elements of “students”, while the elements referring to “administration” are connected to “students” and “teaching staff”. It is obvious that any separation of the elements is impossible, but it is also clear that an organization in IS has to be done according to a certain model. What cannot be seen in ITS and what has been demanded as a visible component in our case is “knowledge”. At the same time this seems to be the task to which we should pay greatest attention in the development of any new IS in education.

Implementation of the IS of the professional college is still far from its realization, but it is necessary to have in mind possible hardware and software solution while the IS is being built. In the scope of hardware demands, it is essential to follow achievements regarding communicational technologies development (wireless communicational equipment, data protection devices...). When software is in question, apart from the tools to be used, it is important to get familiar with the existing solutions in both domestic and foreign market, comparing them with the suggested system of the school and possibilities of implementation and/or pointing to differences. It is necessary to consider the demands of official state institutions which occasionally but these days more and more often enable modern communication – by e-mail, or interactive forms installed at the sites of various state bodies, in order to gather information most often regarding educational and research work of professors in teaching and on various projects. Having all this in mind, we are facing the need to

ensure great adaptability of the system in order to, even after its integration into the organization, change the system and adjust it according to noticed shortcomings and in accordance with possible organizational and structural changes at the college, as well as in the society, i.e. educational or state system.

Conclusion

Finally, as a result of the current phase of building the described IS, certain changes of the college site have been proposed, in order to make the available information more useful and applicable. A fact should also be born in mind that certain hardware as well as software possibilities already are at the disposal of administration, professors and students and it is therefore possible to equip the interest groups with the skills necessary for successful functioning of the system and connect them into a system. It is expected that such moves would bring about positive changes in college, education and knowledge management.

It will be possible to estimate the real value of the proposed IS once it is introduced in the college, but the prior experiences of other schools, institutions or firms have already confirmed the fact that the introduction of an IS in an educational organization is purposeful and justified. Having all this in mind, it is to be expected that the students educated with the support of an IS would become initiators of similar initiatives in their future working places. At the same time, the information in external system could again find its place in the IS of the college, especially regarding connecting and maintenance of professional connection between former students with their college in order to be involved in continual life-long education.

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