

IMPROVING ORGANIZATION AND SKILLS OF PLANNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION USING NEW INFORMATIONAL-COMMUNICATIVE TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract

Change and knowledge management have in the conditions of rapid changes and severe demands imposed on modern organizations become high priority of social strategies. Readiness for change, flexible use of knowledge, creativity, permanent improvement of planning skills and knowledge are undoubtedly most important competencies of employees in modern organizations. The aim of the paper is to research possibilities to improve organizational and strategic skills in higher education using new informational-communicative technologies, according to undertaken need analysis. Results of the need analysis (sample N=33) conducted in November 2015 in the Preschool Teacher Training College in Vrsac (RS) showed that 48% of teaching staff and 62,5% of non-teaching staff evaluate their strategic skills, on a scale from 1 to 5, below 4 and 5. The results also showed that 72% of teaching and non-teaching staff had never attended a training aimed at improving organizational and strategic skills; 52% of teach-

ing staff and 12,5% of non-teaching staff use a computer to plan and organize work, excluding new programming tools. The obtained results imply that there is a need to initiate organization improvement through upgrading of organizational and strategic skills of employees. As a consequence, possibilities are considered in the paper of using new IC technologies for more successful planning and organization in settings similar to Preschool Teacher Training College, requiring high level of interconnectedness and team work in everyday activities.

Keywords: organization, organizational skills, strategic skills, ICT, higher education.

JEL Classification: D8, I2

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization, fast and intensive changes in the needs and demands of market, turbulences in internal and external environment, expansion of IC technologies – are only some of the processes influencing markedly dynamic and continuous changes of organizational setting. Organization functioning in such a complex and constantly changing context demands readiness for change and flexible use of people's knowledge in organizations (Drucker; 1995, Kotler; 1997, Nelson & Quick; 2003, Robbins; 2004, as cited by Đurišić Bojanović; 2007, 212).

Long-term and systematic planning of human resources and creation of functional strategies for their improvement and development, as a cornerstone of organizational development, is a basis of strategic management, taking place within the process of creation of organizational strategies (Bejatović et al.; 2010, 36). Such approaches have announced and marked a new approach to the role of human resources, pointing to great importance attributed to people in an organization, in order to reach strategic aims and improve success of an organization.

Radical novelties in the functioning of contemporary organizations, and thus organizations within higher education, are very complex and take place at the level of an organization, a group and an individual. *Management of self-development of an individual* is a dynamic process of change – it appears in an individual itself, enabling him/her a contact with the outer world, bringing him/her back to personality, changing both the person and the environment. Individuals who are successful in management of their own development are characterised by the following features: they have positive self-assessment, they evaluate themselves in a

more realistic and accurate way than others, they express higher levels of readiness for accepting themselves and others as they really are; they are ready to identify themselves with others to a greater extent, i.e. they have highly developed empathy; they perceive reality in more objective manner; they own more expressed independence and autonomy; they have more meaningful interpersonal relations of high quality, establishing higher levels of interconnectedness and closeness; they have democratically structured character and readiness to cooperate with others and they have a good sense of humour (Nedimović et al.; 2015, 123).

From psychological point of view, improvement of organizational skills and skills of planning at the level of an individual/organization is to a great extent conditioned by numerous factors undisputedly involving those of working motivation of the employed. Modern motivation theories (e.g. McClelland's three factor theory of needs) have emphasized the role and the importance of the *need for achievement* (aspiration towards success, striving for high achievements as compared to established standards), *need for power* (the need to make others behave in a way they would not normally behave) and *need for connection* (desire for friendly and close relations with other people). All three needs are of great importance for interpersonal interaction. They should be born in mind when motivating the employed to improve their own competencies, including organizational skills and skills of planning.

There are three typical general demands each organization (including higher education organizations) requires from its potentially employed staff: (1) becoming a part of an organization and staying in it, (2) carrying out appropriate organizational roles in anticipated way (routine work) and (3) additional, spontaneous and creative behaviour aiming at fulfilling functions and aims of the organization (Katz & Kahn; 1966, as cited by Vujić; 1995, 340). Motivation and readiness to improve organizational skills and skills of planning is in the domain of the third group demands.

Planning is defined as "man's cognitive activity oriented to anticipation, i.e. previous consideration of the objects, subjects, means, time, place and results of a future real activity in order to consciously regulate and rationalize it" (Ristić et al.; 2008, 141). Successful planning assumes respect for scientific principle, principle of complexity, reality, continuity, flexibility, simultaneity, productivity, sustainability, as well as profitability, and it undergoes various phases: ranging from analysis of the work done in the previous period, establishment of intrin-

sic and extrinsic factors, definition of aims, creation of a plan with tasks for each potential participant, to conceiving measures for reaching aims and fulfilling tasks. Product of planning is a multidimensional plan, followed by organization (i.e. “agreement on who does what”) of plan realization.

When higher education institutions are in question, we find ourselves in the domain of *learning organizations* (Garvin; 1993). According to Senge “learning organizations are those organizations in which the employed are constantly broadening and empowering their capacities for creating results they truly want to achieve [...] where people are learning how to learn together” (Senge; 2003, 135), i.e. those organizations in which employees do their jobs in such a way to develop their potentials, sharing the vision of mutual aim with their colleagues. There is certain organizational climate (individual perception of organizational characteristics of the institution) and culture (assumptions, value system, narrations, beliefs) in learning organizations (Nikčević; 2014, 69).

A good plan and successful organization lead, among other things, to savings of time – the only resource which is constantly and irretrievably spent. A sound plan, successful organization and *well chosen tools* for realization of plan and organization of work save time to even greater extent. In higher education institutions there are numerous time stealers and time wasters waiting in ambush: announced visits, private phone conversations, surfing on the Internet, unprepared meetings, vague aims, postponing work and – everyday correspondence exchanging various versions of materials among team members working on different tasks: ranging from accreditation documentation, materials prepared for publication to creation of documents as parts of any scientific conference, etc. Such work is not rarely followed by: fear that the wrong/old/outdated version of the material is sent, abundance of sent and received mails, dysfunctional correspondence (including, e.g. incompatible versions of computer programs), leading to unnecessary waste of time, work energy and enthusiasm of employees. The consequences of such work are felt before all by future academic citizens, i.e. students. Therefore it is a *duty* of each higher education institution to permanently monitor and assess success of planning and organizing at the level of both institution and each individual employee, which is in the domain of strategic management.

The application of information communication technologies in the field of higher education can be considered in two ways, as the use of ICT in the very process of learning (e.g. *distance learning*), but also as a means for planning, op-

erational realization and evaluation of teaching process (class schedule, exam timetable, consultations and other obligations schedule, preparation of documentations, dissemination of information through web sites, evaluation and monitoring of progress of students...) (Prtljaga; 2010, 279-290). Digitalization, unification and integration of all the sub-systems of higher education institution in a unique informational system could significantly contribute to better organization and planning (Spasić; 2007). It has turned out, however, that realization of such projects is often inefficient and long-lasting; it is therefore necessary to gain insights into the needs of an organization and to use on-line tools according to identified needs. These tools can in a simple way lead to improvement in the domain of organization and planning. All the above mentioned has served as a necessary incentive for a research whose findings are presented below.

2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

An exploratory research was conducted with an aim to investigate the needs and possibilities for the improvement of organizational skills and skills of planning in higher education with the use of new information communication technologies. The needs of those employed at Preschool Teacher Training College in Vrsac (Republic of Serbia) were examined in a research dealing with planning and organization of work at the level of individuals – organization members.

2.1. SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE

The research sample consisted of 33 subjects (25 members of teaching staff – professors, lecturers, assistants, teaching associates and 8 non-teaching staff members). The research was carried out in November 2015. A questionnaire designed for the purpose of the research was used as a research instrument in order to collect data. Descriptive and analytic method was used to describe and analyze the results.

2.2. INSTRUMENTS

A questionnaire was designed for the purpose of the research *A questionnaire for the assessment of needs for improvement of organizational and planning skills at the level of individuals – organization members*. The questionnaire was administered anonymously and it consisted of 6 close type questions.

2.3. HYPOTHESIS

There is no *expressed* need for the improvement of organizational and planning skills at the level of individuals among teaching and non-teaching staff employed at the Preschool Teacher Training College in Vrsac (RS).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data were collected according to the *A questionnaire for the assessment of needs for improvement of organizational and planning skills at the level of individuals – organization members* and the obtained results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Assessment of needs for the improvement of organizational and planning skills at the level of individuals – organization members

Assessment of needs for the improvement of organizational and planning skills at the level of individuals – organization members	Teaching staff		Non teaching staff	
	No of responses	%	No of responses	%
1. Do you manage to finish your work on time?				
a) Yes, always.	10	40%	0	0%
b) In most cases.	15	60%	7	87,5%
c) No, I am always behind my schedule.	0	0%	1	12,5%
2. What do you do when you are under pressure of deadlines?				
a) I am never under such pressure.	3	12%	0	0%
b) Nothing, I do what I can.	1	4%	0	0%
c) I prioritize.	16	64%	7	87,5%
d) I share work with others.	4	16%	0	0%
e) I arrange a postponed deadline if possible.	0	0%	1	12,5%
f) Nothing of the above.	0	0%	0	0%
3. What helps you in planning and organization of work:				
a) pencil and paper,	11	44%	2	25,0%
b) computer,	13	52%	1	12,5%
c) a friend, an acquaintance, a colleague...	5	20%	4	50,0%
d) nothing of the above.	2	8%	1	12,5%
If your choice is a computer, please state which software, tools, etc. you use for planning and organization of your work:	MS OFFICE, SPSS, INTERNET, E-BOOKS			

4. Assess your own planning skills at work:				
a) dissatisfactory	0	0%	0	0%
b) satisfactory	12	48%	5	62,5%
c) very good	9	36%	2	25,0%
d) excellent (I am an expert)	1	4%	1	12,5%
e) I haven't thought about this	3	12%	0	0%
5. Other people say you are:				
a) great organizer	3	12%	1	12,5%
b) well organized	11	44%	2	25,0%
c) disorganized	0	0%	0	0%
d) I don't know	10	40%	5	62,5%
NO RESPONSE:	1	4%	0	0%
6. Have you ever attended a training for improvement of organizational and planning skills?				
a) Yes	7	28%	0	0%
b) No	18	72%	7	87,5%
NO RESPONSE:	0	0	1	12,5%

Authors' processing

In regard to planning and organization at individual level (self-assessment) of those employed at the screened higher education institution, the research results showed, among other things, the following:

1. 60% of the teaching staff members manage to fulfil their obligations on time, while even 40% of them cannot do it; 12,5% of the subjects from the group of non-teaching staff is constantly behind schedule.

2. When "under pressure of deadlines" 64% of teaching staff at the College chooses priorities, i.e. prioritize, while only 16% of them share work with others; in the same situation, 87,5% of non-teaching staff chooses priorities, while 12,5% of them arrange a new deadline, if possible.

3. In regard to what helps them in planning and organization of work, teaching staff stated that it is in the first place computer (52%), followed by pencil and paper (44%). When non-teaching staff members are in question, what helps them most in their work organization and planning are their friends, acquaintances, colleagues, etc. (50%), paper and pencil (25%), computer (12,5%) or something else (12,5%). The subjects were also asked to state which software, tools, etc. are most helpful to them in planning and organization of work. These were their responses: *MS OFFICE, SPSS, INTERNET, E-BOOKS*. (The find-

ing that SPSS and/or e-books help them in their more successful organization and planning seems rather surprising to the authors of the present paper).

5. When teaching staff is in question, only 4% of subjects consider that their planning skills are excellent, 48% of them think that they are satisfactory, while 12% of them have not thought about this aspect of their working lives. Only 12,5% of non-teaching staff consider that they are experts in work organization and planning and 62,5% responded that their planning skills are satisfactory.

6. 44% of teachers claim that others assess them as well organized and 40% of teacher staff do not know how other people see them in this respect. In the case of non-teaching staff even 62,5% responded that they do not know how other people assess them as organizers.

7. Only 28% of teaching staff members employed at the College have attended a training for improvement of organizational and planning skills and 72% of teachers have never participated in such a training. None of the employed as non-teaching staff (0%), i.e. in the workplaces dealing with financial, management, and legal issues, has attended a training for the improvement of organizational and planning skills.

According to the gained insights and findings, the established hypotheses according to which there is no *expressed* need for the improvement of organizational and planning skills at the level of individuals among teaching and non-teaching staff employed at the Preschool Teacher Training College in Vrsac (RS) has been rejected. Needs assessment has shown that certain actions should be taken in order to improve (modernize) organization in this higher education institution through improvement of organizational and planning skills of the employees, which is in the domain of strategic management. In what follows in the paper is a model for more successful planning and organization of work in higher education through empowerment of planning and organization of those employed in higher education institutions according to possibilities and offers at our disposal in the age we live in. Possibilities are considered to use new ICT for more successful planning and organization in higher education institutions, characterized by high level of interconnectedness of employees in work and expressed need for team work.

In accordance with the demands of the Bologna declaration in regard to accreditation, standardization and evaluation of education processes, there is ever-increasing need in higher education institutions for creation, organization,

filing and storing of adequate documentation. In order to fulfil its obligations and realize these tasks higher education institutions management forms smaller teams capable to meet the imposed needs. Seen as project tasks, they require calendars with planners and lists of responsibilities, cooperation pages, forums for exchange of documents and discussions, filing of project documentation, etc. It is possible to find plenty of more or less complex tools for this purpose on the Internet. *Glasscubes, Trello, Github, ThinkBinder, Onlyoffice, Vkolab, Voo2do, Notestar* are only some of the most popular tools, which are often, apart from project management, used in the field of project teaching.

Founded on the principles of Kanban – agile techniques/methods leading to successful project implementation, the online tool *Trello*, characterized by simplicity, clarity, neatness and the fact that it is free or charge, is one of the recommended choices when education is in question. It is based on three assumed columns (“planned”, “in progress”, “done”) which can be changed or supplemented by new ones when and if needed. Each column allows creation of cards containing a whole range of possibilities necessary for project implementation, comments, check-lists, calendar information, attachments in the form of text, picture, etc. Manipulation of columns and cards is very simple and opens up possibilities for successful monitoring of progress of project implementation, as an insight into the activity of each team member, i.e. co-workers individually. Progress made within the team is possible to follow through activation of notification via e-mail or on the smart phone. Training for using *Trello* is possible to be organized by a more experienced team member, and it is also possible to be self-trained for using the proposed tool, with the help of a large number of free written instructions or video materials, the so called *Webinars*.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Self-evaluation of organizational and planning skills of teaching and non-teaching staff employed at the Preschool Teacher Training College in Vrsac showed that more of the half of the subjects assess their own planning skills as far below good or excellent and that majority (more than 75%) has never attended a training in the field of improvement of organizational and planning skills. At the same time, more than half of teaching staff uses a computer for planning and organization of work, but not the new available tools appropriate for these purposes. The research findings point out that certain actions should

be taken in order to modernize the organization in the examined higher education institution through improvement of skills of organization and planning. Therefore a possibility is considered in the paper to use ICT (*Trello* tool) for planning and organization of work in higher education institutions. It is suggested that the offered model is applicable in all institutions of similar type. Use of free online tool *Trello* enables improvement of knowledge of employees on the role and importance of ICT in regard to organization and planning of work (primarily team work involving co-workers engaged in project type tasks) and encourages adaptable attitudes of those working in higher education towards new methods and techniques of organization and planning. In a word, it contributes to more successful planning and organization of work in higher education institutions.

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FACULTY OF ECONOMICS IN OSIJEK
POSTGRADUATE STUDY MANAGEMENT
JOSIP JURAJ STROSSMAYER UNIVERSITY OF OSIJEK
HOCHSCHULE PFORZHEIM UNIVERSITY

INTERDISCIPLINARY MANAGEMENT RESEARCH XII
INTERDISZIPLINÄRE MANAGEMENTFORSCHUNG XII

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FACULTY OF ECONOMICS IN OSIJEK - CROATIA
HOCHSCHULE PFORZHEIM UNIVERSITY

INTERDISCIPLINARY MANAGEMENT RESEARCH XII
INTERDISZIPLINÄRE MANAGEMENTFORSCHUNG XII



Under the auspices of the President of the
Republic of Croatia

Opatija, 2016

Published by:

Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Economics in Osijek, Croatia,
Postgraduate Studies "Management"
Hochschule Pforzheim University

For the Publisher:

Ulrich Jautz, Ph.D., Dean, Germany
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Design and print:

Krešimir Rezo, graf.ing.
Krešendo, Osijek

ISSN 1847-0408

All previous proceedings are indexed in: Web of Science, EBSCOhost, RePEc, EconPapers, Socionet

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CONTENTS

VORWORT	13
FOREWORD.....	14
Management	
Željko Turkalj, Ivana Miklošević, Luka Stanić BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE AS SUPPORT TO MANAGEMENT AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM.....	17
Agneza Aleksijević, Mane Medić, Marko Aleksijević OVERVIEW OF THE QUALITY OF SECONDARY HEALTH CARE SERVQUAL MEASURING INSTRUMENTS	29
Besim Aliti, Marko Markić, Boris Štulina IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN ORGANIZING MAJOR-MULTI SPORT EVENTS	41
Mladena Bedeković, Željka Kadlec PROJECT MANAGEMENT WITH REFERENCE TO THE SIMPLIFIED COSTS CALCULATING METHODS OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES	52
Martina Briš Alić, Danijela Amidžić Solar THE EFFECT OF PROCUREMENT PROCESS OPTIMISATION ON COMPANY PERFORMANCE	65
Valentina Čizmar, Radovan Dragić, Lazar Mosurović FUNCTIONAL DIMENSION OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE INFORMATION AGE WITH REFERENCE TO ANCIENT PARADIGM OF KNOWLEDGE	78
Mirko Cobović, Andreja Katolik Kovačević, Ivona Blažević POSSIBILITIES OF BUSINESS INFORMATION SYSTEM BASED ON A UNIFIED ACCOUNTING PLAN	89
Danijel Čorak, Vice Mihanović MODERN MARKETING TOOLS IN THE FUNCTION OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA	99
Sendi Deželić, Ana Skledar Čorluka, Helena Štimac QUALITY FACTORS OF HIGH EDUCATIONAL SERVICES AT PRIVATE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS	111
Ghodbane Adel, Affes Habib ACCESS TO STRATEGIC RESOURCES THROUGH THE RELATIONAL NETWORK OF THE CONTRACTOR AND INNOVATION OF TUNISIAN SMES	122
Blaženka Hadrović Zekić, Dominika Crnjac Milić ICT SECURITY RISK ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS.....	138

Andreja Hašček, Damir Butković MANAGEMENT OF THE OPERATIONS AND RESOURCES IN THE PROCESS OF RAISING CAPITAL BY ISSUING SHARES ON THE CAPITAL MARKET IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA	156
Sandra Herman MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL RESOURCES IN MEĐIMURJE COUNTY	174
Zorislav Kalazić, Jasna Horvat, Josipa Mijoč DIGITAL STOCK PHOTOGRAPHY AS A PROMOTER OF SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE CREATIVITY	185
Domagoj Karačić, Natko Klanac INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES AND COMPANY DEVELOPMENT IN CONDITIONS OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT	205
Kristina Kobrehel, Zlatko Barilović, Igor Vrečko COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT MATURITY MODELS	215
Maja Lamza-Maronić, Verica Jovanovski, Ivana Stanić EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND MODELS OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT WITH REGARD TO GLOBAL TRENDS AND THE ROLE OF COMPETENCES IN SCHOOL PRINCIPALS	224
Sandra Lovrić, Đuro Horvat CHOOSING AN EFFECTIVE HUMAN RESOURCES INFORMATION SYSTEM (HRIS) IN REMOTE ENVIRONMENT	236
Martina Mišetić MUSEUM ACTION “FATEFUL I DO AT THE VUKOVAR MUNICIPAL MUSEUM”	244
Ivan Miškulin, Željko Turkalj, Boris Crnković CHANGE MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENTAL STRATEGIES OF CROATIAN UNIVERSITIES.....	255
Robert Obraz, Miro Hegedić RESULTS OF KAIZEN METHODOLOGY IMPLEMENTATION IN MANUFACTURING.....	263
Lazar Ozegovic, Marko Ivaniš, Novica Pavlović ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS OF POWER BUSINESS IN SERBIA	274
Mirko Pešić, Teufik Čočić, Velimir Lovrić LEADERSHIP THROUGH PRIVATE INITIATIVES IN MUSEUM AND GALLERY ACTIVITIES	285
Željko Požega, Melita Cita CAPITAL STRUCTURE OF CROATIAN FOOD COMPANIES.....	294

Predrag Prtljaga, Tanja Nedimović, Ivana Đorđev IMPROVING ORGANIZATION AND SKILLS OF PLANNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION USING NEW INFORMATIONAL-COMMUNICATIVE TECHNOLOGY	303
Drago Pupavac TOLERANCE FOR CHANGE AMONG STUDENTS	313
Andreja Rudančić, Marko Akmačić, Edvard Badurina THE IMPORTANCE OF MONITORING TRENDS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF DEMAND IN BUSINESS TOURISM SEGMENT: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM OPATIJA, CROATIA	322
Ivan Ružić, Irena Bosnić, Ivan Kelić RIVER CRUISE AS TOURISM PRODUCT: MARKETING APPROACH.....	339
Drago Ružić, Mario Banožić, Zrinka Tolušić HUNTING TOURISM IN CROATIA – POSSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS– CASE STUDY VUKOVAR – SRIJEM COUNTY.....	349
Ivana Šandrk Nukić, Josipa Matotek PRELIMINARY RESEARCH OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE OF CONSTRUCTION COMPANIES IN CROATIA.....	363
Romina Sinosich ROLE OF LEADER PROGRAMME IN CROATIAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT	374
Mirko Smoljić, Branka Stipanović, Hrvoje Smoljić INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION MODEL IN TOURISM ORGANIZATION.....	384
Milan Stanić, Berislav Bolfek, Zoran Tršinski PRACTICE-ORIENTED EDUCATION AS AN ADVANTAGE FOR UNIVERSITIES OF APPLIED SCIENCES.....	394
Željko Turkalj, Ante Orlović, Ivica Milković MOTIVATION FOR WORK – PERCEIVED SOURCES OF WORK MOTIVATION OF POLICE OFFICERS (PROFESSION, ORGANISATION, MANAGEMENT)	404
Ivana Varičak, Branko Wasserbauer, Andreja Brajdić SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN CROATIA.....	416
Radovan Vladisavljević, Dragan Soleša, Marko Carić THE IMPACT OF PROJECTS AS AN INTEGRATOR IN IMPROVING THE PERFORMANCE OF ENTERPRISES.....	427
Ivan Miloloža “EDUCATION ON EXPORT-RELATED TOPICS OF CROATIAN ECONOMY STUDENTS:CURRENT STATE EVALUATION”	437

General Economics

Boris Marjanović, Tamara Žufić Košara MOTIVATION TO PURSUE HIGHER EDUCATION OF PART-TIME STUDENTS.....	453
--	-----

Microeconomics, Macroeconomics and Monetary Economics

Martina Harc, Martina Basarac Sertić THE INFLUENCE OF THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT ON THE SMES EMPLOYMENT IN THE EU 28.....	465
Zlatko Rešetar, Marija Zdunić Borota, Zdravko Tolušić DEVELOPMENT OF NEW PRODUCTS WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GUTENBERG'S PRODUCTION FUNCTION	475

International Economics

Branko Matić, Hrvoje Serdarušić, Maja Vretenar Cobović CROATIAN STUDENT WORKFORCE: FINANCIAL IMPACT AND EXPERIENCE	487
Mihuț Ioana-Sorina, Luțaș Mihaela-Mariana THE DYNAMIC OF THE ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION	497
Helena Miloloža, Marina Šunjerga EXTERNAL BARRIERS THAT DISEMPOWER THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF CROATIAN COMPANIES ON MARKETS IN EASTERN EUROPE	507
Anita Peša, Jurica Bosna, Marko Pribisalić RESEARCH OF THE FACTORS WHICH AFFECT FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA	517
Larisa Nicoleta Pop, Mihaela Rovinaru, Flavius Rovinaru MANAGING THE AGRICULTURAL PRICE VOLATILITY – A GOVERNMENTAL APPROACH FROM A GLOBAL AND EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE	531
Zdravko Šergo, Ivan Matošević, Tatiana Zanini-Gavranić SEASONALITY IN TOURISM DEMAND: PANEL MODELS WITH CENSORED DATA	542

Financial Economics

Urban Bacher, Alexander Eck DIE TEUERSTE AKTIE DER WELT IM KURZPROFIL FUNDAMENTALANALYSE VON ALPHABET INC. (EHEMALS GOOGLE) SAAMT EINER ERSTEN SWOT- ANALYSE	555
Ljiljana Dmitrović Šaponja, Goran Šijan, Saša Gravorac, Sunčica Milutinović MEASUREMENT AND (E)VALUATION OF INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL – A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE INTELLECTUAL – INTENSIVE INDUSTRIES ...	569

Ticijan Peruško	
ACCOUNTING INFORMATION FOR PLANNING OF BUSINESS GOALS IN SOLICITORS' PRIMARY PROFESSIONAL INDEMNITY INSURANCE.....	580
Izabela Pruchnicka-Grabias	
ZERO-COST COLLARS IN CURRENCY RISK MANAGEMENT. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FROM THE POLISH FINANCIAL MARKET	592
Zvonimir Savić, Tadija Vrdoljak	
SIMULATION OF POPULATION GROWTH AND EFFECTS ON CONSUMPTION POTENTIAL IN FOOD AND BEVERAGES SEGMENT IN TOURIST SEASON (AUGUST) IN THE COASTAL COUNTIES IN CROATIA	605
Nikolina Smajla	
FINANCIAL INVOLVEMENT OF STUDENT POPULATION AT KARLOVAC UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES	619
Public Economics	
Sofija Adžić, Jelena Kovačević	
INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT (REVIEW OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA)	633
Siniša Bilić, Safet Subašić, Muamer Muminović	
THE ISSUE OF BUDGET MANAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FOR PUBLIC REVENUE USERS	644
Branimir Marković, Slobodan Stojanović	
FISCAL POSITION OF COUNTIES AS REGIONAL SELF-GOVERNMENTAL UNITS IN REPUBLIC OF CROATIA	655
Dražen Vitez, Hrvoje Mataković	
FINANCING OF POLITICAL PARTIES FROM PUBLIC SOURCES: CAUSES, FORMS AND CONSEQUENCES	666
Health, Education and Welfare	
Merima Činjarević, Lejla Turulja, Almir Peštek, Lejla Sinanović	
WHAT STUDENTS REALLY EXPECT FROM ACCREDITED HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS?	683
Aleksandra Gojkov Rajić, Jelena Prtljaga	
DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND STUDENT AUTONOMY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING	697
Ivana Ivančić, Nada Bosanac	
TOWARDS CREATING A QUALITY CULTURE WITHIN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: CROATIAN EXPERIENCE	706

Renata Jukić, Snježana Dubovicki COMMUNICATION IN TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION – COMPARISON OF EXPERIENCES IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLEGES	720
Anita Kulaš ANALYSIS OF LABOUR MARKET BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION IN THE SELECTED MEMBER STATES OF EUROPEAN UNION	732
Vladimír Masaryk, Jana Keketiova, Thorsten Eidenmüller, Timo Keppler SOCIAL WORK IN HEALTHCARE FACILITIES	742
Suzana Obrovac Lipar CONTENT MANAGEMENT ON FACEBOOK PAGES (ON THE EXAMPLE OF RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF CROATIA)	757
Aleksandar Stojanović, Grozdanka Gojkov CREATIVITY AND METACOGNITION AS INDICATORS OF HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY	773
Ivana Tucak LEGAL AND ETHICAL JUSTIFICATION OF COMPENSATION REGARDING COMPULSORY VACCINATION INJURIES	783
Law and Economics	
Rodica Diana Apan THE SYSTEM OF INTERCONNECTION OF TRADE REGISTRIES IN THE EU MEMBER STATES AS INSTRUMENT FACILITATING FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENTS (FDI)	801
Ivana Barković Bojanić, Nefreteta Zekić Eberhard THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE FAILURE TO RECOGNIZE THE VALUE OF HUMAN CAPITAL IN THE MEDIA: THE CASE OF LOCAL MEDIA HOUSE	813
Dejan Bodul, Dunja Škalamera-Alilović ON MODELS OF OVERCOMING BUSINESS CRISIS: BANKRUPTCY PROCEEDINGS OR CHANGE IN STATUS	831
Igor Bojanić JUSTIFICATION OF LEGAL ENTITY PUNISHMENT FOR CRIMINAL OFFENSES	845
Damir Šebo, Tonći Lazibat, Aleksandar Včev THE IMPACT OF AMENDMENTS TO THE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT ACT ON THE INCREASE IN TOTAL VALUE OF PROCUREMENT	859
Industrial Organization	
Thomas Cleff, Marie-Ange Huijnen, Nadine Walter DO YOU TRUST YOUR BRAND OR NOT? A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ADOPTION OF BRAND EXTENSIONS OF GENERATION X VERSUS Y IN THE FMCG INDUSTRY	871

Jerko Glavaš, Josip Jukić, Neđeljko Knežević THE IMPACT OF MANAGEMENT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF REPAIR PROCESS	891
--	-----

Business Administration and Business Economics

Dragan Benazić, Erik Ružić, Dražen Alerić THE IMPACT OF INTERNAL MARKETING ON THE CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT	903
---	-----

Economic Development, Technological Change and Growth

Antun Biloš, Tvrtko Galić AN EXPLORATION OF INTERNET USAGE AMONG STUDENTS: THE CASE OF JOSIP JURAJ STROSSMAYER UNIVERSITY OF OSIJEK, CROATIA	917
--	-----

Bodo Runzheimer CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) – NEUERE RECHTLICHE ENTWICKLUNG IN DER EUROPÄISCHEN UNION (EU) WESENTLICHE ECKPUNKTE UND EINIGE POTENTIELLE AUSWIRKUNGEN AUF UNTERNEHMEN	929
--	-----

Luka Burilović, Ivan Ambroš, Gabrijela Žalac EMPOWERING NUTS2 REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY BY APPLYING S3 POLICY	950
---	-----

Lena Duspara HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT ON THE FINANCIAL SUCCESS IN MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY IN REPUBLIC OF CROATIA	958
---	-----

Nenad Rančić, Gordana Marčetić, Ozren Pilipović THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS IN THE ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – THE CASE OF COUNTRIES IN TRANSITION	968
--	-----

Marija Šmit, Zorislav Šmit TRENDS, FACTS AND FIGURES OF THE GLOBAL TOYS AND GAMES MARKET AND INDUSTRY	997
---	-----

Davorin Turkalj, Slavica Singer, Sunčica Oberman Peterka M-LEARNING APP DESIGN BASED ON STUDENT PREFERENCES: CASE OF MASTERS PROJECT	1010
--	------

Mladen Vedriš A POLICY FOR AN ECONOMIC TURNAROUND OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA THE BASIS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	1020
---	------

Urban, Rural and Regional Economics and Growth

Rikard Bakan, Dejan Tubić, Božidar Jaković INTEGRATED APPROACH TO TOURIST EXPERIENCES– AN IMPERATIVE FOR BRANDING AND COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES FOR DESTINATIONS IN CONTINENTAL CROATIA	1043
---	------

Višnja Bartolović CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE GLOBAL ECONOMY	1054
Davor Bošnjaković, Marija Tolušić, Marta Borić THE ROLE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF OENOTOURISM IN BARANJA	1067
Josip Britvić, Vladimir Grebenar, Erina Stančin APPLICATION OF INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS WITH HIGH LEVEL STRUCTURE IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP	1081
Nataša Drvenkar RESHAPING REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – TIME FOR REINDUSTRIALIZATION?	1094
Ivan Herak, Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Martina Herak CAN CROATIAN TOURISM REACH PROFESSIONAL MARKETING?	1111
Sanja Knežević MIGRATION INTENTION AMONG YOUTH IN BROD POSAVINA COUNTY	1120
Igor Kralik, Hava Mahmutović, Sanja Scitovski MODELS OF POULTRY GROWTH AND ECONOMICAL BREEDING ON AGRICULTURAL FARMS IN RURAL AREA	1130
Miscellaneous Categories	
Dražen Barković PAVING THE WAY TO THE KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY IN CROATIA: DOCTORAL STUDY AT THE FACULTY OF ECONOMICS IN OSIJEK	1141
Ulrich Föhl, Tim Schneegans THE SOUND OF BRANDS – DO ASSOCIATIONS OF BRANDS WITH MUSIC STYLES AFFECT BRAND PERSONALITY?.....	1156
Wolfgang Gohout, Katja Specht STOPPREGELN UND PRAKTISCHE ANWENDUNG	1172
Heidi R. Krauss NO RISK, NO INCOME? IBN KHALDŪN AND THE FACTOR RISK	1179
Mladen Jurišić, Sanela Ravlić, Ružica Lončarić, Irena Pugelnik IMPLEMENTATION OF GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN MARKETING – GIS MARKETING.....	1188
Markus Häfele, Sarah Katharina Stiegeler WIRTSCHAFTSKRIMINALITÄT UND ACCOUNTING FRAUD.....	1197

VORWORT

Es ist uns ein Vergnügen, das Konferenzband "Interdisciplinary Management Research XII/ Interdisziplinäre Managementforschung XII" vorstellen zu können. Ein Buch aus dieser Reihe ist zum ersten Mal 2005 erschienen, als Resultat der Zusammenarbeit zwischen der Wirtschaftsfakultät in Osijek, Kroatien und der Hochschule Pforzheim, Deutschland, und insbesondere durch das Magisterstudium des Management. Die Zusammenarbeit der zwei genannten Partnerinstitutionen ist unter anderem durch jährliche wissenschaftliche Symposien gekennzeichnet, auf welchen interessante Themen aus verschiedenen Bereichen der Wirtschaft und des Managements vorgestellt und folglich in einem Band veröffentlicht werden. Jedes Jahr ziehen die wissenschaftlichen Symposien Akademiker anderer kroatischer, sowie ausländischer Universitäten, einschließlich Australien, Deutschland, Ungarn, Polen, Rumänien, Slovenien, Montenegro, Bosnien und Herzegovina, Serbien, Indien, Irland, Czechien, Israel, Italien, Sudafrica, Belgien, Schweiz, USA, Slowakei, Dänemark, Mazedonien, Mexico, Zypern und Großbritannien an, die ihren wissenschaftlichen und professionellen Beitrag zur Diskussion über zeitgenössische Fragen aus dem Bereich des Managements leisten. Die Aktualität der behandelten Fragen, der internationale Charakter im Hinblick auf Themen und Autoren, die höchsten Standards der Forschungsmethodologie sowie die Kontinuität dieser Konferenzreihe wurden auch von der internationalen akademischen Gemeinde erkannt, weswegen sie auch in internationalen Datenbanken, wie Web of Science, Thomson ISI, RePEc, EconPapers und Socionet, zu finden ist.

Die neueste Ausgabe von "Interdisciplinary Management Research XII/ Interdisziplinäre Managementforschung XII" umfasst 96 Arbeiten geschrieben von 211 Autoren. Der Erfolg früherer Ausgaben ging über die Grenzen der Länder hinaus, deren Autoren schon traditionell Teil der Reihe waren und zog neue Autoren aus Taiwan und Tunesien an. Jedes der Autoren leistete einen bedeutenden Beitrag zu diesem fachübergreifenden Managementforum.

Als Herausgeber dieses Bandes hoffen wir, dass diese Reihe auch weiterhin Akademiker und Professionelle dazu bewegen wird, in Forschung und Beruf die höchsten Standards zu beanspruchen, und dass es weiterhin als Ansporn zu weiteren Formen von Zusammenarbeit unter Teilnehmern dieses Projektes dienen wird.

Dražen Barković, professor emeritus

Prof. Dr. Bodo Runzheimer

FOREWORD

It is our pleasure to introduce the book “Interdisciplinary Management Research XII/ Interdisziplinäre Managementforschung XII” to you. The first volume appeared in 2005 as a result of co-operation between the Faculty of Economics in Osijek (Croatia) and Pforzheim University (Germany), particularly through the postgraduate programme “Management”. The co-operation between these partnering institutions has been nurtured, amongst else, through annual scientific colloquiums at which interesting topics in various fields of economics and management have been presented and later published in the proceedings. Over the years, the scientific colloquiums have drawn the attention of academic scholars from other Croatian universities, as well as from other countries including Australia, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, India, Ireland, Czech Republic, Israel, Italy, South Africa, Belgium, Switzerland, USA, Slovakia, Denmark, Macedonia, Mexico, Cyprus and the United Kingdom each making a contribution in academic and professional discussion about contemporary management issues. Actuality and importance of the issues discussed, the international character of the book in terms of authors and topics, the highest standards of research methodology and continuity in publishing have been recognized by the international academic community, resulting in the book now being indexed in world-known data bases such as Web of Science, Thomson ISI, RePEc, EconPapers, and Socionet.

The latest edition, i.e. ““Interdisciplinary Management Research XII/ Interdisziplinäre Managementforschung XII” encompasses 96 papers written by 211 authors. The success of former editions has echoed beyond the traditionally participative countries and authors and now includes new authors from Taiwan and Tunisia, each providing a valuable contribution to this interdisciplinary management forum.

As editors we hope that this book will continue to encourage academic scholars and professionals to pursue excellence in their work and research, and to provide an incentive for developing various forms of co-operation among all involved in this project.

Dražen Barković, professor emeritus

Prof. Dr. Bodo Runzheimer