ABSTRACT: The paper discusses the importance and relevance of corporate education as a social responsibility of universities. The research findings are intended to provide a starting-point for understanding the nature of the working relationship between universities and corporations in order to successfully develop and deliver corporate education programs in engineering and business. The role of universities has been evolving over the last 20 years, from a focus on teaching and research towards a partnership with industry, government and communities. Nowadays the mission of higher education comprises also the necessity to contribute to the sustainable development and improvement of society as a whole. The ability of the universities to organize the traditional disciplines differently to suit the needs of the society is the key to success of corporate education. Beyond the crisis, the strategic importance of the corporate education is driven by technological changes, the global economic liberalization, the rise of the service economy, the cosmopolitanism, etc.

Key words: corporate education, social responsibility, relationship universities-corporations, globalisation

1. GLOBALISATION, CRISIS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Globalization is a highly dynamic process. It is not purely an economic process - it has deep social, cultural and environmental consequences. It has produced tremendous benefits, poverty levels have fallen in many countries and increased trade has been transformative. What the financial crisis shows is that we were ill-prepared to manage this global economy.

According to many theorists (Foster (2009), Krugmann (2009), Wolf (2008), James (2009)) neoliberal globalization has come to an end, capitalism is in a long-term crisis and we are faced with „depression economics” as a general case. As Immanuel Wallerstein, a world-system theorist, has suggested for some time, what was called “globalization” in the last couple of decades was really at the global level an “age of transition” away from the current capitalist world-system towards something else. What is this “something else” we do not know yet.

Because of technology, globalization, crisis and other competitive forces companies have radically restructured how work gets done.

To meet the challenges of this rapidly changing environment, it is necessary to prepare individuals for a workplace where duties are permanently changing, where cross-cultural and language skills must be developed, where flexibility, lifelong learning, flat hierarchies and an increase of social competence are required, where information technology becomes of paramount importance, where initiative-taking is more important than obedience, and where strategies are especially complex because of expansion of markets beyond national borders. The workplace will have less hierarchy and supervision, more autonomy and responsibility, more collaboration, less predictability and stability.

Therefore, education must help individuals to perform tasks for which they were not originally trained (Tullao, T.S., 2003), to improve their team skills, to lay the basis of complex thinking linked to the realities of this new world. To memorize any information or learn how to follow directions will be insufficient for success in the job market of the 21st century.

According to Anthony Salcito, the Vice President of Microsoft Worldwide Education (cited in Schiller and Arena, 2012), the education system no longer meets the needs of the population it serves. The public schools were designed for 19th-century industrialism not an era of globalization and interconnectivity. Because students remain largely uninspired due to the outdated standards and textbooks corporations are pressed to recruit new talents. “We have to acknowledge that learning is shifting away from content memorization to a more relevant, personalized, skill-based foundation. We have to dig deeper, think harder and get more engaged to determine what change is needed and then push the pieces forward. We also have to bring a culture of sustainability to the process of transforming education,” said Salcito.

Globalization is affecting the types of knowledge and skills students will need to thrive. Since they will be collaborating with people around the world, they will need to have greater “global literacy”—knowledge about the people and cultures.

With the advancement in information technology and a move towards knowledge-based industries, the role of educational services will become more important in the future.
Five major lessons emerge from the expert research and opinion (Jerald, 2009) on what kinds of knowledge and skills will most benefit students in the future:

- More education, some postsecondary education or technical training are essential;
- More advanced courses in traditional knowledge and skills in school subjects like math, language arts, and science;
- Students must better learn how to apply what they learn in those subjects to deal with real world challenges, rather than simply “reproduce” the information on tests.
- Developing the ability to think critically about information, solve novel problems, communicate and collaborate, create new products and processes, and adapt to change;
- Applied skills and competencies can best be taught in the context of the academic curriculum, not as a replacement for it; critical thinking and problem solving are highly dependent on deep content knowledge and cannot be taught in isolation.

Education has the potential to provide solutions to the major problems that we are currently facing. The German government plans (The Bildungsrepublik Deutschland), for instance, have identified investment into education as a strategic and tactical key area for the recovery from the current financial crisis and economic recession. However, we argue that education can realize this potential only if it comprises ethical and social responsibility aspects. In this respect, we agree with Mullerat (Mullerat, 2010), who argued that the world cannot survive without a “global ethic” which respects human rights but also conveys the idea that rights go hand in hand with duties. Universities have their duties regarding this new environment of learning.

2. THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF CORPORATE EDUCATION

Corporate education is a system of professional development activities provided to educate the workforce. It may consist of formal university training or informal training provided by non-collegiate institutions.

The simplest form of corporate education is represented by training programs on specific aspects of the job processes or responsibilities. Corporate training can be provided through contracts or relationships with educational institutions that may award diplomas, certificates, credits (also possible through a system of Continuing Education Units). Corporate education can be used as part of a holistic human resources effort to determine the performance of the employee and as part of their review systems. Also, the organization can use corporate education and training as a win-win-arrangement with managers and key employees.

The literature is full of examples of partnerships that created mutually beneficial education programs. When partnering goes, corporations gain educated workers and higher education fulfill its mission and maintains academic integrity. Universities can provide to the corporate partners education, research partnerships, and connections to world class faculty and students.

The standards in corporate education focus on the acquisition of skills that are expected to bring changes in an employee's performance and to have an impact on the organization. Therefore, according to Kessels (1991) in corporate education, curriculum is defined as: „the course of action open to an organization for influencing the necessary skills of employees that contribute to goal-oriented changes in their performance and in their work environment, thus striving for a desired impact on the organization by applying planned learning activities and the resulting learning processes”.

Companies need to bring education into their corporate DNA as a mean of innovation and marketplace survival and to embrace corporate education and training as an investment and not just a business expense.

According to Ryan (Ryan, 2010), a study in the United States on 3,100 workplaces by the National Centre on the Educational Quality of the Workforce (EQW) found that a 10% increase in workforce education/skills levels led to an 8.6% gain in total productivity, while a 10% increase in the value of equipment increased productivity by just 3.4%.

A study looking at Australia’s productivity levels considering the availability of skilled people in management, and the workforce generally, found the positive impact of skills on management practices to be significant, with 64% of managers in the highest performing organizations having a university degree or higher, along with 20% of their workforce. This compared with only 3% of managers in the lowest performing firms having university degrees and only 1% of their workforce (Management Matters in Australia: Just how productive are we?, Nov 2009, Dept of Innovation, Industry Science and Research).

Studies like 2009/2010 Trends in Executive Development: A Benchmark Report, highlighted some emerging trends in this area:

Professionals in executive development have learned to measure the success of development offerings and are adept at finding and creating relevant learning opportunities for the executives and for themselves.

The economic downturn means that there is more pressure now than before to prepare leaders (and the workforce) who can weather the storm and navigate their companies successfully through the turbulence.

The next generations of executive leaders are lacking necessary competencies. They highlighted weaknesses in the ability to think strategically, lead change, create a vision, and rally others around that vision.

We can say that corporate education is increasingly gaining much importance and attention in the knowledge based economy on the one hand and in a globalized world and in crisis, on the other hand, with the knowledge workers becoming key factors for the growth and development of organizations and societies.
3. THE WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES AND CORPORATE EDUCATION

Universities served the public interest through education, research (creation of knowledge) and knowledge transfer. In the present day context the mission of higher education became more complex comprising also the necessity to contribute to the sustainable development and improvement of society as a whole.

According to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC, 2001), “the mission of higher education is to contribute to the sustainable development and improvement of society as a whole by: educating highly qualified graduates able to meet the needs of all sectors of human activity; advancing, creating and disseminating knowledge through research; interpreting, preserving, and promoting cultures in the context of cultural pluralism and diversity; providing opportunities for higher learning throughout life; contributing to the development and improvement of education at all levels; and protecting and enhancing civil society by training young people in the values which form the basis of democratic citizenship and by providing critical detached perspectives in the discussion of strategic choices facing societies.”

Developing advanced knowledge and skills and converting these into useful products and services underpin the vitality of our societies. At the Spring European Council „Working together for growth and jobs” the European Commission stated that, in order to meet the Lisbon agenda and Barcelona objective, „Universities' contribution to the creation and dissemination of knowledge throughout the Union must be reinforced”.

One of the principal barriers has been the difficulty in aligning the university and industry interests, especially in the perspective of creating long-term partnerships. By establishing the foundations for successful research partnerships with industry and public bodies, responsible partnering reinforces the value of the university within society, creates new opportunities and enhances the prospect for continued top-quality research and education. But this is just one aspect of the problem.

According to McGee (McGee, 2006) traditional universities will become long-term partners to business by:

- Adapting materials to reflect learning needs spelled out in an organization's annual operating plan;
- Matching the pace of change in business to serve as thought leaders and guides to the corporate work force;
- Developing a business-oriented approach to recruiting and retaining lifelong corporate learners.

Universities and corporations must identify learning solutions and their corresponding business results. The strategic alignment to business priorities requires close collaboration between those who develop and deliver learning (in our case the universities) and the company’s senior management who establish the business strategy (and the learning account manager) in order to prioritize learning requests against capacity and affordability and identify opportunities for learning investments to drive hard business outcomes. According to Meister (Morrison and Meister, 2000) „managing the corporate university according to “business impact measures” is really what separates a high-performing learning organization from one focusing on providing a catalog of courses “pushed” to businesses”.

Universities have also to drive innovation in learning design, development and delivery that meets strategic business priorities.

Universities foster a broad, integrated frame of reference that draws from a wide, multidisciplinary spectrum, but they must also provide practical business knowledge, managerial competence, and task-oriented education. Universities must not ignore the social, historical, and economic forces at work in today's world. In the age of iTunes, open source software, and for-profit online universities, there are new rules for higher education (De Millo, 2011).

Corporations often want new degree programs or curricula for engineers, manufacturing people, or other business-related jobs, and they become frustrated when universities cannot create these programs quickly. As a partial response to company demands, MBA-accredited programs are adapting by delivering more leadership development, supplying the increased demand for flex- and blended- (a mix of online and face-to-face learning) MBA programs, and even projecting additional language requirements for the growing importance of the global market.

But the university’s structure has to be realigned in order to bring greater value to their institution’s relationships with industry. To stay competitive and current, traditional business schools can continue to re-invent and emphasize their ability to supply these, negotiating special contracts with large corporations and promoting them to the market. The research of Ryan (2006) highlights the need for universities and corporate to take time to learn and understand the requirements and expectations of each other and, as in any good relationship, provide flexibility to accommodate these requirements and expectations.

According to Topal (Topal, 2009) “the socially responsible ethos of higher education has been subordinated to the forces of marketization and both society and the participants in such education are the poorer for it”. Therefore a new strategic aim for universities that adopted corporate education is social responsibility. Universities can serve as a bridge to the outside world, to move towards it and invite it to enter the organization. It can help the company to discover the stakeholders and cooperate with them.

It can educate employees to respect people and the environment, to learn new competencies to help a company to be more rigorous and demanding for itself in the elaboration and implementation of its business strategies. For this purpose universities can deliver seminars on corporate responsibility culture, on protection of the natural environment, discouraging
waste and pollution. They can organize leadership learning programs on Corporate Responsibility, Corporate Citizenship and Sustainable Development for top executives and middle management. They can help employees who support NGOs through voluntary programs. They can develop cooperation with educational systems and other academics, building new curricula; they can deliver programs on the education of underprivileged people literacy, etc. Courses and learning assets can be effectively used to reach and influence the workforce, stakeholders, community, faculty and staff in regard to critical subjects that promote and educate corporate social responsibilities.

For expanding their values, goals and norms, the universities, especially in developing countries, should be able to combine good science with the complexities of business, intellectual property protection, social sciences and a regulatory environment in order to adopt different strategies for making the university education to suit the local communities and industries.

Sir Richard Lambert, Chancellor of the University and former Director-General of the CBI, argued that “universities themselves are going to have to show strong and purposeful leadership to navigate these times of change. They will need to work more closely with business in the interests both of their students and of their research activities – but not at the expense of their independence or their intellectual integrity. And there will be real opportunities ahead for those that get this balance right”.

4. THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF UNIVERSITIES IN DEALING WITH CORPORATE EDUCATION

Higher education exists to serve the public interest and has to be socially responsible. It is globally recognized that an expanded higher education sector has become a necessary condition for a country’s growth in the present environment; it is important in promoting faster technological catch-up and in improving a country’s ability to maximize economic output (World Bank, 2002).

Sustainable development and social cohesion depend critically on the competencies of all the population – with competencies understood to cover knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. According to Rychen (Rychen and Salganik, 2003) there are three broad requirements in the context of organization or society: individual competencies, institutional competencies and application of individual competencies to contribute to collective goals. OECD identifies key competencies for personal, social and economic well-being.

De Haan (De Haan, 2006) identified eight key competencies for shaping competence: competence in foresighted thinking; competency in interdisciplinary work; competency in cosmopolitan perception, trans-cultural understanding and cooperation; participatory skills; competency in planning and implementation; capacity for empathy, compassion and solidarity; competency in self-motivation and motivating others; and competency in distanced reflection on individual and cultural models.

Corporate education should cover different competencies required while addressing other challenges faced by industries and individuals. Narasimharao (2010) argued that establishing a center for corporate education in universities not only help in acting as a coordination unit between industry and university but also help in integrating the activities and studies of various disciplines. The corporate education efforts of universities should evolve in this direction for utilizing the diverse expertise available at their disposal. “We need to ask what individuals need in order to function well in the organization or society, what competencies do they need to find and to hold down a job, and what kind of adaptive qualities are required to cope with changing technology”.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The role of corporate education and employee training and development is of tremendous importance and if the issue is not addressed strategically and effectively it will be one of the biggest impediments on any country’s growth, innovation, productivity and lifestyle into the future.

In the context of the corporate social responsibility the corporate education is challenged by not only personnel professional training but also by realizing in companies the programs of training the personnel of all levels aimed at forming the personal responsibility, analytical skills, emotional intelligence, aspiration for the result in the activity, educability.

The corporate education is becoming a factor of a country modernization in social and economic spheres. We can speak about the efficiency of corporate education, forming the employees’ active position via training, developing the corporation’s social capital.

It is necessary that the university takes the responsibility of not only fulfilling the objectives of corporations but also incorporate holistic education and training to prepare the employees for learning to think and act in a more integrated way in this changing and evolving world.

The European Commission published in September 2011 an agenda for modernisation of Europe's higher education systems and two of the main areas for reform identified in this agenda were: to improve the quality and relevance of teaching and researcher training, to equip graduates with the knowledge and core transferable competences they need to succeed in high-skill occupations and to strengthen the "knowledge triangle", linking education, research and business.

US universities are focused on entrepreneurship, strategic management, innovation and corporation accountability and we can see in the last years more top American universities breaking ground on similar programs in emerging markets, where, according to Marian Salzman (cited in Forbes, 2011) a whole new generation of would-be corporate raiders is ripe for picking.
The crisis has put the Education and Training systems to a test and we should see it as an opportunity to improve or change what is needed to be changed.

The partnership between the business and the education sectors should be deepened to match the labour shortages and the future needs. Training should lead to the employment.

To achieve that, the image of corporate education has to be promoted and we can say that with the right corporate university management process the new era of management can be more profitable and exciting. This area is a major challenge but also an opportunity for many universities all over the world.

Around the world, there are 2.3bn Generation Y (the generation that was born between 1980 and 2000) and almost 50% of the world’s population is under the age of 27 (The Talent Management Summit 2012).

This generation has a profound effect on how companies will manage, recruit and retain talent. Finding how to capitalize on this generation is one of the biggest challenges and opportunities facing global companies and the education system. Regarding the generations after the age of 27, they must ensure that they have the right experience and skills to be comfortable with rapid change and near-unprecedented complexity.

To achieve these goals we need to transform the educational system to prepare all students to compete in a global economy by working with businesses and organizations to create a network of support for schools at the local, national and international levels.

Keeping pace with the changes in the labor market, with the needs of companies represents a major social responsibility, and universities should be a mainstay of this.

Moreover, the Ministry of Education of Romania has initiated a process of change in the undergraduate curriculum in adapting to the demands of the labor market and universities should assume in turn this approach, both through consultation and by changing their own curriculum and through partnerships with corporations.

The economic currents are changing rapidly and we need to keep perspective on what works, inviting new ideas and new ways to create value, and involving and communicating with others.

6. REFERENCES
4. Forbes; 5 Big Trends for Education in 2012-13, 21.11.2011


