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ADMINISTRATION FOR SUCCESS THROUGH EDUCATION *

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Context of the informational society

The enthusiasm for the so called *information technologies* or *new technologies* has made of common use expressions such as information society or knowledge society, presenting them frequently as key terms to explain problems, offer solutions and forecast sceneries that cover the most diverse ambits of society. This may be observed in the analysis of the homogenization of the market needs for consumption, the influence of globalization on local realities, the vertiginous rhythm of cultural influences, the

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transformation of the State, the tendencies of labor markets, as well as the evolution of labor training.

Analyzing more specifically the changes that within the ambit of the training of human resources in social security are associated to the boom of these technologies, demand the application of an integrating view in which the teaching-training and technological processes and the social security trends, are considered as ambits of reciprocal influence. With this point of view in mind, we are presenting a panoramic review of the concept of *informational society* and of the manner in which flexibilization marks the labor markets and the education and training trends.

Some of the first references of the expression *informational society* are found in the studies of Manuel Castells, who defines it as:

(...) the attribute of a specific form of social organization in which the generation, the processing and the transmission of information become fundamental sources of productivity and power, due to the new technological conditions that arise in this historic period. (Castells, 1999:47)

To amplify the explanation of the terms *informational society*, Castells outlines the difference between this term and the *information society*. He stresses in this respect that his outline is aimed at describing the manner in which certain social and technological dynamics, inherent to an informational scheme, saturate the activity of contemporary societies and of their institutions. In this sense, the author makes a comparison with the so called industrial society, underlining the consequences of the latter on the most diverse ambits. If the analysis of the

informational society encompasses geopolitical, economic and everyday life aspects, for the purposes of this paper we limit ourselves to examine the fundamental elements, such as *network society*, *use of information technologies*, *as well as the notions of space and time*, because these are the origin of flexibilization.

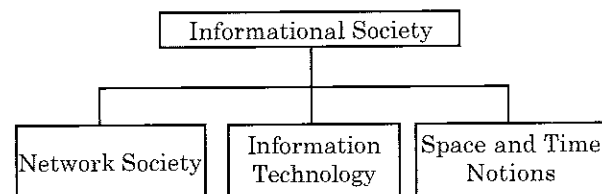


Figure 1. The informational society

The consideration of the space and time notions is a must if we bear in mind that social life not only occurs in intersections of presence and absence, established in terms precisely of space and time, but that it is constituted by said intersections. An example of the above is the relationship established between persons assiduous to certain public spaces. Specifically, in the informational society, the traditional meaning of these notions, far from disappearing or being transformed, is now subject to a logic of organization of the social practices that are performed under physically unconnected positions, but which are possible due to sequences of interaction permitted by the information technologies.

Therefore, the technological infrastructure determines spaces or regions according to the flows established through the *network society*, articulating, far beyond the geographic contiguity, the global and the local aspects. The above may be exemplified by the fact that, through internet and electronic mail, it is possible to generate flows of messages equally intense and frequent among sites geographically near or far. In the terms of

Anthony Giddens, presence possibilities are shaped according to modes of regionalization understood "not only as location in space, but also as referred to the zonification of a space-time in relationship to routine social practices" (Giddens, 1995: 151-152). It is then possible to speak of a two-way relationship; to the extent that technologies permit time and space coincidences, social interactions are established; in turn, social interactions may come to delimit a specific space and time.

In this respect, the meanings of distance proposed by Henri Bakis (1991: 52), as land/distance, effort/distance or symbolic/distance, are very useful to explain that in the *informational society* more emphasis is made on the development of technologies—such as telecommunications—that decrease the effort necessary (in economic terms or in terms of energy) to link sites located at long land/distances. This regionalization may even come to decrease the symbolic/distance between sites (linguistic distance, for instance), or else, to increase it between those that cannot accede to technological resources. In any event, we can observe the *flexibilization*, that is, the possibility to establish intense relationships beyond the physical contiguity.

Implications of flexibilization in labor markets

A first sight evidence of an *informational society* within the ambit of labor markets, is the decentralization of tasks and their coordination through communication networks, equally established among several floors of a building or among several continents. The above is only one of the instances in which flexibilization is a must:

It is true that current technological trends promote all the forms of flexibility so that, in the absence of

specific agreements to stabilize one or several dimensions of work, the system will evolve towards a multiphase and generalized flexibility for workers and for labor conditions (Castells, 1999: 302).

This flexibilization is sustained, among other factors, by aspects provided by the utilization of information technologies, such as the growth of transnational enterprises through across-the-border corporations; the impact of international trade on employment conditions and the at-a-distance administration of labor in each country, for example.

In this manner, forms of flexibilization of salaries, of geographic mobility, of occupational position, of contractual security and of tasks performed are established. These forms of flexibilization find specific evidences as the following:

- Reduction of the size of enterprises, maintaining preferentially skilled labor in developed countries.
- Sub-contracting of parts of the work with transnational companies or with their auxiliary networks, establishing lower cost work centers in under developed countries.
- Hiring of temporary workers, partial time workers or informal enterprises.
- Growing presence of independent workers.
- Automation of relocation of tasks or functions.
- New working and salary conditions.

Implications of flexibilization in training

Together with the characteristics of the labor flexibilization described above, factors arise that are directly related to labor education and training (Castells, 1999) among which we can underline:

- Value added generated as from the innovation both of process and of products, even in the services sector.
- Independent innovation of two main factors: research potential and capacity for markets specification. In this manner, opportunities are offered to the organizations that are more capable of generating know-how and of applying it to specific needs.
- More effective performance of tasks increasing the capacity to adapt the great decisions or strategies of institutions to the coordination of processes and of the most specific tasks. In this manner it is possible to automate procedures and to concentrate the human potential for the discernment of feedback and adaptation tasks.
- Consequently, the capacity to integrate internally all the elements of the production process around strategic objectives and, at the same time, to adapt to the needs of the environment, is fundamental and finds an important point of support on internal training.

Likewise, the flexibilization inherent to the informational society is evident in the ambit of training through guidelines such as that of *education throughout life* (Delors, 1997), because one of the bases of this concept is that the educational processes, spaces and times must not be limited to their conventional expressions, but must be sufficiently flexible to implement training

practices under the most diverse conditions. In the case of *education throughout life*, this flexibility is expressed in the elimination of the traditional distinction between basic education — inherent to one stage of life— and permanent education; in the updating and application of knowledge; in the complementation between the different types of training and in the overcoming of space and time restrictions in order to increase the scopes of education.

Social security principles and reform processes

The characteristics of labor flexibilization have also encouraged "the individualization of the worker in the labor process" (Castells, 1999: 294), as well as the professional fragmentation and diversification. In this sense, the idea has also been spread that the individual utilization of resources permits a better use thereof, an idea that is imbued to a good extent in the reforms of social securities in the continent.

The above is an element of said reforms that should be highlighted because the well-being State and the institutionalization of social securities had as one of their bases the negotiations among sectors to arrive at situations of social stability. Hence that the training of human resources in social security has as a first challenge to show the prevalence and the viability of principles such as universality, solidarity, obligatority and equity in a scenery characterized by flexibilization and individualization.

Universality, as the ideal that the entire population will have social security, a challenge of particular importance, considering the growth of the informal sector evident in Latin America.

Solidarity, as the responsibility acquired by all the members of society in the destiny not only of society itself but of each one of its members (Ruezga, 2003: 23). It is then a question of a social and ethical duty that must be expressed also as a legal and economic duty.

Obligatority, a principle that is a consequence of considering solidarity as a duty; obligatority covers workers, employers, insurance institutions and the State.

Equity, as the principle of social security that eliminates all discrimination in the regulations related to contributions, fringe benefits and conditions to enjoy the latter.

References for education and training in social security

The association of the quality of training with the relationship of contiguity between teacher and student, the reserves that are natural in an innovation and, also, we must say, the inordinate promises related to the application of technologies with educational purposes (Demo, 2001), frequently lead to pose the question: "In the flexible training modalities, such as at-a-distance education, does the student really learn?" This question should be answered with another question, the latter very seldom asked: "In the presential modalities, does the student really learn?" Naturally, the answer to the second question would imply considering different shades of the theoretical bases of educational processes and of the practices derived from these processes, as well as taking into account the specific circumstances in which the training actions occur. In like manner, the effectiveness of the flexible modalities will depend, to a good extent, on the theoretical horizons on

which they are founded and on the instrumentation of the concepts of these horizons, because not all at-a-distance training activities start from the same premises.

It should be pointed out, also, that the expansion of flexible modalities has brought about a profusion of concepts that not necessarily refer to the same reality, or that do not give a sufficient account of this reality. Then, a review becomes necessary, although very general for the purposes of this article, of different schemes that become the references for training in social security. In this manner, it is possible to recover from these schemes those elements that generate labor competences to face the context of flexibilization, that use the advantages of said flexibilization and that are more akin to the principles of universality, solidarity, obligatority and equity that give sense to social security.

Management of knowledge

Although this scheme is not limited to flexible training, it is a reference for this training. Generally speaking, it is based on three aspects; one of them technological, aimed at the applications of technology to store, organize, present and transmit the information from an organization, so that these applications will constitute a capital beyond the persons involved.

A second aspect of the management of knowledge is centered in the persons involved, considering that it is them who create and utilize knowledge, and therefore the management of the organizations must induce the social and relations and the processes that will in turn propitiate the creation and transmission of information and knowledge. In the same sense we can speak of social capital.

Accounting constitutes the third aspect, which is centered in that the determination of the value of the intangible assets makes their management more adequate, which benefits the processes of the organization.

***E-learning* and virtual environment of learning**

These are types of at-a-distance education carried out totally through internet as a communication medium. They are applicable both for on-line courses or for virtual universities. In this latter case, the concept is amplified to include within an internet environment all the elements offered by a traditional *campus*. This has brought about that the expression *virtual learning environment* is used more and more to refer to the systematization of resources as a whole that make learning possible. In any event, the important thing is that, if anyone of these terms is used, diverse resources are included—even of an administrative order, for example—and that this is not limited to sending presentations and include the traditional tools of an internet site without an adequate didactic design (Moreno y Bailley-Baillère, 2002).

Distributed learning

This term has become popular to describe a system in which it is possible to transmit contents to a large number of persons. Even though the possibility of using a greater diversity of media (internet, compact discs, printed media) is admitted, the fundamental idea is that it is sufficient to deposit in one medium the content to be learned, which comes close to the concept of learning through the mail used in the XIX century in which there was little or none interaction with the teacher. It is precisely

due to this vision of the educational process, in which the student assumes a passive role and limits his learning to memorizing activities, that this approach does not take into account the complexity of at-a-distance education.

Open education

The concept is used at different levels: on the one hand, as a principle of education in general: education open to all fields of knowledge, to all persons and to all media, to represent knowledge and its application in educational processes. Some universities are inspired in this sense, as is the case of the Open University of the United Kingdom (ouuk, 2001).

The open education concept is applied, on the other hand, to flexibilization in the organization of processes and requirements of an educational institution to offer its services (registration periods, mandatory attendance at lessons, evaluation periods, etc.). The extreme opposite would be represented by the "most scholarly" systems, because they have restrictions (including time and space restrictions) for these services. On the basis of this meaning, this is a manner of offering solutions to educational needs. We easily come to the question: Is it then possible for education to be at the same time open and at-a-distance? It is so possible that colloquially both terms are often used as synonyms. Likewise, terms such as *open-distance learning* (Keegan, 2000: 43) have been created and perspectives open to at-a-distance education have been proposed (Ferraté et al, 1997). The search for flexibilization would be the common denominator in this integration.

Semi-presential training

In view of the acceptance of the advantages of presential education and of the growing acceptance of the opportunities offered by *e-learning* or at-a-distance education in general, the use of semi-presential education is showing a constant growth. It is located half way between both modalities.

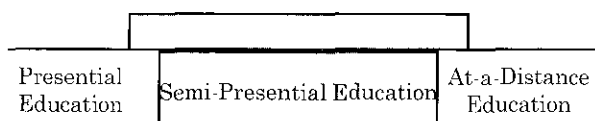


Figure 2. Semi-Presential Education

If we admit that every day it is more difficult to find a totally presential training (because most of the practices include activities outside the class room, in which the student works in an independent manner), the particularity of semi-presential education would be that the planning of this modality includes moments of coincidence between teacher and students for the strategic phases of the process and that, being mandatory, they have a significant weight in the duration of the course.

Learning network

This concept (*learning networks*) appears at the time of applying the characteristics of the so called computer mediated communication (CMC) to education. It is used, especially, to refer to the advantages of internet and of the telecommunications networks in this ambit, and therefore, the term network has been focused, in the immense majority of cases, at the strictly technological sense (Barberá 2001: 160), with the aggregate (of learning) only for the ambit in which it is applied. This approach,

merely technological, constitutes a reductionism not limited to education, that consists in saying that something that is simply interconnected "is in the network".

However, among the terms mentioned so far, this stands out because to a good extent it contains that description of at-a-distance education in which independent study is linked to the interaction with teachers or other members of the network. It also stands out because it includes the flexibility of time and space as a basic element. Likewise, it is highlighted because it emphasizes the importance of social relations to analyze learning networks, whether in the case of a line that has had less diffusion or of that which exalts only the advantages of technology.

Due to these peculiarities, the concept *learning network* offers more elements to handle complex aspects of the flexible modalities, such as the fact that even if teacher and students are separated, an interaction between them is maintained and this separation is didactically used to an advantage.

The flexible training network of the CIESS

The flexible training activities carried out by the Inter-American Center for Social Security Studies (CIESS), whether at-a-distance or semi-presential, retake as fundamentals, among others, those inherent to open education. This is due to the affinity with the principles of social security and because this perspective permits going from the application of the technology per se, to:

- Training *open to all persons*, including those that cannot adapt to the times and spaces of presential training. That is, a *solidary and equitable* education.

- Training *open to diverse contents*, which is, also in this sense, an education with *universality*.
- Training *open to innovating methodologies* for all contents and for all persons, so as to bring it closer to the purposes of societies in which all the fields of knowledge advance equally and all the sectors of society benefit equally from this knowledge; in this manner, the purpose would be to implement the concept of *mandatory and equitable training*.

These principles have set the bases to carry out, in recent years, sixteen at-a-distance and semi-presential activities through which the CIESS has offered flexible training to around 1,000 officials.

These academic activities have as an axis the learning process. It is pertinent to say this, because frequently at-a-distance systems use as an axis only one of the elements that integrate them: these are systems that by giving pre-eminence to tutoring are inclined towards teaching, seeking to emulate the characteristics of presential training, for example. A case on the other extreme is that of training activities that are based on the development of didactic materials for autonomous study, so that they tend to dispense with tutoring.

The at-a-distance training network of the CIESS, on the other hand, takes as point of departure that the training process required by the resources of social security includes equally teaching and learning, so that its purpose is to balance independent study, didactic material, tutoring and institutional support. In this manner, the advantages of flexibilization are used profitably, such as the possibility that a higher number of social security officials establish a relationship with didactic purposes with colleges of several countries,

without need to abandon their daily activities.

The participants in the at-a-distance activities of the CIESS study in an independent manner topics of social security, that is, they do so adapting the activities to their own availabilities, capacities and experiences. To this effect they are furnished printed didactic materials, designed to guide gradual and progressive learning. Also, they establish communication with an assigned tutor who, through electronic mail, offers counseling throughout the development of the academic activity and evaluates the papers required to accredit the knowledge acquired.

The relationship between the community of participants, tutors and the CIESS itself, is also supported by the use of internet resources designed for that purpose. In this manner, it is possible to be aware of general information, consult complementary materials, resort to on line sources that complement the didactic materials, as well as participate in asynchronous forums of discussion —because the best time to study may vary from one country to another, or even, may depend on the circumstances of each participant.

It should be mentioned that the methodological proposal of the flexible training network of the CEISS received a very significant back-up when in 2001 the Center was accepted to participate as full right member of the Latin American At-A-Distance Superior Education (AIESAD) one of best known international organizations in this ambit. The Center has been participating in this capacity in the work of this Association and this relationship is expected to be even more advantageous after the concretion of an informatics development plan that is already being implemented at the CIESS

and at the Secretariat General of the Inter-American Conference on social Security (CISS).

Growth of the flexible training network linking efforts

The existence of the learning networks is closely related to the interaction of their participants; this is why the CIESS is interested in diversifying the options and methodologies so that preferentially the members of the CISS and those interested in the study of social security in general, will have access to its training activities.

In this sense, the informatics development plan mentioned above will favor communication among the participants in the at-a-distance courses, will increment the exchange of information through the *web* site of the Center, and will improve internal processes. Worthy of special mention is the fact that the second phase of this plan includes the installation of resources to carry out video conferences from the CIESS itself, because those that have been developed in collaboration with the UNAM and linking institutions of Costa Rica, Chile, the United States of America, Italy and Uruguay have given very favorable results.

In like manner, precisely during these days the Center is working with the Corporación de Investigación, Estudio y Desarrollo de la Seguridad social of Chile (CIEDESS) in the implementation of a course under the *e-learning* modality, which will surely enable us to increase the training possibilities using precisely the technological tools that encourage *flexibilization* which is characteristic to a good extent, of the scenery in which social security institutions act and will surely continue to act.

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