



TRAINING NEEDS OF OFFICIALS OF THE GREEK - CYPRIOT TAX ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT

In general, any tax system, even the most perfect in legal level, is not effective without reliable tax mechanism and reliable provided tax services to the citizens and the enterprises. The application of new innovative technologies could solve the problem of serving citizens and businesses in the time they deal with the tax administration services.

Tax administration is the link between tax legislation and tax payers. With this content it is obvious that it determines the realization of the revenues provided for in the respective State Budget and ultimately the actual tax burden.

In this article we investigate the training needs of employees of the Greek and Cypriot Public Tax Administrations. This article consists of three parts. In the first part, following a study of the literature concerned, the theoretical frame article on which the survey was based is presented. The second part describes the methodology of the survey. The third part is followed by a presentation and comment on the results of the survey.

Keywords: training needs, tax Administration, officials, Greece, Cyprus

JEL Classification: H20, I25, M53, O57

Introduction

In modern knowledge and information societies, neither information nor knowledge of recent and forthcoming changes is self-evident. At the same time, developments and changes at all levels are very rapid and radical. As a result, basic initial training of officials cannot cover the full range of theoretical and practical knowledge, skills and skills required by officials in carrying out their article. As Kelpandis and Vrinotis (2004) say, "what has changed today is that initial education is not enough to prepare for a short time because knowledge, technology and society are changing so quickly that continuous periodic updating of knowledge is required."

The investigation of the training needs of tax officials in Greece and Cyprus is particularly important, since their basic training cannot meet all the scientific and professional needs of tax administration services (Liargovas et.al, 2019a). Continuous and rapid changes require the official to keep up-to-date training and corresponding professional renewal.

Greece has adopted significant changes in almost all areas of economic activity, including the labor market, pensions and health systems, and tax administration, which will help it emerge slowly and steadily from the economic crisis (Komninos et. al, 2020a).

A modern knowledge society and rapid technological development necessitates the continuous updating of the knowledge and skills of tax officials. Continuing training, carried out on the basis of the needs of tax officials, is the basic process of strengthening the human resources of public services and adapting them to the modern requirements of administrative action, provided that it is designed and implemented in the light of the real needs of both the services and the citizens to whom the services are provided. In this way, the tax administration can be better organized and run (Anastasiou et al. 2020; Anastasiou et al. 2021a).

The exploration of the training needs of these employees enables designers of the training policy of the Tax Administration services to gain valuable knowledge of the existing training needs of employees in thematic areas related to the subject of their article. Therefore, an essential precondition for the effectiveness of any training approach is "the identification of its objectives, resulting from the detection, clear formulation and evaluation of the training needs of the participants.

A crucial factor for success in this process is the identification of real needs rather than subjective assessments" (Kafetzopoulou, 2005).

Theoretical background

a. Conceptual clarifications

Training is an integral part of the continuous professional and personal development of the staff, which is carried out in direct conjunction with the overall development of the institution in which they are employed. Continuous training of human resources and updating of their knowledge is therefore necessary to respond to new tasks and changing working conditions.

According to the New Greek Language Dictionary (Babiniotis, 2005) training is the provision of additional scientific and/or vocational training. Training is therefore aimed at acquiring new knowledge as well as new academic, practical and professional attitudes and skills directly related to the professional activity of the recipient. Training is not simply the monitoring of certain training programs. It is a self-evident and integral part of the personal and professional development of articleers. The learning that can be gained from specific training programs may be from simple information to in-depth training and from retraining to the improvement of the staff's knowledge and skills.

According to Mavrogiorgos (1999), training for individuals can be defined as "all activities (which, according to Kokkos (2005) are a sub-category of adult education) and processes related to the conception, design and implementation of specific programs, the primary purpose of which is enrichment, improvement to upgrade and further develop their academic - theoretical or practical, professional and personal interests, competences, knowledge and skills". It is a process of challenging, strengthening, supporting and offering opportunities to workers for professional development and development. It is also (Mavrogiorgos, 1999) dependent on the identified needs of the workers themselves, identified by pre-existing basic education, their article and the service in which they article. Training and, more generally, staff development can therefore be of benefit to both the individual and the entire organization (Koutouzis, 1999).

The training for CEDEFOP (1996) is "post-school and post-school education aimed at filling educational gaps and keeping up to date on new developments and trends, with a view to improving at personal, social and professional levels". In this definition, education has the meaning of training and further training, i.e. further training of specialized learning activity, which prepares someone to take on a role, usually within a professional framework, in order to help them to develop their

skills, to enhance their knowledge, to improve their vocational training, based on their social experience and not on the date of birth.

In conclusion, the basic principles which define and conceptually define the framework for training are as follows (Mavrogiorgos, 1999, Hatzipanayotou, 2001):

- Training necessarily involves the basic training of the trainers on which it is based and which it is expanding, and the initial training is provided with the training data.
- Training is a complementary educational process to basic education, because there are gaps in the scientific preparation of the trainee.
- Training is also considered to serve as an improvement, renewal or replacement of the contents of basic education in order to take advantage of the latest data provided by science and the latest expertise in specialization.
- It is a personal choice of the trainees, it is a continuous and repeated process systematically organized, institutionalized or not, and in this sense contributes to their personal, social and professional development.
- Training shall be based alongside the career and career development of the official.
- It is a state institution that covers needs that are not necessarily related to the personal choices of the trainees, but to the overall function of public administration.

Training is therefore a major subset of lifelong learning¹ and is proceeding in parallel with the career and personal development of the trainee (Hatzipanayotou, 2001), aimed at adults who have completed the course in conventional education in order to fill the needs and gaps which have arisen after the completion of their course and are already at the stage of the production process. It is a form of "mature age education", as Rogers says (1999). Xasapis (2000) and Kokkos

¹ Lifelong learning, which is broader than the term education, implies the unlimited nature of learning, which covers the whole spectrum of life and aims to improve its knowledge and skills and includes all forms of learning, both those provided by all kinds of educational actors, and forms of informal learning (Kokkos, 2005).

(1999), believe that further training is adjacent to the concept of further training and concerns trainees who have completed a training period in the past².

b. The need for further training

According to Vergidis (1998), scientific, technological and socio-economic developments have the effect of multiplying and radically diversifying the knowledge necessary for the working and social life of the worker. In other words, no initial training is sufficient to enable the worker to adequately respond to the working or general needs of our time. Every worker is therefore obliged, in order not to discredit his or her knowledge, to learn and keep up to date about developments in his or her sector in order to respond effectively to modern economic, political, social and technological requirements and to new management systems.

Training helps to increase his professional performance by helping him to deal with the problems arising from the day-to-day performance of his article, while at the same time critically evaluating his article and working for his professional completeness (Hatzipanayotou, 2000).

It follows that the need for further training is apparent from the general assumption that the staff member's training may not be terminated by the first appointment. On the contrary, it must be kept up to date with scientific information in order to ensure that the training process is effective and that citizens are satisfied with the services provided (Hatzipanayotou, 2000).

c. Demarcation of the concept of training needs

Economic - social and, above all, technological developments affect the labor market, with the result that no formal education is sufficient for the entire length of a worker's working life. The training of the public sector worker is considered to be one of the most important human resources management factors in upgrading the quality and effectiveness of public institutions (Lyroni et al., 2018)

It was also stressed earlier that the need to participate in adult learning comes from the specific characteristics which they have such as knowledge, skills, interests, studies, motivation, aspirations, attitudes, attitudes, but also a number of

² Jarvis (2004:58-59) points out that training can be either pre-vocational, vocational or academic and comes after compulsory education, but not necessarily after initial training.

experiences from the professional, family and social surroundings. But how does the concept of training need arise?

According to Xasapis (2000) training needs mean any knowledge, skill or attitude that is necessary but not available to a person for the adequate and complete execution of a job or more generally an activity involving a set of tasks. The schematic performance of this definition could be:

Education need = necessary - available knowledge, skill, attitude.

In other words, it is the lack of qualifications deemed necessary for the execution of a job or equal participation in the various dimensions of social life (Karalis, 2005, Knowles et.al, 2005). This term therefore describes the full range of training needs which arise and may relate to an organization, business or individual and which always arise from the existing socio-economic, political and cultural reality.

Methodology for exploring training needs

Research into training needs is crucial to ensuring the quality, design and implementation of training programs (Leftheriotou, 2006). As a methodology for exploration³ training needs is defined as the systematic research process of identifying the training needs of a target population in relation to a given reference framework⁴. The process of exploring training needs results in identifying the educational content of an intervention, which refers to the target population concerned and is intended to address specific shortcomings in relation to the reference framework (Karalis, 2005).

Adequate knowledge and research of the characteristics of the target population is a necessary precondition for identifying the training needs which the program seeks to cover and for the effective organization and implementation of the training programs (Xasapis, 2000). The procedures for the investigation of training needs lead to conclusions and proposals, finally identifying the educational content of the intervention as a result of the distance of the requirements of the reference framework and the current situation of the target population (Xasapis, 2000), i.e. (Karalis, 2005):

³ The term 'investigation' means a careful investigation to identify evidence, intentions, etc. (Babiniotis, 2005).

⁴ Educational needs concern target individuals or populations, but they are always defined in relation to a set of activities called the reference framework.



In the process of exploring training needs, it is necessary to collect the following data relating to the reference frame article and the target population (Karalis, 2005, Xasapis, 2000):

On the frame of reference:

- Determination of the problem
- Precise definition of the reference frame
- Capture and detailed description of the organizational structure and operation of the reference framework, recording of objectives, content and results of key activities
- Recording of basic methods for the implementation of activities and the qualifications required of those employed
- Identification and description of external factors that will differentiate or will diversify the characteristics and functions of the reference framework in the near future.

On target population:

- Demographic, family and social characteristics of the target population
- Educational level (formal education and/or initial vocational training stage)
- Previous education and experience related to the problem (monitoring of training programs, professional experience)
- Problem specific characteristics of the target population

Methodological Framework

a. Sample of the survey

Of the 8.342 employees serving in the 130 departments of the Greek and Cypriot Tax Administration, 1.348 employees completed the questionnaire. So, the study sample of this research consisted of 1.348 (16,15% of the total population) employees at Tax Offices of the Independent Authority for Public Revenue (41,1% male and 58,9% female) and in Cyprus (51,2% male and 48,8% female). The majority of the employees (78,8% in Greece and 87,5% in Cyprus) are University graduates while a significant percentage (25,2% in Greece and 35,7% in Cyprus) holders of postgraduate and doctoral degrees. Lastly, the majority of employees (75,6% in Greece and 67,8% in Cyprus) have significant article experience over 11 years. The statistical analysis of the sample data has been performed using the SPSS Ver.24 statistical program, which is of great help in interpreting the results obtained from all the questionnaires answered. The reliability index of the questions in the Cronbach questionnaire was 0.88887. Therefore, the measurement scale used in the research is considered reliable since it shows good consistency and reliable variables.

b. Research Questions

The present article is investigating an issue on which, as the review of the relevant literature has shown, there are no findings of previous investigations and therefore the researcher cannot make reasonable predictions of the expected results expressed in the form of research cases (Paraskevopoulos, 1993). Given the lack of previous research findings, it is therefore prudent to formulate simple exploratory questions, the study of which may lead to reasonable research cases for further consideration" (Paraskevopoulos, 1993).

In view of the analysis carried out in the theoretical part of this article and the study of the literature concerned, it was therefore considered appropriate to investigate the following research questions to which respondents were asked to reply:

1. What skills, knowledge and attitudes do tax officials consider to be necessary in order to successfully carry out their duties and to what extent do they have them?
2. Do you think that your education is such that you are efficient in modern requirements and in an ever-evolving digital environment?
3. Does your Service allow you to participate in training programs to improve your ability to meet new digital requirements?

4. What are the main reasons for the officials of the Greek and Cypriot tax administrations to participate in training programs and what difficulties they encounter in participating in them?
5. What five important issues do the tax officials in the two countries want to include a training program?

c. Research results

In the **1st research question**, whether the Tax Administration official, following completion of a follow-up training program, successfully carries out his official duties and to what extent, the survey showed the following results:

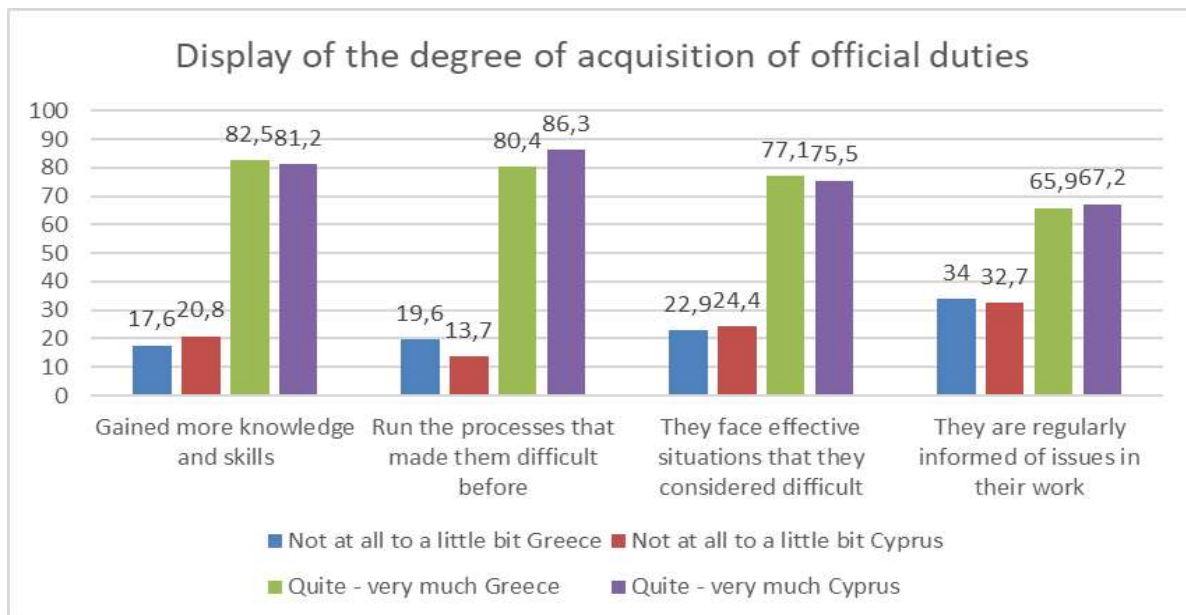


Chart 1. Illustration of the extent to which officials of the tax administrations of Greece and Cyprus acquire official duties

The majority of those involved in research (>80%) in both countries are quite positive to the results of a training program. In particular, participants in Greece (82.5%) and Cyprus (81.2%) gained more knowledge and skills to be able to meet the requirements of the tax item in which they serve. The acquisition of new knowledge contributes significantly to improving skills such as teamwork, problem solving, communication with citizens, etc. In fact, where the main motivation for participating in a training program is to increase or update the staff member's knowledge, this will also improve performance at the workplace. The majority of participants in Greece (80.4%) and Cyprus (86.3%) are more easily performing the processes that made them difficult in their daily article before, while facing more

effective situations that they consider to be of increased difficulty. This will result in an effective response to day-to-day problems in the article of employees, which is an important trigger for participation in training programs.

In the **2nd research question** of how efficient Tax Administration employees are according to their education to be efficient in modern requirements and in an ever-evolving environment, the majority of participants (50.10% in Greece and 51.20% in Cyprus) said they do not feel particularly efficient based on their education.

On the **3rd research question** whether the tax office is enabling its employees to participate in training programs aimed at improving their skills in the new digital services, the majority of participants (59.1% in Greece and 76.8% in Cyprus) replied to the negative.

The provision of service facilities for the monitoring of a training program in the form of a special educational leave and an exemption from the service duties is an important motivation affecting the official's decision to participate in the training program. The exemption from their official duties for the period of the training program shall contribute to the monitoring of the program without the burden of daily articleing on the day-to-day life of an adult. It is not easy to require employees to participate in training programs without at the same time being given similar incentives and facilities.

In the **4th research question**, what are the main reasons for the need for tax administration employees to participate in training programs, the survey showed the following results:

- **increase their knowledge.** Indeed, almost all officials in Greece (95.9%) and Cyprus (93.5%) are expressing the wish to participate in a training program either to increase or to update their knowledge.
- **improve their skills.** Indeed, the acquisition of new knowledge, for all officials in Greece (94.40%) and Cyprus (93.40%), makes a significant contribution to improving their skills such as teamarticle, problem solving, communication with citizens, etc.
- **meeting their personal goals.** Indeed, satisfying the specific need for self-esteem according to Maslow's theory for the majority of employees in Greece (85.20%) and Cyprus (77.40%) is an important result achieved through employee participation in training programs.
- **improve their article performance.** In fact, when the real incentive for all officials in Greece (95.40%) and Cyprus (93.50%) to participate in a training program is to increase or update the staff member's knowledge, this also leads to an improvement in their workplace performance. This

view is also confirmed by Pagakis (2003) "Training helps to increase the professional performance of the worker"

- **improve their professional position.** Indeed, the majority of employees in Greece (80.8%) and Cyprus (60.1%) consider it important to try to improve their professional position. This view is also confirmed by Hatzipanayotou (2001) "By learning the right ways to address the malfunctions that occur in practice, critical appraisal of the article carried out and activation for professional completeness, we are leading to an improvement in the professional position of employees".
- **obtaining a degree.** Indeed, 42.37% of Greek participants and 73.8% of Cypriot participants regard as a low priority the motivation of obtaining a degree in which to participate in a training program.

From the study of the results of the research sample, many difficulties in participation in most employees create:

- **lack of information on the organization of training programs.** Obviously, as the majority of participants in Greece (66.5%) and Cyprus (73.8%) in their services do not appear on the communication table or the relevant circular is not communicated in time for the implementation of training programs.
- **family responsibilities.** The majority of participants in Greece (58.6%) and Cyprus (69.1%) are in great difficulty, especially employees who have young children and have difficulty moving for a period of time away from their place of residence.
- **its mandatory monitoring.** Obviously, as the majority of participants in Greece (38.5%) and Cyprus (26.8%) express, the lack of flexibility in this matter creates difficulties in adapting to a learning environment, especially when it includes several theories.
- **the theoretical approach to issues.** Since it is included in most of a training program, it creates difficulties for the majority of participants in Greece (54.4%) and Cyprus (69%), which intensify when the trainee does not use a combination of educational techniques suitable for adults.
- **the lack of time - workload.** Indeed, for the majority of participants in Greece (62.2%) and Cyprus (64.3%), the timing and duration of the training program are important incentives for the employee to participate in it.

- **the lack of relevance to everyday work.** Often when officials are not notified of the subject areas of a training program, the majority of participants in Greece (55.9%) and Cyprus (46.7%) are concerned about the relevance of the program to their tax purposes.
- **subject matter does not meet their expectations.** For the majority of participants in Greece (53.3%) and Cyprus (63%), the content of many training programs does not cover the difficulties encountered by employees every day in their work.
- **the reluctance of Supervisors to approve the monitoring.** Indeed, for the majority of participants in Greece (65.1%) and Cyprus (58.4%), the reluctance of Heads to approve membership is, as we have seen before, a particular difficulty for officials.

Finally, in **Research Question 5**, which five important issues do the tax officials of the two countries want to include a training program, the research showed the following results:

For the Greek Tax Administration, the following:

Subject matter	Quite – Very much
Controller training	83,9%
Taxation of income of natural and legal persons	83,5%
Tax code	80,3%
VAT issues	80,3%
Greek Accounting Standards	79,4%

For the Cypriot Tax Administration, the following:

Subject matter	Quite – Very much
Vat issues	87,6%
Training in the TAXIS Integrated Information System	76,7%
Serving the citizen. Ability to communicate with citizens	76,2%
International Accounting Standards	75%
Contact subject: Conflicts - Negotiations	67,3%

The responses provided by the survey participants and formulated in the above table highlight a number of subject areas which express training needs because on the one hand they are considered useful in order to be able to fulfill their tasks

adequately and on the other hand they reveal a lack of knowledge and skills. We therefore draw the following conclusions:

The training needs of officials in Greece can be seen in particular in the subject areas of 'Training of auditors', 'Taxation of the income of natural and legal persons', 'VAT issues', 'Greek Accounting Standards' and 'Tax Quality' and in Cyprus 'VAT issues', 'Training in TAXIS', 'Serving the Citizen', 'International Standards Accounting Standards and Communication Topics, which take the top positions in their preferences, demonstrating the need for continuous information and training on issues related to the effectiveness of their article.

Conclusions

Training is the crucial area of human resources management as it is the fastest growing part of staff activities. Training, referred to as a training course for the development of skills by service employees, has helped the Tax Administrations of the two countries to have a crucial strategy for the development of employees, with the aim of enhancing their effectiveness in the provision of services (Liargovas et.al., 2019b).

The need to improve and upgrade the knowledge and skills of the employees of the tax administrations of the two countries is evident from the personal and conscious needs of each (Komninos et.al, 2020b).

The purpose of this article was to explore training needs in order to identify those points which need further deepening of their knowledge. In addition, the reasons for the employees to follow a training program and what results they expect were investigated.

The primary survey conducted through the movement of the questionnaire was intended to identify the training needs of employees and also to reflect their positions and views.

The importance of training is recognized as vital, as it can be seen when one considers that the formal education system does not teach sufficiently specific skills at the level of professional article. Thus, there are very few employees who possess the skills, knowledge and skills required to fulfill their tasks in full. This highlights the need to improve employees in order to be able to meet the goals of the Tax Administration (Anike & Ekwe, 2014, Anastasiou et al. 2021b).

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DATA AVAILABILITY

a. Funding :

No funding was received.

b. Conflict of interest:

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

c. Ethical approval and d. informed consent:

The research carried out in this article was taken into account with respect to the observance of all the rules of ethics that govern the conduct of such research.

Data availability:

Our manuscript contains data, which will be made available on reasonable request

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