CORPORATE UNIVERSITY: POSSIBILITY FOR A SOCIOCULTURAL FORMATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL

UNIVERSIDADE CORPORATIVA: POSSIBILIDADE PARA UMA FORMAÇÃO SOCIOCULTURAL DO INDIVÍDUO

UNIVERSIDAD CORPORATIVA: POSIBILIDAD DE UNA FORMACIÓN SOCIOCULTURAL DEL INDIVIDUO

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ABSTRACT: This article presents a proposal for the creation of a Corporate University (UC) dedicated to the strengthening of the business organization, with emphasis on the educational development and sociocultural skills of its employees and collaborators. However, it is easily perceived that the objective of these institutions should go beyond improving productivity and incorporating performance strategies. In this sense, we present a proposal for the creation of a UC that is dedicated to strengthening the business organization, highlighting the educational and sociocultural development of employees and collaborators. The work developed resulted from the articulation with the exploratory and bibliographic research that served as the basis for the theoretical-methodological framework of the discussions presented here, in addition to a theoretical-practical experience lived by the researchers, with a proposal of a UC that creates the conditions for the sociocultural development of its members.

KEYWORDS: Corporate University. Corporate Education. Sociocultural Development.

RESUMO: *Neste artigo apresenta-se uma proposta para criação de um modelo de Universidade Corporativa (UC) dedicada ao fortalecimento da organização empresarial, com ênfase no desenvolvimento educacional e nas habilidades socioculturais dos seus funcionários e colaboradores. No entanto, é facilmente perceptível que o objetivo dessas instituições deveriam ir além da melhoria da produtividade e da incorporação de estratégias de desempenho. Nesse sentido, apresentamos uma proposta para a criação de uma UC que se dedique ao fortalecimento da organização empresarial, destacando o desenvolvimento educacional e sociocultural dos funcionários e colaboradores. O trabalho desenvolvido resultou da articulação com a pesquisa exploratória e bibliográfica que serviu de base para o referencial teórico-metodológico das discussões aqui apresentadas, além de uma vivência teórico-prática vivenciada pelos pesquisadores, com uma proposta de uma UC que crie as condições de desenvolvimento sociocultural de seus membros.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Universidade Corporativa. Educação Corporativa. Desenvolvimento sociocultural.*

RESUMEN: *En este artículo se presenta una propuesta para la creación de una Universidad Corporativa (UC) dedicada al fortalecimiento de la organización empresarial, con énfasis en el desarrollo educativo y las habilidades socioculturales de sus empleados y colaboradores. Sin embargo, es fácil percibir que el objetivo de estas instituciones debe ir más allá de mejorar la productividad e incorporar estrategias de desempeño. En este sentido, presentamos una propuesta para la creación de una UC que se dedique al fortalecimiento de la organización empresarial, destacando el desarrollo educativo y sociocultural de los empleados y colaboradores. El trabajo desarrollado resultó de la articulación con la investigación exploratoria y bibliográfica que sirvió de base para el marco teórico-metodológico de las discusiones aquí presentadas, además de una experiencia teórico-práctica vivida por los investigadores, con una propuesta de una UC que crea las condiciones para el desarrollo sociocultural de sus miembros.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Universidad Corporativa. Educación Corporativa. Desarrollo sociocultural.*

Introduction

The theoretical and methodological construction of this article stems from the researchers' concerns about the need to reframe the role of Corporate Universities (CUs). It seeks to capture aspects of reality, social transformations, as well as new demands and social contexts that are generally under-discussed in professional relationships but may be present in the daily operations of most corporate institutions, exerting some influence on the relational dynamics between employees and collaborators.

Thus, based on the researchers' experiences in both the corporate world and the academic sphere, as well as the articulation between theory and practice provided by the opportunity to engage in the Professional Master's Program in Education (MPE), a qualitative, exploratory, and bibliographic study on the subject was developed. This study aims to understand the role of corporate universities better and rethink their function in society. The results obtained from the investigation are presented in this text as reflections and considerations on the importance of CUs, understood here as spaces for the sociocultural formation of individuals within an institution. This text is hoped to contribute to a new perspective on the creation and redefinition of CUs, aiming increasingly for a just and equitable society.

Corporate Universities (CUs) have often been treated merely as marketing tools (external or internal) or, in other cases, as channels for enhancement offered by the organization to its members. The goal is to expand the reach of CUs, elevating them to a strategic internal environment that provides not only training and skill development but also promotes the sociocultural and personal formation of the individuals involved.

The essential peculiarity of the corporate world is surrounded by positions whose interests may be exclusively oriented toward the capitalist universe. Thus, the market increasingly demands more from today's professionals, and automatic actions are no longer sufficient. It is essential to aggregate a set of skills, competencies, and knowledge that go beyond technical training. Some form of additional development is necessary, as companies demand multifaceted and flexible employees within the possibilities offered by the fabric of social acculturation. Simply pressing a button is no longer sufficient.

Contemporary society reveals the need for a deeper understanding of various phenomena, conditions, and complex and distinct realities, whether they are of a sociocultural, sexual, ethnic, color, or other diverse nature within the sphere of human coexistence. This is evident not only in external environments or the interpersonal relationships that people maintain in their social lives outside the workplace, but also in the daily interactions within organizations, among the collaborators themselves, in their interactions with clients, and in their socio-professional relationships.

Inevitably, the entire corporate environment is impacted by these conditions. Therefore, if an institution desires an open and healthy channel for coexistence, it is important to create opportunities to discuss such sociocultural demands and simultaneously offer conditions for the training and development of the individuals who work there.

Thus, in dialogue with educational interests aimed at the sociocultural development of individuals, this text proposes the creation of a Corporate University (CU) that transcends issues such as increased productivity and the incorporation of performance strategies for the company, focusing instead on promoting a sociocultural growth environment for its employees. In this context, the possibilities for opening and discussing topics involving relationships and understanding differences were envisaged.

The proposal to create a Corporate University is based on understanding its origins, objectives, and needs. Certain theoretical and conceptual aspects reveal its importance and suggest a way to implement it that goes beyond objective issues such as competitiveness and profit, among others, and brings to the discussion the elements that make up the social fabric of the organization and all its relationships: human development, sociocultural development, and civic education.

Understanding Corporate Universities

A Corporate University cannot and should not be limited to operational training or merely serve as a marketing tool. The resources employed, whether financial or time-related, can explore a multitude of objectives but must always be linked to the company's overall strategy. According to Allen (2002, p. 9), a corporate university is an educational institution designed to assist a company's headquarters in fulfilling its mission by conducting activities that promote individual learning, knowledge development, and the acquisition of wisdom.

This initiative began in the 1960s when companies started recognizing the need to train their employees, given that new technologies were emerging with new machines, and computers began to integrate the commands of these devices. However, Meister (1999) notes that the concept was propelled forward with the creation of General Electric's Training Center, known as Crotonville, located in Ossining, New York, USA. Inaugurated in 1956, this training institution became known as the first Corporate University (CU), specifically established by a company to train its workforce.

In the early 20th century, training programs dedicated to improving the internal workforce emerged. These programs were initially designed to align with the institution's goals,

placing the awarding of academic diplomas or educational credits as a secondary priority. According to Senge (1998, p. 44, our translation),

> Team learning is vital because teams, not individuals, are the fundamental learning units in modern organizations. This is a crucial point: if teams lack the capacity to learn, the organization will not achieve learning.

With the advent of the Modern Industrial Revolution, corporate schools gained popularity in various sectors such as manufacturing, insurance, publishing, and public services. Traditional academic qualifications proved inadequate, leading many companies to create and manage their employee development systems.

The emergence and significant growth of corporate schools occurred mainly in the 1980s, when companies realized that traditional educational institutions could no longer provide graduates with the necessary knowledge to navigate an ever-changing business environment, often described as a "liquid world" (Bauman, 2012). It became essential to bridge the gap between new realities and the workers' lack of knowledge, and to develop new possibilities for adaptation. According to Meister (1999, p. 27, our translation), "Organizations are increasingly entering the education sector to ensure their survival in the future."

Corporate universities differ from traditional training and development departments in several ways. Instead of offering only technical courses or specific skills for immediate tasks, these universities aim to provide a more comprehensive education, often aligned with the company's long-term strategies. They also strive to adapt to the changing business and social environment, offering more flexible and personalized learning. Meister (1999, p. 79, our translation), states that "the main goal of launching a corporate university is to institutionalize a culture of continuous learning, linked to the most important business strategies."

The concept of the Corporate University has become a benchmark for continuous learning within the corporate environment. According to Ivoryit (2022), the workplace serves as the primary stage for interactions between employees. This environment is essential for establishing healthy relationships and accepting individual diversities. It serves as a backdrop to understand the role and impact of Corporate Universities in the training and development of their employees.

Sociocultural Formation of the Individual

Experiencing years in the private sector as a business manager and participating in the creation of Corporate Universities has allowed one of the researchers of this text to occupy a unique "position of speech," rich with contextual, historical, and cultural specificities. This concept, as defined by De Certeau (2011), legitimizes the discussion of this topic to some extent.

In discussing an issue that occurs within a specific space between past and contemporary narratives, De Certeau refers to it as a "historiographic operation." It highlights the importance of the "place from which one speaks" and how this "place" significantly influences this "operation" or how the story is told (De Certeau, 2011).

In this context, the discussions proposed in this text reveal the inquiries and dialogues between both authors, occurring within the scope of the MPE. Furthermore, they align with relevant literature on the conditions and possibilities for developing critical thinking, highlighting the necessity for Corporate Universities to advance beyond merely increasing productivity and efficiency or merely reproducing what is already good and innovative.

In this conception, Corporate Universities can significantly contribute to the sociocultural formation of individuals. It is essential to recognize that every educational process is also a process of humanization. According to Rivière (1988, p. 18, our translation), referring to Vygotsky, "(...) humanization is a product of formal and informal education, conceived in terms of interaction." Ultimately, the enhancement of education equates to the improvement and refinement of humanity itself (Rivière, 1988, p. 18, our translation).

From this perspective, corporations do not always aim for the learner to develop an emancipatory character, enabling them to understand the true value of their work within society and their social relations. In the absence of this emancipatory character in learning, there is a risk of accepting the fallacy that, in the absence of an adequate educational system, someone will determine the learner's paths and objectives, with this system being the corporate one itself.

There is a vast body of literature on this environment of knowledge dissemination, aimed at advancing the organization through the acquisition of superior human resources. This objective should not be neglected; however, within this scenario, it is also possible to aspire to cultural and social development, supported by the intellectual, ethical, and aesthetic progress of the individual. After all, education plays a crucial role in this type of teaching.

As presented by Luca (2023), through an internal educational institution conceived by the corporation itself, it is possible to instill in employees the values, objectives, strategies, and goals of the organization while aligning these principles with external variables beyond the direct control of the company. This approach not only strengthens internal synergy and cohesion but also allows for proactive adaptation to external changes and challenges, thus enhancing the corporation's performance. As Pietro (2011) states,

> The alignment-performance relationship is widely accepted in studies involving the concept of alignment, having been established by contingentialists who affirm that the good performance of organizations results from the proper adjustment between endogenous variables, such as strategy, structure, and managerial processes, and exogenous variables, such as environmental uncertainty and technology (Pietro, 2011, p. 17, our translation).

According to Pietro (2011), the contingentialist theory posits that an organization's performance results from the effective alignment between internal variables, such as strategy and structure, and external variables, such as environmental uncertainty and technology.

In the study "Corporate Universities – An Engine for Human Capital" conducted by the Boston Consulting Group, the emphasis is on the importance of aligning the Corporate University (CU) with the company's strategy. However, the group highlights that the primary goal should be to develop programs that enable participants to create their strategies rather than merely replicating existing models.

Eboli (2004) states that many business leaders believe that knowledge and skill development lead them to invest in CUs as a way to create greater synergy, which can enhance the company's external image by demonstrating a commitment to evolution recognized by the market, and internally boost the team's motivation. Essentially, there are five drivers:

> 1. Flexible organizations: the emergence of the non-hierarchical, lean, and flexible organization capable of responding to the turbulent business environment.
> 2. The era of knowledge: the advent and consolidation of the knowledge economy, where knowledge is the new foundation for wealth creation at individual, corporate, or national levels.
> 3. Rapid obsolescence of knowledge: the decreasing shelf life of knowledge associated with a sense of urgency.
> 4. Employability: The new focus is on lifelong employability/career sustainability rather than lifetime employment.
> 5. Education for global strategy: a fundamental shift in the global education market, highlighting the need to train individuals with a global vision and international business perspective (Eboli, 2004, p. 46, our translation).

Eboli (2004) identifies five trends influencing the business and educational landscape: the need for agile and adaptable organizations to navigate unstable environments; the rise of knowledge as the primary resource for wealth generation; the rapid obsolescence of this knowledge requiring constant updating; the shift in focus from long-term employment to continuous employability; and the growing importance of a global perspective in education, given the internationalization of business.

Various academics and experts in education and human resource management have studied and discussed the distinction between corporate universities and traditional or formal academic institutions. Allen (2002) and Meister (1998) elucidate how these two categories of institutions differ significantly in terms of objectives, content, and methodology, providing a deeper insight into their purposes and impacts.

In Alperstedt's view (2001, p. 10), corporate universities are institutions created and linked to companies aimed at developing essential competencies for the organization, which, cumulatively, exhibit the following characteristics: extend their educational services, as

appropriate, to suppliers, customers, franchisees, other companies, and the external community, not restricting them to their employees; establish partnerships with higher education institutions, culminating in the validation of credits completed and the possibility of awarding diplomas, or enjoy the possibility of awarding diplomas independently.

As defined by Alperstedt (2001), corporate universities are institutions closely linked to companies and focused on developing essential competencies for the organization. These entities not only serve their employees but also include suppliers, customers, and the external community, bringing them in to participate in training with a specific focus on their interests. Additionally, many corporate universities establish partnerships with academic institutions for credit validation and diploma-granting.

This latter characteristic, in particular, creates a point of convergence between corporate and formal universities, emphasizing the complementary role that both play in forming and empowering individuals. Such complementarity is especially relevant when considering Quartiero and Cerny's observation (2005, p. 39, our translation) that "the corporate university is only successful when it relies on the formative competence of the academic university." According to Bauman (2014), an educational society must emerge in response to the new priorities and demands of a constantly changing society, characterized by a "liquid world." This educational society should provide the opportunity to fully explore all available spaces, aiming to build a community that promotes collaboration and understanding among its members. A lifelong education that cannot be confined to formal university cores, but goes beyond,

> Under this new perspective, lifelong education is conceived as something that goes far beyond what is already practiced, especially in developed countries, namely: initiatives for updating, recycling, and conversion, as well as professional promotion, for adults. It should open up educational opportunities for all, with various objectives: offering a second or third chance; responding to the thirst for knowledge, beauty, or self-improvement; or enhancing and expanding training strictly associated with the demands of professional life, including practical training. In summary, lifelong education should take advantage of all opportunities offered by society (UNESCO, 2010, p. 32, our translation).

Lifelong Education, as advocated by UNESCO, refers to a condition in which society should, as much as possible, offer and individuals should take advantage of all available opportunities "throughout their working lives and beyond" (UNESCO, 2010, p. 32, our translation). This ensures that individuals have adequate conditions to continuously educate and develop themselves as long as they feel able to learn. To fulfill the objectives of the proposal presented here, the intention is not to discuss the construction of a specific curriculum for a Corporate University (CU), but rather to analyze the importance of the CU in the relationship between individual formation and development "throughout life."

Therefore, the conception of a CU vision begins here, aiming not only to leverage results but, above all, to promote the engagement of the individual who produces, at all levels, in a society that is constantly changing, with exponential speed, driven by media and openness to the new, whether in work relations or interactions between different groups.

Furthermore, it is observed that education in the "liquid world" (Bauman, 2014) cannot end in school benches, at the end of an institutionalized training journey, as it is known that this learning process continues throughout life, with the experience and curiosity of each individual. It is even possible to return to school benches, but there are still few course offerings, and the high costs often make this return unfeasible, which, in a way, becomes a possibility for a small portion of the population.

Thus, intellectual enhancement is not achieved solely through superficial interactions; it requires continuous development that encompasses cultural, social, and transformative aspects. It is essential that this knowledge be interconnected, promoting complementary learning that goes beyond immediate utilitarianism. The importance of integrating various areas of expertise should be explicitly presented, especially when it comes to contributing to the progress of organizations.

Corporate Universities should not restrict their training to the transmission of skills directly related to company activities. Consider the positive impact that a personal financial education program could have on the entire team. Such training not only provides employees with more peace of mind in managing their resources but can also lead to increased productivity and minimize ethical issues within the organization.

Trainings of this nature are not limited to developing specific knowledge of interest to the corporation in the Corporate University (CU) curriculum but can bring chain benefits. For instance, a group of employees with financially stable personal and family situations tends to work better, without the worry of not having the necessary resources to meet their commitments. Therefore, it is important to establish training in personal finance, which will bring peace of mind to employees, increasing productivity, and reducing potential ethical issues in the company.

Education, then, is not limited to the hours when students are in a formal classroom but to all moments where interactions and dialogues can be established to develop new and significant ideas. Corporate Universities fit into this context as responsible for promoting and developing formative processes, allowing citizens to better understand their space and establish more effective coexistences. Considering that humans are essentially social beings, these formative processes are fundamental. When isolated, relationships that promote growth and learning are not established.

According to Rivière, citing Vygotsky,

> For him, higher functions were the result of enculturation, of cultural influence on learning and development, and could only be explained in their genesis, by their history, placing them in their original context. Therefore, humanization was a product of formal and informal education, conceived in terms of interaction... At the same time, he felt that the essential pragmatic goal of Psychology itself was the improvement and perfection of real education, which was like saying the improvement and perfection of man himself (Rivière, 1988, p. 18, our translation).

Thus, ethical and moral development, intertwined with the educational process, must be an intrinsic responsibility of Corporate Universities. This channel arises from the need to build knowledge to meet the new requirements of the market and corporate coexistence. Although the name "Corporate University" is an allegory aimed at bringing prestige, similar to its traditional counterpart, this created space cannot be dismissed. It must be valued as an environment conducive to ethical and moral development, as well as contributing to the improvement of internal corporate processes.

In the words of Pedro Demo (2000, p. 10), in new learning processes, it is essential to develop the ability to shape one's destiny and to be a critical and creative individual in existing circumstances, always with a sense of solidarity. And for this, it is necessary to establish a place of speech and development.

A Conservation Unit (UC) cannot be understood as a substitute for formal Universities, since these provide the knowledge base for various fields of activity, legitimize and consolidate the necessary training for the theoretical and practical frameworks of professional practice. Furthermore, universities promote intellectual, ethical-moral, and civic development, creating conditions for individuals to coexist in society, work professionally, and enter the job market with learning and adaptation skills to the complex and demanding world of capitalism. Such attributions cannot be expected from a Conservation Unit.

If the expression "Corporate University" is interpreted as a metaphor, it is also crucial to understand that it is a space dedicated to personal development. Although they lack the formality of conventional universities within the educational system, corporate universities (UCs) also require attention and care, especially from their administrative and pedagogical bodies. Moreover, it is of paramount importance that UCs can rely on formality, allowing for curriculum analysis and the definition of methodologies that enable the granting of certifications. By establishing this connection with Institutional Universities, the opportunity to establish ethical standards and solid content is created. In this regard, it is highly valuable, for the success of a business training school, to develop partnerships with traditional formal

Universities. These collaborations with academic institutions become a decisive factor, including in attracting interest.

In this process, not only internal collaborators should be considered, but also clients, as they are the ones who share the company's message and need to be aligned with the various perspectives of society. Furthermore, it is important to extend corporate education to suppliers so that they too are committed to the presented needs. Finally, it is essential to involve the community, which is part of the company's environment, as it is part of the corporation's ecosystem.

A significant part of the process of building and developing Corporate Universities involves identifying deficiencies and training needs, whether they are technical or socio-cultural in nature. Therefore, before determining which disciplines or approaches will be included in the creation of a specific curriculum for an organization's UC, it is essential to understand the existing deficiencies and where it is possible to drive people's engagement, seeking benefits for the whole.

Final considerations

The purpose of this article was to propose a model of Corporate University that transcends the concept of an internal strategic environment serving the business organization, focused solely on training and developing skills for its employees and collaborators, with an emphasis on marketing tools, increased productivity, and competitiveness in the market. It is understood that the objectives of Corporate Universities should encompass issues that go beyond improving productivity and incorporating strategies to enhance performance and competitiveness in the market.

Based on the discussions presented throughout this text, it is believed to be feasible to promote, through the Corporate University, an environment of human and socio-cultural growth, not just technical-professional.

Given that the objectives of a Conservation Unit (UC) must transcend technical aspects and the pursuit of improvement and performance, it is necessary to develop goals and strategies that allow the participation of employees, clients, suppliers, and the community. This participation aims to build knowledge and appropriation of information for reflection on abstract and human themes present in society, such as discrimination, diversity, socioeconomic inclusion, ethics, morality, and other relevant aspects.

Thus, the proposal for achieving these objectives involves forming partnerships with formal educational institutions with the aim of adding theoretical-practical capacity in the field of education and the possibility of certification to be added to the participants' curriculum.

Therefore, this article proposes a model of a Corporate University that goes beyond the traditional concept of an internal environment focused solely on the technical development of employees for the benefit of the business organization. The approach here aims to promote not only professional growth but also the personal and sociocultural development of those involved. In addition to contributing to professional development, Corporate Universities have the potential to promote the sociocultural growth of individuals, encouraging intellectual, ethical, and aesthetic development. They can integrate the values and goals of the organization, strengthening internal cohesion and proactively responding to external challenges.

Thus, it is essential to recognize education as a process of humanization and cultivate critical thinking through Corporate Universities, going beyond the simple pursuit of efficiency and productivity. The education offered by these institutions should empower individuals to understand the impact of their work on society and to promote healthy and inclusive relationships in a diverse world.

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