

# THE PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTING LESSONS LEARNED IN THE MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS

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As society evolves, people face more and more complex cognitive challenges, which actually requires the need of continuous everyday learning in order to excell. This process of learning takes place not only individually, but also organizationally, as organizations can perform better employing the knowledge they have.

Following a brief conceptual analysis, the article presents main characteristics of the lessons learned process at the level of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Moreover, thorough a sociological survey based on a qualitative interview, I analyze the necessity and the possibility of implementing the lessons learned concept within the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

**Keywords:** knowledge; identified lessons; lessons learned; data bases.

We are currently facing a rapid transition from an "industrial society" to a "knowledge-based society", knowledge being an important asset necessary in the organizational competition<sup>1</sup>. Many organizations in the knowledge-based society have identified a certain type of knowledge, namely potentially organizational knowledge, which means knowledge that could have been obtained had we not missed the opportunity. Most organizations, too often, do not analyze or debate upon what has happened so that they could improve their performance when there might appear a similar situation in the future. In order to prevent the appearance of similar problems, both organizations and their employees should pay attention to lessons learned from experience, thus appearing new knowledge, namely potential organizational knowledge.

Due to the lack of time, employees prefer carrying out most urgent tasks at any given time, allocating less time to accomplishing important future-oriented tasks, such as developing new knowledge, which is a tool used to improve performance. The new organizational knowledge covered in this article, namely the lessons learned, refers to results stemming out from attending briefing and debriefing sessions, post-action review processes and other similar actions, where the attendance of employees must be as large as

possible. Employees who have not been personally involved in the processes, events, or projects from which lessons are learned are prone to forgetting and disregarding these lessons. Information and, implicitly, the knowledge extracted from such learning are stored in the employees' brains so that they can be reused in the future<sup>2</sup>.

Knowledge-based organizations have as their primary objective the organizational processes of acquiring lessons learned. The term *lessons learned* is generally used to describe people, things, and activities related to learning from experience in order to achieve improvement of any kind. The idea of lessons learned in an organization is that through a formal learning approach both individuals and the organization can reduce the risk of repeating past mistakes and thus increase the chances of repeating success. In the military context, this means reducing operational risk, increasing cost efficiency and improving operational efficiency<sup>3</sup>. These processes lead to a substantial reduction in recurring mistakes due to the application of repeatedly taught lessons, organizations learning from past mistakes, with the aim of improving future performance.

There are many times when people know, remember, and still do not use the acquired knowledge, as knowledge is related to a different context. According to Edward Cell, the human brain stores, processes and recovers huge amounts of data, information and knowledge using templates representing the stored knowledge. Each situation is compared to the most relevant existing topic,

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and then analyzed<sup>4</sup>. The same thing happens with the new lessons learned within the organization, as they are usually labeled according to the context in which they were developed, and later, when these lessons are relevant, in a different context and situation, it should not be difficult to recover and use them.

### **Lessons Learned and the Ministry of Internal Affairs Structures**

The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) is the institution that represents the public order dimension, a component of the National Security, Public Order and National Security System<sup>5</sup>, and "through its specialized structures it applies, according to its competences, measures to maintain, assure and restore order and public safety, the citizen's safety, prevention and fight against organized crime, criminal phenomena and acts of corruption, and identifies and counteracts the actions of those elements that affect the life, freedom, health and integrity of individuals, private and public property, as well as other legitimate interests of the community"<sup>6</sup>. The legal framework for operation is the Emergency Ordinance no. 30/2007 on the organization and functioning of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

At the level of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the activity of lessons learned is regulated by "Order 91 of 26 July 2017 for the approval of the methodology for capitalizing the results of the operational activities carried out at the Ministry of Internal Affairs". At the central level, the microstructure dealing with lessons learned, within the "Operational Management General Directorate – DGMO, coordinates and methodologically guides interested units, for the implementation, development of the lessons learned system"<sup>7</sup>. The lesson learned process consists of a set of actions organized and executed in seven stages, as follows: preparation, observation and collection of data and information, data and information analysis, notice of the information note, implementation and monitoring of lessons identified, validation of lessons identified and dissemination of lessons learned in accordance with the orders of the Director or, as the case may be, of the commander of the unit concerned.

The structures within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which have expressed their interest in

capitalizing on the experience gained in the areas of competence through the lessons learned process are: "The Department for Emergency Situations, the Romanian Police, the Romanian Gendarmerie, the Romanian Border Police, the Aviation General Inspectorate The Ministry of Internal Affairs, the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations, the National Administration of State Reserves and Special Issues, the General Inspectorate for Immigration and their subordinate structures"<sup>8</sup>.

Of all the MIA structures, the concept of lessons learned has the greatest expansion in the structures of the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations (IGSU) and implicitly in the Department of Emergency Situations (DSU). Exercise Planning and Exceptional Management Exercise Division (DPEMSE). organizes and coordinates the specific activity in the field of lessons learned at IGSU According to the General Inspector's Order of IGSU no. 234/IG from 29.12.2016, "all emergency inspectorates or structures within the I.G.S.U. that conduct exercises have the obligation to send to the Planning, Organization and Evaluation Exercises Department within the above mentioned direction, the evaluation reports with proposals for lessons identified or lessons learned. DPEMSE, through the specialized service, draws up reports on the lessons learned, as well as recommendations, proposals or remedial measures to amend existing operational documents in order to improve the emergency response system. Twice a year, DPEMSE on the basis of the exercise assessment reports, reports on the analysis activity and the lessons learned, as well as on proposals for improving the response actions to be materialized in operative documents"<sup>9</sup>.

Following the very serious consequences of the fire produced on the 30th of October, 2015 at the "Collective" Club in Bucharest, an analysis of the actions was carried out at the level of the Department for Emergency Situations – DSU, on the basis of the reports received together with the reports of the persons involved in the intervention, the Bucharest-Ilfov Ambulance Service (SABIF), the Mobile Emergency Service, Resuscitation and Demarcation Service (SMURD) and the Emergency Situation Inspectorate "Spirii Hill" Bucharest-Ilfov (ISUBIF), as well as the ISUBIF Dispatch Center, and proposing mechanisms for improvement. The result of these analyses was a comprehensive collection of lessons learned, which will be applied

at national level, in order to ensure optimization of intervention mechanisms in similar situations<sup>10</sup>.

Several lessons learned from "The Report on Lessons Learned after the Fire at the "Collective" Club, no. 1453/09.03.2016" are the following:

- supplementing the questions asked by dispatchers in order to succeed, as far as possible, to form an image of the emergency situation produced (estimation of a potential number of victims);

- supplementing intervention resources based on information arriving at the Dispatch Center, irrespective of its source, even if there is a risk that these resources will be recalled at the base if the information is denied;

- the need for dispatch and integrated coordination of all intervention resources.

The above-mentioned lessons learned have a significant impact on the efficiency of the intervention of emergency structures and are compared with the way in which interventions are made in the event of similar events at an international level<sup>11</sup>.

A particular case of lesson identified is good practice. Good practice is "a technique, process, or methodology that helps improve the work of an organization because, by comparing it with other good practices, the best way to operate in a particular field has been identified. Ideally, good practice must be able to adapt, be repeatable, and be used immediately"<sup>12</sup>. In the case of good practice observed through the lessons learned process, the advantages of that practice should be promoted.

When an identified lesson is good practice, the remedial measures consist of documenting the conditions in which the positive experience has occurred and introducing the necessary measures to ensure the repeatability of the conditions<sup>13</sup>.

For all categories of forces, structures and dimensions, there are good practice manuals, the specific objective of such manuals being to identify best practices for mitigating risks in the field. For example, at the level of the Romanian Police, in the field of domestic violence, good practices are derived from the work: "Domestic Violence. A Handbook of Good Practices for Magistrates and Police Workers". In this manual, the phenomenon of domestic violence is presented from the point of view of justice and the response given by the authorities. An "analysis of domestic violence is carried out, starting from the descriptive theoretical

level to concrete action to prevent and combat the phenomenon. Theoretically, the results are intended to contribute to a proactive and reactive approach to tackling the phenomenon that will break down myths about victims, putting their safety at the heart of the concerns of the institutional and social actors involved"<sup>14</sup>.

### Lessons Learned Data Bases

In the NATO view, an identified lesson, which was officially transformed into a lesson learned, is recorded in the computerized basis containing NATO lessons learned, thus becoming a standard practice. NATO's lessons learned database is the most important database of this destination in the world, all of the lessons learned databases from NATO member countries being connected to it.

At the NATO level, there is *the NATO Lessons Learned Portal (NLLP)*, a personalized application that can be used to collect and facilitate navigation, searching, filtering, sorting, reporting and archiving observations. However, the NLLP was primarily designed as an instrument to support the lecturers with lessons learned in the NATO Bi-SC LL process.

The Microsoft Office suite is used as collection software for comments through its applications: Word, Excel and Access, simple and widespread tools that can be easily used in the storage and management of observations. The vast majority of computer users are familiar with these applications, making it easier to share information<sup>15</sup>.

In our country, the lessons learned database connected to the NATO lessons learned database of the Joint Analyzes and Learning Lessons – JALLC<sup>16</sup> Center is set up at the level of the Defense Staff of the Ministry of National Defense and the structure designated for the management to be the Lesson Office learned from the Direction of Instruction and Doctrine<sup>17</sup>.

At the level of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, a database of lessons learned is currently not operational. The Learned Lessons section of the Strategic Analysis Service of the Operations Management Division has developed a pilot project with such a database, currently being piloted.

Locally, at the level of the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations, there is such an internal database, the lessons contained being inapplicable to the other structures of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

### **An Analysis of Possible Improvement of the Lessons Learned Process within the MIA**

I have asked a set of questions to decision-makers in several MIA structures, wishing to know whether they are aware of the legislative part, and whether they use or find beneficial the concept of lessons learned.

The method of research employed is the investigation method, and the technique is the interview, the verbal gathering of information from the subjects<sup>18</sup>.

The instrument used in the research allowed qualitative determinations on elements related to the functionality of the lessons learned. I posted the interview concept on the GoogleDrive storage site corresponding to the lessons learned email address – [lectii.invatateMAI@gmail.com](mailto:lectii.invatateMAI@gmail.com)<sup>19</sup>.

Studying the answers of the respondents and comparing the results, we get important considerations of the lessons learned at MIA. The content of the interviews is very varied, reaching all aspects of the state of knowledge in the field of organizational learning, especially in the field of lessons learned<sup>20</sup>. Applying the extended interview guide is also uploaded to the above mentioned storage<sup>21</sup>.

In general, interviewees are familiar with the lessons learned activity. Considering the fact that within the Ministry of Interior there are two categories of staff: civil servants with special status, who carry out their activity according to the law no. 360/2002 on the status of the police officers, and the military personnel operating according to the Law no. 80/1995, regarding the status of the military cadres, among the interviewees, only the military personnel are fully aware of the activity of lessons learned. Among the military personnel, the most familiar is the Emergency Situations Inspectorate, and it is working on materials that are specific to the lessons learned. At the level of this structure, lessons learned, lessons identified and the good practices are extracted both from the multiple exercises involving all staff and everyday activities. A great deal of lessons learned was extracted from the fire produced on 30.10.2015 at the "Collective" Club in Bucharest.

Procurement workers assimilate the lessons learned with the case libraries (especially with the National Agency for Public Procurement –

ANAP). They argue that this library, in addition to a comprehensive procurement guide, also offers some situations where some people have enforced the law and, if there is any similarity, others can follow the same pattern in similar situations.

Although the phrase *lessons learned* is very familiar to them, some of the interviewees assimilate the lessons learned with the system procedures and the internal ones that they perform accordingly.

Nearly all of the interviewees are aware of the pilot project of the lessons learned database initiated by the Operational Management General Directorate of the Central Office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, regarding the capitalization of the results of the activity carried out at the level of the subordinated structures.

Analyzing the research results following the survey method, after using the interview technique as an extension of the concept of lessons learned, we concluded that they should be promoted and implemented at the level of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, since each mission involves risks and vulnerabilities, positive aspects and negative aspects, from a series of conclusions and recommendations can be drawn. Joint exercises highlight irregularities, making them a priority action line, being considered a source of lessons learned, and, obviously, of good practices.

Proposals for improving the knowledge management functionality at the level of the interviewed structures are the following:

- at the level of the Romanian Gendarmerie it is desirable to create a virtual library in such a way that all employees, such as group commander, platoon commander, detachment commander, head of office, head of service will have access to all training programs. This library must be permanently updated and should contain all kinds of knowledge necessary to carry out appropriately all missions of the structures. In addition to internal learning, this library should also contain lessons from European missions such as Frontex and international ones such as NATO – Afghanistan, where the Romanian Gendarmerie units were also sent.

- an e-learning platform is necessary at the level of emergency structures. With this platform, you can share your knowledge, thus all IGSU staff having access to the lessons learned in specific normative acts, doctrines, manuals, instructions, nomenclatures, good practice manuals.

- at the level of the structures within the Central Office of MIA. the sharing of knowledge is done through formal meetings; for example procurement structures, at the order of the Secretary General of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, once a month a debate is held with all representatives of public procurement of the large structures of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

### Conclusions

In order to improve their activity and to be innovative, individuals need to learn both from their experience and from the experiences of others, shared through databases containing lessons learned and good practices. Should the concept of lessons learned be successful, all individuals within an organization need be involved in the learning process.

One of the purposes of this article is to provide ideas for a successful change of personal conduct and organizational practices, and transforming the lifecycle model of learned lessons management and good practice into an integral part of "organizational DNA".

Implementing the process of lessons learned at the organizational level requires a methodology that leads to a change in the way both individuals and organizations act. A lesson is not taught until something changes in the course of the organization's activity, and those who need to change the way of action are affected by a particular situation.

The greatest expansion of the lessons learned and good practice at the MIA is found within the structures with responsibilities in the field of emergency situations, especially DSU and IGSU. In addition to the structures mentioned above, the Romanian Police has an impressive collection of good practice manuals.

Analyzing the results obtained from the sociological survey based on the qualitative interview, we could conclude that the vast majority of the structures within the MIA are familiar with the concept of lessons learned and are looking forward to the operationalization of the learned lessons database located at DGMO.

What needs to be mentioned is the fact that all types of lessons should be collected and managed together by a single entity using a combined system that contains all the improvements suggested at the organizational level. The result of the technological

process through which an organization stores its knowledge of all kinds is a knowledge bank.

Knowledge bank contains sets of lessons learned, best practices and other knowledge presented as conclusions, each with a title, values for context-based attributes, values for fixed attributes, attachments, and hyperlinks.

We propose that our future research be aimed at developing a demonstrative model of a knowledge bank for the National System of Defense, Public Order and National Security.

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