Online Corporate Learning in the Serbian Market

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The purpose of this paper is to examine corporate learning relations between companies, and to investigate the possibility of converting of traditional corporate trainings and meetings to modern means of communication and education, with particular reference to the application of online training and the videoconference system in the process. In addition, the objective of this paper is to examine how well informed companies are about the technology and its introduction into everyday business practice. The research underlines the results of the analyses concerning the practical aspect of videoconferences both in Serbian companies and in foreign ones operating through branches in Serbia.

Key words: corporate learning, online learning, videoconferences, virtual meetings

Introduction

The exponential growth in the extent of available information, which is one of the major characteristics of modern business, has induced the increase in learning requirements, which has been particularly pronounced in recent times. The daily inflow of the new and continuing obsolescence of the present information, accompanied by constant changes in the business environment, irretrievably results in the necessity of education of employees, which enables companies to keep pace with changed circumstances (Boord 1997, 152).

Training staff occasionally and covering only the theoretical aspect of education usually proves insufficient. Surveys carried out in the USA in 2009 suggest that 90% of employees soon forget the information and skills acquired by traditional methods (Tas Group 2009). Continuous education that includes modern technological innovations is currently being in the focus (Rosenberg 2008, 88). Permanent and quality education on the one hand, and cost reduction on the other are the two opposite objectives which can be reconciled and united. Namely, the Internet enables the education of a large
number of employees, whereby the increase in the number of candidates makes only a minor increase in companies’ expenses. Furthermore, the use of the Internet enables an employee or a group of employees to acquire the exact part of the educational material intended for them, without further costs (Meister, 2007). In terms of quality and costs, online courses and videoconferences are the most frequently applied means of education. Numerous advantages arising from these forms of education make videoconferences and distance learning courses more attractive, thus dispensing with traditional learning methods (Prusak 1997, 89).

These forms of contemporary education have been increasingly introduced in Serbia in recent times. However, modern forms of education are mostly related to large, primarily foreign companies with established branches in Serbia. It is the strong inclination of companies to change the current trend of low investing in staff education and introduce new forms of education that raises hope for brighter prospects in the Serbian business market (Njeguš and Veljović 2004, 30–34).

In order to gain a deeper insight into companies’ attitude towards corporate learning and their knowledge and experiences in videoconferencing and online courses, and aiming at perceiving the companies’ initiatives regarding the introduction of videoconferences and online courses into business practice, we have carried out an investigation into the attitude towards corporate learning and modern education forms among Serbian companies and foreign ones operating in the Serbian territory.

**An Investigation into the Current State and Needs of the Serbian Business Market from the Aspect of Corporate Learning**

**Research Structure**

**Research Subject**

The attitude of Serbian companies and foreign ones operating in the Serbian market to online corporate learning, how knowledgeable the companies are about the advantages of application of videoconferences in staff education and organizing meetings, and providing insight into companies’ initiatives concerning the introduction of the named technologies into their business practice.

**Research Objectives**

- To study companies’ attitudes towards corporate learning.
Online Corporate Learning in the Serbian Market

- To study the possible conversion of traditional forms of meeting to modern means of communication and education, with special reference to the application of videoconferences in the processes.
- To study how knowledgeable companies are about the specificities of videoconferencing, and their attitude towards their potential introduction into everyday business practice.

Research Variables

The major research variable, which is subject to change, refers to the application of different types of online education and videoconferencing in business practice. It includes two aspects – qualitative (mode of implementation of online education and videoconferences, i.e. online courses, videoconference-based lectures, virtual training and simulation, virtual meetings) and qualitative (frequency of different types of implementation of education, and the application of the systems). Independent or unchanging variables include a number of issues, i.e. demographic (major activity and a company’s seat), environmental (place of work and the working environment), socio-demographic (sex, age, a respondent’s place of residence), psychological (a respondent’s attitudes to learning and education, and his/her value system) and educational (education degree, how knowledgeable he/she is about online education).

Hypotheses

In our research, the major assumption has been that companies in the Serbian education market give modest allocations for training of employees, which most commonly occurs only when the situation calls for it, even in cases when their attitude to education is positive. In addition, we also assumed that the majority of companies do not take up videoconferencing in their business, nevertheless, by understanding the advantages arising from the application of the method, they do plan to introduce it when the resources are provided.

Research Methods and Techniques

Classic and online survey methods were applied for the purpose of gathering data. The majority of queries put before the survey respondents involved choosing between one or more answers. The conception of a number of queries included the descriptive method, whereas in other cases respondents were given an assessment scale with grading option from 1 to 5, whereby the scale referred to their
evaluation of current state in their company. The instrument struc-
ture involved a total of 35 queries (items), 1 being of open-query
type, 32 closed queries that included multiple or alternative choice,
and 2 queries in the form of an assessment scale. The queries were
arranged into 2 thematic blocks. The data were processed by the
statistic software, and were subjected to quantitative analysis. Re-
sults are presented via a description method, tables and/or charts
derived from the statistic software.

Research Sample and Course of Research

Although Questionnaires were sent to over 150 companies operat-
ing on the Serbian market, we received only 30 completed question-
naires. Unfortunately, the vast majority did not show any interest in
research studies, which could be owing to the fact that in the time of
crisis and transition which Serbia has been experiencing in recent
times, companies do not see corporate education as a priority. Such
a small sample is the reason for the authors’ decision to use only
basic statistical methodology.

The survey included 22 domestic companies and 8 foreign ones
operating through branches in the region of Serbia. In 40% of the
companies, it was managers that answered to the query (12/30),
whereas only in 60% of the companies did the operating workers
respond (18). The survey included different branches of economy,
which also helped us to perceive the general state of affairs in the
economy of the country (table 1).

Respondents in the survey were persons who, by position in their
companies, were authorized to answer the query. Persons holding
the office of Manager accounted for 40%, whereas 60% of the sur-
vey respondents were classified as operators. The research was con-
ducted from December 2008 to September 2009 via a conventional
and online poll.
Online Corporate Learning in the Serbian Market

![Resource allocation](image)

**Major Objective**
Confirmation of the hypothesis: the application of online education and virtual training in corporate learning offers numerous advantages in business practice.

**Survey Structure**
The survey aims at providing information through detailed questions on the advantages of online corporate learning and videoconferences. The obtained results not only provide an insight into the current level of implementation of corporate learning in our country but also ensure achieving some additional objectives, such as the study of the possible application of videoconferences in the education of both employees and clients, and in organizing virtual meetings.

**Research Results**
In this paragraph the survey results are shown descriptively, while in some cases, tables and figures in addition to textual descriptions are used for greater visibility and evidence. For the survey results that do not require additional explanation, only images and/or tables are used.

Before studying companies’ attitudes to online education and videoconferencing, we had to investigate their attitude toward education in general, and gain an opinion on their current investing in staff education.

Almost all respondents (96.7%) regard education as a necessity that has a major influence on business, whereas only 3.3% of respondents consider it as a necessary evil that increases business costs. The latter pointed out that their companies do not invest in education, while the rest gave different answers (figure 1).

The facts that 96.7% of respondents believe that education provides broader benefits, and that only 10% of respondents report on the modest allocations their companies give to staff education, are encouraging. This enables us to draw the solid conclusion that Serbian companies are inclined to following global education trends and
that they understand the importance of continuous education of employees.

Despite the collective awareness of the necessity of permanent-based staff education, Serbian companies are facing hard times for running a business due to the social and economic crisis, therefore only few companies can boast of having staff education departments (30%, 9 companies), whereas 53.3% of companies assign the issue of staff education to only one person. Other companies neither have a department nor a person in charge of education of employees (16.7%). The fact that only in 5 out of 9 departments (55.5%) is education the major activity is indicative of the crisis. In the remaining departments (4 departments) it is considered an additional activity. The same goes for companies which have a person instead of a department in charge of education (table 2).

But, as Bill Brandon says (Brandon 2009): When the economy takes a turn for the worse, all organizations tighten their belts and adjust their priorities. This includes e-Learning activities. While the situation is serious, there are many things that managers can do to ensure that online learning supports corporate strategy and direction in a recession.

Education is occasional or continuous in 28 companies (93.3%), whereas 6.7% of the surveyed companies do not devote any attention to the process. Fifteen companies in the former group (53.6%) educate their employees, 12 (42.9%) companies educate both the employees and the clients, whereas 3.5% of companies educate their clients only (figure 2). The purpose of educating clients is a wish to introduce them to the advantages of cooperation with the company, as well as teaching them about the most effective and efficient ways of using the products and services of the company that organizes education (Morrison and Meister 2001).

The presented data show that although they do face the crisis and lack of money, Serbian companies are in search of ways to educate their employees and customers, which is consistent with our
assumption that Serbian companies understand the importance of corporate learning.

Education is conducted in two modes – it is either self-supporting or run jointly with external institutions, i.e. ‘by order’ (56.7%).

Partly confirming the hypothesis, the results of the analysis suggest that, despite their favorable attitude towards education, companies in the Serbian market allocate modest resources for education, often only when the situation calls for it.

In the following segment of the survey, we shall present the analysis of utilization of modern Information Technologies (Videoconferencing systems) in education and meetings.

A major prerequisite for the application of videoconferencing in education and meetings is a permanent Internet access facility. The fact that all companies participating in the survey satisfy the requirement, which corresponds to some earlier studies, is encouraging. From the results we infer that these companies utilize the Internet mainly for communication, gathering information and browsing, education and holding meetings.

The introduction of videoconferences into business is sensible if there is a need for virtual lectures and/or meetings in the form of supplementary activities, and if traditional forms of education can/are needed to be replaced (Kay 1991, 112–113).

In companies, lectures are mainly run through occasional courses, which occurs rarely in 36.7% companies, frequently in 26.7% and when needed in 23.3% of the surveyed companies. The courses are given either very rarely or are never organized in 13.3% of the companies. In contrast, there is the almost unbelievable fact that 74% of leading American companies that took part in the survey in 2009 have planned to increase the number (which is already considerably high) of the courses intended for employee education (Futurethink 2009).

Courses are most commonly organized in telecommunication and informatics companies, which is not surprising, as these are subject to constant development and advancement. Similarly, in this respect, the sectors of sale and foreign companies’ representation are keeping up with current education trends (table 3). These facts suggest
that the companies in the Serbian market do not fall much behind the companies in more economically developed countries, in theory, at least. Namely, the survey carried out in more than 60 American companies shows that 62% of the participants plan to perform the greatest part of the employee educational process in future by using contemporary technologies, like the Internet and videoconferencing (ACS 2009).

As regards course workout, 16 respondents (53.3%) are of the opinion that the work should be entrusted to external subjects, whereas 11 respondents (36.7%) would rely on experts inside the company.

Since the survey infers that the majority of companies do organize courses, the query concerning the form of the course gave the following results: 30% of the companies provide opportunities solely for traditional courses, whereas in 66.7% of companies these are available both online and via videoconferences (table 4).

This implies that videoconferences have a future in terms of education in Serbian companies.

As a mode of education, videoconferences can most be applied in export, sale and representation companies (87.5%) as well as in those working in the sectors of telecommunication and information systems (83.3%), banking, accounting and insurance (60%), whereas distance lectures can be provided in fewer than half the number of
Online Corporate Learning in the Serbian Market

Table 5: Advantages of online courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantage</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher productivity</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater competence</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased self-confidence</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of belonging</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion opportunities</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>76.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased motivation</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge-induced feeling of satisfaction</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

production companies (42.8%). It is likely that the former are more popular because production procedures are simpler for presenting in practice.

Understanding the advantages of videoconferencing is the essential prerequisite for its incorporation into business. Attending lectures from a workplace is both practical and economical, is the opinion of 90% of respondents. Besides, there are a great many additional advantages that respondents put forward (table 5).

In the survey, higher productivity obtained through videoconferences and classical online courses is most commonly recognized as the greatest advantage (50%). The fact that additional education through online courses provides promotion in only 23.3% of companies leaves space for worry. Hence, it is not surprising that only 30% of respondents believe that online courses have a positive effect on employees’ self-esteem and that motivation is very low – only 30% of respondents find frequent online courses stimulating.

Participants in the study were also asked to comment on which online courses are major – ‘by order’ courses or available commercial and/or free ones or courses created by employees. Some 96.7% of respondents gave an answer to the query, whereby 65.5% opted for the ‘by order’ courses. The result is indicative of the above mentioned hypothesis. Namely, companies are asked about the online course they would run, not about those they are already running. As regards the engagement of external institutions in staff education, 56.7% of respondents reply that they are using the services of external institutions. However, the very fact that 65.5% of respondents are interested in the services and would engage in the courses undoubtedly reflects the economic crisis that companies in the Serbian market are facing.

Results of some earlier studies point to the fact that online trainings and videoconference-based lectures in corporate learning have bright prospects in the Serbian market.
Figure 3  Online courses selection

Table 6  Availability of virtual meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Availability of virtual meetings</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional form of meetings is required</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few meetings are possible via videoconference system</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority of meetings are possible via videoconference system</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of respondents</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some 86.7% of respondents in the survey believe that attending meetings from the workplace is doubtless a great advantage of videoconferencing. Bearing in mind that in the surveyed companies managers attend meetings often or very often (50% and 26.7% respectively), videoconferencing could undoubtedly be applied in organizing meetings either inside a company or among companies, whereby one should pre-determine which section of a meeting can be organized using the above technology.

Some 83.3% of respondents believe that a number of meetings could be virtual, which points to promising prospects for videoconferencing (table 6).

Besides expressing their opinions on the technical possibilities of running virtual meetings, respondents also included comments on technical possibilities for running virtual process simulation, simulation of device operation, and installation and device operation procedures (table 7). The answers were mostly positive, which further encourages the introduction of videoconferences and newly developed systems into the business practice of companies in the Serbian market. The importance of practical simulation and exercises can best be seen in the survey carried out in the USA in 2008. Namely, in 1986, an employee on average needed 75% of theoretical and 25% of practical knowledge in order to do their work properly. The survey from 2008, mentioned above, shows that now employees need 8–10% of theoretical and more than 90% of practical knowledge to do their work properly (Clarke and Jennings, 2009). The advantages of the use of VC systems in these processes are beyond doubt, beginning with cost reduction and an increase in productivity, to implementing practical exercises in an authentic environment, or, in other words, at a place where the knowledge will also be used practically.
The questions above refer to the hypothetical application of videoconferences, or rather \textit{whether or not videoconferences could be applied}. From the theoretical aspect, the current state corresponds to the first part of the hypothesis, i.e. an averagely successful company in the Serbian market gives modest allocations for staff education, has a positive attitude towards education and believes in the wider application of videoconferences in everyday business. Therefore, we can shift towards the second part of our hypothesis which argues that the results of the investigation prove that the majority of companies have not yet had an opportunity to impalement videoconferences, but recognizing the importance and advantages of the systems have planned to take the initiative for their introduction as soon as the resources have been provided.

As regards how knowledgeable they are about the advantages of videoconferences, respondents were encouraged to assess them (1–5). Although the average grade was 3.40 it varied among sectors (table 8). As expected, the sectors of Telecommunications and Information Systems, which, in character, are closely related to modern technologies, gave the best results – all respondents were acquainted with the advantages of videoconferencing (graded 4–5). On the other hand, the sector of Export and Sale gave the least favorable results (graded 1–3, none of the respondents graded it with 5). In conclusion, table 8 shows that all sectors are mostly acquainted with the advantages of the above systems, which is a favorable precondition for their introduction into business practice.

In addition, the research included the issue of the practical application of videoconferences, or rather, whether or not, and to what extent, videoconferences are used in companies operating in the Serbian market. Some 40% of companies included in the survey have experienced the application of videoconferencing, whereas from the rest – 60% (18 companies) – 14 of them (77.7%) are planning to introduce the system (table 9). The introduction of the vc system into practice is clearly indicative of tendencies of Serbian companies to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Virtual meetings (see table 6)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual process simulation</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual simulation of device operation</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual simulation of installation and device operation procedures</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 8  Acquaintance of respondents with advantages of the videoconference system (by sectors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banking, financing and insurance</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunications and information systems</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import, service delivery and sale, representation</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 9  Companies that are not using, but are planning to use videoconferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banking, financing and insurance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunications and information systems</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import, service delivery and sale, representation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of respondents</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

keep up with the leading world companies that use the many advantages of the vc system technology.

The application of videoconferences varies among sectors – it is most commonly applied in the sectors of Production (57.1%) and Telecommunications and Information Systems (50%), and is least utilized in Import and Sale sectors (22.2%).

The survey also examines to what extent the education of employees, aimed at easier application of videoconferences and providing access to these systems, affects the acceptance of the idea among employees. Ten companies (83.3%) out of 12 already using the systems regard staff education as a necessity. Similarly, even a larger number of companies (91.7%) believe that the simple attitude of employees to these systems greatly encourages employees to use videoconferences. As regards 14 companies that are to introduce videoconferencing into their business, they understand to a great extent how the knowledge on the importance of education (85.7%) and simplicity of these systems (78.6%) can influence easier acceptance of the systems among employees (table 10).

The results obtained from the final question in the survey confirm the second part of our hypothesis, i.e. companies in the Serbian market are recognizing the advantages of videoconferencing and are planning to introduce them into their business practice (no fewer than 93.3% of all companies in the survey) (table 11).
Online Corporate Learning in the Serbian Market

**Table 10** Employees’ acceptance of videoconferences as influenced by the education thereon (in companies that are planning to introduce videoconferencing)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education of employees</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple use</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Column headings are as follows: (1) necessary, (2) activity has no effect, (3) necessary (%), (4) activity has no effect (%).

**Table 11** The plan of introduction of videoconferences into business practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction of VC system into practice</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No, videoconferences are not required</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, as soon as the resources are provided</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>76.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, it is one of the priorities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of respondents</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Videoconferencing has numerous advantages that encourage authorized persons inside companies to opt for the introduction of the above technology:

1. Videoconferencing provides persons through Europe the opportunity to follow lectures from their workplace, which not only eliminates travel expenses but also increases productivity. Further, a great advantage of learning in the workplace is that employees learn in an authentic environment where they will be able to use the acquired knowledge (Polley-Berte 2009). In addition, 90% of participants in the survey believe that a rise in the number of participants in the lectures does not necessarily result in higher training costs (Senge 1990, 52), believe.

2. While attending virtual lectures, participants are focused on lecture material, as 76.7% of respondents believe. Numerous investigations suggest that in traditional lectures, employees are under pressure due to the need to leave the office and traveling to other towns or countries where lectures are held, which causes stress than the very learning process (Brodie 1995, 188).

3. The introduction of videoconferences into communication with employees who are spatially distant from their leaders has a positive effect on business, as communication and travel costs are substantially reduced, and higher productivity is ensured through communication from the office. Some 90% of respondents agree with the statement.

4. Frequent virtual meetings with suppliers and clients contributes
to strengthening business relations and co-operation, as is believed by 73.3% of participants in the survey.

5. When an employee is in two minds about any issue, he/she can ask for advice from colleagues or superiors who are better instructed in the respective field. This doubtless adds up to the quality of service delivery and maintains business costs lower (Spencer 2006, 172), as is believed by 86.7% of respondents.

6. Some 73.3% of respondents said that the introduction of video-conferencing contributes greatly to the general image of a company, which comes over as keeping up with modern technology trends, thus further improving its position in the market.

The above results fully support the pre-set objectives, i.e. the attitude of companies towards corporate learning, the investigation into potential replacement of traditional forms of meetings and lectures with modern communication modes and online education with particular reference to the application of videoconferences in the process. Similarly, we were also investigating how knowledgeable companies are about the named technology and their attitude to its potential introduction into everyday business. The fact that data processing has attained the major objective of the research-confirmation of the proposed hypothesis, is of particular importance. In other words, the research has confirmed that the application of online education and virtual training in corporate learning can yield important advantages in business management.

**Conclusion**

Despite the fact that companies do recognize the necessity of keeping up with current trends and the advantages of permanent education of their employees, the fact that Serbian companies are operating under the circumstances of economic crisis should also not be overlooked. As a matter of fact, every third company has departments in charge of staff education, whereas it is only in a narrow majority of companies participating in the survey that the education issue is assigned to a single person. Similarly, indicative of the current crisis is the fact that only 55.5% of the companies have specialized education departments, whereas in the rest, education issues are considered as an additional activity of certain departments. As regards companies where education is assigned on a personal scale, only 18.7% of companies regard education as a primary activity, while the rest (81.3%) consider it as an additional activity. With regard to the above stated, and the fact that only modest resources are allo-
icated for education purposes, only when the situation calls for it, we can draw the conclusion that companies in Serbia have recognized the importance of education; nevertheless, the shortage in resources is the major limiting factor for establishing permanent-basis education. On the other hand, companies in developed countries, like the USA, have suitable conditions that enable them to invest into education as much as they need. In accordance with this goes the fact that in the USA investments in staff education increase on the average every year, while the highest growth was registered in 2006 (an increase of 7% in comparison to 2005) (Bersin 2007).

The fact that a large number of respondents are knowledgeable about the advantages of online training and videoconferencing is rather encouraging. Besides lower costs and enhanced productivity, the application of modern technology and improving the quality of service delivery are emphasized as principal advantages that render a more attractive image of a company. The research confirmed that 66.7% of companies are equipped for videoconference-based lectures, whereas even 83.3% of companies believe that meetings can be held via the same technology. The results, which include the above facts, and the conclusion that only 6.7% of companies find the introduction of videoconferences unnecessary, suggest that companies operating in the Serbian market understand the advantages of applying of the above systems, but low resources come out as the limiting factor.

However, 40% of the surveyed companies found a manner of overcoming the problem and they managed to apply videoconferences in their business, which helped them practically to become familiar with advantages of the systems. Companies which have not yet had opportunities to implement these systems are showing interest in introducing them in everyday business (77.7%).

In conclusion, the performed research infers that the Serbian market is open to videoconferences, as even 93.3% of respondents are planning to introduce these systems (16.6% of the companies are to implement them into their business in the near future, and 76.7% in the foreseeable future, as soon as the resources are provided).

It should be noted that, beside the main objective, i.e. deeper insight into companies’ attitude towards corporate learning and their knowledge and experiences in videoconferencing and online courses, the survey also had a self-educational note. In fact, many of the questions were descriptive and could provide the subjects of new information on the use of ICT in corporate learning and the benefits from being in the company. For the purpose of further deepening of
Serbian companies’ knowledge in corporate training through video-conference and online courses and related company benefits, we propose holding of a series of presentations for them. The case study of corporate learning and videoconference solutions in the world’s leading companies should be presented.

Bearing in mind the fact that videoconference technology is still in the transition phase and is gradually being introduced into the Serbian market, and also that companies are becoming aware of the advantages of this technology, it would be beneficial to repeat the research so as to gain an insight into the current state concerning the introduction of the technology into business.

In addition, as this issue has not been given sufficient attention by the wider community of the West Balkans, it would be beneficial to conduct another survey which could provide a deeper insight into the corporate learning attitudes in the region of the Western Balkans.

References


