

dr Ivan Rekun

Katedra Zarządzania
Klasyczny Prywatny Uniwersytet w Zaporoziu

Knowledge Society and Lifelong Learning

INTRODUCTION

Most people see schooling as a period of their lives that prepares them for work in a profession or for a change of career. This view has not enabled people to cope well with the following situations: most people change careers several times in their lives, even though what they learned in school was designed to prepare them for their first career; the pace of change is so fast that technologies and skills to use them become obsolete within 5–10 years; university graduates are not well prepared for work; companies have trouble institutionalizing what has been learned (e.g., in the form of organizational memories) to ensure that the departure of particular employees does not disable the companies' capabilities; and although employers and workers alike realize that they must learn new things, they often don't feel they have the time to do so. School-to-work transition is insufficiently supported. If the world of working and living relies on collaboration, creativity, and framing of problems; deals with uncertainty, change, and distributed cognition; and augments and empowers humans with powerful technological tools, then the world of schools and universities needs to prepare students to function in this world. Industrial-age models of education and work are inadequate to prepare students to compete in the knowledge-based workplace. A major objective of a lifelong learning approach is to reduce the gap between school and workplace learning by exploring answers to questions such as: What "basic skills" are required in a world in which occupational knowledge and skills become obsolete in years rather than decades? How can schools (which currently rely on closed-book exams, the solving of given problems, and so forth) be changed so that learners are prepared to function in environments requiring collaboration, creativity, problem framing, and distributed cognition? The "Gift Wrapping" approach dominates educational reform. Information technologies have been used to mechanize old ways of doing business rather than fundamentally rethinking the underlying work processes and promoting new ways to create artifacts and knowledge. In learning, these technologies have been used primarily as add-ons to existing practices rather than a catalyst for fundamentally rethinking what education should be about in the next centu-

ry. Frameworks, such as instructionism, fixed curricula, memorization, decontextualized rote learning, etc., are not changed by technology itself. We cannot prepare people to live in a twenty-first century world using nineteenth century technology. Computer literacy” has often been equated with a bag of superficial and transitory knowledge rather than with what really matters about computers: namely, that we can use them for our own purposes by becoming independent of high-tech scribes [Fischer, 1994]. New technologies and new media (such as the World Wide Web, multi-media design, etc.) are necessary to achieve certain learning objectives and to provide foundations for people to change their mindsets, but they by themselves are not sufficient. Just as “the music is not the piano” [Kay, 1996], the fundamental challenges for puters and education are not a function of the technologies themselves, but of the social arrangements we create around their uses.

THE CONTEXT

The purposes this paper is to describe knowledge society and lifelong learning. Human capital has become a key assets of companies’ competitiveness in the knowledge society. Moreover learning and lifelong learning are seen as ways to build a productive and satisfying life within which people can use their full potential as professionals and active citizens. Lifelong learning is the key to employability, competitiveness, adaptability and active citizenship, which interact with one another very closely. Everyone should have equal opportunities to adjust to the demands of social and economic change and participate actively in the shaping of Europe’s future.

Lifelong learning can no longer be seen as one aspect of education and training; it must become the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts. The new focus is on lifelong – during the whole duration of life – and life-wide learning – building on all the learning experiences – formal, non-formal and informal – an individual will come across during his or her professional and personal life. Today, both education and training are of fundamental concern in a European Union striving to secure full access to social, economic and political life for all citizens. If this is to be achieved, both have to occur not merely in the earlier stages of life but throughout it, in a way that depends on individual personal and professional needs. As a result, the aims, content, methods and all procedures governing the activity of education and training systems have to be thoroughly reappraised. It is against this background that the Member States have brought lifelong learning as a goal onto their political agenda, and that the European Commission has undertaken to strengthen European cooperation in this area. The European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996 was a first initiative along these Lines.

Lack of creativity and innovation. Societies and countries of the future will be successful not “because their people work harder, but because they work smarter.” Creativity and innovation are considered essential capabilities for working smarter in knowledge societies [Drucker, 1994]; thus an important challenge is how these capabilities can be learned and practiced. An implicit assumption made is that self-directed and lifelong learning can influence the creativity and innovation potential of individuals, groups, organizations, and countries [Dohmen, 1999].

At times when competitive, flexible and open economies go together with destabilised societies and insecure individuals, the challenge for lifelong learning is not only about economic performance and labour market regulation. Inability to respond in innovative ways to individuals’ demand for security would inevitably fuel social disintegration and political forms of intolerance. In this context “learning to live together”, the third pillar of the Delors’ report takes growing significance [Jarvis and Parker, 2003]. There are great quality of publications, dedicated to enterprises transformations, creating and work of small and medium business, functioning of enterprises alliances [A. Tkach, T. Tkach, 2011].

Several recent papers have argued that organizational forms, mechanisms and procedures of enterprise transformation, is open to question and far from clear and complete. The interrelations between organization of business and value of development economies and a firms within them is of increasing importance of as emerging markets around the world look to the developed markets to decide how to set up their own economic and business – system , working in conditions of high uncertain market degree.

Lifelong learning is not a new subject, either at European level, or in the Member States. So, let us now try to define Lifelong Learning. In the past there has been no understanding of lifelong learning covering a wider range of ‘learning’ opportunities that were separate to the ‘educational’ opportunities that were offered by formal educational facilities. The problem is not with schools or teachers. It is because we have never made adult education a national priority. Someone has to stop and say we want to give people a second chance to learn” (1998).

There is a growing world wide trend to now include all formal, informal, community and employment related learning opportunities under the heading of ‘tertiary’. Its purpose is to encourage a love of learning from ‘cradle to grave’. learning for learning’s sake and learning that is controlled by the learner, not by the provider.

The philosophy is based on the premise that if you put the needs of the learner first, rather than the needs of society or the employer, and encourage learners to learn what they want to learn, then a general attitudinal change to learning will occur.

The assumption is that this approach will open the learner’s mind to new ideas and perspectives, allowing the needs of society and the employer to re-emerge.

Therefore, it will be easier for the learner to go on learning and take up specific, focused and formal educational qualifications. That, in turn, may well change the way society and the employer does things now.

Education, training and lifelong learning are vital components in meeting the challenges of the new knowledge-based economy, Implementing Lifelong Learning is a top priority for many companies, which believe that human capital is crucial to business competitiveness. Investing in people – both the present and future workforce – makes business sense, and helps increasing community competitiveness, and reinforcing social inclusion. Business, in partnerships with education and training institutions, has a key role in promoting Lifelong Learning.

Table 4. Company training objectives in the Australian industry group

Reasons for training	Enterprises agreeing	Enterprises disagreeing
Improve our quality	93,7	1,3
Improve our competitiveness	88,2	3,0
Multi-skill our employees	87,0	4,1
Meet health and safety requirements	77,4	4,4
Implement workplace change	68,8	7,7
Build commitment to the company	67,1	8,1

Source: Allen Consulting Group [1998].

Further support for a more optimistic view of the incidence of industry training in Australia is provided by the Business Longitudinal Survey (ABS 1999). The Business Longitudinal Survey (BLS) is a composite of data gathered from a sample of business on the ABS business register. The BLS gathers data primarily on business and financial performance of enterprises but also includes some simple questions on the provision of training to employees. In 1997/98, the BLS data indicated that 54% of enterprises provided training to their employees and 23% provided structured training. Whilst these figures fall between the data provided by the TES and TPS, it is important to note that the BLS collects data from enterprises with less than 200 employees. Thus, large enterprises are under represented in the sample. This would suggest that a higher rather than a lower estimate of industry training is warranted by the ABS data overall. Estimates of the number of employees receiving training from their employers in the period of the survey suggest that 68% received on-the-job training whilst 46% received structured training. These figures are broadly in line with those of the SET for on-the-job training. The numbers receiving structured training are higher than the number receiving in-house training in the SET, however the definition of structured training in the BLS is broader than that of in-house training courses in the SET [OECD 1999; OECD 2000a; OECD 2000b].

Learning that takes place in the field of post-school education and training... It is as much about what happens on the job as it is about what happens in universities and research institutes. It is as much about foundation education and training which bridges people into further education and training, or into a job, as it is about world-class doctoral study. It is as much about relevance as it is about excellence. The reforms include: better integration of the Industry Training system, Adult and Community Education and Training Opportunities and Youth Training Programmes, within the wider tertiary education system... And it is essential that we find ways to ensure that business and communities, in addition to providers and local and central government agencies are part of the partnership that underpins the implementation and refinement of this Strategy.”

The emergence of a new labour market regime, associated with the knowledge economy, and the ageing of the population requires the organisation of individual life cycles to be reconsidered. The new pattern combines, at different times and in various orders, education, work and leisure [Best, Stern, cited by Gaullier, 2003].

In the Member States, and beyond, there are a lot of promising initiatives in terms of policy development and to put lifelong learning into practice, at various levels. Lifelong learning is the key to employability, competitiveness, adaptability an active citizenship, which interact with one another very closely. Everyone should have equal opportunities to adjust to the demands of social and economic change and participate actively in the shaping of Europe’s future. Lifelong learning can no longer be seen as one aspect of education and training; it must become the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts. The new focus is on lifelong – during the whole duration of life – and life-wide learning – building on all the learning experiences – formal, non-formal and informal – an individual will come across during his or her professional and personal life. The idea of life as “the enterprise of oneself” means that each person can be regarded as continuously employed in that enterprise.

Consequently it is the responsibility of persons to make adequate provision for the creation and preservation of their own human capital. As a concrete follow up to the Proposals for Action, CSR Europe launched its new Programme on “Education, Training and Lifelong Learning: the role of business towards a knowledge society for all”. The mission of the programme is to engage business in innovative education and training partnerships in order to promote a wider access to knowledge and lifelong learning as the key driving force of social inclusion and economic competitiveness.

On the one hand, European countries are undergoing a transition towards knowledge-based economies and societies. Knowledge, competence and the ability to use information intelligently are now important elements – both to allow individual citizens to participate fully in society and to strengthen European competitiveness and economic growth. Today, more people need access to

skills that were previously the privilege of a minority of the population. Lifelong learning is a response, not just to help people develop the skills they need to get and retain a job. Lifelong learning is also a key strategy for giving people the tools they need to make sense of the complex and multi-cultural societies in which they live. On the other hand, there is a broad understanding and support, at the highest political level, that much more needs to be done to make lifelong learning a reality for all citizens – not just to promote learning per se but also to help Europe reach the ambitious objectives. Although progress has been made in several fields, not the least concerning education and training policy, lifelong learning is still far from being a reality for all citizens. 14 million people are still unemployed in Europe. There are growing skills gaps in some sectors of the economy, in particular in the ICT sector. There are also skills mismatches right across the board of sectors where people's qualifications and competence, on the one hand, and employers' demands, on the other, do not match. All this hampers the creation of new jobs and slows down economic growth. According to one estimate, the mismatches between the supply and demand of labour cost the European Union 100 billion euro each year.

RESULTS

In our opinion, during times of high unemployment and a lack of job security, further vocational training is all too often put on the sidelines in favour of economic competition objectives and labour market flexibility. Today, in a time of high growth and low employment, lifelong learning should play a major role in the construction of a society characterised both by high performance and a higher degree of solidarity. We are no longer in an era where our basic education level determines our whole life. Each of us should put our knowledge and skills permanently on show. Learning techniques evolve and disrupt traditional teaching methods and knowledge acquisition.

This is what we are capable of doing in our countries and in the Union as a whole to ensure that the notion of education and lifelong learning will not just become simply a slogan. The fact that our institutions, both national and European, are now taking this into account represents a significant step forward but it is by no means sufficient.

Lifelong learning will only be achieved when a culture of continuing learning is achieved. To stimulate this, the demand side must be stimulated. This must be done by removing barriers to personal learning (particularly financial ones). Lifelong learning has an important role to play in coping with the emerging economic and social challenges:

1. The ageing of the population, which challenges the traditional combination of social arenas and times;

2. Globalisation is affecting all countries. It changes the labour market and the related skills requirements deeply;
3. The importance of knowledge as a key contributing factor to economic growth is increasingly being recognised (e.g. “new growth theories”);
4. The increasing diversity of individual life cycles, largely as a result of the deep transformation of the labour market.

A common policy response to globalisation increasingly emphasises the importance of lifelong learning. The fastest growing industries are knowledge-based. Economic returns tend to be increasingly attributed to intangible factors, including skills. Financing of lifelong learning is crucial to expand access and participation in lifelong learning on a lifelong basis.

The proximity between the lifelong learning agenda and the concern for employability for all has led to increasing linkages between lifelong learning policies and labour market policies. As a result, access to learning is largely conditioned by individual position in the labour market. Most learning opportunities are granted to paid workers – with great disparities – and job seekers. The relevance and sustainability of this pattern of participation and funding is increasingly questioned in the context of the emerging knowledge societies, which are also risk societies. The increasing vulnerability of individuals to labour market crises militates for treating the funding of lifelong learning as a form of social security, ensuring social inclusion of at-risk- groups and promoting social cohesion. New financing arrangements for lifelong learning are also important because governments are not able, or not prepared, to provide all the additional resources required to expand and improve the national skills base. In the context of an ageing population and high unemployment, the aggregate cost of unemployment benefits, retirement pensions and health care creates an enormous pressure on resources. This urges for more funds in addition to public moneys, and for a more effective utilization of the resources available.

CONCLUSION

If gaps exist, industry, higher education and government must work together to identify ways to fill them. Lifelong learning has an important role to play in coping with the emerging economic and social challenges:

- The ageing of the population, which challenges the traditional combination of social arenas and times;
- Globalisation is affecting all countries. It changes the labour market and the related skills requirements deeply;
- The importance of knowledge as a key contributing factor to economic growth is increasingly being recognised (e.g. “new growth theories”);
- The increasing diversity of individual life cycles, largely as a result of the deep transformation of the labour market.

Developing Lifelong Learning is a concrete way for companies to put into practice their corporate social responsibility, raising the skills level of their employees – present and potential, improving relations with the community, and developing closer contact with customers and business partners. In this context, some of the challenges ahead include:

- promoting the business case about Lifelong Learning,
- helping companies in building their capacity for implementing lifelong learning,
- promoting the transfer and cross fertilisation of diverse, successful Education Business Partnerships.

It is imperative to look beyond the economic benefits of lifelong learning, to also emphasise that it fosters social cohesion and improves quality of life.

Most people and governments agree with the idea of promoting lifelong learning for all. But what this will cost, or where the money will come from, remain, to a large extent unanswered questions. The main barrier to lifelong learning is demand, not supply. A lifelong learning strategy must focus on initiatives and targets which will increase demand among potential learners.

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Summary

During times of high unemployment and a lack of job security, further vocational training is all too often put on the sidelines in favors of economic competition objectives and labour market flexibility. Most people change careers several times in their lives, even though what they learned in school was designed to prepare them for their first career; the pace of change is so fast that technologies and skills to use them become obsolete. School-to-work transition is insufficiently supported. We cannot prepare people to live in a twenty-first century world using nineteenth century technology.

Kształcenie ustawiczne podstawą społeczeństwa opartego na wiedzy*Streszczenie*

W czasach recesji wysokie globalne bezrobocie coraz bardziej marginalizuje cele gospodarcze, konkurencję i elastyczność rynku pracy. Większość ludzi narzeka na swoje życie i pracę, ponieważ są zmuszeni zmieniać pracę kilka razy w ciągu swojego życia, mimo wiedzy i umiejętności, które otrzymali w szkole. Tempo zmian jest tak duże, że technologia i wiedza szybko ulegają deprecjacji. Szkolnictwo nie nadąża za zmianami w stęchniczonym społeczeństwie. Nie można przygotować ludzi do życia w XXI wieku wykorzystując technologię z XIX wieku.