

LIFELONG LEARNING - A KEY COMPETENCE ON THE FUTURE LABOUR MARKET

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"Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young."

(Henry Ford)

Abstract: *Our time is marked by profound and rapid changes, but also by new and disruptive technologies. The world is changing so fast that we can say that what seemed like the innovation of the moment, tomorrow is out dated. Products can be copied very easily. Today, even the protection offered by an innovation is only valid for a few years, less and less. Services can be copied even easier. Even the process can be copied. Under these conditions, continuous learning and experimentation are about the only sustainable differentiation options.*

People increasingly understand and accept that one of the most important "solutions" to face the challenges of the labour market of the future is lifelong learning, which helps us to reinvent ourselves in the profession we already practice, without changing field of activity.

This paper shows why lifelong learning is so important, in the context of the future labour market and what its benefits are.

Keywords: *lifelong learning, future labour market, European Union, knowledge-based society.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays there is so much talk about *disruption* caused by the new technologies, which will affect all areas of activity, will overturn our value pyramid and change the way we work.

People in the workplace are bombarded with information coming from all sides, related to automation, digitization, robotics and change.

In such an era marked by profound and rapid changes, but also by new and disruptive technologies, soft skills are more important than ever.

In addition, many of today's young people will have jobs that have not yet been invented.

The most common question we all ask ourselves is: *what are the skills that we will write in the CV in the future, so that we can resist the labour market?*

Helene Li, Managing Director, Head of Strategic Planning, Brand & Communications, the Asia-Pacific area, at BNP Paribas Wealth Management, sums up the skills we need to survive on the future labour market, with this illustration:



(<https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6412468874373107712/>)

Other specialists identified four crucial skills that will help us deal with the labour market of the future ():

- **lifelong learning;**
- **critical thinking** - is that intellectual aptitude that ensures a disciplined process of analysing, synthesizing and evaluating the information acquired through observation, experience, reflection or communication, in order to formulate convictions and establish a course of action;

- **resilience** - the ability to cope successfully with major and continuous changes;
- **self-confidence**.

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People increasingly understand and accept that one of the most important "solutions" to face the challenges of the labour market of the future is *lifelong learning*, which helps us to reinvent ourselves in the profession we already practice, without changing field of activity.

Market research shows that we feel prepared for this challenge.

For example, *PwC Up skilling Hopes and Fears research* shows the paradigm shift in job training and the move to a continuous learning-based system during employment, so that workers can keep up with the impact of technology on the labour market. (<https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/news-room/press-releases/2019/global-skills-survey-2019.html>)

The research was carried out on over 22,000 adults from 11 countries (Australia, China, France, Germany, India, Netherlands, Poland, Singapore, South Africa, the UK and the US). According to this research,

More than half of global employees feel threatened by automation and believe that will significantly change or make their job obsolete within the next ten years, according to PwC Upskilling Hopes and Fears research. They also feel that their current employers could be doing more to help them acquire new digital skills.

The majority, 61%, were positive about the impact of technology on their day-to-day work, and 77% of people would learn new skills now or completely retrain to improve their future employability.

The main conclusions of the research are:

The opportunities and attitudes vary significantly by an individual's level of education, location, gender and age.

Over a third (34%) of adults without school education or training beyond school say they are not learning any new digital skills compared with just 17% of college graduates

Men are more likely than women to think that technology will have a positive impact on their jobs are also more likely to be learning new skills (80% of the men surveyed say they are doing so versus 74% of women).

69% of 18-34-year olds feel positively about the future impact of technology on their jobs compared with 59% of 35-54 year olds, and 50% of those aged 55+.

This paper shows why lifelong learning is so important, in the context of the future labour market and what its benefits are.

2. THE EVOLUTION OF THE *LIFELONG LEARNING* CONCEPT

The right to education is provided in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Over time, content and meaning of this law have evolved quality, from initial education, to the lifelong education and training, as a result of economic, social, cultural transformation, and as a result of transition to the knowledge-based society.

During the period 1940-1960, the emphasis is on initial education, respectively, the acquisition of basic knowledge for the entire population of school age. The major objective of that period is the eradication of illiteracy in the world. Although there have been significant expenditure in this respect, the results were below expectations.

During the period 1960-1970, the focus has shifted from initial education to basic education (preschool and primary education) considered fundamental and binding. This is the starting point of the on-going process of lifelong education. Therefore, education can not be interpreted only as a means of tuition, but it is the basic factor of fundamental and lifelong learning, beyond the training in specialized institutions through training courses or work in the workplace, etc.

Since the '70s, the focus is, more and more, on lifelong education and training. If at first the initial education and continuous professional training were considered complementary concepts, those concepts were then integrated into a single concept that covers all aspects of education. According to Faure Report (UNESCO 1972), continuous education and training is not only a coherent system, but is the principle that underlies the organization of the entire global system of education and training and, consequently, the development of each of its parts.

The new concept of lifelong learning appeared as a response, as an alternative to the major problems facing humanity, as a result of globalization, under new requirements imposed by knowledge-based society and knowledge-based economy. In such a society, human capital becomes a strategic asset and the investment in such assets is critical to economic and social development. Lifelong education and training is one

of the major targets of the EU and this actually came as a result of the study and understanding of current economic and social environment and the challenges it posed. This concept was reconsidered at each stage of work on European Employment Strategy (EES 1997), as evidenced by the debates which took place in the European Council meetings in order to establish the strategy to be followed every year in this respect: the Lisbon European Council, March 2000, European Council in Santa Maria de Feira, June 2000, the European Commission Memorandum of Lifelong Learning, October 2000 and subsequent European Councils (Stockholm - 2001, Barcelona - 2002 Brussels - 2003, 2004, 2005).

When European Employment Strategy was launched, lifelong education and training was conceived as "all useful learning activity, permanent aimed at improving knowledge, skills and competence." (European Commission, 1999) This way of defining the concept, has created controversy in the debate to cast European strategy for education and training, considering that lifelong learning activities would have a restrictive, controversy finally led to a universally accepted definition: "lifelong education and training includes all acquired learning activities throughout life in order to improve knowledge, skills and competencies in terms of a person, environment or civic employment prospects." (European Commission, 2002).

According to this definition, the concept of lifelong education and training includes all forms of learning and training, operated by the person during its existence: formal education, non-formal education, informal education. As stated in the European Commission Lifelong Memorandum, "lifelong learning ... must become the guiding principle of education and participation in continuous learning process. (...) Learning is the common umbrella under which all classes should be aggregated to learning and instruction. The implementation of lifelong learning requires that all work together effectively - both as individuals and as entrepreneurs." (European Commission, 2000)

Education and training are central to the Lisbon agenda for growth and jobs and a key element for 2020 perspective. Creating a well-functioning "knowledge triangle" of education, research and innovation and helping *all* citizens to be better skilled are crucial for growth and jobs, as well as for equity and social inclusion. The economic downturn puts these long-term challenges even more into the spotlight. Public and private budgets are under strong pressure, existing jobs are disappearing, and new ones often require different and higher level skills. Education and training systems should therefore become much more open and relevant to the needs of citizens, and to those of the labour market and society at large.

Policy cooperation at European level in the areas of education and training has, since 2002, provided valuable support to countries' educational reforms and has contributed to learner and practitioner mobility across Europe. Building on this approach, and fully respecting Member States' responsibility for their education systems, the Council endorsed a Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training in May 2009.

The content and meaning of the concept of lifelong learning, with its specific issues, vary depending on the existing diversity of national policy and markets policy at a time (supply and demand for education and training), and according to other aspects derived from national characteristics and priorities. Long-term goal of these systems is to contribute to full expression of individual personality, by acquiring a high quality training, by highlighting their traits and talents, by stimulating their development.

3. THE BENEFITS OF LIFELONG LEARNING

Lifelong learning has unlimited benefits on all levels.

Reality shows us that lifelong learning is an essential competence without which you cannot advance professionally and cannot receive leadership responsibilities.

Today, lifelong learning is becoming more important and more nuanced, as the speed of technology development, the need to integrate these technologies and new working methods into our current lives has increased. The exchange of information is much faster, so the need for continuous learning is obvious and unchallenged.

At the individual level, lifelong learning refers to the development of skills on a regular basis, thus updating skills and increasing the level of knowledge, in order to be able to adapt better to the needs of change in the workplace, but also in personal life, given that today many people work from home, work from a distance, have a high degree of autonomy, they have to plan and plan set the pace of work yourself and find quick solutions.

In the organizational context, lifelong learning involves analysing one's own experiences, using them as a level of learning and, many times, questioning one's own presumptions, values, methods and policies, working practices and interacting with people who you've never seen them, from other cultures and other time zones.

In this very dynamic context, the way in which the training is put into practice and the skills that you use today when you have so much technology and so much information available to learn and to develop continuously, have changed.

Today, lifelong learning is rather a mentality. It is a growth mindset, to remain agile, to adapt to situations that evolve very quickly and which you may not understand.

Trainings are an important component of lifelong learning.

Romanian companies are increasingly aware of the need to invest in training their employees in order to obtain the best specialists with a high degree of professionalism.

This trend is also confirmed by a Eurostat report showing that in 2016, 45.2% of people in the EU aged 25 to 64 took part in education and training, the majority of which participating in non-formal education and training. This meant an increase of 4.9 percentage points compared to the previous survey, which was conducted in 2011, when 40.3% of the working age population participated in such programs. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Adult_learning_statistics)

Also, the participation of younger persons (aged 25–34) in the EU was more than 20 percentage points higher than that of older ones (aged 55–64) in 2016.

In 2016, Employers in the EU were the most common providers of non-formal education and training activities (35.4 %).

The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training adopted in May 2009 sets a number of benchmarks to be achieved by 2020, including one for adult participation in learning, namely that an average of at least 15 % of adults aged 25 to 64 years old should participate in lifelong learning.

In 2018, the proportion of persons aged 25 to 64 in the EU who participated in education or training was 11.1 %; a share that was 0.4 percentage points higher than the corresponding share for 2013. The adult learning indicator refers to participation in formal and non-formal education and training and the reference period for the participation is the four weeks preceding the interview as is usual in the labour force survey.

Denmark, Finland and Sweden stood out from the other EU Member States as they reported considerably higher proportions of their respective adult populations participating in lifelong learning in the four weeks preceding the interview, ranging from 23.5 % to 29.2 %. Estonia, the Netherlands, France, Luxembourg and Austria were the only other Member States where the participation rate in 2018 already exceeded the

15 % benchmark. By contrast, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia and Slovakia reported adult learning rates of 4.0 % or less.

The proportion of the population who had participated in adult learning was higher among women (12.1 % in 2018) in the EU than among men (10.1 %); the shares for men and women were both higher in 2018 than they had been five years earlier.

Unfortunately, Romania is on the last places in EU ranks for lifelong learning: only 0.9% of Romanians aged 24 to 64 extend their knowledge through courses, trainings and other activities, so we are in the last place in the EU at this chapter.

We observe a worsening of the situation compared to the same period of 2013, when 2% of Romanian adults were concerned about lifelong learning.

Adult participation in learning, 2013 and 2018 (*)
(% of the population aged 25 to 64 participating in formal and non-formal education and training in the last 4 weeks)

	Total			Male			Female		
	2013	2018	2018	2013	2018	2018	2013	2018	2018
EU	10.7	11.1	11.1	9.7	10.1	10.1	11.6	12.1	12.1
Belgium (*)	6.9	8.5	8.5	6.7	8.1	8.1	7.1	9.0	9.0
Bulgaria	2.0	2.5	2.5	1.9	2.4	2.4	2.1	2.6	2.6
Czechia	10.0	8.5	8.5	10.0	8.3	8.3	9.9	8.7	8.7
Denmark (*)	31.4	23.5	23.5	25.7	19.2	19.2	37.2	27.8	27.8
Germany	7.9	8.2	8.2	7.9	8.5	8.5	7.9	8.0	8.0
Estonia	12.6	19.7	19.7	9.8	16.2	16.2	15.3	23.2	23.2
Ireland (*)	7.6	12.5	12.5	7.2	10.3	10.3	7.9	14.6	14.6
Greece	3.2	4.5	4.5	3.3	4.5	4.5	3.1	4.5	4.5
Spain (*)	11.4	10.5	10.5	10.5	9.5	9.5	12.2	11.5	11.5
France (*)	17.8	18.6	18.6	15.5	15.9	15.9	20.0	21.0	21.0
Croatia	3.1	2.9	2.9	3.0	2.4	2.4	3.3	3.4	3.4
Italy	6.2	8.1	8.1	5.8	7.6	7.6	6.5	8.6	8.6
Cyprus	7.2	6.7	6.7	7.0	6.8	6.8	7.4	6.6	6.6
Latvia	6.8	6.7	6.7	5.1	4.8	4.8	8.2	8.4	8.4
Lithuania	5.9	6.6	6.6	5.2	4.9	4.9	6.5	8.3	8.3
Luxembourg (*)	14.6	18.0	18.0	14.0	17.6	17.6	15.2	18.4	18.4
Hungary (*)	3.2	6.0	6.0	3.1	5.6	5.6	3.2	6.4	6.4
Malta (*)	7.7	10.8	10.8	7.4	9.3	9.3	8.0	12.4	12.4
Netherlands	17.9	19.1	19.1	17.4	18.3	18.3	18.4	20.0	20.0
Austria	14.1	15.1	15.1	12.8	13.7	13.7	15.4	16.5	16.5
Poland (*)	4.3	5.7	5.7	3.8	5.1	5.1	4.9	6.3	6.3
Portugal	9.7	10.3	10.3	9.3	9.8	9.8	10.1	10.8	10.8
Romania	2.0	0.9	0.9	2.2	1.0	1.0	1.8	0.9	0.9
Slovenia	12.5	11.4	11.4	10.5	9.4	9.4	14.6	13.5	13.5
Slovakia	3.1	4.0	4.0	2.9	4.2	4.2	3.3	3.8	3.8
Finland	24.9	28.5	28.5	21.1	24.7	24.7	28.8	32.4	32.4
Sweden	28.4	29.2	29.2	21.5	22.4	22.4	35.5	36.1	36.1
United Kingdom	16.6	14.6	14.6	15.0	12.9	12.9	18.3	16.2	16.2
Iceland	26.3	21.5	21.5	22.9	18.3	18.3	29.8	25.0	25.0
Norway	20.8	19.7	19.7	19.2	17.5	17.5	22.4	22.1	22.1
Switzerland	29.3	31.6	31.6	30.0	32.4	32.4	28.7	30.9	30.9
Montenegro	2.8	3.2	3.2	2.7	3.3	3.3	2.8	3.0	3.0
North Macedonia	3.7	2.4	2.4	3.9	2.4	2.4	3.6	2.3	2.3
Serbia (*)	3.9	4.1	4.1	3.4	3.7	3.7	4.5	4.5	4.5
Turkey (*)	4.5	6.2	6.2	4.6	6.3	6.3	4.5	6.0	6.0

(*) Refer to the internet metadata file (http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/en/trng_ifs_4w0_esms.htm).

(*) Break in series.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: trng_ifse_01)

Recently, in Romania, the most requested training programs have been those of *leadership*, especially for people in leadership roles.

The second place in the top of the traineeships required by the companies is *the public speaking* ones, because the companies have understood that business presentation has moved to the next level and it is very important that the employees become better sellers and are oriented towards networking.

The third place in the top of the training programs accessed by companies is the *management of the personal brand*, especially for the employees included in what the companies call talent pool - that category of specialists who can access the next level in the company.

Regarding the categories of employees who benefit from training sessions provided by companies, 70% come from the top and middle management. On the other hand, the companies that invest the most in such programs are those in the BPO (business process outsourcing), share service center and banking industries. (Revista Carriere, sepembrie, 2019).

4. CONCLUSIONS

In the context in which the world (and, implicitly, the labour market) is transforming at an astonishing speed, we (as employees and people) will find it difficult to make up for it if lifelong learning is not a habit.

Through lifelong learning we realize that we have infinite mental capacity and that we obtain the right kind of power. Lifelong learning makes us effective, more than effective, meaning you do what you need, instead of doing it properly. Lifelong learning tones your thinking, preserving your ability to be amazed, which brings us happiness.

In each organization there are people who are constantly learning and enjoying the benefits of this approach. It is important to understand how we can encourage this behaviour in schools – for students, but especially for teachers - and in companies – for collaborators, but especially for leaders.

Lifelong learning is about mentality and less resources. In order to people who do not have the mentality of lifelong learning become contaminated, the main problem we have to solve in our organizations is accepting experimentation, and inherently mistakes, as a method for progress.

The financial side can be a barrier, but there are many valuable resources available for free: from online platforms, to TED Talks clips or courses provided by universities. You can also borrow leadership and personal development books or talk to friends and co-workers including things related to development, industry, philosophy or spirituality.

Until the active involvement in meetings, in the training programs at the workplace, the simple attention and connection to the subject is a learning opportunity. That is why we speak of continuous learning as a mentality.

As we know more and develop stronger skills, we can bring greater value around: our family and friends, the company we work for, our clients: the term towering competence - meaning getting better at what we do, continuing to learn all our life.

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