

LIFELONG LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NEW LISBON STRATEGY

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Lifelong learning is the core of the ambitious Lisbon 2010-process. Lisbon Growth and Jobs Strategy aims to transform Europe's education and training systems into world leaders. Also, considering the challenges of the complex adaptive systems, it is therefore undeniable that the future success of European Union economy will rely on the capacity to build up an environment promoting knowledge, creativity and lifelong learning. The human being is an intelligent dynamic system with unthinkable capacities. And the management of the new world organizations has to be focused on building societal and organizational systems that generate collective intelligence and continuously facilitate co-evolution and innovation among the citizens, among the employees. This in turn, enables them to re-create themselves and positively contribute to the economical growth. We consider lifelong learning to be the key in achieving all these goals.

Key – words: lifelong learning, lifelong learning strategy, Lifelong Learning Programme, Lisbon Strategy, complex adaptive systems, ChangeBrain strategic learning spiral

The European Union adopted a Communication in October 2006 entitled "*It's never too late to learn*". The document suggests lifelong learning to be the core of the ambitious *Lisbon 2010-process*, in which the whole European Union should become a learning area, especially now when the *knowledge based economy* is characterized by a continuous acceleration of innovation and an increased use of knowledge.

Three years after it was re-launched in 2005, the *Lisbon growth and jobs strategy* demonstrated that it is working, but the European Union must reform further in order to succeed in a globalised age. We can state now that the "*triangle of learning*" (*education – research – innovation*) plays a central role for a positive trend in growth and jobs creation. But what involves in fact the *New Lisbon Strategy*? – an increased research development & innovation, a more dynamic business environment, *investing in people*, and greening up the economy [1]. With reference to the objective of investing in people, we must consider besides more and better jobs, *lifelong learning* as being of major importance, and, in consequence, subject of our paper.

Lifelong learning must mean high quality initial education for all, from an early age and throughout lifetimes, reducing drop-out rates from schools, world-class higher education, vocational training systems that respond to students and employers' needs, real opportunities and incentives to learn new skills throughout careers, including for older workers. *The Lisbon Growth and Jobs Strategy* aims to transform Europe's education and training systems into world leaders. *Lifelong learning* equips people for change and better jobs, so it is also an important element of flexicurity, the labour market model, already used in some Member States that combines flexible work arrangements with strong social protection [2].

Lifelong learning should be viewed as a concept covering all contexts (formal, non-formal, informal) and levels (pre-school, primary, secondary, tertiary, adult, continuing) of education and training. A *lifelong learning strategy* should include flexible learning pathways and effective transition points between all systems and levels of education and training in order to avoid dead-ends. Lifelong learning strategies should build on partnerships with all relevant stakeholders (including policy makers at national, regional and local levels, social partners, learners and representatives of civil society) and must include the necessary implementation and dissemination arrangements. [3]

The agreements from the 10-year work program of the European Commission, *Education and Training 2010*, constitute the EU strategic framework of co-operation in the fields of education and training, and are

implemented through the open method of coordination. Member States have agreed on *three major goals to be achieved by 2010* for the benefit of citizens and the EU as a whole [4]:

- First to improve the quality and effectiveness of *EU* education and training systems;
- Second to ensure that they are accessible to all;
- Third to open up European education and training to the wider world.

Over the last five years the *Education and Training 2010 Work Program* of the *European Commission* has made a vital contribution towards achieving the main objectives of the Lisbon Strategy: growth and jobs working together for Europe's future. The *Education Council* adopted for the first time in 2001 the future objectives in terms of quality, accessibility and openness of education and training systems, to be achieved in practice by 2010.

These objectives were followed-up in 2002 by a detailed work program. In 2002 it also adopted a resolution committing the Member States and the *European Union* to developing national *lifelong learning* strategies. The *Copenhagen Process* was launched in 2002 by the Ministers responsible for vocational education and training in cooperation with the social partners and the *European Commission*, with a view to improving cooperation in the field of vocational education and training. *The Education and Training 2010 Work Program* incorporates these various policy orientations and the implementation of the *Mobility Recommendation and Action Plan*. It also takes into account the outcomes of the Bologna process in the field of higher education. It establishes cooperation between 32 countries and involves different stakeholders, including social partners and international organizations. It covers all learning contexts (formal, non-formal and informal) and levels (pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher, adult education and continuing training) of education and training within a lifelong learning perspective.

The conclusions from the spring 2006 *European Council* underline that education and training are critical factors in developing the EU's long-term potential for competitiveness as well as social cohesion and reiterate that "investments in education and training produce high returns which substantially outweigh the costs and reach far beyond 2010". Further to this the conclusions from the spring 2007 *European Council* describe education and training as prerequisites for a well-functioning knowledge triangle (education - research - innovation) which play a key role in boosting growth and jobs [5].

Also, last years of research in education field were remarkable by results as establishment of new concepts – *zone of mutual trust (ZMT)*. There are many reasons for the emergence of *ZMTs*, as example enhancing *lifelong learning* through improved access to learning or through increased learner awareness of skills etc. Definitions of a *zone of mutual trust* and reference levels were developed to help those who need a common understanding. A *zone of mutual trust* is an agreement between individuals, enterprises and other organizations concerning the delivery, recognition and evaluation of *vocational learning* outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences). *ZMTs* offer practical help with decisions about the value of qualification and certification, further learning and recruitment into employment. They may be dynamic in nature and may become more or less formal in scope and from according to the mutual confidence and needs of the stakeholders involved [6].

At European level, it is remarkable the *European Commission's* initiative of integrating various educational and training activities under a single umbrella, the *Lifelong Learning Programme* [7]. With a significant budget of nearly EUR 7 billion for the period 2007 - 2013, the new programme replaces the existing education, vocational training and e-Learning programmes, which ended in 2006. The new Lifelong Learning Programme enables individuals at all stages of their lives to pursue stimulating learning opportunities across Europe. It consists of four sub-programs: Comenius (for schools), Erasmus (for higher education), Leonardo da Vinci (for vocational education and training) and Grundtvig (for adult education). A transversal programme complements these four sub-programs in order to ensure that they achieve the best results. Four key activities focus on policy co-operation, languages, information and communication technologies, effective dissemination and exploitation of project results. Finally, the Jean Monnet programme stimulates teaching, reflection and debate on the European integration process at higher education institutions worldwide.

Lifelong Learning Programme represents the necessary infrastructure for transforming Europe in a real area of lifelong learning, and in consequence is a key in promoting social inclusion and personal fulfilment, and also in achievement of people's employability and adaptability.

We are experiencing now the very middle of the second economic revolution, as a result of the changes in the stock of knowledge, which entails an entirety societal conversion, depicted by three particular changes in the economic system:

- a change in the reserve of knowledge generated by
- a change inside the organizations in order to enable them to cause the new productive potential
- generating as outcome a change in the productive potential of a nation [8] the entire world becoming more and more complex.

Complexity theory has grown out of *systems and chaos theories* in an effort to demonstrate why the entire universe is greater than the sum of the parts and how all its components come up together to generate overarching patterns as the system learns, evolves and adapts. But *chaos theory* is totally different from complexity, the two concepts being totally distinctive as in chaos theory the iterated principle is constant, while *complex systems are be capable of adapting and evolving*. [9]

Researchers are translating the theory into a new science relating its key elements to management with a focus on learning and knowledge management. But are the complex systems capable to adapt as fast as the external system impose this? The application of *complexity theory* to a broad range of business and *organizational development issues* is widening in practice. In this field of inquiry a body of thought known as *complex adaptive systems*, or *CAS*, theory has been successfully established. As Mitleton-Kelly (2003) states, complexity is not a methodology or a set of tools (although it does provide both). The theories of complexity *provide a conceptual framework, a way of thinking, and a way of seeing the world* [10] and understanding the business systems in order to provide solutions for the future economy.

It is therefore undeniable that the future success of European Union economy relies on the capacity of building an environment promoting knowledge, creativity and entrepreneurial spirit, *lifelong learning*, through a coherent, inclusive and proactive modern policy. Socio-economic growth, in a globalised world, increasingly relies on entrepreneurial initiative and innovation capabilities. As Greenspan states that *the ultimate competitive goal didn't change* [11]; it is still gaining maximum rate of return. What will happen, in this context, if the present gaps between developed world and the rest might become too big and impossible to be covered or the price for covering it might cost too much our entire humanity?

The human being is an intelligent dynamic system with unimaginable capacities. And the management of the new world organizations has to be focused on building societal and organizational systems that generate *collective intelligence* and continuously facilitate co-evolution and innovation among the employees, in order to make them able to re-create themselves and positively contribute to the economical growth. The result will be the creation of new social and organizational forms through co-participation of all those directly affected. Thus, it does not matter if we are speaking about a developed market or an emerging one, the importance of the entrepreneur not only *through his management skills and employee administration* [12] but also through the decisional process concerning organizational development and human resources training, it is critical.

The change of the systems way of thinking can be generated by both something apparently insignificant or by a huge reform. A small, but critical, change of the system way of thinking can make the deep, unimportant, thoughts of the human being to become tremendously powerful. Richard Hames [13] consider that the most effective tool of ensuring that an organization is conscious of the internal and external system evolutions *is through the persuasive use of the ChangeBrain strategic learning spiral*.

Accordingly to *chaos theory*, missing connections and communication not only during the entire existence of an organization has as outcome the insecurity of the future. Consequently, any strategy developed, in these circumstances, will be incremental and short-term. An improved communication within the organization, by using both formal and informal channels and the promotion of formal and informal training, will maximize the entire activity, by creating a balance not inside the system but in the system development process.

Information is of no use unless it can be communicated. Therefore a work environment allowing and promoting employees' development it is compulsory for the organizational survival and growth, the transfer of managerial know-how constituting a key mission. *ChangeBrain spiral* model combines rigorous investigation with intuitive synthesis and use the operational intelligence of the entire system, promoting and facilitating continuous development and learning, as presented in figure 1.

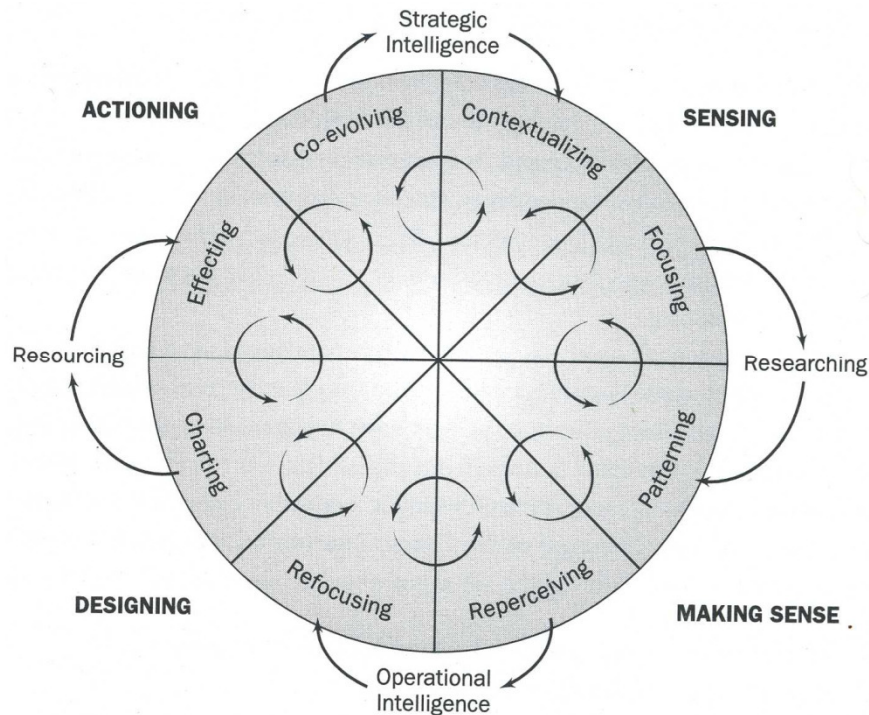


Figure 1. The ChangeBrain Strategic Learning Spiral
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The *ChangeBrain spiral* model is generator of power and craving for learning and confidence for taking actions by leaders. Moreover, it is initiator of organizational growth in a world requiring more and more mixes of generalized and advanced skills and competencies, in line with the modern working conditions. In order to manage complexity it is necessary to become capable to come to a decision in real time, considering not only the dynamics of the functions that make up the complex system but also the dynamics of the system itself. [14]

Nyhan et al. [15], states that one of the keys to promoting learning within organizations is to organize work in such a way that it promotes human development. Additionally, they need collaborative support networks, which will facilitate the transfer of tacit knowledge. This has to be implemented through a continuous direct and permanent contact between actors from diverse organizations, based on spatial and cultural neighborhood, if they are to implement e-learning in the workplace. And it has to be based on partnership between enterprises and other regional 'knowledge institutions' such as universities, innovation centers, technology centers, and vocational education and training providers.

Europe's tomorrow society needs to make *learning a lifelong endeavor*; and people, does not matter their age, have to develop continuously their skills. E-learning will have a significant contribution, for both employees and organizations, promoting development and transforming the way they learn, interact and work. Furthermore, e-learning is opening access to knowledge for people with special needs and those living in difficult circumstances (marginalized groups, migrants, single parents, etc.).

The world economy is evolving, is becoming more complex than ever before, and also the regional economies and European Union. And the European Union societies are eminently shaped by political developments, legal structures and cultural factors. Therefore it become imperative for the enterprises to rethink the way they are doing business, by moving toward a real strategic development and educate their workforce in order to facilitate the recognition of lifelong-learning benefits.

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