

Chapter 22

Towards a Framework for Lifelong E–Learning and Employability

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents and introduces several key concepts related to lifelong e-learning as a way for employability from the point of view of the socio-technical approach. Current employability needs and continuous training via new information and communication technologies bring an opportunity for a fresh proposal in this research area. Starting with the human capital approach, and several issues related to a socio-technical lifelong e-learning, we introduce the need of a new conceptual framework for improving the employability of workers and global citizens, which is based on relationships between people and technologies.

INTRODUCTION

The current world does not stop changing, and workers have to have their knowledge updated in two areas: 1) Economic, related to the labor market and technical skills, and 2) Social, oriented towards an intercultural, open and cosmopolitan society (UNESCO, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2016). From this perspective, numerous institutions and international organizations are carrying out continuous training oriented towards the empowerment of citizens for decades (Commission of the European Communities, 2001; Freire, 1967). This approach is especially important in recent times, since it is observed that the neoliberal context of the past few years has caused the social concept of employability to forget the economic and political factors, and place the people as uniquely responsible for having or not having a job (Fleming, 2017).

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Towards a Framework for Lifelong E-Learning and Employability

In this way, the proposal of this chapter is to study a lifelong learning that takes into account social and technological aspects of the uses of information and communication technologies (ICT) in globalized educational contexts (Stoyanov, Hoogveld, & Kirschner, 2010), and with which to acquire professional skills and citizenship-oriented and empowerment abilities. In addition, we also consider educational ecosystems centered on students, interactive, social, uninterrupted and ubiquitous (Redecker et al., 2011), particularly, by applying the benefits of a learning made through e-learning and based on globalization of knowledge and open educational content (Varis & Puukko, 2010).

Considering these ideas, the document is structured in different parts that are related to lifelong e-learning, socio-technical e-learning, employability, and empowerment. The final conclusion is the need of considering a new conceptual framework for a lifelong e-learning aimed at employability and based on a socio-technical approach.

THE HUMAN CAPITAL THEORY

ICT innovations and higher rates of productivity, profitability and business competitiveness lead to development and global economic progress (Castells, 1996). In this context, the fourth industrial revolution is beginning to develop in all its magnitude (Schwab, 2016), and the labor market is polarized and suffering the effects of robotization (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2017; Barley, Bechky, & Milliken, 2017). In particular, workers suffer the consequences of a gig economy based on work oriented towards short-term tasks, and with employers working with insecurity and volatile conditions (Bithymitris, 2017). These factors are linked to other factors related to self-identity on the Internet, loss of skills, and other approaches such as of the filter, tail or herd theories (Arrow, 1971; Piore & Doeringer, 1970; Van Belle, Caers, De Couck, Di Stasio, & Baert, 2017).

That is why the theory of human capital developed during the sixties by Theodore W. Schultz (1961) and Gary S. Becker (1993) is one of the best tools for workers to improve their value in companies. A useful tool but also with certain shortcomings, vindicated by: i) their individualism, a fact that causes a large part of the responsibility related to employment to fall on the workers; ii) its validity as a seed for self-employment, uberization (collaborative and direct economy between clients and suppliers), job insecurity, and financial debts (Fleming, 2017); and iii) its utilitarian vision of education (Gilead, 2012), with aspects linked to ephemeral learning (Barnes, Brown, & Warhurst, 2016; Jarvis, 2009; Lazzareschi & Gomes Filho, 2006), to content that depends on the business needs (Bauman, 1999), to the skill-biased technological change (SBTC) (Sanders, 2013), to the overqualification (Davidson & Sly, 2014; Leuven & Oosterbeek, 2011), and to gender inequalities in training with effects on quality at work (Cloutier-Villeneuve, 2012; Mühlau, 2011).

In addition, other incongruities can also be observed, such as: i) not considering the benefits that non-formal education offers (Casano, 2016, Ward & Herzog, 1978; Wochowska, 2015); ii) existence of university graduates in unemployment and instability situations (Jackson & Wilton, 2017), and in unpaid jobs (Discenna, 2016; Holford, 2017); iii) importance of the physical presence of people in personnel selection processes (Beam, Hyman, & Theoharides, 2017); and iv) overqualification of workers in national industrial sectors with low innovative and technological intensity and non-knowledge intensive (Torrent-Sellens, Díaz-Chao, & Ficapal-Cusí, 2009).

Given this, various solutions are proposed, such as the adequacy between the skills learned and those required by the labor market (Corominas, Saurina, Villar, & AQU, 2010; Nieto, 2015), which are often

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