

Learning Long Lasting Skills in Current Era

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INTRODUCTION

The need of the information society coupled with the technology advancement created necessary conditions to explore alternatives for lifelong learning. Because knowledge is doubled in every seven the shelf life of degrees is shrinking rapidly, thereby indicating that a worker is supposed to acquire promptly and most accurately, to prove him/herself most workmen. Latest advancements in different fields of knowledge and technology have also facilitated the liberalization of economic policies, privatization and globalization. As a result, the industry is motivated for: quality upgradation, emergence of collaborations and joint ventures, rigorous training programmes, downsizing of workforce, improving work environment and professional management forcing a worker to be lifelong learner for updating the knowledge and skills.

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The knowledge revolution in information society has aggravated multifold competition creating conditions in which a worker is expected to articulate high performance at workplace pressing him/her constantly to be creative and adaptive. Francis Bacon is of the view that the power involves the use of force, wealth and knowledge. A learner in today's world is aware of the fact that knowledge itself is a power. He however did not emphasize the crucial links of knowledge with other sources of power in the society.

It is because the changes have links that Alvin Toffler speaks of as power shift: the remarkable extent to which both force and wealth have come to depend on knowledge. Not very long ago, even military power was basically an extension of the 'mindless first'. Today, it relies almost totally on 'congealed mind', the elements of which incorporate technologies, logic and epistemology-in short work of human brain. In a parallel development it is being increasingly realized that wealth is also dependent to a large extent on brainpower or knowledge. Today's advanced economics cannot run for 30 seconds without computers. The new modalities of production, the integration of vastly divergent and constantly evolving technologies and the progressive dematerialization of markets indicate the increased amount and quality of information needed today to make possible higher production of wealth. Therefore, today's learner is convinced that knowledge, information and communication skills are the key to all forms of power and s/he has to cultivate lifelong learning attitude to survive and make progress in a global society.

Conceptual Framework

Longworth and Davies, relates, "The development of human potential through continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge values, skills and understanding they will require throughout their lifetimes and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances, and environments". The concept of lifelong learning makes the learner to canalize, focus energies to develop an attitude to learn persistently throughout life. The concept of Lifelong should not be confused with continuing education where the professionals are engaged to undertake learning and orientation after they have completed their formal training. The onus of learning is on the worker who should be motivated continuously and enable him/ her to apply what s/he has learnt in varying circumstances.

The emerging trend of World Trade Organization cheering multinational companies to make cross country investments has made openings for the individuals to work in different cultural contexts and thus a worker need to adapt him to new cultures and adapt or evolve appropriate policies, procedures and practices. To be successful a multinational worker one needs to develop adaptability to work in different work cultures, ability operation and develop co-ordination among different professionals to execute programmers. In such situation, the success of a worker demands professional, personal competencies and a healthy attitude towards lifelong learning.

World Education Report points the young generation is entering changing in all spheres; scientific, technical, political, economic, social and industry. In this changing world, the learners have to orient themselves to play a crucial role in preparing themselves not only to face the knowledge-based society with confidence but with purpose and responsibility. The people in the world of work have to keep pace with the knowledge explosion, technological advancements, increasing trends towards interdisciplinary approach to acquire knowledge and skills on continuous basis. For instance, advancements in the field of communication and information technologies have significant effect on the industrial processes and structures. The effect is quite visible in the form of paperless offices, the use of computers, enterprises out that a world which is a planning, CAD/ CAM/ Flexible recourse Manufacturing

Systems, Use of Robotics etc. It is apparent that workforce in the 21 Century has to be equipped with the knowledge and different types of skills.

Skills for Lifelong Learning

American Society for Training and Development in a survey on lifelong learning skills identified a set of seven skills expected of the future workforce These includes; learning how to learn, reading, writing and computing; communication skills; adaptability skills (managing personal and professional growth), group effectiveness skills (interpersonal, team work and negotiation skills); and influencing skills (organizational effectiveness and leadership skills).

Bennet et al reports learner of the 21st Century will be required to develop three types of skills viz., generic skills, employment related skills and soft skills (i.e. personal transferable skills, core skills, key skills, and soft skills).

Anderson and Marshall in a study report that a learner of the 21st Century requires six essential skills for employability. The skills identified are: (reading writing, numeracy, oral communication and personal traits including honesty and reliability); occupation specific skills needed for individual effectiveness in the job (e.g. book keeping or welding, generic skills- communication, problem solving, application of number and reasoning skills, motivation and leadership) and at stage three over-reaching capabilities for maximizing organizational performance-system thinking which include team working, self-management, business thinking and customer orientation.

A study by Longworth advocates the inculcation of the skills among the lifelong learners such as: Life skills-decision making, problem solving entrepreneurial skills, self-esteem and self-management, empathy and tolerance for others, Creativity-a sense of humour, flexibility, adaptability, versatile; critical judgment; thinking, vision planning; practical skills learning to learn; discussing-communicating formally; and information handling.

Standard Board of Singapore identifies seven core skills to be developed among the lifelong learners such as: learning to learn, literacy, listening and oral communication, problem-solving and creativity personal effectiveness, group effectiveness organizational effectiveness and leadership. The study further points out that these skills make the learner to learn: how to learn, to apply what they have learnt at work, to analyse and solve problems, to optimize their potential and abilities, to communicate/inter relate with colleagues and to lead and motivate others.

Comparative analysis of different sets of lifelong learning skills makes us to understand that a learner in the 21st Century requires to develop professional competencies. Jars define the term competence as the quality or the state of being functionally adequate or having sufficient knowledge, judgment, skill or strength as for a particular duty or in a particular respect. Further analysis of the term competence involves the knowledge and understanding of the academic discipline, skills i.e. the ability to perform the various psychomotor tasks and interact with others Attitudes comprise the emotive commitment to professionalism and the willingness to perform professionally. Competence has also been defined in terms of professional and personal

competencies. Professional competencies of a lifelong learner comprise skills and knowledge in the area of information resources, access, technology management research and the abilities to use these competencies as a basis for lifelong learning. On the contrary, personal competencies comprise skills, attitudes and values which enables a lifelong learner to provide valued and valuable service, communicate well, survive in the new world of information and focus on lifelong learning throughout the life. Thus, personal competencies that comprise the inculcation of more generic skills of various kinds are required for a professional to perform efficiently. Precisely the study on the required skills of a knowledge worker in Twenty-first Century reveals that a knowledge worker in information society needs to inculcate professional competencies of two types viz. generic and specific. The generic competencies refer to those, which are common to various functions, positions, work-settings etc. Competencies particular to different functions positions and work-settings are called specific competencies. Specific competencies could be formulated for a lifelong learner working in non-traditional work settings.

Developing Lifelong Learning Skills

Lifelong learning skills can be developed in the learners both through conventional and non-conventional modes of education by developing formal and informal curriculum. The formal curriculum refers to the instructional activities a learner experience during lectures, tutorials and labs while the informal curriculum refers to the extracurricular activities which refer to leadership skills and whole range of other life skills such as: decision making, problem solving, critical and creative thinking, seeking for information, planning etc. Studies reveal that it is difficult to develop life-skills among lifelong learners through informal curriculum.

In other words, both conventional and non-conventional modes of learning can be used to develop lifelong learning skills but for that purpose formal curriculum is essential. Irrespective of modes of learning we require to develop curricula to inculcate the following lifelong learning skills:

- Skill of Linking for Learning
- Collaborative Workmanship,
- Understanding Learning Process,
- Learning to Construct Intellectual Questions,
- Developing Creative Flexible Approach to Learn,
- Effective Learner-Tutor interaction
- Effective Learner-Learner interaction; and
- Critical Awareness.

Strategies for Developing Lifelong learning Skills

The significance of developing effective strategy to cultivate learning environment for the learner to be a lifelong learner is imperative. Experts in the field have proposed number of strategies to facilitate the knowledge worker to be a lifelong learner. However, the following strategies can be tried upon:

- Identification of lifelong learning skills
- Train teachers to develop and assess lifelong learning skills,
- Labelling the components of lifelong learning skills
- Sequencing the components of lifelong learning skills for practice
- Assessment of the components of lifelong learning skills
- Providing flexibility in the courses for practising lifelong learning skills,

- Strengthening in-service training and practical work; and
- Encouraging Learner's involvement

Identification of Lifelong Learning Skills: An attempt needs to be made to identify lifelong learning skills of the knowledge worker in the Twenty-first Century to perform speedily, intelligently, efficiently and effectively in the work place. The process of identification of lifelong learning skills required to be inculcated among the learner of a knowledge society can be made on the basis of: direct observations of the specialists in the field, interviews with the learners the employers, and by critical incidental technique etc.

Train Teachers to develop and assess Lifelong Learning Skills: Seng is of the view that teachers of the 21st Century needs to have clear understanding of the objectives of training in the five disciplines namely personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and system thinking to inculcate and assess the lifelong learning skills. Tulsi advocates that for the development of generic skills and their assessment among the pass-outs, an interaction with the employers, industry needs to be organized on continuous basis to design programmes of teacher training.

Labelling the Components of Lifelong Learning Skills: On the identification of different lifelong learning skills, the teacher is supposed to spell out various components of each skill. The analysis of each component of lifelong learning skills guides a trainer to understand the situations best suited to train and assess the quality of skill performed by a learner Sequencing the Components of Lifelong Learning Skills for Practice: The process of sequencing the components of a particular skill enables the learner to understand the practical application of each skill in different setup of situations. The practice of sequencing of different components of lifelong learning skill helps to further understand the relationship of different skills and their application in day-to-day life.

Assessment of the Components of Lifelong Learning Skills: Appropriate techniques to assess lifelong learning skills enable us to understand the thinking, feeling, behaving processes of a learner. Most popular methods of assessment of lifelong learning skills is made through the techniques namely; self- assessment, peer assessment and portfolio assessment.

Providing Flexibility in the Course for practicing Lifelong Learning Skills: Developing lifelong learning skills among the learners is a continuous process which requires learning in different pursuits of knowledge. For the purpose a learner is supposed to learn at his / her own pace. Therefore, to inculcate lifelong learning skills among the learners of information society, it is imperative to adopt flexibility in the course meaning thereby that the adoption of open and distance mode will be most suitable for the learner of the Twenty-first Century.

Strengthening In-Service Training and Practical Work: Learner in the information age requires having in-service training programmes under the supervision of area experts/industrial resource person who should assess the required skills of the worker during the service. The need of the time demands that during service an alternative arrangement to be made to update the worker's persona, professional and special skills which further indicates the role of open and distance education to be a lifelong learner.

Encouraging Learner's Involvement: Learner's involvement in various management committees of the institutes and industry gives an insight of the skills and abilities required among the workers in near future. The development of insight into the required skills/competencies directly motivates the learners to make necessary efforts to become productive workforce by inculcating lifelong learning potentialities for the furtherance of mankind.

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