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## LIFE-LONG LEARNING: THE FOUNDATION FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Jonathan L.H. Lim

Multimedia Resource and Development Center, INTI College Sarawak, Sarawak, Malaysia  
(jonlim@intisar.edu.my)

### ABSTRACT

In today's society, people are getting more aware of the need to take responsibility for their learning, not just during the compulsory formal schooling periods, but also throughout their lives. Familiar certainties and old ways of doing things are disappearing. In order to keep up with the current changing demand and unstable job market, people have to constantly review and update their knowledge and skills.

This paper first looks at the concepts of lifelong learning. With a participant observation in a learning organisation, the paper analyses learning culture and its inhibitors. The last part of the paper examines the fundamentals of staff development in educational institutions.

### INTRODUCTION

"Lifelong learning is a deliberate progression through the life of an individual, where the initial acquisition of knowledge and skills is reviewed and upgraded continuously, to meet challenges set by an ever-changing society." (The Learning Age, 1998)

It has been recognised that developments in technology and the rapid organisational change have led to an ever-increasing pace of change in nature and methods of work as well as the attitude to work. "Knowledge gained by the time a person is 21 is largely obsolete by the time he is 40, and that skills that made him productive in his twenties are becoming

out of date during his thirties." (Knowles, 1996). Consequently, the traditional division of the three stages of life: "Education (learning), employment and retirement" is a thing of the past and together with this has been the end of the "job for life" culture.

Le Harvey (1997) found that employers are now looking for graduates who are not only adaptive but also adaptable. Graduates are required to have the ability to learn and add knowledge and skills. They must also have the ability to use knowledge and skills in the face of change. It is obvious that they need to be flexible and adaptable in their approach to work. The ability to learn and retrain throughout life, and the need for the opportunity to do so, has now taken on a new significance (Beattie, 1997). Modern professional life demands a wide range of skills, which go beyond the acquisition of knowledge and specific techniques. They involve the whole person in learning to learn and take a more active role in self-evaluation and development (Cox, 1992). Education is now being defined as a lifelong process of discovering what is not known, and not a process of transmitting what is known (Knowles, 1996).

The above has highlighted the importance of lifelong learning, which is high on the agenda of government, employers, employees, students and institutions. There is a growing awareness of the need for individuals to take responsibility for their learning throughout

their lives. In tandem with this, the community, academic institutions, companies and also the employers have a crucial part to play in the development of a culture of lifelong learning and the delivery of appropriate learning opportunities.

### LIFELONG LEARNING

Lifelong learning is a term that can be and is interpreted in many different ways. The Learning Age (1998) enlightenment in the United States, is usually taken to mean adult education, that is, learning which occurs outside the formal, traditional school-college-university system. Europe often links the term with day release from work. In the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth countries, lifelong learning is viewed as achievement of higher level of self-realisation, self-fulfillment and self-actualisation.

In the same context, World Initiative on Lifelong Learning (1995) emphasised that lifelong learning is concerned primarily with the promotion of skills and competencies necessary for the development capabilities and specific performance in roles and activities that relate directly to job development. A second perspective is that lifelong learning is primarily an instrument to achieve an extrinsic goal. There are three major elements or outcomes of lifelong learning:

- Education for a more highly skilled workforce;
- Personal development leading to a more rewarding life; and
- The creation of a stronger and more inclusive society.

It is the interplay between these elements that animates lifelong learning. The process itself begins in pre-school, continues through

compulsory and post-compulsory periods of formal education and training, and is then carried on throughout one's lifespan. It is actualised through provision of learning experiences and activities throughout life.

Realising a lifelong learning approach for economic progress and development, for personal development and fulfillment, and for social inclusiveness and democratic understanding and activity, will not be easily achieved. It requires a substantial re-appraisal of the provision, resourcing and goals of education and training, and a major re-orientation towards the concept and values of the idea of the "learning society". Herein lies the major challenge for policy-makers and educators as they are conceptualising lifelong learning and realising the aim of "lifelong learning for all".

In the Green Paper (1998), the British Prime Minister stated, "education is the best economic policy we have". In the words of The Learning Age (1998), "The development of a culture of learning will help build a united society, assist in the creation of personal independence, and encourage our creativity and innovation.... Learning offers excitement and the opportunity for discovery; it stimulates enquiring minds and nourishes our soul. It takes us in the directions we never expected, sometimes changing our lives. Learning strengthens families and the wider community, and encourages independence."

The UNESCO Paper (1983) pointed out that many nations have taken the initiative to support and develop lifelong learning as a key response to the major challenges associated with the new century. Access to education and training for all citizens is seen as an investment in the future, a pre-condition for