

ECONOMIC CHANGES DEMAND TO MOVE FROM LIFE LONG LEARNING TO LIFE WIDE LEARNING

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Abstract

Lifelong learning is indispensable to develop successfully into a knowledge-based economy and society. Educational level is the most important determinant of employability. According to experience those who have higher qualifications can adapt faster and better to changing circumstances and new tasks than those who have a lower-level education. That is why adult education and training is essential to competitiveness and economic growth.

In several Western European countries, e.g. in Denmark, Germany and Sweden where adult training has long traditions, the high level, high quality adult training is a determining factor of economic competitiveness.

Nowadays the term "lifelong learning" is familiar even in Hungary, which includes/would include old age learning as well. However, practically there is no opportunity for it; life-long learning means only the training of those employable in the labour market.

Nevertheless, a lot of old aged people would learn new things with pleasure. In most Western European countries there are opportunities to do so.

The question naturally arises: to what extent can old people be burdened, what are they capable of either at school or in the labour market? It should not be treated only as an employment problem: it is also indispensable with regard to life quality.

Key words: *education, knowledge, knowledge based society, lifelong learning.*

Introduction

Welfare, economic power of societies are influenced by their ability how they can establish up-to-date and useful knowledge in the long run, on the basis of their own knowledge, tradition and how societies can make it accessible to wide layers of people. Those countries which cannot realize the significance of knowledge will collapse or will become stagnant. This idea is very far from our practice, we cannot use our possibilities of teaching or studying.

Council of Europe held a conference in the year of 2000 in March that was of capital importance from the view of direction of EU actions. Facts delivered there demonstrated that Europe reach the age of knowledge. This situation demands great changes in the areas of culture, society and economic life. To

meet these demands not only individuals have to adapt but the ways of actions have to be changed.

Never has such a great demand been to access an up – to – date and steadily increasing knowledge which is a basis of competitiveness nowadays. The first condition of all these is an open society where everybody can get qualitative education with equal opportunity - throughout one's life - and individuals cannot be discriminated against their ages. People are leading characters of a knowledge based society. The main value is their knowledge that can become wider steadily. Knowledge can produce newer and further knowledge with effective and rational using. It establishes lifelong learning and to make it accessible for everybody is very important not only for employees but it is significant from the view of employers as well.

To provide the facilities of lifelong learning for employees is vital because they have to keep up with economic and social changes, which accompany their whole life. Nowadays we can keep our workplace and we can have a chance at a labour market if we can develop and accommodate continuously. It is important from the view of employers too because they can insure their employees' competences and individual and organisational learning with their employees' steady development.

Expectations of a Knowledge Based Economy – Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning is indispensable to develop successfully into a knowledge-based economy and society (Harangi – Pordány, 2000). Educational level is the most important determinant of employability. According to experience those who have higher qualifications can adapt faster and better to changing circumstances and new tasks than those who have a lower-level education. That is why adult education and training are essential to competitiveness and economic growth.

Studying is really a life long process nowadays which can establish the prerequisites of adaptation to our ever - changing environment. It has a lot of benefits by the side of employment. It can mean workplaces of good quality, personal development of welfare, concern feeling. On the level of society lifelong learning can contribute to the lower costs of social subvention, unemployment and age - preferential pension.

One of the most important ideas of Lisbon Memoranda is that in a knowledge based society it is needed to have new abilities by the side of traditional basic abilities - as writing, reading, counting - to participate in economy actively. These new abilities have to be acquired by everybody within the frame of public education (younger) and adult education (older).

From these new abilities knowledge of foreign languages and IT knowledge, good communicational abilities, the ability of problem-solution, personal working and creativity are the most important. It is decisive for everybody to reach these new competencies and abilities by adequate teaching methods. The lack of these knowledges can lead to a new illiteracy - which is called functional illitarcy by literature - because adults who cannot use a PC, cannot get vital information which is indispensable for their job.

In a knowledge based society people play leading characters who live there. The most important value is their knowledge. It can be used effectively and this way it can be expanded, increased while it can establish new knowledge. This idea demonstrates that lifelong learning is very important for employees and employers as well. For employees it is important to keep steps with changes of our society and economy. Nowadays a job can be held and anyone can have a chance on the labour market if they can develop and adapt continuously.

For employers it is important because they can establish competecies and learning of the organization and the individuals by the employees' continuous development. (Karoliny& Others, 2003)

A learning society can be formed by a paradigm of lifelong learning if it becomes general.

In EU the level of employment among older employees is very low. In the year of 2003 it was 40%. At that time it was 28.9% in Hungary, 60.2% in Denmark, 68.6 in Sweden. It is one of the neuralgic points of the EU. It means tension and wasting in economy and in society as well. As societies grow older, conflicts emerge in the area of social insurance, society and employment. The personal feeling of importance becomes injured. Consistance of labour force, requirements of services – for example education - can be changed.

The aim of European employment strategy is to promote active growing old. It means to increase the avarge retirement age, to keep the older employees, to increase the number of workplaces. Together

with these aims it is a further stressed purpose to realize and to encourage lifelong learning in practice. With lifelong learning – conservation of physical and intellectual conditions, development of up-to-date professional knowledge – it is necessary and possible to give a possibility to employees to be active for a long time. To this it is needed to find or to create motivation that it should be worth employing people at their elder age, too. To reach this aim it is indispensable to change the view points and activity of employers. (Maróti, 2002)

Possibilities Without (age) Limit – Life Wide Learning

In Germany there is an independent organisation at universities for older and retired people where they can study in very different areas of science again. They can attend lectures, take exams, their performance can be estimated and at the end of their education, they can get a degree.

In other Western-European countries and in the USA a lot of people start their studies at an older age, sometimes they choose absolutely different areas of science, too. There are universities where these older people can study separately from the younger ones, but nowadays it is not too rare that the older and the younger study together.

According to experiences in every part of the world – as in Hungary – those people take part in adult education who have at least a secondary school qualification. To study at elder age requires some prerequisites. The most important ones are motivation, ability to study with pleasure and interest. These abilities can be acquired in childhood from public education.

In Germany and in Denmark it is a requirement to have at least a secondary school qualification if somebody wants to study at an elder age at university. But in Skandinavian countries there are possibilities for the elderly to study, to train or to develop themselves if they have only a lower qualification.

For example there are very many teams where 6-8 people meet regularly every week, they choose a range of subject and they can talk and can get new information from each other and from the teachers about this topic. They study together. They will know the others' opinions, they can see the things from different views, they can learn tolerance while an ability to synthesize different point of views can be formed.

In our experience people with higher qualifications and people who worked earlier in intellectual areas desire more to increase or expand their knowledge when they are pensioners. Knowledge and gladness to know something is formed in everybody but – independent from age – it is not conscious in everybody. In these cases their interests has to be waken up and this is the aim of adult education.

In Hungary there are some factors that hinder studying at an elder age, we have to calculate on these facts.

1. The older people's qualification level is lower due to their earlier circumstances.
2. People who have only little cultural, educational happenings at their younger age, they are not interested at older age at all. But it depends on their personalities, circumstances and residences.
3. A life full of failure, disappointment contribute to the lack of appearance in any type of education.
4. If there are financial problems in their everyday lives, demands to study stay in the background.
5. After retirement the elderly have to work.
6. Tasks in a family, roles as grandparents fill their time and mind.
7. Friends who help to pass time away.
8. A sequestered hobby, for example reading, gardening.
9. Passive psychological attitude, defensive, malicious personality who cannot be involved in anything.
10. Great distance from a place where they can study.

We were inspired by positive Western-European examples to start a serious research. The starting point of this research was this actual survey among Hungarian employees. Our research questions were: How important is it to have a possibility to study and to develop themselves at an elder age? How can

they use the possibilities to study, to train nowadays and how they can live with these chances later? If the answers are yes, which special fields are preferred which they would like to join?

The results of our survey will be presented on the following pages.

Methodology of Research

This international research started in the year of 2009 in Hungary by questionnaires. This research focused on the employees' behaviour to study and education from different areas of our country.

The collection of samples was made by the 'snowball' method was used. The number of received, measurable questionnaires are more than four thousand. Before this survey we had continued semi - structured interviews by personal asking to test our idea and our questionnaire.

The results were evaluated by simple statistical methods (frequencies, average values, means, standard deviation) in a Microsoft Excel program and by cross tables in an SPSS program.

The research hypothesis was: There are requirements to study lifelong, to form a knowledge based society ,however, to meet these demands it is the employees wish first of all and the government and employers have to do a lot in this area.

Research Method

- qualitative method by semi – structured interviews

A semi-structured interview technique was selected because it is a representative of a questioning technique and can acquire a broad range of knowledge. The semi - structured interview is a standard technique used in numerous knowledge management projects. It makes use of a predesigned set of questions but allows unplanned supplementary questions to be asked during the session. Traditionally the interviews are carried out face to face, one to one and consecutively. The interview is a mutual and conversational interaction process which is based on asking and answering questions and carried out for a serious and predetermined aim. Twenty people were interviewed in these processes.

- quantitative method by questionnaires

The questionnaires consist of four main chapters with 25 questions. They are closed, opened and scaled questions. The questionnaire was based on interval scales but there are nominal and ordinal scales in it as well. We used Likert scale with 5 grades. The questionnaires were collected in one part on-line (by PC) and in the other part by face to face questioned method.

MS Excel and SPSS programs were used to analysis answers. (ANOVA, η^2)

Characteristics of Sample

This survey can be reckoned as representative. The number of questioned people symbolize well and give an overall picture of their situation in Hungary. In this paper we focus on female employees only. Their number is 2922.

The questionnaires were filled by female employees between the age 18 and 60. Dominant parts are the females of 26-35 (42%), between 18-25 and 36-45 years old are 20%, the rate of the older than 46 years is 16%.

We have analyzed the questionnaires with ANOVA and η^2 statistics. We have compared the means of subsamples. We separated our country into 5 regions. The answers from these regions are at an equal rate.

Chapters of Questionnaire

I. Demography

II. Information about taking up a job, recent education and studies in connection with the job

III. Expectations towards possibilities to study in the future

IV. General information

Results of Research

I. Demography

Most of the questioned women between 18 and 60 are with a higher degree (a college 30%, a university 18%). Qualifications from a secondary school are 36%, with a lower qualification you can find ladies (skilled worker and elementary school) are 16%.

From the questioned women 38% live alone, the others are married or live with a life-partner.

II. Information about taking up a job, recent education and studying connection with the job

The questioned women work continuously, they have continuous labour relations from their first engagement to work.

The answers to the question - in what kind of education they participated in the past two years – were not too positive. The bigger rate of these women did not study at all. Who studied, they did it in their own initiative, but not with the organization of their employers. Most of these educations were out of school system ones, trainings or other educations. (See the figures 1.- 2.)

When employers organize an education, it can be connected to actual skills and qualifications, they are trainings and complementary educations. In the cases if employees organize educations themselves, they study absolutely different things with pleasure. (See the figures 3.- 4.)

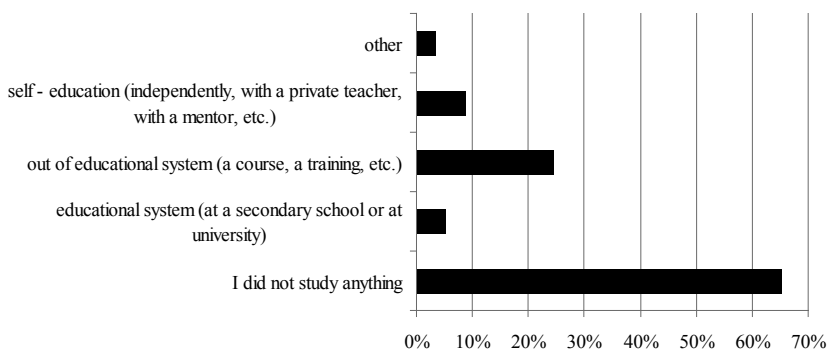


Figure 1. The areas of employees' study by the organisation of their employer in the past two years.

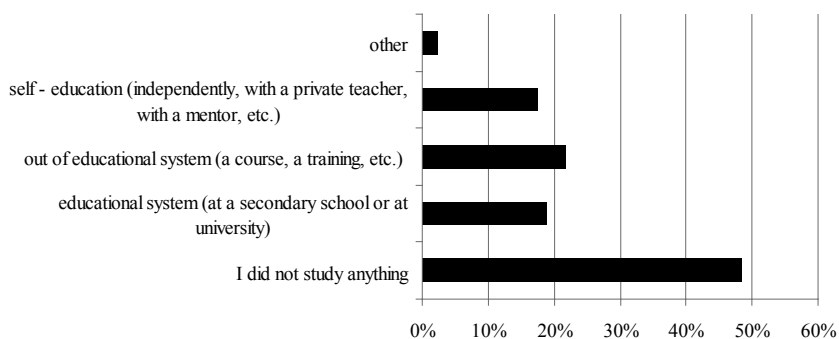


Figure 2. The areas of employees' study by their own organization in the past two years.

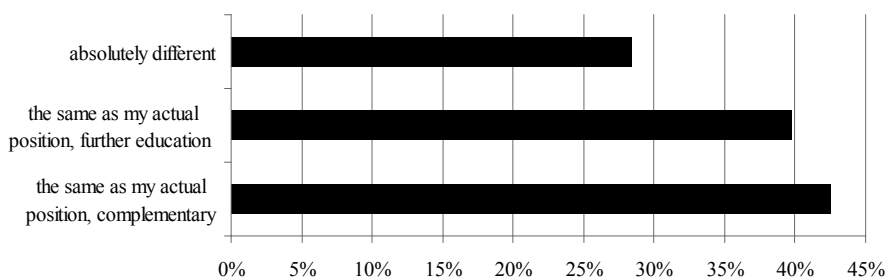


Figure 3. Professional field of employees' study by the organization of their employer.

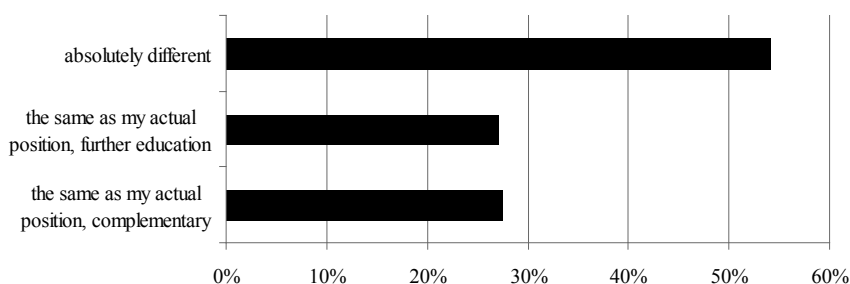


Figure 4. Professional field of employees' study due to their own initiation.

The women's answers to the question – what was the cause of their studies in their life some-when - was the professional development, (in school system 41%, out of school system 38%), but 29% started to study in their own interest.

The most important **personal features** from the view of keeping their job in the order of importance (independent from age and qualification):

- reliability 67%
- independence 62%
- adaptability 50%

The most important **behaviourial features**:

- ambition to succes 51%
- tolerating stress 45%
- persistence 42%

From the view of **professional skills** as the most important features are:

- abilities of problem-solution 61%
- special professional preparedness 55%
- suitability for team work 40%

The questioned women keep it acceptable to study or change a profession or to work in a very different area more times in their lives (90%).

In similar measure (95%) they keep it acceptable that they should take an exam or should give a report about the results of their study.

The women with a higher degree (56%) would study with any age-group, but with a lower qualification, they prefer their own age-group (42%).

III. Expectations towards possibilities to study in the future

The questioned women (43%) find relationships - not knowledge or studying - the most important feature to get a good job or keep the actual job. (I think it is very sad.)

72 % feel that she needs to study something or need to participate in any education, in a training in the next two years.

The employers find it more important to train their employees out of the school system (56%). In this area there is an agreement between employees and employers and they both prefer practical training.

What would they like to study? Women with a higher degree would like to study languages (53%), women with a lower qualification would like to study different professions (55%), and they would like to study in their actual profession at a higher level (38%). (See the figure 5.)

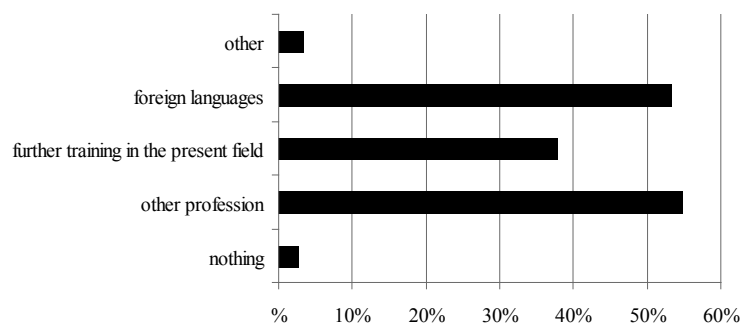


Figure 5. Areas of study which employees would like to study most of all.

After finishing their official job (after retirement) women with a higher degree would like to work continuously (57%), either in their own profession (48%), or in different areas (34%) what they are interested in. 27% of women with a lower qualification want to work only, but they would study in the field of their interest or in the area of their hobbies with pleasure (58%).

IV. General information

The questioned women have continuous labour relations, 78% of them have had continuous assigned, in a leader position there is only 20%. The rate of a higher degree holders from them is 12%. In lower level leader positions it is not an absolute requirement to have a higher degree, especially at an older age.

To work after retirement and to study in connection with this work can be shouldered by 58% of women. But without official work, they would like to do something which is in accordance with their hobbies or fancy, they demand possibilities of studying or another occupation (37%).

Summary

In the cases of the questioned women's employers we can say that employers do not encourage their employees' studies with pleasure, but it would be a basic prerequisite of successful operation or staying alive.

The questioned women study and would study with pleasure because they know that it is the most important demand from the view of future. They shoulder and would shoulder the continuous education, to acquire new, different skills or to know different professions at their older age in their retirement as well.

They do not rule out possibilities of calling to account and they would study together with younger people, too.

In the area of education the school system is not too popular, they prefer a course or training forms in their own initiative. Many people would study new knowledge in their own profession, but they are open to acquire new, absolutely different knowledge as well.

At the same time it is regrettable that they know which properties are important to acquire a good job, to become a successful employee - they make or would make something to possess these properties - but the possibilities to acquire a new job or keep the actual job is determined firstly by personal connections in every age group.

Conclusions

We have to say that Hungary is at a beginning phase of building the conditions of continuous studying and education. Lifelong learning is a basic feature in a knowledge based society, but our country has to do a lot to fulfill this requirement as a natural thing. Over lifelong learning, - to study out of professions, to educate oneself in different areas till the end of our lives – to reach life wide learning, we have to insure additional conditions, have to change our thinking, and create new economic possibilities. The receptiveness is bigger from the side of employees than from the government or enterprise leaders.

In most cases enterprises try to realize their high-level demands out of the employees that they want to buy 'ready' employees who are suitable for their requirements. They do not want to invest time and money into employees' education or knowledge. The results of this thinking are such inviting applications which are inconsistent with the employees' features. They should be young with great practice, with more degrees and they should communicate in more foreign languages at a high level at the same time.

The results of these demands are that employees need to study in their individual initiative, and they have to produce the financial and temporal conditions of those, too. It means an additional burden and load for families and for individuals as well.

Employees feel that they need to acquire additional knowledge, indispensable to study continuously, sometimes in absolutely different or opposed areas. It is accepted that they need to change their behaviour and their knowledge too.

An individual initiative sometimes comes before the forced expectations of enterprises. On the basis of our survey it means that the questioned women see the results of changes of our environment, they are ready to study, to educate themselves and the idea of lifelong learning and life wide learning is not strange for them.

At the same time we have to know that actual preparedness of our society does not make a possibility to study after official pension or acquire new deeper knowledge. We are prepared neither at social level nor the level of creating new workplaces.

Active people and who are capable of work have a great potencial and power. If a government does not capitalize them, it is very extravagant. The young 'old age people' who desire to act who would like and want to work, in this case can feel neglected, useless, inefficient people. It is a big burden on a society.

Therefore our leaders' responsibility is enormous because they have to meet the requirements of the society and the market as well. We should be capable to build our own active system on the patterns of the developed western countries.

It can lead us to build the conditions of old age studying, capitalization of the potentials of our society, to increase employment and to decrease the burdens. At the end this process above will end up in creating life wide learning.

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