ANALYSIS OF POSSIBILITIES AND KEY COMPETENCES OF LIFELONG LEARNING IN SELECTED ORGANIZATION

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Abstract

This paper deals with the possibilities and key competences of lifelong learning in the selected organization. The state educational programmes in Slovakia refer to the European Framework and the framework also directly influenced two key policies in Slovakia. Competences for this framework are defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context. Key competences are those that all individuals need for personal satisfaction and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment. Promoting education, including the lifelong learning system is an important tool for equipping current and future workforce with the necessary knowledge and skills, and thus a tool for promoting economic growth and expanding opportunities. Given the rapid technological advances and related changes in job profiles and requirements, lifelong learning must be based on strong cooperation and synergies between industry, education, training and learning. At the same time, education and training systems must adapt to this reality. Further findings and results of the case study of the possibilities and competences of lifelong learning in the selected organization are presented at the end of the paper.

Keywords: Key competences, lifelong learning, possibilities, improvement.

1 INTRODUCTION

Implementation of new training programs can enable the next generation to have a stronger basis, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, cooperative learning, communication and the use of new technologies. [1] The ubiquity of informal learning is generally recognized both by authors who adopt a social and by those who adopt a psychological perspective. [2], [3], [4] Eraut [5] outlines how formal learning has the following characteristics:

- a prescribed learning framework,
- an organized learning event or package,
- the presence of a designated teacher or trainer,
- the award of a qualification or credit,
- the external specification of outcomes.

In study of formal, non-formal and informal learning, Colley examined data drawn from several broad research areas, which covered: workplace learning for school teachers and learning within further education; community education and learning; and mentoring in the contexts of business and working with excluded young people. [3] There are three basic categories of purposeful learning activity:

- **Formal learning** takes place in education and training institutions, leading to recognised diplomas and qualifications. [6], [7]
- **Non-formal learning** takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training and does not typically lead to formalised certificates. Non-formal learning may be provided in the workplace and through the activities of civil society organisations and groups (such as in youth organisations, trades unions and political parties). It can also be provided through organisations or services that have been set up to complement formal systems (such as arts, music and sports classes or private tutoring to prepare for examinations). [8], [9], [10], [11], [12]
- **Informal learning** is a natural accompaniment to everyday life. Unlike formal and non-formal learning, informal learning is not necessarily intentional learning, and so may well not be recognised even by individuals themselves as contributing to their knowledge and skills. [13]
Table 1 below shows the differences between formal, non-formal and informal lifelong learning, depending on the objectives, plan, process, space, way and type of learning, mistakes and focus in education, mistakes, similar of results, responsibility of results, the role and interaction in the group, participation, activity leader, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Formal</th>
<th>Non-formal</th>
<th>Informal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
<td>Clearly defined</td>
<td>Clearly defined, adapted to the needs of the participants and co-created by them</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plan</strong></td>
<td>Clear, gradual steps</td>
<td>Techniques and methods can be varied according to the knowledge and capabilities of the participants</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process</strong></td>
<td>It is important, fixed</td>
<td>It is important, flexible</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place</strong></td>
<td>Fixed</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Everywhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of learning</strong></td>
<td>Conscious – information, knowledge</td>
<td>(not) conscious, intuitive competences</td>
<td>Unconscious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td>Individual, knowledge</td>
<td>The individual and the group, knowledge, attitudes, emotions</td>
<td>Self-development - knowledge, attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mistakes</strong></td>
<td>Punished - classification</td>
<td>Allowed, positively evaluated, can be extracted from them</td>
<td>Means of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Results</strong></td>
<td>The same, everyone should know the same thing</td>
<td>Similar - the topic is the same, but the knowledge is different</td>
<td>Different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibility for results</strong></td>
<td>Educator</td>
<td>Participant, group, educator</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group – the role</strong></td>
<td>The role has an influence, but it is not essential</td>
<td>The substantial role supports the learning process</td>
<td>If exists the role, he/she plays it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group – the age</strong></td>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>Intergenerational</td>
<td>Intergenerational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group - interaction</strong></td>
<td>Competitiveness</td>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>By context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participation</strong></td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>Automatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activity leader</strong></td>
<td>Directive</td>
<td>Non-directive support, partnership, leadership can change</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation</strong></td>
<td>Diploma, certificate</td>
<td>Certificate of attendance, certificate</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td>Established - a long-term process with steps which must always follow the same procedure</td>
<td>Short/long term, flexibility within the activity</td>
<td>Lifetime</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to classical learning, knowledge is also gained in self-study. There exist e.g. platforms known as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which mark online courses provided for large free learners. In addition to learning materials such as videos, books, presentations, they provide interactive user forums that help build a community for students, professors and their assistants. Benefits of lifelong learning (Fig. 1.) are:

- **The mind is a muscle** — using and pushing it helps to keep it strong and healthy. A new activity learns a new skill or expand your base skills and knowledge help maintain brain cells and stimulate communication among them.

- **Nurture curious minds** — discovering about politics, current events or other countries’ culture. Dedicating to new learning can help break life routines and stimulate new parts of brain.

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• **Building new skills** - learning to think differently as an important part of lifelong learning is the exchange of viewpoints and ideas through discussions with other learners. These discussions help us see the other side of an issue and gain perspective.

• **Improving memory and increasing self-confidence** - learning a new skill can also boost belief in abilities. By learning something new and working to recall it later for discussions.

![Benefits of lifelong learning](image1.png)

Figure 1. Benefits of lifelong learning. [8]

Lifelong learning is no longer just one aspect of education and training; it must become the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts. [9]

This paper is structured in the form of five main sections, where demonstrated is the case study that focuses on the possibilities and competences of lifelong learning in the selected organization.

### 1.1 European key competences for lifelong learning

Key competences are a dynamic combination of the knowledge, skills and attitudes a learner needs to develop throughout life, starting from early age onwards.

The key competences are developed in a lifelong learning perspective, from early childhood throughout adult life, and through formal, non-formal and informal learning in all contexts, including family, school, workplace, neighbourhood and other communities. They are all considered equally important; each of them contributes to a successful life in society.

![New competences for lifelong learning](image2.png)

Figure 2. New competences for lifelong learning. [1]

**Literacy** is the ability to identify, understand, express, create, and interpret concepts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written forms, using visual, sound/audio and digital materials across
disciplines and contexts. It implies the ability to communicate and connect effectively with others, in an appropriate and creative way.

**Multilingual competence** defines the ability to use different languages appropriately and effectively for communication. It broadly shares the main skill dimensions of literacy: it is based on the ability to understand, express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in an appropriate range of societal and cultural contexts according to one’s wants or needs.

**Mathematical competence** is the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking and insight in order to solve a range of problems in everyday situations. Building on a sound mastery of numeracy, the emphasis is on process and activity, as well as knowledge. Mathematical competence involves, to different degrees, the ability and willingness to use mathematical modes of thought and presentation (formulas, models, constructs, graphs, charts).

**Digital competence** involves the confident, critical and responsible use of, and engagement with, digital technologies for learning, at work, and for participation in society.

**Personal, social and learning to learn competence** is the ability to reflect upon oneself, effectively manage time and information, work with others in a constructive way, remain resilient and manage one’s own learning and career.

**Citizenship competence** is the ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life, based on an understanding of social, economic, legal and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability.

**Competence in cultural awareness and expression** involves having an understanding of and respect for how ideas and meaning are creatively expressed and communicated in different cultures and through a range of arts and other cultural forms.

**Entrepreneurship competence** refers to the capacity to act upon opportunities and ideas and to transform them into values for others. [1]

## 2 METHODOLOGY

Participation in the survey was voluntary, in the form of an anonymous questionnaire. The survey was conducted by electronic communication using a questionnaire. The following procedure was selected when creating the questionnaire:

- **The preparatory stage** consisted of the design of the questionnaire objectives, the construction of the content of the questionnaire, the selection of respondents (exploratory sample), the choice of the method of recording and evaluating the data, the proposal of the required deadline for the response.
- **The implementation stage** started with contacting the respondents in electronic form in order to get answers to the questions in the questionnaire.
- **The evaluation stage**, the content analysis of the obtained data was carried out, which had to be processed, evaluated and conclusions drawn up in the form of tables and graphs for better visualization of the survey results.

## 3 CASE STUDY – SURVEY OF THE POSSIBILITIES AND COMPETENCES OF LIFELONG LEARNING IN THE SELECTED INSTITUTE

The following exploratory questions (EQ) have been set:

**EQ (1): Is coaching the most effective lifelong learning method in a selected institute?**

To address this, we’ve included the following questions in the questionnaire:

- What forms of learning do you use?
- What learning methods do you most often learn in your position?
- Which learning methods do you think are most effective?
- Which lifelong learning opportunities do you use?
EQ (2): Do employees of the selected institute develop digital competence as a priority?

We have included the following questions in the questionnaire:

Express on a scale from 1 to 6 to what extent you develop the following key competences for lifelong learning: communication in the mother tongue, communication in the foreign language, mathematical competence in science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, interpersonal, intercultural and social competences and civic competences, entrepreneurship, cultural expression.

(3): Does lifelong learning primarily aim at gaining new knowledge and skills?

To address this research question, we have included the following questions:

- What is your motivation for further education?
- What benefits does lifelong learning have for you?
- What do you consider to be the main barriers to your lifelong learning?

The questionnaire contains 17 questions and 4 areas:

- Identification questions.
- Possibilities of lifelong learning.
- Key competences for lifelong learning.
- The motivation for lifelong learning.

4 RESULTS

A survey of the possibilities and competences of lifelong learning of employees was carried out at the Institute of Lifelong Learning, which has 30 employees. The mission of the Institute of Lifelong Learning is to develop and disseminate learning at all stages of life and to provide comprehensive training services. Its long-term goal is to build a workplace providing comprehensive education and counselling services, to create and innovate a portfolio of language, professional and interest programs that follow the latest developments and practice needs, promote international cooperation in all its structures, and stimulate seniors to activity.

4.1 Results of Area 1: Identification Question

The survey was conducted from January to April 2019. The questionnaires were addressed to 30 respondents where we got 29 questionnaires back. Based on the results of the survey of the possibilities and competences of lifelong learning in the selected organization (institute), we evaluated the following conclusions.

Based on the identification question no. 1 (What is your highest level of education?) was found that the respondents have completed a doctoral degree and master’s degree. They have completed formal learning with a state examination.

4.2 Results of Area 2: Possibilities of Lifelong Learning

Question no. 2 showed that the most common form of is non-formal learning (96,6%) and informal learning (72,4%).

Recommendation: Employees are interested in non-formal learning. As a recommendation, a meeting was proposed where each employee could express an opinion in which areas, they could undertake further training and include these with the highest requirement in the future training plan. Currently, employees attend a learning program based on their own interest and the need to participate in educational activities. On the basis of their proposals and the results of a questionnaire survey, an in-service training plan would be developed to take into account their requirements.

The third question showed that the most common learning methods are self-education (93,1%), workshops (75,9%), lectures (27,1%) and task assignments (72,4%).

Recommendation: There are many institutions and professionals who offer quality education through different learning methods. Coaching is very popular, where employees are looking for answers and solutions to problems. As part of the training, the recommendation is to invite a professional coach to the workplace.
In the fourth question, we found out which methods are the most effective according to employees. The most preferred learning method is coaching (86.2%), e-learning (58.6%), outdoor training (44.8%), case study (4.8%), mentoring (20.7%), training (10.3%), simulation (20.7%), instruction (10.3%), role-playing (27.6), self-education (20.7%) and job rotation (27.6%).

**Recommendation:** The recommendation in question no. 3 is verified - coaching is currently a very effective method for downloading topics with an external specialist that they do not want to talk to anyone with the corporate environment. An external coach has an independent position and insight if possible, without misrepresentation. An external coach does not have to be an expert in the field, but must be able to harness the potential of a coached worker and allow him to look at the situation from a variety of points of view that, for example, they have not yet found for their "professional blindness". They can also train their own internal coaches in the organization.

The fifth question was aimed at identifying which lifelong learning opportunities are being used by employees. They mostly attend language courses (English, German) (41.4%), specialized seminars (44.8%) and special courses (65.5%). E-learning program is used by 10.3% of employees.

**Recommendation:** Nowadays, major e-learning trends are in foreign language education. The recommendation is to purchase an e-learning course of a selected foreign language.

### 4.3 Results of Area 3: Key Competences for Lifelong Learning

In the sixth question, we found out how employees develop their mother tongue communication. The answers show that 55% of employees develop this competence. This means that employees are aware of the need to understand and use their mother tongue in a positive and socially responsible way.

**Recommendation:** As part of the development of this competence - communication in the mother tongue, we would recommend that a professional seminar be organized every month, where competent staff from the given section of education would always present their results and new knowledge and thus increase this competence.

In the seventh question, we have learned the competence of communicating in a foreign language that requires skills such as mediation and intercultural understanding. The individual's level of advancement will vary in four different levels (listening, speaking, reading and writing). The answers showed that most of the employees develop communication in a foreign language.

**Recommendation:** Employees should be able to appropriately use aids and learn languages in an informal way through lifelong learning. Their attitude, interest and curiosity about languages and intercultural communication can be positively evaluated.

From the answers to the development of mathematical competence in question no. 8 shows that most employees develop mathematical competence, but there are also employees (13.8%) who do not currently need to deal with it.

From the answers to question no. 9 shows that 34.6% of employees develop competence in science and technology, competence to be able to report on the characteristics and conclusions of their scientific research and give reasons.

The evaluation of question 10 shows that all employees develop digital competence at different levels. From the answers of question no. 11 (competence - learning to learn) we can show that employees are keen to learn and improve themselves.

From the answers of question no. 12, we can show that employees use and develop the ability to communicate constructively in a different environment. They can be tolerant, to express and understand different views, to negotiate with the ability to create trust and to feel empathy. From the answers of question no. 13 shows that employees develop the ability to think critically and creatively.

**Recommendations to questions no. 8, no. 9, no. 10, no. 11 no. 12 no. 13, and no. 14:** Developing these competences will be part of the activities in the future learning and training plan. Employees should be able to organize their own learning, assess their own work. The desire to apply previous education and life experiences and curiosity about learning opportunities and learning in different life contexts are essential elements of a positive attitude.
4.4 Results of Area 4: Motivation for Lifelong Learning

In the following question no. 15 was to find out what motivates employees to lifelong learning. The evaluation shows that the greatest motivation of employees to learn is to acquire new or supplemented knowledge (65.5%), effective time spent (62.1%), new knowledge (58.6%).

Question no. 16 shows that, as the greatest benefit of lifelong learning, employees see improvements in the quality of life (63%), new skills, knowledge dissemination (66.7%), self-employment (55.6%), and a new perspective on the issue (44.4%) and the development of confidence and enjoyment of new knowledge (40.7%).

Question no. 17 shows that the main barriers to lifelong learning are employees setting priorities (44.8%), lack of time (31%), high workload (24.1%), insufficient willpower (20.7%).

5 CONCLUSIONS

In the following section, the conclusions from the survey of the possibilities and competences of lifelong learning of employees in the selected institute are presented. Based on the survey results, it was found that:

EQ (1): Is Coaching the most effective method of lifelong learning in the selected institute?

The survey showed that employees would like to use this method. Coaching skills are based on competencies that are declared by the International Coach Federation (ICF). This is a coach-manager attitude that sometimes differs significantly from a classical manager.

The new coach-manager attitude focuses on the potential of the subordinate to deal with the situation [14], [15].

Another skill that employees adopt is active listening with reflection. Asking questions is another basic skill of the coach. Questions lead to reflection and open the door to solutions. The point is to know why to ask, how to ask and what to ask.

Coaching offers an elegant G-R-O-W process. [16], [17], [18] It involves asking questions that focus on the outcome of the interview, linked to its initial goal and thus delivering results. When managers learn the skills of asking questions in a coaching process [19], [20], [21], they are surprised by the positive changes of the result. They are more successful in managing subordinates, in business negotiations, and in getting free from routine activities. The effects come in better use of time, better utilization of human potential.

EQ (2): Do employees of the selected organization develop digital competence as a priority?

Answer: no, the survey showed that employees do not prioritize digital competence. Therefore, improving digital competence is included in the future learning and training plan. [22] At present, an Intelligent Industry Action Plan (Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, 2019) [23] has been created, which by 2020 will create the basic precondition for a successful transformation of the Slovak economy responding to the digitalisation of the industry with the assumption of starting the digitization process.

The one of the proposed measures is lifelong learning and retraining. New vocations will be created. The Lifelong Learning Institute needs to respond to this development and to prepare graduates at all levels of education, including retraining and lifelong learning so that they are able to successfully handle all aspects of workflow changes within their professional qualifications.

To do this, they should have employees who will be able to provide these activities. It is therefore clear that the expansion of digital competence is now very much needed in view of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, known as digital transformation, and means a comprehensive change in the labour market and education perceptions.

EQ (3): Does the lifelong learning of employees direct the acquisition of new knowledge and skills?

Answer: yes, the survey revealed that lifelong learning of employees, in particular, to acquire new knowledge and skills. Employees are interested in acquiring new knowledge, skills and learning, so we have suggested the learning and training plan in the next subchapter 5.1.
5.1 Design of the Learning and Training Plan

Based on the results of the questionnaire, we propose the future learning and training plan for further education of employees of the Institute of Lifelong Learning, where the requirements of employees are taken into account. Table 2 shows which section in the institute has the opportunity to participate in the training, during which period it will be provisionally implemented. Furthermore, the name of the organization that will provide learning, the chosen learning methods and the indicative price. The main benefit of the proposed learning and training plan will be to increase those competencies that employees have identified themselves as those in which they would like to improve or develop.

Table 2. Future learning plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advanced training</strong></td>
<td>January 2020 - June 2020</td>
<td>Coaching - (individual and team) - Coaching in the workplace</td>
<td>Od 200 – 2490 Euro</td>
<td>ZAKO – Žilina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Development Program - Employee Motivation</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Dekra-development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Online Course - Microsoft Office</td>
<td></td>
<td>E-learnmedia.sk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional programs</strong></td>
<td>January 2020 - June 2020</td>
<td>E-learning - Management of Educational Materials Creation</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Projectoutdoor.sk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Training - communication skills in a virtual classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teambuilding - improving teamwork in the team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foreign Language Section</strong></td>
<td>January 2020 - June 2020</td>
<td>Outdoor training - focused on soft skills - communication skills, teamwork development</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Outward Bound Slovensko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Internal Coach, Internal Mentor - Basic Performance Improvement Tool (1 day)</td>
<td>126 Euro</td>
<td>Kurzy.sk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mentor Adventure Course - (30 hrs)</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Academia Istropolitana</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Lifelong learning program should be regularly monitored and evaluated in the framework of cooperation between the Commission and the Member States in order to adapt it, in particular as regards the priorities for implementing the measures. The evaluation should include an external evaluation by independent and impartial bodies.

Lifelong learning should not only be perceived as a tool or just adult education, which is used by individuals with a high level of welfare to carry out their leisure time or by equipping the qualified workforce to be exposed due to the ageing of the population. Instead of trying to draw the limits of the concept of lifelong learning, trying to expand the concepts of education and learning will be a correct starting approach for the conceptualization of lifelong learning. The future also depends on young people’s ability to adapt to social changes, to acquire high-level qualifications, and to continue lifelong learning.

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