

# **TITLE: Management of Lifelong Learning; from individuals to learning organizations and societies**

## **I. Need for the study on the management of lifelong learning**

Learning is the core competency required by the human beings, all living things, and even half-organisms like viruses, to survive in this world. Learning continues throughout one's life. When learning stops, it is almost the end of life. This fact remains explicit for anyone who observes life closely. Review of literature on progresses, innovations and overall successes of individuals, societies and organisations reveals that such achievements are greatly facilitated by the effective and efficient management of the lifelong learning process. Management of lifelong learning involves facilitation of all the life-cycle events of learning specific to various contexts in life like childcare, formal education and preparation for employment, employment, entrepreneurship, and active aging. That is why almost all international organizations, like UN, WHO, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Commonwealth of Learning (COL), universities across the world, organizations that promote entrepreneurship, government establishments, industries, skill development programmes etc promote strategies, initiatives, and platforms to nurture lifelong learning.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 of UN sets the goal '*Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*'. Moto of WHO Academy is '*Transforming lifelong learning for health impact*'. World Bank has a lot of reports published on the importance of lifelong learning.

In the above context, further research into the management systems and processes that facilitate efficient lifelong learning experience is found to be vital for developing models that can be easily adopted. It will equip the mankind with capabilities for tackling the present and future challenges of life; especially as the world anticipates tremendous escalation of foreseen and unforeseen challenges due to the cumulative effect of climate change and socio-economic factors. The graduation of learning from the individual level to organization level and broader societal level also must be studied. This paper is a study in that direction based on the literature available on the internet and the learning from hundreds of capacity building sessions facilitated by the authors over a long period of time.

## **II. Defining lifelong learning**

Wikipedia defines lifelong learning as "*ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons. It is important for an individual's competitiveness and employability, but also enhances social inclusion, active citizenship, and personal development*".

In the organizational context, lifelong learning is generally accepted as the continuous learning facilitated throughout one's career to achieve organizational goals along with personal and professional development of the individuals concerned. In the societal angle, there must be continuous acquisition of knowledge on general developments, social systems, processes, procedures, events etc in the same manner the world has learnt how to deal with Covid19 pandemic since 2019.

## **III. Evolution of lifelong learning**

Quest for leaning and efforts to promote continuous learning have prehistoric roots. All epics and almost all fables in the world have elements that promote lifelong learning. For instance, fables in Panchatantra written around 200 BCE focus on promoting learning from various life events.

While considering the modern history of lifelong learning, in 1972 UNESCO published a report titled 'Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow'. It is also called 'Faure Report', named after former Prime Minister and Minister of Education of France, Edgar Faure. The Faure Report, under the sub-topic 'The heritage of the past', states that "*In primitive society, education was complex and continual. It aimed at forming the character, aptitudes, skills, and moral qualities of an individual who educated himself through a kind of symbiotic process, rather than being educated. Life in the family or clan, work or play, rites and ceremonies were all day-to-day opportunities for learning, from motherly care to lessons from the hunter-father, from observing seasonal changes to watching familiar animals, or listening to tales told by the elders and chants of the tribal shaman*". This comprehensive statement on the origin of lifelong learning corroborates the need for learning as explained in the opening part of this paper.

The Faure Report can be considered as the beginning of modern history of lifelong learning. Because, another paper titled 'Conceptions and realities of lifelong learning', published by UNESCO in 2016, which was commissioned by the Global Education Monitoring Report as background information for drafting the 2016 report, provides a list of lifelong learning policy initiatives of Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe

and North America, and Latin America and Caribbean – all with publishing years after 1972. In India, after the launching of the National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) by the Federal Government in 1978, the University Grants Commission (UGC) began to encourage universities and colleges to participate in lifelong learning programmes and started funding it.

Another important global initiative was the establishment of Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in 1997 with an objectives “*to create and widen access to opportunities for learning, making use of the potential offered by distance education and by the application of communication technologies to education*”.

The current century witnesses the widespread acceptance of lifelong learning.

#### **IV. Phasing of lifelong learning for the purpose of current study**

World population is almost eight billion now. It makes lifelong learning requirements of the world huge and complex. Therefore, phasing of the entire gamut of lifelong learning is essential for the conduct of a meaningful study. Accordingly, following phasing has been made:

- A. Early childhood
- B. Education/ preparing for livelihood (from primary to tertiary)
- C. Employment/ entrepreneurship /livelihood
- D. Old age (Older adult learning and active ageing)

This paper considers one example, which represents the best practices, for detailing in each phase. Under each phase a brief detailing of the example system and an analysis of its learning management aspect are given. Finally, a consolidation of research findings is also given.

##### **A. Early childhood phase**

UNESCO’s web page on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) provides the following statement: “*Early childhood, defined as the period from birth to eight years old, is a time of remarkable growth with brain development at its peak. During this stage, children are highly influenced by the environment and the people that surround them*”. And it continues to tell the readers “*It aims at the holistic development of a child’s social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs in order to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing*”.

SDG 4 of UN also stresses the importance of early childhood education and care. As per the report ‘A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing quality early childhood education (UNICEF April 2019)’ “*...a solid body of evidence shows that the foundations for learning are largely built in the early years of life before a child ever crosses the threshold of a primary school. Children who fall behind in these early years often never catch up with their peers....*”

National Education Policy of India 2020 states that over 85% of a child’s cumulative brain development occurs prior to the age of 6 and hence the policy mandates to provide universal access to high-quality ECCE across the country.

All the above emphasises the criticality of learning in this phase as its quality would keep on influencing the individuals throughout their lives.

##### **Example case: Early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Finland**

###### **a. The system**

Finland is one among the countries with strong systems for ECEC. As per the statement on the website of Finnish National Agency for Education: “*Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is part of the Finnish education system and an important stage on the child’s path of growing and learning. ECEC lays a foundation for lifelong learning. The Finnish ECEC is based on an integrated approach to care, education and teaching, the so-called “educare” model, with particular emphasis on pedagogy*”.

In 2018, the Finnish National Agency for Education issued a national regulation on 'National Core Curriculum for ECEC' to ensure intrinsic value of childhood, growth as a human being, rights of the child, equity, equality, and diversity, diversity of families, and healthy and sustainable way of living. Under the national monitoring of this regulation, individual ECEC plans are drawn up for children in ECEC centres and family day-care in coordination with guardians and children. In Finland ECEC caters for children aged 0 to 6 years old and all children under school-age have a right to ECEC. After the parental leave period, when the child is 9 or 10 months,

parents can choose ECEC centres, family day care, clubs, or playground activities. If the parents choose to take care of their child at home, they will get home care leave and allowance until the child turns three years old.

The Finnish ECEC aims at developing transversal competencies, viz, Thinking and learning, Cultural competence, interaction, self-expression, learning to take care of oneself, multiliteracy, ICT competence, participation and involvement skills, which are all part of life-skills or core skills.

## **b. The management of lifelong learning**

### **i. Individual level**

Since the learners are small children, learning strategies by individuals are not much visible in this phase rather than maintaining curiosity and consistency.

### **ii. Organizational level**

The organizational level management starts with consolidating authentic knowledge and expertise being generated all over the world, use it to develop policies, development of programmes under such policies, its implementation, and review.

Field level implementation is carried out in a decentralized manner by entrusting the responsibility with the Municipalities (local bodies). Municipalities must ensure that all children who need ECEC are assigned a place within 4 months of applying. In urgent cases a place must be assigned within two weeks of applying. This requires the related organizations to remain proactive and transform into learning organizations

### **iii. Societal level**

The analysis of Finnish and similar models of early childhood education and care spreads light into the need for coordinated actions by children, parents, mentors, governments, and the society in general to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of lifelong learning in this phase. As in the case of organizations, society in general also must remain proactive.

United Nation's Sustainable Development Solutions Network publishes 'World Happiness Report' every year with the first report released in 2012 and the latest in 2021. As per the reports for the last four consecutive years, Finland remains as the happiest country in the world. The authors of this paper conducted internet-based research to find whether there are any linkages between the above enviable position and the importance that Finland provides for implementing ECEC. The said research led to the conclusion that organically evolving character ethic like honesty, respectfulness, empathy, discipline etc and core skills are vital factors for harmony, development, and happiness. Stronger ECEC systems can support this in a sustainable manner.

## **B. Education/ preparing for livelihood (from primary to tertiary) phase**

This phase covers the entire period of education and training, post childhood care phase and prior to entering the labour market or entrepreneurship. It aims at further development of core skills, knowledge acquisition and technical skills for personality development, social acceptance, and industry/entrepreneurship readiness.

### **Example case: Additional Skill Acquisition Programme (ASAP), Kerala, India**

#### **a. The system**

From primary to tertiary, including professional education, and parallel systems of industrial training, apprenticeships etc, Kerala is a pioneer among the Indian states in promoting lifelong learning through various innovative initiatives. On analysis it is found that all such initiatives used life-skills or core skills as a driving force for promoting lifelong learning. These skills include critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem solving, risk assessment, decision taking, and constructive management of feelings. The example case confirms this finding.

Additional Skill Acquisition Programme (ASAP) is a skill development project of Higher Education department, Kerala, which was launched in 2012. Initially it was a ADB funded initiative covering selected higher secondary schools and colleges as an additional programme offered before and after regular academic hours and on holidays. Later the programme secretariat was converted into a company to establish facilities for the students and general population to attend skill training on flexible time schedules.

ASAP developed a foundation module for life skills training and industry specific technical skill module with the support of industry. The foundation module integrated life skills training into English language skills training,

which is highly aspirational among students, parents, and teachers in the state. Kerala population has a long history of travelling around the world seeking employment and business opportunities. It makes acquisition of higher skills in the usage of English as a global language highly aspirational. The foundation module contains a sequence of activities to train students in life skills and English language skills simultaneously. Above this foundation, they are given industry/job role specific technical skill training with National Skills Qualification Framework based assessment and certification.

An independent third-party survey of the programme revealed that ASAP enhanced employability of students substantially along with enhancing their aptitude, self-initiation, and capabilities to pursue higher education. Their general awareness, readiness to share household works and support the needy in the society around them also improved substantially, which was testified by their parents and local community. Basically, ASAP helped the students to recognize appropriate lifelong learning paths and accelerate learning. Yet another initiative of ASAP as given below also substantiate this finding.

A Trainer's Training Academy was established at ASAP under the initiative of the authors of this paper, while they worked there, with the objectives of addressing the dearth of trainers having industry experience and to introduce currently not working industrial experts to the training industry. Altogether 61 residential workshops have been conducted in 2016 -17 for 1523 participants, including four batches for master trainers. During the workshop the participants were trained in platform skills, training methods, techniques and tools, equipments, facilitation skills, counselling techniques etc. The feedback collected from the participants during training and the programme managers after their field deployment showed that the workshops helped them re-establish their paths of lifelong learning and recognize their capabilities, and it in turn helped their performance as trainers.

## **b. The management of lifelong learning**

### **i. Individual level**

In this phase the need for individual learning management strategies is found to be increasing as the student graduate each level of education. The successful ones recognize their aptitudes, capabilities, and opportunities for development. And they start to learn with a purpose. All these together makes them efficient managers of their own learning process.

### **ii. Organizational level**

Enabling policy and implementation framework are pre-requisites. The methods should help individuals to recognize right learning paths. Government, funding institutions, academic institutions, and industries must collaborate in implementation. All organizations concerned should remain proactive and agile enough to become learning organizations.

### **iii. Societal level**

The society should be proactive in spreading awareness about the increasing development opportunities and the need for pursuing lifelong learning to grab such opportunities. In short, by remaining agile and proactive the societies should work to become learning societies as in the case of organizations.

## **C. Employment/ entrepreneurship /livelihood phase**

In this phase the importance of core skills and up to date technical skills as per industry requirements is very high. 'Global framework on core skills for life and work in the 21st century' published by ILO endorses it: "*Both core skills and technical skills are required by individuals, if they are to become employable, manage their careers in a fast-changing world of work, use digital technology at work and in everyday life, achieve life goals and contribute to their own well-being and that of their community*".

This phase is mostly about continuous on-the-job capacity development.

### **Example case: Tata Communications Limited**

#### **a. The system**

Tata Communications Limited is an Indian telecommunications company with strong presence in India, Hong Kong, USA, Canada and Australia. The importance of this company with respect to the present study is the fact that it maintains an industry high 225.6 learning hours per employee per year (aggregate 112,782 learning person days). The company attributes its business success chiefly to the continuous learning programmes that keep the company and its employees agile, adaptive, and ahead. As per the reports available online, company has integrated

its business policy with various kinds of training and development activities, starting with the induction training, that makes it a learning organization. It helps the company to maintain world's largest wholly owned subsea fibre network, its commitment to Environment, Social and Governance (ESG), customer solutions and support the SDGs of UN etc.

Inputs on learning requirements are taken at all points and used for developing learning solutions that ensure professional development of employees along with the development of business. Effectiveness of these programmes also assessed continuously monitored.

## **b. The management of lifelong learning**

### **i. Individual level**

The learning management strategies of individual employees are found strongly pivoted on recognizing every piece of learning as a vital tool for their professional development and performance excellence. It gives them sufficient motivation and energy to explore the advantages of the open, inclusive, and enabling work environment provided by the company.

### **ii. Organizational level**

In the example case, the lifelong learning is integrated into the business policies of the company while keeping it personalized and flexible. The company continuously promotes shared learning across the different geographies and among a large variety of stakeholders. It is made possible through proactive involvement of employees, efficient use of technology enabled training and development strategies and platforms. Above all it also requires commitment from the top management to keep the organization a learning organization.

### **iii. Societal level**

In the societal level it is seen that company is keen to get learned from the society and return learning opportunities to the society with business and social development objectives, that is, a highly productive association between a learning organization and learning societies.

## **Old age phase (Older adult learning and active ageing)**

In July 1996, an international meeting was convened in Brasilia, in collaboration with WHO's Programme on Ageing and Health, to develop an agenda on ageing for the remainder of the 20th century and beyond, which was attended by a multidisciplinary group of experts from Brazil and 21 other countries. The 'Brasilia Declaration on Ageing', approved by the meeting, stressed the need for education for seniors to enhance their capacity for self-help and mutual aid, advocacy, and leadership.

Another paper titled 'Active Ageing A Policy Framework' presented by World Health Organization (WHO) to the Second United Nations World Assembly on Ageing, held in April 2002, in Madrid, underlines the importance of lifelong learning in this phase: "*Low levels of education and illiteracy are associated with increased risks for disability and death among people as they age, as well as with higher rates of unemployment. Education in early life combined with opportunities for lifelong learning can help people develop the skills and confidence they need to adapt and stay independent, as they grow older*".

Lifelong learning in this phase is becoming more important as the life expectancy and the old age population increase worldwide consequent on innovations in health sciences, betterment of social infrastructure and systems etc.

## **Example case: The Third Age (U3A)**

### **a. The System**

The U3A was started in France at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Toulouse in 1973 by Prof. Pierre Vellas as an outside the academic initiative. Later it has been initiated in many countries in the world in varying models. In 1980s U3A was adopted in UK as a self-help organization. In the UK model each U3A is structured as an independent self-financing and self-managing charity with links to the Third Age Trust, a national coordinating body. Each individual U3A comprises several activity groups which cover a wide range of different topics like arts, languages, physical activity, discussion, and games. Whereas in USA it has been established as lifelong learning institutes. Career development is not an objective of the lifelong learning institute. Intellectual challenge and social enjoyment are the objectives of this initiative.

In the global context, among diverse objectives such as learning for the purpose of learning, entertainment, social engagement, and career development, U3A initiatives pick objects suitable for serving the needs of older age population depending on the local requirements. It is flexible in a way befitting to the philosophies behind older adult learning and active aging.

## **b. The management of lifelong learning**

### **1. Personal level**

Initiative to pursue learning by individuals is the critical success factor in this phase. It is found that for the smooth transition from full-time working age to this phase, individual level planning and strategies for continued learning are highly essential. Personalized and localized initiatives with maximum amount of flexibility is the approach most appreciated by the learners.

### **2. Organizational level**

Policy development and facilitation of this phase of lifelong learning is found to be a collaborative process, with government departments, academic institutions, developmental organizations, and volunteers work together for addressing varying local requirements. Proactiveness and agility of organizations concerned are as important as childcare phase. However, majority of organizations with a potential to serve this phase are yet to start doing things in this direction.

### **3. Societal level**

Here, societal interventions for encouraging and supporting the older people to engage in lifelong learning activities to enjoy the benefits of active aging are vital. Depending on the general health and living circumstances the old age people may not take self-initiation. In such cases organizational and social interventions become critical.

## **V. Consolidation of ideas on Management of Lifelong Learning from the example cases/ Conclusion**

- a. In all the phases of lifelong learning discussed here, the leaning management strategies of individuals, organizations, and broader society remain interlinked, mutually complementary and the learning flows from one phase of life to another by justifying the definition of lifelong learning.
- b. Life-skills or core skills act as the driving factor for lifelong learning in all the phases.
- c. Need for strong policies and implementation frameworks, that can address local and individualized learning requirements are found necessary in all the phases as given in this paper.
- d. Proactiveness and agility are found to be quite essential to nurture lifelong learning in individual, organizational and societal levels.
- e. In the life cycle of lifelong learning management, organizations, and larger society nurture individuals by providing ample learning opportunities. In return, the individuals strengthen the organizations and the society by making use of their learning. This process also transforms related organizations and societies into learning organizations and learning societies.
- f. In the Education/ preparing for livelihood (from primary to tertiary) and the Employment/ entrepreneurship /livelihood phases, learning strategies should be designed based on aptitude and competencies required to grab the ever-evolving opportunities.

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