

Lifelong learning: What you need to know

Author: Kudzai Derera . December 2020

Most individuals equate schooling with formal education at school, college, university, etc. We are all told that we should obtain a successful education from an early age. Generally speaking, formal education and the credentials that come from it are indeed necessary. Education will maximize our ability in our chosen profession to pursue better, more fulfilling work, earn more and maybe become more successful. Schooling is just one form of schooling, however.

There are also other ways to advance your expertise and improve the skills you need in life. Everywhere, expertise can be gained and skillsets developed-learning is inevitable and takes place all the time. However, for both personal and career growth, lifelong learning is about developing and retaining a positive approach to learning. Lifelong learning is a type of education that is self-initiated and based on personal development. Although there is no standardised concept of lifelong learning, learning that occurs beyond a formal educational institution, such as school, university or corporate training, has usually been referred to.

However, lifelong learning does not inherently have to limit itself to informal learning. To achieve personal satisfaction, it is better described as being voluntary. Informal or formal education may result in the means to do so. Formal education is something that everybody has to go through to some degree, and in real life, the experience it provides is not all that realistic. Life-long learning is how, little by little and day by day, you grow as an individual. The value and excitement of development are understood by life-long learners, so they never settle for what they already know and still pursue change.

What is lifelong learning?

Learning is about realising your full potential and it will assist you to achieve self-actualisation, the greatest need recognised by the Hierarchy of Needs of Maslow. Lifelong learning retains the ability of a person to acquire new knowledge outside of the traditional system of education. The only way to survive in the complex world that we live in today is to cultivate a mindset where you continuously learn. Lifelong learning is the education that is carried out after school. It is thus optional, rather than mandatory, and is fully self-motivated, with the primary purpose being to promote personal or professional growth.

Lifelong learning, whether by formal training or anything much less organised, may be done in several different ways. It can be used by guidance or coaching, but any form of self-taught learning is also included in the term. Also, our everyday experiences with our peers can be counted as lifelong learning, as well as the skills and habits we learn both within and outside of work. Lifelong learning builds on prior learning as it expands knowledge and skills in depth and breadth (London, in press). Learning is “how individuals or groups acquire, interpret, reorganize, change or assimilate a related cluster of information, skills, and feelings. It is also primary to how people construct meaning in their personal and

shared organisational lives” (Marsick, 1987, p. 4, as quoted in Matthews, 1999, p. 19).

The importance of lifelong learning

Lifelong learning will help us to achieve personal fulfilment and happiness, whether it is following personal interests and passions or chasing professional goals. It acknowledges that people have a natural desire to discover, learn and develop and encourages us by paying attention to the ideas and aspirations that inspire us to enhance our quality of life and sense of self-worth. With increasingly diverse and dynamic workplaces, more and more employers recognise that standardized credentials are not the only way to classify desirable workers.

The knowledge acquired from previous experience will greatly benefit the company, as well as any skills that have been self-taught or gained along the way. Lifelong learning also ensures that their workers continue to evolve and reflects their ability to improve at a professional level. The minimum prerequisite for success in your profession is understanding. Every day there is growing information and awareness about everything. This implies that to keep up, awareness must also increase.

Examples of lifelong learning

Here are some of the types of programs for lifelong learning that you may partake in:

- Developing a new ability (eg. sewing, cooking, programming, public speaking, etc)
- Study of Self-taught (eg. learning a new language, researching a topic of interest, subscribing to a podcast, etc)
- Learning a new activity or sport (eg. Joining martial arts, learning to ski, learning to exercise, etc)
- Learning a new technology to use (smart devices, new software applications, etc)
- Fresh knowledge acquisition (taking a self-interest course via online education or classroom-based course)
- Internships and Traineeships
- Technical courses
- Teaching a new language by yourself
- Studying a new subject
- Learning to use new technical pieces
- Playing a new sport or game
- Adding to your expertise at work
- Gaining from the awareness of your surroundings and learned habits

Most beneficial lifelong learning skills

Lifelong learning abilities may be very similar to many of the soft abilities you might have heard of. It has to do with how we relate to each other and the world around us. They are all about developing relationships in many respects. The following are some of the abilities that are helpful to all individuals:

- Creativity
- Problem Solving
- Critical Thinking
- Leadership
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Information Management
- Adaptability
- Curiosity
- Reflection

The difference between lifelong learning and lifelong education

A personal process is lifelong learning. It is something that is achieved by people. Lifelong education, on the other hand, is a systemic reality (Searle, 1995), originating from the social world and applied by it, typically in the context of the provision of specific kinds of experiences. There is a lot of debate about lifelong learning in cultural, political, and scientific discourse. This topic has centred on learning linked to the employability of individuals during their working lives since the Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1996).

The increasing necessity for adults to be working and employable until the end of their seventh decade reflects this trend in countries with advanced industrial economies. In changing occupational practices and with diverse workplace requirements, this requires adults to remain working-competent. Given such conditions, there has been a misplacement of trust that initial occupational readiness, often at the beginning of working life, would be appropriate for lifelong employability. As a result, there has undoubtedly never been a period when the learning and growth of adults have been given so much attention over their life span, albeit increasingly geared towards employment-related outcomes.

Lifelong learning is something that happens when people think and behave all the time, some of which happens through their involvement in educational programs and organizations (i.e., lifelong education; Billett, 2009a). Yet such services only contribute regularly during the life cycle of individuals. When these two principles (i.e., lifelong learning and lifelong education) are combined, a fundamental categorical mistake is made (Billett, 2010). One comprises a personal fact and practice: it is initiated and enacted by individuals, quite likely in personal-particular ways, as shaped by individuals' ontogenetic development or legacies of life histories (Billett, 2003).

The other (i.e., lifelong education) is a set of experiences generated in the social world, manifested in the form of social suggestions that comprise particular forms, norms, and practices whose intent is to realize particular kinds of changes in people (i.e., learning). For example teachers and instructional planners, those who consciously plan such experiences, understand this by referring to the expected effects of these experiences. They realize that there is no guarantee that particular styles of learning can result from what is given. These two terms are categorically different in this sense, not synonymous. The following table shows the differences between lifelong learning and lifelong education:

Differing premises of lifelong learning and education

Lifelong learning	Lifelong learning	Lifelong education
Foundational category	Personal factors and goals	Institutional/social factors and goals
Enactments	Process of experiencing	Provision of experiences
Outcomes	Learning and development	Societal continuity and/or change
Antecedents	Individual knowing and knowledge	Social institutions, practices, norms, and forms
Mediational means	Knowing, what individuals know, can do, and value	Projection of the social world
The manifestation of paid work	Vocations	Occupations

In our world today, information is the main source of meaning. The key to overcoming any performance obstacles that might be in front of you is your desire to develop your mind and dedicate yourself to lifelong learning. Learning something new will boost your resume if you are unemployed or underemployed), as well as your chances of moving into a more desired or better-paid job.

Kudzai Derera is a Consultant at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd, a management and human resources consulting firm.

LinkedIn: <https://zw.linkedin.com/in/kudzaidererera>

Phone: +263 242 481946-48/481950

Email: kudzai@ipccconsultants.com

Main Website: www.ipccconsultants.com

<https://thehumancapitalhub.com/articles/Lifelong-Learning-What-You-Need-To-Know>