

## Lifelong learning and everything you need to know

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“There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education. The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning.”

– Jiddu Krishnamurti

**Definition** - Lifelong learning is self-initiated education that is focused on personal development, it occurs mainly outside formal education institutes like schools, universities, or corporate development programs.

In this age of rapid change where skills are getting obsolete at an alarming level due to automation and AI, long-life learning is an option for individuals and employees to keep themselves relevant. It is usually learning undertaken voluntarily, with an individual being in charge of the whole process. It is often a means for achieving personal fulfilment and living life at a higher dimension. Long-life learning is usually directed by personal goals and individual interests.

Continuous learning is providing employees with a chance of upskilling and developing new skills to keep abreast with industry trends and technological changes. The sprawling of internet and digital technologies is allowing employees an opportunity for self-study at the time of their convenience.

### Why is long-life learning important

1. **The rapid expansion of the corporate world** is imposing a need for continuous learning on individuals. The rule of the corporate jungle is 'either you adapt and survive or you remain rigid and die'. The corporate world is continuously changing and evolving, skills that we're relevant to a decade ago no longer have the same value. Employers place a premium on value-added and they reward value hence to remain valuable, employees need to keep pace with the change by learning new skills.
2. **Change in job description and skills needed**, changes in the work world as

fueled by shifting customer demand, technology, and new regulations, calls for new skills on the part of employees. Job descriptions are also changing to reflect changing organizational skill needs. For example, the current trend for marketers' job descriptions was the need for digital marketing and graphics design as key requirements, even though most local universities started offering the course a few years ago.

- 3. Automation and Artificial Intelligence**, have their obvious advantages like improving efficiency and reducing cost, which have the overall effect of improving profitability. Most people argue that technology changes bring forth new opportunities for entrepreneurs and new jobs. However, in the short run automation and AI are resulting in job erosion for the blue-collar level and some white-collar areas. To insulate themselves, employees need to keep upskilling and learning new skills, through lifelong learning.
- 4. With the emergence of the gig economy**, organizations and HR professionals struggled for a long time with striking a balance between company labor demand and market labor supply. This problem seems reduced by the emergence of the gig economy. Through it, organizations can now contract independent workers on short-short-times, allowing them to cost cost-efficient keeping costs. The future of work is that organizations will no longer be safe havens for the incompetent and non-performing hiding behind long-term contracts. For employees to function in the gig economy they need to keep updating and refreshing their skills.

## Advantages of lifelong learning

- 1. Keeping you employed**, one way to ensure that you keep providing value to your employer and attracting the interest of other employers is by improving yourself, deepening, broadening, and expanding your skills. Employees need to be up to date with industry trends and developments. This can be attained through attending industry seminars and conferences, subscribing to newsletters, and taking refresher courses. Understanding your industry enables you to capture arising opportunities and prepare for threats if we are to go by the SWOT analysis model. The result is providing employers with the value they will be willing to pay for.
- 2. Keeping motivated**, monotony is the arch-enemy of individual motivation. Learning new skills ignites a new interest in individuals which improves their motivational levels. This contributes to job satisfaction and individual fulfilment.
- 3. Improving the quality of life**, through learning individuals are exposed to new ideas and new people. Online discussions with people of similar interests help in comprehending how the world works. Exposure helps people adopt new ideas that make them better employees, parents, spouses, and citizens, hence improving the quality of life.
- 4. Helping the brain stay healthy**, research shows that learning keeps brain cells

working at the optimum level. This can limit cognitive and memory decline as we age, which is a positive thing.

5. **Job success**, hiring managers often complain that job seekers lack the necessary skills that the company requires. Furthermore, common sense shows the existence of a correlation between acquisition of new skills and improvement in job performance. Having new skills enable individuals to attain higher-level performance, which results in an elevation in the workplace and job fulfilment.

## Types of lifelong learning

1. **Formal learning** is usually done in formal settings where a student learns with other students on a clear schedule. It is usually done within formal institutions like universities, colleges, professional courses, etc. Formal learning follows a set sequence and is usually monitored, it culminates into an examination and awarding of certificates. Most Zimbabweans employees are up taking lifelong learning by going for master's degrees and professional body exams. Most employers have made it a point to demand post-graduate qualifications for positions beyond the entry levels.
2. **Informal learning** is the outright opposite of formal learning. This is undertaken by individuals out of their interest and is mainly guided by personal goals and individual interests. Knowledge may be acquired through reading books, watching videos on YouTube, discussions with peers, or trial and error.
3. **Professional**, professional development opportunities on the job or through professional organizations, are one way individuals can uphill themselves. Most companies have professional development programs that are either conducted internally or externally. Furthermore, companies like Google, Microsoft, etc are offering courses that can impact professionals within their industry, and most professionals are taking advantage of such offers.

## Conclusion

In this age of rapid change due to changing consumer demand and technological evolution, individuals must keep upgrading and upskilling themselves to remain relevant. One important way to grow professionally is by taking a learning attitude throughout one's life. Factors like the rapid expansion of the corporate world, the emergence of the gig economy, the advent of automation and AI, and changes in the job descriptions are imposing a need for workers to keep learning new skills. Lifelong learning has specific advantages like keeping an individual employed, keeping a person motivated, and improving chances of job success. It can be undertaken formally, informally or through professional development means.

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