

New Perspectives for Learning - Briefing Paper 55

Towards sustainable employability through participation in continuing vocational education and training

This is an Interim Briefing Paper of the project that started in November 2001

Context of the Research

A critical issue for sustainable socio-economic development of all regions of Europe is the ability to ensure that those who are already in employment continue to have the skills and qualifications that are required for continuous changes in the workplace. This requires adequate and effective policies to be designed, developed and implemented for continuing vocational education and training.

This project is analysing the structural, organisational, and individual factors that influence employees' decisions to participate in continuing vocational education and training. It is looking at employees using technical skills from industrial small and medium enterprises in Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. It is also studying the attitudes of employees using technical skills towards their participation in continuing vocational education and training, including using information and communications technology skills.

The project is aiming to understand the factors influencing an individual's decision to participate in continuing VET offerings and to engage in informal learning processes. It is assessing and characterising the attitudes of employees using technical skills toward participation in continuing vocational and educational programmes and engagement in informal learning processes.

Initial Conclusions

Initial conclusions of the project:

1. Where technical work is challenging, most continuing vocational learning takes place outside formal training programmes.
2. As well as updating technical skills employees also need to further develop a range of more generic skills, including planning, problem solving, communication, IT and management skills.
3. Self-directed learning needs to increase significantly through activities that encourage learning how to learn and through the promotion of lifelong learning.

4. Learning how to organise knowledge effectively and applying it appropriately is vital for technical workers development.
5. However, provisional findings suggest situational factors and individuals' attitudes towards continuing vocational education and training have most influence on participation in continuing training offerings in some settings.

Initial Recommendations

1. The focus of strategies for skill development should be upon continuing vocational education, training and *learning*, rather than just upon participation in continuous vocational education and training.
2. Greater attention should be given to helping employees become more effective in supporting the learning of others at work.
3. There is a need to focus upon the development of hybrid skills rather than just technical skills development.
4. There is a need to encourage the spread and sharing of tacit knowledge, through the combination of individual mobility plus formal and informal networks that will increase the competitiveness of companies in particular districts or sectors.
5. Public training institutions should implement policies to promote continuing training for professional and company development. In particular, a policy for self-learning through e-learning strategies should be developed and implemented.
6. Policies to promote and ensure quality in continuing training in small and medium industrial enterprises should be developed and implemented. Incentives for training of quality should be integrated into policies.
7. Policies should integrate measures to make employers and managers aware of the need to promote continuing vocational education and training for technical workers. In particular, policies should include measures to make companies develop strategies, not only to reduce participation barriers, like situational factors and individual attitudes, but also to implement incentives emphasising the role of training for job performance.

Further Information

The full title of the project is: "Participation in Continuing Vocational Education and Training: a need for a sustainable employability". The final report is due in May 2004.

The project web site at: - <http://www.academus.pt/public/EstudosPlanmnt/ProjCurs/PARTICIPA.doc>

Partner details

Key Publications

Figueira, E., Brown, A., Entonado, F., Alves, M., Tomassini, M., Patiniotis, N., Grollmann, P. (2002). *“Active adults’ participation in Continuing Education in Alentejo”* Paper presented in XV World Congress of Sociology, Brisbane – Australia, 7-13 July 2002, Published in the Proceedings.

Research Institutions

Academus, L.da. – Consultadoria, Formação e Investigação Instituto para a Inovação na Formação, Portugal
ITB, Universitaet Bremen, Germany
ICE, University of Extremadura, Spain
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