

# Rethinking Quality for Building a Learning Society

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## Abstract

The article explores how the issue of quality in the knowledge economy and learning society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century might dramatically differ from that we have known in the industrial age. Until now, most approaches to quality were based on the idea that there is a clear separation between the producer of a good or service and its consumer. How should we define the quality of a learning environment where learners are not simply consumers of knowledge, but co-producers of their own as well as their organisation's and community's knowledge? How do we define quality in a system of *prosumption*, where consumers and producers merge?

To suggest a response to this issue, the article will examine how the understanding of the organic link between individual, community, organisational and territorial learning is critical to realise the true power of e-Learning, i.e. the e-transformation and quality of all the processes linked to education, training, human resource and community development.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

*“What we want to see is the child in pursuit of knowledge, and not knowledge in pursuit of the child.”* — George Bernard Shaw

We are now entering into a new world, a world where learning is an integral part of work and the fabric of society, a learning society. As John Dewey wrote: *“Education is not preparing for life; education is life itself”*; or to paraphrase Descartes, one could say: *“I live, therefore I learn.”*

In this article, then, we shall be looking at how the need to rethink education, training and learning to meet the needs of a knowledge economy and a learning society<sup>2</sup> inevitably leads to a new approach to building, exploiting and validating the quality of lifelong, and lifewide learning. We will explore how the concept of quality must move from a piecemeal to a holistic approach, placing the individual learner as the key component of a quality policy with a set of new competencies at the centre of a network of relationships: learning organisations, learning communities, learning cities and learning regions. Our particular focus is on the critical role to be played by technology.

So, when looking at quality approaches designed for learning, the questions one should ask are:

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<sup>1</sup> NB: this article is the result of the work undertaken by EIFEL and our contribution to different European projects on quality and learning (SEEL, SEEQUEL, ReLL), in particular SEEL (supporting Excellence in E-Learning) explored the concept of quality applied to learning regions – looking at the role of technology in the activities of eLearning regions.

<sup>2</sup> *Knowledge economy* refers to the transformation of the economy, its mode of producing added value, goods and services leading to the emergence of a new class of *knowledge workers*; *learning society* refers to the emergence of a new relationship between citizens, organisations, firms, associations, public authorities, cultural heritage, etc. leading to the construction of learning communities, learning cities, learning regions (R Florida, D Wolfe) and learning countries. Knowledge economy focuses on *capital growth*, learning society focuses on *social capital growth*.

- How do they take into account the new political, economical, sociological and technological environment? What do they offer that was not, or could not have been, offered 20 years ago? This latter question is an excellent ‘acid test’ to determine whether something is really new or is a mere revamping of old ideas.
- How can we ensure that our approach to quality meets the real needs of a knowledge economy and a learning society? How might maintaining an old framework create obstacles to progress and innovation?
- Is it possible to adapt quality systems tailored to the industrial age to a knowledge economy and a learning society, or should we invent other quality reference frameworks? These are classical epistemological questions: do we need (are we participating in) a paradigm shift (Kuhn 1970) or a mere adaptation of the old theoretical framework?
- What are the relations between the different learning dimensions (individual, community, organisational, territorial) and how do they impact quality systems? Many quality systems developed in the field of education and probably even more in the field of e-Learning are focused on the ‘inputs’: quality of the learning resources (e.g. CERFAD, Italy), competencies of the tutor (e.g. EIFEL standards of competencies), quality of the training provider (e.g. OPQFC, France), very few provide a holistic view of learning as a social and community process.

It is clear that we are witnessing the emergence of a new environment requiring citizens with a whole new set of skills (skills for life) that are in contradiction with some of the educational and managerial models inherited from an industrial society (Tapscott 1998). Learning is now an integral part of work, and not something that is limited to a dedicated time, space or modality (classroom, physical or virtual) (Schank 1997).

A quick *PEST* analysis will elicit some of the trends.

- **Political:** *the move from independent education policies (subsidiarity) to cooperation and coordination* – as seen in the need for transparency of qualifications (e.g. Common Qualification Framework and European Diploma Supplement) and mobility of the work force (e.g. Europass Mobility) in an extended Europe.
- **Economic:** *the move from an industrial economy to a knowledge economy* – e.g. changing the relations of the nature of the goods produced, their production and delivery methods, the qualification of employees, the change in obsolescence patterns of goods and services.
- **Sociological:** *the move from brawn intensive to brain intensive labour* (Tapscott 1996) – e.g. change of the relations between organisations, employees and employers, the development of telework, organisation of the space, the need to develop new schemes for accreditation of prior learning.
- **Technological:** *the move from mass media to knowledge media* – e.g. the ubiquitous access to a “world brain” (Wells 1937) empowering individuals, not just as consumers, but as co-producers of information, knowledge and culture.

The European 2010 objective, to build “[...] *the most competitive knowledge economy* [...]” is an attempt to give political leadership to a phenomenon that needs to be controlled in order to ensure “sustainable development and social inclusion” – which is part of the same Lisbon declaration, but too often forgotten. Rethinking quality for a learning society needs to take into account all these dimensions.

In the following section we will explore:

- How the emergence of a knowledge economy and learning society are changing our vision of learning and quality of learning
- What new references we can use for planning learning quality
- What a typical 21<sup>st</sup> century e-Learner will be like, and what will be his/her unique contribution to quality

This discussion will lead us to the conclusion that only an organic vision of learning and quality, including all their dimensions (individual, community, organisational, territorial, societal) will be able to support the quality approach to learning required in a learning society.

### **Linking individual, community, organisational and territorial learning**

Learning is about "...establishing new premises (i.e. paradigms, schemata, mental models, or perspectives) to override the existing ones." (Nonaka 1995). This applies to individuals, communities, as well as regions. The concepts of learning community (Argyris & Schön 1978), learning organisation (Senge 1990) or learning region (Florida 1995, Wolfe 2002) should not refer to independent entities and processes. In order to succeed, the *learning regions* require a critical mass of skills and knowledge that organisations, companies, associations and citizens can provide. As authorities they have the power to remove (or create) obstacles to individual and community learning and to behave (or not) as learning organisations. They have the ability to place learning at the centre of their communities, challenging people's views about learning and contribute significantly to the development of a learning culture. This will ensure that learning is integrated into all aspects of everyday life, an approach to continuous improvement and citizenship, rather than something isolated or a distraction.

In the industrial society, human resource management was principally focused on training and was not really involved in organisational learning, a domain that was left to operations managers. Learning management systems were the technology of choice, a system focused on managing formal training with little or no ability to support organisational or informal learning. In the knowledge economy, it is critical that human resource managers integrate organisational learning as a key component of their learning policies.

## **The need for a new quality framework**

It is clear today that there are different and often conflicting visions of what learning quality is about (as indeed is reflected in this handbook!). There may be conflicts of interest between the same categories of stakeholders as well as across different categories.

To start with, the organisation and activities of learning inevitably reflect the value systems of (the most powerful) stakeholders and society. For example, learners with a middle class background may be perfectly satisfied with the 'quality' of an elitist educational system resulting in a high failure rate for children from a less fortunate background. An elitist system has structural failure built in and is not concerned to exploit all the talents available in a community.

Although a recent study (Berry 2004), confirming several previous studies, has found that raising the general skill levels in a country 1% leads to 1,5% increase in productivity and 2,5% in GDP growth, such research will only have an impact in a society ready to learn from facts and research and implement corrective policies and actions. An elitist society can thrive

perfectly well on exclusion, nurturing a kind of “third world” – France uses the concept of “*quart monde*” – *fourth world* – to describe its inner third world. Another indicator of an exclusive society might be the general level of education of its immigrant populations; it is clear that it is certainly difficult for a country to claim to have a quality education system, when it tolerates the continued existence of a large population of unqualified immigrants.

Beyond the global context of learning policies, there are issues with even more tangible issues, such as the quality of educational resources: some resources might be recognised as ‘quality’ educational resources for people without disabilities, while being completely inaccessible to learners with disabilities. This time, the structural exclusion may be found in the technology being used, the development process, the competencies of the authors, the values of the publisher or accessibility policies and regulations.

Similarly, a training organisation can be certified ISO 9000, and not meet the needs of today’s employment market, producing ‘quality’ unemployable workers. This is typically what happens in some programmes for unemployed people, where training is being used to reduce the unemployment figures rather than genuinely re-skilling and re-qualifying.

There are also still conflicting visions between those focusing on the *learning path*<sup>3</sup> (in reality, often *the training path*) and those focusing primarily on *learning outcomes*. Most credit systems rely on the number of study hours (centred on classroom time<sup>4</sup>) rarely on the ability to create meaningful outcomes. Also, someone can be perfectly competent yet denied a qualification on the basis that they have not attended the right number of courses and exams.

Moreover, although most learning occurs informally and non-formally, most quality systems are primarily focused on formal education and training – probably because this is where most of the funding goes!

In addition to fundamental issues of values, there is also the ongoing debate about quality in terms of quality control/assurance/management systems. Is quality about conforming to standards? Is it about simply satisfying – or delighting – the client or end-user? Is it about fostering innovation or reproducing the same good or service over and over again?

To meet the challenge of building learning quality for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, two main options are open to us: accommodation and assimilation.

*Accommodation vs. Assimilation* is used here metaphorically, in reference to the work of Piaget (Hatwell) on learning as being a combination of assimilation (of new facts and processes) and accommodation (changing one’s representations in order to be able to interpret the new facts). In this article, *training* is understood as a process principally *externally driven* and mainly focused on *assimilation* of new rules, procedures and facts; while learning is understood as a process driven internally and mainly focused on *accommodation*.,,

*Accommodation* of quality to a learning society requires a complete rethinking of what quality is about and the modalities for implementing, supporting and verifying it. Contrary to *accommodation*, the *assimilation* process does not fundamentally rethink quality values, models or processes, but is an attempt to maintain the old order of things by introducing amendments to a mainly invariant reference framework – e.g. add an ‘e-’ in front of words

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<sup>3</sup> Most Learning Management Systems (LMS) focus on the management of predefined “learning paths” programmed by the response to multiple choice questions (or equivalent) to give the right to move to the next section or not, reducing the learning environment to a series of inputs and tests, confusing *deep reflective learning* with the *drill and practice* used in boot camps.

<sup>4</sup> Making a distinction between face to face or online is not really relevant in this context.

and place 'ICT' here and there in the old framework. It is our view that the persistent use of such terms as 'open and distance *training*, rather than *learning*, in many European countries is typical of the desire to cling to the old approaches that were organisation and teacher-centred rather than learner-centred. It is as though the Lisbon agenda, the Bologna and Copenhagen process, the movement towards accreditation of prior learning, recognition of informal and non-formal learning, the e-transformation of many processes linked to education and human resource development, the massive invasion of knowledge media (as opposed to mass media) has had no impact.

One particular development in the field of knowledge, information and learning technologies has been the raise of the knowledge media (Eisenstadt 1995), which has a major impact on the value chain of learning resources and environments. While we have developed the expertise to assess the quality of *mass media based* learning resources, the adaptation of this expertise from traditional *mass media* (e.g. print, television and radio) to digital *mass media* technology (e.g. delivery of contents through CD-ROMs, DVDs or the Internet) has been done through a simple *assimilation* process – by adding a few criteria, such as *being interoperable* or *accessible*.

### **Knowledge media**

*“vast amounts of high quality moving graphics and sound, instantly accessible anywhere on the, er, Infobahn. [...] Now we need to discuss what goes into the multimedia: what fits on those CD-ROMs, what sits on massive file servers, what travels down the Information Superhighway? What do you call it? The conventional wisdom says that you call it 'content', and the hip view says 'bits is bits'. Both of these views are widespread, and in my view dangerous, because if we adopt either of these views we are selling ourselves tragically short. Yes, from the perspective of a Hollywood studio, 'content' is ok. And from the perspective of an editing technician, 'bits' are ok too. But its kind of like saying that Mozart wrote notes (content) and used ink (bits). What's missing in the widely-discussed convergence of telecommunications and computing is a very important third strand: the learning and cognitive sciences. This three-way convergence gives rise to what I call 'Knowledge Media'. I therefore want to raise the stakes and talk about 'knowledge' rather than 'content', and show how that relates to multimedia and the information superhighway.” (Eisenstadt 1995)*

In a *knowledge media* model, where the Internet is not just used as a means of delivering pre-packaged contents but as a tool for helping learners to co-produce, co-organise, co-exploit and share knowledge – e.g. wiki-based resources, blogs or ePortfolios – the reference model for quality is certainly very different. What is important in this context is not so much the *intrinsic* quality of pre-packaged educational objects, but the quality of an environment able to foster knowledge co-construction. Reassessing learning resources that were viewed as 'quality' in the old context could lead to some radically different results in this new context. Conversely, keeping the same old quality reference framework could lead to providing objectively poor quality learning resources. The quality of *knowledge media based* resources needs a new reference framework that goes beyond the mere quality of the media and the traditional view on instructional design of *mass media-based* learning resources. A more holistic view must be taken. To those who years ago used the slogan that “content is king”, we are happy to respond “context is dynasty.”

While we used the difference between *mass* and *knowledge* media to illustrate the need to revise old quality frameworks (moving the focus from *contents* to *context*), the major reason for such a revision remains the move from an industrial society to a knowledge economy and learning society: the learner is now at the centre of a multidimensional learning space through an active participation in learning communities (personal and professional), learning organisations, learning territories (municipalities, regions) and society.



Learning is an active process *blended* into everyday life. “*Placing the learner at the centre*”, in this context, does not mean that he/she is the *centre of attention* of well-meaning teachers and trainers, but the *centre of production* of knowledge that occurs in a series of different contexts, involving a series of different stakeholders, from schools, teachers, parents and municipalities to peers, professionals, awarding bodies, training institutions, public authorities, employers, unions and professional bodies.

This new context will have an impact on the *qualities* (competencies) required from learners, as well as on the nature of a quality framework that should be organically linked to the different dimensions of learning: formal and informal, personal, community and organisational. This should require more than mere assimilation into the old quality framework. A new framework is probably required.

## Measuring the quality of learning

While it is true that many different factors contribute to the quality of the learning experience (e.g. resources, processes and contexts), at the end of the learning process there are a series of simple indicators that will provide relevant information about the quality of the learning experience. Meaningful discussion and action to improve the quality of learning must provide evidence about:

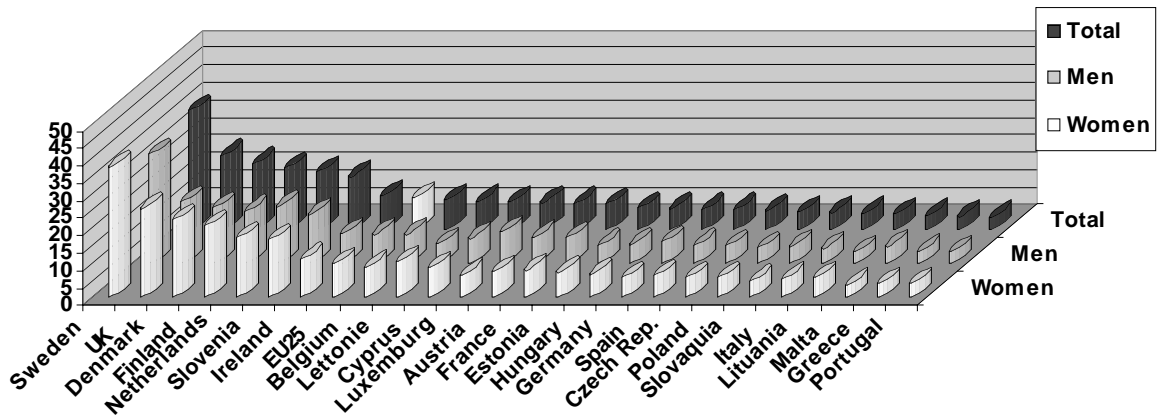
- **Who has learned?** This can be provided by statistical information at international, national, organisational or classroom level.
- **What has been learned – and how?** What are the *learning practices*, formal, non-formal and informal? What are the instructional practices? What are the environments? What is the quality of individuals’ *learning engagement and activities*? This can be provided through evidence collected by reflective practitioners and communities of practice.
- **What is the impact of the learning activities?** What are the measurable outcomes? How has the performance of individuals, organisations and society as a whole improved? Have we achieved our learning goals? This can be provided through the evidence collected in personal, organisational and community ePortfolios.

We are going to look at each of these and then consider a future-facing model for the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner.

### *Who has learned?*

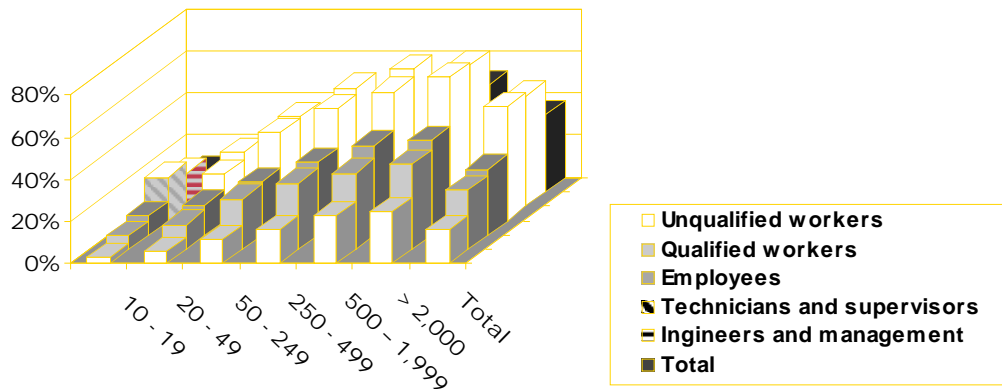
If we now refer to the Lisbon and Bologna agenda, and take a look at the reality of learning in Europe, it is clear that the current system is not paying sufficient attention to informal and non-formal learning opportunities. There are for example interesting statistics published by Eurostat about who is engaged in all forms of learning, formal and informal, professional or personal: the statistics shows that there are great discrepancies in the participation of citizens in learning activities across Europe (fig. 1).

**Figure 1 - % of adults engaged in a training or educational activity within the 4 weeks preceding the 2002 annual poll (source Eurostat)**



These discrepancies at European level can be amplified at national level. France, for example, which has a mandatory training levy, with the objective of providing professional continuing training to all, in reality has a system that increases the gap between qualified and non-qualified workers as well as between SMEs and large corporations. As the figures compiled by CEREQ (fig. 2), an official body studying employment and qualifications, indicate, while SMEs represent nearly 90% of employed people, very little training goes to small enterprises – what the graphic doesn’t show is that men get more training than women.

**Figure 2 - Training in relation to qualifications and organisations’ staff size in 2002 (Source CEREQ 2002)**



Although France has a system of continuing education that, despite the initial vision of its founders<sup>5</sup>, expands the gap between qualified and unqualified people, it does not mean that people with no or few qualifications, or working in an SME do not learn. If they were not capable of learning, many of the SMEs would be pretty soon out of business! But this

<sup>5</sup> Nobody can doubt the goodwill of those who inspired (Jacques Delors) and voted the 1971 law on continuing education, but the facts demonstrate that creating a training levy and enshrining in law the idea of continuing education would have positive effects. It is interesting to note that, in the 90s, the Australians tried to imitate the French system of training levy, only to abandon it a few years later, recognising that far from closing the gap in education, it created even wider disparities.

learning has not been identified or recognised until recently (2004<sup>6</sup>), with the development of *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience* (Accreditation of Prior Experience) and a *Droit Individuel à la Formation* (individual training right) providing each employee with 20 hours training per year, managed by themselves.

We need to stress that France is not unique. We have taken one example in order to illustrate the need to change our approach to the organisation and validation of learning. We need to recognise that learning is not synonymous with training – people learn despite the existence of mandatory training or the existence of a training levy – and therefore, quality of *learning* can't be reduced to the quality of *training* and traditional quality systems are of little help to measure the quality of true or deep learning.

So, in order to respond to the first question about the quality of learning (Who?) it is important to take a look at the big picture, and to benchmark policies across countries and organisations in order to understand who really participates in learning activities, in the classroom (for formal learning) and outside (for informal and non-formal learning), in the organisation, the community, the region and the nation. It is critical that we develop statistical instruments to be able to measure beyond the obvious number of trainee\*hours that some countries use to establish official statistics. It is vital to be able to understand, support and value all those *other* learning activities that some say represent more than 80% of all learning.

As we shall see later, what has also changed is the increasing responsibility placed on learners to take their own learning into their own hands, as well as on society to empower individuals. This requires a new set of competencies and rights. Learning technology has a critical role to play in extending and improving learning opportunities as we now see as we consider the second measure of learning quality.

### ***What has been learned – and how? The contribution of technology to quality***

We turn our attention now to the issue of learning activities. How can we ensure that learners are carrying out meaningful learning activities that will help them to achieve the desired objectives? It is our view that a new approach is needed and that this is facilitated by technological advances. We have already developed the beginning of an answer for the first point. We should like now to concentrate on the second point, linking new requirements for learning with the new environment, in particular technological.

**Learning is about transforming representations** – it is a process combining *assimilation* of new facts or procedures (training) and *accommodation* of our brain to new ideas and concepts changing our interpretation and vision of the world as well as our values (Piaget 1975).

**Learning is co-constructed** - all new knowledge is constructed on a foundation of prior knowledge, and this new knowledge, once inter-linked and referenced to the prior knowledge, forms a foundation of new prior knowledge. The learning brain is constantly re-organizing itself by adding and subtracting information. (Salmon 2002)

**Learning is experiential** and explorative – learning takes place by engaging in meaningful practice; experiential learning is at the heart of the acquisition of new competencies and skills (physical and intellectual) (Kolb 1975). The proof of having acquired such competencies is the ability to replicate them over time with the required level of performance

**Learning is proactive** – learners take responsibility for their own learning – the role of learning supports (teachers, trainers, mentors, coaches, etc.) is to set up the circumstances

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<sup>6</sup> It is the *Loi de Modernisation Sociale* (Social Modernisation Law), after an unsuccessful attempt, since 1894 to offer the opportunity for *Validation des Acquis Professionnels* (Accreditation of Professional Experience).

under which learners are likely to teach themselves and to encourage learners to do so. Empowerment is a key element in learners' motivation to learn and a strong determinant of the outcomes and success of learning.

**Learning is social** – and it changes one's ability to participate into the society. Learning requires feedbacks and interaction with peers, team support, colleagues or customers. This feedback and interaction may vary in quantity and quality, but it provides a critical element for providing meaning and value to learning activities (Vygotsky 1934).

**Learning is reflective** – The active work of constructing a base of new knowledge by linking it to prior knowledge can be compared to receiving inventory in a warehouse. Higher order thinking and learning occurs in the lull following the active work of intake as the brain orders and reorders what it has received. The learning brain requires the periodic expanses of mental white space we refer to as reflection (Dewey 1933).

**Learning requires regular feedback and diagnostic** – learning requires exploration, trial, error, and sympathetic feedback. Learning is also enhanced by challenge and inhibited by threat.

**Learning design is about empowering learners** – the function of instructional design is not to apply some predefined formula to shape contents to ease digestion of contents, but to provide an environment where learners will be able to co-construct their knowledge and skills. We have no evidence that a given "instructional chunk" yields a single identifiable "learning chunk" in the learner's brain.

**Learning is about pleasure** – there are evidence that even the most basic learning mechanisms, such as memorisations are enhanced when associated with pleasure.

Of course, this series of statement is not new and could itself "*have been written 20 years ago*"! – even if the concepts have not been universally applied! What we now need to recognise is the need to interweave (Wenger 2002) the different dimensions of learning: individual, community, organisational and territorial. This organic link and interweaved dimensions of learning can now be translated into a series of knowledge, information and learning technologies that elicit and support the underlying processes, enabling the emergence of new practices, in rupture with the previous ones. This should have consequences on quality models and processes – which are in fact learning processes, like the EFQM cycle – and should therefore be able to be supported and transformed by knowledge, information and learning technologies (KILT), moving from quality to e-Quality, that is the e-Transformation of quality assurance mechanisms.

So what would quality look like when dressed in KILT: e-Quality? Initially, we need to dissociate two domains where technology will play a role in the quality of learning:

- technology as support to, transformation of the learning process – *e-Learning*
- technology as support to, transformation of the quality process – *e-Quality*

In order to understand the relation between *e-Quality* and *quality*, we need initially to review how *e-Learning* is defined in relation to *learning*.

It is our view it is regrettable that a widespread understanding of *e-Learning* is that is a kind of distance *training* using digital media (online or offline). This misconception has led to the introduction of the concept of 'blended learning' as a way to correct the so-called 'mistakes' of e-Learning, by adding of a portion of face to face to it.

For EIFEL, it is clear that e-Learning is not only distance or online training/learning. e-Learning, for example, includes ePortfolios, interactive white boards, school intranets,

knowledge management systems (for organisational learning) which have nothing to do with *distance* or *blended* learning! Presented as an *enhancement of* e-Learning, the concept of *blended learning* is irrelevant as it merely reinforces the initial misconceptions about learning and e-Learning – this ‘mixed’ mode of training delivery has been in fact available for decades and is far from new to those who with experience of open and flexible learning.

It is also clear that we should acknowledge the fundamental difference between learning and training and use both words in a meaningful and contextualised manner. For example, we feel that one of the technologies used in education and training is improperly named “Learning Management System” (LMS), rather than “Training Management System” although most LMSs are only efficient at managing training<sup>7</sup> and poor at managing real learning, that is supporting authentic self-management of learning, too often obliging individuals to move in constrained predefined learning paths.

A *learning organisation* is thus certainly not a *training organisation* – although it most likely provides training to its employees – and a *learning region* (or city) (Florida 1995) is not a region providing more training than others, but a region valuing all its assets (people, organisations, networks, associations, places, culture, history, etc.). And an e-Learning region, as an extension of the concept of learning region, is certainly not a region providing “e-Learning” in the limited interpretation of the term – nor “blended learning” - but a region using KILT to achieve its goal as learning region.

Richard Florida specifies his concept of the learning region by offering a comparison with "mass production regions". As far as he is concerned, "learning regions provide the crucial inputs required for knowledge-intensive economic organisation to flourish : a manufacturing infrastructure of interconnected vendors and suppliers ; a human infrastructure that can produce knowledge workers, facilitates the development of team orientation, and which is organised around long-life learning ; a physical and communication infrastructure which facilitates and supports constant sharing of information, electronic exchange of data and information, just-in-time delivery of goods and services, and integration into the global economy ; and capital allocation and industrial governance systems attuned to the needs of knowledge-intensive organisations" (Maillat & Kebir 1998).

Starting from a clear understanding of e-Learning, which is fundamentally different from *e-Training*, we would like to discuss the relation of quality and e-Learning. Is it about

- quality of e-Learning? Or
- e-Quality of learning?

In order to understand the difference between the two concepts, we suggest the following definitions.

**e-Learning:** *the e-Transformation of all the processes linked to individual, community, organisational and territorial learning, from education to culture, from training to human resources development and social capital development. E-Learning is about using knowledge, information and learning technologies (KILT) to value the assets of an individual, a community an organisation and the society at large.*

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<sup>7</sup> Poor eTraining is too often based on rote memorisation (read, watch and respond to multiple choice questions) and mimicking poor educational models

**e-Quality:** *the e-Transformation of all the processes linked to quality using knowledge, information and learning technologies (KILT). e-Quality is about using KILT to design, document and update standards, implement and document assessment, audit and verification processes. It is about using KILT to facilitate the contribution of all stakeholders in the different processes linked to quality.*

**e-Quality e-Learning** *is about using KILT to support, document and assess the e-transformation process of education, training and human resource development required to sustain learning individuals, communities, organisations and the society at large.*

Back to the initial question (the difference between *e-Quality learning* and *Quality e-Learning*) one could say that one is focusing on the *e-Transformation of quality processes* linked to learning, while the other focuses more on the *quality of the e-Transformation of learning processes*. If we define quality as a learning process (stating objectives, documenting progresses, getting feedback, reflecting on what has been achieved, modifying plans, tools, standards, etc. according to what has been learned) then we could elicit a much more organic link between e-Quality and e-Learning. For example, the e-Portfolio is at the same time a tool to support e-Learning and e-Quality (assessment process, individual as well as organisational, i.e. documenting what the organisation has achieved).

Of course, there are different orders of magnitude in the e-Transformation of quality, from the mere integration of technologies into existing processes, to the transformation of the processes themselves. We would like to define a first level of granularity in these different levels of change.

The very first level of e-Transformation of quality, could be putting the quality documentation online. This can be of course useful to maintain such documentation, making sure that everyone has access to the latest version in real time; among the advantages are reduction of maintenance and distribution costs. This cannot really be considered as innovation - no more than putting the contents of *open and flexible learning* courses online, using the Internet as a mere delivery channel instead of a CD-ROM or text books.

The next level of e-Transformation of quality (e-Quality) would be in supporting existing quality processes: quality assurance is about collecting evidence that is then submitted to an auditor delivering a certificate. It could be also using the Internet to manage customer service, letting customers having an asynchronous dialogue with maintenance engineers, building FAQs. There again, this not a real innovation, simply changing channels and media to support old processes.

Real innovation with e-Quality starts when KILT transforms the quality process from some kind of external process to an organic process *embedded* into everyday activities, into communities and life itself, and where the power shifts from one actor to another, or when the concept of quality itself is being challenged and transformed – e.g. relying on interactive networks of learners and citizens as an alternative to ‘accreditation agencies’ to deliver ‘quality marks.’ This is something that is now emerging where customers and users of products are building communities to share knowledge, make recommendations, etc. These kinds of services that were before provided by consumer advocacy groups through *mass media* can now use *knowledge media* to built interactive, dynamically updated information system. Search engines such as Google, new generations of tools like RSS and aggregators of blogs provide a *transformation* of the relationship between consumers as a group, as well as between consumers and providers of goods and services.

The concept of e-Quality is an opportunity to move from “quality *of* learning” to “quality *for* learning” in the same way as we need to move from “assessment *of* learning” to “assessment

for learning.” The ePortfolio is one example of how technology can at the same time support *learning*, *assessment for learning* and the *quality* of the assessment process. E-Portfolios provide an *organic link* between learning and quality, eliciting the *quality process as a learning process*. This is clearly moving one step further than the mere assessment of the quality of a course delivered on a DVD or on the Internet or assessing the competencies of teachers and trainers as was done before. For example, the quality of learning resources can be assessed from the collection of assessment from the different users, providing useful information of the value of the resource in different contexts – a resource can be excellent in a given context and a nuisance in another. Similarly, the competencies of teachers can be assessed by an external assessor, their peers and/or their students. For example, a learner looking for a specific course, can visit the ePortfolio of the teacher and consult the ePortfolio of his/her previous cohort of students in order to assess whether his/her style of teaching his/her philosophy of teaching is adapted to his/her style. The power of social networking of ePortfolios, could transform the traditional approach to quality.

### ***The 21<sup>st</sup> Century e-Learner***

What will the 21<sup>st</sup> century e-Learner look like? What will be his/her contribution to the quality of his/her own learning, his/her community or organisation?

In our view, an e-Learner is not someone attending an ‘e-Learning course’, especially in the restricted definition of “online course”) but someone with a deep understanding of the link between individual, organisational and community learning and who takes personal responsibility for it.

A 21<sup>st</sup> century learner is someone who ‘extracts learning from everyday activities’, at work and in the community, through mainly informal, non-formal, intentional, incidental or accidental learning activities, and shares his/her learning with peers within relevant communities.

#### **The 21<sup>st</sup> Century e-Learner’s “Responsibilities”**

- **Plans own learning** – identifies and creates his/her own learning opportunities; sees learning as an integral part of everyday life, e.g. “extracts learning from the workplace”; *does not wait for a course to learn*.
- **Measures learning achieved** – looks for authentic assessment, practices self-assessment, asks and provides feedback to peers – *in preference to multiple choice questions and all forms of automatic testing*.
- **Uses all forms of learning:** formal, informal, non-formal, incidental or accidental, professional, cultural and citizen, individual- team- or community-based, face to face and at a distance, synchronous and asynchronous.
- **Looks for authentic learning experiences** – meaningful and challenging, providing relevant practice producing meaningful learning outcomes and artefacts.
- **Selects relevant sources of learning** - books, seminars, Internet, courses, visits, interviews, travel, work, leisure, community activities; *makes informed judgement on learning provision*.
- **Gets support for learning** – gets feedback from peers, colleagues, friends, family, manager and seeks counselling from career professionals.
- **Contributes to learning communities** – professional body, work colleagues, municipality, shares lessons learned with others, supports the learning of others. Contributes to professional, personal and community networks; reflects on and share the lessons learned with

communities (of interest, practice, professional, social, etc.).

- **Value the learning gained** – values his/her personal assets: knowledge, skills, competencies, networks, etc., using relevant technology. Gets accreditation for prior learning or experience, obtains a promotion, seeks a position or job change.

- **Uses relevant knowledge, information and learning technology** to plan, organise, assess and reflect on his/her own learning, e.g. e-Portfolios; is information literate: finds, sorts, edits, presents, classifies, shares information; uses relevant technology to solve problems or finds people who can help.

The main competence that should be possessed by e-Learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is their ability to develop and value their personal assets, i.e. knowledge, competencies and networks. This goes beyond the requirement for self-guided or self-directed learning. It is about the emergence of the knowledge worker and his/her power, using knowledge, information and learning technologies to take back the control of his/her own life and personal capital (competencies, knowledge, networks). This is probably one of the reasons for the emergence of the ePortfolio which is to personal capital what the financial portfolio is to finance.

Of course, a list of responsibilities should be balanced by an equivalent list of rights (Table 1).

**Table 1 – the e-Learner’s Bill of rights (EIFEL 2005)**

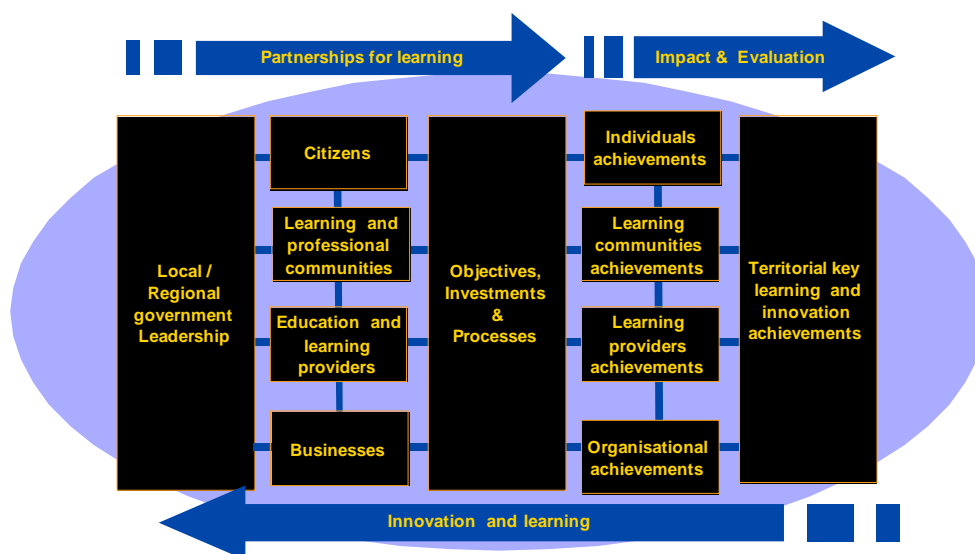
	<b>Right</b>	<b>Learners have the right to</b>
1.	<b>Access to learning</b>	open and equal access to education, training and other learning opportunities
2.	<b>Information on learning provision</b>	full and accurate information on learning provision
3.	<b>Learning guidance</b>	open information and guidance on all aspects of adult education, opportunities and rights
4.	<b>Learning Administration</b>	fast, efficient and courteous administration
5.	<b>Learning support staff</b>	be supported by qualified and competent staff who are actively engaged in their continuing professional development
6.	<b>Learning environment</b>	a suitable, accessible and state of the art learning environment facilitating peer support
7.	<b>ePortfolio</b>	an ePortfolio to plan, and manage learning, and value one’s assets within communities
8.	<b>Learning activities</b>	learning which is relevant to learners’ lives
9.	<b>Learning resources</b>	appropriate learning resources to facilitate self-directed learning
10.	<b>Occupational standards</b>	accurate and up-to-date occupational standards
11.	<b>Planning learning</b>	participate or be appropriately represented in planning learning activities
12.	<b>Prior learning</b>	prior learning recognition
13.	<b>Learning induction</b>	appropriate induction
14.	<b>Learning strategies</b>	a personalised and balanced range of learning and teaching strategies
15.	<b>Self-directed learning</b>	personal control over the learning experience
16.	<b>Monitoring and assessment</b>	a fair and transparent assessment process
17.	<b>Feedback &amp; complaints</b>	a fair and effective feedback and complaints procedure

### *Linking learning individuals, communities, organisations and territories for quality*

Alongside our earlier question, *Who has learnt?* We should also be asking who has contributed to the definition of the learning policies. Learning is not just the consumption of a service decided by others, but a system where all stakeholders, including the learner and the citizen, directly or indirectly (through representatives, trade unions, associations or lobby groups) influencing the policies at local, regional and national levels.

Without leadership, without strategy, without knowing into which direction to move, no real learning can happen, therefore no *learning quality* is possible. Learning quality at local or regional level starts with leadership, based on partnership with citizens, learning and professional communities, providers of education and learning as well as businesses. Learning communities are at the heart of the idea of a learning territory, whose mission is not to provide more education or training, but to value all its assets: individuals (e.g. competencies, expertise, talents, and networks), organisations, communities, associations, networks, historic, natural and cultural patrimonies, etc.

**Figure 3 - Quality model for a territory (source: SEEL, adapted from the EFQM model)**



A learning territory (city, region, community) is the place providing a social context to learning, even to the formal learning happening within a classroom. The ‘quality’ of the education taking place in an educational institution is intimately linked to the ability of a territory to provide a meaningful context to this learning through interactions which go beyond the annual school field trip or the student work placement. This involves the education of learners as citizens understanding the complexity of the interactions between the different levels of learning and their ability to contribute, at their levels, as pupil, student, active or retired worker, to the policies of the organisations they belong to, in cooperation with the people with whom they interact within various communities.

This leads us to observe again that learning is not primarily about *content*, but about *context*, the ability for an individual (resp. organisation, community or territory) to take control over its learning environment. Learning to learn is not just a *psychological* issue (e.g. what are my learning styles) but a *sociological* one as well, the ability of one individual to contribute actively and consciously to learning organisations, learning communities and a learning society at large (Wenger).

We see this not as an idealistic vision, but an extremely practical approach required for today's education and training (in the sense of 'creating the conditions for learning') that can be translated into operational activities:

- **Linking individual and community learning** (schools): there are many opportunities for children to contribute actively to the resolution of local (or global) problems, sharing their talents with their community making an extended environment (beyond the school walls) be their active learning environment
- **Linking individual and organisational learning:** through documenting professional practice, linking with professional networks and associations, professionals can bring into their organisation the knowledge developed by a larger community
- **Linking individual and professional community learning:** through reflection on their practice, professionals can share knowledge in their community, demonstrate informed practice, contribute to the evolution of professional standards.

Put into the context of articulating individual, community, organisational and territorial learning, here is a series of indicators for an approach to learning that links the different dimensions of learning (individual, community, organisation, territory and society).

	<b>Who</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>How</b>
<b>Individual</b>	% of time spent learning (formal, informal, non-formal)	How what I have learned has changed my life as citizen, worker, spouse, etc.?	What are my preferred learning styles?
<b>Programme</b>	% of individuals who have achieved successfully the programme	What is the impact of the programme on the organisation's performance?	What are the teaching and learning methods used?
<b>Community (professional)</b>	% of professionals engaged in a community and continuing professional development	What are the emerging practices elicited by the community?	How do communities support reflective and informed practice?
<b>Organisation</b>	% of staff engaged in learning activities	Development / adaptation learning ratio	How is informal and non-formal learning recognised?
<b>Community (city, region)</b>	% of citizens actively engaged in associations, clubs, networks	% population registered in adult learning centres / culture centres / popular universities	Mentoring schemes, community centres, public and mobile libraries
<b>Society</b>	% of citizens and workers engaged at any time in learning activities	Cultural / professional learning ratio	% of qualifications delivered through accreditation of prior learning

The study of the three basic questions about learning (Who?, What? and How?) shows that there are great discrepancies across countries<sup>8</sup>, some still demonstrating a provider-driven approach, while others develop a more holistic approach to learning, including the development of local adult community and cultural centres, popular universities, etc. The emergence of a learning society should elicit converging factors.

## **Conclusion: for an organic approach to quality**

The emergence of a learning society and knowledge economy requires the transformation of the old quality reference framework. This transformation cannot be a mere adaptation of the old framework, but a radical transformation based on the new political, economical, sociological and technological context.

This empowerment of individuals through technologies has transformed the nature of the relations between learners and learning support staff, the learning employee and her employer and the learning citizen and his learning communities. The pervasive presence of, and ubiquitous access to, knowledge technologies provide the foundations for a seamless learning environment, linking individual, community, organisational and territorial learning, recognising to a fuller extent that learning occurs in context, learning is active, learning is social, learning is reflective. So is quality – and e-Quality!

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<sup>8</sup> A European project (OSMOSYS) is currently studying those questions through the comparative analysis of adult learning centres in Europe ([www.osmosys.se](http://www.osmosys.se)).

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Created in 2001, EIfEL is the leading cross-sectoral professional body whose mission is to support the development of a knowledge and learning society, in particular by recognising the organic link between individual, organisational and community learning and the role played by knowledge, information and learning technologies (KILT) to achieve this goal. EIfEL is leading Europortfolio, a consortium that has set as its objective that in 2010, every citizen will have an ePortfolio, believing that this will be a key policy element in achieving the goal set in 2000 at the Lisbon European Commission Conference: to make Europe the most competitive, sustainable and inclusive knowledge based economy in the world.

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