

WORKERS AND LEADERS IN THE 21st CENTURY; THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES

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PREAMBLE AND OUTLINE

- The world has entered an era of profound change with major consequences for society, the economy and the labour market, politics and education
- Consequences both for working people and leaders of the 21st century and for the role of education, in particular Higher Education. Brief examination of:
 - I The fast-changing environment of human activities
 - II The profile of workers and leaders in the 21st century
 - III Challenges for teaching and learning
 - IV Challenges for the Higher Education system
 - By way of Conclusion: various ways forward

I THE FAST-CHANGING ENVIRONMENT OF HUMAN ACTIVITIES

- The world is changing at an increasingly faster pace
 - Diverging demographic trends: uninterrupted demographic growth throughout the World, apart from the Western World which is aging
 - Globalization
 - Political: end of the Cold War (implosion of USSR)
 - Economic: freer trade (Gatt + WTO)
 - Breathtaking scientific and technological progress; knowledge society
 - Large transfer of industrial production to the new emerging economic powers (mix of cheaper labour and capacity to innovate); the service economy has become the main source of added value in the West
 - Economic activities are challenging planet Earth and the living conditions of its inhabitants in terms of climate, energy and natural resources; moreover health is threatened by new illnesses
 - Due to ideological (incl. religious) or sheer monopolization of power, many countries are also acting against modernisation and are at the root of many tensions or regional conflicts

- Consequences:
 - Societies, nations, institutions, businesses and individuals are confronted with
 - **Increasing competition:** getting or keeping a position requires being better and, in the West, also working harder!
 - **Continuous change:** we are moving into an environment where the most stable element is change
 - The long-term **sustainability** of development trends and policies has become a priority. Today, sustainability
 - has not only a material (natural) component: environment, climate, exploitation of natural resources,
 - but also a human and societal one (geo-political, economic, financial and social)

- Education, and in particular Higher Education and Research (HE&R), are doubly at the centre of the change process
 - They largely contribute to the change in ...
 - creating new knowledge thanks to fundamental and applied research
 - disseminating acquired and new knowledge
 - Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are also seriously challenged by the change and its speed
 - They should adapt faster to respond to new needs, but the heavy burden of the human factor and of HEIs' governance and organization model make them slow to adapt, in particular with respect to teaching and learning
 - They are losing their monopoly as single provider of knowledge, in particular due to distance learning, in-house training programs of firms and internet
 - The nature of knowledge is changing: less encyclopaedic, more specialized and interactive

II THE PROFILE OF WORKERS AND THE LEADERS OF TOMORROW

- The fast-changing environment is deeply transforming the workplace (as well as the lives of ordinary citizens); working people (unskilled, specialists and leaders) are confronted with
 - Increasing complexity: doing a job well (whatever the level of qualification required) demands better knowledge and professionalism (i.e. agricultural workers, cleaners, secretaries, specialist, leaders).
Paradoxically, although professional and managements tools are better and more user-friendly, complexity comes from the fact that one wants to do more!
 - Change: the changing manner of doing a job, as well as the quasi-permanent restructuring of the working environment (departments, firms), require everyone to accept change and, even better, to contribute to change
- Consequences: the labour market expects from all working people
 - professional qualifications AND
 - personal (generic) skills

- **Professional qualifications in the knowledge economy**
 - Depend largely from the level of development and the type of economy (industrial or service economy)
 - Experience shows that it is difficult to plan the supply of different types of qualifications
 - Annual entry of new qualifications less than 5% of the working force
 - Long time lag between a policy decision to change and availability of new qualifications
 - Life long Learning is not developed well enough
 - Engineers are strongly demanded in modern economies, in particular industrial ones. However
 - Scientists are also needed as it is not possible to apply something which has not been discovered
 - Social sciences and humanities must not be neglected: an economy and society which rely heavily on scientists and engineers also need social scientists and men and women of the liberal professions and art to integrate science and technology in business and society and to contribute to the homogeneity of society
 - Post-industrial economies (USA and Western Europe) need a greater variety of professional skills, often at the border of traditional disciplines

- **Personal (generic) skills**

- Necessity **for almost every workers**, even unskilled ones,

- to work independently, and, increasingly in the future, to work away from an office environment (i.e. at home)
- to interact positively with others
- to be ready to question yourself, to adapt to a continuously changing environment and also ready to change job many times in a carrier

- For **specialists and leaders** (in addition)

- to be highly professional, take initiatives, be innovative and pro-active (dynamic)
- To have a genuine natural authority
- To go beyond provincialism and become international, which includes being able to work in two or more languages
- To hold values indispensable for sustainability (ethical, respect for others, including the family, a building stone of society)

- “Young” and “old” are not in an equal position when faced with the change process, in particular the IT revolution, which is dramatically changing the way we work and communicate
 - “old” people have to work hard not to be dropped
 - “young” people learn part of IT while playing, but are increasingly cut off from the values and tradition transferred by the family and at school
- The change process is creating an imbalance between demand and supply of labour
 - Many business have difficulties recruiting qualified people
 - At the same time, well qualified graduates don’t find a job corresponding to their qualifications
- This double phenomenon is due to at least two factors:
 - Rigidities in HEIs in providing enough graduates with required new profiles and, in business, in introducing new products/services/processes requiring these new profiles
 - Insufficient internationalization: more labour mobility in- and outwards can (partly) compensate for national imbalances

III CHALLENGES FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The changing environment and requirements of the labour market are challenging teaching and learning on many levels
- In particular, it would be an illusion, at university level, to try transferring to students all the existing scientific and scholarly knowledge; therefore students should
 - learn how to learn, and be prepared to learn throughout their lives
 - be encouraged to be critical, curious and to search for information and solutions by themselves (research spirit and methodology)
 - be given enough freedom to choose among different courses according to their curiosity as it is extremely difficult to know what will be most needed in ten years time
 - be confronted with research as well as interdisciplinarity (narrow and broad)
 - mathematics should not be erected as the single filter of selection, but developed according to the use made in a discipline

- Moreover,
 - Higher education programs should promote:
 - personal generic skills
 - societal values (need for sustainability, ethics, intercultural tolerance, engagement)

 - The respective teaching and training roles of HEIs and business or administration should not be mixed up
 - HEIs are far better equipped to train brains, that is to teach general principles and how to learn; they shouldn't be forced to produce graduates who are immediately profitable in a working environment
 - The responsibility of preparing graduates for the working environment and for the activities of the specific organization belongs to firms and to administration
 - But both are responsible for promoting and offering lifelong learning to maintain the employability of working people

IV CHALLENGES FOR THE EDUCATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS

- The entire education and HE&R research systems must – like any other institution – adapt to the changing environment; this implies reforms – often major ones – in many countries
- It is important to think in terms of systems
 - The system should be coherent from primary school onwards and should offer serious alternatives to the upper secondary – university channel (i.e. apprenticeship)
 - A well balanced system has various types of institutions responding to different needs, from vocational 2-3 years colleges to a few research-intensive universities (Master plan)
 - The permeability of the system is extremely important; students should be able to move from one type of institution to another according to their merit and performance

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION: SEVERAL WAYS FORWARD

- Making sure the HE&R sector prepares workers and leaders for tomorrow depends on many factors. In my view, the two most important factors are
 - **Human resource development:** it is essential to attach the highest priority to human resources in the education sector: the new generation of graduates and instructors depends strongly on them. This is unfortunately a serious constraint in developing countries which are beginning to develop their Higher Education sector
 - **Modernization of the HE system and HEIs:**
 - Establish a rigorous and impartial analysis of the future requirements of the labour market AND society
 - Firm willingness to change and a real capacity to convince people because those inside the system are very conservative and prone to defend their territory or interests (incentives are much better than coercion)
 - Guarantee the autonomy of institutions to make sure they are motivated to move forward (which does not exempt them from the requirement to be accountable and responsible); the alternative of an enlightened “political commander in chief” is possible but rare

THANK YOU