

# Abstract submission details EARLI Special Interest Group 14 Learning and Professional Development - Paper presentation

## Format

Paper sessions are oral presentations, followed by a discussion with the audience. The time allowed for each paper, including the presentation and discussion, is 20-30 minutes. It is important that empirical papers have data and results, or they will not be accepted. Research that is at an earlier stage is very suitable for Round Table or Poster sessions. Theoretical papers, of course, are welcome.

## Points of attention

Contributors should pay special attention to:

- Relevance to the domain of learning and professional development
- Significance for theoretical debate
- Theoretical framework, conceptual rationale or pragmatic grounding
- Embeddedness in relevant literature
- Research method and design (research questions, context, participants, data sources, sampling, procedure, ethical issues)
- Clarity and robustness of theoretical argument
- Overall quality and scientific originality

## Title:

Typologies of Lifelong Learners in Professional Higher Education
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## Details:

### Author(s) details

Title	
First name	Margriet
Surname	de Jong
Affiliation	Leuven University College (KH Leuven), Belgium
<hr/>	
Title	Dr.
First name	Sigrid
Surname	Nindl
Affiliation	3s research laboratory, Vienna
<hr/>	
Title	Dr.
First name	Klaas
Surname	Vansteenhuyse
Affiliation	Leuven University College (KH Leuven), Belgium

Contact author e-mail address	nindl@3s.co.at
Submission type	Paper

### **Abstract (300 words max.)**

The number of words applies to the abstract-box. References are excluded in the count.

**Abstract: type text in the box below**

### **Extended summary (1000 words max.)**

Paper submission should detail the aims, methodology, findings and theoretical and educational significance of the research.

**Extended summary: type text in the box below**

The FLLLEX project (The Impact of LifeLong Learning Strategies on Professional Higher Education) is an EU-funded project (1/2010—8/2012) with the objective to identify challenges and implications of the incorporation of LifeLong Learning (LLL) into European higher education institutions (HEI's). A survey with important stakeholders in LLL was conducted for developing a self evaluation instrument for HEI's to test their flexibility when it comes to LLL. Learners, businesses and business training providers were asked about their expectations, motives and/or barriers to engage in LLL. The self-assessment tool for HEI's is based on the crucial indicators for LLL as defined by the stakeholders in the survey and shall help HEI's to assess, if they match the expectations of the different stakeholders. In this context a survey was conducted with lifelong learners who are studying at HEI's and working at the same time. They were asked about their motives to study and possible barriers. A questionnaire in a web-based format was designed and spread in the countries of HEI project partners in the project FLLLEX: Belgium, Finland, France, Ireland, Lithuania, Netherlands, Turkey, UK.

On the basis of a multidimensional typology, firstly designed by Markowitsch/Hefler (2009), several target groups of lifelong learners were identified. Most typologies of adult learners (see e.g. Houle 1998, Kasworm 1990, Blair et al. 1995) set their focus on either external or internal factors for re-entering formal education. The typology from Markowitsch/Hefler goes beyond usual descriptions of student typologies (e.g. formal/non-formal education, admission criteria, mode of attendance, target award, student profiles, duration/ECTS, purpose/motivation, learning location, funding source, pedagogic style), and uses a life cycle approach with focus on education and work. The following types of lifelong learners with focus on education are identified in this model:

- \_ Completing with the sub-types "finishing" (working while completing formal education without particular connection of work and education) and "entering" (being hired in late phases by an employer in need of graduates)
- \_ Returning: re-entering HE and revising a temporary transition from learning to work
- \_ Transforming: significant transformation of an existing career pathway and/or individual development

Types of lifelong learners with focus on work are:

- \_ Reinforcing an existing career pathway (use offers of formal HE to solve developmental issues or to support progress within the chosen line of occupational/professional development)
- \_ Compensating for shortcomings of an existing career pathway

The results of the survey were analysed in the context of this typology. 1.525 students participated at the survey, which took place from June 2010 until March 2011 (with 2 main data collection phases). The questionnaire initially was provided in English, then translated in Dutch, Finnish, Lithuanian, Turkish, French. Most of the participants were from Finland (36%), Ireland (18%), Turkey (12%), Lithuania (11%) and Belgium (10%). A smaller rate of participation was from Scotland (5%), Netherlands (4%) and France (2%). The median age of participants was 27 years, 71% were female. The participants who were employed (63%) came from different sectors and spent on average 37,5 hours per week in their job. The HE study course of the participants takes about three to four years, the main field of study is Business and Administration, followed by Humanities and Social Sciences and Health Sciences, which corresponds with the sector of the company the students are employed by.

The results were reflected in the context of the typology to specify whether there are differences between the five main types of learners. 34% of the participants were classified as compensating learners, 31% as transforming, 15% reinforcing, 12% completing and 9% returning learners. The highest education level of Completing, Returning and Transforming Learners is most frequently "upper secondary". The majority of Reinforcing Learners and – to a lesser extent – Compensating Learners completed a first-stage tertiary education. The relative number of employed learners is somewhat higher within the groups of Reinforcing,

Compensating and Transforming Learners than within the groups of Completing and Returning Learners. In general, these results are consistent with the definitions of the types of learners. The employers support the respondents with flexible working hours and the use of company-internal resources. The biggest differences between provided and important support concern the integration of higher education into the career plan, information about company-internal support and government support. There is a clear tendency for Reinforcing Learners to receive more support from their companies than the other types of learners. For Compensating Learners the chance for educational leave is also above average. Returning learners have the lowest percentage chance for educational leave (17%).

More than 60% of the participants had prior learning recognised for their study. But not even half of the respondents gathered information about the recognition of prior learning. The most frequently used information source (from 51% of Reinforcing Learners up to 77% of Completing Learners) was the HEI. Knowledge about the recognition of prior learning was the most relevant factor to beginning their study for Reinforcing and Completing Learners.

The most important motive to study is to advance prospects for personal growth. But students also study to gain knowledge and skills in a special field of interest, and job-related reasons also played a decisive role. The reduction of free time and stress are the main problems the participants face. To support LLL for working adults the respondents wish for more allowance for employed students, and tax relief for HE provided by politics and public authorities.

From their HEI's Completing Learners most frequently wish for upgrades in the quality of teaching and timetable adaptations to employed students. Upgrades in the quality of teaching would also be appreciated by Returning Learners, as well as flexibility when job-related requirements increase. Transforming Learners and Compensating Learners primarily want timetable adaptations to employed students and flexibility when job-related requirements increase. Most Reinforcing Learners' wishes refer to improvements in the recognition of prior learning or experience and in flexibility when job-related requirements increase.

These results show that there tend to be differences between the identified types of lifelong learners, their motives and needs, which can be taken into account by HEI, e.g. by focussing on particular types of lifelong learners and their needs.

**Keywords: insert 3-5 keywords below**

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