

BOOK REVIEW

The 60-Year Curriculum: New Models for Lifelong Learning in the Digital Economy

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New York Routledge, 2020, pp. 167

ISBN 978-0-367-42319-3 (hbk)

ISBN 978-0-367-82127-2 (pbk)

ISBN 978-1-003-01361-7 (ebk)

The 60-Year curriculum: New models for lifelong learning in the digital economy examines new vantage points for higher education reform and global shifts in workforce development driven primarily by new models of lifelong learning. The chapter authors have provided insightful and occasionally provocative analyses of how universities in the digital economy will need to reconceptualise their models of lifelong learning given the impacts of digital technologies and increases in life expectancy resulting in longer careers and the need for education, training, upskilling-re-skilling-upgrading. In sum, these trends mean that “what we learn, when we learn it, how we learn it, and who we learn it from will all change” (Scott, p. 25).

Chris Dede opens Chapter 1 with an introduction to the concept of the 60 Year curriculum (60-YC) in which he highlights that this will entail present and future workers needing lifelong learning over a sixty-year span – ages 15-75 approximately. Dede notes that the 60-YC concept, originally coined by Dr. Gary Matkin, Dean of Continuing Education, University of California-Irvine, referred to continuing education centered on lifelong learning linked to occupational changes and transitions. Dede draws upon some notable national studies in the US to demonstrate the changing nature of work, the need for reskilling and updating skills, and the increasing number of providers that will exist upon the lifelong learning continuum.

Perhaps the first observation of the 60-YC is that in reality it should be called the 40-45-YC. The focus of this book is on adult-career reskilling and professional development across the lifespan assuming multiple careers for future workforces. The assumption that this lifelong learning will be needed from ages 18-78 may ultimately be the lifelong period of work for most, but not the lifelong learning retraining-upskilling-reskilling longevity corridor. There are two reasons for this observation.

First, most students entering college at age 18 won't need anything resembling adult retraining or upskilling until at least age 25 and perhaps even later. Yes, students 18-25 may dabble in different offerings even whilst in the middle of pursuing a degree but this will not be career development or



upskilling or reskilling. They don't have a career yet. This may more aptly be called the student's career scanning and prioritisation period.

Secondly, not all people will choose retraining/upskilling at age 65 for one last career push. Yes, some may choose a lifetime executive education course at age 55 but most workers post 65 will be looking for ways to have more leisure, travel, and down time, not a longer career. People will want a longer retirement. In sum, the most realistic corridor for the future curriculum is probably 40-45 years with the key point being that working life may last 55-60 years, but not the corridor where most people will engage and pay for retraining and upskilling.

Andrew Scott's Chapter 2, entitled "Education, age, and machine" opens with a discussion of five major economic challenges facing US universities, and global universities in general.

The first challenge is a levelling off of qualifications or human capital — stated more simply, there is less need for high-end degrees in the workforce because the trend of increasing successive qualifications is coming to an end. A second challenge is 'cognitive only' jobs are reversing so the highest qualified workers are moving down the occupational ladder — highly educated workers are taking jobs they are over-qualified for which in turn creates job displacement particularly for low-skilled and low-education workers. A related third challenge of course comes along with this — credentials don't match workforce markets which is what has happened in recent years. We have an over-qualified workforce that does not align with the actual workforce needs of society and employers.

A fourth challenge commonly cited is automation. Without question, most of us have already been affected by digital technologies and our reliance on computers to process, store and communicate information and knowledge. Interestingly, Scott suggests in this chapter that only 9% of the workforce will lose their jobs due to automation. The final challenge is longevity — people will be on the job longer over their careers which in turn means alternative lifelong learning opportunities will be needed. Scott concludes the chapter with a discussion of some select impacts of these challenges.

Michel Servoz engages the reader in Chapter 3, with the insightful title "Are we ready for the jobs the digital economy will offer to us?" Indeed, this question has a corollary and that is will we be willing to take those jobs that are offered to us?

Servoz follows the opening chapters by Dede and Scott by accentuating that the workforce and career traditions have been turned upside down. Digitalisation has altered 90% of all work, some jobs more than others. Today's elementary students may be preparing for a future in which the jobs they enter the workforce for do not even exist.

Servoz, perhaps drawing upon his experience in the European Union, suggests that the 60-YC must start with K-12 basics. In essence basic computational, digital literacy and communication skills will need to be refined and at the high school level a greater focus on vocational technical training may need to be integrated into the sector. Servoz cites examples from Switzerland and Germany as well as the TAFE voc-tech system in Australia whose models have produced robust economic stability and jobs for young entry level workers.

The author has suggested that HE will need reform, the private sector must be more involved and public employment services may take a greater collaborative role with HE and the private sector. The

chapter concludes with a reflective discussion about who pays for all of this workforce development — government, employers, workers, universities, taxes?

Interestingly, Servoz appears to be asking these questions in the European context, not the American workforce and HE landscape. Unlike most EU countries, the US does not have a national qualifications framework and the training and lifelong learning provider continuum is quite vast and complex to navigate.

In Chapter 4, “Employing the 60-year curriculum as a strategic approach”, Ann Brewer discusses the 60-YC as a strategic approach for colleges and universities. The underlying theme of this chapter focuses on the need for engaging students in their own learning design; and greater design input from other key stakeholders such as employers, industry councils, etc. A related area is reframing university lifetime relationships — Strategic Student Relationship Management whereby students stay linked for professional development and/or reskilling with their core university.

Stephen Harmon and Nelson Baker provided an interesting vantage point in Chapter 5 on the transformation of Georgia Tech University (GTU) and Creating the Next in Higher Education at Georgia Tech. This is an excellent essay on how one institution has chosen to look long term (2040) and embrace bold visions of forecasting its future. The authors highlight the success of their online master’s degree in Computer Science by emphasising that their two guiding principles were: 1) design for online, and 2) plan for scaling for larger numbers of students.

Additional factors related to lifetime education are covered: rate of knowledge creation; industry need, longer lifespan, multiple careers, and educational debt. GTU’s future initiates focus on whole person education; new models of advising; new products and services; AI and personalisation and distributed world-wide presence.

Punya Mishra and Jacqueline Smith from Arizona State University (ASU) cover design models for lifelong education in Chapter 6 entitled “Known for Whom We Include: Designing Model for Lifelong Education at Arizona State University”. The authors open their chapter by aligning the Open University in the UK with the concept of the 60-YC. However, the catalyst for the creation of the OU by British Prime Minister Harold Wilson was not adult learning per se; it was a direct response to an elite social structure that historically excluded the majority of people from university except the very wealthy and privileged upper classes in the UK. As a US-centric book, citing well known and reputable lifelong education providers such as the University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of California, and/or Penn State University (and many others), would have aligned much better with the topic and chapter focus than the OU.

The authors provided an excellent discussion of innovative initiatives, practices and strategic positioning taken by ASU in the past ten years and the critical role top leadership has played in this transformation. This section is worth reviewing by all readers — it will give you some interesting ideas to consider at your own institution.

In Chapter 7, “Market-driven education: The imperative for responsive design and application”, Jason Wingard and Christine Farrugia open their discussion with a focus on the misalignment between university offerings and employer needs, which in practice means graduates lacking the skills that many employers need upon hiring.

Universities are certainly at fault for some of this by getting it wrong, having a rigid curriculum that cannot be adapted, and a focus of general education skills over specialised skill domains. This assumes, of course that employers know exactly what they need and often they do not know.

The Columbia University School of Professional Development case study is terrific. Why? Because it is built around context, culture, and the audiences where it does business. New York City is a competitive market and whilst the outsider might think what a captive market, the truth is, providers face many challenges in terms of competitive pricing, diversified program offerings, scheduling, and more.

James Honan offers a unique perspective on executive education in the 60-YC by providing a case study of Harvard's Institute for Education Management (IEM) in Chapter 8. This is a very good example of what might be very attractive later along the 60-YC cycle although as stated earlier I would probably envision executive programmes of the future for those in the 35-55 age range. Certainly, there will be those who jump to a higher position like a presidency or CEO in their late 50s where a tailored executive education programme could be exactly what the doctor ordered. Others may opt for these for other personal reasons and less for professional advancement.

As a graduate of the Institute for the Management of Lifelong Education (MLE) similar to the Harvard Institute, nearly thirty years ago, this reviewer left a two-week executive education programme (age 38) with a sense of renewal, a broader professional network, new learning and unlearning, diverse new vantage points from which to guide my career and work, rejuvenation, and of course lifelong friendships. These outcomes could not have been accomplished online nor could they today in 2022.

In Chapter 9, Huntington Lambert and Henry Leitner complement the earlier Case Study of Columbia's School of Professional Development by outlining some of the key steps the Harvard Division of Continuing Education has taken and is taking to integrate the 60-YC. What is clear is that Harvard has detailed its inventory of all available current units and offerings that would fall along the 60-YC — some have long histories and others are relatively new in response to new employer needs or skills and competency-based certifications. Key elements for implementation — objectives, virtualisation, personalisation, credential harmonisation, institutional collaboration and task are covered. A summary discussion of measuring success and performance is also provided.

In the final chapter, Chapter 10, John Richards sums up some key observations from the book and offers insights into the future of the 60-YC. He astutely notes that societal trends create a constantly changing landscape which in turn drives workforce and economic development. Whether one chooses the 60-YC or a narrower work window in the future of 40-45 years, what is not debatable is that people will have multiple jobs and need periodic and continual lifelong learning opportunities whether upskilling, re-skilling, professional development, and/or executive education renewal.

Richards offers a good discussion of the domains of competence for the future. These include intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competence. Finally, the chapter addresses the issues of a changing andragogy model for the future.

Summary and Recommendation

What is glaringly obvious to the reader is this book is written by authors who work at elite universities that are well resourced, have elite level services and research capability. In fact, they are

not representative of the majority of faculty and leaders in the majority of American colleges and universities in the US. Does this matter? Probably not, although certainly the idea of the 60-YC may have better been embraced with community college representation either in the authorships or institutional examples. A small percentage of community college graduate students transfer — most complete Associate of Science (AS) or Associate of Applied Science (AAS) technical-vocational degrees to go to work. Community colleges belong in the forefront of this discussion about future adult education. Moreover, it should be noted that the push for open US adult higher education emanates from community college ‘open door’ policies of the 1970s. Public regional state universities will play an immense role in adult education in the future. Even land-grant universities and private universities and colleges will likely be on the adult education and workforce training playing field.

The book would have benefitted from a discussion about the basic norms, context and culture of US higher education. Context and culture matter, even outside of Cambridge and NYC. Generally, there is widescale consensus that higher education policy in the US needs restructuring, new pedagogy models, financial reform — in short, a new path to the future. Where is the editor’s advocacy of ‘unlearning’ on these? It is not just concepts and constructs in the academic realm that need ‘unlearning’ from things that just do not apply anymore, but we need this across the mega-environment of higher education.

An invaluable contribution to this book would have been a contemporary discussion of micro-credentials, OERs, assessment models, national qualification frameworks and most importantly the credentials evolution-revolution. No single book can address everything, but these are inextricably linked to this emerging employment landscape and are priority discussion and policy briefs across the global HE landscape.

Despite these delimitations and oversights, this is a powerful book. This book is extraordinarily well-researched and is a good example of a resource for a scholar-practitioner because the problem we all face is that real life doesn’t play by these rules. It shifts, it changes, social values and norms ebb and flow and much of this will not be found in logic or statistics. Adaptable and responsive education institutions will be a critical market differentiator in the future adult education sector.

The book’s authors make us think, they make us challenge some of those outdated assumptions that Professor Dede believes we should ‘unlearn,’ and it makes us want to outline what our own institutions need to do to be on the adult education playing field for the future. What do we already have? What expertise and history do we have in outreach? What works and does not work in our partnerships with employers? With government? With competitors?

Indeed, this book is US-centric and written from elite university vantage points on the future of higher education and the world of work. Moreover, the gender and ethnic diversity of the authors could have been more inclusive and representative. This element was rather disappointing given the socio-political landscape that has defined the US over the past six years.

In summary, I recommend this book to all aspiring educational leaders. It will be a valuable resource and reference for the future. This book can feel frustratingly elite at times, inspiring at other times and even irrelevant at moments. Despite these observations, one must concede the foundations of this book and the 60-YC future view of the world of work and adult education, in its many guises, is on the mark and heading in the right direction.

Reviewed by:

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Cite this paper as: Olcott, D. J. (2022). Book Review: The 60-year curriculum: New models for lifelong learning in the digital economy. *Journal of Learning for Development*, 9(1), 145-150.