

Quality Podcast 2021: Continuous learning

Hanna Marttiini: Welcome to listen to LaatuPorinat 2021 podcast series. In this episode, we discuss continuous learning. The discussion is held by Merija Timonen and Antti Koski and I am Hanna Marttiini. Could you briefly introduce yourselves?

Merija Timonen: Yes. Merija Timonen and I am Director of Teaching and Learning Services at the University of Lapland. Continuous learning is part of that work too.

Antti Koski: Yes. Antti Koski and from the university's Education and Development Services Unit and I work as the Director of this unit. And continuous learning is a fundamental task of our unit, and I'm sure that's what we're going to discuss here.

Hanna Marttiini: Yes, good. We could start, Merija, that what does this continuous learning mean and how does it appear here at the university in practice?

Merija Timonen: Continuous learning is about increasing competence and continuous learning specifically about increasing competence for working life or during working life. We do have other concepts with which we talk about this kind of increase in competence. Perhaps such an individual perspective now and perhaps in the past has been the concept of lifelong learning, which is a concept that goes beyond continuous learning. The concept means increasing competence, learning from baby to grandpa. And this continuous learning now focuses more on the working-age people, at work, in relation to work. And that lifelong learning, if you think of it as a broader concept, is not necessarily such a linear concept that everything from a to b and c continues linearly. But in learning one cancels, comes backwards, moves on; so it is shaping according to the life situations. When it comes to continuous learning, it is thought that competence is growing all the time. Working life needs new kinds of skills, updated skills and even, of course, working life needs completely new experts, experts in a new fields.

And in addition to this concept of continuous learning and lifelong learning, of course we use adult education in everyday language. And perhaps that concept has also wanted to be limited there to the period after ones first degree, the first basic degree, which is the working life there. Continuous learning therefore emphasizes increasing the competence of working-age people. So here at national level and at all levels of education we want to respond to the changing needs of working life. At the moment, it seems that change is very rapid and that change is taking place all the time. But maybe when you think about it this situation has always been like this. Change happens, it comes all the time, so the needs of competence changes too. The development of competence from the point of view of this continuous learning will, of course, support the meaningful careers of individuals. And at the same time, continuous learning at national level is intended to respond to the good development of employment in society and, of course, competitiveness and productivity to organizations, companies.

So how does this continuous learning manifest itself in practice at the University of Lapland? Now, and perhaps much earlier, this is reflected in the fact that university education is of interest to different parties and individuals. And, of course, that means guidance and increasing the need for guidance. Competence educators individually have some development needs, their own areas of development, but there are very many areas for developing continuous learning in the work

community, in the organization. In this guidance of continuous learning, of course, from the point of view of the individual, I would think that entering university-level studies for the first time is also visible. Whether it is individual studies, qualifications or such continuing vocational education. So applying for the first university studies requires guidance. And in guidance, I think recognizing the strengths of individuals is at the core. That is, guidance on finding that interest in increasing competence, but also finding situations where we are going, what we already know, what to develop. And in this way, it is then possible to target that guidance and perhaps that education provision.

And then where I would see that this continuous learning in university now is reflected in that supply planning. So perhaps traditionally, it has been thought that one university degree is the kind of package that an individual or even a work community needs. But at the moment, these contents, which are available in degree training, for example, are much smaller and needed all the time. Development can be done and competence growth can be done even with smaller entities. Perhaps that's where we'll have the work to do then to find interesting content in those entities that individuals and work communities need to grow their skills.

Hanna Marttiini: Thank you Merija. And then how — you did tell me a lot about what's already been done and how it manifests itself here on the university side — it's going to be developed now in the next few years and now?

Merija Timonen: Yes. If I continue from earlier, that there is indeed this supply, but it may not meet or find individuals or work communities. So in this development — both for the University of Lapland and certainly for all other universities — work has now been done and will be further developed for the discoverability of its contents. How is the supply presented? What kind of language is used about it? So how does everyone find that supply in universities, now at our university? And perhaps this kind of service brands have now been launched here recently and various sites have been built. The presentation of supply, it is precisely what needs to be developed. And that is where the University of Lapland has also started. And perhaps that development also needs us to identify those content from all the extensive content and to be able to bring them in packages, modules to offer.

As with other universities, the University of Lapland has had such a continuous learning development project. As far as we are concerned, it is now beginning to be in its final stages for this spring. But here we have developed and piloted especially such smaller modules, entities. And for the University of Lapland, these continuous learning development projects have piloted, for example, two MOOCs (massive open online course), which are content-structured, supply-structured and, of course its dissemination built. That's what's new at our university. But these continuous learning development pilots have also had a pilot, which has been done as a development project with the organization. And maybe then one development pilot thinking about this lifelong learning; the development of skills and learning skills to match higher education students.

So these development pilots and the lessons learned from them are distributed and then disseminated to everyone else here in the university community. At the same time, such a model of development project will also be disseminated, starting from anticipating the need to developing supply and continuously developing it. And at the same time, this continuous learning development projects at the University of Lapland have considered these places of verification, where individual performance is recorded, so how a single student of continuous learning can make his or her own

competence visible, for example, from services maintained by the National Board of Education. One example is a KOSKI service. But the development of continuous learning, of course. It continues all the time and perhaps this kind of continuing vocational education in units of different universities is one that is constantly being developed. Those modules that may already be more advanced from that provision of degree education.

Hanna Marttiini: Thank you Merija. And this brings us to Education and Development Services and continuous learning. How do you see, Antti, this continuous learning in this everyday work?

Antti Koski: Well, as I said at the beginning, continuous learning includes continuing education. And as Merija well opened up this concept, it is a very broad concept. And indeed, on our property and in our region, there is continuing education or adult education, whatever term you want to call it. And the thing is that, of course, since we have looked at this development a little longer in this area, one will see that these concepts are coming and that is good. The new concepts come with new emphasis. But the fact that continuous learning with us is reflected in tailored continuing education, adult education. And the focus is on identifying and trying to identify and respond to the educational needs of our customers very accurately. So our operations are based on demand and need. It automatically means that we have to be very up to date with its own supply, and it is tied to the educational needs of each time. But where our continuing education, continuous learning is currently focused is that we clearly have perhaps half a dozen priorities at the moment. This is how we can structure our operation. It emphasizes entrepreneurship-related education, development projects, management, well-being at work has become a very strong part now, whether you could say, in the last five years. And then there is some connection with this digitalization, the digital age, which has brought its own stigmas to teleworking. And we have now tried to meet these educational needs.

And in that way, of course, in this constant learning here in our university world, one of our great assets is, of course, this research activity of our university. So this study, which is done at the university, is strongly based on our educational provision, and it is built on it, modified to make that practice applicable. This is one particular feature of what we have to offer and, of course, we have a certain, could we say, a competitive advantage in that education market. But as such, this coming of continuous learning has not made many changes to our basic activities. Of course, all of us continuing education actors are happy to be involved in this time, having been noticed that right now. So these have started with the government program of the previous government, and this is, however, a great thing for us in continuing education that now this is, could I say, a little lightened. Finally understood for this continuous learning and the importance of continuing education in working life. That is the work we are now continuing and indeed it is great that it has now gained visibility and its importance is understood.

And of course, now that Merija was talking about change and the fact that we always certainly live or have always lived in the midst of change. And, of course, it is emphasized in every time. But perhaps now you could say that in some way we are experiencing an exceptionally rapid pace of change, a time of speed, at the moment. And, of course, it is stamping on this educational provision of ours. There, the emphasis changes, that now in this particular time, for example, this well-being at work, digitalization is those emphases. They will now be reacted to. But how these changes are reflected in our operations is that our organization live in time and change all the time in terms of our areas of expertise and supply. So we don't have such a permanent, static state. So if you're going

to keep up, and when you want to keep up with this, you're going to have to be constantly awake. So foresight is done hard and then this research data is mirrored, which is then always a little early at its best. This way, we can then build those educational products for need and, at best, even so that we can offer our customers education products that they may not yet be able to need themselves. In some way, with our own expertise, we can awaken our customers' thoughts and ideas about their own development. So that is how it goes.

But I could still add as a conclusion about this continuous learning that this kind of continuous learning at the individual level is the starting point for how this is viewed. But this is also reflected in our operations in the fact that we are clearly building education products for organizations as well. Of course, there are individuals there too who will then take these issues forward, but that it is very typical that we have education projects with, for example, half a dozen employees from a company or in a public administration organization to embrace something new. And we will then provide the education and the opportunities for development, and then they will go to their own organization to take this forward with our support. So we see this continuous learning a little more extensive at the moment rather than just the continuing education of individuals.

Hanna Marttiini: Right. Here I would have asked that when you have a large proportion of your clients of working age and those in work, how have you tailored these educations flexibly, that it is also possible to educate alongside work?

Antti Koski: Yes. So this is when you look back a little further, there's been a big change. Let's go back 10 years, and the trainings were arranged — a little exaggerated, putting the bends straight — on Friday evenings or Saturdays. It no longer works today that our customers always show up at a certain time and then perhaps in very limited periods or pieces. But today, continuing education has been more or less taken online, into the online environment. It has long been a development that has gone in that direction. And increasingly, in addition to this kind of teaching, education, when it very often has different kinds of guidance, development and guidance for development projects, these have also been taken online. And this teaching, independent of time and place, has become such a central part. We need to be able to meet the need. Our customers live a hectic life as well, and that everyday life hectic. And then we should be able to be flexible through this pedagogy, through online pedagogy in these situations. So educations and guidance related to it are then flexibly arranged on the customers' terms. And this is a clear trend.

Now, of course, we too are coming fast with these MOOCs, where we are at the point where the trainees are doing them at their own pace. It is precisely this week that we are actually taking this issue forward, and next week we will launch a sustainable tourism education product developed by MTI, where everything will happen — basically, if our systems work — from the time the training is paid for, the customer will take care of everything independently. Gets a performance, evaluations come completely automatically. We have staff there in the background as support, but if everything works, support is needed only in the situation when something in our system is failing. So we have gone a long way now in this time-independent and location-independent teaching. And now it is great that we at the university have also taken up the development of this type of education in the faculties. Of course, we are still at the beginning of it, but that the first good examples already exist of MOOCs, and I believe that they will encourage further development.

Hanna Marttiini: Could you open up a little bit what this MOOC means?

Antti Koski: Yes, in practice it is a question of teaching that is completely independent of time and place.

Hanna Marttiini: Yes, so online?

Antti Koski: Online, yes.

Hanna Marttiini: Right. Interesting and certainly in today and modernity and brings that flexibility to continuing education.

Antti Koski: Yes, yes. Suitable for certain types of training. It does not suit not for everything. Of course, it loses its interaction and so. But the fact that information can be shared and that basic education work can also be done through these. But of course they are very suitable and excellent solutions for something.

Hanna Marttiini: Yes, there are alternatives. But thank you very much Merija and Antti. We now learned a lot about continuous learning, which is really expanding even further. Thank you very much.