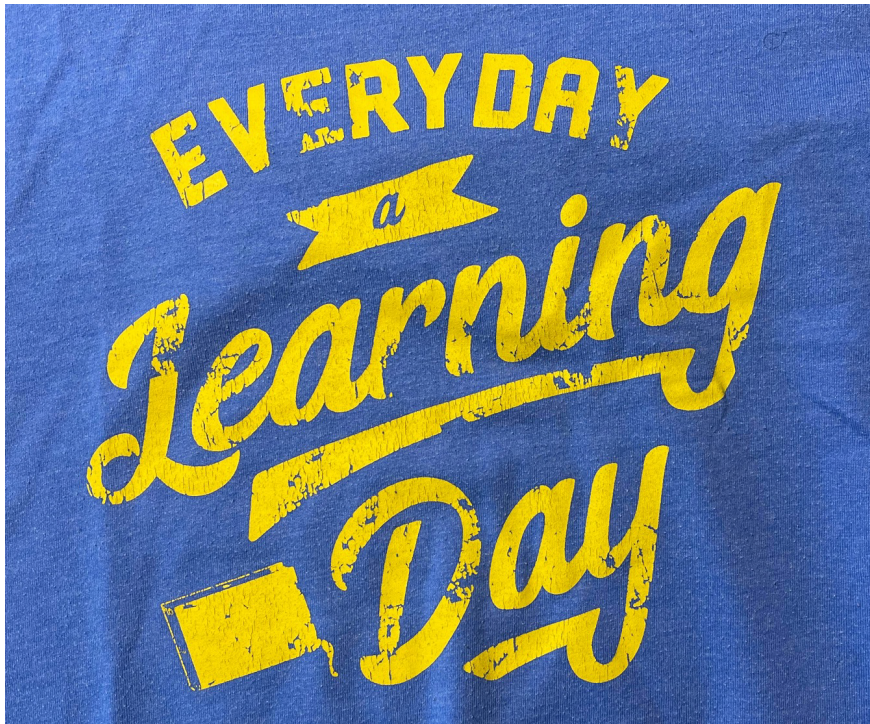


*Hey, it's me who's learning!*

# Manifesto

for a new social contract on learning



**Ruud Duvekot**

July 2022  
Houten, The Netherlands



*So ist das Leben und so muß man es nehmen, tapfer,  
unverzagt und lächelnd – trotz alledem.*

Rosa Luxemburg

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## Preface

*This manifesto is the synthesis of a lifelong wonder at the dynamism and enjoyability that learning brings to one's life and career. Learning is first and foremost self-directed and in interaction with others, intentional and non-intentional. You have to be aware of this in order to (co-)determine the course of your life. Learning systems are designed to support such personal-steered learning. And it cannot be the other way round; after all, systems do not learn, but it is the people who live and work together in the learning society who learn.*

*The inspiration to write this manifesto is also drawn from many sources, some important ones being Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), UNESCO's *Learning to be* (1972), UNESCO's *Learning: the treasure within* (1996), Jens Bjørnåvold's *Making Learning Visible* (2000), James Rickabaugh's *Learning Independence Continuum* (2012) and Minouche Shafik's *What we owe each other* (2021).*

*Written in the summer of 2022,  
Ruud Duvekot*





## Hey, it's me who's learning! A manifesto for a new social contract on learning

A new social contract is needed to adapt the learning systems in education, training and human resource development (HRD) to the shifting learning paradigm with its call for more holistic - personalised and customised - learning. The main pillar of the contract is to embrace the main actors - the learners themselves and the experts in the learning systems (teacher, trainer, P&O official, HR professional) - as equal and autonomous partners in meaningful dialogues about the objective, content and form of (lifelong) learning. In order to realise their dialogues about (lifelong) learning, it is important that they can hear each other well and work together by ...

... confirming the trend towards a learning culture in which the learner is truly central. This trend manifests itself in more contextualised, personalised and flexible learning processes, the more bottom-up and process-driven nature of learning and the increasing use of methods to validate personal learning experiences and facilitate customised learning.

... understanding that this development represents a shift from the analytical and control-oriented learning paradigm to a more holistic, personalised and trust-based learning paradigm. This is a shift in learning culture from control over *what will be learned* to trust in *what has been learned and can be learned*. It means connecting existing learning experiences, gained through education, work and informal learning, with the acquisition of new learning experiences in order to hear and value 'the voice of the learner' (student, employee, volunteer, migrant, job seeker, self-employed person, refugee, etc.).

... mapping out a roadmap for each actor in the learning process, starting with *outreach* to approach learners and help identify and articulate learning needs. Outreach leads to awareness of the value of personal learning experiences for the creation of new development opportunities. *Assessment* then values such learning experiences and connects them to appropriate new development opportunities. The subsequent customised *learning* concerns personalised learning paths that correspond to the results of the assessment. *Validation* involves the formal completion of each pathway through certification, qualification, a concrete career step or otherwise. This roadmap is repeatable and thus emphasises the recurring nature of learning for maintenance, upgrade, update or personal development.

... realising meaningful and practical dialogues in the social contract by:

1. *Adopting a common language for validation and learning*: learning outcomes as a format for articulating and valuing the standards of learners (personal reference frameworks), education & training (qualifications, certificates, badges) and HRD (occupational or job standards).
2. *Outreach as a social service*: raising learners' awareness that it is the learner who learns - formally, informally and non-formally - and that learning systems can assist the learner to value and build upon those learning experiences.
3. *Sharing true ownership of learning with the learner*. The time is ripe for learning systems to learn to listen to 'the voice of the learner' by *facilitating dialogues through the formula  $P^{SR} + V^{PF} = L3$ : Personal learning needs (based on Self-evaluation + Reflection) + Validation (of Prior Learning for Future Learning) = LifeLong Learning*. This formula triggers and feeds dialogues on learning between:
  - a. The learner with a personal frame of reference (beliefs, goals, professional products) as input.
  - b. The teacher (assessor, coach, tutor & teacher) with qualification standards/certificates.
  - c. The HR professional (human resource development functions) with professional or job-specific standards.
4. *Using assessment of, for and as learning*: valuing the learning history of the learner in relation to qualification- and function-oriented standards in order to offer 'truly' customised learning.
5. *Strengthening and trusting the autonomy of professionals* in education, training and HRD in all their actions (assessment, teaching, training, coaching, supervision).
6. *Prioritising quality assurance over quality control*: organise trust in the capacity and autonomy of the partners in the dialogues, especially the assessment and advisory expertise.
7. *Affording reciprocal learning via the portfolio loop optimally*: provide legal, financial, educational and social space for dialogues on learning by, for and with the learner.



## Hé! Ik ben het die leert! Een manifest voor een nieuw sociaal contract over leren

Een nieuw sociaal contract is nodig om de leersystemen in onderwijs, scholing en human resource development (HRD) aan te passen aan het verschuivende leerparadigma met zijn roep om meer holistisch - gepersonaliseerd en op maat - leren. De belangrijkste pijler onder het contract is het omarmen van de belangrijkste actoren – de lerenden zelf en de experts in de leersystemen (leraar, trainer, P&O functionaris, HR-professional) - als gelijkwaardige en autonome partners in betekenisvolle dialogen over doelstelling, inhoud en vorm van (levenlang) leren. Om hun dialogen over (levenlang) leren te realiseren, is het van belang dat zij elkaar goed kunnen horen en samenwerken door ...

... de ontwikkeling naar een leercultuur te bevestigen waarin de lerende echt centraal staat. Deze trend uit zich in meer gecontextualiseerde, gepersonaliseerde en flexibele leerprocessen, het meer bottom-up en proces-gestuurde karakter van leren en het toenemende gebruik van methoden om persoonlijke leerervaringen te valideren en maatwerk in leren te faciliteren.

... te begrijpen dat deze ontwikkeling een verschuiving inhoudt van het analytische, op controle gerichte leerparadigma naar een meer holistisch, gepersonaliseerd en op vertrouwen gebaseerd leerparadigma. Dit verandert de leercultuur van een focus op controle over *wat geleerd moet worden*, naar vertrouwen in *wat geleerd is en geleerd kan worden*. Dan verbindt leren de reeds bestaande leerervaringen, opgedaan in onderwijs, op werk en door informeel te leren, met nieuwe leerervaringen om zodoende 'de stem van de lerende' (student, werknemer, vrijwilliger, migrant, werkzoekende, zelfstandige, vluchteling, enz.) te horen en te waarderen.

... een routekaart uit te stippelen voor iedere actor in het leerproces, te beginnen met *outreach* om lerenden te benaderen en leerbehoeften te helpen identificeren en articuleren. Outreach leidt tot bewustwording van de waarde van persoonlijke leerervaringen ten behoeve van het creëren van nieuwe ontwikkelkansen. Vervolgens waardeert *assessment* dergelijke leerervaringen en verbindt ze met passende, nieuwe ontwikkelmogelijkheden. Het daaropvolgende *leren op maat* betreft gepersonaliseerde leertrajecten die corresponderen met de uitkomsten van het assessment. *Validatie* betreft de formele afronding van elk traject via certificering, kwalificering, een concrete loopbaanstap of anderszins. Deze routekaart is herhaalbaar en benadrukt zodoende het wederkerende karakter van leren voor onderhoud, upgrade, update of persoonlijke ontwikkeling.

... in het sociale contract betekenisvolle en praktische dialogen te realiseren door:

1. *Een gezamenlijke taal voor valideren en leren te hanteren*: leernutkomsten als format voor de articulatie en waardering van de standaarden van lerenden (persoonlijke referentiekaders), onderwijs & scholing (kwalificaties, certificaten, badges) en HRD (beroeps- of functiestandaarden).
2. *Outreach als maatschappelijke voorziening in te richten*: het bewustzijn van lerenden (helpen) versterken dat het de lerende is die leert – formeel, informeel en non-formeel - en dat leersystemen de lerende kunnen assisteren om die leerervaringen te waarderen en op voort te borduren.
3. *Het eigenaarschap van leren echt te delen met de lerende*. De tijd is rijp voor de leersystemen om te leren luisteren naar 'de stem van de lerende' door *dialogen over leren te faciliteren* cf. de formule  **$P^{ZR} + V^{ET} = L3$** : **Persoonlijke leerbehoefte (gebaseerd op Zelfevaluatie + Reflectie) + Validering (van Eerder Leren voor Toekomstig leren) = LevenLang Leren**. Deze formule stimuleert de dialogen over levenlang leren tussen:
  - a. De lerende met een persoonlijk referentiekader (overtuigingen, doelen, beroepsproducten) als input.
  - b. De leraar (assessor, coach, begeleider & docent) met kwalificatiestandaarden/certificaten.
  - c. De HR-professional (functies rond personele ontwikkeling) met beroeps- of functiegerichte standaarden.
4. *Assessment van, voor en als leren te benutten*: de leergeschiedenis van de lerende waarderen ten opzichte van kwalificatie- en functiegerichte standaarden teneinde 'werkelijk' maatwerk in leren te kunnen bieden.
5. *De autonomie van de professionals* in onderwijs, scholing en HRD in al hun handelingen (beoordelen, onderwijzen, trainen, coachen, begeleiden) te versterken én te vertrouwen.
6. *Kwaliteits-zorg te prevaleren boven -controle*: organiseer en onderbouw het vertrouwen in de capaciteit en de autonomie van de partners in dialogen, m.n. de beoordelende en adviserende deskundigen.
7. *Wederkerend leren via de portfolio-loop optimaal te faciliteren*: juridisch, financieel, onderwijskundig en sociaal ruimte bieden voor dialogen over leren door, voor en met de lerende.



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## Summary

On a global scale, a general trend is visible in a slow but sure development towards a learning culture that has more attention for the learner as the primary actor in engaging in (lifelong) learning. The trend shows itself in more contextualisation, personalisation and flexibilisation of learning processes, strengthening of the process-driven nature of learning and the growing use of validation techniques.

This transition entails a shift from the analytical, mass learning and control-oriented learning paradigm to a more holistic, personalised, customised and trust-based learning paradigm. It is in fact a shift in the learning culture from *control of what needs to be learned*, to *trust in what has been and can be learned*.

A control-focused, analytic learning process is predominantly top-down managed, convergent and monological. It is focused on making standardised choices in the learning process, whereby the maintenance of the established standard (qualification- and/or occupational) is paramount. Assessment is aimed at checking as comprehensively as possible the learning outcomes achieved and to which the learner must conform.

A trust-oriented, holistic learning process is more like a contextualised, divergent, bottom-up driven and dialogical learning process. The learner's learning desire is central and any choice in the learning process is possible. Validation is based on organising trust in the learner's ability to learn in any given context, period and learning method, both retrospectively and prospectively; proven abilities are valued as widely as possible.

### A new social contract

Human development is certainly a pillar of society. Especially with the help of a collective system, people can evolve in their lives. The extent to which this actually happens depends very much on the social contract that people find in their environment. The social contract concerns all norms, values and agreements between people, institutions, organisations and the government about the way in which people live, work and learn together. What is true for all areas of life is certainly also true for the area of learning. So, it's *'not about increasing the welfare state, but about investing in people and building a new system of risk sharing to increase overall well-being.'* (Shafik, 2021, p. 247).

The 'social contract for learning' is about the coordination of personal development between people and the other actors involved. However diverse 'learning' may be on an individual level, what always counts are the agreements - implicit and explicit - about direction, content and ownership of learning. At the present time, it is clear that these agreements need to be adjusted in order to bring the function of 'learning' into line with the changing social reality in which 'the voice of the learner' is the most important factor. The new social contract therewith is logically a more informal form of a personalised contract between the learner and the social opportunities accessible and afforded by the traditional system-partners in society (employers, trade unions, authorities).

Actively placing the learner at the centre of one's learning process entails a new social contract on the shared ownership of lifelong learning in which the learning system is put in the service-mode for social development of all in the *learning society*. The question 'how to proceed' is opportune. When considering what is already possible in lifelong learning on the learner's own initiative, within schools, universities, training institutes but also at the workplace, in volunteering and in daily life activities, it will undoubtedly become apparent that many parts of the roadmap to follow for filling in the new social contract for lifelong learning are already in place. Some parts, however, need to be designed or (further) developed. And yet other parts require agreements on joint development and implementation.

What should happen in any case is changing the mindset within schools, universities, organisations, companies and institutions from an analytical, supply-driven approach to learning aimed at certification and competences to a flexible, holistic learning culture in which people's dialogues about their lifelong learning needs are central; a change from a top-down to a bottom-up approach, so to speak. It is of great importance that the dynamism that *dialogical validation and learning* can give to the raising awareness of learners and the connecting power of the dialogues between learner and assessors/teachers is directional for validating and filling in a dialogue on further learning for everyone who knocks on the door of *the learning society* with a specific learning need.

Highly important in the 'contract' is the acceptance and the affordance of the agency of the individual learner who can and has to fill-in an autonomous position in the dialogues on further (lifelong) learning. In a same manner this autonomous position also goes for the experts within the education and training institutes and in the learning organisations; they also need to fill-in their autonomous role in these dialogues. This shared

ownership of tasks and duties, or better responsibilities, is at the heart of a holistic learning culture in which a shift has been realised from *control of what needs to be learned*, to *trust in what has been and can be learned*.

### Building blocks for the contract

To back the new social contract, vital building blocks are:

1. *Adopting a common language for validation and learning*: learning outcomes as a format for articulating and valuing the standards of learners (personal reference frameworks), education & training (qualifications, certificates, badges) and HRD (occupational or job standards).
2. *Outreach as a social service*: raising learners' awareness that it is the learner who learns - formally, informally and non-formally - and that learning systems can assist the learner to value and build upon those learning experiences.
3. *Sharing true ownership of learning with the learner*. The time is ripe for learning systems to learn to listen to 'the voice of the learner' by *facilitating dialogues through the formula  $P^{SR} + V^{PF} = L3$ : Personal learning needs (based on Self-evaluation + Reflection) + Validation (of Prior Learning for Future Learning) = LifeLong Learning*. This formula triggers and feeds dialogues on learning between:
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4. *Using assessment of, for and as learning*: valuing the learning history of the learner to connect to qualification- and/or function-oriented standards in order to offer 'truly' customised learning.
5. *Strengthening and trusting the autonomy of professionals* in education, training and HRD in all their actions (assessment, teaching, training, coaching, supervision).
6. *Prioritising quality assurance over quality control*: organise trust in the capacity and autonomy of the partners in the dialogues, especially the assessment and advisory expertise.
7. *Affording reciprocal learning via the portfolio loop optimally*: provide legal, financial, educational and social space for dialogues on learning by, for and with the learner.

### The actors in play

The new social contract will enable the learning systems in education & training and in human resource management systems to adapt to the shifting learning paradigm with its call for more personalised and tailored lifelong learning. For the sake of shifting learning processes from an analytical and monological approach towards a holistic and dialogical focus the main actors in the "learning triangle" can thus (re)gain their meaningful role in lifelong learning processes:

- The learner can be empowered by supporting her in articulating 'her voice' and learning to be a reflective actor in learning processes. *The learner therefore needs to learn reflecting on one's activities.*
- The teacher/trainer can regain her autonomy as a professional by no longer being merely the guardian of qualification standards but more the manager and guide of learning processes that support learners in their (lifelong) learning. *The teacher-trainer needs to learn listening to the learner's voice.*
- The human resources expert or any other functionary responsible for the HRM in the organisation can also regain her position as an autonomous professional in stimulating and affording the learning processes of employees, job seekers, volunteers, migrants, refugees, etc. in a dialogical way. *The HR-expert needs to learn investing in people through such dialogues.*

It is up to authorities and social partners (employers and trade unions) to create favourable conditions for the interplay between these three actors in the new social contract, through legislation and funding. Every actor is thus involved in the new social contract. The most important pillar in the contract, however, is the learner herself, because she<sup>1</sup> is the one who will - finally – be at the heart of designing lifelong learning strategies. The real change agent for transforming the learning culture therewith is the learner with her input for learning based on a personal reference framework. This input so far has been largely missing in the game of learning. So, holistic learning is all about me, for the sake of the collective in the learning society.

### Hey, it's me who's learning!

With the focus on personalised learning, it is most important to understand that - when it comes to strengthening the autonomy of the learner - it is crucial to afford the learner in becoming the director of her own learning

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1 Whenever 'she' or 'her' is written, the reader should be aware that this also means 'he', 'his' or 'him'.



process. For some learners, this means that they need to be firmly supported in order to learn to reflect on their own actions and to get grips on the self-value of those actions. For others, it will probably be easier to discover this self-value. In short, if every learner learns to take account of the value of their own learning history, either pampered by support from a learning system or self-empowered, an important precondition will have been met for shaping the dialogues within 'the learning triangle' on lifelong learning in a holistic way.

Since every learner is somewhere in the bandwidth of 100% pampered and 100% empowered learning, everyone will need to be supported to some extent. That support - especially aimed at learning to reflect on and value one's own actions - is an important task for the professionals within the learning and HRM systems. To this end, the professionals themselves must of course also be able to reflect on their own actions and must - above all - with an open mind be able to help open the way for the 'voice of the learner' to be heard. After all, it's also them who learn!

### **The new social contract**

The new social contract is essentially an informal contract between 'me' and system-partners like schools and organisations on the wide labour market. It is focused on self-managed talent recognition and development of the learner and offering structural social support like guidance, learning opportunities, funding and cross-sector employability so that no one is left out in the cold. The new social contract aims at being really social since *it's me who learns but I can only do that in the collective model of 'the learning society'* as advocated by UNESCO and OECD. Only in this way, achieving a more holistic learning culture in which validation and learning processes are linked, will be helpful for *me* as the learner and for *us* in the society.

The new social contract invites me with my learning history to sit at the table where decisions are made on where, when, what and how to learn. So, essentially the new social contract is about including me and my prior and future learning as a voice to be listened to. This is a major challenge for every stakeholder, including myself. In fact, never before in history has there been so much room for personalising learning processes in such a way that my voice is truly heard and can even determine the content, form and meaning of learning



## Introduction

*.. the challenges humanity faces, [-] call for societies that understand themselves as learning societies and people who identify themselves as learners throughout their lives. Realizing this vision requires a learner-centric, demand-led approach to education that enables learners of all ages and backgrounds to codesign actively and use any learning process and its outcomes to achieve their full potential. Accordingly, learning to learn and managing one's own learning journey must become basic competences. (UIL, 2020)*

On a global scale, a general trend is visible around which lifelong learning policies are unfolding and developing, namely a slow but sure development towards a learning culture that has more attention for the learner as the primary actor in the game of (lifelong) learning. This transition means a shift from the analytical, mass learning and control-oriented learning paradigm to a more holistic, personalised, customised and trust-based learning paradigm. It is in fact a shift in the learning culture from *control of what needs to be learned*, to *trust in what has been and can be learned*.

A control-focused, analytical learning process is predominantly top-down managed, convergent and monological. It is focused on making standardised choices in the learning process, whereby the maintenance of the established standard (qualification- and/or occupational) is paramount. Assessment is aimed at checking as comprehensively as possible the learning outcomes achieved and to which the learner must conform.

A trust-oriented, holistic learning process is more like a bottom-up driven, contextualised, divergent and dialogical learning process. The learner's learning desire is central and any choice in the learning process is possible. Validation is based on organising trust in the learner's ability to learn in any given learning environment, period and learning method, both retrospectively and prospectively; proven abilities are valued as widely as possible.

Actively placing the learner at the centre of one's learning process means that a new social contract on lifelong learning is needed in order to place the learning system at the service of social development in the present learning society. At the heart of this new contract are five emergent features of the new learning culture (also see annex 1):

- A. The *transition from a system to a process approach* in which the learner and her learning process are central. Facilitating effective learning processes becomes more important than justifying the use of the learning system itself.
- B. The *flexibilisation* of (lifelong) learning through *a broad approach to learning* and *a focus on learning outcomes*. 'Broad' primarily means that learning always takes place everywhere and anytime: formally in education and training, non-formally in non-accredited education and training and informally in other situations like work-based learning.
- C. The *contextualisation* of learning through *dialogues* between partners in learning' by focusing on the real *learning needs* as the focal point. What can or should be learned is central and all actors contribute to this.
- D. The *personalisation* of learning by strengthening the *shared ownership of (lifelong) learning*. The learner is the one who learns and has the right to participate in her/his own learning process. This is perhaps the strongest, most innovative factor in the changing learning culture, namely the realisation that the learner is co-owner of one's learning process and therefore can help manage to determine how, what and why to learn lifelong.
- E. The adaptive capacity of validation methods to enhance the *flexibility* and *binding capacity* of lifelong learning paths, by linking personal reference, qualification and occupational standards.

Effective strategies for person-centred lifelong learning (LLL) must be able to match people's learning needs and needs in order to ensure that the learner is truly central. The key to meeting individual learning needs is to organise learning as flexibly as possible and to make use of the learning history of learners in order to provide each learner with a flexible, personalised learning pathway. Such person-centred learning is based on two interrelated processes:

1. *Validation processes* that focus on identifying, valuing, recognising prior learning outcomes and advising on further development of competences that a learner might acquire, both formally and informally.
2. *Learning processes* that facilitate learners in initiating, designing and implementing flexible learning arrangements to achieve a desired learning effect.

The organisation of LLL, the guidance, assessment and further learning are geared towards giving learners the opportunity - in dialogue with teachers, trainers, training advisers, employers and other actors in learning processes - to take as much control as possible over their own learning process. With the aid of this dialogue, the learner can help determine the objective, pace, method of assessment, content and form of learning. Such person-centred learning based on co-management of the learning process is the basis for personalised learning. It has validation and learning as its supporting pillars. Whereas *learning* is mainly about the organisation, guidance and implementation of a desired learning pathway, *validation* is about assessing and advising on the content of the learning outcomes achieved and to be achieved by the learner.

Creating the right balance in the coherence between both pillars is the essence of the dialogue between the learner and the teacher or trainer and possibly also the employer or other actors. The learner is in any case the owner of personal learning experiences and takes care of using her learning experiences to achieve an intended learning goal. The professional (teacher, trainer, coach, assessor, supervisor) is the owner of (the learning outcomes of) the learning offer and has the responsibility to adapt this offer to the learning experiences and learning needs of the learner. The employer or any other actor in the social context is the owner of the competence requirements or job requirements that apply to functioning in a certain social setting and can make this content part of a learning process through work-based learning arrangements and the management of occupational standards.

The validation process is based on a portfolio-driven approach for articulating one's learning need (reflective function), evaluating and assessing (summative function) and advising (formative function) in a learning culture that is based on learning outcomes and shared ownership of learning processes by the learner and professional(s). The learner has a variety of assessment instruments at disposal and can help achieve the intended learning objectives in the learning process (depending on the learning pathway). Professionals fill in various roles in supporting and strengthening learning processes: teaching, coaching, training, assessing, guiding. The learning process includes all forms of active learning that are necessary and that can be made possible through tailored learning. Personal fulfilment and the avoidance of unnecessary learning are paramount. The whole process of learning and validation should ideally have a dialogical character because of the continuous dialogue between the learner, the professional and any other actors on the learning outcomes already achieved and those to be achieved.

To achieve a more holistic learning culture in which validation and learning processes are linked, a broad view of both processes is needed. This broad view is presented in this paper. First, I will explain the processes of validation and learning in their mutual coherence. Then I connect them by outlining a holistic perspective on LLL. I conclude with a roadmap of the tasks and roles that can be fulfilled by the different actors in a learning culture of dialogical validation and learning. This roadmap provides the building blocks for the new social contract that's needed for turning the 'old' analytical learning culture into a more holistic learning culture in which the learner is central to the activation of LLL-strategies.

## 1. The problem and the solution

On a global scale, a general trend is visible of a slow but sure development towards a learning culture with more attention for the learner as the primary actor in (lifelong) learning. The trend in learning manifests itself in more contextualisation, technology-driven innovation, personalisation and flexibilisation of learning processes, strengthening of the process-driven nature of learning and an increasing use of validation techniques. The reason for this trend lies in the rapidly changing social and labour relations in 'the learning society'. Society is evermore becoming more flexible as a result of technological and social developments.

A few decades ago, an education once received was sufficient to maintain a career permanently in the labour market. As a result of social and technological developments and changes in competitive positions and production processes, everybody has to continuously adapt and take into account the need for 'lifelong learning'.

There is hardly time to maintain a job level in a structured manner or to upgrade it in order to grow within the job level (deepening, differentiation) and /or to another job level (broadening, scaling up). In this context, everybody (youth, employees, employers, jobseekers) needs to receive adequate and periodic training (theory and practice) and learn to use the workplace or any other environment for learning. Informal learning is in this growing practice the main means for and of learning: unconsciously and unstructured learning by doing. Efficient management of human capital development by the people themselves, supported by employers and education and training institutes, calls for turning learning into an open minded, all-encompassing nature, managed and driven by the learners themselves. Hence this focus on a new social contract on creating a more broad and personalised cooperation between all already installed stakeholders - the old contract-partners: employers, trade unions, authorities – with the learners within a self-steered learning culture. 'It goes without saying that 'self-steered' entails largely the recognition that every learner is able to capture one's talents and learnability; the level of self-steering depends largely on one's competence to get a grip on personal talent development. Self-steering can then mean that one learner needs more support and guidance than another; a bandwidth in self-steering from 'pampering' to 'empowering', so to speak. The bottom line, however, is and remains that personal talents are the focus of lifelong learning.

The contract aims to solve a number of problems and create opportunities: (1) to give investment in human talent development a boost, (2) to activate people's sustainable employability and learning capacity, (3) to make people's unused and invisible potential (informal learning) recognisable and employable, (4) to strengthen people's involvement in their social participation, and (5) to create improved sustainable employability by making lifelong learning a process in which people themselves - the learners - are the owners and can help steer the objective, content and meaning of learning. After all, it is people themselves who learn and who can ensure that society adapts to changing circumstances.

The developability of people is therefore at stake. The preconditions must be offered by allowing people to steer their own developability. The existing social contract is rather system-steered and top-down when it comes to activating and utilising the true human potential. In order to make people co-owners and responsible for their continuous development, they must be able to participate in decision-making on where, how, when and in what to invest in oneself. The preconditions for this can be shaped in a new social contract. This contract focuses on the bottom-up process and not on systemic thinking at macro level, as is the case in the current contract. The new social contract is informal and based on the recognition that everyone has talents and qualities that can be used in some way for (self)development. It's just a matter of acknowledging everybody's own power in this and supporting people's agency by affording social services for learning.

The new social contract is essentially an informal contract between 'me' and system-partners like schools and organisations on the wide labour market. It is focused on self-managed talent recognition and development of the learner and offering structural social support like guidance, learning opportunities, funding and cross-sector employability so that no one is left out in the cold. The new social contract aims at being really social since *it's me who learns but I can only do that in the collective model of 'the learning society'* as advocated by UNESCO and OECD (Faure, et al, 1972; UNESCO, 1996; OECD, 2000). Only in this way, achieving a more holistic learning culture in which validation and learning processes are linked, will be helpful for *me* as the learner and for *us* in the society.

The new social contract invites me with my learning history to sit at the table where decisions are made on where, when, what and how to learn. So, essentially the new social contract is about including me and my (prior and future) learning as a voice to be listened to. This is a major challenge for every stakeholder, including myself. In fact, never before in history has there been so much room for personalising learning processes in such a way that my voice is truly heard and can even determine the content, form and meaning of learning.

## 2. Learning = Validation

A broad view of the phenomenon of validation and learning embraces all validation and learning activities that take place consciously and unconsciously, informally, formally and non-formally, and above all continuously. Validation and Learning can be regarded as individual activities within social processes. Such processes encompass all possible learning, working and living situations and are not necessarily intentional but always enrich - consciously or unconsciously - one's knowledge, skills and insights. Where formal learning encompasses all learning achievements in accredited learning processes, non-formal learning is about learning achievements in non-accredited learning processes like training and work-based learning tasks. Informal learning is never

organised, has no fixed objective in terms of learning outcomes and is not intentional from the learner's perspective. It is usually referred to as 'learning by experience'. (Cedefop, 2009; UNESCO, 2009). Non-formal learning experiences in particular are well suited to validating one's status in lifelong learning and then providing appropriate new learning solutions (Bjørnåvold, 2000).

Validation revolves around various forms of assessment that are all aimed at the evaluation of someone's learning experiences, acquired informally, non-formally or formally. In all forms of assessment, the personal reference standards (values, beliefs, professional products, goals) always come first, with the standards from qualification and function systems as possible frames of reference (Travers, Sheckley & Bell, 2002).

First of all, such validation includes the forms of self-directed assessment such as self-examination and self-appraisal. Next, the linking of the personal learning to a job profile or a qualification, or to a personally set goal, is paramount. Validation then acquires the meaning of assessment *of, for or as learning*: there is a potential for direct effects (cashing in on the outcome of the assessment) as well as prospective effects or continuity of learning via (further) development of someone in the light of personally set learning goals. A prospective effect may also involve reflection on the learning by the learner herself.

This broad concept of validation is what Bray and McClaskey describe as validation supporting personalised learning paths through assessment of learning - measuring learner performance - assessment for learning - providing feedback throughout the process - and assessment as learning - with the learner monitoring her progress and reflecting on the new learning experiences (Bray and McClaskey, 2015).

Assessment involves the (self-)valuation of personal learning experiences in view of the connection between the individual and the organisation and/or the school and is operationalised around the phenomenon Rickabaugh terms 'the learning independence continuum': a model for integrating validation and learning by bringing together the individual's autonomous learning and the extent to which learners can get to grips with that in one model with five characteristics: motivation, involvement, self-efficacy, ownership and independence (Rickabaugh, 2012).

Claxton states that learning *'comes in many different shapes and sizes. And these start to kick in at different stages of development. [-] learning is a much wider, richer concept than is captured within current models of education and training'* (Claxton, 1999, p. 5). It also includes implicit, non-intentional learning in its holistic approach:

*Learning is what one does to transmute incompetence into competence, ignorance into knowledge. By definition, learning starts in the zone of the unknown, and attempts, via a whole variety of activities, mental and physical, to discover comprehension and expertise* (Claxton, et al, 1996, p. 47).

This description supports a social constructivist, broad and social interpretation of learning and includes both the breadth and depth of learning. Jarvis defines such learning as a lifelong activity in which people's continuous learning experiences can be actively used for the various purposes for which learning occurs:

*Human learning is the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person - body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) - experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person.* (Jarvis, 2009, p.25)

Jarvis' definition is useful as a basis for the model of dialogical validation. After all, people learn in different ways, partly determined by their personality, by reflecting on and internalising their experiences, within a given context and by processing theoretical information. People learn consciously and unconsciously in all their phases and areas of life. Every person is a learning person - *'it is the whole person who learns'* - with a personal learning style, motivation, experiences and ambition (Jarvis, 2006, p. 50). Dialogic validation unravels the unique, individual learning experiences and links them as a personal reference standard with the social standards in education/training and HRM. In this way the learner is assisted in linking *"new ideas and concepts to similar ideas they have come to know through prior learning and experience"* (Travers, Sheckley & Bell, 2002).

### 3. Competences & learning outcomes

The concept of competences is central to the design and content of learning. Learning objectives should ideally be based on a concept of competences characterised by context, indivisibility, links with tasks and activities, changeability, personal competences and the interrelated nature of learning content (Merriënboer, van der Klink & Hendriks, 2002). Learning outcomes are closely linked to this concept of competences.

Competence-based learning assumes that someone has certain competences or wants (or needs) to have and maintain these competences. Competence-based learning therefore focuses on increasing personal abilities within a given context. Validating someone's acquired competences is important in this learning approach. The starting point is that someone already has certain abilities that can subsequently be shaped, complemented, enriched and deepened. The degree of self-management, the learning level and the learning style may vary; in addition, the content of someone's already acquired competences depends to a large extent on the context in which they are activated and learned. In line with this function, Dochy and Nickmans' emphasise the personal, development-oriented character and describe 'a competence' as a personal ability of someone to manifest herself:

*A competence is a personal ability, which shows itself in the performance of successful behaviour in a certain contextual situation. A competence is changeable in time and developable to a certain extent. A competence consists of an integrated whole of knowledge, skills and attitudes, where personal characteristics and aspects of professional functioning also influence (the development of) competences in a certain way and to a certain extent. (Dochy & Nickmans, 2005)*

According to Klarus (2006), the central premise of such a concept of competence is the assumption that a competence is the whole of interrelated personal abilities or skills - the situational use of relevant knowledge, metacognitive skills, personal characteristics and technical skills - that are necessary to achieve a result, whether or not predetermined, in a particular situation or context of action. That result can be an objective, but also a (professional) product, service or effect. This relationship that he establishes between the personal capacity to act and the result of that action is important in the context of validation processes. After all, this process tries to assess someone's competences as they may have been acquired somewhere; such an assessment can take place if there are tangible results or learning outcomes.

Parry's description of competence is a useful addition in this context. He defines 'competence' as '*a cluster of related knowledge, skills, and attitudes that affects a major part of one's job (a role or responsibility), that correlates with performance on the job, that can be measured against well accepted standards, and that can be improved via training and development*' (Parry, 1996). This definition implies that competences are focused on the individual and his/her ability to solve (professional) problems. Professional problems are solved by producing certain professional products. The professional product is the product that shows that someone possesses competence(s) at a certain level and in a certain context. Professional products can be described in detail or globally. The level of detail depends on the complexity and the context in which the product has to be delivered. They meet predetermined quality standards regarding the product or process and add value directly or indirectly to the professional act. By means of an assessment, professional products can be linked to, for instance, qualification or job standards. A condition for these standards is that their content is also formulated in terms of competences.

Learning outcomes are closely linked to the concept of competence. A learning outcome is a factual description of the knowledge, skills and attitude aspects embedded in a competence, the use of which becomes visible in a learning process and/or (professional) action. The more complex and independent an action is, the more integrated these three components are.

Anyone can acquire and demonstrate learning outcomes in learning processes and (professional) acts that can be formal, non-formal or informal. The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) has two coherent definitions that capture the relationship between learning and the practice of learning outcomes. On the one hand, learning outcomes are *statements of the learner's knowledge, what the learner understands and what a learner can perform when completing a learning process*, which is defined in terms of knowledge and skills. On the other hand, learning outcomes are also sets of knowledge, skills and/or competences that an individual has acquired and/or can demonstrate on completion of a formal, non-formal or informal learning process (Cedefop, 2014). These two definitions illustrate that learning outcomes are dynamic

and subject to change and that there is a constant dialogue between the learning to be achieved and the learning already achieved.

The translation of competences into learning outcomes is important for the generation of a personal impact in learning processes independent of the learning pathway in order to '*appreciate and recognise what people have learned outside of education (in courses and training, in other education and through work experience), so that it can be tailored to their needs*' (Adviescommissie, 2014). The consequence of such learning processes is that the learner knows what remaining learning outcomes he/she has to work towards and what the range of different relevant educational activities (within the educational unit) is from which he/she can choose.

Learning outcomes can be validated or learnt separately but also often occur in units of learning outcomes. Such units are the carriers of flexible learning paths that professionals, after being validated, can follow. Requirements for learning outcomes of such personalised learning paths are

- Learning outcomes, in the absence of a prescribed programme, should always provide a good basis for confidence in the quality of the intended certification, graduation or other appreciative effect.
- Learning outcomes should be informative enough as a basis for validating the competences already acquired, both for summative validation prior to actual learning and for formative validation during learning for the purpose of personalising learning.
- Learning outcomes should allow for differentiated customisation on an individual level. This should lead to such increased flexibility that it should bring a valuable learning objective within the reach of substantially more people than current education (web.ref. NLQF).

In short, a competence is a general statement about a learner's ability to apply the necessary knowledge, skills and behavioural aspects in her activities in a given context. A learning outcome is a specific statement about the knowledge, skills and behavioural aspects a learner can demonstrate and be assessed on. There may be one or more measurable learning outcomes defined for a competence.

An example of competence versus learning outcomes.

*In the Netherlands, the pedagogical competence of a teacher in primary or secondary education is the ability to realise a safe, supportive and stimulating learning climate for her pupils in a professional, development-oriented manner and in cooperation with her colleagues. (Web.ref OCW.nl)*

*This pedagogical competence can be elaborated in three measurable learning outcomes:*

- 1. The teacher builds up a safe relationship with pupils through an open and responsive attitude and promotes an optimal living and learning climate for all participants in a group, in cooperation with professionals and parents.*
- 2. The teacher enables all pupils to develop to their full potential and values diversity, identifying developmental needs and opportunities for growth, adapting to individual needs and thus creating equal educational opportunities.*
- 3. The teacher actively stimulates the personal development of the pupil and effectively supports them in taking up a conscious position as a world citizen in a diverse society, by making connections with the living environment of the pupil and the wider social context. (HU/IA, 2021)*

#### 4. Analytical versus holistic learning

Dialogical validation and learning is an important - decisive - factor in the shift of the learning culture from the analytical, mass learning and control-oriented learning paradigm to a more holistic, personalised, tailored and trust-based learning paradigm.

In learning processes, a certain tension can be seen between the system and the process approach. Whereas 'the system' in general represents the top-down approach, the process is mainly bottom-up driven. The *system as such* consists of two sub-systems, namely (1) the learning system with an offer of qualifications or professional profiles and (2) the social system with job profiles or occupational standards. The *process* concerns the course, progress and results of these (sub)systems in a given context or situation. In a process, systems are used, a learning need is formulated and results are achieved.



In everyday practice, learning processes are confronted with either an *inside-out* or an *outside-in* approach of the learning sub-systems. With *inside-out* managed learning processes, there is little possibility or desire for flexibility or adaptation to others (organisations and/or learners). In fact, the standard that is used (qualification or occupational) is dominant and both the teacher and the employer on the one hand and the learner on the other have to conform to the requirements of maintaining and being accountable to the content of the standard. In *outside-in* managed processes, there is more opportunity for tuning in to the specifics of a learning trajectory. The recognition of the importance and equivalence of personal learning experiences stretches the possibilities for systems to deal more flexibly with the more personalised content of LLL programmes. Policy development is then more inclined to allow this personal orientation and to (re)formulate policy accordingly.

**Table 1: Target groups and their learning needs**

Target groups	Learning target	Learning experiences	Standards	Revenue
Youth	Start qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Formal learning:</b> (partial) qualifications, certificates from accredited learning, obtained examinations</li> <li>- <b>Non-formal learning:</b> certificates from non-accredited education or training</li> <li>- <b>Informal learning:</b> professional experience(s), whether or not in combination with job profiles, specific tasks and responsibilities, citizenship and volunteering activities, hobbies</li> <li>- ...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Qualification</li> <li>- Job profiles sector</li> <li>- Company/organisation job profiles</li> <li>- Volunteering function standards</li> <li>- Non-formal qualification systems</li> <li>- Open badges, credit systems</li> <li>- Personal reference frameworks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Qualification</li> <li>- Certificate</li> <li>- Badge or micro-credential</li> <li>- Personal rating/acknowledgement</li> <li>- Job-promotion</li> <li>- Employability</li> <li>- Reintegration</li> <li>- Enjoyability</li> </ul>
	Switching education			
	Starting again after drop-out			
	Career orientation			
Working people	Update			
	Upgrade			
	Job switch horizontally or vertically			
Migrants, refugees	Reintegration			
	Recognition			
	Self-reflection			
	Inclusion			
Volunteers	Appreciation			
	Access to paid work			
	Job-promotion within voluntary work			
The citizens in general	Bildung			
	Personal development			

Source: Duvekot, et al, 2007

An analytical learning process fits in well with setting out system-steered and inside-out learning paths. Such a learning path is organised more top-down, convergent and monological. It is mainly focused on making standardised choices in the learning process, whereby the maintenance of the established standard is paramount. The assessment aims to identify as completely as possible the learning outcomes that have been achieved and to which the learner has had to conform. The focus is on *what needs to be learned*.

A holistic<sup>2</sup> learning process on the other hand is more of a process-steered and outside-in learning path. It's bottom-up driven, contextualised, divergent and dialogical. The learning need of the learner is central to the organisation of a tailored learning path and any choice in realising the learning process is possible. Validation in such learning is based on organising trust in the learner's ability to learn in any given learning environment, period and learning method, both retrospectively and prospectively; proven abilities are valued as widely as possible and the remaining learning outcomes are offered in a tailored programme. The focus therefore is on *what has been and can be learned*.

The learner's desire to learn can be intrinsically or extrinsically motivated by a desire for obtaining a formal qualification (*authorisation*), acquiring an update/upgrade of an existing professional level (*competence-building*) and/or a personal development desire (*engagement*). The dialogical character in this consists of the fact that the learner, when pursuing the desire to learn, builds as much as possible on previous learning experiences in order to gain new learning experiences. The dialogue focuses on the valuation of the prior learning experiences and the future learning outcomes still to be achieved.

2 The Greek word *holos* (or *holè*, *holon*) means whole or complete. [ὅλος- ὅλη- ὅλον]

Learning experiences may have been acquired formally, informally or non-formally, both inside and outside school. The learner builds up a file (portfolio), either by herself or under supervision, with the evidence of previous learning experiences. She adds personal reflection to indicate the value of those learning experiences in relation to the learning outcomes to be achieved. The dialogue that then takes place with the provider of the learning outcomes - possibly including the voice of the employer or other actor involved - takes the form of a motivational interview and a subsequent assessment. The assessment results in an appreciative (summative) and formative (developmental) statement about what the learner has already learned and what still needs to be learned in order to fulfil the personal learning desire through a personalised learning process.

In the holistic process of learning and validation, *trust* in each other (learner, teacher/trainer, examination board, employer, etc.) and the achievement of the desired or required learning outcomes are paramount. In short, the holistic learning paradigm in which dialogical validation and learning is the driving force of LLL focuses on **trust** in a person's ability to use previous learning experiences as input for achieving new learning experiences or outcomes. The focus is mainly on personal fulfilment within the given context of job or qualification standards. The current, more analytical learning paradigm, on the other hand, is much more focused on making systemic choices in the learning process and aimed at **controlling** systemic norms.

#### How to capacitate assessors?

*In **Malaysia**, the assessors of those applying for Validation of Prior Learning have to meet the required qualifications. Some examples of the requirements include: the assessor must be a subject matter expert or specialist and able to evaluate an individual, must have knowledge in using test assessment tools, use multiples modes for assessment and performance tasks, design tools that will assess applied and theoretical knowledge, make sure assessment tools are culturally inclusive and at appropriate language and literacy levels. (UIL, 2022)*

Trust means that the dominance of the standard that must be maintained is replaced by ownership of the standard by a teacher, trainer or HR manager. Their autonomy is guaranteed by maintaining a standard not on the basis of imposed control mechanisms (rubrics) but on the basis of trust in the assessment skills of the professional. The freedom gained by the professional can be used directly in the dialogue with a learner and to make a rich connection with people's personal standards. In this way, the professional is valued again and can operate independently, diversified according to context, learning demand and someone's background.

**Table 2: Analytic versus holistic learning**

Analytical learning paradigm (1990-2020)	Holistic Learning Paradigm (2020-.... )
Convergent process: the learner reflects on the whole of the standard (qualification). The standard is central and 'the learner's voice' is subordinate to the standard.	Divergent process: the standard (qualification or occupation) reflects on who the 'whole learner' 'already is. The 'voice of the learner' is central and the standard adds value to it.
Self-diagnostics for engaging learners is in general absent.	Self-diagnostics is available for any generic or specific field of expertise.
The assessor evaluates each part of the standard (qualification) and thus connects the standard little by little with the learner.	The assessor evaluates the learner's portfolio as a whole and links personal learning experiences to the standard (qualification)
Assessment based on a list of criteria (rubrics)	Assessment & advice on the learner's entire portfolio
Assessment is based on established requirements and rules for a negative/positive outcome.	Autonomous judgement of the assessor about the achievement of learning outcomes.
The teacher or trainer is guardian of the standard (qualification)	The teacher or trainer acts autonomous and is primarily a facilitator of the learner's learning process.
Content and form of learning is defined in the standard (qualification) and managed by the teacher or trainer.	Content and form of learning are given meaning in various contexts and are aimed at achieving learning outcomes.
Learning for set tasks with one correct solution.	Learning for tasks with various, contextualised solutions.

Source: author

Whereas in an analytical learning process the learner gradually works towards approaching 'the whole of the qualification' with every exam or learning result achieved, a holistic learning process works the other way round. In holistic learning the 'whole of the learner' is central and the components of the qualification complement that 'whole'. Analytical learning is therefore a convergent process in which the learner realises the whole of the qualification. Holistic learning is divergent because the qualification complements the learner's whole. In this context, the 'voice of the learner' is of great importance. The 'voice of the learner' is formed by valuing and documenting all that a person has learned and then using it to articulate a particular learning need. In an analytical process, little attention is paid to this 'voice' because the qualification or standard is central. In a holistic process, however, the 'voice' is central and is validated and learned to strengthen or enrich that voice.

The role of the assessor or examiner also differs substantially: in analytical assessment, the main objective is to achieve a sufficient score for all components of the qualification. Each assessment has a rubric or list of criteria that must all be demonstrably assessed for each part of the study. In a holistic assessment, the assessor gives an overall assessment based on the rubric. The whole is leading instead of each criterion or part.

The role of the teacher or trainer is also different. In an analytical learning process, the teacher or trainer is primarily the custodian of the qualification and has the responsibility to teach the learning objectives or final attainment levels of the units of study according to the defined learning pathway. Holistic learning processes, however, strengthen the autonomy of the teacher or trainer by placing each learner at the centre and by guiding the learner and providing space for personalised learning pathways.

## 5. From control to trust

When validating someone's prior learning experiences, an education or training institution or a human resources department can work with either learning pathway-dependent or learning pathway-independent testing. In the case of learning-pathway dependent testing, the learner follows the learning route offered before he takes the test offered. In the case of learning pathway-independent tests, the learner does not need to follow the education offered because she may feel that she does not need it or that she has already mastered the content. The assessment that the learner then undergoes in order to be able to complete the relevant education is carried out in a learning pathway-independent assessment.

When using an analytical framework in the case of learning pathway-independent assessment, the assessors assess all assessable aspects of the study components: knowledge, skills, attitudes and the integration of these three aspects. All these aspects are assessed separately and scored in a rubric. Only at the end of the assessment does the rubric form a whole of all parts. This is an appropriate approach, for example, for determining whether a learner has mastered critical knowledge or sub-skills, or when there is a single correct approach or solution. Above all, it is an exponent of a learning culture that is based on 'control' so that the system cannot be damaged by perhaps unfairly awarded, positive assessments.

In a controlling learning culture, the intended learning and investigative capacity of the learner is subordinate to the urge of the educational institution or organisation to be able to conclusively justify that it has not failed. That is why this culture offers little or no scope for assessing the extracurricular learning experiences that the learner already has. The analytical assessment framework simply cannot fit such learning experiences into the rubric. It is only capable of assessing learning experiences in terms of lower order thinking and acting, which, according to Miller, we can classify under educational content that we call *knows* and *knows how* (Miller, 1990). In the case of more complex thinking and acting, the analytical framework is unable or less able to value an individual learning performance in its context and personal character in a nuanced way. Analytical assessment is therefore a convergent assessment framework in which the components work towards a result. A cut-off point is possible, but in general almost all parts of the rubric should receive a score of at least sufficient.

In holistic assessment, the learner's performance cannot be reduced to a score on micro-specific assessment criteria. The whole, so to speak, is more than the sum of its parts. Holistic assessment is appropriate when the subject matter to be assessed is complex and the learner's learning performance is measured against a particular learning outcome, within a standard. The learning performance to be assessed may concern a process, product or method with which the learner reflects on part of the standard, and for which more than one solution is possible, or the professional context may differ and is not unambiguous. The number of assessment aspects will

increase as the complexity of the performance to be examined increases. This particularly concerns higher-order thinking and acting and, according to Miller, can be classified under the content we call *shows how* and *does*.

A holistic assessment process is an exponent of a learning culture based on the 'trust' that the learner is capable of thinking and acting appropriately. The system is designed to organise this trust so that justice is done to the learner's ability to learn and investigate. This ability can be assessed by means of learning activities inside and outside the school, both prior to and during a learning process. In this way, unnecessary teaching can be avoided. Space is offered to the ownership of the learning process by the learner himself. The learner is, so to speak, at the forefront and the 'system' acts primarily as a facilitator in order to provide the learner's ownership with concrete recognition in the form of a diploma, qualification and/or microcredentials. This makes a holistic learning culture also extremely suitable for organising learning strategies for *lifelong learning*.

Holistic assessment is a divergent process in which the learner is advised from 'the whole' of all that the learner has already learned, about a personalised learning pathway that focuses only on what actually still needs to be learned to achieve the intended learning goal. No learning environment or form of learning is excluded, and it may even be justified that a learner appears to have fully met a particular standard based on their prior learning. The assessment framework has no fixed format for assessing the different parts of a learning pathway because personal learning achievements can be translated into larger learning units or sets of learning outcomes that together cover a certain competence within an occupational or a qualification standard. In fact, the format should be able to make a good translation from the learner's personal standard - a portfolio with documentation of relevant learning achievements - to a given formal effect.

#### How to provide tailored assessment facilities?

*There are two types of processes for validation services in Colombia. The first process is an indirect assessment of documents and a verification of the necessary requirements to obtain a certification or admission to a non-formal school. The second process is for the direct evaluation of the results and certification that proves one's knowledge or experience acquired at work. The first process was implemented when the government allowed the validation of the bachelor's degree obtained in another country and the extradition programs that allowed people 18 years of age or older to obtain primary and secondary education (Decree 3011/1997). The latter program was established by Decree 3011 of 1997, and its objective was to implement a program that considered a comprehensive vision of human development without any discrimination. (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 1997)*

*The Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (SENA) manages the second process for certification of prior competences acquired in non-formal education or education for work and human development. Currently, SENA offers approximately 3,854 courses across the country. Additionally, SENA can certify a person without taking a course if he can demonstrate the work experience and knowledge in the field he wants to certify. This process is entirely free. The SENA training aims at recognizing a person's empirical knowledge in any field, considering their work skills. This process is for adults (18 years of age or older) who are not included in the Ministry of National Education's standard curriculum. (Web.ref. SENA)*

The shift from control over 'what needs to be learned' to trust in 'what has been learned and can be learned' depends very much on the role that the legitimising bodies play in a learning culture. In the analytical learning culture, control of the extent to which what has been learned corresponds to the content and learning objectives of what has been set out in the standard is central. Examination boards, sector councils and others monitor the standards and when awarding them look especially at the correct handling of the reporting and grading forms. They only look at the content of the dialogue between the learner and the professional if there are demonstrable complaints or mistakes.

A holistic learning culture is based on trust in the arrangements and management of dialogues about evaluating prior learning and opening up further learning opportunities for all learners. The autonomy of both the learner and the professional is paramount. The quality assurance of the results of the dialogues thus transcends the system's tendency towards quality control. Trust is ensured by the fact that the validating bodies in the learning systems, such as examination boards, sector councils and others, have clarity regarding the quality of the professionals' assessment skills and their ability to clearly articulate the learner's input into the learning process in accountability reports.

Analytical and holistic assessment principles (see also section 6) can both be used in a learning-independent tests or assessments and each has its own strengths and weaknesses. With the advent of personalised or person-centred learning, based on learning outcomes, however, the existing input model of the learning system shifts

explicitly to an output model. In an output model, holistic assessment lends itself best to assessing authentic, professional skills and learning outcomes.

## 6. Dialogical validation ...

Connecting the learning needs of the learner with the learning offer within education, training and/or working environments is based on validating prior learning experiences and taking them as a starting point for organising a learning cycle in which new learning outcomes are achieved at regular intervals and anchored in one's portfolio. The dialogical character of such a cycle is based on Paulo Freire's view that the dialogue between learner and teacher should essentially be open and equal and concerns the desire or need to shape and determine the content of learning. Without openness and equality in the dialogue about learning, there can only be limited use of validating one's previous learning to initiate meaningful and personalised learning (Freire, 1972).

Such a dialogue has a holistic character in which portfolio management and assessment methods are aimed at the summative (assessment OF learning), formative (assessment FOR learning) and reflective (assessment AS learning) validation of someone's generic qualities for the purpose of creating and strengthening a personal career strategy. The holistic character consists of the learner learning to meet certain learning outcomes both inside and outside the school-environment, based on a self-determined assessment pattern and self-constructed evidence. A rubric is more analytical in its assessment, but as it is a conscious choice, it can also be part of a broader, holistic assessment process in the dialogue between learner and teacher, so to speak.

Learning - and also validation - can be considered in Freire's view as a cycle that starts with experience, which is reflected upon, which then leads to a certain action, which finally results in a concrete new experience that can be reflected upon: *'Learning is a process where knowledge is presented to us, then shaped through understanding, discussion and reflection'* (Freire, 1998, p. 22). Such learning revolves around the experiences that people gain in specific situations within their living and working environment and about which they can enter into a dialogue with those around them. This dialogue motivates and enables people to (self)reflect. The right combination of experience and reflection then leads to new learning processes, which ultimately causes people to gain autonomy, resulting in a new perspective on the future. Such a cycle is based on the integration of validation and learning. The role of the portfolio is best utilised in the cycle if it is aligned with various functions within the cycle (planning, guiding and assessing), and if the portfolio fulfils a central function in the guidance and monitoring of personal development (Tartwijk & Driessen, 2009).

How to integrate validation and learning advice for all target groups on a regional level?

*In Portugal, in Qualifica centres, integrating validation and guidance leads to efficiencies in costs and human resources. The fact that the Qualifica centres are embedded in different types of local entity (schools, PES) allows them to understand the particularities of their local environment in relation to the needs of adult learners and specific target groups like newcomers and the demands of the local labour market. This organizational setup not only improves communication between different local entities but also generates savings on staff and infrastructure costs (Cedefop, 2019). It's an approach for designing personalised, tailored learning paths.*

Validation processes can vary according to ambition, intended effect and learner context or situation. *Dialogic validation* that serves the realisation of one or more of these effects can be defined as *the learning-independent assessment of an individual's learning experiences and advice on further learning with a view to achieving a desired learning effect through a personalised learning path* (Duvekot, 2017).

Broadly speaking, there are three main forms of generating impact through validation (Duvekot, 2016):

- I. Validation aimed at civil effect: the learner wants to obtain a civil effect; testing is characterised by a classical approach in which a programme standard is chosen, for which a specific portfolio is then completed and assessed in order to realise access to the programme and/or accelerated learning. The common term for this kind of validation is 'authorisation'.
- II. Validation aimed at social effect: the learner chooses to strengthen certain areas of competence. This can be in the context of employability, professionalisation, integration or career (re)orientation. Use can be made of a portfolio format such as a personal, broad portfolio or a portfolio format aimed more specifically at certain areas of competence. The goal is to start learning (again) or to keep learning up to standard (initiation, upgrade or update). The common term for this kind of validation is 'competence-building'.

- III. Validation aimed at a personal effect: the learner can choose to achieve a purely personal effect (empowerment, inclusion, content enrichment, *enjoyability*) when entering into an assessment. This could mean, for example, that the learner wants to have a personal portfolio of personal learning experiences validated as a self-contained, reflective assessment procedure. It is then up to the learner to use the assessment report as an outcome to undertake something in the context of personal learning objectives. However, it can also remain as such a 'portfolio assessment'. If desired, this personal effect can be recorded in an official certificate with civil effect, or a badge/microcredentials. The common term for this kind of validation is 'engagement'.

## 7. ... and dialogic learning

Like validation, learning is part of a holistic process that is flexible and dialogical and based on the achievement of desired learning outcomes by the learner. The holistic character consists in the learner being able to meet certain learning outcomes both inside and outside the school with self-constructed evidence.

In holistic learning and validation, *trust* in each other (learner, teacher, examination board, employer, etc.) and the definitions of learning outcomes are paramount. The learner's self-chosen or orchestrated evidence and the open approach to learning outcomes ensure that learning and validation is a holistic process.

The process of validation and learning is an integrated process, characterised by ten (10) principles underpinning assessment and (further) learning in a holistic learning culture:

1. *Learning outcomes*: the final results of learning processes that jointly and collectively produce a certain *effect* for the learner. Learning outcomes are the integration of knowledge, skills, attitude related to a particular learning unit that can be both validated and learned.
2. *Concentricity*: learning outcomes assume that a person's development shows itself in the degree of complex and autonomous action. A person's development is built up from simple and supervised action, via semi-complex and -supervised action, to complex and autonomous action as a competent professional. The principle of concentricity implies that if someone's capacity has been demonstrated at a certain level, then the underlying acting levels have also been demonstrated. Learning and validation are aimed at making this concentricity in someone's development visible.
3. *Personalised learning*: the dynamic learning concept in which the learner is central and can (co-)initiate and engage in flexible and personalised learning arrangements within a learning culture based on self-directed, flexible, prospective and lifelong learning (Duvekot, 2016).
4. *Learning path independence*: only the learning outcome counts, not the learning path to achieve a learning outcome. It is a concept of learning that can take place independent of time and place in formal, non-formal and informal contexts and can already be demonstrated through validation or be acquired through learning.
5. *Learning environments*: any context can lend itself to a learning environment such as the workplace, the classroom, e-learning, private environment, volunteering, etc.
6. *Equivalence of learning*: formal, informal and non-formal learning are forms of learning that can all, in their own way and equally, result in the validation of learning outcomes. This also entails that the 'paradox of assessing learning outcomes' (see chapter 13, critical aspect nr. 4) can be solved.
7. *Assessment of learning* is the independent assessment of a person's learning experiences and advice on further learning with a view to achieving a desired learning effect through a personalised learning pathway (Duvekot, 2017). As a learning path-independent assessment system, it focuses on recognising, appreciating, acknowledging and further developing the competences that someone has already learned in any learning environment. *Assessment* as a tool to compare and value the learning history of the learner and the learning outcomes of the assessing organisation can use three forms of assessment to make this comparison:
  - Assessment *of* learning, whereby a person's portfolio is summarily assessed against a chosen yardstick and can lead directly to (partial) recognition.
  - Assessment *for* learning, which formally involves development-oriented advice on a follow-up trajectory in which the set goals can be achieved.
  - Assessment *as* learning, which shows the reflective nature of validation. Assessment is experienced as a learning process in itself.



8. *Dialogical*: approaching learning and validation as a continuous and open dialogue between the learner, the professional assessor/teacher in which both have an input and in which the determination of the actual learning need - form, content and meaning - of the learner is central.
9. *Shared ownership of the learning process*: in 'the Learning Triangle' (see § 7), the ownership of the learning process is implemented according to a holistic learning setting. The ownership is shared between the learner, the professional and 'the employer':
  - a. *The learner*: the (conscious) ownership of the learner of her own learning experiences and the reflective ability to connect to the learning outcomes that are valuable for an assessing organisation to support internal working and/or learning processes.
  - b. *The 'teacher'*: The role of the professional will shift from the standard-dependent expert who looks after the professional or job standards and ensures that the system is and remains accountable, to the autonomous professional who, in close dialogue with the learner (and possibly the employer), can function flexibly within the broad context of learnability and validation of competences and learning outcomes. This means that the ownership of the professional within LLL routes shows a shift from monitoring the analytical, mass learning and control-oriented learning paradigm to ownership within a more holistic, personalised, customised and trust-based learning paradigm.
  - c. *The 'human resources manager'*: within the learning organisation the ownership of the learning process consists of the learning and validation of the content of the job requirements as required by the organisation or context to fulfil the organisational goals. From this content, 'the employer' can be co-owner of a learners' learning process if the learners also learn within or on behalf of the organisation.
10. *Trust*: shifting from control over 'what needs to be learned' to trust in 'what has been learned and can be learned' depends on the role that the legitimising bodies play in a learning culture. A holistic learning culture is based on trust in the arrangements and management of dialogues about evaluating prior learning and opening up further learning opportunities for all learners. The autonomy of both the learner and the professional is paramount. The quality assurance of the results of the dialogues thus transcends the system's tendency towards quality control. Trust is ensured by the fact that the validating bodies in the learning systems, such as examination boards, sector councils and others, have clarity regarding the quality of the professionals' assessment skills and their ability to clearly articulate the learner's input into the learning process in accountability reports.

#### How to design tools for self-assessment?

*MYSKILLS is a tool implemented in **Germany**, providing multilingual electronic tests that assess competences in job seekers with several years of experience but no formal proof as well, as in the case of migrants without formal qualification or proof of their competences. MYSKILLS is supporting job placement officers in getting a better picture of an individual's competences in the 4-7 occupational fields of application of the respective profession. Per profession, the tests of about 120 items each take about four hours to complete. The test is available in six languages – German, English, Arabic, Farsi, Russian and Turkish. It uses a simple language and a culture sensitive approach. (Ball, 2019)*

## 8. A formula for integrating validation and learning

Integrating dialogic validation and learning into a lifelong learning strategy requires sharing the responsibility for engaging in and completing learning processes with the learner. When this integration of validation and learning is embraced and the focus is put on the learner, nothing stands in the way of learning systems learning to listen to "the voice of the learner" by facilitating dialogues about what has already been learned and what is desired to learn next. For these purposes of integration and focus, the following formula can be used to connect the desire to learn with the fulfilment of that learning need through a personalised learning path:

$$P^{sr} + V^{pf} = L3$$

This formula stands for:

**P<sup>sr</sup>**: Personal learning needs, based on Self-evaluation and Reflection.

**V<sup>pf</sup>**: Validation of Prior Learning for Future Learning

**L3**: LifeLong Learning.

This formula needs to be supported by a roadmap covering all building blocks concerning outreach facilities, guidance and assessment services, capacitation of experts, tailored learning opportunities, accurate return on investment models for employers and agencies, clear impact potential for learners, supporting legislation and regulation, rules of engagement for schools, institutes and universities, funding arrangements, etc. In § 12 such a roadmap is presented. In essence, the formula aims at triggering and feeding dialogues on learning between:

- a. The learner with a personal standard or frame of reference (beliefs, goals, professional products) as input.
- b. The teacher (assessor, coach, tutor & teacher) with qualification standards/certificates.
- c. The HR professional (all human resource development functions) with occupational or job-specific standards.

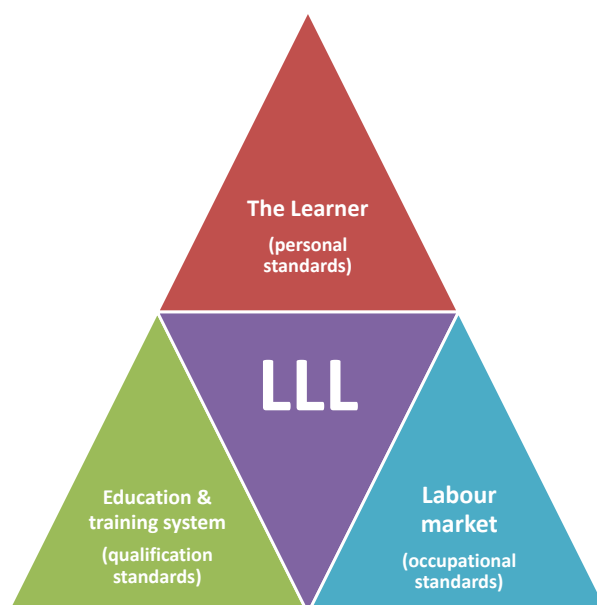
## 9. Partners in Learning

Various 'partners in learning' operate in processes of LLL: the learner as a learning individual, all organisations in and around the labour market as learning organisations and the education and training organisations as so-called learning schools or universities. Together, these partners discuss and organise the purpose, form and content of LLL strategies. The government and the social partners promote this process on a macro level with legislation and funding. The interaction of these 'partners in learning' takes place in *the learning triangle*. In *the learning triangle*, the dialogue on an appropriate learning strategy plays an important role in organising an LLL. After all, learning brings the three actors in the process together, activates them all on the basis of their own responsibility and offers action perspectives for all in the objective(s) and the learning effect to be achieved.

A learning strategy is designed and implemented in the dialogue between actors and is fed by input from:

- The *learner* who invests in her/his learning strategy based on a personal competence profile in which the prior learning experiences are documented and articulated in a personal reference framework or standard. Prior learning experiences reflect one's acting in specific professional, critical situations.<sup>3</sup>
- The *organisation* that invests in its human capital through human resource development programming, which is based on its description of function-oriented competence profiles or job profiles.
- The *education and training sector* (schools, universities, training institutes, etc.) that supports LLL by means of tailored learning offers and provides impact through certification/qualification. This contribution to the dialogue is formulated in terms of qualification programmes or professional competence profiles.

**Figure 1 - The Learning Triangle**



Source: Duvekot, 2016.

3 *Critical situations* are characteristic situations for demonstrating certain acting skills, knowledge and attitudinal aspects that show the personality itself in that acting, touch the core of the function or show the profession as such in the broadest sense. Critical situations can be visualised at various levels and can be distinguished in terms of level by the degree of guided or autonomous action and by the degree of acting in simple to multiple complex situations.



It is up to authorities and social partners (employers and trade unions) to create favourable conditions for the interplay between the actors in the new social contract, through legislation and funding. A good example of this macro level helping to create favourable conditions for a more holistic approach to validation + learning is New Zealand. This country - driven by neo-liberal market principles - was the first in the 1980s to establish a national qualifications framework with an associated qualifications authority: the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) (Young, 2001). A general framework was created that covered the prevailing national qualifications, including higher education. The NZQA laid the foundation for a lifelong learning policy with a focus on flexible learning pathways through the design of learning outcomes-based qualifications. The acquisition of learning outcomes no longer depended on where they were acquired (in or out of school) but on the extent to which learning outcomes had some demonstrable value in relation to national qualifications. This broad view went hand in hand with the prioritisation of the advisory function of the Inspectorate of Education over the control function.

The most important pillar in the contract, however, is the learner herself, because she<sup>4</sup> is the one who will - finally - be at the heart of designing lifelong learning strategies. The real change agent for transforming the learning culture therewith is the learner with her input for learning based on a personal reference framework. This input so far has been largely missing in the game of learning. So, holistic learning is all about me, for the sake of the collective in the learning society.

## 10. Hey, it's me who's learning!

With the focus on personalised learning, it is most important to understand that - when it comes to strengthening the autonomy of the learner - it is crucial to afford the learner in becoming the director of her own learning process. For some learners, this means that they need to be firmly supported in order to learn to reflect on their own actions and to get grips on the self-value of those actions. For others, it will probably be easier to discover this self-value. In short, if every learner learns to take account of the value of their own learning history, either pampered by support from a learning system or self-empowered, an important precondition will have been met for shaping the dialogues within 'the learning triangle' on lifelong learning in a holistic way.

Since every learner is somewhere in the bandwidth of 100% pampered and 100% empowered learning, everyone will need to be supported to some extent. That support - especially aimed at learning to reflect on and value one's own actions - is an important task for the professionals within the learning and HRM systems. To this end, the professionals themselves must of course also be able to reflect on their own actions and must - above all - with an open mind be able to help open the way for the 'voice of the learner' to be heard. After all, it's also them who are learning!

How to validate occupational standards and link them to qualification standards?

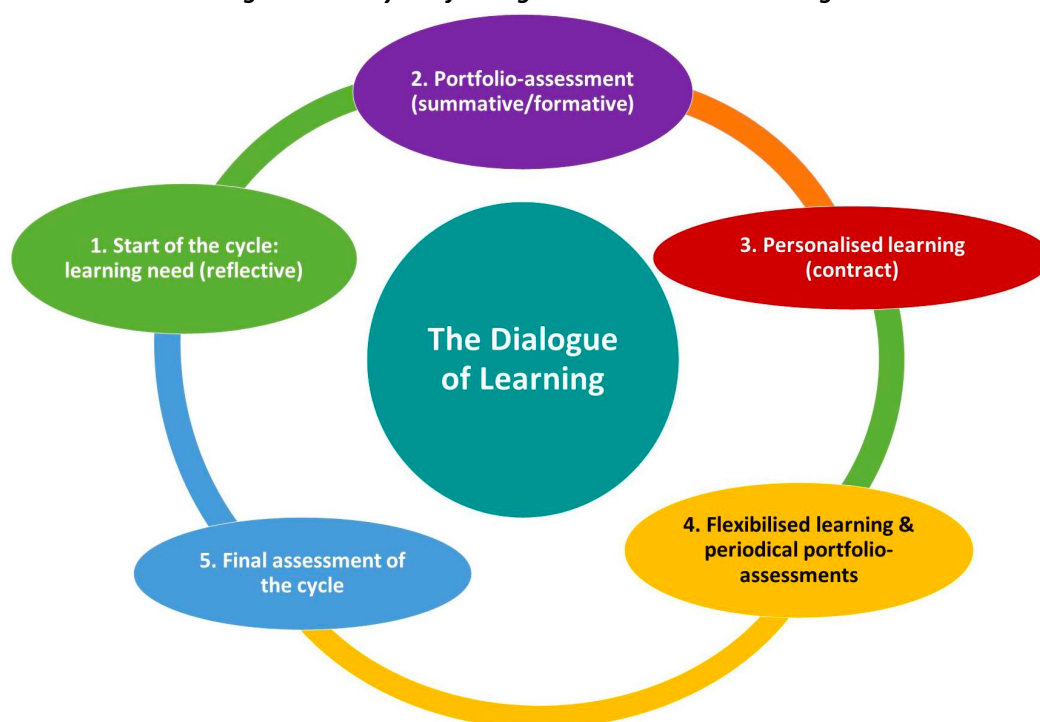
**The ChileValora scheme (CV)**, established in Chile in 2008, is an example of a dialogue between the labour market and the education and training system (Endrodi, 2019). CV is an occupational standard system that has a value in itself but is also linked through various dialogues with schools and universities to qualification standards. It is targeted at people with few or no formal qualifications in order to improve job mobility and employability. The main objective of the initiative is to provide formal recognition of individuals' labour market relevant skills and competences, regardless of how they have been acquired and whether they have a title or degree awarded by formal education. It also aims at promoting lifelong learning opportunities by directing unsuccessful candidates who do not receive certification towards competency-based professional training. Successful applicants receive a certificate that records competences who can then become part of the Registry of Certified Persons (Registry). Those who do not meet all criteria have the option to search for alternatives within the training system that enable them to fill the gaps. The country's public employment and training office provides support for these efforts. The CV scheme is expected to increase employability and reduce the time spent without employment. For those in employment, the certification has the potential to generate a positive impact on mobility within and outside the company or even intra-sector. From the employer's side, it enables companies to hire workers whose skills are certified through a trusted and transparent process whilst reducing the cost and time spent by employers on searching for skilled labour. In the first ten years after the start of CV, over 100 000 individuals have certified their competences through the scheme.

4 Whenever 'she' or 'her' is written, the reader should be aware that this also means 'he', 'his' or 'him'.

## 11. It's cyclical

Dialogic validation and learning can be interpreted as a repeatable or recurring cycle in which validation and learning alternate. At the end of each cycle, the outcome may be the starting point of a new cycle, if desired, or a new cycle may be started in its own right. In all cases, there are successive learning cycles that are necessary and useful for the learner in the context of shaping lifelong learning in order to maintain and improve himself sustainably in the learning society (empowerment and employability).

**Figure 2: The cycle of dialogical validation and learning**



Source: Duvekot 2017.

The successive steps in the cycle are:

1. The awareness of personal values and the articulation of the learning needs of the learner on the basis of his/her already acquired learning experiences, including reflection on his/her own actions, are central. This documentation and demand articulation are recorded in the learner's portfolio. This portfolio forms the start of the process of dialogical validation.  
Immersing the learner in the process can add value to the dialogue by giving the learner a good idea of what can be expected from each other.
2. Valuing or assessing and advising on this learning need in an intake assessment, in order to recognise the learning outcomes already acquired (summative) and to design a personalised learning path (formative).
3. After the intake, the learner receives an appropriate summative and/or formative offer, depending on the learning objective: recognition of the individual's value (summative) in the form of a portfolio rating, certificate or diploma combined with development-oriented (formative) advice on further learning in the form of a personalised learning path.  
N.B. In case of the choice to pursue only recognition, the learner completes the cycle with Step 3 where the personal portfolio is updated (and validated) with the result achieved.
4. The learner then receives recognition of what he has already learned and follows a personalised and flexible learning path, designed through blended learning with periodic tests or progress assessments. The portfolio can serve as a progress tool for the learner herself and in her communication with the learning provider's tutor.
5. Finally, the new learning outcomes of each completed learning cycle are summarily assessed by means of a final assessment and anchored in the person's portfolio or file.

If desired, the result of one cycle can lead to the beginning of a new learning cycle. In fact, this is lifelong learning pure and simple because the result of one learning cycle generates new learning needs for a subsequent learning cycle. We call this *the portfolio-loop* in which the completion of a learning process leads to an adjusted or enriched portfolio that can be the starting point of a renewed learning process (Duvekot, 2016).

#### How to provide an effective portfolio-training?

*In the Netherlands, a portfolio training of refugee women by the International Women's Centre in Den Helder results in these women properly recognising and self-assessing the knowledge and skills they bring with them to their new country. Subsequently, they can make targeted investments in realising the social opportunities that this recognition of their own employability offers within their new context. In almost all cases, this training leads to lower costs for social benefits because the women find paid work to which they are immediately suited or end up in apprenticeships. The social profit of the local investment in the portfolio training is estimated at approx. €20,000 per woman in social benefits that no longer need to be paid. (Duvekot, 2016)*

## 12. Perspectives

*Dialogical validation and learning* gives space to learners' needs and learning strategies. It enables the learner to articulate a concrete learning need that can either result in a direct outcome or - more indirectly - make a connection to the design of a learning path that is flexible in terms of content and form. Since dialogical validation in the form of '*assessment as learning*' is a learning process in itself, it forms an integral part of personalised learning.

In the light of this result expectation, the perspective is broad and deep:

- *Dialogic validation and learning* can be used in a wide range of applications in the context of personal development issues and training and personnel policy (career development, meeting formal training requirements, etc.), for different target groups and at different cognitive levels. Since organisations generally function with different target groups who also work at different levels, dialogical validation presents itself as a broadly applicable method for pursuing certain learning goals for each target group or level.
- An important factor in the use of *dialogical validation and learning* is the savings it can bring in terms of time and money when practising personal career development or - on an organisational level - human resource management, both for normative and developmental policies.
- *Dialogic validation and learning* can be used for general or specific learning objectives by independent professionals and within organisations. The advantage lies in linking more efficiently the available potential and the need for a certain potential from person or organisation. It can also help filling in labour market shortages by being able to search new staff within non-traditional recruitment groups.
- Extrinsic factors can give rise to the use of *dialogical validation and learning* in activities aimed at career development and personnel policy. It may concern, for instance, quality requirements set by the legislator with regard to personnel working in a certain sector. These requirements may be general requirements such as having a relevant qualification. Specific requirements may also be set, for instance with regard to safety procedures in production processes. In such cases, the use of *dialogic validation and learning* can be the catching up that professionals or organisations have to do to meet the new requirements.
- Intrinsic factors can be a promoter of *dialogical validation and learning* in career development and personnel policy. Seen from the learner's eye, the initiative to gain access to personalised learning can be taken from the motivation to upgrade or update one's own capacity or to do some job-hopping. The employer can also act as a catalyst by facilitating validation services in terms of time and money.
- Utilisation of work-to-work policies, both internal and external, can be supported more efficiently through *dialogical validation and learning*, as it provides a broad view of what is or is not appropriate in the allocation of personal potential (matchmaking).
- The process of *dialogical validation and learning* stands and falls with the way in which a personalised portfolio is prepared, used and, in view of the recurring character of the cycle (see figure 2), can actually generate a recurring effect on the process of LLL of a learner. Practical examples show that the information and guidance of candidates for dialogical validation is particularly crucial in the phase in which the portfolio

is made. After all, the portfolio is the input that the professional provides for the assessment and the basic material on which they base their personal learning needs. In the assessment, the evaluation takes place that subsequently determines the type of recognition that is needed from a personal or organisational perspective.

- Flanking policy from stakeholders at national level like the authorities and national employer and trade unions can have very positive impact on the implementation of integrated and holistically inspired validation and learning processes. Flanking policy mainly concerns legal, financial and quality-assurance policy and measures.

#### *How to create a favourable legal framework for the new social contract?*

*The **Mexican legal framework** offers many possibilities for linking validation perspectives for lifelong learning to education and labour market opportunities through qualification standards and certification. These possibilities exist not just for Mexican people but also for migrants and refugees. The legal framework is derived from constitutional mandates that offer regulations and guidance. The Mexican Constitution's Article 3 (revised in May 2020) establishes that every individual has the right to education. This right to education enables individuals to acquire, update, complete and expand their knowledge, capacities, abilities, and aptitudes which will allow them to achieve their personal and professional development. Of particular relevance for validating learning experiences and integrating them in tailored learning paths is the General Law of Education which was adapted in 1993 and provides the regulatory bases for such validating practices. The legal framework addresses the validation of knowledge of adult education and that obtained in a self-taught way (not at formally accredited school, but through non-certified training) or through work experience. It also indicates that the normative specifications must be established by means of Secretarial Agreements, that is, of the Federal Executive. In this sense, Agreement 286 is fundamental as it establishes the guidelines to validate knowledge and skills corresponding to formal educational levels (mainly upper secondary education) or job skills. (GOB, 2017)*

### 13. Critical success factors

One of the difficult aspects of dialogic validation and learning is not only to teach learners within the new social contract for learning to actually articulate their voice but also to teach the other contracting parties to hear that voice. In addition, everyone needs to get a grip on the holistic way of assessing and advising on personal learning experiences and the feasibility of personal learning and career paths in terms of time, money and concrete learning effect and personalised learning. A number of critical success factors can be identified (UNESCO 1996, Bjørnåvold, 2000, Duvekot, 2016):

1. A favourable *legal framework including funding* for activating bottom-up steered lifelong learning processes needs to be in place. Government and social partners (employers and trade unions) need to realise that it's a return on investment if they are offering people cross-sectoral validation and learning opportunities that are accessible, affordable and inclusive.
2. *Awareness of the value of dialogues on validation and learner-centred learning* requires broad support. Awareness is needed for creating the willingness to invest in portfolio formation on the one hand and dialogical validation on the other. Acceptance of each other's role and responsibility (ownership) is important in this respect to make validation truly dialogical. It is also important to recognise that the function of validation is integrated into the learning cycle.  
Special attention needs to be on reaching out to those learners that haven't been in the loop of lifelong learning for various reasons: drop-out in education, negative experiences in the formal learning system, no awareness of the value of work-based learning experiences, etc.
3. The way in which the content of the learning offer is translated into concrete and recognisable *learning outcomes*. This says a lot about the way in which *dialogical validation and learning* based on a learner's learning needs can be linked to a personalised learning arrangement.
4. The *paradox of specific or generic assessment of knowledge and skills* needs to be solved. This paradox entails that informal and non-formal learning experiences and paths are validated and used for lifelong learning only on their specific value, i.e. the value of one's skills and knowledge in the single action. The formal learning process however is well able to assess knowledge and skills on the basis of one-off or specific learning achievements and to value these with a generic certificate or diploma with which a

person is considered to have the capacity to act in all kinds of similar actions. At present, it is often argued that a particular skill and its embedded knowledge gained in an informal or non-formal setting has no value or equivalence to learning the same skill and its embedded knowledge in a formal training domain. Therefore, most learners will still have to go through the formal learning and assessment process despite the demonstrated skill and knowledge. However, such unnecessary education or training can be avoided by also being able to link the specificity of informal and non-formal learning outcomes to the generic nature of learning outcomes achieved or to be achieved in formal education or training. The paradox can only be resolved if the dialogue between all actors acknowledges the equality of informal, non-formal and formal learning experiences, which are owned by the learner.

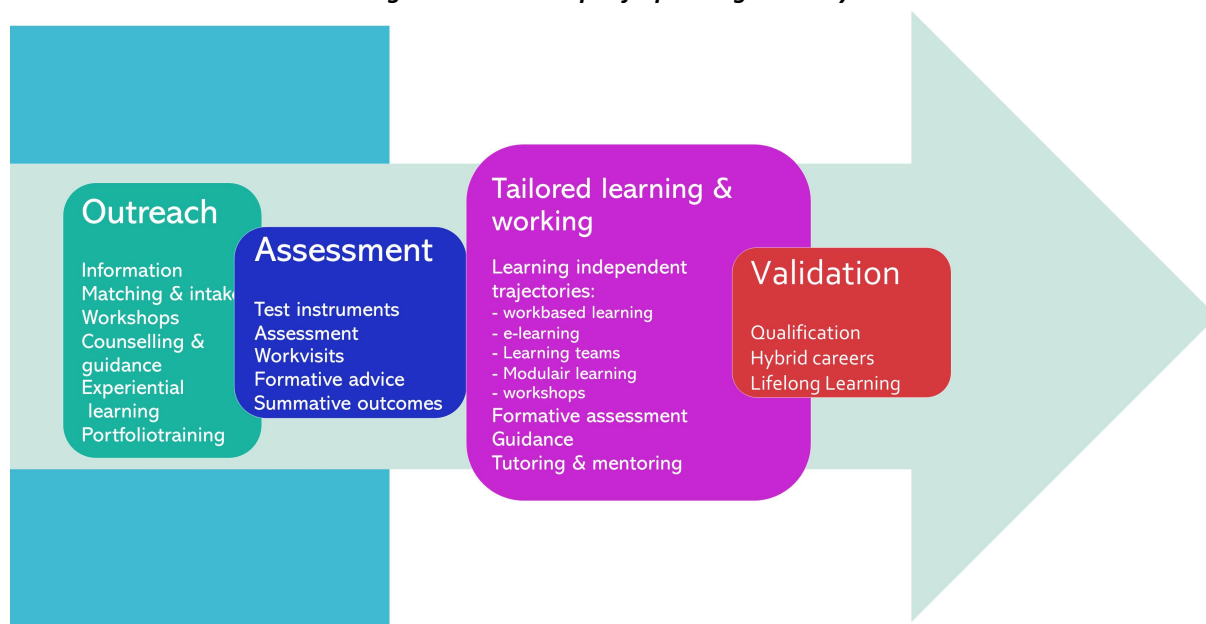
5. The *portfolio* as carrier of the dialogical validation and the personal learning arrangement. The portfolio is a powerful tool to give form and substance to the learner's ownership of learning. Facilitation from the *education and training system* (see figure 1) is a welcome push in this direction by offering ...  
 ... portfolio trainings and counselling services focused on self-management of competences. This assists the learners in their portfolio formation and self-reflection on their own knowledge and skills.  
 ... self-assessment tools to help determine competence and ambition levels. This can be important for determining the goal and direction of an envisaged personalised learning path.
6. The *professionalisation* of staff members dealing with education, training and HRD in the field of dialogical validation and learning. This mainly concerns the creation of support and learning to deal with new forms of testing and new roles such as those of coach, portfolio supervisor and assessor. The ability to listen to each other in the dialogue in order to create an effective balance between learning need and learning supply is paramount.
7. Assessment should primarily work as a *diagnostic tool* to determine what a learner has already learned and how she could develop further. This diagnostic process is less about making someone's learning experiences conform to a learning system and more about personal appreciation and offering development opportunities. Giving grades for learning achievements is not so relevant here but generating self-directed learning for the benefit of the collective (all learners in 'the learning society') all the more so!
8. *Assessment* has four main forms: self-assessment, assessment of learning, assessment for learning and assessment as learning. All forms can be integrated into the concept of personalised learning of the learning school and learning organisation. They all enrich the creation of a valuable connection with the learner.
9. The *ownership* within the *dialogue validation and learning through the formula*  $P^{sr} + V^{pf} = L3$ : *Personal learning needs (based on Self-evaluation + Reflection) + Validation of Prior Learning for Future Learning = LifeLong Learning*, helps creating rich dialogues on validation and learning between:
  - a. The learner taking care of the (motivated) learning need, self-reflection and -management of competences and the construction and management of the portfolio. The portfolio is the basis for constructing personalised learning paths.
  - b. The education and training system managing the standards (qualifications and certificates) and must be able to respond to the learner's learning needs, i.e. be able to offer customised services in terms of meaning, form and content and to support the learner's self-learning capacity.
  - c. The labour market organisations being responsible for articulating the organisation's competence needs and facilitating the worker's investment in learning.
10. For *flexible learning arrangements*, not only the content but also the form in which the learning takes place is important. This means (1) blended learning for the design and (2) flexible, personalised learning arrangements for the content. Form and content are based on learning outcomes. However, flexibility should not be hindered by the 'rigidity of the learning or working system'. The learner is paramount and the system is there for the learner, not the other way around!
11. Formalising the personalised learning process by means of bipartite or tripartite learning agreements and anchoring them in the tracking system and education and examination regulations is important for quality assurance and accountability of the process.
12. *Validation of learning* has as its final stage the formalisation of all that has been assessed before, during and at the end of the learning pathway through evaluation. Validation of learning is therefore, at its core, the translation of all that has been learned (formal, non-formal and informal), wherever it has been learned, into an appropriate civil effect such as a diploma, a qualification, a certificate, badges or microcredentials, a formal professional honour or step, etc.
13. *Action research* is needed into practices, approach, methodology and impact of dialogical validation in combination with personalised learning. This research is aimed at learning to use both phenomena as separate processes and in combination within the framework of LLL strategies.



## 11. Roadmap for an Action Plan for the new Social Contract on Lifelong Learning

If *dialogic validation and learning* are the connecting tool for the partners in the *learning triangle*, then it is important to map its different functions, and project a roadmap for an action plan that aims at establishing a new social contract as the basis for a holistic learning culture. In the roadmap every partner in LLL-strategies can fill-in its own tasks and responsibilities for embracing the new culture of lifelong learning. The roadmap is based on the *Upskilling Pathways* approach (web.ref. OP). This is an approach that defines the steps to take: outreach, advice, assessment, portfolio support, professionalisation, tailored learning offers, quality assurance, legal frameworks, research and monitoring. With this conceptual approach, the roadmap can adapt flexibly to a demand for a holistic approach in learning and working processes within the new social contract.

**Figure 3: The concept of Upskilling Pathways**



Source: Duvekot & Valdés-Cotera, 2019.

The *Upskilling Pathways* concept starts with **outreach-activities**, in which target groups – especially the ones that are not quite in the loop of lifelong learning strategies - are approached and guided in their identification of learning needs. The focus is first on raising people’s awareness of the value of their prior learning for aiming at further/new learning and career opportunities. Secondly, guidance and advice aim at enhancing people’s voice and assisting them in creating meaningful and positive dialogues on validating and learning in order to strengthen their participation in the learning society.

The next phase of **assessment** aims at defining the learning path at an individual level in terms of content and form by creating trust in the value of one’s prior learning and tuning into a personalised, further learning path. In this phase it’s determined which components can already be regarded as completed and which still need to be learned. The **tailored learning & working** phase means that the learning pathway is executed in accordance with the agreements that were made about this after the assessment in an educational and work-based agreement. **Validation** as the final phase rounds off the learning path (certification) and puts the focus on lifelong learning for maintenance, upgrade or otherwise of what has been learned and practised. Validation in this sense therefore has meaning for the completion of learning and for emphasising that learning is a recurring process in the lifelong learning arena.

How to create a basis for outreach to all citizens?

*In Brazil, there is a national system for the recognition and certification of professional knowledge and skills. The opportunities for validating prior learning are quite comprehensive as they involve both public and private education and labour sectors as well as governmental institutions to provide validation and accreditation of acquired knowledge, skills and competences to all Brazilian natural citizens, including migrants. Brazil is in the implementing/strengthening stage of ‘the roadmap for lifelong learning’. (Macauley & Duvekot, 2022)*

The four phases are ideally designed and implemented as an integrated approach with subsequent phases for Outreach, Assessment, Tailored Learning & Working and Validation, including accompanying policies. Each phase within the roadmap is characterised by a wide range of services that can be flexibly adapted to suit all learners and their learning needs. This means that within each phase, not all the services listed will necessarily be used. Nor is it necessary to build a large assessment centre covering all process steps; it is sufficient for successive services to be linked together so that a kind of *one-stop shop* for personalised learning pathways is available to the learner. In general, the range of services for each stage can be as follows, noting that not every service needs to be present to initiate dialogue between the *partners in learning*. The table below illustrates the step-by-step process of the roadmap and highlights the linking function of assessment and the ultimate validation of a person's capacity by validating her realised achievement of a desired learning goal or career step.

**Table 3. Roadmap for an Action Plan for the new Social Contract on Lifelong Learning**

<b>Outreach</b>		
<b>Phase 1</b>	<u>Definition</u>	<i>Outreach includes services and target group orientation for creating meaningful dialogues in which learning needs are found and articulated and the most appropriate development path is prepared. In the learning society, outreach is about engaging and empowering learners and specific target groups to share their previous learning experiences in order to create a personalised and future-oriented pathway. The main outcome of outreach activities is geared at raising awareness of people's rich learning history and the potential for building further on this history.</i>
	<u>Process</u>	Practice in which the organisation/institution, together with clients, defines and approaches the target groups, takes stock of and helps articulate learning needs, and prepares and manages appropriate processes for dialogic validation and learning.
	<u>Building blocks</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local and regional learning centres for advice and guidance</li> <li>• Information-provision</li> <li>• Raising awareness campaigns, especially focusing on the ones who are not yet in the picture</li> <li>• Realising cross-sectoral equality of formal, informal and non-formal learning outcomes</li> <li>• Provide legal rights, like a legal right to portfolio evaluation</li> <li>• Matching &amp; intake processes</li> <li>• Available funding schemes; counselling &amp; guidance</li> <li>• Portfolio training</li> <li>• Self-assessment &amp; self-management of competences</li> <li>• Diagnostic and testing tools (for empowerment)</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment</b>		
<b>Phase 2</b>	<u>Definition</u>	<i>Assessment aims to identify and validate acquired learning (summative) and determine a further development path (formative) at individual level in terms of content and trajectory for intended learning outcomes (tailored).</i>
	<u>Process</u>	Assessment is a means for diagnosing where the learner stands when it comes to deciding where 'to go to'. Parts of one's personal roadmap for investing in one's life and career can already be considered as completed and other parts still may need to be filled in by the learner in dialogue with her partners in the learning process, such as schools, companies, etc. Assessment services provide both summative assessment ('what has been learned') and formative advice ('what and how to learn'); they build on the reflective process of the learner on her learning experiences.
	<u>Building blocks</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diagnostic value of assessment and evaluation</li> <li>• Assessment of/for/as learning</li> <li>• Intake, follow-through and final assessments</li> <li>• Skills and knowledge tests</li> <li>• Assessment centre approach</li> <li>• Criterion-based interviews</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working visits &amp; performance assessment</li> <li>Standards based on learning outcomes</li> </ul>
<b>Tailored learning paths</b>		
<b>Phase 3</b>	<u>Definition</u>	<i>Tailored learning paths include the personalised process that is carried out according to the agreements laid down in a development plan after the assessment. This agreement describes what has already been learned and what and how still needs to be learned. Learning outcomes give substance to what has not yet been learned and what still needs to be learned.</i>
	<u>Process</u>	Tailored learning pathways are carried out according to the arrangements laid down in a development agreement following validation. Employee/learner, employer and trainer are signatories to this agreement.
	<u>Building blocks</u>	Building blocks for tailored learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workplace learning</li> <li>Classical learning at school</li> <li>e-Learning</li> <li>Learning teams</li> <li>Modular learning through learning opportunities</li> <li>Guidance &amp; feedback</li> <li>Mentoring and tutoring</li> <li>(Further) qualification, certification, microcredentials (badges)</li> </ul>
<b>Validation (formal recognition)</b>		
<b>Phase 4</b>	<u>Definition</u>	<i>The validation process completes the assessment process and provides both a direct impact through certification and/or qualification of the employee's pre-existing values and developmentally appropriate advice on further learning options. It is about agreeing 'in dialogue' on the learning pathway to be followed, both in terms of accrediting what the worker has already learned and in terms of desired or necessary further learning.</i> <i>This further learning may be based on a person's capacity building through the pursuit of a qualification or the further development of skills. The pleasure of learning can also be a motivation for further learning.</i>
	<u>Process</u>	The validation process completes the assessment process and provides both a direct effect through certification and/or qualification of the learner's pre-existing values and advice on further learning opportunities.
	<u>Building blocks</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Qualification, certification, microcredentials (badges), competence</li> <li>Career step: job honours, job step</li> <li>Validation function of examination boards</li> <li>Hallmark for the assessment process as a whole</li> <li>Providing (Hybrid) Career Steps</li> <li>Concrete strategies for lifelong learning (person-centred)</li> <li>Dynamic Human Resources Development paths</li> <li>Vouchers, funding</li> </ul>
<b>Flanking policy</b>		
<b>Flanking activities</b>	<u>Definition</u>	<i>Developing and embedding the roadmap for "LLL as a learning strategy" within the society and its schools, institutions and learning organisations requires flanking actions to secure both the development and embedding process. Flanking activities are mainly geared at policymaking on legal, financial, monitoring (impact-research) and quality-assurance aspects pertaining to the utilisation of the 'roadmap for LLL'.</i>
	<u>Process</u>	The supporting programme is geared towards supporting the development, implementation and evaluation activities related to the roadmap.
	<u>Building blocks</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legal framework for both assessment and validation, as well as flexible and tailored learning paths for all citizens.</li> <li>Financial arrangements to stimulate and fund LLL, especially as LLL is an investment in human capital that's beneficial for all in society.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Websites (information provision, pilot-projects)</li> <li>• Quality assurance models for creating trust in the expert's role in leading dialogues on validation and learning with all kinds of learners in particular contexts, incl. facilitating external legitimization of examination boards, HR boards, accreditation bodies, or others</li> <li>• Professional registers for the labels of <i>basic &amp; senior professional capacity in holistic validation &amp; learning</i></li> <li>• Action learning and research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A manual on the validation-principles</li> <li>○ Researching the <i>return on investment</i> of Dialogical Validation &amp; Learning</li> <li>○ Researching the <i>impact</i> of Dialogical Validation &amp; Learning</li> <li>○ Creating a databank with 'personal learning experiences' (stories)</li> <li>○ Connecting learning outcomes of qualification and human resources management systems</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Professionalisation programme for intakers, portfolio-guides and supervisors, assessors/examiners, examination committees, human resources managers and staff, teachers/trainers (all internal/external)</li> <li>• Networking internally and externally (employers, providers, trade unions, sector organisations, etc.)</li> </ul>
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Source: Macauley & Duvekot (to be published)

## 14. Moving on to the new social contract for learning

The question 'how to proceed' with lifelong learning is opportune. When considering what is already possible on one's own initiative, within schools, organisations or institutions, it will undoubtedly become apparent that many parts of the roadmap are already in place. Some parts, however, need to be organised or developed further. And yet other parts require agreements on joint development and implementation.

Actively placing the learner at the centre of one's own learning process entails a new social contract on the shared ownership of lifelong learning in which the learning system is put in the service-mode for social development of all in the *learning society*. The question 'how to proceed' is opportune. When considering what is already possible in lifelong learning on the learner's own initiative, within schools, universities, training institutes but also at the workplace, in volunteering and in daily life activities, it will undoubtedly become apparent that many parts of the roadmap to follow for filling in the new social contract for lifelong learning are already in place. Some parts, however, need to be designed or (further) developed. And yet other parts require agreements on joint development and implementation.

What has to happen in any case is to change the mindset within schools, universities, organisations, companies and institutions from an analytical, supply-driven approach to learning aimed at certification and competences to a flexible, holistic learning culture in which people's dialogues about their lifelong learning needs are central; a change from a top-down to a bottom-up approach, so to speak. It is of great importance that the dynamism that *dialogical validation and learning* can give to the raising awareness of learners and the connecting power of the dialogues between learner and assessors/teachers is directional for validating and filling in a dialogue on further learning for everyone who knocks on the door of *the learning society* with a specific learning need.

The set-up for a new social contract on lifelong learning in *the learning society* follows the roadmap in many ways. Highly important in the 'contract' is the acceptance and the affordance of the agency of the individual learner who can and has to fill-in an autonomous position in the dialogues on further learning. In a same manner this autonomous position also goes for the experts within the education and training institutes and in the learning organisations; they also need to fill-in their autonomous role in these dialogues. This shared ownership of tasks and duties, or better responsibilities, is at the heart of a holistic learning culture in which a shift has been realised from *control of what needs to be learned*, to *trust in what has been and can be learned*.

In order to back this shared ownership under the new social contract, vital building blocks need to be activated:

1. Providing a **favourable legal framework** including funding for all learners to be inspired and activated.

2. **Outreach** facilities for strengthening the awareness that every citizen is a "learning individual" and that there are many opportunities to build further on one's learning history (self-diagnostic tests, portfolio-training, etc.).
3. Acceptance of the **equivalence and complementary value of Validation and Learning**, with *validation* for the diagnostics of assessing one's learning experiences of, for and as learning and *learning* for filling-in personalised and tailored further learning paths.
4. **Shared ownership** in a dialogical process of:
  - a. **The learner** with a personal reference framework or standard as input.
  - b. **The teacher** (assessor, coach, guide & teacher) with qualification standards as input for the dialogue.
  - c. **The human resources manager** with professional standards as input for the dialogue.
5. **Learning outcomes** for providing a format for articulating and assessing prior learning experiences and designing further learning content. Learning outcomes are all-encompassing and interchangeable.
6. **Capacitation of experts:** teachers in education and training and human resources managers on the labour market have to become multitaskers in lifelong learning strategies: assessing, teaching, coaching & guiding.
7. The **autonomy of the expert** (assessor, coach, guide & teacher) needs to cover both the assessment- and learning-functions as well as 'the managing of dialogues with learners in a **learning culture of trust** in building together inspiring, reflective, developmental, enjoyable and sustainable learning paths.
8. The learning culture has to be built on **trust in the arrangements and management of dialogues** on assessing prior learning and opening up further learning opportunities for all learners. The quality-assurance of the outcomes of the dialogues quality assurance transcends the system's tendency to quality control. Trust is safeguarded by the validating bodies in learning systems, such as exam boards, sector councils, and others.
9. Affording the **portfolio-loop** for dynamising recurring, learning pathways, and turn them into learner-steered LLL-processes, supported through the dialogues with the other partners in the *learning triangle*.

## 15. Speeding up the new social contract

For the right focus on the mindset for learners and within schools, universities, companies and organisations and their staff, it is important to focus directly on the right approach for conceptualising, designing and implementing the roadmap for lifelong learning. Two supporting actions for speeding up conceptualising the many features of the roadmap under the umbrella of the new social contract are:

- I. **Formulating and presenting an action plan for the new social contract** on lifelong learning
- II. **Action research** into examples or good practices of divergent, learner-steered learning paths.
- III. Composing a **capacitation programme** of, for and by the professionals involved.

**Ad I. Formulating and presenting an action plan for the new social contract** for fostering people's voice and awareness. Such an action plan needs to focus on strengthening people's awareness that it is they who are learning, that they are always learning through their actions and activities and that their learning can be the basis for a personalised lifelong learning strategy that adds value to their lives and careers, which also boosts the lives and careers of other people.

It is especially important to reach those who are not so aware of their existing learning value and for whom 'learning' conjures up the - often negative - image of having to go back to the classroom. Policies and measures within the framework of outreach facilities must be inclusive and reach out to everyone, encouraging them to take ownership of one's learning opportunities. Obvious measures are to extend the constitutional right to education to a right to lifelong learning and to a recurring right to career advice. These rights can be brought to the attention of citizens through a publicity campaign. Subsequently, services are needed through which these citizens can exercise their rights. Examples are offering advice and funding for the development of a portfolio in which the 'voice of the learner' can be heard, offering procedures for the appreciation and recognition of someone's learning experiences, offering cross-sectoral support for the development of a portfolio, and offering the possibility to make use of the services that are available to them.

It is the system parties at macro level who can initiate such policies and measures. In particular, the government can strengthen the rights of citizens and thus support them in taking ownership of their learning process. Also the financing of services for citizens is largely the responsibility of the government. However, paying for lifelong

learning is an investment in the quality of society which automatically pays for itself because it keeps personal careers in line with social developments.

The social partners - employers and trade unions - have the main responsibility for stimulating and utilising lifelong learning by opening up training funds for cross-sector validation and learning. In this way, sectors help each other in keeping the knowledge and skills of personnel up to standard, they create a flexible flow of people from one sector to another. In this way, the need for labour in one sector can be solved by deploying the surplus of labour in the other sector. After all, most competences of workers and job-seekers are generic enough to make this transition effective. However, the social partners must be open to this and - like the government - realise that this is an investment in a sustainable labour market.

Other measures that are suitable in a holistic learning culture are:

- Organising local and regional counselling centres where people can go to 'articulate their voice'.
- Designing an 'open badge system' to validate people's competences. Such a badge can recognise and describe competences people have acquired informally or non-formally. These can be any generic or specific competences that they can demonstrate by means of professional products or in an assessment.
- The equivalence of informal, non-formal and formal learning experiences and learning paths can be organised within a National Qualifications Framework. The stakeholders in education and training must then conform to an NNQF and embrace flexible validation and learning.
- The paradox of specific or generic assessment of knowledge and skills can also be solved if informal and non-formal learning experiences and paths can be validated and used for lifelong learning in the same way as is done with formal learning. Where the formal learning process is well able to assess knowledge and skills on the basis of one-off or specific learning achievements and to value these with a generic certificate or diploma, this could also be allowed for the assessment of knowledge and skills that have been or can be acquired through informal and non-formal learning processes. At present, it is often argued that a particular skill and its embedded knowledge gained in an informal or non-formal setting has no value or equivalence to learning the same skill and its embedded knowledge in a formal training domain. Therefore, a learner will still have to go through the formal assessment process despite the demonstrated skill and knowledge. However, such unnecessary education or training can be avoided by also being able to link the specificity of informal and non-formal learning outcomes to the generic nature of learning outcomes achieved or to be achieved in formal education or training. The paradox can thus be resolved and lifelong learning can be better promoted in the dialogue between all actors.

A (new) action plan for the new social contract for lifelong learning can help manage these policies and measures. Such an action plan is actually quick to formulate because the possible actions have already been formulated, the necessary funding is available (it is a return on investment) and the actors who will bear the new social contract have been named as owners of lifelong learning processes. The partners in the action plan have recognised the usefulness and necessity for some time, but must now take responsibility and act to bring the primary actors in 'the learning triangle' together much better than is currently the case.

#### How to create a national action plan for a new social contract, including its funding?

*In **Sweden**, the 2022 Government's transition package to improve long-term flexibility, adaptability and security in the labour market is based on a proposal from the trade unions and private sector employers. All workers will gain better opportunities for transition and skills development throughout their working life, and Sweden's competitiveness will be strengthened. This involves a reformed labour law, a new student finance scheme and new basic transition and skills support.*

*Labour law will be adapted to today's labour market to meet an increased need for flexibility and security. Employers will gain increased flexibility and better opportunities to adapt skills according to the needs of their activities, as well as lower costs in connection with dismissals. Workers will gain greater security. General fixed-term employment will be abolished and replaced by specific fixed-term employment, which will be more rapidly converted into permanent employment – the time period will be halved. Steps will be taken to regulate re-regulation to lower level of working time and to prevent hiring of labour from becoming permanent. Full-time employment will be the norm.*

*A new publicly funded student finance scheme for transition and retraining will be introduced to strengthen the position of employees in the labour market. It will be possible for people to participate in education for transition*

or skills development purposes without having to worry about how they will be able to pay the bills, as the scheme will ensure that most people will be able to study with at least 80 percent of their salary for up to one year. Workers will have the opportunity to take part in basic transition and skills support to strengthen their future position in the labour market. Support in the form of advice and guidance will facilitate the transition and changeover to a new job or training both for employees and for employees whose employment contract is about to expire or be terminated. It will be possible for employers who finance transition and skills support to receive compensation.

Source: Webref. Swedish Action 2022

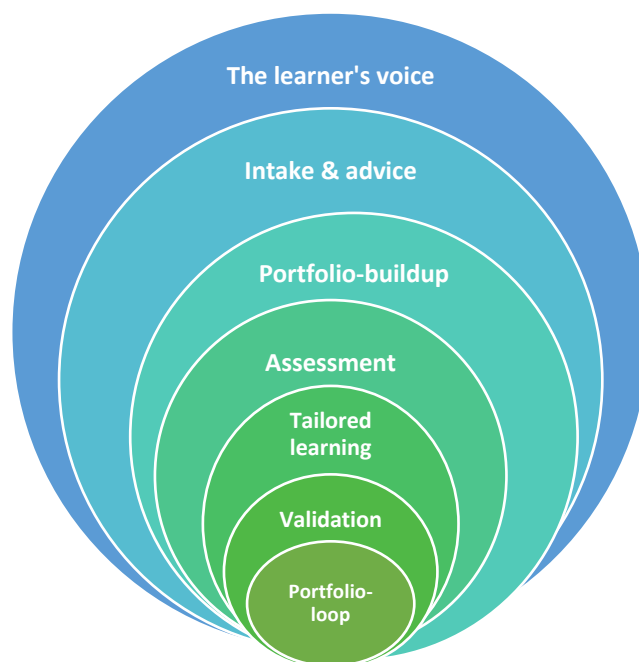
**Ad II. Action research** focuses on different cases in which *dialogical validation and learning* in personalised learning paths is initiated, designed, tested and evaluated in different contexts and partnerships and with different target groups. With x-number of case studies, an inventory and analysis can be made of how *dialogical validation and learning* within 'the learning triangle' works out in the design of LLL-strategies, e.g. for the upgrade and/or update of employees, lateral entrants at sector level, valuing personal development within volunteer contexts, etc.

The actors in these cases are:

- 'The learning individual' as the owner of rich learning experiences. This is anyone who has passed the stage of initial education and is active in society.
- 'The organisation' as the demander of people with rich learning experiences. This is any social organisation with profit, non-profit, voluntary, civic or social activities.
- 'The school' as an enabler of learning experiences. The 'school' is a metaphor for any service organisation in the field of validation and learning (education, training, career guidance, etc.) such as (high) schools, universities, training institutes, career counselling agencies, training institutes, etc.

The input from multiple cases can be used to carry out a Delphi study on the critical success factors for broad implementation of *dialogic validation and learning* in learners' practices that match the actual learning demand in the society and offer an interesting palette to learners with diverse learning experiences, providers (schools, etc.) and learning organisations.

**Figure 4. The divergent – learner steered - learning process**



Source: author.

A divergent approach, starting from 'the whole person' and working towards a relevant learning or development path at a personal level lends itself best to be the step-by-step plan of an action research project. That is, the

roadmap is filled in starting from the learner's learning need and the successive steps of the learning cycle to follow-up on that. The end result is the validation of the learner's objective. Validation - in whatever form - then contributes to the *portfolio-loop*, which in turn will provide the input for the learner to formulate a new learning need (by choice). Lifelong learning at its best!

A learning story of a holistically inspired, learner-steered process for getting access to further learning on the basis of an assessment of one's prior learning.

*A scouting-leader in a local Scouting-group organised a parent day for scouts aged 6-11 years. This activity included various critical tasks, which could be documented through a description of the situation, personal reflection on the preparation, execution and evaluation of the activity and feedback from children and parents. This scouting-leader became inspired by news items on the shortage of teachers in primary education and the possibilities for lateral entry into this profession.*

*So, after she was triggered to pursue her interests in working as a primary education teacher, she enquired about the possibilities in her area. It turned out that she could make use of an abridged training variant to become a qualified teacher, involving teacher training and a primary school as workplace. After an aptitude test (start assessment), she could complete the parts of the teaching profession that were still missing through workplace learning.*

*In preparation for her assessment, she first received a portfolio training in which she was supported in reflecting on her learning experiences, insofar as they were relevant to the profession. She also learned to substantiate these descriptions with evidence. Supporting documents for demonstrating relevant skills and knowledge were the pedagogical training programme of scouting, the programme of the parent day, reports of preparation steps and meetings, a video, photos, feedback forms, etc. In addition, she was placed in a teaching situation in which she could already teach a class at a primary school, under supervision. The portfolio she created consisted of reflection and evidence based on her experience as a scout leader and as a beginning primary school teacher.*

*In the starting assessment, her portfolio was first evaluated by two assessors. Then these assessors carried out a lesson visit and a criterion-based interview in order to be able to determine exactly which learning outcomes of the training to become a primary school teacher she had already completed and which she still had to learn.*

*Subsequently, her reflection on her learning biography so far could be compared with the critical professional situations that are taught at the teacher-training programme for primary school teachers. Comparable situations were acknowledged for the personal, pedagogical acting skills, the communication with the external environment (parents, colleagues) and the didactic approach. At the end of the assessment, the scouting leader was awarded exemptions for her prior learning outcomes and offered a tailored learning path for the remainder of her qualification programme, offered through a work-based programme. The scouting leader could learn for the remainder of her programme while working as a primary school teacher.*

*This case demonstrates the holistic character of learning through the trust in the potential value of out-of-school learning experiences, the personal nature of reflection and documentation, the dialogical process of aligning one's personal frame of reference with the professional qualification framework and the focus on a contextualised learning path. This did justice to 'the voice of the learner' and the learning system's support of that voice.*

**Ad III. Capacitation of the professional** is shifting from the semi-autonomous expert in an analytic learning culture, in particular guarding the qualification or occupational standards and ensuring the system is accountable and justified, to the autonomous professional (teachers and human resources managers - representing the education and training world on the one hand and the learning organisations on the other hand on the labour market - who, in dialogue with the learner, can function flexibly within the broad context of the learnability and validity of competencies and learning outcomes that together constitute a qualification or occupational standard. We call this shifting of the crucial role of the expert "the transition from control to trust": the shift of the learning paradigm from the analytical, mass learning and control-oriented learning paradigm to a more holistic, personalised, customised and trust-based learning paradigm. The main difference between both paradigms is the centrality of the learner: is the learner seen as 'a whole learning person' and mirrored in the content of the standard or is the standard as the main focus mirrored in the content of the learner?

The following step-by-step plan aims at initiating a suitable professionalisation approach:

1. The formulation of the new expert profile starts with a Delphi method. In a number of consultation rounds with internal and external experts, it is worked out how the professionalisation of the monodisciplinary

expert into a broader, multidisciplinary lecturer/assessor/coach/career counsellor and the active involvement of external parties such as school and workplace supervisors, training advisers, target group advocates (e.g. jobseekers, migrants, refugees) can be tackled as effectively and efficiently as possible.

2. This is followed by a second consultation round in which a professionalisation plan is drawn up that focuses flexibly on strengthening the experts' confidence in their new roles and the school's and organisation's confidence in this expert. This is the phase in which not only the content but also the form of the professionalisation is composed: flexible, personalised, etc. Actually, it's at best going to be a 'practice what you preach' professionalisation program in which these experts also are seen as the main drivers for their own learning path.
3. Quality assurance in the expert's role in leading dialogues on validation and learning with all kinds of learners in particular contexts is at the core of a learning culture of trust in which the expert's autonomy is based on the proven qualities of the expert and is guaranteed by the external legitimization of examination boards, HR boards, accreditation bodies, or others. This autonomy is not hindered by systemic restrictions.
4. After obtaining broad support, a first training group can be formed as a pilot for acquiring a quality-assured role with a formal label for basic/senior professional capacity in holistic validation & learning.
5. After the pilot, the professionalisation programme can be embedded within programmes for the promotion of expertise at schools, colleges, universities, companies, NGOs, etc. Certification can be secured within the own organisation ('badges') or legitimised via an external partner.

## 16. Final words

*Looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future. (Freire, 1972)*

With more insight into the holistic character of person-centred lifelong learning, the dialogues between the learning individual, the learning system and the societal system can be strengthened and broadened; because this much is clear, lifelong learning offers challenges and opportunities to all stakeholders and actors, especially if I myself, as a learner, am closely involved in its content, form and meaning.

The promise of lifelong learning for all is very much in practice and requires the active participation of all, above all myself and my learning potential. The new social contract for learning builds on this and connects every learner with opportunities for development and advancement. This contract is essentially informal and person-centred. What matters most is that I make my voice heard and that my voice is heard by the other partners in learning. My voice emphasises my ownership of my learning capacity and desires within the collective of 'the learning society'. After all, it is I who learns, but always in dialogue with and for the benefit of the collective.

It is therefore mainly up to the learner - in dialogue with the other actors - to shape the new social contract and to decide the extent to which her voice should be heard and what degree of ownership and co-design suits her lifelong learning strategy. Learning then moves from the instruction-based 'diploma concept' to the 'portfolio concept' driven by the personal need to learn, in which learning the valuing and valuing the learning serve personalised learning. The starting point is that the meaning and content of learning does not so much require a formal diploma but rather a personal portfolio that can be continuously enriched. A diploma is just one of the roadmaps in learning - and in life - while the portfolio is the flexible travel guide for lifelong learning. That is what lifelong learning is for and why dialogical validation and learning reinforces the orientation towards personalised learning within the shared ambitions of 'the learning society'.

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## Annex 1. The characteristics of 21<sup>st</sup> century lifelong learning

The gradual but continuous development of lifelong learning (LLL) policies since the 1970s reveals five general features of the emergent holistic learning culture (Duvekot, 2016, 2017):

### 1. Transition from system to process

In policy development, an area of tension can be seen between the system approach and the process approach. Whereas 'the system' represents the top-down approach, the process is mainly bottom-up driven.

In this context, the system consists of the learning system with an offer of qualifications and the social system with competence management in job profiles or sector qualifications. The process concerns the course, progress and results of these (sub)systems in a given context or situation. In a process, systems are used, a starting question is formulated and results are achieved.

In practice, processes are confronted with *inside-out* or *outside-in* approaches to systems. With *inside-out* learning processes, there is little possibility or desire for flexibility or adaptation to others (organisations and/or customers). With *outside-in* processes, there is more opportunity for this. The increasing recognition of the importance and equivalence of personal learning experiences stretches the possibilities for systems to deal flexibly with the more personalised implementation of LLL routes. Policy development is then more inclined to allow this personal orientation and to (re)formulate policy in that sense.

### 2. Operationalisation of a broad concept of learning

Policy development shows a movement from strategy to tactics and operationalisation, from policy to practice, so to speak. The awareness has grown that practice is patient while policy has developed dynamically. Although the qualitative results of LLL have been achieved, they are still too limited to demonstrate a quantitative shift in thinking about learning. Within this movement, however, a fundamental shift is visible in the area of validation of learning experiences. Whereas UNESCO already emphasised in the 1970s that citizens should also be able to make use of non-formal and informal learning environments in order to learn (Faure, *et al.*, 1972), this has slowly but surely been widely accepted with the help of the validation system. The value of workplace learning, learning through voluntary or civic activities or informal learning that is hardly visible but helps develop personal qualities, has been recognised by policy makers at (inter)national level and has become an integral part of the recommendations to adapt the learning and social system to the context of the citizen. This broader view of the concept of learning means that formal, informal and non-formal learning can contribute equally to organising personalised learning.

### 3. Contextualisation of learning

The pursuit of the goal of 'lifelong learning for all' was not so much a challenge as a struggle. In the period under review (1990-2020), there was an ideological struggle between the alignment of lifelong learning strategies in society with social change and participation on the one hand and economic growth and competitiveness on the other. In times of prosperity, more attention was paid to social objectives, and in times of economic hardship, the focus changed to employability and labour mobility.

Within this oscillation of economic and/or social perspectives, a view of learning was realised that went beyond viewing 'learning' as a matter of education and training. This view was accompanied by a broadening of the focus on target groups - a focus on all citizens rather than just young people - and on linking learning inside and outside the formal learning systems. Creating commitment to LLL by encouraging the involvement of more stakeholders as 'partners in learning' than just 'the teacher' or the employer has also changed with the transformation of the learning individual as 'object of learning' to 'participatory subject'. Partnerships in learning have increased as a result of the recognition that learning happens anywhere, anytime and anyhow. This has also led to a recognition of the importance of fulfilling professional roles in relation to LLL in the areas of learning supervision, assessment and coaching. These roles are no longer exclusively focused on scoring diplomas and certificates, but also on learning for personal development, upgrading, updating or simply for enjoyability.

### 4. Personalising learning

The role of the learner in the LLL game remains an abstract concept. There is much talk **about** but not **with** or **by the** learner. The learner is frequently used to justify the policy in the light of the social trend towards individualisation. This trend emerged as early as the 1970s and focused in particular on the socio-cultural value of self-development of the learner within 'the learning society'. Also, within the neo-liberal thinking from the eighties onwards, the learner was effortlessly incorporated in the policy to legitimise the validity of the

ideology of market forces, largely from the economic value of individual learning experiences. Only with the focus on validation as a connection between the learning experiences of the individual and the learning outcomes approach within the learning system, the value of the existing individual wealth of learning experiences and development potential came into focus. The policy slowly but surely focuses on facilitating the dialogue in which 'the voice of the learner' is heard. This facilitation is done, for example, by encouraging people to substantiate their informal and non-formal learning experiences and to use these to obtain learning paths or to substantiate a career switch.

Of course, the learner herself plays an important role in making this dialogical process of assessment and learning more bottom-up driven. It's all about making sure 'the voice of the learner' is being articulated properly and heard by the system. A well-orchestrated dialogue motivates and enables people to (self)reflect. The right combination of experience and reflection then leads to new learning processes, which ultimately makes people autonomous, resulting in a new perspective on the future. Such a cycle is based on the integration of validation and learning. The role of the personal portfolio is best utilised in this cycle if the portfolio fulfils a central function in the guidance and assessment of personal development; and as explained earlier, these roles have been recognised in policy as being essential for the activation of LLL.

In order to make the step from individualisation to personalisation of learning, the management of LLL therefore must be supported by the learner. LLL policy has many perspectives that can stimulate the learner to fulfil this role as "change agent". However, it can only (finally) be realised when the learner can decide freely and openly about the organisation of LLL routes on the basis of his/her own portfolio, ambition and learning needs.

#### **5. Adaptive capacity of validation-systematics**

It is noteworthy that, from the moment that the validation of personal learning experiences as a method became part of the LLL-policy, it remained on the agenda regardless of an economic boom or bust. Although it fluctuated in terms of policy priority, it was always present from the 1980s onwards. In boom times, it became part of strategies aimed at the social utilisation of individual potential and in downturns the emphasis was more on economic utilisation. This means that dialogical validation is considered a useful methodology to support the goals of the LLL-policy, regardless of the prevailing goals, whether it is a focus on labour mobility and employability or social inclusion and empowerment.

The dialogical validation process focuses on the recognition, appreciation, acknowledgement and further development of the competences or learning outcomes that someone has already acquired both formally and informally.

Within the 'slow moving history' of the period since the 1970s, the adaptability of dialogue-based validation can also be observed in the changing focus of stakeholders within LLP policy; where initially validation was mainly seen as an employability tool in the hands of employers, the validation system adapted effortlessly to the shift in policy focus towards a more person-centred use of available competences. As this history unfolds, dialogic validation has become an important pillar under UNESCO's long-standing adage concerning the purpose of 'education' - in the broad sense of learning - and has become a key component of the UNESCO system - as the instrument *'to enable man to be himself, to become himself'* (Faure, et al., 1972).