

Ron Anderson

Thursday 2 September 2004

Topic: Intergenerational Learning

ABC Program Transcript

Australia has enjoyed exceptional growth in real incomes and rising living standards over the past decade. However, according to the Treasurer, growth in living standards will slow in coming decades unless we save more and give people incentives, like tax cuts, to remain in the workforce for longer.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the proportion of the population over 65 is expected to double from 12.4% to 25% within 30 years. In the United States the older adult population will reach 70 million and globally there will be over one billion.

The trend is that many older people will stay in the workforce longer, not only because they are mentally and physically able to do so, but because they might need to work to fund their retirement and maintain their lifestyle. And with fewer younger people entering the workforce, the labour market will be able to support more older workers.

In the public sector we're already noticing that older people are tending to work part-time or as consultants, blurring the distinction between working life and retirement.

At the same time, people are becoming less willing to spend endless hours at work, young people in particular are unlikely to subordinate their family or social life to work and to lead an unbalanced life in which personal well being comes last.

Why work the extra hours only to afford the housecleaner or childcare!

One initiative to encourage our aging population to work longer is to promote intergenerational learning in the workforce. Learning to learn from each other is one of the skills we will all need as the twenty-first century unfolds.

Intergenerational learning represents an important dimension of lifelong learning. It is defined simply as activities or programs that increase cooperation, interactions or exchange between two generations, or co-learning that results in the transfer or sharing of experiences, knowledge and wisdom between older and younger persons. It can be formal or informal.

Across organisations the transfer of knowledge and skills to a younger generation will be important for maintaining a cohesive workforce and for succession planning. And retaining older people in new technologies and approaches will become an important role of young people.

Workplace learning is becoming crucial to meeting these numerous and

changing demands.

Today, communication skills, flexibility in thinking and emotional intelligence are increasingly seen as the keys to performance and productivity in a competitive global marketplace.

These general skills are best developed in the workplace and are not the exclusive province of the young.

ILO research shows that the workplace is increasingly an important place for learning and knowledge production: knowledge not as the product of individuals but as something constructed through collaborations and networks.

The Research Centre for Vocational Education and Training (now OVAL Research) notes that this form of learning is different from what is offered now in formal courses:

- it is context-bound, driven by specific and immediate work requirements
- it emphasises learning over teaching or training
- it depends on the responsibility for learning being spread amongst a number of people in the workplace, and
- it is consistent with new learning concepts such as learning networks, learning organisations and communities of practice.

The shift from 'teaching as transmission of knowledge' to 'learning as production of knowledge' is also very relevant to intergenerational learning.

As a sub-set of life long learning, intergenerational programs and policies are valuable approaches to addressing critical social problems, and ensuring the sharing and production of knowledge and workplace culture across an organisation.

A report to the UK Cabinets Office in 2001 shows that high-performance work organisations that produce high-value-added products and services are particularly good at developing experience-based knowledge of staff.

These organisations provide learning opportunities for all employees, including learning from team mates, mentoring and participation in shared projects.

In Australia, helping people to learn to learn and to become motivated to learn is why we celebrate Adults Learners' Week and Learn@Work Day which is part of our world wide celebration of life long learning.

Life long learning means the learning occurs during the entire course of a person's life, and that goals change with time and that all kinds of learning should be recognized.

Help us advance the concept of life long learning and learning at work to both large and small workplaces across Australia.

Guests on this program:

Ron Anderson

Executive Director
Adult Learners' Australia

Further information:

<http://www.adultlearnersweek.org>

Producer: Sue Clark