Guest editorial

Carrying out studies on competence-based training for career development–introduction to the special issue

With the changes related to the invention and the introduction of new technological devices (Weatherbee, 2010), most notably, the internet (Torkzadeh and Van Dyke, 2002), to the economic crisis (Utting *et al.*, 2012) and to different patterns of social life (Tyler, 2002), our modern society has been defined as *information society* (Webster, 2002), *knowledge society* (Hargreaves, 2003) and even *liquid society* (Bauman, 2000, 2011). Do these labels have a meaning or are they a way of hiding phenomena rather than defining them? In any case, they tend to be taken seriously, at least from the point of view of research. As for the relationship between the information and communication technology and the world of education and training, it is interesting to note the existence at present, as a sign of the times, of the *Journal of e-Learning and Knowledge Society*.

In this framework, such a concept as *lifelong learning* is considered to be important for both work and personal development (Sartori and Ceschi, 2013). In fact, lifelong learning is traditionally considered to be an appropriate response to changes (Gibbs, 2007) and a key lever for adaptation and development (Smidt and Sursock, 2011), both individual and organizational (Roland, 2010; Western, 2010), as it can be the means by which people go on learning new things (Field, 2006); acquiring competences (Shandler, 2000); making meaning, gaining wisdom and expertise (Jarvis, 2009); and adapting to different conditions (International Labour Organization, 2000) and developing while growing (Commission of the European Communities, 2007).

Lifelong learning is a theoretical and practical concept; it refers to the idea that it is both possible and necessary for human beings to keep on getting information, knowledge and competences throughout their lives for either personal or professional reasons (adaptation, improvement, development, etc.). It involves such education and training activities as reading, studying, attending lessons, working, practicing at home or other places, traveling, gaining experiences of different kind (off and on-line) and, according to the concept of *reflective learning*, reflecting on them (Schön, 1991; Moon, 2004). In fact, according to a classical definition, lifelong learning is a process through which individuals acquire information, knowledge and competences in a range of formal and informal settings, throughout life. It may occur as part of schooling, education, training, personal development (Brookfield, 1986; Grant and Stanton, 1998) or workplace-based learning (Billet, 2011).

It is therefore clear that competence is a key concept within the general lifelong learning perspective. From a theoretical point of view, over the years, the term competence has been defined in several ways (Gelman and Greeno, 1989; Elbers, 1991; Ellström, 1997, Mulder, 2007), depending on the context and the perspectives adopted (Fischer *et al.*, 1993), whereas practically, both scholars and laymen acknowledge that it is something related to learning, training, work and organizations (Spencer and Spencer, 1993): competences are precisely those personal characteristics (a set of knowledge, abilities and attitudes) that allow people to be effective in the workplace and in everyday life. In this sense, being competent in something can be considered synonymous with capability (in that they both comprise knowledge, skills and experience). Competences

can be learned (McClelland, 1973; Nuthall, 1999). That is the reason why they tend to be taught through education and training activities dedicated to people working in organizations and living in our modern society (Raven and Stephenson, 2001).

In a lifelong learning perspective and maintaining the focus on the concept of competence, we can define career development as the lifelong process of managing learning, work, leisure and transitions to move toward a personally determined and evolving preferred future. In educational development, career development provides a person, often a student, with a focus for selecting a career. In organizational development, research in career development looks at how individuals manage their careers within and between organizations and how organizations structure the career progress of their members. In the current world, more employers are looking for ways to facilitate career development and encourage their employees to drive their own careers.

In this Special Issue, we want to link the concepts of competence, training and career development by articles from different countries. Activities such as training and development dedicated to adult employees and workers aim to promote learning based on the analysis of their professional needs (Sartori *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b). Different kinds of learning are considered to be promoted by different kinds of training activities and would allow the development of different kinds of competences. In this regard, the EU's "Education and Training 2020" work program is a new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training that builds on its predecessor, the "Education and Training 2010" work program, and provides common strategic objectives for Member States, including a set of principles for achieving these objectives, as well as common working methods with priority areas for each periodic work cycle (Mulder *et al.*, 2007; Mulder, 2007; Weigel and Mulder, 2006).

The main aim of the framework is to support Member States in further developing their educational and training systems. These systems should better provide the means for all citizens to realize their potentials, as well as ensure sustainable economic prosperity and employability. The framework should take into consideration the whole spectrum of education and training systems from a lifelong learning perspective, covering all levels and contexts (including non-formal and informal learning) and trying to achieve the following four strategic objectives:

(1) *Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality*: Progress is needed in the implementation of lifelong learning strategies, the development of national qualifications frameworks linked to the European Qualifications Framework and more flexible learning pathways. Mobility should be expanded and the European Quality Charter for Mobility should be applied.

(2) *Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training*: All citizens need to be able to acquire key competences and all levels of education and training need to be made more attractive and efficient.

(3) *Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship*: Education and training should enable all citizens to acquire and develop skills and competences needed for their employability and foster further learning, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue. Educational disadvantage should be addressed through high quality inclusive and early education.

(4) *Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training*: The acquisition of transversal competences by all citizens should be promoted and the functioning of the knowledge triangle

(education-research-innovation) should be ensured (Sartori *et al.*, 2013; Ceschi *et al.*, 2014; Sartori and Scalco, 2014). Partnerships between enterprises and educational institutions, as well as broader learning communities with civil society and other stakeholders, should be promoted. A set of principles are also provided that should be observed when working toward the objectives mentioned above. This includes the implementation of European cooperation in education and training from a lifelong learning perspective (Mulder *et al.*, 2007; Mulder, 2007; Weigel and Mulder, 2006).

Against this background, the first article of the Special Issue deals with the career decision-making competence, a construct which is needed to be kept in mind when explaining why some people take personal care of their career development whereas others do not seem to take it seriously (Ceschi *et al.*, 2016). The term "decision" refers to the entire process of selecting an alternative by evaluating outcomes. According to Stoner (1968), the decision is the process of identifying and selecting a solution for solving a specific problem. For McGrew and Wilson (1982) a decision is much more than the end of a state, but a dynamic process known also as decision-making. A more completed definition is given by Hastie and Dawes (2010), who consider a decision to be a response to a situation where the decision maker is able to evaluate more alternatives and to create expectations regarding possible outcomes (Sartori *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b).

The second article deals with the concept of vocational education and training (VE), that is to say, education and training for work. In its technical sense, education is the formal process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills, customs and values from one generation to another, for example, by schooling. On the other hand, training is the acquisition of competences as a result of the teaching of vocational or practical skills and knowledge, for example, in the workplace. The article reports a German experience of a competence-based VET (Bohne *et al.*, 2016).

Given the variety in definitions, Weigel and Mulder (2006) and Mulder (2007) examined the question whether there exists any coherence in the concept of competence in the context of VET development in England, France, Germany and The Netherlands. Therefore, in line with the aforementioned German article and with considerations by Wiegel and Mulder, the third article deals with the development of vocational competences during secondary education from a career development perspective. It cites an English experience (Behle, 2016).

With the fourth article, we move to Lithuania and we progress from school to the workplace (Tutlys, 2016), and the fifth article describes a study based on the construct of career adaptability (Bocciardi *et al.*, 2016). The last article is from Iran, where the author carried out a study to find out how closely students' career intentions are affected by their entrepreneurial knowledge (Farani, 2016).

Riccardo Sartori and Giuseppe Tacconi
Department of Human Sciences, University of Verona, Verona, Italy

References

Bauman, Z. (2000), *Liquid Modernity*, Polity, Cambridge.

Bauman, Z. (2011), *Culture in a Liquid Modern World*, Polity, Cambridge.

Behle, H. (2016), "Developing vocational competences during secondary school? A new approach to VET via an International Baccalaureate Career-related Programme (IBCP)", *European Journal of Training and Development*, Vol. 41 No. 1.

Billet, S. (2011), *Vocational Education: Purposes, Traditions and Prospects*, Springer, Dordrecht.

Bocciardi, F., Caputo, A., Fregonese, C., Langher, V. and Sartori, R. (2016), "Career adaptability as a strategic competence for career development: an exploratory study of its key predictors", *European Journal of Training and Development*, Vol. 41 No. 1.

Bohne, C., Eicker, F. and Haseloff, G. (2016), "Networked and competence-oriented vocational teaching and learning", *European Journal of Training and Development*, Vol. 41 No. 1.

Brookfield, S.D. (1986), *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Education*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes.

Ceschi, A., Philips, S., Costantini, A. and Sartori, R. (2016), "The career decision-making competence: a new construct for the career realm", *European Journal of Training and Development*, Vol. 41 No. 1.

Commission of the European Communities (2007), "Action plan on adult learning", It is always a good time to learn, Brussels: COM (2007) 558 final, Brussels.

Elbers, E. (1991), "The development of competence and its social context", *Educational Psychology Review*, Vol. 3, pp. 73-94.

Ellström, P.E. (1997), "The many meanings of occupational competence and qualification", *Journal of European Industrial Training*, Vol. 21 Nos 6/7, pp. 266-273.

Farani, A.Y. (2016), "The role of entrepreneurial knowledge as a competence in shaping Iranian students' career intentions to start a new digital business", *European Journal of Training and Development*, Vol. 41 No. 1.

Field, J. (2006), *Lifelong Learning and The New Educational Order*, Trentham Books, London.

Fischer, K.W., Bullock, D., Rotenberg, E.J. and Raya, P. (1993), "The dynamics of competence: how context contributes directly to skill", in Wozniak, R. and Fischer, K.W. (Eds), *Development in Context: Acting and Thinking in Specific Environments*, Psychology Press, London, pp. 93-117.

Gelman, R. and Greeno, J.G. (1989), "On the nature of competence. Principles for understanding in a domain", in Resnick, L.B. (Ed.), *Knowing, Learning, and Instruction*, Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ, pp. 125-186.

Gibbs, S. (2007), *Human Resources Development: Processes, Practices and Perspectives*, Prentice Hall, London.

Grant, J. and Stanton, F. (1998), *The Effectiveness of Continuing Professional Development*, Joint Centre for Education in Medicine, London.

Hargreaves, A. (2003), *Teaching in the Knowledge Society: Education in the Age of Insecurity*, Teachers College Press, New York, NY.

Hastie, R. and Dawes, R.M. (2010), *Rational Choice in An Uncertain World: The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making*, Sage, New York, NY.

International Labour Organization (2000), *Lifelong Learning in The Twenty-First Century: The Changing Roles of Educational Personnel*, ILO, Geneva.

Jarvis, P. (2009), *Learning to be a Person in Society*, Routledge, London and New York, NY.

McClelland, D.C. (1973), "Testing for competence rather than for "intelligence", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 28, pp. 1-14.

McGrew, A.G. and Wilson, M.J. (1982), *Decision Making: Approaches and Analysis: A Reader*, University Press, Manchester.

Moon, J.A. (2004), *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning*, Routledge, London and New York.

Mulder, M. (2007), "Competence", *The Essence and Use of The Concept in ICVT: European Journal of Vocational Training*, Vol. 40, pp. 5-21.

Mulder, M., Weigel, T. and Collins, K. (2007), "The concept of competence in the development of vocational education and training in selected EU member states: a critical analysis", *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, Vol. 59 No. 1, pp. 67-88.

Nuthall, G. (1999), "Learning how to learn: the evolution of students' minds through the social processes and culture of the classroom", *International Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 31 No. 1, pp. 139-256.

Raven, J. and Stephenson, J. (Eds) (2001), *Competency in the Learning Society*, Peter Lang, New York, NY.

Roland, S. (2010), *Practicing Organization Development: A Guide for Leading Change*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Sartori, R. and Ceschi, A. (2013), "Assessment and development centers: judgment biases and risks of using idiographic and nomothetic approaches to collecting information on people to be evaluated and trained in organizations", *Quality & Quantity*, Vol. 47, pp. 3277-3288.

Sartori, R. and Scalco, A. (2014), "Managing organizational innovation through human resources, human capital and psychological capital", *European Journal of Management*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 63-70.

Sartori, R., Favretto, G. and Ceschi, A. (2013), "The relationships between innovation and human and psychological capital in organizations: a review", *The Innovation Journal*, Vol. 18 No. 3, pp. 1-18.

Sartori, R., Ceschi, A. and Costantini, A. (2015a), "On decision processes in businesses, companies and organizations computed through a generative approach: the case of the agent-based modeling", *International Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 15, pp. 25-38.

Sartori, R., Tacconi, G. and Caputo, B. (2015b), "Competence-based analysis of needs in VET teachers and trainers: an Italian experience", *European Journal of Training and Development*, Vol. 39 No. 1, pp. 22-42.

Schön, D.A. (1991), *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Farnham.

Shandler, D. (2000), *Competency and the Learning Organization*, Crisp Learning, Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale.

Smidt, H. and Sursock, A. (2011), *Engaging in Lifelong Learning: Shaping Inclusive and Responsive University Strategies*, European University Association, Brussels.

Spencer, L.M., Jr. and Spencer, S.M. (1993), *Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance*, John Wiley and Sons, New York, NY.

Stoner, J.A. (1968), "Risky and cautious shifts in group decisions: the influence of widely held values", *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 4 No. 4, pp. 442-459.

Torkzadeh, G. and Van Dyke, T.P. (2002), "Effects of training on Internet self-efficacy and computer user attitudes", *Computer in Human Behavior*, Vol. 18, pp. 479-494.

Tutlys, V. (2016), "Challenges of development of work-process based occupational standards", *European Journal of Training and Development*, Vol. 41 No. 1.

Tyler, T.R. (2002), "Is the internet changing social life?, It seems the more things change, the more they stay the same", *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 58, pp. 195-205.

Utting, P., Varghese Buchholz, R. and Razavi, S. (2012), *The Global Crisis and Transformative Social Change*, Palgrave Mcmillan, London.

Weatherbee, T.G. (2010), "Counterproductive use of technology at work: information and communications technologies and cyberdeviancy", *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 35-44.

Webster, F. (2002), *Theories of the Information Society*, Routledge, Cambridge.

Weigel, T. and Mulder, M. (2006), "The competence concept in the development of vocational education and training", Wageningen University, Chair group of Education and Competence Studies, Wageningen.

Western, S. (2010), *What do We Mean by Organizational Development*, Advisio Press, Krakow.

Corresponding author
Riccardo Sartori can be contacted at: riccardo.sartori@univr.it