

Employability: Job market, broad professional expertise and citizenship

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Introduction

The relationship between labour and citizenship has traditionally been marked by tension, as a few views from the recent past illustrate. In the 1960s and 1970s critical labour scholars or union members regularly found that 'democracy appeared to end at the factory gates.' They urged greater efforts to establish co-determination in companies. In the 1970s the need to educate young workers was often justified explicitly as compensation for the lack of personal enrichment opportunities within the firm. Only later did the focus shift to the unemployed youth and ways to improve their prospects on the job market. In the 1960s and 1970s the rising demand for 'continuous education' also included ideas about learning outside the work environment and enhancement of personal enrichment opportunities as a counterweight to the current labour relationships. In addition to offering continuity, this outlook differed markedly from the current focus on lifelong learning, which is also viewed far more explicitly as an economic need.

The editors of this special issue question whether competencies in employability resemble those in citizenship. Any such equivalency has two possible causes. The contrast between labour and citizenship has become less pronounced following the entry of democratic citizenship in corporate industry. Alternatively, citizenship's structure may be based more on economic and market-oriented values. We perceive both patterns. The first entails organizational de-hierarchization, a focus on teamwork and rising expectations of self-direction and personal responsibility among employees. Whether such changes make companies more democratic is a matter of opinion. Presumably, the sharp conflicts in interest have vanished or are managed through a consultative structure. This presumed situation, however, may lead to added pressure. In addition to providing part of the staff with more opportunities for personal enrichment, the added responsibility increases the pressure at work. 'Market laws' lead to redundancies, purely because production is more profitable elsewhere. Companies such as Volvo and Rover, champions of broader functions, teamwork and the learning organization, have been sold, shut down or threatened with foreclosure. Option packages several times higher than salary increases reveal that major discrepancies persist.

Second, the growing importance of economic and market-oriented values in citizenship has diminished the significance of specific professional identities and positions (Meijers, 1995, Blom, Meijers and Den Ouden, this issue). Instead, a general labour market identity has become more pronounced. The current societal trend is regularly designated as a 'risk society' (Beck). In fact, it is largely a market society in which individuals are forced to rely on their own competencies and abilities and their willingness to cultivate them. Given these circumstances, employability's popularity among both employers and management consultants and unions and supporters of lifelong learning is remarkable. The question is whether all these parties interpret the concept the same way.

Nevertheless, employability and citizenship are often viewed as different. The current credential system for vocational education calls for triple qualifications, requiring experience in addition to occupational skills and socio-cultural qualifications. In a recent recommendation (1998) the Education Council has specifically urged citizenship

competencies in addition to professional competencies oriented toward career and job market (employability) and learning.

Basically, the relationship between work and job-market competencies and citizenship is complex. In this contribution we will explore means for employability between the job market and citizenship based on the competence concepts and broad professional expertise. The competence concept and its emphasis on the ability of individuals to cope with professional problems introduce an element of personal interpretation and identity formation in economic and corporate demands. Requiring a greater range of competencies (broader professional expertise) at work today enables reconciliation of the traditional contradiction between workers and citizens and places the opportunities for including citizenship training in vocational education in a new light.

The employability concept

The employability concept comes from the United States and has had several different meanings over time. Versloot, Glauzé and Thijssen (1998) have divided the shifts in emphasis according to three chronological periods. Into the 1970s the focus was on employment, social flexibility and the availability of the underprivileged. In the 1980s the interest turned to organizational flexibility and improvement of the internal labour market. In the 1990s employee flexibility and individual responsibility became the areas of interest.

In the United States the concept's relevance to education is now linked to the debate about basic skills. The main areas of concern are the quality and academic value of the school system, which, as critics assert, educates people to become college students but does little to make them employable. Accordingly, many efforts are in progress to identify the skills people need to succeed professionally (Stasz, 1998). This discussion's relevance derives from the virtual absence of vocational education in the United States. Joining a firm is thus necessary to acquire credentials through corporate education and formal or informal on-the-job training and learning. Many young people start their careers by trying out several jobs until they find one with career prospects. This practice is presently jeopardized by corporate cuts, outsourcing and restructuring. Jobs are becoming harder to find, and unemployment is rising.

Remarkably, the discussion in the Netherlands has adopted several themes from the American one without acquiring the same background. At least two points of view come into play in the Netherlands. On the one hand, employability is largely associated with people's performance on the job market (see e.g. the article by Fruytier and Komps, this issue); on the other hand, it concerns different performance within firms (Versloot *et al.*, 1998).

The first point of view focuses on job-seekers. Here, professional entrepreneurship enters the picture (Van der Zee, 1997). According to this highly optimistic image emphasized by leading managers and business magazines, 'all professionals are responsible for deciding about their future' (Van der Zee, 1997, 168). To this end, Van der Zee believes they should concentrate on 'continuous education', view work as the engine driving development (and reach their professional decisions accordingly), manage their social capital wisely and keep several irons in the fire at once. Disregarding the fact that 'job scroungers' (Van Hoof, in Thijssen, 1997) can access only the secondary job market, this description underestimates the complexity of the requirements in professional life and is unilaterally formulated as individual responsibility. The Education Council (1998) has expressed this view by identifying the need for career competencies.

The second point of view concerns the 'ideal, employable worker': such individuals are willing to attend educational programmes and perform a variety of functions, are geographically mobile, cover a broad quantitative and qualitative spectrum and are willing to

work non-standard hours (Bolweg and Maenhout, 1996). These attributes also refer to the workers visualized by the government in its recent campaigns for lifelong learning. Bolweg and Maenhout note the resulting corporate paradox: managers need to stimulate employee commitment to the organization while increasing flexibility. Thijssen (1997) has observed the different views among those operating within the company. 'While managers look for submissiveness for an intended transfer to proceed smoothly, employees need to be sufficiently resilient to avert unwelcome situations or to accomplish a desired career move without friction' (Thijssen, 1997, 25). Many companies prefer to broaden functions and thus kill two birds with one stone: the work becomes more enjoyable, and employees grow more versatile. De Sitter (1994), however, rightly notes that complete functions offering learning opportunities by comprising duties reflecting an integrated composition of a series of executory and regulatory actions that are both conditions for each other and serve a distinctive purpose in the production process differ from the simple addition of unrelated tasks. Mere addition of responsibilities gives rise to highly versatile employees that supervisors can assign at their discretion at any given time. De Sitter finds that such an approach enhances the regulatory capacity of supervisors but not of workers.

The definition of employability tends to cover a very narrow scope and revolves around the willingness to be flexible and general job market skills. Competencies regarding professional substance appear unimportant or at any rate less important. Moreover, discussions tend to view cultivation of employability competencies as primarily an individual responsibility. Some workers aim to become more economically attractive in pursuit of autonomy and emancipation, while others view the practice as a permanent source of insecurity. They risk lifelong fears about their own competence and experience learning as a Sisyphean task in which they will never accomplish their objective. Adapting constantly to requirements set by employers is threatening to supplant the protection afforded by qualifications that are 'inflation-proof' and generally acknowledged (Geissler and Orthey, 1993).

In our view substantive competencies take precedence over employability. Workers are still expected to have skills. While some things do indeed need to be learned at work, acknowledged vocational credentials can be of immense value on the job market. Both points of view described are therefore cause for considering the relationship between employability and vocational aspects in the employability debate. Unlike in the United States and Britain, vocational education is quite established in the Netherlands and is expected to provide those attending it with entry-level credentials for the job market at the very least. Remarkably, vocational education is virtually overlooked in the employability debate. Wherever they do play a role, vocations are considered old fashioned and inflexible, both as a form of social organization and as a career option, and are associated too closely with the institutionalized job market. Recommendations that the significance of occupations be reinforced (Geurts, 1989; Hövels, 1994) as a vehicle toward more substantive structuring of the job market seem more worthwhile, provided occupations are perceived from a sufficiently broad perspective. According to this view, vocational education serves mainly to provide people with credentials for embarking on a successful career and performing a broad range of functions. In addition to the funding and controllability issues, this aspect is central to the policy of the government and the social partners. In the past fifteen years participation in vocational education has risen considerably (De Bruijn 1995; Onstenk, 1998) and is characterized by a wealth of interesting innovations geared toward better preparation for professional life.

Admittedly, a continuing tendency exists toward individualization and a greater need for planning one's career and ensuring versatility on the job market (cf. Meijers, 1995). It is, however, more like a problem field rife with contradictions for which people require

preparation, for example through vocational education. This basic equipment should in our view extend beyond labour market skills or strategic competencies to encompass broad professional expertise (Onstenk, 1997b) catering to the increased demands for competencies while enabling workers to obtain a firmer grasp of their opportunities for personal enrichment. Building one's arsenal of resources for cultivating skills or expanding them on the job market throughout one's career is more important and entrusts responsibility to employees and employers alike.

Competencies and the knowledge economy

We will elucidate this assertion by discussing the value of competencies. The growing interest in the competence concept indicates the new role of workers, both on the job market and in organizational performance (Onstenk, 1997b; Klarus, 1998). The competence concept is becoming increasingly pronounced in the debate about goals in vocational education and corporate education and also plays an important role in the debate about Human Resources and their contribution to market strength. The skill or competency concept is crucial in its emphasis on dealing with problems that people encounter in their line of work. It is central in the cycle of problem formulation, analysis, design, implementation and evaluation. In fact, problems may even be easier to solve if attributed to the absence of a set of skills. In this view the skills of strategy managers are usually paramount and receive the most attention. Many view the main skill of managers as managing the skills of their employees. Important instruments include recruitment, hiring, evaluation and education. All debates reflect the idea that competencies have a strategic function. Gaining insight into an organization's strategy should enable deduction of the competencies necessary to implement that strategy. The conviction is growing that careful analysis of the existing competencies helps establish which ones are missing that are necessary to achieve strategic goals. We can then commission or develop these competencies. Commissioning involves recruitment and hiring; developing entails educating. Implementing such a train of thought is called competence management.

The increasing talk of competency in addition to knowledge objectives and qualifications is closely related to the employability debate. The observation that work environments are highly dynamic and change rapidly underlies the debate's focus on getting and keeping people at work. In their quest for employability, employees will be more inclined to switch jobs and will need to adapt to different types of working relationships and cultures. Flexible workers in network organizations will have to maintain their economic attraction to stay employable. Learning is more than acquiring expertise in new subjects and problem-solving skills and serves mainly to foster skills in reflection, communication and teamwork. Self-regulatory skills concerning motivation, emotions and affections merit special attention (Kessels, 1996). After all, if the knowledge economy is driven by the ability to keep growing smarter, then participants will need to trace their actual interests. Analysing the conditions for cultivating expertise and delivering an optimal performance reveal that excellence is possible only in areas where individuals are genuinely interested and highly motivated.

The knowledge economy probably requires knowledge based on competency as an individual skill: the ability to identify new, unusual problems tomorrow that are not even suspected today. The view that knowledge is a subjective skill that is not transferable but that every individual needs to acquire independently calls for a competence-based curriculum.

Competence is a general concept that denotes a general model of activity or action (Engeström, 1987; 1994) applicable to different living arrangements (or systems of activity, in Engeström's terms): school, work, politics. We are referring primarily to cultivation of competency among learning individuals with a view toward job market credentials and

ongoing training (in a programme for continuing education, additional schooling or on the job) and preparation for functioning in society.

Competence or expertise may be described as the structured and integrated ability to perform labour activities adequately and to solve labour problems. Competence has its own structure and does not correspond with a list of required skills. It involves the cohesion of relationships between the constituent knowledge and skills. Competence relates to individual professionals or employees, contrary to required qualifications defined in terms of a function or occupation. It is thus an attractive concept from the employability perspective as well and denotes the complete range of occupational problems that professionals are equipped to handle, whether in their current positions or in different ones.

Competency comprises various dimensions (Onstenk, 1997b). Significant ones include content (one's area of competence), a control dimension (one's level of competence) and, last but not least, an interpretation dimension (the competency's significance to the individual). Competence can also evolve within this three-dimensional sphere: broadening and shifting (content), enhancement (control) and enrichment (interpretation). People attain various levels in the different dimensions. The development orientation is another attractive feature with respect to employability.

The final noteworthy aspect is that the competence theory explicitly links cultivation of competence among individual workers with cultivation of competence among organizations and activity systems.

Skill perception thus undergoes an interesting change. People tend to become skilled in areas where they have a strong personal interest. Motivation and curiosity are probably more important than the organization's formal strategy. If organizations perform better when they continue to cultivate individual and collective competencies, then tracing those personal, individual skills and enabling employees to enrich and cherish them becomes especially important. To this end, employees need to participate in networks that acknowledge and respect such skills and encourage additional enhancement, broadening or enrichment. A certain direction indicated by a network of skills signifies charting a course or pursuing a strategy. Alternatively, it may be a direction that emerges because the participants in the network find joining forces for a while a mutually attractive proposition. In such cases, the formal strategy merely confirms a strong movement around specific skills and interests that had been apparent among influential groups for some time. If these dynamics arise in many places in an organization, cultivation of skills will flourish. If those networks acquire a self-steering ability as well, little will be left to manage. Cultivation of competence could thus provide a basis for a new wave of emancipation, heralding the end of strategic thought and the overly entrenched conviction that we can manage everything we consider important. Cultivation of competence then becomes the driving force, while competence management comes to denote an obsolete quest for control.

At present the significance of implicit or tacit knowledge is widely recognized. This pattern of knowledge, which may be perceived as a skill, determines the ultimate actions. Nonetheless, stating explicitly, describing and documenting this skill has proven difficult but is the concealed objective in many views about competence management and knowledge management. Once the relevant areas of expertise have been traced, codified and recorded in a system, they may benefit many staff members throughout the organizations: such a knowledge system is expected to promote sharing of knowledge. The rationales underlying knowledge management resemble the ones that apply for competence management. Knowledge management serves a strategic purpose with a view toward identifying desired knowledge, purchasing or producing missing knowledge and discarding superfluous

knowledge. Such knowledge systems are run by knowledge managers. If we view knowledge as a personal skill, describing, stating explicitly and codifying such knowledge will yield no more and no less than the information about the other person's expertise, unless our own expertise is at issue. This information, which may be recorded in the system, is not the actual skill. Competencies and expertise cannot be shared or transferred. Nor can they be purchased or sold.

Broad professional expertise

The next question concerns the competencies at issue. Competent performance on the job requires being able to handle the demands, expectations and problems that may arise within and between the different aspects of the work environment. The objective is to perform professional duties usefully and to solve task-related problems in a specific and complex productive, organizational-hierarchic and social-communicative context subject to change. Doing so alters the core problems in professional practice (Onstenk, 1997a, b): the central problems and dilemmas in professional practice as regularly encountered by professionals and thus characteristic of the profession. They also need to be able to operate in several capacities and situations and to contribute to the labour system's development. There is thus a need for a wide range of competencies (i.e. broad professional or occupational expertise). The concept of 'broad occupational expertise' (Onstenk, 1997b) is closely related to concepts devised previously, such as *Breed Toepasbare Beroepsqualificaties* [Broadly Applicable Professional Qualifications] (De Jong *et al.*, 1990) and key qualifications (Hövels and Römken, 1993; Van Zolingen, 1995). While the substance of the term broad occupational expertise has basically the same meaning, it reflects greater emphasis on cohesion, on the link with the profession and on applicability. The word 'occupation' refers to the substance of professional activities, the word broad to the need to consider contexts in which the occupation or profession is carried out and the future prospects. Broad occupational expertise may be described as a multi-dimensional, structured and cohesive set of professional, methodological, administrative, strategic, social-communicative, culturally prescriptive and learning and planning competencies intended to ensure an adequate approach to the occupation's core problems (Onstenk, 1997b). Professional and methodological competencies concern the occupation's substance and the conception of an adequate approach to occupation-specific tasks and problems. Administrative-organizational and strategic competencies relate to performance within organizations. Social-communicative and culturally normative competencies refer to the ability to function as a team and the department, company or professional group's practical environment. Learning and planning competencies require the ability to enhance one's own development and that of the profession and company (future prospects).

The ability 'to manage' the core problems in a profession and position is important in broad professional expertise. Core problems may be identified according to their scope and level of complexity. Moreover, professionals deal with core problems differently with respect to individual style or as an indication of contradictions and changes in parts of the activity system. Comparing the ways people handle core problems will highlight the distinctions between beginners and experts.

A broad definition of professional expertise need not be indicative of the scope of the professional skill actually required and potential shifts in the importance of certain components. The concrete substance, relative importance and relations between the dimensions vary according to the profession and position and may change over time or by dimension. Specific dimensions may accommodate narrower or broader ranges. The debate about broad professional expertise or key qualifications actually concerns (1) broader demands imposed on the different components and (2) a shift in emphasis within individual

relations, thus increasing the relative importance of organizational, social-communicative and learning competence (De Jong *et al.*, 1990; Onstenk, 1992).

Professional expertise broadens by cultivating the ability to optimize and innovate, which requires both expanding the substance and deepening involvement and reflection, not only with respect to the production task but also with respect to the organization and the social-communicative context. The shift from Taylorist production concepts to new production concepts and the learning organization means transferring the emphasis on qualifications, defined from a certain package of duties and prescribed optimal job performance, to competence and broad professional expertise, defined as versatile, organizationally effective, cooperative and responsible employees. The requirements regarding professional expertise become broader with the increase of problems to be resolved in the shop floor production process. As a result, organizational and team-related difficulties, as well as involvement and commitment, become more important in daily work environments (Stasz, 1998). Increasingly, employees may also be expected to help optimize and change the production process or to assume greater responsibility for their own career and job security.

In this event, employees require broad professional qualifications that intrinsically enable them to handle tasks and conflicts at work independently (Dedering and Schimming, 1984, Nieuwenhuis, 1991; Hövels and Römken, 1993). Professionals should promote the work's ongoing development. Changes occurring in the labour system give rise to contradictions and dilemmas. The requirements concerning the quality of job performance as adaptive, optimizing or changing performance are rising as well.

In practice different production and organization models exist concurrently, both between industries and within industries or even companies (Onstenk, 1997b; Fruytier and Klomps, this issue). This concurrence of different models indicates changes and contradictions in the prevailing activity system. In such a situation training and vocational education have both a passive, submissive and an active, stimulating role in the continuing development of new production concepts and qualified labour. Broad professional expertise in the sense defined here should direct the learning objectives of position and job-oriented learning and educating. Programmes in vocational education target a rather broad field of related functions and should offer preparation for a professional career (i.e. they should be oriented toward the future). Educational profiles and analysis of the required qualifications should address mastery of broad professional expertise as well, based on the structure of competence and skill that results from the changing characteristics in the system of production, management and culture.

Core problems in task performance define the structure of the competencies actually required and thus form an important link between vocational education, corporate education and on-the-job learning. Core problems are relevant to this learning process in two ways. People acquire greater insight and become better at dealing with the main problems in their occupation. In addition, learning to deal with complexity, contradictions and insecurity strengthens their learning ability and meta-cognitive skills. Learning through core problems thus improves the transfer ability of professionals. Training and work environments become more closely intertwined.

Acquiring employability

The arsenal of means for devising professional skill during one's career or manifesting it on the job market should be expanded to increase employability. This process is the responsibility of employees and employers alike.

This task rests primarily with initial degree vocational training. The objective of vocational training entails promoting broad professional expertise among students (i.e. the ability of competent individuals to perform their duties purposefully and to apply a task-oriented approach to problems in a specific productive, organizational-hierarchical and social-communicative context). Such an effort presumes that students master the knowledge and routines necessary to perform the desired tasks adequately and include them in devising broad professional expertise. The initial degree vocational training should also be viewed as the start of an unending process of developing professional expertise. Acquiring the desired skills, expertise or competencies requires learning situations that encourage curiosity, collaboration, involvement and interpretation. Education should cultivate these competencies in pupils, students and future professionals, make learning more enjoyable and facilitate the transition from school to work.

Vocational education is also expected to teach social-cultural qualifications, which refer to general training, as well as to the Education Council's perception of career, learning and citizenship competencies. Themes such as employability and lifelong learning figure prominently here and may be classified as competencies linked to specific problems. Career problems, for example, are associated with the rise in labour dynamics. The rapid changes are constantly accelerating and involve many facets (commercial, organizational, technological). From that information the employability debate focuses on people's ability to acquire and retain work and on the roles and responsibilities of the different parties concerned (employees, employers, educational institutions, government). At issue are processes of change and ways of dealing with them.

Cultivation of professional expertise and competencies also provides a basis for analysing learning and educational programmes at later career stages. The policy of promoting training that government and social partners have adopted in the wake of the employability debate is very promising. Considering the problems mentioned in the literature regarding transfer and effectiveness of training, restricting the issue of learning during one's professional career to attending or not attending educational programmes would be a step backward. Instead, relating learning on the job with training on the one hand and changes in the job description on the other hand should be essential here.

Viewing knowledge as expertise affects the planning of educational programmes in many ways. Familiar concepts such as 'knowledge transfer' and 'subject matter' are no longer useful. Expertise may be acquired, cultivated and improved. Conventional learning objective formulations along the lines of 'knowing about', 'having insight into', 'having an understanding of', 'conveying the significance of', 'being able to describe', 'stating the main characteristics of', 'distinguishing between' may refer to interesting information but do not directly involve relevant expertise. Competence training presumes an understanding based on skills and requires learning situations where staff members examine which skills matter, and which do not. They will then acquire and elaborate the desired forms of expertise independently or with specific assistance from experienced colleagues or specialized educators. By proving their competence, staff members substantiate their success. Work environments are perfect for cultivating the desired skills. If the effort fails in this setting, educational programmes will be of little use. Learning in the proximity of a work situation is necessary to acquire and cultivate expertise.

Learning on the job is important not only for the companies but also for the job market's performance and efforts to reduce unemployment. Among the various ways of increasing flexibility and mobility on the job market, the 'employability' concept is key (Bolweg and Maenhout, 1996). Aside from general labour skills and the ability to plan one's career

independently or with others (Meijers, 1995), 'having' marketable qualifications is an important asset. At present, such qualifications are acquired largely through attending educational programmes. The growing importance of learning on the job raises the question as to whether the skills acquired are context-bound by definition (thus precluding transfer opportunities) or can be useful outside the original settings. Transfer of learning results has a practical significance for both companies (i.e. how useful is the experience from one position in another one) and employees. With the employees, the job-market potential is especially important.

This issue has acquired a special urgency in light of the rise in corporate redundancies and progressive flexibility on the job market. Increasingly, people with little education face the danger of extended unemployment. The growth in the numbers collecting disability is not only a consequence of doing dangerous, heavy or psychologically taxing work (the pressure of the work) but also one of redundancies through restructuring. Some of these workers lack the versatility and learning ability to operate in new positions. One possible cause is the process that Thijssen (1996) described as 'concentration of experience': employees who have held the same position for a long time acquire greater experience within a progressively narrower scope over the years and thus become significantly less able to cope with new situations. Promoting learning in a variety of workplaces would appear to be a preventive strategy. The ageing workforce and the decline in the supply of new workers on the job market are among the more general reasons why companies benefit from retaining employees (especially flexible ones) who preserve their 'employability'. Both recognizing and acknowledging learning in unskilled positions (Kusterer, 1976) and promoting the process merit serious consideration. A qualified organization should help raise employability for this group as well by encouraging broad professional expertise.

Broad professional expertise and citizenship

Returning to this article's original question, we find that if competencies are turning into broad professional expertise, employability can begin to resemble citizenship competencies. The definition used by the Education Council (1998) offers a point of departure. It describes citizenship competencies as competencies that are required for managing in many areas of society. Knowledge, skills and dispositions are deemed necessary to function properly in social and societal transactions. This description closely resembles the ones that employers and management consultants embrace of employability and the ones underwritten by the unions and supporters of lifelong learning. Based on the above analysis several conclusions may be formulated about the relationship between citizenship and employability perceived as broad professional expertise.

First, the competencies expected of employees today will benefit them as citizens as well. Examples include organizational, communicative and social skills, as well as strategic competencies to help protect personal interests. The rising importance of the organizational and social-communicative aspects of professional performance and the required competencies (planning, acceptance of responsibility, independent action, social skills etc.) is shifting the traditional distinctions between general and professional training and between professional qualifications and social-cultural qualifications (Kraayvanger and Hövels, 1998). In vocational education this pattern surfaces in problem-driven education, where instructors of general subjects explicitly play a role in the acquisition of professionally relevant skills (Onstenk, 1997a; Onstenk, in press).

These competencies may to some extent be acquired at work. If modern types of work (especially in services) and labour relationships are indeed based more on good faith (Heisig and Littek, 1995), they can do much to establish support for a society based on mutual trust.

Conversely, we should take care not to glorify the situation – organizations tend to be imbued with economic interpretations of such competencies. This approach is too confined for citizenship competencies and too restricted for the market approach.

Second, employability, at least in the broad sense advocated here, helps reinforce the scope for personal development and freedom of movement. Employees are offered immense responsibility for their professional lives, which they can accept if they receive the means to cultivate their professional expertise. Job and subsistence security require balancing the demands on availability, mobility and flexibility and the means for cultivating individual skills. Not everybody has realized these opportunities. While members of the working population with a scarce commodity that is important to the knowledge economy probably have, people without work, especially if they lack entry-level qualifications or a similar ‘basic capital’ (the job scroungers), are less likely to have done so. Nonetheless, the first group also risks stress and early burnout if the focus on immediate availability prevails without extensive flexibility with respect to time, place and community and room for reflection and enrichment. Personal growth and competence enrichment among professionals thus become important goals (Laur-Ernst, 1989), including moral and ethical development (Hoff, Lappe and Lempert, 1991). These objectives serve corporate interests both by ‘including’ employees in the process of change and by forming competencies with a high transfer value with regard for unknown future demands concerning professional skill (Zarifian, 1995). The ‘human standard’ is therefore more than a condition for developing one’s own professional identity and ensuring ongoing enrichment for individual staff members. In the future, companies will require the necessary broad professional expertise to supply constantly changing products and services.

Third, the increased opportunities for assuming responsibility for furthering the growth of one’s social unit (team, company, professional group) may be of great value in cultivating citizenship. Professionals can function in various ways within a work environment: adaptation, optimization or change (Dedering and Schimming, 1984; Onstenk, 1997b). Optimizing on-the-job performance serves to improve the production process by adequately solving an institution’s organizational problems (De Sitter, 1994), proposing improvements and focusing constantly on enhancing quality and efficiency. Structural solutions to ‘incidents’ and organizational problems through reflection and improvement play a central role here. Such on-the-job performance satisfies the demands of the new production concepts, which emphasize continuous improvement, flexibility and quality awareness. The quality factor is essential in Human Resources Development (cf. Zarifian, 1995) and should do more to highlight competence development. Action geared to accomplish change is the next step and targets strategic modification (De Sitter, 1994) of the observed work situation. It involves a discerning and active approach to the contradictions and core problems inherent in the profession and a contribution to new solutions. Double-bind situations at work give rise to fundamental learning moments in work situations involving expansive learning (Engeström, 1987; 1994). In this respect competence cultivation results from the activity resolving this problem, even if only provisionally. The process also links the dynamics and course of individual learning activities with the dynamics and organization of collective learning and labour activities. Here Engeström (1987) has introduced the concept ‘zone of proximate development’ as the situation when working people, supported by external expertise and developing research, learn aspects of the labour object, method, goal or product not yet included in the current operating procedure but refers to a new procedure that is possible and in a sense necessary based on changed circumstances. Professionals are thus able to influence the design and quality of their labour. In addition to task performance, the underlying standards and principles are addressed. Increasingly, this situation is necessary not only for

reflective professionals and learning organizations (Tjepkema 1993) but for staff carrying out the work as well.

Conclusions

In this article we have advocated interpreting employability broadly as the ability of employees to find work and to perform adequately in different and changing work situations. This emphasis on enhancing the position and opportunities of employees does not entail disregarding the impact of changes on the labour market (see Fruytier and Klomps in this issue) but does offer a different perspective. The substantive component of skill remains essential in our view and is even subject to more stringent albeit frequently different demands than in the past. Undeniably, they will include the flexibility to develop competencies, as well as to chart new fields of competency and possibly to abandon old, familiar ones. While a few organizational developments and demands stemming from the knowledge economy are in our view irreversible, they need not have divergent effects on various groups. In many functions the changes entail work pressure rather than competencies. The position of weak groups with low employability and labour market status merits consideration.

The potential of employability and broad professional expertise to benefit cultivation of citizenship depends on the opportunities for optimizing and changing on-the-job performance. Notwithstanding contradictory trends and limiting factors, such opportunities are increasingly available in many positions. As employees become more able to improve and change their work environment, with a view toward both process and product improvement and better performance, changes in availability can coincide with changes in social availability and personal opportunities. Aspects such as environmental concern, prevention of discrimination or promotion of social justice may figure in this process.

The process need not be harmonious and universally attuned from the outset. On the contrary. Increasingly, employees will face major organizational, social and personal dilemmas requiring responsible decisions that meet the situation's demands. A discerning attitude is in our view an integral part of broad professional expertise.

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