

UNDERSTANDING LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE:
CONCEPTS, MEASUREMENT AND APPLICATION
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Chapter 2: **Learning in and for working life: A relational interdependence between personal and social agency**

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(500 word extract)

Currently, there is great interest in and expectations of learning through work and throughout working life. An interest in ongoing work-related learning has even caused concepts of lifelong learning to be recast in ways that views its principal purpose as learning for workplace productivity (Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development, 1996). This represents an attempt by governments and employers to achieve enterprise and national competitiveness in an increasingly globalised economy by mobilising workers' ongoing learning (Field, 2000). The expectation here is that through engaging all kinds of workers in processes of learning that this will maintain their workplace competence, extend that competence into new domains of activities, as work requirements change, and across to new forms of work as occupational transitions become necessary. Much of this effort is directed towards making lifelong learning happen in particular ways, with initiatives directed towards attendance in courses and programmes aimed to secure these kinds of outcomes. Yet, learning throughout life, including that in working life, occurs inevitably through individual's engagement with their daily tasks, including those at work, often in the absence of anyone directly guiding that learning. In short, there is no difference between the processes of thinking and acting, and learning (e.g. Lave, 1993; Rogoff & Lave, 1984): it is ongoing and continuous in so far as we think and act. The ongoing process of learning that arises throughout our lives has been described as microgenetic development (Rogoff, 1990) and comprises the moment-by-moment learning that contributes both incrementally and transformatively to individuals' lifelong process of change: their ontogenetic development (Scribner, 1985b).

The kinds of incremental and transformative learning arising throughout working life are no exception. They arise through individuals' engagement in everyday goal-directed work activities (Billett, 2001b), which by degree are familiar or novel to those individuals. Familiar activities likely provide experiences that incrementally refine and hone (i.e. develop further) what individuals know and can do, whereas activities novel to the individual stand to be generative of new knowledge, categories. That is, they can transform individuals' knowing and their ontogenetic development. This ongoing and pervasive process of learning likely constitutes most of individuals' learning throughout working life. Therefore, its processes and consequences are worthy of careful consideration in order to understand, elaborate and identify how they proceed. From these bases, it might be possible to improve or direct that learning in particular ways or to achieve particular kinds of learning wanted by governments, employers and workers themselves. Certainly, as it becomes increasingly important to understand lifelong learning across all kind of work and workers, because of the constant changes to work requirements, there is a need to understand further this process of learning. This includes the variations in this process and the kinds of learning that are realised through these variations. Such an understanding might then help advise how best this learning throughout working life can be advanced and contribute governments', enterprises and workers goals for learning. Clearly these are important priorities for those interested in human resource development.