

# eLearning Hubs and Edu-business: How Private Companies Can Serve Common Good: The Case of Samsung School

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**Abstract** “*You are never too old, too young or too busy to learn*”. This means that you can be a lifelong learner, truly enjoying your learning experience. This has been quite an interesting change of perspective in learning, which is worth investigating. Both in environments primarily thought for education and during *ad hoc* experiences Edu-tainment is the leading star to perform at best and enjoy the deepening of your knowledge and skills. The theoretical aspect of Education and Learning is no more detached from the concept of “being able to apply notions”. What it matters today is not only the pure knowledge, which still constitutes the basis of the knowledge society. However it is ‘simply’ the first layer, on which others should be put: in modern society skills and competences are fundamental, when it comes to Education and Innovation, considered by a lifelong learning perspective. They span different domains, which were not traditionally part of the educational field: digital competences, social and civic ones, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression. Education is and remains a common good by all means, however it is no more an abstract and a stand-alone concept, rather it is considered more valuable if it serves a precise purpose in our society. Skills-based knowledge is what makes the difference today. It is no more the notion that is at the centre of the learning process, rather its links with the real world and the degree of impact that what you have learnt and experienced can make in the society, is what counts. Education is more and more considered by learners as a permanent status in their life: sometimes it comes up, other times is in sleep mode. What is meaningful is that it is by all means a life experience, where the attitude of the learner means more than everything: “*Learning to learn is the ability to pursue and persist in learning, to organise one’s own learning, including through effective management of time and information both individually and in groups*”. As the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning states. What is more, in the

Recommendation we read: “*a positive attitude includes the motivation and confidence to pursue and succeed at learning throughout one’s life. A problem-solving attitude supports both the learning process itself and an individual’s ability to handle obstacles and change*”. In other words, the learning experience is not something which is accomplished just in school, on the contrary it permeates the life of the learner, as skills and competences should be used to cope with challenges which belong to the world outside the classroom. As a concrete evidence of this, we can refer to e-Learning as a mean to build thinking skills: when you help learners build this kind of competences, you enable the workforce to quickly adapt to changing conditions. Each lifelong learner needs to face different circumstances: what makes the difference is not the theory, rather, what matters are problem solving skills; such as creative thinking (generating new ideas) and critical thinking (analysis and evaluation). This is just an example, on how non traditional transferable skills can enhance the employability prospects of a learner. Outlining this scenario is fundamental to pave the way to the analysis of the Copernican (R)evolution we are witnessing in the (educational) world: social benefit and private investments are now part of the same life-cycle. In my paper I will focus on the principles, reasons and consequences that are implied in this new phenomenon, which has already affected other domains (i.e. Eco-business). In my opinion, the “mix” between public and private investments will be increasingly relevant in the future of education, for two basic reasons: resources availability is more and more scarce; competitiveness is becoming stronger. It is extremely important to underline that in investigating this (R)evolution we need to be rigorous and distinguish among experiences, singling out the virtuous patterns that can be transferable and applicable to different contexts, ensuring that common standards are respected and that the nature of learning is not distorted. The participation of private actors in the (e)Learning process should not be considered as a way of relinquishing the inner nature of Education and Learning,

rather, if well-conceived and managed, the final result proves to be completely the opposite. What should be always granted is the fairness of the processes, namely solid and sound policies have to be in place in order to provide the precise framework, in which a private actor can then intervene, complementing and integrating what the public authority has to assure to its citizens. In the paper the investigation of such a phenomenon will be complemented by the focus on a case study, with the purpose to shed light on the practical implications that this new educational scenario can lead to. Namely "Samsung School and Labs" will be under scrutiny. The purpose of innovation, in each domain, is to open up new scenarios: in Education and Learning fields it is particularly true that creativity is inspiring and, if well managed, can be revolutionary.

**Keywords** Copernican (R)evolution, Personalisation, Corporate Social Responsibility

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## 1. A New Learning Perspective: Key Findings and Policy Relevance

Education is a common good. Learning lays at the basis of each society. The quality of both education and learning is a universal value. As each human experience both quality and learning have evolved through space, time and delivery means: we cannot anymore argue that pedagogical methods look the same, as they were centuries ago. The mix of "Technology and Innovation" has had and has a terrific impact on the way in which we conceive, deliver and manage education and learning. Observing reality, we can state that today, teachers and learners are both designers: the training field is undergoing an evolution from a craft based on fads and folk wisdom to a profession that integrates evidence into the design and development of its products. Part of the training revolution has been driven by the use of digital technology to manage and deliver instructional solutions. How we learn, with whom, and by what means is changing. Two are the driving forces behind the creation of new approaches to dissemination and integration of new information into the educational process, which spans both the classroom and the workplace: on the one hand knowledge and on the other technology. Moreover learners, who have traditionally been readers and receivers of information, are taking on a new role as notion generators and information providers. In this scenario, what is worth underling is that a technology does not make e-Learning, but rather teachers and learners use technology to create the social space in which learning occurs. In the specific, where e-Learning embodies a transformation in learning, it entails more than just a change in delivery mechanisms, it changes the way we learn. Some of the transformative effects include greater learner responsibility in formal learning setting through collaborative learning as a practice and online

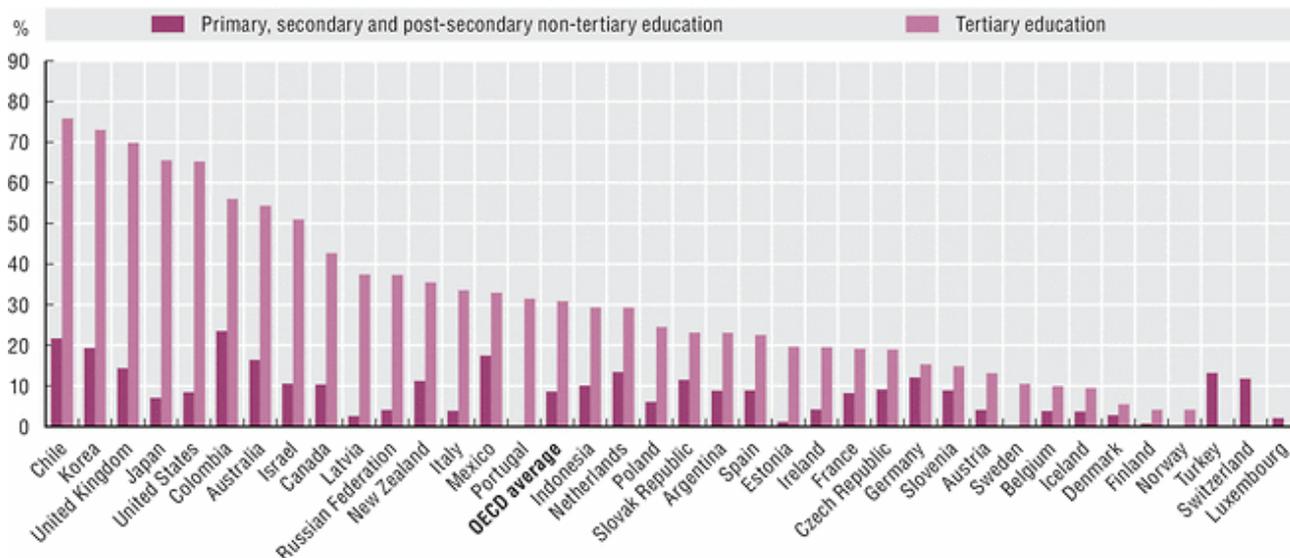
conversations as rhetorical platforms. *"We will be not judged for the "champions" we create, but by the number of opportunities we create for others to be "champions" in life."*<sup>[1]</sup> The purpose of education is to prepare individuals for life and to instill a sense of democratic citizenship; and to do so for all learners, regardless of socio- economic and cultural differences. *"Quality education and training fuel inclusive, sustainable growth as learning outcomes translate into the productivity and innovation of the working-age population. The crisis has brought to light that sometimes education systems prepare children for a world that no longer exists; many schools are not attuned to the benefits of digital learning and the new pedagogies they enable; and too many learners do not have their qualifications recognised."*<sup>[2]</sup> Namely what clearly marks the new learning perspective is the rising of a concept which opens horizons: the attractiveness of education and training systems, and of the teaching profession. The socio-economic impact of education is long-lasting and holistic, this is why education cannot afford to contribute anything less than its full potential. In fact it has been extensively demonstrated that there is a strong economic and social case for investing in education. Resources should be spent on conceiving and implementing new theories and methodologies of teaching and learning: a case in point is eLearning in higher education, a domain which has been traditionally resistant to the systematic and systemic use of technology within the curricula and syllabi. It is under our eyes, at which extent pedagogical and technological innovations are redefining higher education. At the nexus of this convergence is e-Learning. Concurrent quality and cost reduction pressures are creating the conditions for the transformation of higher education. Investments both from the private and public sector are paying off if they fuel real innovation, building up on the existing. In fact e-Learning will fail if it is merely add on or to repackage current educational designs. It is essential to be ready to rethink and re-design current educational programs and practices, having as a reference new educational frameworks. In so doing we should have a leading star: e-Learning in higher education is first and foremost about providing quality in the educational experience. It is the potential of e-Learning to merge verbal and written discourse, unconstrained by time, and its capillarity within everyday life which makes it worth investing on it also in educational domain. Education is about ideas, not isolated bits of information. And in the specific communication technologies with their multiple media are transforming teaching and learning. Within higher education, through wise investment in technologies, Communities of Inquiry are springing and they are organized around sub-elements of teaching presence (design, facilitation and direction); each of these in turn reflects the issue of social and cognitive presence. New principles should be followed: the creation of open communication and trust, establishment of community and cohesion, sustain enquiry that moves to resolution, ensure assessment is

congruent with intended processes and outcomes. However realizing the potential of e-Learning does not imply that traditional values and practices will be declared obsolete. It is the demand of an evolving knowledge society which creates expectations for individuals to be independent thinkers and, at the same time, interdependent, collaborative learners. It is in fact the ability to connect instructors and students in a sustained manner which has changed the approaches to teaching and learning in higher education. Once Web 2.0, Web 3.0 (semantic web), social media, mobile learning are considered opportunities and not constraints to deliver a high quality of academic education, joint investments, both from public and private sector should be made in order to exploit the full potential of these new media. This is a concrete way through which education can contribute to productivity, competitiveness and innovation, while leveling the playing field and breaking cycles of disadvantage. Near the "Knowledge Triangle", Education-Learning-Innovation, a new triangle has risen to complement the first, to spur the full potential of contemporary education: Productivity – Competitiveness - Employability. Focusing on this aspect: youth unemployment remains rampant across Europe and the employment rate of recent graduates stagnated at 75.5% in 2013. VET graduates have better employment prospects in countries where work-based learning is a strong component of VET programmes and higher education graduates are still about 11 percentage points more likely to be employed than those with upper secondary education attainment.<sup>[3]</sup>

## 2. Share of Private Spending on Educational Institutions, 2011

This figure shows the share of private spending on educational institutions as a percentage of total spending on educational institutions.

However increasing the private share in educational budgets does not automatically lead to improved educational outcomes. In fact, as the table above shows, in countries where traditionally the educational standards and performances are excellent (i.e. Sweden, Finland and Denmark), the highest investments are made by the public sector, at the same time, where the private sector wisely channels its funds (i.e. United States, Japan, United Kingdom) the educational sector is effectively competitive and strives for excellence. The way the resources (often scarce) are used and the mechanisms for channeling them, do matter. To reap the benefits of education, it is necessary on the one hand consolidating public budgets, and on the other to stimulate growth-enhancing policies, such as education and training. In combining these two sides, the role of private funding is fundamental in fuelling innovation: till some years ago this kind of investments were mainly directed to higher education, nowadays the scenario has changed. Philanthropy is no more the unique mean through which investments step in education and training systems. Significantly partnerships are virtuously springing and transforming slowly (but surely) several segments of the learning system, spanning early childhood, primary education and lifelong learning.



Source: OECD (2014), *Education at a Glance 2014*, Chart B3.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933117478>.

**Table 1.** Share of private expenditure on educational institutions (2011)

	Pre-primary education	Primary and lower secondary education	Upper and post-secondary education	Tertiary education
EU	16.2	6.1	14.3	25.4
Belgium	3.6	2.9	4.2	9.9
Bulgaria	8.8	1.3	5.8	49.4
Czech Republic	8.0	7.7	11.3	18.9
Denmark	7.9	3.8	0.5	5.5
Germany	19.6	3.1	27.4	15.3
Estonia	1.6	1.1	1.1	19.6
Ireland	0.1	3.8	5.3	19.5
Greece	:	:	:	:
Spain	28.6	9.1	8.1	22.5
France	6.3	7.1	10.3	19.2
Croatia	8.3	0.6	4.4	24.9
Italy	9.7	4.2	3.2	33.5
Cyprus	22.4	8.1	13.0	50.5
Latvia	1.8	1.6	4.7	37.4
Lithuania	12.0	2.4	4.5	26.1
Luxembourg	1.2	2.0	2.4	:
Hungary	:	:	:	:
Malta	26.6	24.3	8.7	:
Netherlands	12.4	3.6	33.8	29.2
Austria	28.3	3.3	5.4	13.1
Poland	23.9	5.5	7.6	24.5
Portugal	:	:	:	31.4
Romania	3.3	0.6	1.5	11.1
Slovenia	18.8	8.1	10.8	14.8
Slovakia	16.0	11.9	10.7	23.1
Finland	9.9	0.4	1.3	4.1
Sweden	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.5
United Kingdom	30.7	10.9	26.6	77.1

Source: Eurostat (UOE) based on a July 2014 extraction. Note: the Table depicts the private expenditure as a percentage of the total expenditure on education institutions. EU estimate based on available data.

What is extremely important to bear in mind, while investigating these transformations in the interaction between private and public sector within education, is that investment in education is an important element in building growth, while both equity and inclusiveness have to be addressed with the purpose of distributing the benefits of education more equitably across society. In fact, private spending on education risks raising inequalities if student support systems do not include a strong element of targeted support for the most disadvantaged. As the table significantly shows, private investments in Europe are mainly channeled towards higher education. In fact, as it has been stated above, being private investments linked to employability, higher education is the segment of educational sector which is more linked to the job market, therefore the return of investments is more likely to be higher. Again the UK are the European country where private investments are strongest, while Nordic countries are the most resistant in "allowing" private investor to fund education, being it part of their strong welfare state.

Education is and remains a common good by all means, however it is no more an abstract and a stand-alone concept,

rather it is considered more valuable if it serves a precise purpose in our society. Naturally the freedom of choice is left to each learner: being a fundamental human right (UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art 26) human beings can (unfortunately in several cases, could in principle) decide the extent to which they want to engage in such an experience, which still has a speculative component, but which is more and more complemented by other forms of considerations.

Skills-based knowledge is what makes the difference today. It is no more the notion that is at the centre of the learning process, rather its links with the real world and the degree of impact that what you have learnt and experienced can make in the society, is what counts. As stated above e-Learning is a case in point of this, and as each innovation should be subjected to SWAT analysis, to have a complete overview of the implications, advantages and shortcomings that can occur. Among the strengths: for its nature, it is a bottom up process; it deals with a diversity of models and theoretical approaches which correspond to a variety of implementative solutions, strongly user oriented; last but not the least the opportunity to capitalize the knowledge and to

build and multiply the possibilities of connection. The weaknesses include the chronic shortage of economic, human, professional, structural and technological resources; the absence of copyright policies to protect specific know-how productions; the significant resistance within the academic institutions; the risk of dispersion and fragmentation present in these technologies. Regarding the opportunities: the progressive lowering of costs in relation to the diffusion of Information and Communication Technologies; the variety of ways of teaching made possible; an expanding market offering new job opportunities, and more importantly, the establishment of a new idea of lifelong learning policy that could open training for a new 'student target'. Finally a reflection on threats: the serious lack visor and policies of development at the decision making level; the lack of investments in this sector and the inadequate technological infrastructure.

### 3. A Copernican (R)evolution

Outlining this scenario is fundamental to pave the way to the analysis of the Copernican (R)evolution we are witnessing in the (educational) world: social benefit and private investments are now part of the same life-cycle. It is extremely important to underline that in investigating this (R)evolution we need to be rigorous and distinguish among experiences, singling out the virtuous patterns that can be transferable and applicable to different contexts, ensuring that common standards are respected and that the nature of learning is not distorted. The participation of private actors in the (e)Learning process should not be considered as a way of relinquishing the inner nature of Education and Learning, rather, if well conceived and managed, the final result proves to be completely the opposite. What should be always granted is the fairness of the processes, namely solid and sound policies have to be in place in order to provide the precise framework, in which a private actor can then intervene, complementing and integrating what the public authority has to assure to its citizens. This is the solid basis on which public-private partnerships can flourish and bear fruits. Nobody should be naive: private companies invest if they see a return. However this principle does not conflict per se with the performances and the quality of the educational experience, if solid compensatory mechanisms are set in place. The concept of scholarships (which has been and still is powerful) has been overcome by the logic of private continuous investments in the learning process: this phenomenon is particularly evident within eLearning.

More importantly, we should bear in mind that human beings have always been seekers of knowledge. The minute we discover something new, we want to share it with others and move onto the next achievement. Since the beginning of recorded history (and probably before) we have always strived to discover the mysteries of the planet, of Earth and of ourselves. It is this concept of natural predisposition towards "sharing", combined with, on the one hand knowledge and

skills acquisition going in parallel, and on the other, the advent and the impact of powerful innovation through technologies that make eLearning the case in point for assessing how this new partnership between public and private actors can be translated in a win-win situation. More specifically digital technology is becoming nearly omnipresent in our daily lives as well as at work. Technology offers important opportunities for individuals to be creative and innovative, as well as more productive; and to connect and to collaborate across borders. It also gives potential access to a continuously expanding online pool of knowledge. It is under everybody's eyes that ICTs by opening up education and training philosophy and systems, respond effectively to the challenges of equipping citizens with the range and depth of competences required in the context of global competition and interconnectedness, demographic changes and rapid technological developments. To succeed in doing so, it is of key importance that Europe fully exploits the potential offered by pedagogical research and new technologies to foster more personalised, collaborative, creative and innovative methods of learning, and better access to learning resources and learning opportunities. The virtuous role of private sector in this process is fundamental.

### 4. Case Study: Samsung School and Labs

Within Samsung world, education is considered from another perspective: learning is associated to productivity. The starting promise is to "provide a superior quality educational experience, to nurture a professional, highly skilled teaching staff to help students reach their full potential; to manage schools in an efficient and cost-effective manner". In this case the Learning Triangle is made up of: Sharing-Connecting- Fostering Student-Teacher Communication. Entering in Samsung

Learning Lab, means to find on the left hand side column what follows:

*Music Hub*  
*Game Hub*  
*Reader Hub*  
*Video Hub*  
*Learning Hub*

In other words "learning" is completely harmonious and resonate semantically with music, game and other domains, because you are the "manager of your learning experience" and being the learner at the centre of the eLearning process, strict boundaries have no more sense to be traced. No matter which age you are, no matter in which place you are, regardless of the hour of the day or of the night, you can be immerse in the Learning Hub and choose what to do: if to opt out for the Learning hub, or if to focus your attention on other subjects, exercising forms of Edu-tainment, through technologies, by means offered by a private company, on a devise of that company, following the logic they have

created for you Learner of the XXI century. Namely “Samsung School is a total education solution designed to delight students and teachers alike with its innovative teaching and learning tools. The innovative Samsung School integrates devices with interactive learning tools, to offer more flexibility in storing, managing, and sharing educational content and student information.”<sup>[4]</sup> Starting from Samsung School keywords “Manageable, Collaborative, Engaging” the concept of attractiveness (as stressed as cornerstone of the learning process in EU and OECD documents) is depicted, displayed and implemented at its highest potential. The hands on experience and collaboration result in an increasing knowledge retention: this is the concrete answer of Samsung to the concept of “personalising education” which is nowadays the leading star of contemporary pedagogy. The “learning environment” through screen monitoring, student device control and the lesson toolbar; a simpler “content management system” with remote launch, course administration and the public library on teachers’ and students’ PCs and tablets; “digital collaboration in the e-classroom” through group discussion, group report, separable canvas, screen sharing and digital hand writing capability brought to the following brilliant results. Initial testing in actual classrooms showed that Samsung School increased school competitiveness and improved student concentration by 23%, while teachers productivity was improved by approximately 10%.<sup>[5]</sup> These are meaningful findings, in line with what is expected by education and training systems of contemporary societies. Wishful thinking would bring to strive for more partnerships of this kind between public and private stakeholders within the domain at stake.

## 5. Conclusions

The purpose of innovation, in each domain, is to open up new scenarios: in Education and Learning fields it is particularly true that creativity is inspiring and, if well managed, can be revolutionary. The goal of my paper is to show both theoretically and practically that public/private partnerships can open up new paths towards a future of education where what is stated in art. 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is always true: “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace”

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