

Rising generation and IT

Young people have throughout history been at the heart of creativity, innovation, and social and economic progress. It is therefore important that their talents are carefully nourished so that they are able to realise their potential in full. It is often young people, who first see (I can describe innovations, they will make them happen) the innovative opportunities and who fully exploit the possibilities offered by novel technologies, such as ICT. This sector has repeatedly been built by young and dynamic people: Linus Torvald created Linux when he was only 22, Janus Friis the co-founder of Skype is still only 30 and Bill Gates was only 19 when he founded Microsoft. Today's youth will therefore play a crucial role in the region's prospects, as jobs and growth will come from new products and services and new ways of doing things that they will create.

If the younger generations win, a country wins. If they lose, there is no hope.

However, and this is embarrassing, rather surprisingly it is among the young that unemployment and underemployment are the highest, not only in this region, but in Europe as a whole. At the same time, despite the levels of unemployment, the demand for skilled workers outstrips supply – a recent IDC survey looked ahead at 2008 and found that there may be a shortage of up to half a million people in advanced networking technology skills in the EU alone.

So, what it is that we are doing wrong, or not doing at all?

We need to realise that the young are key to the future economic and social health of all nations. The challenge was, and is, to go beyond the 1 billion people who use computers today. I don't need to remind you that today's landscape of so called global economy, our lives in most details and aspects, are largely driven by computers and software, and the speed of change is growing.

Clearly, governments play a key role in driving the information revolution within their countries, using technology themselves to be more efficient, to be more

transparent, to deliver better services, and then providing key policies for the investments, and particularly in education which is a key factor to allow things to develop.

As we think about the next ten years, the advances in technology are going to create even more opportunities, and we're going to revolutionize more activities than ever before.

The technology will be lower cost as the prices constantly come down, and it will be much easier to use because instead of just working with a key board in the years ahead, the machine will be able to take ink as an input. It will have a tablet device that you can just write on it, and send your ink to other people, or have it be recognized. You'll be able to use speech. The computer will even have a camera and be able to tell who is participating, who is talking, and see exactly who is there, so that it can offer up all the right options.

We have to think about the infrastructure and the training. We have to think about financing and the quality maintenance globally. It's not just the cost of the PC, but rather these issues of connectivity, of the training, the maintenance, the support, all of those have to come together, and most of those are actually more difficult, and more expensive than just the hardware piece.

The magic of software is something I've believed in for a long, long time and it is the main reason why I am still after 15 years in Microsoft.

In the years ahead, computing will change the way we think about education.

The chance to go up online and see the lectures from the best universities in the world, the chance for a teacher to go up and see another teacher teaching the course, and doing it in the best way possible, the opportunity to go up and find materials that will make the course interesting to the students, those things are all going to be just standard capabilities that we take for granted. And things that we used to think of all being together in education will, in some ways, separate out.

When we think of a university, we think of giving lectures, we think of doing study groups to help with the materials, and we think about testing to really certify that somebody has a degree, that they have a certain skill set.

Well, as we use the Internet and digital approaches, the lectures will be there and a very few universities can provide either for free or at low cost, and so that piece others should not feel the need to duplicate, because it will be much better to use what's already there. Sharing lectures. Likewise, the certification, the actual testing of knowledge can be delivered in a very efficient digital form. So that leaves creating the environment where the teacher and the students are working together and interacting. Today that is best done on a face-to-face basis. But over time even some elements of that can be done over the Internet.

ICT skills are central to this discussion because they are part of the increasingly globalised world economy and give those who use them a significant competitive advantage. Software enables people to be more effective and productive by facilitating access to information, improving decision-making and boosting collaboration and a growing number of businesses are aware of that. The World Bank has been a particular leader in developing and applying the “knowledge economy” framework to assist the development strategies of individual countries and to generate useful comparisons among them.

Additionally, an IDC study commissioned by Microsoft in January revealed that e-skills are the key to employment and inclusion, as they are increasingly “THE” entry-ticket to the labour market and better jobs, like a social elevator. Computer literacy is becoming the fourth key skill required by employers alongside, reading, writing and arithmetic.

For me, education needs to be at the heart of the answer to the problem.

Helping the younger generations to achieve their potential is one of the most important missions that one could have in life. It is a destination and it is a journey. But no one can do it alone. We have to be together!

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