

Systemic changes and disruptions: rethinking our *approach to skills*

THIERRY CADART AND ÉRIC CHEVÉE

The world of work is entering an era of rapid change. The lifespan of a technical skill has plummeted, falling from 20 to 30 years in 1980 to just **6 to 24 months** today. In the face of this rapid obsolescence, the accumulation of theoretical knowledge is no longer enough: the ability to adapt has become the central challenge for individuals and organisations.

This acceleration is radically transforming our relationship with skills. According to the EESC, we must collectively rethink how we identify, acquire and recognise them. The study offers key insights on how to make skills a real asset in the face of the transitions ahead.

A labour market that still overlooks too much talent

The EESC notes that the way in which skills are identified and recognised continues to hinder access to employment. This can hinder the integration of young people into the labour market, limit the ability of older workers to remain in employment, and reduce the professional recognition of many female-dominated occupations, as well as the opportunities for career progression and retraining for many workers. This approach creates a form of pre-determination upon leaving the education system, preventing some individuals from fulfilling their professional potential. The EESC points out that these missed opportunities for individuals inevitably lead to missed opportunities for society as a whole, and that it is becoming essential to include everyone in order to prevent certain groups from remaining permanently excluded from the world of work. Des transformations majeures qui bousculent le travail... et génèrent des solutions.

The EESC points out that major transitions — the green transition, the digital transition (including AI), reindustrialisation and demographic change — are profoundly transforming occupations and skills. They require retraining, the emergence of new occupations and the continuous updating of skills. According to the EESC, these upheavals are not merely challenges: they can also serve as catalysts by highlighting the conditions and tools needed to better recognise, develop and maintain skills throughout life.

The lifespan of a technical skill is between 6 and 24 months.

How can we rethink our approach to skills?

STUDY

The EESC, true to its role as a guide for social change, identifies work as the cornerstone of our social contract. At a time when the rapid shift in skills requirements has rarely been so pronounced, our system continues to leave citizens on the sidelines by failing to recognise their true potential. The EESC identifies three main areas for consideration:

1 PROMOTING 'SOFT SKILLS' - WHICH THE EESC PREFERS TO REFER TO AS SOCIO-COGNITIVE SKILLS - AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Whilst technical knowledge is facing accelerated obsolescence, socio-cognitive skills (the ability to solve complex problems, cooperation, adaptability), as defined by AFNOR, are becoming crucial.

The EESC highlights that the recognition of learning acquired outside academic pathways (volunteering, trade union activity, civic engagement) remains a persistent 'blind spot' in France. It calls for these skills to be made visible to support access to skilled employment.

2 VIEWING TRAINING AS AN INVESTMENT AND BETTER COORDINATING NEEDS

The EESC stresses that training is still too often seen as an immediate expense with uncertain benefits, even though it is essential for tackling major changes. It highlights the importance of better aligning individual choices with the collective needs of businesses and sectors.

3 BUILDING 'LEARNING ORGANISATIONS'

Faced with the risk of exclusion for young people without qualifications and the challenge of keeping older workers in employment, the EESC proposes promoting the learning organisation model. This framework encourages autonomy and knowledge-sharing, transforming the workplace into a setting for continuous skills development. The challenge is to break free from the constraints of initial qualifications to enable genuine lifelong inclusion and to allow organisations and businesses to adapt more effectively and continuously in a rapidly changing world.

THE RAPPORTEURS

Thierry Cadart

thierry.cadart@lecese.fr
(33)1 44 43 64 07

Thierry Cadart is a former national secretary of the CFDT. He is a quaestor of the EESC and represents the CFDT group on the EESC's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and on its Committee on Education, Culture and Communication.

Éric Chevé

eric.chevee@lecese.fr
(33)1 44 43 64 20

Éric Chevé is Vice-President of the Confederation of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (CPME), responsible for social affairs. He represents the Business Group on the EESC's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs.