



Panel Detail:

Tuesday, April 23, 2002
02:45 PM - 04:00 PM

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Lifelong Learning: Competing in the 21st Century

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Concurrent Session

Sponsored by Thomson Enterprise Learning

Speakers:

Gary Becker, Nobel Laureate, Economic Sciences, 1992; Professor of Economics and Sociology, University of Chicago.

[Alex Brnilovich](#), President and Chief Executive Officer, Thomson Enterprise Learning (Naperville, IL)

[Stephan Hittmann](#), Executive Director, Fire and Life Safety, New York City Fire Department

[Jeanne Meister](#), Founder and President, Corporate University Xchange (New York)

[Stephen Rae](#), Worldwide Executive, IBM Mindspan Services (Atlanta)



Alex Brnilovich of Thomson Enterprise Learning discusses the importance of people to continually learn new skills. At left is Nobel laureate Gary Becker; Stephan Hittmann is at right.

The Lifelong Learning session brought together leading practitioners in the field of corporate and individual lifelong education with the Nobel Prize winning economist whose work on human capital demonstrated the value of education to individuals and societies.

Andrew Rosenfield was joined on the Lifelong Learning panel by Nobel Laureate Gary Becker, Alex Brnilovich, Stephan Hittmann, Jeanne Meister and Steven Rae. Rosenfield opened the session with some introductory remarks that illustrated the importance of human capital to wealth creation and economic growth. Skilled workers have, he argued, become accustomed to what he deemed a steep age-wage gradient. Individuals expect to receive increasingly higher remuneration as they gain experience. In order to maintain this gradient, he suggested, it is necessary for knowledge workers to continue their education throughout their careers.

Rosenfield asked Becker to set the stage for the discussion who stated that human capital is the most important form of capital for the modern economy. Human capital now accounts for more than 75% of the capital stock in the U.S. and the return to education has doubled since the 1960s. Reflecting on countries that have been economically successful, he identified three key factors: openness to trade, ideas and migrants; flexible labor markets, and investment in human capital. Human capital, Becker remarked, depreciates over time and skills become rapidly obsolete and require lifelong learning to update them.

Jeanne Meister compared corporate learning in 1992 with its present day form. In 1992, corporate learning was classroom based and dominated by small scale "mom and pop" businesses. Today, education firms are publicly traded and large scale. At the same time, there has been an explosion in the growth of corporate universities. Corporations are increasingly aware of the benefits of lifelong learning and are entering into strategic partnerships with universities more and more to create learning programs tailored to the needs of their workforce.

The perspective of the NY Fire Department was brought to the discussion by Stephen Hittman who related his experience in rebuilding the Fire Department in the wake of the World Trade Center tragedy in which 343 firemen including 89 senior leaders were lost – a total of 4,400 years of experience. Increasingly, the department seeks to use blended learning solutions to allow its members to learn new and increasingly needed skills without damaging the effectiveness and response times of the emergency services.

Alex Brnilovich, a partner of the Fire Department in providing educational services added that a key challenge for corporations is the need to re-skill workers, especially in the wake of major restructuring efforts. e-Learning is an increasingly important market segment with three million students and hundreds of firms offering virtual education. Brnilovich foresaw a future consolidation in the industry that would result in a market of just two or three large providers.

Steve Rae of IBM was the final speaker. For IBM, there are 3 issues of importance: investing in the human capital of its employees and partners, maximising the value to clients of IBM products and providing learning services to customers. He stressed the challenges of e-learning - most notably completion rates. Panelists agreed on the value of collaborative learning and the importance of course content. Andrew Rosenfield echoed the importance of collaborative learning and then gave the audience a practical demonstration of Cardean's commitment to avoiding passive communication by turning the rest of the session over to questions from the audience.

Panelists were first asked to predict what corporate learning would look like in five years. Stephen Hittmann remarked that the technology used would be impossible to forecast but foresaw an important role for blended learning solutions. Andrew Rosenfield believed collaboration between e-learning students would be more important while Alex Brnilovich stressed the likely role for wireless media. Another notable question was posed by Gary Becker. Wasn't it possible that the relationship between ability and education made it more likely that the return to ability had increased and not the return to education? Becker reflected on recent research to conclude that high ability individuals in fact have lower earnings than educated high ability individuals.