

15 Key Points made in
Nicola Söhlke's Keynote Speech

"Employability and Workforce Skills – What's Needed"

I. The new media are increasingly shaping all parts of our society: education and lifelong learning; industrial processes and services; participation in politics and institutions; procurement of entertainment and information. And, of course, communication processes in general.

II. In the past, economic success depended on the ownership of resources such as steel, coal, and manpower. Now, the "knowledge" factor stands at the heart of our modern information society.

III. As a result of this far-reaching societal transition, the success of a national economy is bound up with the degree to which it succeeds in networking and exploiting the knowledge of its citizens.

IV. Companies – and not just those in the IT industry – now need employees who treat computers and the Internet as normal everyday tools.

V. For each individual it means that his or her personal and professional development actually depends on how well he – or she – is able to handle existing information. How capable he is of procuring information, of exchanging his knowledge with others and of participating in the evolution of knowledge.

VI. Demands on young people looking for a good job have increased significantly. Even today, the overwhelming majority of occupations require comprehensive skills in handling new media.

VII. Especially in project-oriented occupations, employees have to be capable of researching and compiling current information. They must be able to handle a search engine as naturally as an encyclopedia.

VIII. Young people in particular must be given the opportunity to build these skills so that they are qualified for the job market.

IX. While German students who attend a "Gymnasium" are almost certain to receive computer instruction, this is much less likely to be the case for students at a "Hauptschule" or for the significant proportion of high school dropouts.

X. With respect to disadvantaged youths, we must consider ways for private and social sector to complement formal education, to avoid widening the gap between people who have good access to education and those who don't.

XI. The idea is not merely to prevent a digital divide at the societal level, but also to establish or at least come close to "freedom of opportunity" by digital means for everyone.

XII. The "Coaching Campaign for Youth Multipliers" of Foundation Digitale Chancen (www.digitale-chancen.de) shows us a way to counteract the digital illiteracy of disadvantaged youths.

XIII. This November, an initial coaching session for social workers will take place in a youth center in Brandenburg. The Foundation Digitale Chancen will be coaching 12 YMCA employees on how to meaningfully integrate the new media in their social youth work.

XIV. The coaching campaign will gradually be extended to other social institutions and disseminated using the train-the-trainer principle.

XV. Campaigns like this coaching series help to shape the future of our society – for the good of our young people, for the good of the sponsoring partner, and for the good of the society in question.