AN INTEGRATED APPROACH OF THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

SOME IMPLICATIONS TO DISTANCE - EDUCATION

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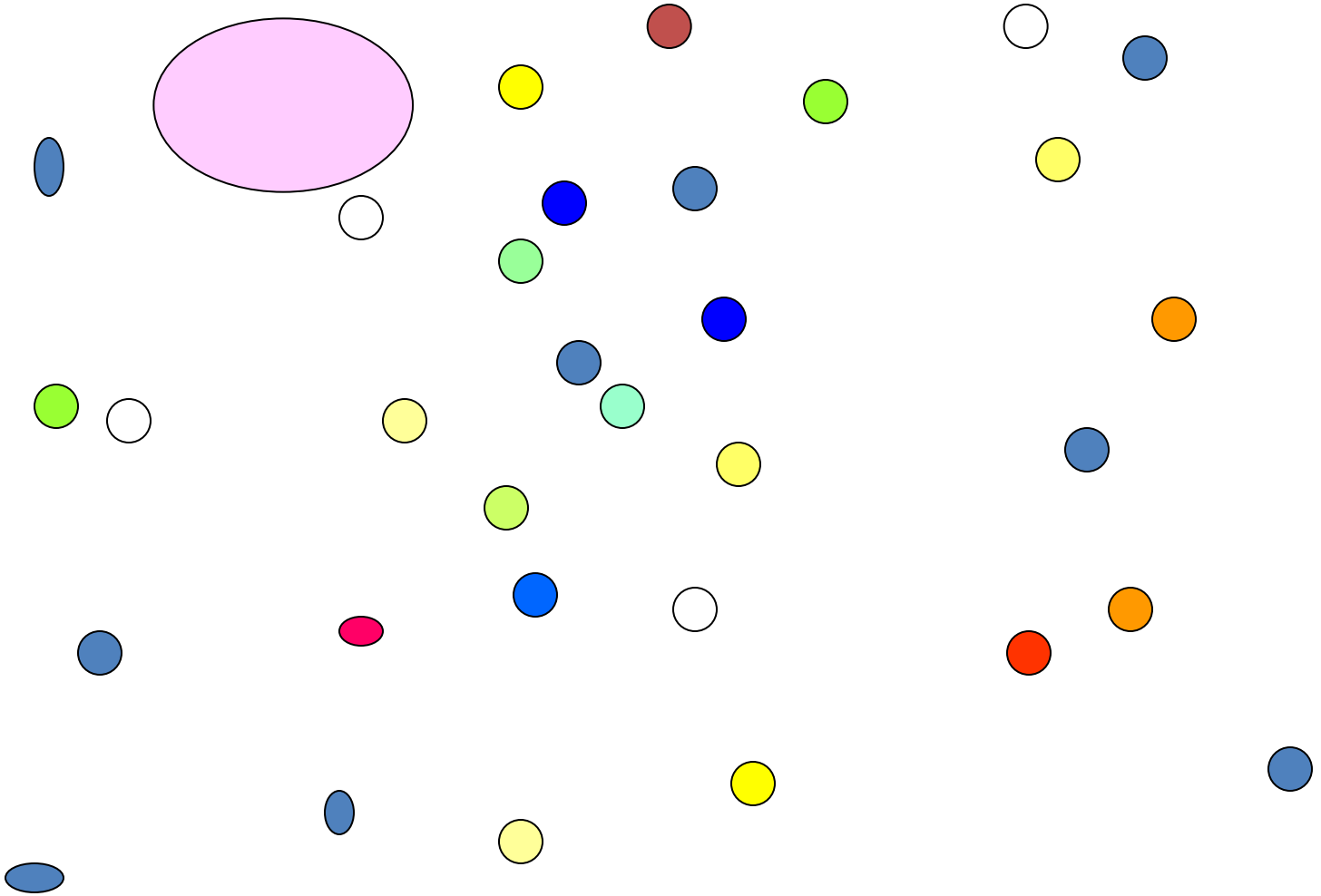
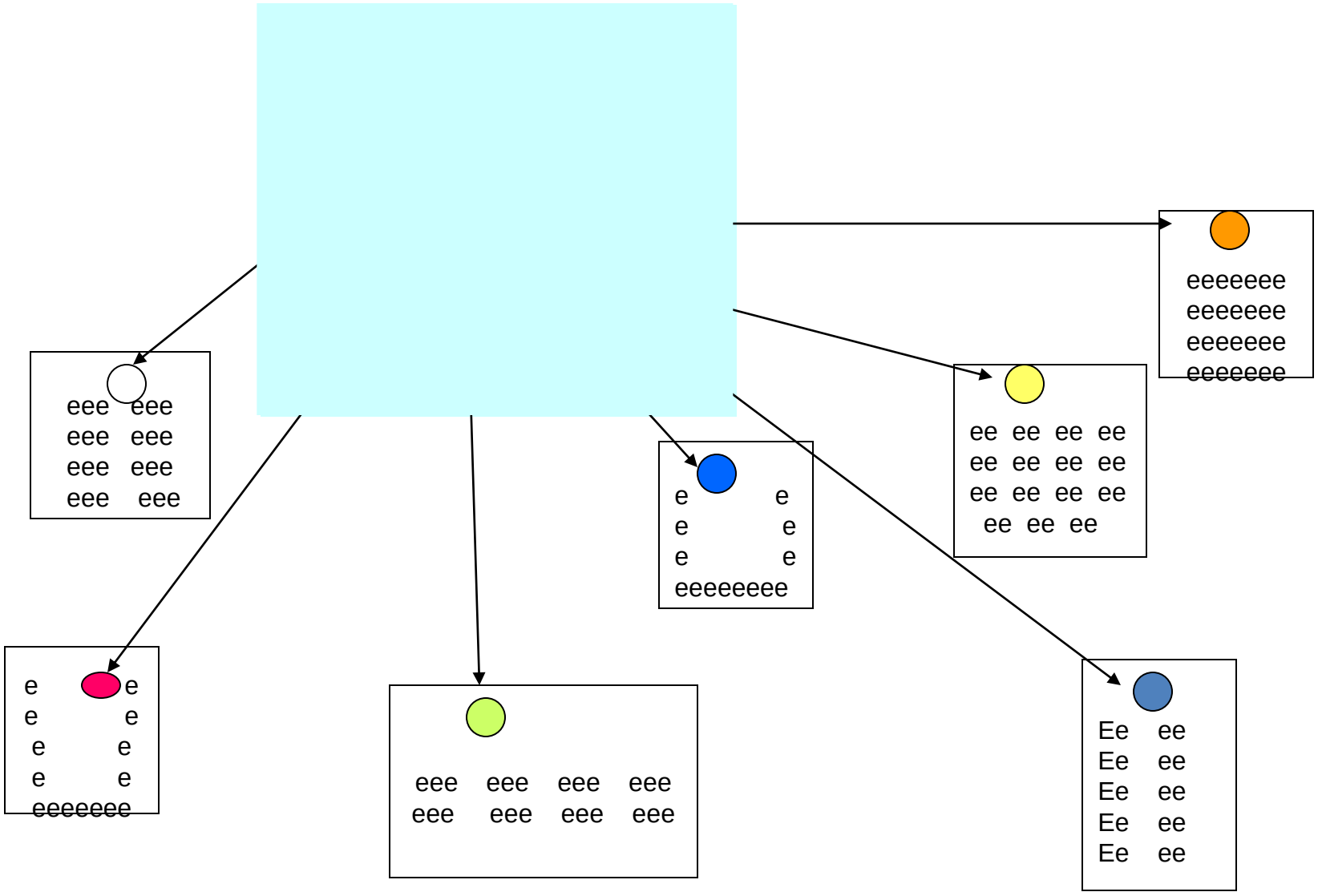
Distance Education

= a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accomodation and learning



- The higher education providers of distance-education programs consider learning as an individual activity, formalized in training courses off-the-job. But the attendants of this kind of program are working in different organizations, mostly as employees.

Is distance education only a two - ways process?



I. The context: the **off the job** and **on the job** training contribution to the professional development

II. A theoretical frame of reference: the Van der Krogt multidimensional model of learning

III. The distance-education (DE) as a network of learning-networks

IV. Proposals for the management and for reference and performance indicators of the DE programs of study.

I. The context:

Two professional development systems:

Off the job training:	**On the job training:**
a formal professional development	organized in the context of work organization (“work based learning”)

Off the job training:	**On the job training:**
a formal professional development	organized in the context of work organization

1. Although formal training remains a well-known and well-used practice, nowadays professional training is increasingly delivered on-the job, in the workplace.

Off the job training:	On the job training:
a formal professional development	organized in the context of work organization

2. There is a gap between formal professional development and work-based learning.
   At least, the former ignores the latter.
   The relationship between learning and work is usually left implicit.

Off the job training:	On the job training:
a formal professional development	(work based learning)

3) „On the job based learning" is undervalued.

There are a lot of professional learning situations (incidental learning, learning by observation, learning by doing the job, learning by mistakes, learning by projects etc.), which happens during the work and have to be integrated and valued as well by educational formal institutions.

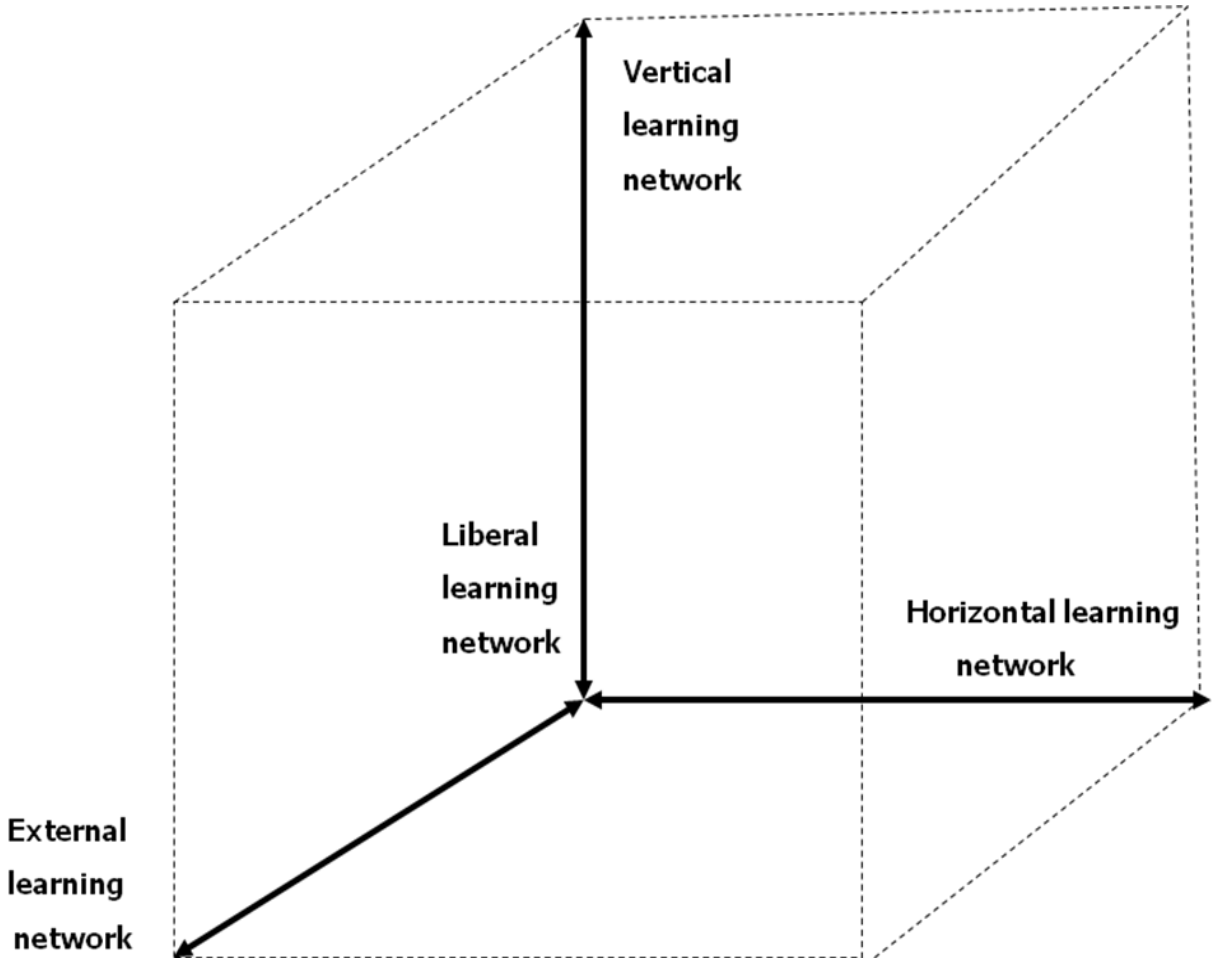
II. A theoretical frame of reference: the Learning-Network Theory

(Van der Krogt multidimensional model of learning-1995)

- The Learning-Network Theory points out that learning is generated in every organization, but the way it is generated differs.

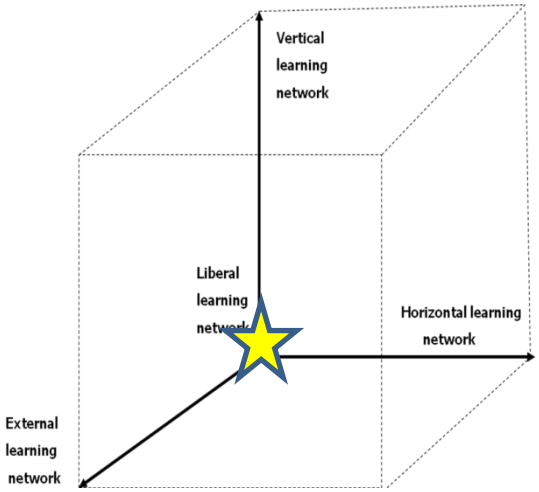
- Each learning-network has three main components: actors, learning processes and learning structures.

- **a) actors**: employees, managers and consultants. They organize learning activities, or learning processes, in interaction with each other;
- **b) learning processes**: in their interaction the actors create learning programs, policies, and practices. All these processes are referred to as learning processes;
- **c) learning structures**: the interaction between the actors and their strategies will result in certain structural arrangements regarding the content and organization of the learning project.
- Learning networks can be organized in different ways. The diversity in learning structures is captured along three dimensions: vertical, horizontal and external, and four theoretical types of learning-networks:


Vertical
learning
network
Liberal
learning
network
Horizontal learning
network
External
learning
network

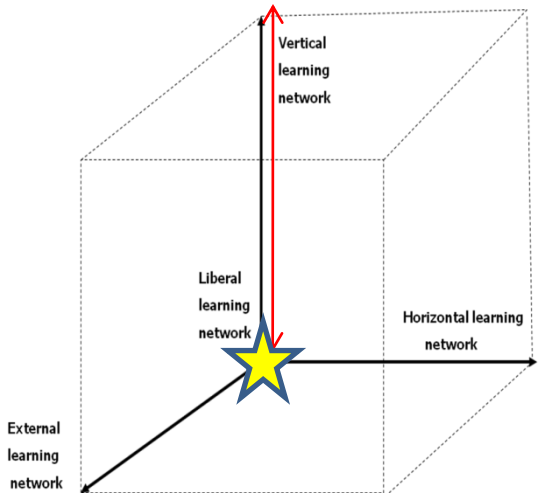
In the **liberal learning-network:**

- **Individuals** are responsible for their own work and learning, take care of coordination and control of learning themselves.



- They decide what they want to learn and organize a loosely coupled network of people to help them achieve it.

- The learning program consists of individual activities and is relatively unstructured.

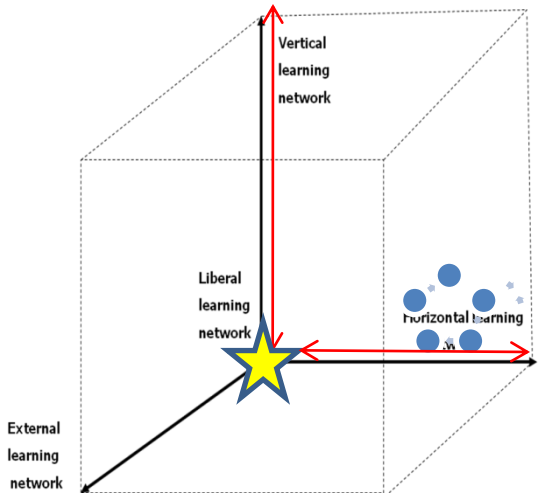


In the **vertical learning-network:**

- **The management** of the work organization decide on new work policies, design learning programs and give supervision to the learners, his employees.

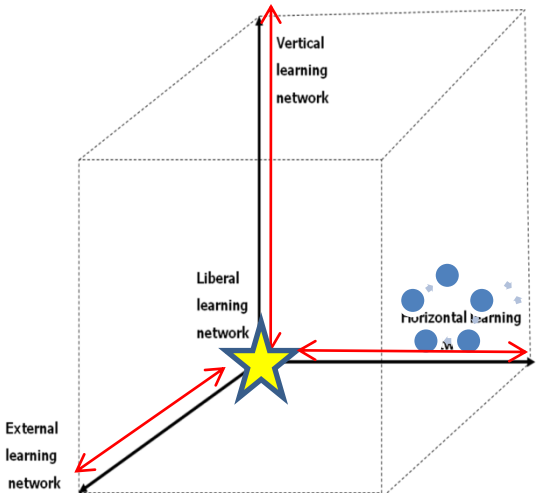
- The learning program is linearly planned and function oriented.

The **horizontal learning-network:**



- refers to the formal and in-formal groups the learner belongs to.
- **The working group** tackle work-related problems, attempts to solve problems by reflecting on experience, and bringing these into practice in an investigative manner.
- The learning program is problem oriented and integrated with daily work.

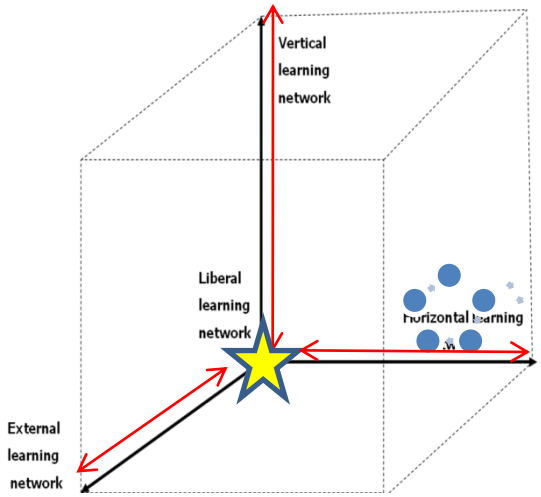
In the **external learning-network:**



- **Actors** outside the work organization (e.g., scientific and professional institutions /associations, trade unions, government agencies, commercial training agencies) can offer formal or non-formal learning programs.

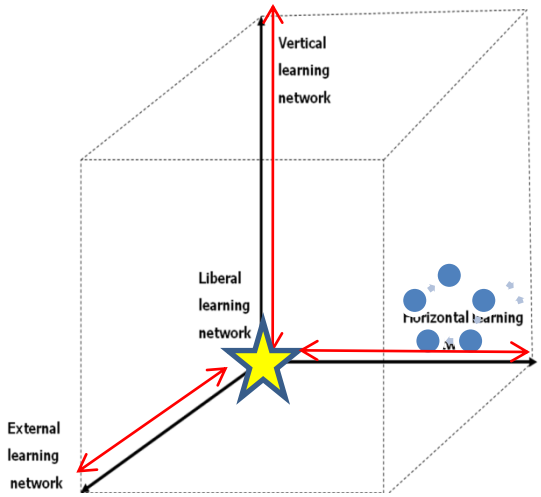
- The programs are externally coordinated and profession oriented.

The learning-network model :

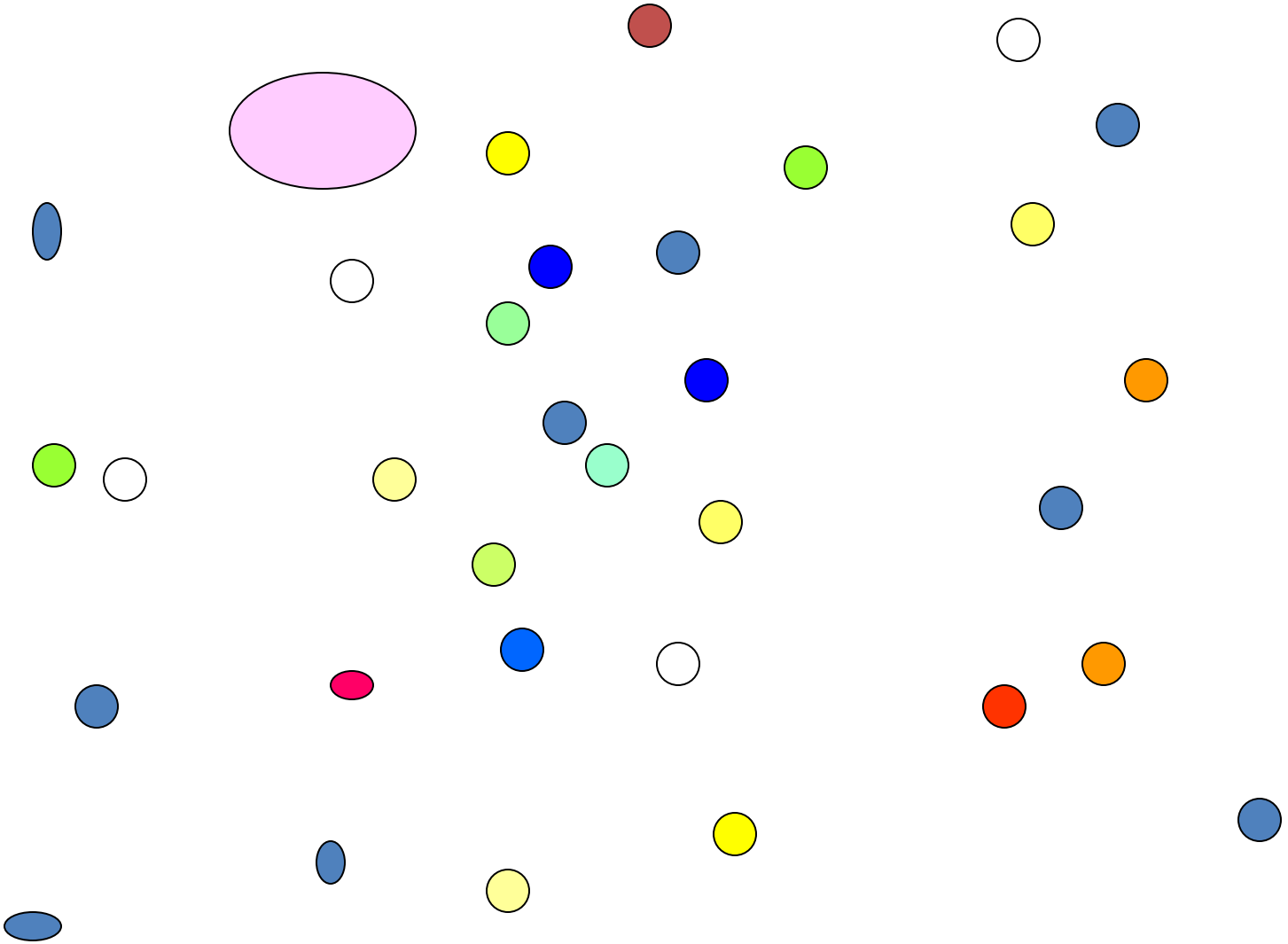


seems to be a useful frame of reference for understanding, reflection on, and action in distance-learning, an alternative theoretical framework on work-related learning.

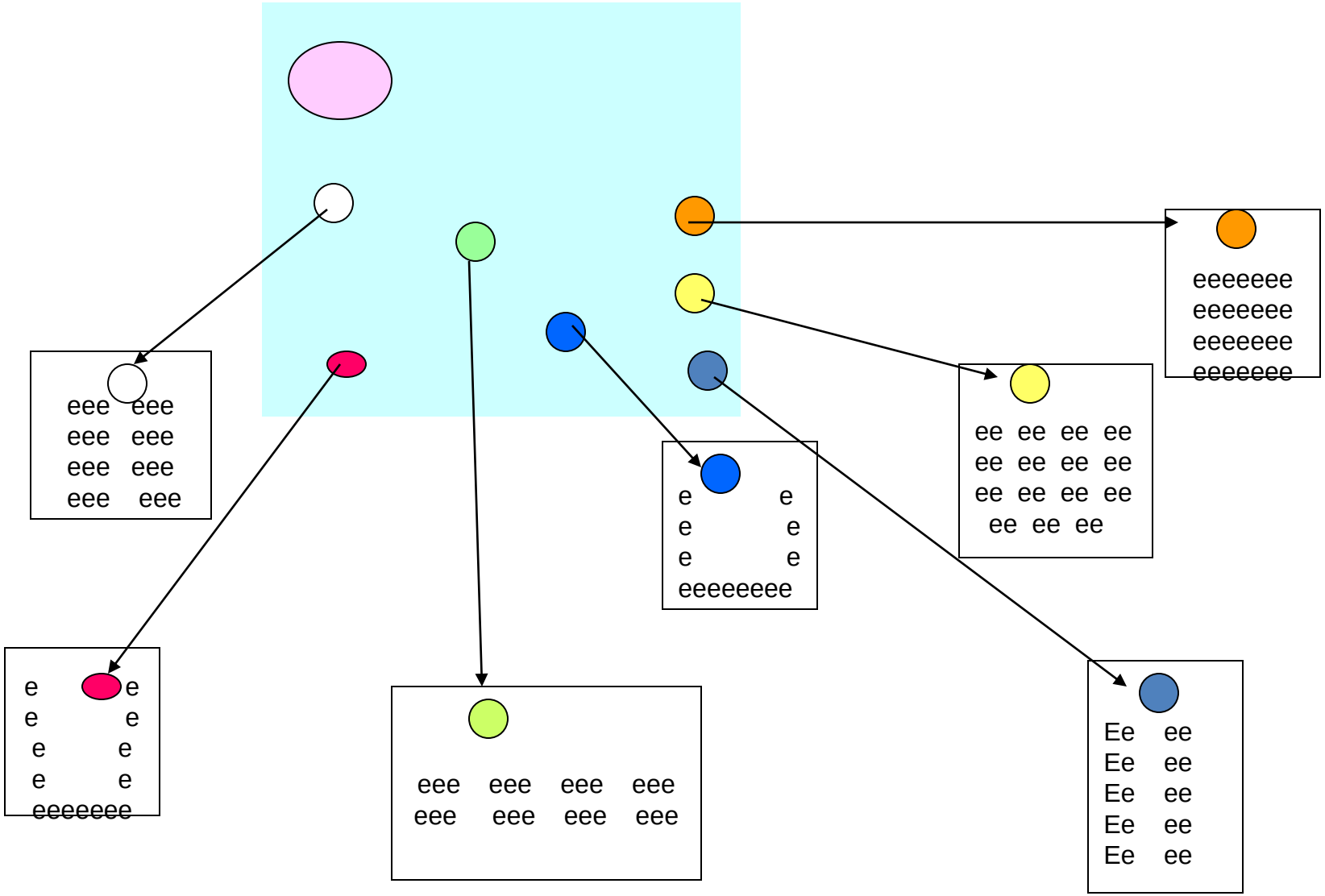
III. Distance-Education as a Network of the learning-networks



Applying the learning-network approach to distance-education allows us to a better understanding of the distance-education identity, and to the improvement of quality assessment tools.



Is distance education only a two - ways process?



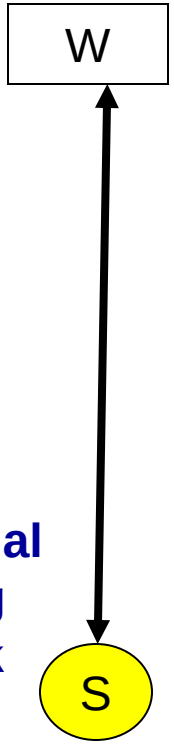
- **Liberal learning network** is the student learning network.

S

- Distance education designers should take into account the prior and everyday knowledge and interests of learners.

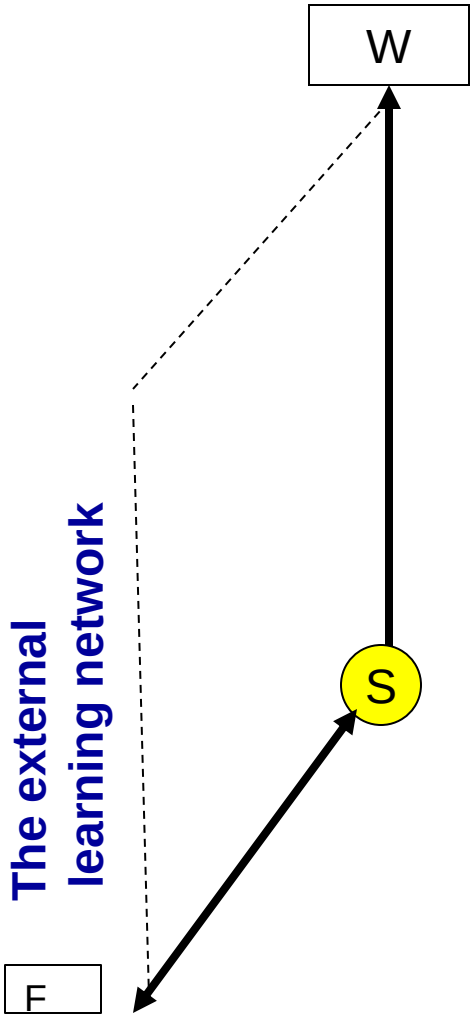
- The range of learning resources available to DE-students has increased in the past decade.
- An easier acces to data, communication devices and services do not necessarily guarantee that information is selected. To do it, student must be able to make choices between different learning sources and to monitor his/her own progress.

Vertical learning network:

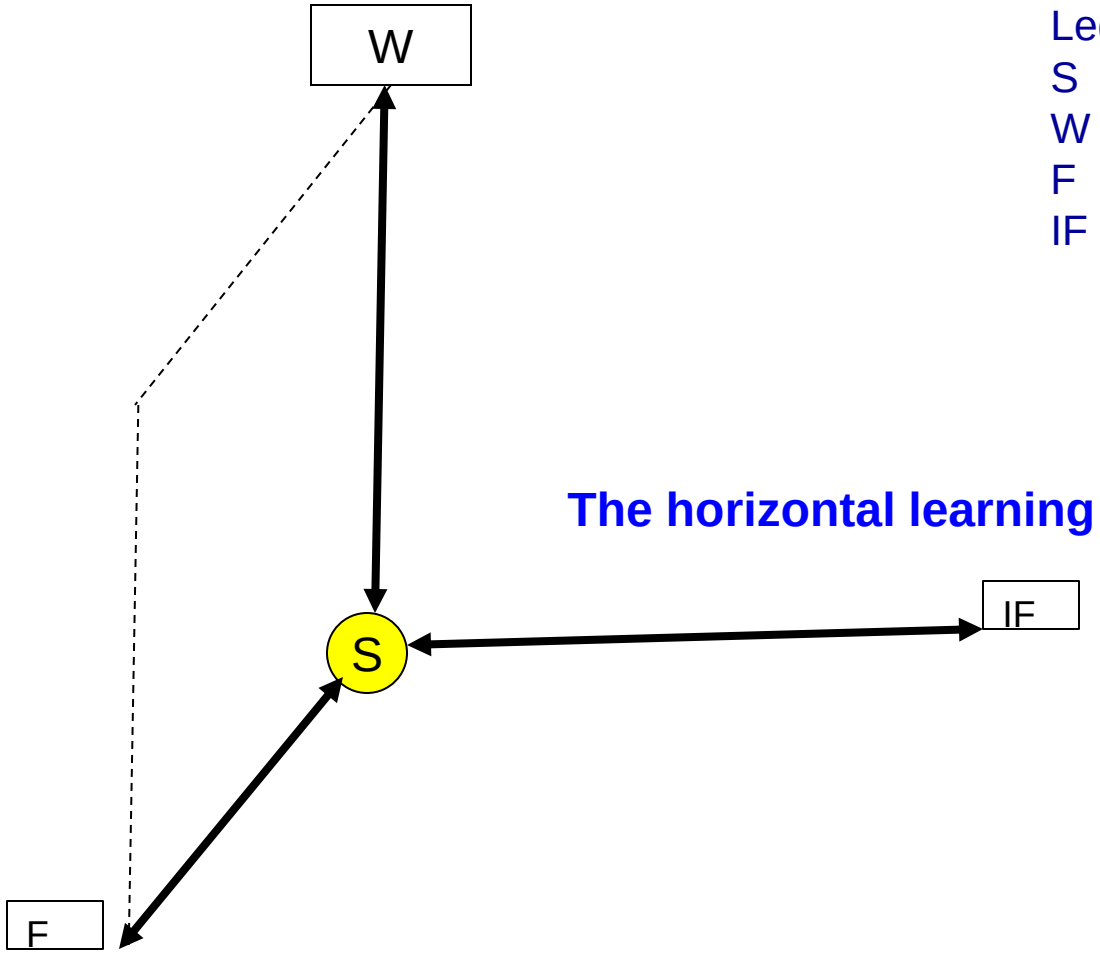


Individual learning network

Legend:
S - student
W – work-based learning

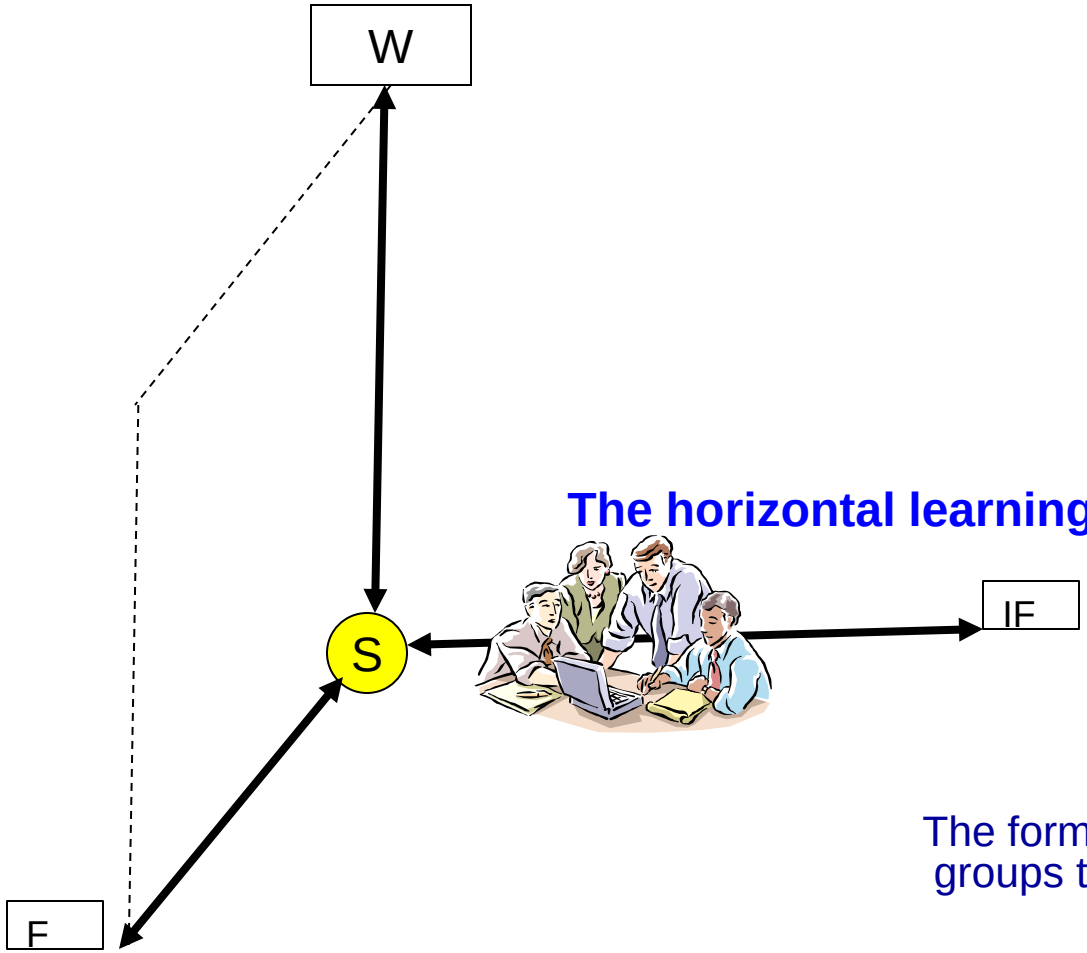


Legend:
S - student
W - work-based learning
F - formal institutions



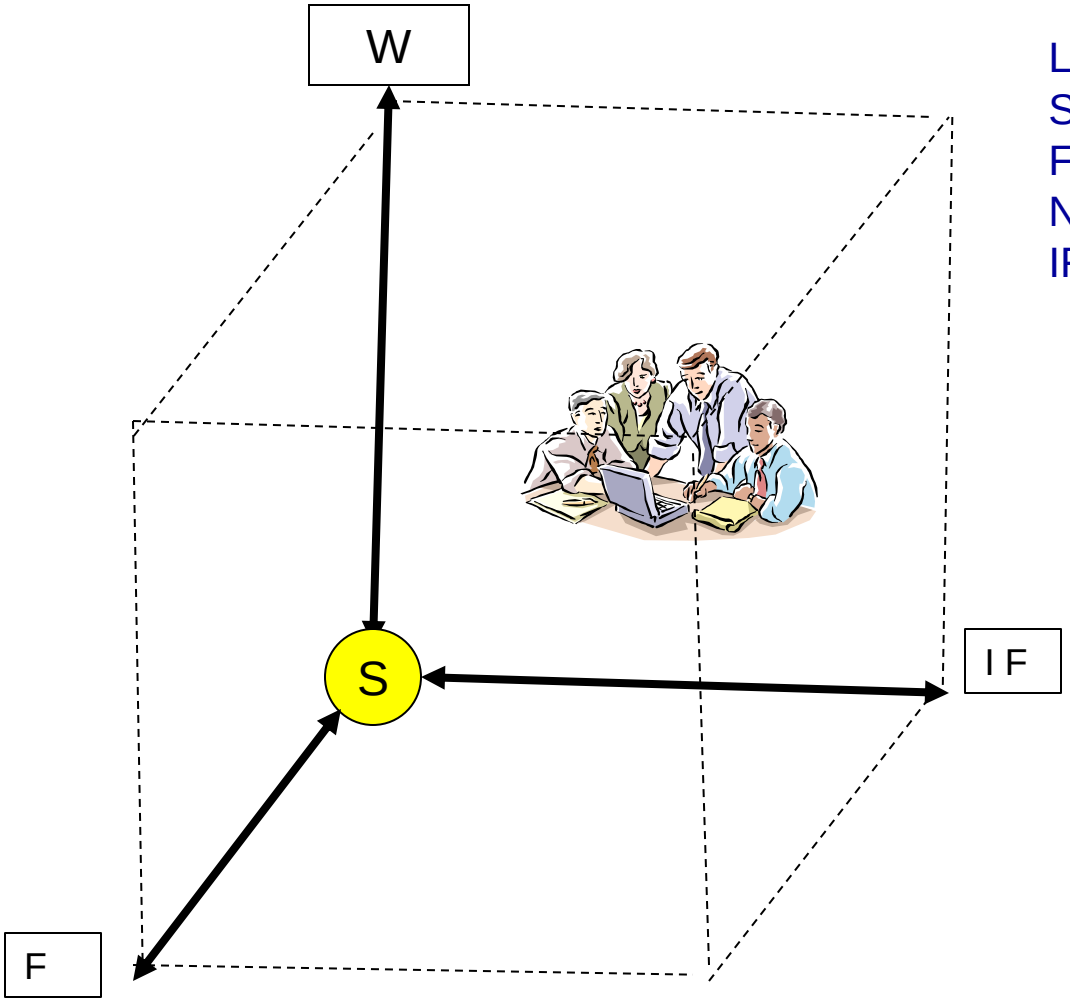
Legend:
S - student
W – work-based learning
F - formal education
IF - informal education

The horizontal learning network



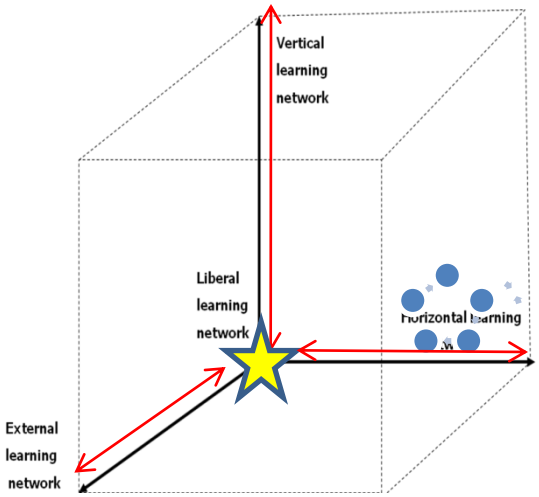
The horizontal learning network

The formal and informal groups the learner belongs to.

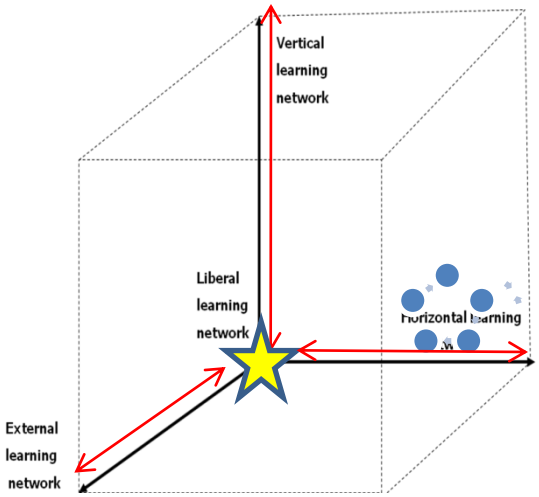


Legend:
S - student
F - formal education
NF- non-formal education
IF - informal education

The employees who attend distance-learning programs should not be treated as full-time students, but both as students and participants in work processes that offer, as well, learning possibilities.

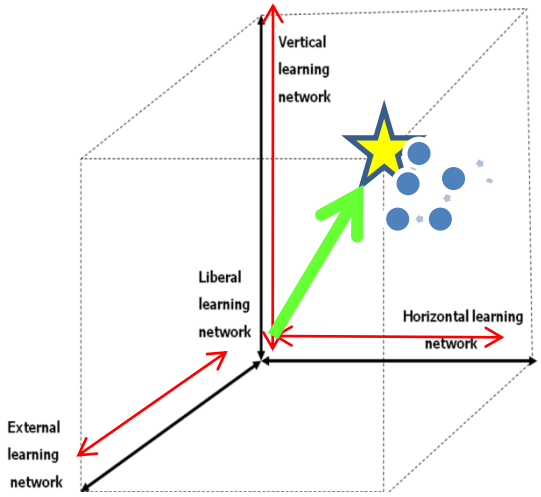


They are simultaneously engaged in the organizational learning networks (liberal, vertical and horizontal) and in different external learning-networks, that of distance-education program offered by a certain university being only one of those.



- The formal educational institutions which offer distance-education programs of specialization belief that they and the distance-education students are in a vertical learning network, as is their learning relationship with the full-time students.

- Usually, D-E students have a stronger relationship with their work organization than with the distance-education provider.



- The distance-education students are in a vertical learning-network with their work management, not with their distance-education teachers or tutors..

IV. Proposals for the management and for reference indicators of the DE programs of study.

1. The first lesson learned is to avoid one-best-way thinking about the distance-education.

2. Learning-network theory suggests a multi-faceted approach of distance-education. The different strategies that actors use reflect diverse ways (vertical, horizontal and external dimension) in which learning can be organized.

3. Learning-network theory focuses on people.

The actors implied in distance-education processes are not only the students and teachers of the university which deliver the distance-education program of study, but the students work-managers and professional groups, other formal and informal actors.

According to common opinion, the level of quality of the distance education is judged according to the quality of distance-education teachers.

- Nowadays, this statement needs to be supplemented

- The student, the groups he/she belongs to and a lot of other known and unknown local and global factors also play an active role in the reconsidering the framework of distance lifelong learning.

It seems to us that the most powerful way to enhance distance education learning is to make use of the group processes and exercises.

- On one hand, one supports and reinforce the efforts, the critical thinking and the pleasure to learn with the other.

- On the other hand, work tasks are today often performed in teams and groups, supported by technology and characterized by shared tasks and competence requirements.

4. Distance - education is not limited to courses provided by the university.

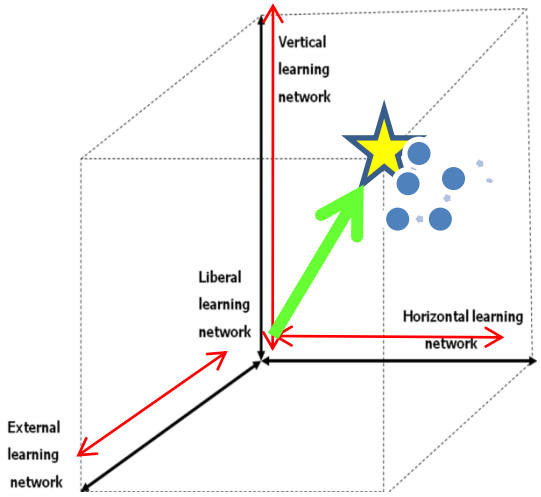
5. Distance-education implies formal as well as non-formal and in-formal learning activities. Extracurricular and work activities, programs on radio and television, fares, home or leisure-time activities, shopping, transportation, self-education are some of them. None of these opportunities is to be neglected.

6. The present methodology on distance-learning contains criteria and standards to evaluate the quality of distance-education only as a formal (external) learning, that being a single dimension of the process;

7. Other ways in which distance-education students learn during the period of their formal distance-education program are ignored, even the transfer of training content to the job.

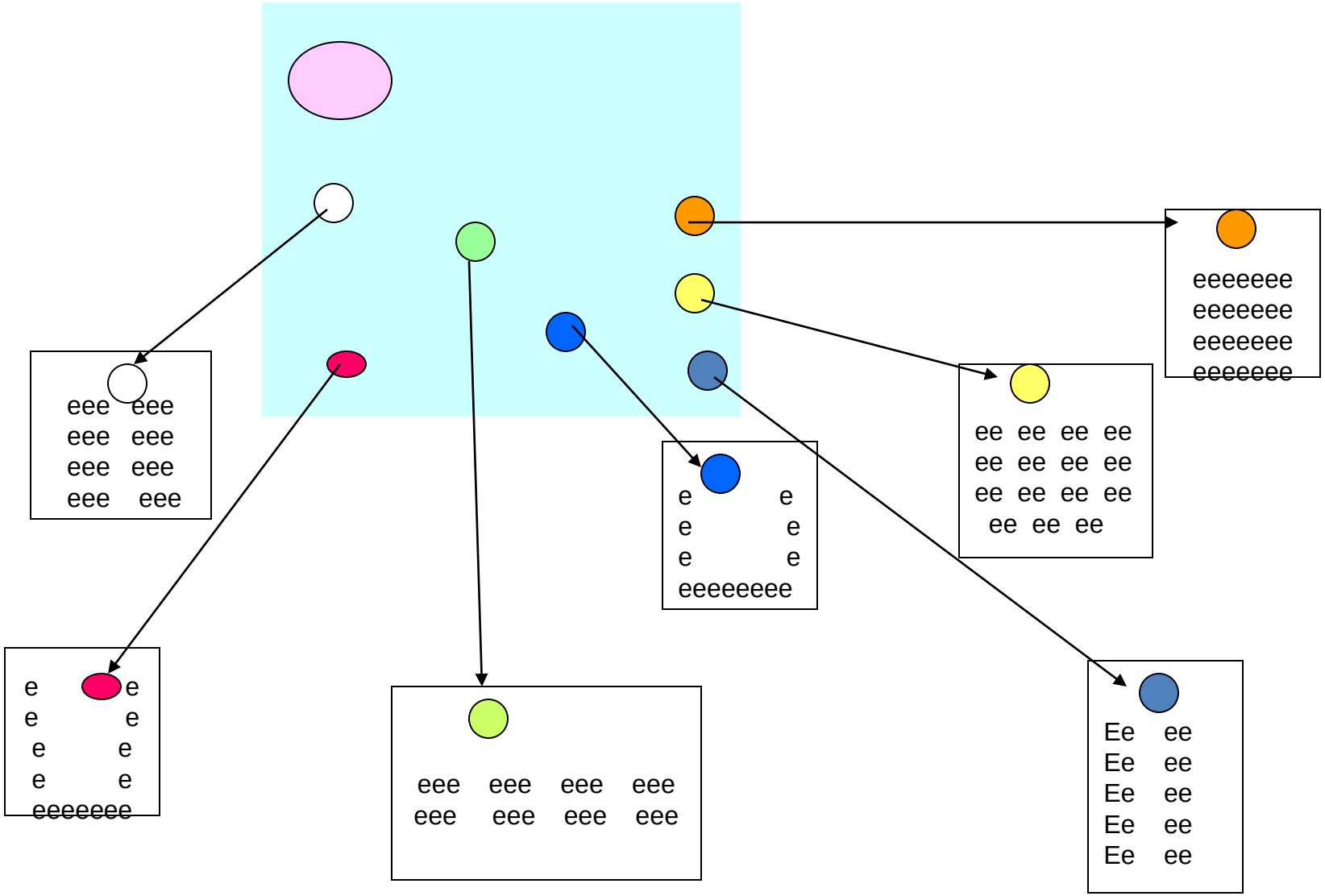
8. Because distance-education system is perceived in such a way, the assessment standards are formulated especially in terms of structures and functions, and in lower proportion in terms of actors strategies, action theories, and interaction processes.

Perhaps, we have to reconsider the accent, as specialists suggest:



putting real-life people (actors) instead of abstract structures in the centre of attention, learning-network theory allows us to better comprehend how learning networks are organized and how they are modified.

Summing up these considerations, we can observe that the distance education is a highly complex activity and the DE evaluation process must reflect it .

Thank
You!

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