I’m particularly pleased to introduce the book Synergic Integration of Formal and Informal eLearning Environments for Adult Lifelong Learners edited by Sabrina Leone, PhD, because of a couple motivations linked to my personal history.

First, I was the advisor of Dr Leone’s PhD course and thesis. It was a very stimulating and enriching exercise to accompany her travel to improve her knowledge about adult learning and teaching during the three years of doctoral studies and the preparation of her doctoral dissertation.

Second, I’m personally involved in the eLearning project of my university. This is a long-term project aimed at improving the level and quality of learning of our students by flanking the traditional didactic approach of the university professors with the availability of online learning resources and activities.

The task is particularly complex because my university offers degrees and tertiary level schools only in technological and scientific domains: Economics, Medicine, Engineering, Natural Sciences, and Agricultural Technologies.

Therefore, on one side, the teachers’ reluctance to modify their role and their way of teaching is rather high. On the other side, it has to be said that a large portion of the students have difficulty in taking the responsibility of their own learning, acquiring crucial self-agency abilities and competences, and transforming their learning job in a knowledge acquisition adventure.

However, as a higher education institution, we have to face two main challenges. The first one is due to the continuous increase and evolution of the corpus of technologies and scientific achievements, so that most of our former students have to come back to the sources of knowledge and competences some years after their graduation (from five to ten years) to align and/or to enrich their professional competences. In general, they are working and cannot access ordinary courses because of time constraints and organisational issues, so a suitably tailored educational offer has to be provided in an open manner. Such a challenge is enough, in my opinion, to ask the institution to consider the adaptation of technology-supported informal learning to produce specific educational offers.

Moreover, in our time of globalisation of the education and of reduced budget, higher education institutions cannot ignore the potential of the integration of formal and informal learning to improve the cost-effectiveness ratio of their didactic organisation and to efficiently make recognizable their research and education excellences.

Both these challenges ask for strategic decisions from the governing bodies at educational institutions. For the purpose of such decisions, an always valid guideline is “to know to decide.”

It seems to me that an edited book like Synergic Integration of Formal and Informal eLearning Environments for Adult Lifelong Learners can provide information to establish the knowledge useful for the urgent decisions educational institutions have to take.
The problem is not well assessed yet. Now the attention is focused on openness and scalability. Nevertheless, a book collecting so wide a set of experiences and reflections that have been carried out all around the world by groups and institutions that are actively involved in lifelong learning seems to me a timely and valuable effort.

In particular, I think that the subdivision of its chapters in the three sections “Infrastructural and Cultural Issues,” “Pedagogical Issues,” and “Technological Issues” in this order is by itself a valid approach. Technology without a sound cultural and pedagogical approach would give rise to deceptive experiences.

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Tommaso Leo has been Full Professor at the Chair of Automatic Control since 1981 and Rector’s delegate for eLearning since 2003 at the Università Politecnica delle Marche (UNIVPM), Ancona, Italy. Along his career at UNIVPM, he was Head of the Department of Electronics and Automation (DEA) (1982-1988), Dean of the Faculty of Engineering (1990-1996), Director of the Department of Computer, Industrial and Automation Engineering (DIIGA) (2005-2011); he has been chairman of the Robotics, Automation, and Human Movement Analysis programs at DEA, DIIGA, and now at DII (Department of Ingegneria dell’Informazione). He has coordinated the following projects and PhD courses: 1989-2002, CEC funded projects: AIM programme – CAMARC (Computer-Aided Movement Analysis in a Rehabilitation Context) and CAMARC II; Human Capital and Mobility programme – CAMARN (Computer-Aided Movement Analysis Research Network); ABCMALE project, CEC funded under Telematics Applications to Health Care programme, MODASPECTRA project, CEC Funded under Educational Multimedia Programme; 1990-2001, PhD course in Intelligent Artificial Systems; since 2001, PhD course in eLearning; 2003-2006, TIGER project, under FIRB-MIUR; 2006-2009, (local coordinator) PRIN Project “Development of didactic functionalities in OS Platforms for e-learning”; since 2007, (local coordinator) FIRB project “Learning 4ALL” (RBNE07RCPX). He is an IEEE Senior Member (AC society, BME society). He has authored and co-authored about two hundred scientific contributions, and he has edited some scientific books and special issues of scientific journals.