Preface

It is a long time ago that an individual’s allocation to a place within society was exclusively shaped by birth or origin. In pre-industrial times, the feudal system banned individuals from any opportunity to influence their own societal development. It was at least an important consequence of industrialization that people faced opportunities to find their place within society by work biographies which shape the habitual, economic, and intellectual fundament of societal life. Societal allocation, thus, became a matter of work-related learning: Learning performance influenced success on labour market which again shaped societal allocation. In the course of industrialization, thus, the individuals received first opportunities for shaping a biography on the basis of their self-intended work performance as a result of learning. The paradigm of globalization introduced a regime of permanent change of work conditions. Nowadays, it appears not enough to learn in order to successfully get into a workplace but it appears necessary to permanently learn during the lifespan in order to be able to cope with permanently changing (work) conditions. Hence, learning not only influences the success of the entry into the labour market but also the fact of staying effective in a working career. Learning in context of working live, hence, became an issue of increased awareness from the side of researchers as well as practitioners. Lifelong learning is a widely and commonly used term which indicates such an increase of awareness for issues of education, learning, and development.

In this book, the term professional learning will be used in order to describe learning processes which occur during work activities or learning which can be utilizes for work activities – the entry to the labour market as well as the success of staying effective in working life. This indicates a wide understanding of the underlying terminology by referring to learning about, for, and within work. By using the term professional learning we do not refer to the classical understanding of (academic) professions but we consider all kinds of occupations, vocations, and professions. The phenomenon of professional learning, thus, becomes relevant for and gains increased attention of many disciplines: Education, psychology, sociology, and human resource management. This book aims to develop a concept of professional learning as long-term oriented development which connects different streams of research. However, the main focus will be on educational and psychological insights and findings which inform about becoming and staying successful in working life through learning and development.

The most important pedagogical intention of education is to enable individuals to responsibly master their life by developing, following, and realizing independent goals. Becoming and staying successful in working life is an important aspect of that kind of pedagogical intention comprising issues of supporting individuals during their learning and development to successful individuals in working life. During such a development individuals undergo individual learning processes which are persistently influenced and shaped through their private and working environment. However, an educational support of professional learning demands insight on premises, processes, and products of professional learning inclusively their internal (individual) and external (social) influences. Usually, researchers usually focus either on the internal individual side of professional learning or on the external social side of the environment. This book aims at offering a new perspective on theory and empirical research on professional learning by working out connections between both sides of the coin, the internal and external aspect of professional learning.

The line of thought for this book follows such a narrative: The beginning focuses the phenomenon that some individuals possess capabilities far beyond average performance (chapter 1). It is important to understand excellent individuals within their social contexts, how they developed, how their prerequisites for development were shaped, and how they were treated.
within their social environments, in order to develop an idea of professional learning. It is the specific pedagogical approach not to explain excellent performance by biological facilities but to interpret high performance as result of learning processes. Educational efforts of supporting professional learning become relevant on such a theoretical premise. However, by focusing learning processes, scientific approaches of investigation face certain challenges, since learning as thinking and knowing are phenomena which are not directly measurable. Hence, it is necessary to clarify the scientific perspectives allowing empirical access to these latent phenomena of learning, thinking, and knowing (chapter 2). The various theoretical and methodological paradigms of researching professional learning are to be discussed in order to provide a systematic overview on current research approaches. Commonly shared interests and insights between these approaches are to be worked out. After clarifying the scientific perspectives, the book initially distinguishes the investigation of successful and impeded individuals. It will be of major interest firstly to explore the interrelation between internal and external factors resulting in an individual’s successful performance (chapter 3). Educational, psychological, and sociological theories will help to explain an individual’s capacity to permanently perform better than others do and, thus, assist in understanding professional learning. Secondly, the same exploration of less successful and impeded individuals helps to develop negative knowledge on professional learning (chapter 4). On this basis, systematic assumptions can be developed which internal or external factors support or impede professional learning. Hence, a next step (chapter 5) explores processes of individual development of expertise as capacity to permanently perform better than the average. This comprises two aspects of development, namely changing the inappropriate and retaining the appropriate. Of course, both aspects are inevitably influenced not only by internal factors but also by external ones. Getting so far, it is clear how to become an expert in a domain by processes of professional learning. As introduced at the beginning, becoming an expert is not sufficient nowadays, since the paradigm of permanent change requires that also experts do continuously learn. It is rather necessary, also systematically and deliberately to maintain expertise (chapter 6) which is not as intensive discussed in research as the issue of becoming an expert. After developing the scientific approach of exploring internal and external influences on professional learning and maintenance of expertise, the final chapter 7 merges all thoughts about successful and impeded individuals and individual and social processes of professional learning and development to an overarching theoretical model of professional learning comprising premises, processes, and products of professional learning and development which all are related to internal and external influences. It is a model comprising analytical categories which can be applied for investigating succeeding or failing processes of professional learning and maintenance of expertise. The different chapters focus singular parts of the model and expose the current state of (empirical) research. However, an empirical test of the entire model does not yet exist. The book may be an impulse for accordant research activities. We would appreciate.