

INNOVATION– A PROCESS TVET SYSTEMS NEED TO DEVELOP

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The International Labour Organization (ILO) has estimated that the current financial crisis could wipe out some 30 million jobs worldwide. Other reports suggest a worse scenario raising that number to 50 million jobs lost. Many lost jobs will not be returning and low skill jobs will not create a workforce capable of delivering national long-term economic growth. In either case, the world employment challenge is a crisis that national technical and vocational education and training (N-TVET) systems need to address. Greater amounts of technology, multi-skilling job requirements, and learning on and off the job are requiring workers to bring a different range of skill sets to today's workforce.

For N-TVET systems re-defining themselves, it is worth remembering that training by itself does not create jobs. However, an educated workforce provides the framework for an innovative culture, an incubator for ideas and in turn a good investment in regenerating an economy. The point is that nations, like employers, are recognizing that an innovative and knowledgeable workforce is truly a competitive advantage in the global marketplace. Businesses are much more likely to locate or remain where they find the most talent. In recognizing these issues, political decision makers, employers and educators, by working collectively, have the opportunity to promote an educated citizenry, where the term "learner" and worker are synonymous. This is a transformational process in workforce preparation where TVET systems can become the catalyst that brings community groups and nations together to promote workforce preparation reform.

The answer to the question of where to start in developing a national TVET system should include the establishment of a lead body, having responsibility for coordinating the nation's workforce preparation system.

Initiating a N-TVET Lead Body

In this era of globalization where knowledge and problem solving trump manual skills, TVET training institutions no longer function effectively as isolated components in the labour market. Rather, their influence and credibility as training institutions are strengthened when integrated into a nation's mass of human and fiscal resources. Whether resources are TVET institutions or actions to promote workforce development through inter-sectorial collaboration and community alliances, they are all parts of a learning matrix best coordinated for relevance through a single national TVET lead body.

Labels for occupational coordinating lead bodies vary. Some are called a National-Technical and Vocational Education and Training (N-TVET) agency, which is the term used in this article. Other titles include National Skills Council (NSC) or Workforce Development Authority (WDA). Whatever the title chosen, it should convey a clear description of the national workforce preparation services it provides and the training institutions the agency oversees. Most importantly, to ensure the credibility/relevance of a lead TVET agency, it needs to liaise with the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), formal education systems, trade unions and other interested community groups for inputs and advisory support.

Although most countries are engaged in some form of formal workforce training, not all countries have a dedicated agency to advocate and coordinate workforce learning. This situation may partly explain the existence in many countries of duplicated training agencies and outdated occupational preparation programmes geared more to yesterday's

jobs. A sampling of the type of typical concerns that a relevant lead agency might address includes:

- Eliminating duplicate occupational training courses within the national TVET training system, as well as within government ministries
- Monitoring of TVET graduates to correctly measure the relevance of occupational training - eradicating the gaps between national skill labour demand and supply
- Correcting the politicizing of the N-TVET system by confronting prevalent practices that allow change in TVET leadership as political parties enter /leave office
- Removing abuses to the training enrollment process by perennial learners who pass from one training programme to another as an employment destination, rather than entering the workforce
- Promoting regular public/private sector dialogue on ways to better improve national occupation learning and practice
- Establishing appropriate salaries, and re-skilling programmes, for TVET instructional staff and management
- Mandating and carrying out processes to ensure that internationally benchmarked competency based occupational skill standards are integrated into the nation's TVET training institutions
- Challenging training institutions that do not do well by identifying and correcting the gaps between intended training goals and actual behavior
- Promoting constructive dialogue with the formal education system, and between ministries of labour and education on concerns pertaining to learning standards, career development, formal recognition of skills training and the articulation/integration of TVET learning programmes within the education system

Workforce Learning Practices

Replicating the effective work of an N-TVET agency or a particular vocational training institution is difficult. Ask TVET professionals about replicating "good" practices and many will tell you that what is meant as a good practice in one setting might not be good elsewhere. After all, a good practice is simply a set of instructions that work well in a particular social or workplace setting. Move a good practice out of its original setting and the dynamics of what made the practice good disappears.

Therefore, transferring a "good" practice from one learning environment to another generally turns it into a mediocre, or if you are fortunate, a partly effective practice. It takes repeated adaptation by stakeholders to make a transferred workforce learning practice earn the recognition of being "good" in its new environment. Typical problems in a practice's adaption process include workplace relevance, fitting into local cultural customs and the knowledge and ability of learners to draw benefit from

Suggested Internet sources for researching general TVET organizational concerns and portals for identifying learning good practices include:

- The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training: www.cedefop.europa.eu
- Inter-American Centre for Knowledge Development In Vocational Training (CINTERFOR): www.oitcinterfor.org
- International Labour Organization – Skills and Employment Department: www.ilo.org
- Skills AP Community of Practice: <http://skills-ap.ilobkk.or.th/>
- International Training Center (ICT): www.itilo.org
- [International Vocational Education and Training Association: www.iveta.org](http://www.itilo.org),
- UNESCO-UNEVOC-e-Forum: www.unesco.unevoc.org
- World Bank: www.worldbank.org,
- <http://www.wikieducator.org>, whose goal is the collaborative development of a free education curriculum for all sectors by 2015 using wiki technology.

the transferred practice's application. Yet, identifying and adapting a good practice is an excellent way to accelerate a nation's workforce preparation system. The knowledge imbedded in the good practice when transferred can be the spark to ignite ideas and generate innovation. For TVET systems that wish to accelerate the adaptation process of a practice should consider dialoguing directly with the originators of the practice. A simplistic direct approach made more effective through the use of the Internet.

Although no list of recommended occupational learning good practices can be exhaustive, there are core **Global Organizational Practices (GOPs)** that an N-TVET agency should consider for implementation. The following selected practices and international resource sites are offered for further exploration and national adaptation:

GOP: Assessing the relevance of workforce preparation services provided by a nation's national TVET agency.

Data is collected from employers, relevant community agencies, and from graduates of TVET training institutions, detailing a learner's assessment of training received and applicability of skill sets learned to reflect actual workplace application.

Resources:

Jamaica - Heart Trust/NTA: www.heart-nta.org,

South Africa - Construction Education Training Authority (CETA): www.ceta.org.za

GOP: Establishing through dialog with business, government agencies, workers' organizations and community organizations a national technical vocational strategy/policy to guide the nation's workforce learning and development actions.

Resources:

Barbados -TVET Council Barbados, (BTVC): www.tvetcouncil.com.bb,

New Zealand - Industrial Training Federation (ITF): www.itf.org.nz

GOP: Establishing and monitoring the standardized use of internationally benchmarked - competency based and nationally adapted occupational and employability standards.

Resources:

Brazil - National Industrial Training Service (SENAI): www.Senai.br

Philippines -The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority's (TESDA): www.tesda.gov.ph

GOP: Ensuring that employability skill sets are competency based. Expanding access for learners to the use of Internet search engines, E-mail, and social networks to promote independent learning and professional networking as essential learning blocks for a 21st century worker.

Resources:

Australia - National Quality Council (NQC):

www.nqc.tvetaustralia.com.au/key_nqc_policy/skill_sets,

Mauritius - Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA): www.mqa.mu

GOP: Integrating a blended learning approach (i.e. print, electronic, simulations, video, Internet, social networks, mobile phone use) for instructional delivery, and knowledge gathering in TVET training institutions.

Resources:

Singapore - Workforce Development Authority (WDA): www.wda.gov.sg,

Korea - Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA): www.koica.go.kr/english/main.html

GOP: Establishing a national lead unit for workforce learning, i.e. N-TVET agency, as an autonomous agency with its own board of directors and financed through a training levy.

Resources:

Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan - Vocational Training Corporation (VTC): www.etvetreform.org,

Dominican Republic - National Institute of Technical- Vocational Training (INFOTEP): www.infotep.gov.do

Defining a TVET Image

This article has explored ways for developing the potential of national workforce preparation systems as a necessary step in promoting an innovative workforce. It recommends a framework of actions for establishing a national coordinating lead body, such as an N-TVET agency. Other ideas mentioned included the application of competency-based occupational skills standards and the use of interactive technologies for training delivery, while choosing learning approaches that empower learners to be self-directed and responsible for what they choose to learn. The article also recommends that N-TVET agencies continuously seek out global workforce learning good practices for national adaptation. Yet, all these elements, if executed perfectly, may not be enough to create the type of environment needed for a country to label its workforce world-class. The missing element in too many countries is the public's lack of recognition of technical and vocational learning as a worthy professional occupational path.

It is often the perceived mental image of workforce learning programmes by political decision makers that motivates the degree of support it receives. In particular by the attention nations give to the provision of human resources, policy support and financial backing. However, the image of TVET also plays another role in the level of advisory inputs from the private sector, workers organizations, and the general public. Without the public and private sector providing personal and technical curricula support and without a positive image of TVET in the eyes of the general public, national TVET system will remain only marginally effective.

The words "technical" and "vocational training" do little to describe what workforce learning in the 21st century is all about. This becomes especially true if the image of TVET in the public arena evokes antiquated ideas of instructor organized training, carried out on obsolete equipment, or instruction built upon 20th century technology skill sets. Challenging those obsolete concepts of workforce learning and replacing them with what TVET is doing today is all about image changing through social collaboration. The truth is that N-TVET agencies have the means to change outdated views of TVET and help reformulate the public's perception of workforce preparation.

Reformulating TVET's image can be accomplished by sharing data on retention rates of learners, percentage of placement of graduates, evaluation of training institutions, publishing curricula content and testimonials by employers and learners. This body of knowledge can be used to attest to the relevant work of an N-TVET system. Sharing this information through the media and in community forums opens the work of TVET to the general public. Each of these acts of transparency can promote a continuous national dialogue on the scope of workforce preparation while at the same time providing insight into the public's views of TVET, a process of continual dialogue with the public that over time can infuse life-energy into shaping a realistic national image of occupational learning.

The core components of a national dialogue in formulating a public image of vocational/technical should produce answers to such questions as:

- Is the N-TVET system more training or learning oriented?
- How has TVET changed, international and nationally, in the last 5 years? What has or has not changed and why have the changes taken place? What lessons have been learned to promote workforce readiness initiatives at the national level?
- How are the words technical and vocational, education and training defined in preparing the nation for economic recovery in building a competent workforce? Is there a more relevant term to describe the workforce development process?

- How do N-TVET programmes reconcile training and education/learning?
- How does the national TVET system relate to local industrial development? Micro enterprise development?
- How are N-TVET programmes integrating gender concerns into all occupational areas?
- What is the national TVET system's relationship to formal education, post-secondary and higher education and to theoretical and practical learning?
- What types of the vertical mobility is available for learners entering occupational careers?
- How is the national TVET system relating to the learning needs of disabled persons?
- How does the national TVET system relate to the private sector? What mechanisms are in place to keep occupational and employability skill sets relevant with workplace needs?

It could be argued that the lack of community support for occupational learning has been a constant trend in TVET's modern history, a historical detriment that has over time promoted a negative image of occupational careers that too often goes unchallenged. Reversing negative perceptions of workforce oriented learning has to be a critical part, and maybe some might argue the most important element, of an N-TVET agency's scope of work.

Until a society's negative perceptions of occupation professions are replaced, a national workforce will never attract the caliber of workers they require. Identifying and promoting an accurate description of what a national workforce learning system does and the benefits it can offer to people are necessary in making occupational learning truly a national development goal.

Innovation – Redefining TVET

In this era of global marketplace competition, nations focused on building a quality-oriented workforce do so by continuously investing financial and human resources in their TVET system. Leadership responsible for addressing national workforce readiness have recognized that by preparing people with both knowledge and occupational skill sets geared toward a lifetime of employability they are establishing a learning cycle that promotes an educated citizenry, a productive labour force as well as greater chances for innovation.

Earning workforce accolades and innovation envy of other nations requires a TVET design that promotes talented management both on and off the job site. No single answer may describe how to create innovation in product development, workplace performance and efficiency. Yet, TVET systems that have applied the suggested options and possibilities explored in this article have put in place a framework for making workforce innovation happen.

Re-allocating human and financial resources, establishing labour standards, promoting on-the-job learning, setting national TVET policies and customizing TVET system design - all help create a participatory environment where ideas are generated and in turn innovation can bloom. In many ways by promoting and sharing innovative practices nationally and globally, TVET decision makers may have found a rallying point – social glue- around which they can unite to redefining workforce learning in the coming decade.

Rebuilding a workforce through the blending of knowledge and occupational skill sets to produce intellectual competence takes time, a fact not to be over looked in this period of global economic transition. For governments and their N-TVET lead bodies it will require recognizing that now is an auspicious moment to prepare their national workforce for a rebounding economy. The challenge will be to do so with a sense of urgency.