

Round Table Discussion on North American Workforce Development

Wednesday December 13, 2017

Issue #1: Apprenticeships and other types of work-based learning and technical education, including internships

- We should seek to develop workforce development strategies for the economies of North America that create a virtuous cycle for stakeholders (workers, businesses, government, education/training entities). Seek to connect education, economic development and public policy, along with the financing needed.
- Ultimate goal is to provide the population, including underrepresented groups, with lifelong learning and career opportunities.
- Apprenticeships and other work-based learning programs provide people with the practical experience necessary to build soft and technical skills, and allows them to apply their academic knowledge to the workplace. There needs to be better branding of these programs to help increase their use.
- Elements required to build apprenticeship systems: 1) clear definition of what an apprenticeship is (in distinction from other work-based learning systems), 2) funding and resources, 3) multi-stakeholder dialogue, 4) public awareness of the benefits and advantages of apprenticeships, 5) inclusion of underrepresented populations, 6) expansion of available occupations in apprenticeships, 7) more and stronger public-private partnerships to design and implement them.
- Ideally, apprenticeship systems would be industry led, but governments, educators and unions must also play important roles in developing and sustaining them. The model followed has to be flexible enough to adapt to local and regional labor market demands and needs, while simultaneously being able to incorporate economic and technological changes.
- Collect and share research that speaks to the advantages and benefits of on-the-job learning, in particular highlighting soft skills development, in addition to so-called hard skills, through programs. Collect long-term data on apprentices' placement and employment tracks once they complete the program.
- Work towards building an industry consensus in which apprenticeships are seen as an investment that produces long-term benefits for business. Build spaces and foster dialogue to get businesses on board and move the initiative forward. This may well have to start with a "coalition of the willing" in certain sectors that then gets highlighted and its value added shared with others.
- While apprenticeships are an adequate model for many, they will not work for everyone. Other types of on-the-job learning have to be considered in the workforce development strategy, and we have to clearly define them from apprenticeships programs. In particular, mid-career training and credentialing could follow several non-apprenticeship models and funding tracks.
- We have to be creative and develop more short-term, agile learning and training programs. As the technological transformation accelerates, we have to provide workers with effective, efficient ways of learning new skills.

Issue #2: Certifications and the host of issues surrounding them, including recognition and portability

- One of the main challenges around the implementation of credentials is winning the recognition and support of larger numbers of employers.

- Vital to work towards making credentials transferable and portable across sectors and across borders, as well as getting academic institutions and employers to validate and recognize education and experience from abroad.
- Develop a list of in-demand skills and a common language that streamlines the categorization of skills across borders. This will help with recognition and portability. How to boost this process?
- Seek to build strong relationships with employers and licensing bodies to achieve validation and comparability of credentials. Workforce development strategies do not work well in communities where public/private partnerships are not well developed.

Issue #3: Data collection and transparency, including moving toward accepted norms for data collected and best practices for making that data widely available

- The lack of data systems penalize the population, in particular students and their counsellors: they cannot make informed decisions on education and career choices.
- Seek to collect information and data on the costs and benefits of workforce development mechanisms, as well as long-term data to help measure success. Having information on the return on investment can help incentivize companies to develop workforce development programs. Who and how to collect this?
- It is urgent that we develop a real-time labor market information platform and a national database of in-demand skills that is constantly updated. Technology has facilitated the collection of data and the creation of platforms to access it, so there should not be a delay on making these tools available.
- Having sufficient data on credentials, occupations, and skills would enable the transferability of these factors across sectors and as technology evolves.
- We must determine the actors who should collect, own, and manage the collection of data and the norms for the data collected, as well as making it available to stakeholders. Should this be largely a public sector responsibility? How can we best set norms across economies and across North America?

Issue #4: How best to approach/prepare for “the Fourth Industrial Revolution” or the onslaught of new technology

- Policy makers need to develop new public-private partnerships and models to adapt successfully to the pace of change or face serious workforce crises.
- While technology will eliminate and transform jobs, other new employment opportunities will be created.
- We have to be creative and develop more short-term, agile learning, training and credentialing programs. We have to provide workers with effective, efficient ways of learning new skills more quickly.
- In addition to adequate technical skills, workers will also need the soft skills to be able to learn and adapt through their careers. Underrepresented populations need programs to acquire this type of training.
- We need to create and implement new training mechanisms for workers displaced as a consequence of technological disruption. Educators need the tools to adapt education and learning models.
- Support Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are not keeping up with technology, innovation and talent creation, and need specialized support.
- The businesses and countries that integrate people and technology will be better off than those who fail to do so. On-going, flexible policy and implementation dialogues among stakeholders will be needed.