

Round Table Discussion on North American Workforce Development

Friday November 17, 2017

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

- Workforce Development is a long term effort and an issue of shared responsibility that requires a joint effort by schools, businesses, philanthropy, governments, unions, etc. Private-Public Partnerships and coordination between sectors and programs is crucial.
- Elements to be in place to have a sustainable system: 1) effective branding, someone to take up the task of "retail-sales" to recruit companies and then organizing apprenticeships programs with companies, 2) building agreement on occupational standards, 3) finding funding and resources, 4) expanding systems for counseling students and screening them for interest at an early age, 5) quality and creating systems for employment assessments, 6) set up a certification body (bodies) to issue the credentials and continue the research, and 7) regular efforts to build and maintain political support.
- We first need an initial mechanism in place, then we can spread out successful stories and encourage the population to seek a career through diverse educational and training mechanisms.
- Work based learning and technical education should start at an early age so students are ready to pick the adequate career when the time comes. This will require much work at sub-national levels in the US and Canada. Ideally, we should seek to transform education systems into career readiness programs.
- The development, implementation and evaluation of workforce development programs such as apprenticeships should follow clear standards and a minimum set of criteria so that programs and credentials are comparable across each country and the countries of North America.
- North America can learn from best practices and lessons learned by other countries, such as from Germany's and UK's apprenticeships systems. Many U.S. states have systems and mechanisms in place that could also serve as models for other states that are lagging behind.

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

- Competency frameworks should be structured and built by the industry. The starting point is to develop a methodology on how to define the criteria of standards among a key constituency that will use them. If we develop industry-driven and competency-based credentials that meet the demands of the industry, we will develop credentials that have a good chance of being accepted and used widely, and that are comparable globally. Jobs, skills and competencies are not local or national, but global.
- North America does not have a national skills programs. We should learn from the experience in the EU and its member states.
- We need a framework of standards, qualifications and assessment criteria. Develop credentials, standards and competencies that are verified and assessed from the beginning and periodically in order to avoid having credentials that do not mean anything or do not age appropriately.

- Start by bringing together a coalition of the industries that are interested in working to develop such a framework and use the results of that collaboration to demonstrate the value; then work toward a national or perhaps a North American sector strategy. Create protocols of how we can tie frameworks together. Evaluate what should be handled locally and what nationally.
- Certify and assess experience or informal on-the-job learning.
- People would be better off if credentials were portable and transferable, which means they would be able to apply their knowledge and skills in a different industry and/or country. This is why it would be good to develop competency and skills criteria for sectors/industries.
- Professional skills and licensing are an issue in trade talks and between states and provinces in the US and Canada. These will be hurdles to overcome.

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

- One of the biggest issues is that we do not collect the right data on skills and workforce trends. Data collection is low cost and can produce many benefits such as bringing transparency to the credentialing market. It makes great sense to have norms across economies and across North America.
- Data collection can facilitate building career pathways and should get to the level of reflecting employability and occupational skills. However, socioemotional skills are difficult to measure and define.
- Data collection can facilitate upgrading processes and adapting competencies to the economic and technological changes.
- We need to create a centralized registry and develop a global common language so that others globally can use it.
- Workforce initiatives should also be brought to one place so all the pieces of the puzzle can be evaluated and assessed. We need to identify the best indicators to measure success so it can be used by a wide variety of stakeholders.

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

- The pace of change is extremely fast and will produce massive job creation as well as massive job destruction or transformation.
- People would be better off if credentials were transferable, which means they would be able to apply their knowledge and skills in a different industry.
- The assessment of credentials has to be done periodically and the criteria has to adapt at the speed of the technological and economic changes.
- Those that do not possess basic skills will have difficulty developing the skills for the next generation of jobs.
- The need of socioemotional or “soft” skills, such as teamwork, empathy, communication and self-awareness, will only increase since they are transferable. Those are developed mostly at an early age. Workforce development mechanisms can fail when participants lack of socioemotional skills.
- We need to work towards a change in culture and on rebranding education and workforce development.