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ABSTRACT

Recent research has identified trends in the training systems of 13 countries in Africa (Egypt, Mauritius, South Africa); the Arab States (Bahrain, Jordan); Asia (Australia, Fiji, Malaysia); Eastern Europe (Albania, Slovenia); Western Europe (Ireland, Portugal); and the Mediterranean region (Malta). The trends identified are legislation; councils/boards and authorities; national qualifications frameworks; skill standards and certification; workplace learning; and governments overtly promoting training quality assurance. Research suggests that human resource management practices are changing in response to the forces creating the new business environment. The forces include changes in the structure of production; turbulent business environment; and greater customer awareness. Three key and mutually reinforcing requirements for connecting business challenges and management development are clarification of the twin purposes of developing managers to deliver the current business model and develop future business models; development of effective strategic management and business, organization, and management review processes to connect business strategies with organization and management requirements; and management of the learning. (Four examples illustrate the integration of the trends into "bundles" of other activities to facilitate maximum effect. They involve high performance working; linking economic and human resource development; knowledge management; and skills recognition.) (YLB)

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The Future of Workforce Development–A Global Perspective

Anthony J. Twigger

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The Future of Workforce Development- A Global Perspective

A Paper Presented by Anthony J. Twigger – Executive Director, IFTDO (International Federation of Training and Development Organisations)

ACTE Conference - Las Vegas - 12-December 2002

What does the future hold for workforce development? What trends have emerged for establishing training for superior organizational performance? Recent research suggests that it is the way that the workforce development components are linked together into integrated "bundles" which seems to differentiate the highly successful performers from the less successful ones. Obtaining synergy from integrated components, generating human resource performance of the highest quality, and facilitating the ability to compete at the highest levels in global marketplaces all seem to offer the most likely scenarios for the future. But to achieve sustainable success requires organizations to add "something extra" to the conventional approaches.

Trends in national training systems

A forthcoming International Labour Organization (ILO) Skills Working Paper will feature some recent research undertaken by IFTDO, but funded by the ILO, based on trends in the training systems of 13 countries in Africa (Egypt, Mauritius and South Africa), the Arab States (Bahrain and Jordan), Asia (Australia, Fiji and Malaysia), Eastern Europe (Albania and Slovenia), Western Europe (Ireland and Portugal), and the Mediterranean region (Malta). The research confirms some of the long-held beliefs that have existed for some time but also identifies and elaborates on some that are not so obvious. The trends identified include:

First trend - Legislation

A number of countries, both in the developed world and those progressing toward economic self-sufficiency, have become increasingly aware of the need to have legislation that, whilst national, gives flexibility at the regional/provincial level, promotes decentralisation of decision-making and allows greater private sector influence in its implementation. Recent trends suggest that promulgated legislation is less concerned with finite detail and more with promoting the involvement of stakeholders at all levels of the community (Australia, Egypt, Fiji, Ireland, Malta, Mauritius, Portugal).

Second trend - Councils/Boards and Authorities

The formation of Training Councils/Boards to oversee and advise on the use of resources available to training systems is seen as a positive move reflecting awareness on the part of governments to make better use of available resources (Albania, Egypt, Malaysia, Mauritius and Slovenia - in the latter case, this is managed through a Centre for VET). This advice brings some coherence to the ad hoc approach that many countries have found is dissipating the expected benefits. Advisory services have promoted consensus, leading to transparency and tripartite (government, employers and workers) involvement.

National Training Authorities that have executive responsibility are a natural progression resulting from the advisory work of some Councils/Boards (Australia, Ireland). Some

countries have made a quantum leap and established Authorities immediately (Fiji, Mauritius and South Africa). Examples of this can be seen in South Africa where Acts are primarily intended as general statements of the Government's intent. Guidelines, rather than rules and regulations, are provided to assist beneficiaries of the national training system. Another interesting development in South Africa is the emergence of sectoral authorities charged with the responsibility of overseeing training in particular economic sectors.

The increased number of countries that have established bodies to coordinate training suggests that some governments and the social partners are also insisting on more accountability from public training providers. Private training providers are being invited to compete for government programmes (Australia, Ireland). At the same time, training providers are being compelled through increased competition to offer a broader choice to the client (Malaysia). In this case, the recipients of post-school training rather than the profit-taker - the employer - have a choice as to what courses and which delivery mode best suit their own personal circumstances.

Third trend - National qualifications frameworks (NQFs)

NQFs allow both the formally and non-formally qualified to be matched against a common set of criteria that equates individual achievement in an objective manner. A major problem that besets school leavers and adults who did not qualify for further education is the stigma that surrounds qualifications obtained in the non-formal sector. NQFs address this with vigour, allowing skills that have been developed in vocational non-formal courses to have some degree of equivalency with those obtained by following a time-bound programme in the formal education stream. Australia, Egypt, Ireland, Mauritius, Portugal and South Africa have all introduced NQF systems.

Fourth trend - Skill standards and certification (SSC)

The setting of skill standards is increasingly being handed over to employers to determine. This overcomes the previous problems of lack of ownership on the part of enterprise managers who continually claimed that the products of training systems were not suited to the needs of the labour market. The advent of a series of levels of qualifications, commencing with the core level-one skills, has arisen in order to eliminate the confusion in employers' minds concerning the equivalency of awards from different training providers.

The assessors of skill standards are also key elements in maintaining standards whilst acknowledging the skills developed on the job by workers who wish to be qualified at the appropriate level. This is being carried out in Australia, Egypt Mauritius and South Africa.

NOTE: Whilst the success of NQFs and SSC systems is apparent in most of the 13 countries in the research sample, it should also be pointed out that attempts at their introduction in certain other countries have been relatively problematic. Usually the problems have come in incorporating the knowledge requirements into higher-level jobs. NQFs and SSC may be well suited to some middle-level jobs but are mainly suited to relatively unskilled jobs. Employers will often not buy in because of the need for occupational standards to include skills that are not required in their enterprises, with the result that training becomes broader and more expensive than these employers think necessary. The professions do not buy in because

competencies undermine their exclusivity and their monopoly position. In view of these difficulties, countries should introduce NQFs and SSC with considerable care and caution.
It should perhaps also be noted that NQF systems do not necessarily have to be based on competency standards. Germany and France have very effective qualification frameworks, which are not competency-based.

Fifth trend - Workplace learning (WPL)

WPL is defined as linking employees' learning to their work role. In addition, it has three interrelated components. First is structured learning in the workplace. Second is the provision of access to on-the-job training. Third is the identification and provision of off-the-job learning opportunities. WPL in various less-sophisticated terms has always existed. Employers may have consciously provided training, or it may have been informally achieved by observation and practice. It is also linked to the recognition of prior learning. Government instrumentalities have always had WPL; otherwise, the public utilities would fail, the country's defenses would be at risk and the economy would deteriorate. Multinational enterprises have always had integrated training and development plans as part of their operational budgets; they know from experience that training is profitable.

The recent upsurge in this subject is the result of (a) governments realizing that they cannot provide the holistic VET system needed for growth without the direct and total commitment of enterprises; (b) the growth of knowledge-based occupations, e.g. in the professions, and technical, managerial and administrative jobs with high knowledge content; (c) the use of high performance work practices that require workers to learn and utilize their knowledge of the workplace and production process to improve performance.

Sixth trend – Governments overtly promoting training quality assurance

Until relatively recently, in many countries a situation had arisen whereby training programmes offered had become entrenched, procedures for accreditation had become bureaucratic and attitudes on the part of public training providers were not conducive to even the smallest of changes. The involvement of workers' and employers' representatives was minimal, with representation on policy and operational decision-making bodies often regulated so that government posts predominated. With the move toward competency-based assessment and employer-based setting of these competencies, public training providers are now more accountable for the product (trainee) they produce. Processes must be streamlined, staff must be competent to deliver and equipment must be suited to the skills transfer level required. Australia, Bahrain, Egypt, Ireland, Mauritius, Portugal, South Africa, Fiji and Slovenia have determined that they will introduce a quality criterion into their human resource development (HRD) systems.

The Australian body set up to monitor quality is the National Training Quality Council charged with the responsibility to ensure that all training packages meet quality assurance criteria before being issued for use. In the Bahrain Training Institute, a quality assurance department has been established which has developed and implemented stringent procedures for ensuring training quality. In Fiji the recent upgrading of the Fiji National Training Council (FNTC) to the Training and Productivity Authority (TPAF) has resulted in separate Quality Awards Council being established. Quality is subject to detailed guidelines in Ireland,

Portugal and South Africa. Slovenia has also introduced a quality criterion into the training system.

Trends in management development practices

Recent ILO research suggests that human resource management (HRM) practices are changing in response to the forces that are creating the new business environment.. These forces include:

- *Changes in the structure of production* whereby disaggregation is replacing vertical integration, consolidation is taking place around core processes with outsourcing accounting for the remaining processes, and integrated supply chain management is being introduced which includes suppliers at one end of the chain and customers at the other;
- *A turbulent business environment* stemming from rapidly changing global customer tastes and requiring enhanced organizational flexibility and agility with constant innovation;
- *Greater consumer awareness* leading to greater corporate responsibility requiring effective policies for corporate citizenship.

Against this background, management development is increasingly being seen as an important element of organizational strategy to combat environmental forces. New managerial competencies are being provided in management development programmes to enable managers to understand: (i) the use of the latest information and communication technologies; and (ii) their environmental, social and ecological responsibilities.

Research carried out by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) in 2001 (*Developing managers for business performance;* CIPD, London, 2002) found that senior managers see the biggest challenge for their organizations as "integrating management development with the implementation of organizational goals". The research reviewed the knowledge, practice and experience of senior executives and experts. and identified three key and mutually reinforcing requirements for connecting business challenges and management development:

- Clarification of the twin purposes of developing managers to deliver the current business model and to develop future business models. Each purpose requires its own distinctive approaches and each needs to be adapted and customised to the people and the organisation it exists to serve. Both purposes are clearly important and some organizations in the UK are focusing increasingly on managing the two purposes in a coherent approach.
- Development of effective strategic management and Business, Organization and Management Review (BOMR) processes to connect business strategies with organization and management requirements.
- Management of the learning – however good the management development action is, value is created or destroyed by how well the case is made and the connection made. Implementation issues include diagnosing, specifying, implementing and evaluating the contribution of management development to organizational performance. There is an ongoing need to ensure that management development is geared around

contributing to sustained business performance through the BOMR process and by being organized and managed to deliver on the twin business purposes outlined above.

Achieving performance improvements

The above trends indicate how good implementation and control of national training systems can be established. But what are the successful enterprises doing to enhance their corporate and individual performances? The research suggests that the successful performers integrate the trends into "bundles" of other activities to facilitate maximum effect.. Some examples might illustrate such integration and show why "something extra" needs to be added. Four examples are given below involving: high performance working; linking economic and human resource development; knowledge management; and skills recognition.

High performance working (HPW)

What is high performance working (HPW)? HPW practices are defined in terms of autonomous working, team working, devolved decision-making, relationships based on trust rather than control and people having the ability to learn new skills and behaviours and to direct their own learning. Ultimately the concept applies when people work and learn in relatively unstructured organizations in which teams form and reform according to need and in which it is difficult to distinguish between employers and contractors. Although there are relatively few examples of the full use of HPW, organizations in media, professional and other services often make use of some of these practices in an informal way, even though they may have little conscious understanding of the concept of "high" and sometimes exhibit quite anarchic behaviour.

Many of the components of HPW are not new, e.g. self-managed work teams, performance appraisal and total quality management have been around for a long time now. But it is only recently that the "something extra" has been identified as combining such component practices with effective workplace learning to give a powerful means of significantly improving performance.

Research in the United States points in this direction. In 2000 the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) found evidence of a link between the use of "clusters" of HRD practices and company performance. The ASTD identified three frequently used clusters:

- task forces, problem solving groups and quality circles;
- job rotation and cross training;
- employee access to business information.

In the United Kingdom, Leicester University's Centre for Labour Market Studies (CLMS) also identifies three bundles, or clusters, of practices:

- mentoring, appraisals, training for trainers, individual performance-related pay;
- self-directed work teams, group-based rewards, 360-degree appraisals;
- multiskilling, job rotation, profit sharing.

The attractions of HPW practices from an economic point of view include:

- their potential to counter the threat from low cost competitors;

- the opportunities they provide to increase the value of goods, services and earnings, and to develop niche markets;
- they enable organizations to move up the value chain;
- they provide opportunities to use a more skilled workforce;
- they can contribute to improvements throughout supply chains;
- their use increases job satisfaction and promotes self esteem throughout organizations.

In a recently-published excellent book (D. Ashton and J. Sung: *Supporting Workplace Learning for High Performance Working*; ILO Geneva, 2002), the authors review IFTDO/ILO and others' research and suggest that the triggers for the application of HPW include the introduction of new technology, benchmarking, attempts to secure quality market niches, the experiences of multinational corporations, and survival in crisis situations. The IFTDO/ILO research showed a remarkable spread of public and private and large and small organizations in service and manufacturing. Some of them were not large international organizations and were not even located in sectors that would have been thought likely to provide extensive opportunities for value enhancement. Some of them employed relatively lowly qualified people and yet achieved remarkable results. The examples included:

- An electronics plant, which expects every employee to be involved in five project teams and backs this up with a worldwide university re-cycling 'know-how'.
- A bank, which looks for employees with unconventional ideas and cultivates creative enthusiasm and 'prudent risk taking'.
- A driving school's employees who innovate through project teams. One team devised a computer-based package to design a track layout for motorcycle instruction.
- A hotel which now has multi-skilled staff. It is seeking to develop a 'university within a hotel' learning environment and empowers its staff to 'go beyond the immediate call of duty with a little bit of extra help' for guests.
- A US Federal Agency which places reliance on the development of people and the creation of high performance work practices in a context in which government control has been replaced by political direction-setting and agreement on the skills and development strategy to be followed.

Ashton and Sung conclude by warning that HPW practices are only one determinant of competitiveness, but they can offer the prospect of higher living standards for more people, and they do provide the basis for making lifelong learning a reality for many more people.

Linking economic and human resource development

Another example of achieving improvements concerns the linking of economic with HRD planning. For maximum effect in this area, National Training Authorities (NTAs), supported by realistic legislation, are the key ingredients. But in order to ensure complementarity between economic development and HRD planning, the existence of a top-level group of people is also required at both organisational and national levels, all totally committed to achieving the right balance between economic and HR development.

Most countries have already achieved considerable results in educating and training their human capital. Some governments have adopted various types of human resource development strategies, which have resulted in a sizeable, increase in the number of

educational institutes' graduates at all levels. According to international economic institutions, the economic development in many countries is positive and encouraging. But in spite of these positive signs, unemployment and underemployment are threatening social stability. It is felt at all levels that the recognisable increase in the rate of enrolment in education and the considerable expansion of education/training facilities have not matched the changes in economic and investment programmes. Unemployment rates are on the rise. These phenomena suggest that better coordination of all types of policies, but particularly the economic, investment and human capital development policies, is badly needed.

Knowledge management[a]

The next example of achieving performance improvements is knowledge management (KM), although KM could also perhaps be included in the framework of the previous example of balancing economic demand and human resource supply. The rationale for this lies in the belief that economies are transforming into knowledge economies and that individuals, teams and organizations need to develop the necessary competencies to be able to participate in a working life that is mainly based on knowledge productivity (defined below). Traditional approaches do not provide the required learning environment for knowledge work. Again, something extra is needed.

The trend nowadays is for societies to move towards knowledge economies in which the application of knowledge replaces capital, raw materials, and labour as the main means of production. The essential ingredient of products and services is the inherent knowledge. *The ability to gather information, generate new knowledge, disseminate and apply this knowledge to achieve improvement and innovation is an organization's knowledge productivity.* Knowledge productivity will remain the dominant economic factor in a knowledge society, and it stresses the importance of a flexible and competent workforce. Workplace learning through the creation of powerful learning environments is crucial in this context.

In many instances, the potential contribution of the production and application of knowledge has become more important than physical labour and the ability to regulate and coordinate. In manufacturing and service organizations, material items (such as commodities), capital and labour are often less significant than the combination of knowledge embodied in the product or service. Knowledge is crucial to continual improvements in existing products and services and for innovation. In this context, knowledge workers become dominant, exerting more influence over organizational performance than any other group associated with the organization.

If it is acknowledged that organizations operate in a knowledge economy, then knowledge productivity needs to be incorporated into strategic planning. The learning processes become important, and learning cannot be left to random opportunity. The development of core competencies is a major objective, requiring that organizations acquire, create, disseminate, and apply knowledge to improve and innovate processes, products and services. A systematic approach with a clear purpose is necessary. However, ascertaining the knowledge required for developing competencies is far from simple, and the learning processes are very much different from traditional training approaches. An organization that tries to improve its

[a] This account of knowledge management is based on a paper presented by Professor Joseph Kessels at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development HRD 2000 Conference in London on 4 April 2000.

knowledge productivity will focus on the analysis and support of the following learning functions:

•*Subject matter expertise*: Acquiring subject matter expertise and skills directly related to the scope of the target competencies.
•*Problem solving*: Learning to solve problems by using domain-specific expertise, thus developing competencies with which existing domain-specific knowledge is applied to solving new problems.
•*Reflective skills*: Developing reflective skills and meta-cognitions conducive to locating paths leading to new knowledge and reasons for acquiring and applying this asset.
•*Communication skills*: Securing communication skills that provide access to the knowledge network of others and that enrich the learning climate within the workplace. Knowledge productivity requires easy access to relevant sources of information and competence.
•*Self-regulation of motivation and affection:* Procuring skills that regulate the motivations and affections related to learning. In a knowledge economy, smartness and creativity depend heavily on personal interest.
•*Peace and stability:* Promoting peace and stability to enable specialisation, synergy, cohesion, and integration. Peace and stability are necessary for gradual improvement.
•*Creative turmoil:* Causing creative turmoil to stimulate innovation. Creative turmoil brings the dynamics that push towards radical innovation, leaving traditional paths behind.

Skills recognition

The final example of achieving performance improvements concerns skills recognition. This involves national qualification frameworks (NQFs), skill standards and certification (SSC) and quality assurance (QA) systems. But these alone will not achieve the standards for global success. National and international benchmarking practices must also be introduced, together with rigorous evaluation of government-funded training that has been developed and delivered.

Quality systems are now an integral part of the operations of a wide range of industries and service organizations worldwide, including education and training. The ISO 9000 series of quality system standards has now been adopted worldwide, and there is virtually universal recognition that an ISO 9000 standard obtained in one country is comparable to a quality system to the same standard in another country. This may provide benefits to education and training providers seeking to establish links with other countries or wanting to attract overseas students or trainees. However, the biggest benefit is likely to come from the fact that many government departments and agencies, as well as private and public companies, seek the assurance of a certified quality system before awarding contracts to education and training providers. There are many instances now where possession of such a quality system certificate is a requirement for a provider to even bid for a government contract (e.g. in parts of Australia, France, Germany, New Zealand, and Sweden).

Some final thoughts

This paper has barely scratched the surface of some fascinating approaches to what seems to be the future trends for workforce development, i.e. gearing it to improved performance.

In the case of HPW, probably no more than 10 per cent of enterprises use HPW practices, but those that do seem to reap positive performance results. Professor David Ashton suggests that the reasons for the low application of HPW might be that it:

- may only be appropriate for higher value-added forms of production where competition is on the basis of cost and quality;
- requires a long and sustained process of organizational change;
- requires high trust relationships between management and workers; and
- has not been given sufficient exposure to employers.

But if workforce development practices are to make a significant difference, they require an integrated bundle of components, "something extra" above and beyond the conventional approaches.

In the case of ensuring complementarity between economic and human resource development, National Training Authorities (NTAs), supported by realistic legislation, will not on their own produce the required results. The "something extra" is the existence of a top-level group of people at both organisational and national levels, all totally committed to achieving the right balance between economic and workforce development.

Knowledge management is in its early stages of development, but already it is realized that knowledge productivity needs to be incorporated into strategic planning. Examples exist of significant increases in operating efficiency as a result of a KM programme (e.g.a textile company in Mauritius, where a detailed case study will be available soon). But workplace learning alone will not produce the performance improvements – again "something extra" is required, this time through the creation of powerful learning environments and the analysis and support of various learning functions.

Skills recognition involves national qualifications frameworks, skill standards and certification and quality assurance systems. But these alone will not achieve the standards for global success. The "something extra" needed is national and international benchmarking practices and rigorous evaluation of government-funded training.

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