

The Asia-Pacific Roundtable on Workforce Education:

New Approaches Needed to Close Growing Skills Gap

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January 31, 2013

Introduction

Why Asia Pacific?

The Asia-Pacific region represents one of the most dynamic growth areas of the world, with over 50% of the world's economic output. To support this growth, businesses are ramping up talent management strategies and resources. As reported at APEC 2011 by Mr. Roger Crook, CEO of DHL Global Forwarding, Freight, "The biggest challenges that we face in the region are attracting, retaining and developing talent. In countries like China, you've got an aging population, while in Japan, for example, more and more women prefer to have a career and not have a family. All of these trends are having an impact on the availability of talent, and so it is critical that every company have a talent development program or talent identification and development program."¹

In the United States, policy has pivoted toward Asia Pacific. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, "In the next 10 years, we need to be smart and systematic about where we invest time and energy, so that we put ourselves in the best position to sustain our leadership, secure our interests and advance our values. One of the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decade will therefore be to lock in a substantially increased investment – diplomatic, economic, strategic and otherwise – in the Asia-Pacific region."²

Australia is focused on the "Asian Century." A transformational white paper commissioned by Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard states: "The transformation of the Asian region into the economic powerhouse of the world is not only unstoppable, it is gathering pace. In this century, the region in which we live will become home to most of the world's middle class. Our region will be the world's largest producer of goods and services and the largest consumer of them. History teaches us that as economic weight shifts, so does strategic weight."³

¹ <http://apec2011ceosummit.com/about.html>

² http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century

³ Ibid.

With this as a backdrop, nearly two dozen education and business leaders with extensive experience in workforce education and skills training development came together in Hawaii last December to take part in what proved to be a spirited Roundtable at the East-West Center in Honolulu. They came to discuss the implications of – and offer possible remedies for – the growing workforce training and skills gap that is making it increasingly difficult for businesses in the Asia-Pacific region and elsewhere to find trained and competent employees.

Although the Roundtable focused on trends and events in the Asia-Pacific region, the open, forthright and free-wheeling discussion that took place had implications for workforce development efforts around the globe.

As Roundtable participant Manley McLachlan of Canada’s British Columbia Construction Association put it when he quoted *New York Times* columnist and author Thomas Friedman, the world has moved “from the industrial age, through the information age, and on into the age of talent.”⁴

Raw talent may be as abundant as ever, but it is ineffective absent the refining process of training and skills development. Everyone on the panel agreed that many of the developed world’s formerly preeminent educational systems have not kept pace with advances in technology, nor with the career and technical training needs of today’s much more interconnected, mobile, and global labor market. Skilled and trained workers are in far greater demand today in just about every field, from construction to health care, than they were in previous decades. And many of today’s education systems are failing to produce them in sufficient numbers.

Part of the problem is driven by the sheer speed with which technology advances in the 21st century. Jan Bray, executive director of the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE), in the U.S., put it best: “One of the biggest challenges we face is that we are preparing people for jobs that do not yet exist, using technology not invented yet, to solve problems we do not, as yet, know about.”

⁴ Friedman, Thomas, *The World is Flat*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, April, 2005

Another significant factor, the Roundtable members agreed, was the difficulty in changing human behaviors in response to a new and more challenging global business and workforce/skills training environment. This is particularly the case among large government, education and business institutions of the more developed nations. As Bernadette Howard, Hawaii's state director of career and technical education, noted, "We have to transform our education system, but all we do is tweak it. If you talk to young people, they're all about radical change involving technology, not incremental steps."

The world's emerging economies are in "green fields," said Peter Krikstolaitis, head of careers and internships for Navitas, an Australian-based, for-profit provider of education around the world. "Their airports are brand new and gleaming," Krikstolaitis noted, "while ours show their age. The developed countries are trying to renovate old houses. It's always simpler to start brand new, with a focus on innovation and development." In more established countries, with their large, cumbersome legacy institutions, education can often become more about "reporting and compliance" than innovation, Krikstolaitis added.

The Asia-Pacific Roundtable on Workforce Education was sponsored by the East-West Center, the O'ahu Workforce Investment Board, the National Association of Workforce Boards and The McGraw-Hill Research Foundation. Participants came from both the non- and for-profit worlds of workforce education, and from the Asia-Pacific business community. In addition to several Hawaii-based business and education professionals, the Roundtable comprised representatives from the mainland United States, Canada, the Philippines and Australia.⁵

Highlighting the vital importance of education, in general, and the growing global nature of the world today, moderator Karen Knudsen of the East-West Center noted in her opening remarks that the Japanese garden and koi pond visible just outside the center's conference room was where President Barack Obama used to play as a young boy. The East-West Center was a part of the president's beginnings that resulted in the nation's first Pacific president. He played here, and his mother was a scholar here as well. From the East-West Center, Secretary Clinton said: "America's future is linked to the future of the Asia-Pacific region, and the future of this region depends on America."

⁵ A full list of the participants and the organizations they represent can be found at the end of this paper.

An Overview of the Skills Gap – Global and Growing

It has become increasingly clear over the past couple of decades that the current systems of providing workplace training and skills development is woefully inadequate to meet the ever-changing demands of a 21st century global labor market. Today – even in the midst of a sluggish economic recovery and with higher than normal levels of unemployment – employers are finding it difficult to fill essential positions from entry-level on up to and including those jobs requiring specialized skills and training. Even basic skills in areas such as communication, simple arithmetic, customer service and good work habits are lacking among many candidates, in addition to the higher technical skills now demanded for jobs once considered non-technical. These trends threaten to undermine global economic growth into the near future and beyond, according to a 2012 report from the McKinsey Global Institute.

The report said that if these recent trends persist – and absent a massive global effort to improve worker skills, they are likely to do so – there will be far too few workers with the advanced skills needed to drive a high productivity economy and far too few job opportunities for low-skilled workers. The result could be dampened economic growth and lower tax revenues for years to come, coupled with larger numbers of under-skilled and unemployed people needing increased government assistance.

The most significant imbalances that could arise globally, according to McKinsey, include:

- A potential shortage of 38 to 40 million high-skilled workers;
- A potential surplus of 90 to 95 million low-skilled workers; and
- A potential shortage of nearly 45 million medium-skilled workers.

The study also notes that new workers will enter the workforce at a slower pace over the next two decades, as members of the large baby boom generation continue to reach retirement age and leave the workforce. The annual growth rate of the global labor pool will fall, the authors' predict, from about 1.4% annually to 1.0% between now and 2030.⁶

⁶ “The world at work: Jobs, pay and skills for 3.5 billion people,” by Richard Dobbs, Anu Madgkar, Dominic Barton, Eric Labaye, James Manyika, Charles Roxburgh, Susan Lund and Siddarth Madhav. McKinsey Global Institute, June, 2012

An even more dire warning was sounded by Jim Clifton, CEO and chairman of polling company Gallup Inc. In his book, *The Coming Jobs War*, Clifton writes that “the lack of good jobs will become the root cause of almost all world problems that America and other countries will face.”⁷

“One issue that faces all businesses today is an employee’s ability to communicate – specifically in writing,” said Jim Tollefson, president and CEO of the Hawaii Chamber of Commerce. “Regardless of education level – high school, college, even people with graduate degrees – many applicants today really don’t know how to communicate effectively in writing. Despite advances in technology, the ability to communicate effectively in writing is still a prerequisite for getting the job done.”

Although the skills gap issue affects virtually all economies, the potential for disruption may be even higher in developed nations, many of which have lower birth rates, slower current economic growth, aging populations and large institutions resistant to change.

Over the past few decades, the U.S. and some other developed countries have seen a steady loss of manufacturing, call center, technical support and even medical diagnostic jobs to developing economies; an increased demand for workers with sophisticated 21st century technology skills; and – particularly in the U.S. – education systems that have failed to keep pace with both technology and the global economic trends affecting the labor market.

The Roundtable – Starting the Discussion

We, the authors, served as both participants in the Roundtable and as representatives of the sponsoring organizations. We worked as a group to provide background and set the stage for discussion.

Going beyond predictions and the anecdotal, following are some of the hard facts and documented trends we placed before the Roundtable participants right at the start:

⁷ Clifton, Jim, *The Coming Jobs War*, Gallup Press, New York, NY 2011 (Introduction).

- The International Labor Organization at the United Nations estimates that prior to the start of the global recession of 2007-2009, there were approximately 175 million migrants around the world, roughly half of them workers. If this population were a country, it would be the seventh largest in the world.⁸
- A particularly distressing aspect of the recent employment situation worldwide is that young people are nearly three times as likely as adults to be unemployed. A recent ILO report noted, “The bad luck of the generation entering the labor market in the years of the Great Recession brings ... possible [long-term] consequences ... [such as] lower future wages and [greater] distrust of the political and economic system...”⁹

In addition to the above global issues, the U.S. faces the following skills gap challenges:

- A substantial increase in the number of U.S. jobs requiring skilled workers:
 - In 1950, skilled jobs comprised 20% of the U.S. jobs market;
 - By 2010, the percentage of all jobs requiring skills had jumped to 85%;¹⁰
- Of the 30 million new and replacement jobs that will need to be filled by 2018, 63% will require not only a high school diploma but at least “some college;”¹¹
- At the same time, as the need for educated workers is growing, the high-school drop-out rate in the U.S. continues to increase – about 1.2 million students leave high school every year currently without obtaining a diploma¹²; and
- Even those students who stay in school in the U.S. are performing measurably worse than their counterparts in other countries, particularly in math and science, according to the most recent Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) PISA study of international student achievement (with particularly high gaps between U.S. and other students in the area of “soft skills”).¹³

⁸ “Workers without frontiers: The impact of globalization on international migration,” P. Stalker: (Geneva, ILO, 2000); “International Labor Organization: Towards a fair deal for migrant workers in the global economy,” Report VI, International Labour Conference, 92nd Session, Geneva, 2004.

⁹ International Labor Organization – (2011b), Geneva

¹⁰ “Competitive Index: Where America Stands.” Council on Competitiveness, 2007

¹¹ Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2009

¹² Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007

¹³ *New York Times*, December 7, 2010, “Top Test Scores From Shanghai Stun Educators”

But while the majority of all new and replacement jobs will require some post-secondary training, only 45% will require a full four-year bachelor's degree or higher.¹⁴ There is tremendous employment opportunity in the near future for students whose talents and interests are technical or vocational.

There are nearly 30 million jobs available in the U.S. today that pay middle-class earnings but don't require a bachelor's degree. These "middle-skill" occupations, according to the Georgetown University Center for Education and the Workplace (CEW), include electricians, construction managers, dental hygienists, paralegals and police officers. "While these jobs may not be as prestigious as those filled by B.A. holders," the CEW report notes, "they pay a significant premium over many jobs open to those with just a high school degree." In fact, 27% of people with post-secondary licenses or certificates—credentials short of an associate's degree—earn more than the average bachelor's degree recipient.¹⁵

Unfortunately, funding and support for Career and Technical Education (CTE) in the U.S. has fallen precipitously in the past few decades, even while the demand for skilled workers has risen. And CTE training continues to carry the stigma it first acquired when it was called "vocational training," and focused primarily on wood and metal working classes, auto repair and beautician skills.

For decades, students in the U.S. have been told that they must go to a four-year college. And yet, as the world of work is developing, not all careers will require a four-year college degree, nor will everyone need a baccalaureate degree to be successful. As Mitch Rosin, director of adult learning and workforce initiatives for McGraw-Hill Education noted, "There is a culture in the United States that pushes all high-school graduates toward a four-year college degree. This has been the case since the GI Bill was enacted at the end of World War II, and we need to actively change this culture. Not everyone wants to attend a four-year school, and not everyone should. There are many occupations that can be classified as 'good jobs' which do not require a bachelor's degree. It is important, however, that everyone obtain some sort of education or training beyond the secondary level, but this could be specific to an industry and include a recognized credential."

¹⁴ Georgetown University, ob. cit.

¹⁵ Anthony Carnevale, Andrew Hanson, and Tamara Jayasundera, *Career and Technical Education: Five Ways that Pay Along the Way to the B.A.* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2012).

William Symonds, in his book *Pathways to Prosperity*, notes, “The United States is increasingly an outlier in its approach to education and youth development. While we continue to overemphasize the academic, four-year-college pathway, other nations are increasingly embracing high-quality vocational education. If we hope to regain our leadership in education, we must adopt a broader approach, one that puts far more emphasis on development of a world-class, rigorous system of multiple pathways.”¹⁶

Some of the “other nations” Symonds is referring to include the countries of the European Union – which have more fully developed and utilized apprenticeship systems that are available in the U.S. – as well as Canada, Australia, China, and the Philippines in the Asia-Pacific rim. All of these countries are putting substantial resources into upgrading their systems of education – including new programs and initiatives to improve workforce education and training.

Potential obstacles to developing a more comprehensive, well-funded and national system of workforce training and certification in the U.S. include:

- U.S. education at the secondary level is driven by individual states and local districts, making it more difficult to establish a nationwide system of credentialing than it is in other countries, where education is often managed and run at the federal level;
- Many in the U.S. are resistant to large federal education programs; and
- The number of stakeholders with an interest in the workforce training issue is large and varied, with many players – the K-12 education community, the college and university post-secondary system, the adult workforce career and technical education community, federal and state education authorities, the business community, students, certificate and certification grantors, teachers, professionals and parents – to name just some of the widely different groups that have a serious interest – and sometimes competing interests – when it comes to workforce education and training.

Despite these potential obstacles, there are excellent examples around the world of innovative programs, initiatives and systems that are creating new pathways to education and training – pathways that transcend

¹⁶ *The Career Pathways Effect: Linking Education and Economic Prosperity*. A Joint publication of CORD and NASDCTE. October 2012.

the traditional barriers between secondary and post-secondary education models. With modifications, and building locally from the ground up, some of these programs could take root and find support in the U.S.

Qualifications Frameworks

One of the ways in which governments around the world are working to improve the education of their labor force is through the development of “qualifications frameworks” (QFs). Programs based on the QF model have been, or are in the process of being, adopted or endorsed by Australia, Hong Kong, Canada, India, the European Commission and the Philippines.

According to WikiEducator, a QF is “an official document that clearly defines each and every qualification brought under it.” It may also provide a hierarchy of qualifications. It is a meta-data model, an all-encompassing framework that can integrate qualifications issued by different academic bodies into a common structure. It does this through the use of a set of common reference points that refer to specific learning outcomes. These outcomes can be supported by a range of assessment tools and techniques, regardless of the system where a particular qualification was acquired.¹⁷

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF), for example, “acts as a translation device to make national qualifications more readable across Europe, promoting workers’ and learners’ mobility between countries and facilitating their lifelong learning.” At the core of the EQF are eight reference levels that describe “learning outcomes” – what a learner knows, understands and is actually able to do.¹⁸

Representatives from three of the Asia-Pacific nations that have either adopted or endorsed QFs – or that have otherwise undertaken major reforms of their workforce training and skills development systems using core principles based on the QF model – participated in the Roundtable. They discussed their experiences, and made suggestions for steps the U.S. might take in pursuit of strengthening and modernizing its own workforce education and training development efforts.

¹⁷ http://wikieducator.org/Qualification_Framework

¹⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/eqf_en.htm

Canada

The two representatives from Canada acknowledged facing many of the same challenges and frustrations as the United States, such as:

1. A business community that demonstrates only sporadic and inconsistent support for addressing the skills gap issue (*“Our biggest challenge is trying to encourage employers to stop being passive observers and become activists.”*);
2. Difficulties coordinating among different players at the federal and provincial level (*“We have all kinds of agencies [for employee training] in Canada; it’s getting them to work together that’s difficult.”*); and
3. An education system, from K-12 to higher education, that has failed to keep up with the skills and training needs of a more high-tech, global labor market (*“Getting changes in how curriculum is delivered is virtually impossible. We talk to educators about training and they say ‘we train animals, not people.’”*).

But they did acknowledge having one very important asset the U.S. lacks: federal and provincial governments willing to invest heavily in workforce education and training.

Discussing some of the significant achievements they have experienced, Oksana Exell of the Asia-Pacific Gateway Skills Table said:

“Finding out how to do this successfully took years and hundreds of millions of dollars of government tax money. It’s not easy, and it’s not quick. So you need a government willing to make that investment.”

The Philippines

Dexter Ligot-Gordon, co-founder and COO of the Philippines-based company Kalibr, said as a developing country, the Philippines does not have the capacity to deploy large public infrastructures. So the government often partners with industry for workforce education and training, providing guidelines and subsidies.

“In the Philippines, workforce and skills training is regulated by the Department of Labor and Employment, not Education,” Ligot-Gordon said. Specifically, it is run by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, (TESDA), which defines competencies for specific occupations, creates standards for curricula and accredits training providers to deliver training in those particular occupations. Depending on whether or not a particular skill or industry is in demand, TESDA will provide subsidies to institutes of an industry to deliver that training.

In speaking about his own company, which uses an online talent platform to match up would-be employees with employers, then provides the former with the skills training they need to compete successfully for this jobs, Ligot-Gordon says:

“All we care about [at Kalibrr] is whether an employer will actually hire someone we’ve offered and trained. So, we have created a battery of assessments to figure out which skills will get someone hired, and that’s been useful to us tactically. But we’re not selling assessments or certifications – we’re selling candidates. Employers just want to know that a prospective employee can pass the interview and get to work. If they hire them, we know we’re doing a good job.”

Australia

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was first introduced in 1995 to underpin the national system of qualifications in Australia encompassing higher education, vocational education and training and schools. In Australia, education and training is a shared responsibility of all commonwealth, state and territory governments. Education, training and employment ministers collectively own and are responsible for the AQF.

The users of the AQF span each education and training sector: schools, vocational education and training, and higher education, and include the accrediting authorities and institutions providing education and training. The many AQF stakeholders include industry and its representative bodies, unions, professional associations, licensing authorities and governments.

One of the key objectives of the AQF is to facilitate pathways to and through formal qualifications. So AQF qualifications link with each other in a range of learning pathways between schools, vocational training and higher education, as an individual's learning and career ambitions require, removing the boundaries between education sectors.

An AQF qualification is recognized all around Australia and by other countries. School, work-based qualifications and academic qualifications are part of a single system of qualifications, allowing maximum flexibility in career planning and continuous learning.

Peter Krikstolaitis, of Australia's Navitas, explains: "If two people come to you with a certificate in agricultural studies in Australia today, it doesn't matter where it comes from. An employer can believe in it. It's illegal to fake a certificate, or to get one from anyone but an approved provider. So you don't have that situation, common in the U.S. and other countries, where you've got two providers giving you a certification, and one was a two-day workshop and the other was a full-year course of intense study. Everyone in Australia – and increasingly around the world – knows what the AQF is and what it means."

Sally Sinclair, CEO of Australia's National Employment Services Association, spoke about Australia's Employment Services Network, which works with the AQF. "The workforce system is the link that makes it all work. You need people on the ground putting the pieces together," Sinclair said.

The system in Australia is fully privatized, with a competitive contracting model. There are two providers of employment services in every one of Australia's 136 employment services areas: the regular program and a separate one for the indigenous community. The welfare agency that administers benefits refers the client and gets him/her into the employment service. Most of the money paid by the government to the non-government provider is in the form of payments for outcomes, not service fees.

Of that payment, 20% goes into the National Pathways Fund, which the provider can only spend on clients for items like teeth, glasses, work boots, clothing, education and training. And that goes on for every job-seeker in the country.

“Our employment services are the ultimate private/public partnership, funded by the government, but delivered by private parties, both for- and non-profit,” Sinclair notes. “The OECD has said Australia is the world leader in providing this level of support to job-seekers.”

The white paper, “Australia in the Asian Century,” states: “First, irrespective of how the Asian century evolves, Australia’s prosperity will come from building on our strengths. We need to reinforce the foundations of our fair society and our prosperous, open and resilient economy at home. We need to build on areas where we already perform well, in order to extend our comparative advantage. Critical to this will be ongoing reform and investment across the five pillars of productivity – skills and education, innovation, infrastructure, tax reform and regulatory reform.”¹⁹

“Second,” the paper continues, “as a nation we must do even more to develop the capabilities that will help Australia succeed. Our greatest responsibility is to invest in our people through skills and education to drive Australia’s productivity performance and ensure that all Australians can participate and contribute. Capabilities that are particularly important for the Asian century include job-specific skills, scientific and technical excellence, adaptability and resilience. Using creativity and design-based thinking to solve complex problems is a distinctive Australian strength that can help to meet the emerging challenges of this century. As a nation, we also need to broaden and deepen our understanding of Asian cultures and languages, to become more Asia literate. These capabilities are needed to build stronger connections and partnerships across the region.”

Takeaways From the Roundtable

The Asia-Pacific Roundtable on Workforce Education prompted several comments that seemed to encapsulate the core issues surrounding the skills gap and how it might be best addressed long-term. Following are some of the comments that stood out over the two days.

¹⁹ <http://asiancentury.dpvc.gov.au/>

Solving the Skills Gap Will Take Leadership – But Who Will Provide It?

Peter Krikstolaitis: *“The key thing for me is that at some stage, someone is going to have to stand up and take responsibility. Is it going to be education or business, or collaboration between the two? **Instead of finger-pointing and saying, ‘It’s time you guys did something,’ we should be saying, ‘It’s time we got together and did something between us.’**”*

Bernadette Howard: *“Who’s going to take the leadership on this, especially in the U.S.? Do we have the will, the political will? In the recent film about Abraham Lincoln, someone says to President Lincoln, ‘You’ve led us through the war – now who’s going to lead us through the recovery?’ Who’s going to lead us out of this situation? **Someone has to have the chutzpah to take the lead and check their ego at the door.**”*

Jan Bray: *“**It takes leadership from the highest levels in the city, state or in business to get anything done.** We need to redo economic development plans to align with the areas of focus, by region, in order to meet the needs of the nation as a whole.”*

Do Not Underestimate the Power of the Individual

Sally Sinclair: *“We’ve got some far-sighted industry and institutional leaders thinking about these issues. But ultimately we’ve got to have an approach that’s driven by the individual. **A lot of these intermediary structures we’ve built up over time – if they do not keep pace, they will be gone because they don’t meet the requirements of the situation or the needs of the individuals.**”*

Peter Krikstolaitis: *“We have treated the individual choices as a passive commodity. But if you can empower the individuals to understand that they are a powerful asset and have choices, you get a more empowered cohort that can bring change up from below. Let them know they can have an impact. Many workers can quote sporting team stats, but don’t know where their own industry is going and what skills they’ll need in the future. Everyone in this room is successful because we know our industries and what’s needed to succeed in them. **Don’t underestimate what the individual can contribute to their own careers and to workforce development in general.**”*

Listen to and Involve the Business Community

Jim Tollefson: *“One of the high costs of doing business is hiring the right people. If you don’t hire the right people, you can pay for it for years. It can have a bad impact. **But that’s why it’s important to have the businesses at the table. They want to make money. And people are so important to that.**”*

Marilyn Matsunaga: *“What about the disconnect between the education and business communities? **It’s almost like having a chef who is completely removed from the restaurant. He or she cooks and cooks and cooks, without ever knowing whether the people in the restaurant are eating it, starving or ever coming back for more. So we have to put the chef back in the restaurant with the customers.**”*

Jan Bray: *“**It has to be driven by industry. Policy has to either get out of the way or support it. And education has to be open and receptive to it. But it’s going to have to start with industry saying ‘I can’t get the workers I need. And if I can’t get them from you, education, I’ll get them somewhere else.’ Education won’t go away, but if it doesn’t become more responsive to the needs of the employer community, it won’t be relevant anymore.**”*

Start Small

Peter Krikstolaitis: *“I’m a fan of chopping up problems to bite size. **Why not start a Hawaiian qualifications framework right here? Other states will follow suit.**”*

Jan Bray: *“The qualifications framework is very impressive. But it’s going to be difficult to impossible to implement it in the U.S. It could be reached. But it has to start with the certification, the credential. **We have to find consistency in a certification that industry understands and accepts. Start to build that acceptance. It’s all going to start locally. But we have to start somewhere.**”*

Sally Sinclair: *“You’ve got the beginning of a qualifications framework, because you’ve got an employer base that’s expressed what they need. You’ve got good engagement with the education sector. It’s a matter of joining the dots and putting the fragmented system together. **It’s a broad national framework that can be incorporated at a local level. It’s still a matter of creating the platform, and then how you inch forward.**”*

Oksana Exell: *“In Canada, we look at occupation to occupation, not industries. **We start small, and there you can get agreement on what skills are important.** Choose a few occupations within one industry. Then have the National Association of Workforce Boards hype it for scale. **You do it from the bottom up – by occupations, from city to state, city to state.**”*

Jan Bray: *“In Cincinnati, they had a tremendous need, and they formed a partnership between the Career Technical Center, Cincinnati Community College, the University of Cincinnati and the Cincinnati Hospital Association. **And they each played their role.** The career tech center provided basic training and GED diplomas, and they got paid while they were doing it by the hospital. Everything they learned was recognized and accredited at the community college and the university. So an individual could choose what aspect of the health care field they wanted, and go as far as they wanted. **But it was a partnership at the local level that served everybody’s needs.**”*

Conclusion

There is a saying in business: “Whatever has to happen, will happen.” A system must be devised to provide more skilled and trained workers, because that has to happen for business to succeed and remain vibrant in the 21st century.

Whatever system evolves, it will have to provide trusted certifications and credentials that business can trust and believe in. Trusting credentials is essential to any comprehensive workplace skills and training development program, whether national or local. This means that business will need to be more involved than they have been heretofore, and may even have to take on a leadership role.

Which areas of the business-government-education triangle will play which roles is still an open debate, but it seemed clear to the Roundtable participants that education – although it can learn to move and respond faster than it has – will never be as fast as business is at changing course when events change on the ground.

Much of the advice offered to the U.S. from Canada, Australia and the Philippines is worth paying close attention to:

- Start small;
- Don't underestimate the power of the individual to chart his/her own course;
- Listen to all sides, but particularly to the customer – industry; and
- Don't reinvent the wheel.

A good way to start would include high-level cooperation among city, political, education and business leaders at the local level, with everyone playing their proper role, driven by local business needs. Perhaps policy in the U.S. ought to be that given the speed of business, the power of the individual, and the need for education to provide strong basic skills, there should be no presumption of who the providers of education will be beyond high school.

Perhaps the funding should follow the needs of the individual to achieve his/her highest level of competence. Then, if based on articulated and generally accepted competencies, any legitimate provider who can demonstrate performance would be considered a legitimate provider of training, skills and the certifications that validate them.

A system that appealed to the core American values of free-enterprise, entrepreneurship and honest competition seems the best answer to the skills gap issue in the U.S.

Richard Lum, CEO of Vision Foresight Strategy wrapped up the Roundtable with these words: “Change in society happens at different ‘layers’ and at different rates, and different stakeholders in the workforce discussion are focused on different types of change. In order to have the productive conversations we need for progress, we need to bring these views together in a way that maps out the *whole* landscape for the futures of the workforce.” The Roundtable provided a first step in better connecting the U.S. workforce development system and the Asia-Pacific region.

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