



SKILLING FOR THE FUTURE

Industry, academia and government must create an ecosystem for skill development where the focus should be on quality and access



Left to Right: Pradeep Singh, Deputy Dean and CEO, Indian School of Business (ISB) Mohali Campus; Lt Gen (Retd) Dr. SP Kochhar, CEO, TSSC; Arun Rajamani, Country Head & General Manager, Pluralsight India Pvt. Ltd.; Dr. Padmakali Banerjee, Pro Vice-Chancellor & Dean Academics Director, Amity Business School, Amity University, Gurgaon; Dr. Souvik Bhattacharyya, Vice-Chancellor and Senior Professor, BITS Pilani; Bradley Loiselle, CEO, betterU; ET Moderator; Atish Chattopadhyay, Director, Institute of Management Technology, Ghaziabad; Arunkumar Pillai, Executive Director, Government & Public Sector Practice, EY; Bijay Sahoo, Group President HR, Reliance Industries; Pankaj Narula, Executive Director, Maruti Suzuki India Ltd.; Dr. Sunil Shukla, Director, Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India; Dr. Randhir Singh Rathore, Director Skill Initiatives, AICTE

With nearly a million people joining the workforce every month, India faces a huge challenge in skilling people to make them employable. This requires a concerted effort from all the stakeholders - the government, industry and academia - to move the needle on this uphill task. In an effort to create a dialogue between the various constituents, The Economic Times and betterU hosted a leadership forum of skill development in New Delhi on November 18th, 2018. Edited excerpts

ET: Why has the traditional approach to skilling not worked in India?

Lt Gen (Retd) Dr. SP Kochhar, CEO, TSSC: We have a necessity for skill development. I feel there are three categories. One is academic with skills, second is skills with academics and third is skills on its own. So the first one is where you have basic education and that is topped with additional skills; second is the need for academics along with skills as at some places, there is no recognition of skills without academics; and third, are artist skills, like carpentering, etc. who just know how to deliver, and that's it. Unfortunately, most of the skilling is focused on the last part. People aren't very serious about the first and the second part yet education without skills is a problem. Why skills has been the younger brother of academics is that there has been no aspirational movement of skills seeping into academics. The methods that the government is adopting by giving incentives to its students to only get skills is not the best approach. You are paying them money to up their skills but whether they get a job or not, that is not taken into consideration. On the contrary, if you pay the industry to bring the person to that level, after their employment of say three months to a year, you have a created a skilled person also employed.

Arun Rajamani, Country Head & General Manager, Pluralsight India: There is a huge gap for what comes out of academia and the skills required by the industry. Organisations are constantly being challenged to look at changing the culture of learning within their working environments and focus on helping employees advance their skills as and when required. The skills of the future are going to be different than what we have today and it is the onus of the individual to learn and be compatible with what the market demands. We strongly believe that at best, organisations can enable people but the culture of learning needs to change if the individual is to stay current. We do believe that technology is an enabler for learning and virtual technology will add to the way people learn and develop skills.

ET: Don't we need a more integrated approach to skilling?

Dr. Padmakali Banerjee, Pro Vice-Chancellor & Dean Academics, Director, Amity Business School, Amity University, Gurgaon: We need to integrate skills in the mainstream. We cannot have skilling as a separate vertical - it has to work through academic institutions, universities and training partners all coming together. Aligned to the same vision by entrepreneurs coming together as well alongside these partners, our combined focus towards skilling will see quick advancements. It is very critical that we need to identify what would be the journey, what would be our action-oriented steps required to move our country ahead.

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ET: Can India realistically be an export hub of skilled professionals?

Bradley Loiselle, CEO, betterU: Our business vision is 'to create opportunities for individuals to learn and grow' and we help do this by providing access to global education, thus equalizing employment opportunities at a global level. In Canada, for example, you can't get a job in a field like nursing if you have not received training within the Canadian educational system. This applies to employment opportunities around the world. If we can connect education from these countries into India, then all of a

sudden, Indians not only have the ability to learn from global leaders, but they also become a skilled workforce qualified for employment in that country. As a result, the qualified workforce from India now becomes the world's workforce and that's a huge proposition. PM Narendra Modi had mentioned in New York during his speech that India has the workforce that can support the world and he



As researcher, we have to make prototypes but we've never had this hands-on manufacturing flavour of training from our childhood

Dr. Souvik Bhattacharyya, VC and Sr. Professor, BITS Pilani

is absolutely right. I focused on India because I knew if I could advance the education system, I could help open up global employment opportunities for all Indians, equalize education and in turn solve many employment challenges at a global level.

ET: How does our education system need to change to bring up more skilled professionals?

Dr. Souvik Bhattacharyya, Vice-Chancellor and Senior Professor, BITS Pilani: It is critical to target the primary schools where there is a crying need for three-year compulsory vocation courses. After all, students need hands-on training from childhood. So vocational courses from the school level will certainly help mainstream a wide variety of skills. Now BITS undertakes a rigorous internship program with industry where even faculty is present onsite. We also foster work-integrated learning by roping in people with skills who are deployed in the industry but had no opportunity to get a university degree. So we are giving them a unique opportunity that while working, they impart knowledge to students. We currently have 22,000 people enrolled in that program. So they go to the workplace—clusters with industrial pockets. Physical classes are held in the evening and over the weekends—sometimes it's with a company in big numbers, and sometimes, it's on an individual basis.

ET: Are we preparing a skilled workforce that is capable of handling new disruptive technologies?

Bijay Sahoo, Group President-HR, Reliance Industries: When the industry needs changes, it decides which skills to hire. If you look at all the emerging technologies, like mobile internet, 3D printing, automation of knowledge work, genomics, renewable energy, robotics - all these new technologies will create new value. Each technology will destroy the old jobs, and at the same time, they will create some new jobs. We are not preparing the country to move from the old skillset to the new one. If we don't capture the value that these new technologies will bring in and we don't prepare as a nation, and government policies are not aligned to those technologies, we are missing something. People are focused on the newer technologies as they are creating more value - whether it's a nation or a company or an individual.

ET: Do the academics also need to change their view on skilling?

Atish Chattopadhyay, Director, Institute of Management Technology: The first important thing is respect for skills. If you look a few years back, a hotel management diploma was not equivalent to graduation. Secondly, the structure of academic institutions, in terms of the faculty is very conventional. Where the incentive is in terms of knowledge, recognition, creation, the focus is on knowledge, and less on skills. I have worked closely with Harvard's Srikant Datar who along with David Garvin wrote 'Rethinking MBA'. They made three important points; we train our students' analysis, not action; sec-

'India's population is very talented and has global potential'



Bradley Loiselle, CEO, betterU

I grew up in Canada and I've been living on my own since I was a teenager. I was a kid who struggled with education, skill development and how to enhance my career. I had friends who were going off to university and college, while I struggled to find my path. By the time I was in my 20s, I realized that I was great at coming up with business ideas, but I was poor at executing because I lacked the necessary planning skills. Over time I learnt those skills, becoming a Project Management Professional and then becoming a successful entrepreneur launching many businesses. While manufacturing for one of my companies in China, I was exposed to the emerging markets where I saw the need for skills development. Having lived this path, I realized that it was unacceptable and I needed to pioneer a change and so I decided to set a path that would equalize global education. In 2008, armed with my new-found skills and years of practice, I started an online education company that produced courses for companies like BMW, Nike, US and Canada Government, among others. My vision though was to go to emerging markets, like Brazil, China and India. We came to India in 2010 and realized this is where I want to be. After I sold that company in 2011, I took that money and put it into betterU with my goal to help educate a nation. So for the last three-and-a-half years, I have been here 24 times, back and forth, researching, building relationships, partnerships and infrastructure in order to create an education company that made sense for India and the world. I am living proof for what a lack of skills can do and the results that they can achieve when you take them on. When the PM was in Toronto Canada in 2014, I had the opportunity to sit with him because of what betterU was working to accomplish for India. In Canada and many other countries around the world, there is a workforce shortage and India has such a huge population with skills and potential to support the world.

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ET: What has been your experience of working with employees hired from government vocational institutes?

Pankaj Narula, Executive Director, Maruti Suzuki: The government vocational institutes need a makeover. At Maruti, when the car comes back for servicing and repairs, we have employed people at our workshops from ITIs, who are supposed to be auto mechanics. It takes two years for them to be actually proficient in their jobs, despite having undertaken ITI courses. We have to impart training to them regularly to come up to a level where they can repair cars. So what use is that education if the training has to be imparted by the industry? I have visited several ITIs and seen how they function. They are still taught on the 1940s model. How can they work on a Mercedes or Suzuki car? We have adopted 150 ITIs—in 55 of them, we have invested Rs 85 lakh where we have

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Bijay Sahoo, Group President HR, Reliance Industries

built workshops, we are providing them cars, we have given them the diagnostic to do the demos. In the auto industry, which is about US\$3 million now and is going to be US\$6 million in the next 6-7 years, where are we going to get those mechanics to work? The task surely is humongous. Therefore, quality training must be the watchword at government vocational institutes.

ET: How are the central government institutes changing their approach to skilling?

Dr. Randhir Singh Rathore, Director Skill Initiatives, AICTE: Skilling was discussed for long, but for the first time, we are working on it seriously. We plan to organise the sector, which is taking place in different pockets. It should be integrated across. The industry, organisations and government must work together. If you are talking of quality of education, most are not employable. If we are measuring the quality, what exactly are we lacking? We are either lacking by core competency, or soft skills. We must carefully identify the gaps at different levels—how these gaps can be filled, what would be the role of the different parties involved. There should be a linkage of academia and industry. In the next 10 years, one lakh students will be trained to become entrepreneurs and to set up their startup so they won't be job seekers. But they will be job creators.

ET: Isn't skilling people to become entrepreneurs more beneficial for our economy?

Dr. Sunil Shukla, Director, Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India: Entrepreneurship is the need of the hour. In our experience, each entrepreneur creates three

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Dr. Padmakali Banerjee, Pro VC & Dean Academics, Director, Amity Business School, Amity University, Gurgaon

other job opportunities, and every dollar spent on the training, results in 10 times investment into the market. So this is the most cost-effective intervention. I'd like to advocate for that. I believe that there are three important things - this triple model works more effectively - industry, academia and government. Everybody has to play their own role in the ecosystem for skill development. Some of our institutions have actually become placement centers - they guarantee placements and in the two or three years, you just pass time. The focus should be on quality and access. Entrepreneurship will have a big role to play in India's progress.

ET: Isn't the ability of different stakeholders - government, academia, industry - to work together hindering the skilling initiatives?

Pradeep Singh, Deputy Dean and CEO, Indian School of Business (ISB) Mohali Campus: The key gap is in the ability to work together. It's not as if the gap is not identified in the past but it hasn't worked, because the ball has always been in the government's court. It could not have happened earlier when technology or pace of change was nowhere close to what it is today. I would say that the private sector must become the engine, not just advising or passing consultation, and the government has to follow. This means the government has to provide the solutions of this whole empire and that starts from funding, whether it is faculty, technology or curriculum, it is going to need the new currency. And unless the industry is going to deploy that, it's not going to happen.