Lifelong Learning for Lifelong Employment
How Analytics Can Fuel Better Labor Market Outcomes
There is a major disconnect between education and the labor market. All stakeholders in the system—universities, high schools, ministries of education, employers and labor market agencies—have data, but it sits in silos. These vast stores of data are not used in a systematic, institutionalized manner to support learning that contributes to sustainable employment. For instance, while many agencies use analytics to measure labor market outcomes, only 38 percent of public employment services are applying it to lifelong learning efforts.¹

To deliver public service for the future, public employment services must move beyond one-off, project-based data exploitation. The tools are there. It’s a matter of using that data to enable lifelong learning that can help workers find long-term employment, and help employers find long-term employees.
Singapore’s SkillsConnect portal provides a clear window into skills demand, because all employers must post jobs for the first two weeks they are open. Training organizations can apply for accreditation and funding for training incentives. Individuals can access funding for lifelong learning, training opportunities tailored to their personality and interests, and a Jobs Bank of more than 54,000 jobs.

Source: Singapore Workforce Development Agency; SkillsConnect site; online at https://www.skillsconnect.gov.sg/web/guest

Bridging the disconnect

To support lifelong learning, analytics can help labor market agencies to understand the demand of the future labor market, which will inform the supply side and, ultimately, reveal how education can support all dimensions.

Understand skills demand to supply skilled labor

Of labor market agencies surveyed, less than half (44 percent) use analytics to shape the curriculum of education/training the needs of employers and job seekers. Analytics will help agencies to understand the future demand of the labor market and analyze the existing supply and the future supply that will come out of educational and training institutions.

Furthermore, an improved market intelligence competency would help agencies to translate this insight into effective and early intervention across different levels of the organization.

Better forecasting capabilities also give agencies valuable insight they can share with training providers to develop the most relevant curriculum, and job seekers who can then aim to build skills that match job vacancies.

Identify skills gaps and then upskill or reskill people accordingly

It is difficult for labor market agencies to close skills gaps when they cannot precisely identify where those gaps exist. Analytics will help agencies to understand the skills and preferences of the present and future workforce (e.g. upcoming graduates). What are their capabilities? Where can interventions help close any skills gaps?

Predictive analytics can be used to detect and predict skill gaps in certain regions and industries and forecast career options in other regions, in higher-qualified jobs and across industries. Ideally, through ongoing tracking of current and future education and skill demand, agencies can continually adjust training and upskilling suggestions based on ever-changing market trends.

Eighty-five percent of labor market agencies surveyed say it would be helpful to use analytics to provide workforce agencies and departments with segmentations to help map interventions or programs to individuals’ backgrounds.\(^2\)

Segmentation, customer insight and profiling techniques allow agencies to understand the target audience, and shift resources and interventions to those that are most in need. For example:

- Students/graduates may require job coaching or placement services to help them enter the workforce for the first time.
- Particularly vulnerable groups, such as the long-term unemployed or those with multiple support needs, may need a mix of counselling, placement and integration services.
Germany aims to understand and close skills gaps through its Labour Market Monitor, which includes a Specialist Radar that identifies existing or pending shortages of specialist labor. Those involved in education or policy planning can look at the unemployed-vacancy ratio across the short term or longer term to identify a shortage and respond accordingly.

Connect the ecosystem to Identify that interventions are working

Interconnectedness with education providers and other actors is lagging, despite common critical missions that include closing skills gaps, employability and lifelong learning.

To bring together the currently fragmented ecosystem, a central body must have access to and ownership of all relevant data so that public/private actors in the system can track skills, work preferences, work history, and other related circumstances.

Analytics can play a role in this ecosystem by determining what kind of learning activities and labor market interventions will have the greatest effect, and measuring the outcome of them and assessing them constantly.

Public employment agencies must create incentives for employers and education institutions to provide data. For example, if they provide the data, education institutions will better understand what kinds of skills will be required tomorrow. Using that view into the future, they could tailor their curriculums with in-demand courses, thus better positioning them in an increasingly competitive education sector. Employers that understand the skills needed for tomorrow can better recruit for those skills, thereby boosting their competitiveness and fortifying their position in the “war for talent.”

According to Accenture’s Jobs and Skills study, 74 percent of citizens surveyed in France, 66 percent in Germany, 67 percent in the UK and 65 percent in Singapore believe that closer links between public employment services, businesses and the education sector would help ensure that the workforce has the skills required for jobs now, and in the future.
The Employment Security Bureau in Japan operates the Job Information Net, an integrated search system for private sector employment opportunities as well jobs part of the Bureau’s own “Hello Work” network.

The Bureau also helps new graduates find work by counseling students, introducing prospective employers to students and offering “study trips” to places of work.


Having one, integrated place for labor market data will also help agencies to understand which labor market interventions are working. Has employability increased? Are people staying longer in jobs?

Have more graduates found work sooner? These discoveries are difficult to unearth in the current system because agencies only have part of the picture.

An evolution in employment and education

Digital tools can help to change the fact that job seekers, employers and government institutions are working in silos, achieving suboptimal results in spite of their best efforts. Digital platforms can connect the complex stakeholder system so that employers, education providers and other public authorities can work together to address skills demand, create jobs and tackle other challenges jobseekers might have.

Once a country establishes a system that “connects the dots” of the education and employment ecosystem, there are immense opportunities to make learning and job seeking more dynamic and interactive. For instance, gamification tools make it fun to explore labor market and learning opportunities, and learn how to be successful at work. The Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) created a mobile app called “Go Rush” that uses gaming to encourage users to learn about Continuing Education and Training and upskilling pathways with Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ).

Learning is also becoming more social, with online tools in which users can customize their own curriculum. Social learning is important to supporting lifelong learning. It is no longer sufficient to concentrate on traditional classroom teaching when the culture and habits of the target audience have changed. Digital can fuse proven practices of training with future formats of communicating.

Today’s digital world is one of connections, collaboration and data-driven decision making. Public employment services haven’t yet made the leap into the digital future, but when they do, the possibilities for lifelong learning and employment are endless.
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Resources
1 Accenture 2015 Labor Organizations Research
2 Accenture 2015 Labor Organizations Research
3 UWV website: http://jaarverslag.uwv.nl/jaarverslag/a1038_Online-dienstverlening-aan-werkzoekenden
4 European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Skills Supply and Demand in Europe, Forecast 2020, published in 2010

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