

MARKET-WORTHY PROGRAMMES

Employability of students is a crucial benchmark for world-class institutes. India has recognised this but lots need to be done

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We have woken up to the massive opportunity provided by our growing youth numbers. We also realise that if this opportunity is not leveraged, it will turn into a ticking time bomb of large unemployed youth energy —

P Rajendran,
NIIT

ankush Gupta*, a 19-year-old BCom graduate from a university in Punjab harboured aspirations of joining the Indian Navy. But as destiny would have it, he was introduced to a skill centre by a friend and instead joined a food and beverage services course. Today, he serves as a trainee at 32nd Milestone Hotel, Sikanderpur Gurgaon, and will soon be employed at the hotel.

Gupta secured a job before his batchmates. He attributes his success to the life-skill programme. But his success in the job market raises an important question about the availability and accessibility of skill development in higher education.

Problems galore

According to the Indian Labour Report 2012 by TeamLease-ILJT, India's higher education system is a bottleneck, as one million people, who don't have adequate training will join the labour force monthly for the next 20 years. About 80 per cent of India's higher education system for 2030 is yet to be built and needs breaking the difficult trinity of cost, quality and scale — it needs massive innovation, investment, deregulation and competition.

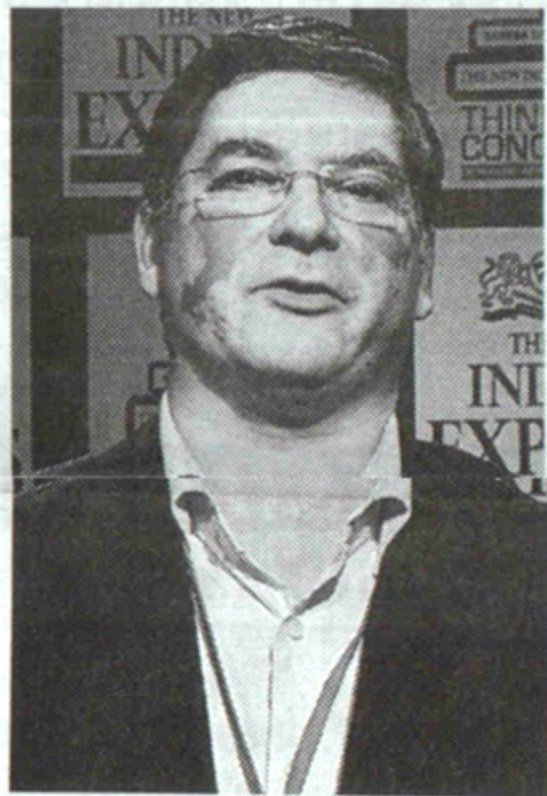
Changing mindsets

Ashok Reddy, managing director of ILJT and co-founder of TeamLease Services, says, "Given the demographic dividend of the country that has given us a huge young resource, it is essential to ensure that learning is structured to connect people to jobs. However, there has been a cerebral division that education is for a degree and vocational training is for a job. It is essential to ensure that this partition is removed and we move to creating platforms for acceptance and corridor effect of vocational training programmes.

Vocational training should move from

certificate programmes to associate degrees that provide for a modular approach and on-the-job training credits," he says.

In fact, in 2009, the Indian Government set up National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to exploit the demographic dividend. It drew a detailed road map for skill training of 500 million by 2022. Quite a task! Dilip Chenoy, CEO and MD, NSDC says, "Our vision is to ensure that skills-related training should be outcome-based and linked with jobs for employability. Our mandate is that whenever you approve a project, the partners should have placed at least 70 per cent of the people. The second thing, when the partner says they train people for XYZ company, we also ask them to show us an evidence from the company that these people are being trained. NSDC approach is



Dhilip Chenoy

sectoral, where the employers put up with the national occupation standards."

Need for competitive markets

Chenoy adds there are two issues India has to address in terms of employability. "According to the skill gap survey by NSDC, industry requires between 244-347 million skilled people. There is a large body of youth that undergoes education and training and end up

with degrees and certification but are found to be non-employable. Also, the total number of seats for graduates and skill development are far less than the number of people that are joining the workforce each year. The number of people joining is significantly lower than what the industry wants. The industry has to be competitive, and if they have to compete in the global market, they need people with global skills," he says.

The other relevant issue in employability is that if industries do not hire such trained people, there is a likelihood of two events. "One, they would invest in capital and therefore there will be people who do not have access to a job or those employed will be negligible," he says.

P Rajendran, co-founder and chief operating officer, NIIT, says, "As a country, we have woken up to the massive opportunity provided by our growing youth numbers. We also realise that if this opportunity is not leveraged, it will turn into a ticking time bomb of large unemployed youth energy. In the past few years, our country has made significant policy decisions to strengthen our vocational education and employability programmes. NSDC is one of the largest such initiatives."

Lagging behind on several fronts

Rajendran, however, feels we are far behind when it comes to skill development and employability. "Reports show that only five per cent of India's labour force in the age group of 19-24 are estimated to have acquired formal training while in developed countries, the same number ranges from 60 to 95 per cent," he points out.

But skill development and training has so far had different concoctions in the country. "To have social currency in India, the acceptable tags are of professions such as engineer, doctor, MBA, and graduates. Functional skills such as plumbing, masonry, automobile repair, and tailoring, to name a few, have little social currency," ob-

serves Rajendran.

Vocational challenges

This raises the question of challenges in the vocational sphere. Chenoy says that we are currently dealing with five major problems. "One, capacity is far less than demand. Second, employers and industry do not have sufficient say in determining the outcome of qualifications of people coming out of these programmes. Third, from the point of view of a young person, there is no



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