



A L&D HUB

THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS' ORGANISATIONS IN BRIDGING THE COMPETENCE GAP

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Currently, the world experiences extensive technological changes such as digitalisation, big data, and the Internet of Things. These trends affect the human capital requirements in the labour markets, especially in emerging countries.¹ However, the development of employee's competences through (technical) vocational education and training ((T)VET) is often not successful since in emerging countries (T)VET is frequently outdated with little practical content and lacks a supportive learning environment. Consequently, in combination with the constant change in human capital requirements, (T)VET often does not meet the needs of employers². This resulting mismatch between the requirements of employers and the lack of qualification of employees is known as the "competence gap."³

Due to the competence gap, in emerging countries, the economic sectors with growth opportunities are often held back. DECP takes on the challenge to bridge this gap through creating economic growth and job prospects. DECP achieves this by offering professional expertise and support to employers' organisations in social dialogue and showing how (T)VET can positively change the economic situation in emerging countries.

Nonetheless, no actor on their own has the capacity to bridge the competence gap, hence, DECP supports these employers' organisations

to seek out alliances with other competence development stakeholders. Most commonly, these are trade unions, participants of the formal private sector (i.e., SMEs, MNEs), and civil society groups (i.e., NGOs). These alliances further increase the bargaining power of employers' organisations to set up projects that will help bridge the competence gap. To provide an example, DECP has worked in collaboration with CNV international to train employers' organisations and representatives of trade unions on negotiation skills in Ivory Coast. In doing so, employers' organisations and trade unions became acquainted with each other's perspectives and challenges which helped simulate each other's positions.

Comprehensive approach

We, a team of six students from Maastricht University, have investigated academic literature and governmental reports, and interviewed 27 experts. The latter was possible through the broad expert network of DECP. Interviewees had a diverse experience in terms of the types of projects they were involved in and various professional and cultural backgrounds. From this, we identified eight conditions that have to be taken into account by employers' organisations to successfully initiate projects that reduce the competence gap (image 1):



image 1: the eight conditions

ENLIGHTENMENT helps employers' organisations to spread the word and make every actor aware of the importance of bridging the gap. This also serves as the foundation to bring partners on board.

STRATEGIC COLLABORATION helps employers' organisations gain the capacity needed to set up projects. When building partnerships a good relationship between employers' organisations and stakeholders is as important as achieving a win-win exchange of resources.

DESIGN OF TRAINING aims to ensure a level of training quality which ensures practice-relevant curricula that mirrors real-life happenings of the (local) employers. This helps to align the training in (T)VET with the needs of employers.

TRAINING STAFF has to be aware of the happenings in the industry which can be achieved through workshops and internships, exchange with other (T)VETs or the private sector. Apart from successfully transferring their knowledge to the pupils, training staff should invest in teaching them soft skills such as effective communication and teamwork.

TRAINING FACILITIES need to be closely connected to the region as they are a key element for students to develop the

competences required by local employers. This further enhances the need of maintaining access to up-to-date training facilities.

FUNDING an initial project can be obtained on the private and sectoral level. When employers' organisations together with their stakeholders want to upscale a project, national and international funds are the ideal source of funding.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION is useful in order to assess the impact of ongoing projects. Moreover, tracking the results helps gain an in-depth understanding of factors that contributed to it as well as to set up future projects based on evidence.

The L&D hub

To fulfil all eight conditions, our advice is that employers' organisations act as mediators that bring together stakeholders to set up (local) projects. In doing so, employers' organisations take on the role of learning and development (L&D) hubs. In other words, the linking pin in a skills ecosystem in which private and public parties interact to bridge the competence gap (image 2).



image 2: employers' organisations as L&D hub

A L&D hub offers practical guidance, tools, and resources to create a supportive and positive framework to meet the competence demands of employers through (T)VET. To bring to life how a L&D hub can look like, we provide the four best practices from the Netherlands in image 3. These show how combining the eight conditions can help bridge the competence gap.

hubs gives employers' organisations a 'spot on the horizon' to work towards. Bringing to life the vision created through our recommendations will require a step-by-step approach and a long-term perspective, which can be achieved by starting from small and strategic choices. Therefore, certain resources (i.e., financial, expertise, time, and human resources) from employers' organisations and DECP are crucial.

Final thoughts

Bridging the competence gap is a complex challenge that requires a long-term multi stakeholder commitment. The notion of L&D

In sum, if employers' organisations act as L&D hubs, they will be in a position to bridge the competence gap. This is a strong steppingstone to up-scale projects to achieve meaningful and long-lasting change

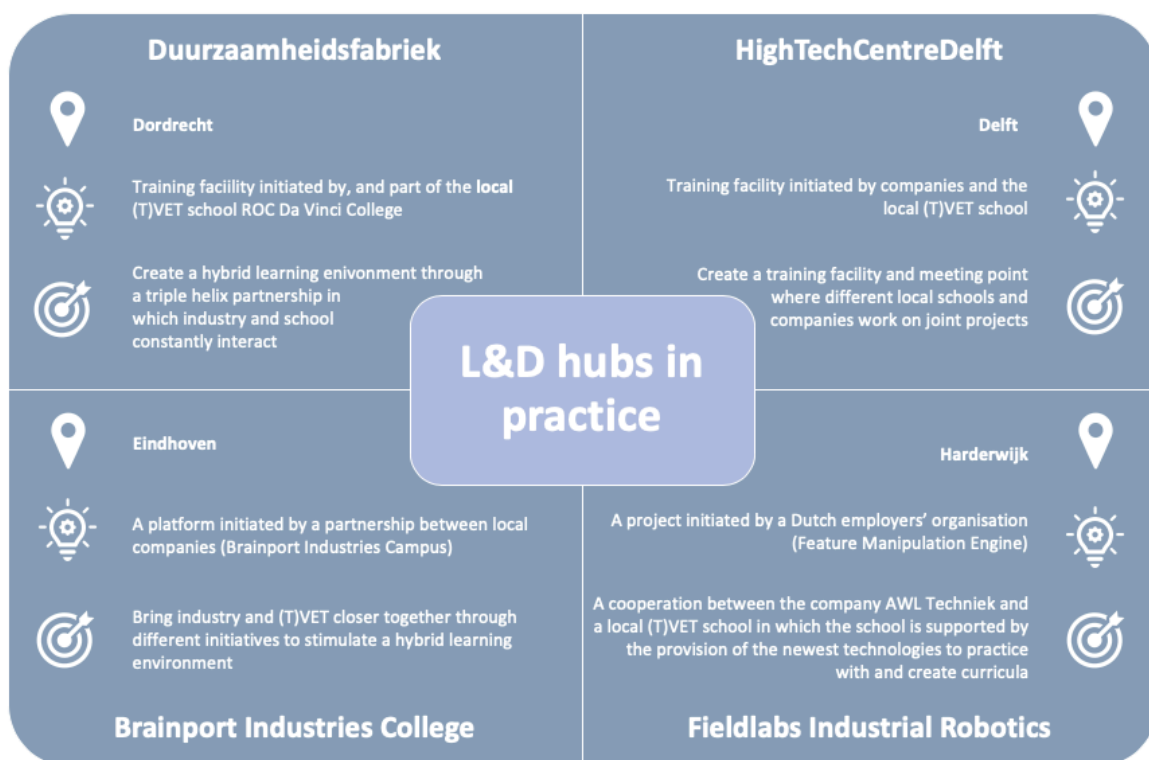


image 3: examples of best practices

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