Frame the Future
Thought Pieces

Ecosystem Approach to Build Lifelong Learning Societies

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The GFCC Frame the Future conversations are particularly relevant in these times, as we have experienced tremendous disruptions in recent years. In particular, as we look at the future of work, there is a need to consider the future of human capital development, and in particular the future of education and training. As an agency under the Ministry of Education in Singapore, SkillsFuture Singapore is realizing the future of education and training through setting policies and providing funding for workforce training and promotion of lifelong learning. We extend these efforts to serve all population segments, companies, and workers across all industry sectors.

As we look into the future of work — on what it takes for economies to be competitive, for talent pools to be employable, for societies to live well — we must consider five major disruptive forces, which are: technological advancements, shifting demographics, extended lifespan and careers, shifts in globalization, and global pandemics. These are persistent trends, and we must not take a quick fix or a patchwork approach to addressing them. But rather adopt a calibrated, systemic, and sustained approach toward human capital development.

The key challenge is that our traditional education and training systems are not designed for these disruptions and times of rapid change. We need to shift our existing paradigm of education and training to a non-linear system that promotes

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lifelong learning. A system that is flexible, agile, and responsive to fast-evolving disruptions. We must also take an inclusive approach to avail the new paradigm to all segments of our workforce and society, and provide the equivalent of universal access to a system of lifelong learning.

Regardless of whether we are building learning societies at the country, state, or city level, an ecosystem approach is needed to align all the relevant stakeholders to create sustainable and effective lifelong learning systems. It is frequently helpful to start with a few promising areas to build up momentum that would support further deployment at scale. Depending on the specific context, the initial momentum generation could be led by the government, or by the private sector and non-profits, and subsequently involve other key stakeholders. To scale-up

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effectively, skills development strategies must be tightly coupled with economic and job creation strategies.

Such an ecosystem approach would require redesigning the education and training value chain to provide multiple pathways to learners throughout their lives. We will need to build capabilities for skills anticipation and forecasting, involving companies, industry bodies, and drawing on big data sources. We will need multiple channels for skills delivery conducted by training providers, companies (including workplace learning), and trade bodies. Public educational entities, in particular higher education institutions, should also broaden their mandates to play a key role in the skills delivery landscape. Learning opportunities must be designed in a way that is accessible and affordable to be as inclusive as possible to various segments of our workforce and population. We will have to measure outcomes of skills acquisition, job placements, and wage growth to demonstrate clear return on investment for skills development. Finally, we have to foster a change-oriented mindset and learning culture among employers, employees, and society at large.

Through the SkillsFuture movement that was launched in 2015, we are building an integrated, high-quality, lifelong education and training system that is responsive to the evolving needs of Singapore's economy and society. In particular, we have advanced innovations in lifelong learning to provide comprehensive options for the acquisition of skills, taking an inclusive approach to support all industry sectors and population seg-

ments, including disadvantaged groups and smaller companies. To ensure a tight nexus between the supply and demand for skills, we defined the Singapore Skills Taxonomy and published 34 Skills Frameworks to document current and future industry skills needs, and to design appropriate interventions to address these needs. We have built up a Jobs-Skills Repository, utilizing artificial intelligence techniques and tools to perform near-real-time analysis of labor market trends. The Jobs-Skills Repository proved to be very useful throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling data analytics to identify skills adjacencies and gaps, and to assist displaced workers in declining sectors to reskill and transition into in-demand jobs.

We have designed Singapore's continuing education and training system to be accessible by offering a wide range of courses in multiple, bite-sized delivery modes, and to be affordable through a range of financial support to defray the cost of training. This has enabled our companies and workforce to develop the necessary capabilities to navigate disruptions and helped them to have the confidence, resilience, and adaptability in times of change, as we have witnessed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

The rich and meaningful exchanges during the Frame the Future conversations are clear evidence that there is room for more knowledge exchange and collaborations at the global level. It is crucial to learn from one another as we guide and support our respective nations, economies, and workforces in navigating future disruptions, and in building lifelong learning societies.