

Rethinking Vocational Education  
The Case of the  
School of Vocational Education at the  
Tata Institute of Social Sciences  
K S Gopal, TISS

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**Rethinking Universities  
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## **Rethinking Vocational Education The School of Vocational Education at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Whither Vocational Training**

The skill requirements of industry were traditionally met by ITI and polytechnics. However they had become lackadaisical over the years. While steps are being taken to improve them, the game has changed for three reasons. For one, many of the ITIs have moved to a public private partnership (PPP) model, where its facilities are managed by the government, but the knowledge component is provided by the private sector. Secondly, the services sector has emerged as the main employer, and the ITIs were not able to meet their requirements. The mantle of such training has fallen on private players, who are focused on short term and immediate results. The ambition is also limited to namely producing people for entry level jobs rather than quality workers which enables career advancement. This is related to the third reason, which has caused training for the manufacturing sector to be neglected. Training for the core manufacturing economy, requires much higher investments, longer duration and hands-on learning.

Post the industrial revolution, industry was very keen to foster and retain its workers. This led to providing several welfare measures that ensured good health and the education of children. Today, industry invariably relies on contractors to provide the labour. The contractors have no human resources management skills nor are they interested in the career path of the youngster. They also do not address the abuse that youngsters face in their work place. Thus a “use and discard” approach to the youngsters is adopted rather than motivation and human resource development.

To sum up, vocational education in India is steeped in the business of body shopping. It has incentivised “employment” rather than “employability”. Man management today calls for new ideas and out of box thinking. It is important that the research and teaching in Indian universities empower the young with skills and capacities such that they negotiate the market on their own terms and succeed. There is also the challenge of laying down the contours of the new worker as needed in the economy as well as attending to the existing psyche of the young boys and girls. As new and relatively unexplored trades come up, boys and girls take up training in a particular skill by word of mouth or contact, and then find they are not particularly suited for it. So along with testing their interests through some tests, there is a need to expose them to different skills with their job requirements, so that they can make a choice akin to their liking. Otherwise they will drop out as is now being observed.

Finally, vocational education policy needs to address neglected geographies. The focus is on urban employment. Not much effort has been made to provide skills needed in agriculture. There is talk about the need for the knowledge worker in rural areas. The land holding structure imposes severe constraints for employing such knowledge workers and rewarding them suitably. . So there is a

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<sup>1</sup> This is a note based on my experience in rural development and my involvement to establishing the Vocational Education Centre (VEC) at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai. I am still a newcomer to the skill development sector but have based this paper on discussions with colleagues at TISS. I am grateful to Mr Amir Sultan who is the Chair of the School of Vocational Education (SVE) at TISS for writing about their approach to skill development

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structural problem here and unless that is changed it will not lend itself for large scale employment opportunities for the youngsters.

Geography is being dictated by the fact that blue collar work is looked down upon. Only certain areas in India are bringing in the workers. This needs to be understood and corrected. Thus enhancing the value of industrial, artisanal, as well as agricultural skills needs fostered through focus on quality, precision, knowledge and services intensity in each of these skills.

It is in this context that the School of Vocational Education in TISS has been incorporated as nodal point to implement an initiative proposed by the Ministry of HRD, Government of India to train unemployable youth into a professional level technician, and design and adopt a Scaled up and technology enabled models in order to address the vast needs of skilled manpower in our Country.

### **Overview of the Vocational System**

The central concept of the system is to transform the marginalized unemployable youth including school drop-outs who constitute more than 80% of the youth population, but have an aptitude for non-academic learning, into confident professional quality technicians in four years. This would prepare them for careers in industry and the services sector or for self-employment as entrepreneurs and thus meet the needs of skills and manpower resources required for the economic development.

TISS – SVE proposes to adopt Work Integrated Training (WIT) that is learning by doing as the central approach to skills and competency development. This approach, though entailing substantial developmental effort is light on investment, gears high employability while involving low payout by trainees. It develops work identity and holistic competency in youth. This is the best route to implement government's vocationalisation policy of meeting manpower needs of economic growth while addressing employability issues.

TISS-SVE purports to initiate and engender social change through vocational education in a new paradigm of developing manpower resources in the context of a developed India. The main challenge lies in mobilizing youth and motivating them to take up vocational careers. TISS-SVE will carry out research into psyche and personality dimensions of the target youth and into the socio-cultural values in communities in India. In 2 to 3 years, TISS-SVE will demonstrate models of DAT, Mobilization, Counseling and Orientation to world of work.

### **The Structure of the System**

TISS-SVE through Centers of Excellence (COE) will develop courses and modular curricula and a special pedagogy for flexible delivery. They will ensure contextual learning in the work situation with attendant variability. The structure of courses & modular syllabi will be designed by TISS-SVE and accredited by TISS Academic Council along with relevant Domain Apex Institution(s) for certification. SVE will set standards for the WIT based VEP to meet competency / performance levels of modern industry instead of the traditional 'certificate' status value.

TISS-SVE / COE will develop and set-up a system of delivery partners called "Hubs" for delivering WIT based VE training at various industry / workplace locations (called "Spokes"). Hubs can be Technical Institutes / Colleges, VTPs, Industry training schools, Institutes under Industry Associations etc. A Hub would manage six spokes with a throughput of 600 to 1000 trainees per year and take care of full training cycle on behalf of SVE / COE.

The sites of the learn and earn programme will be the new economy and the best companies, organizations and industrial/economic clusters. The selection of the sites would be based on standards of work processes, systems and practices at these sites, so that it ensures the high quality of VE training envisaged in the programme. Each Site is the “Spoke”. The industry Spoke System would serve as partners with SVE to impart WIT based VE in perpetuity. They will not absorb more than 5% of trainees and will channel them into premium professional jobs and assignments in India and abroad and into for self-employment. There would be special schemes (like NMCC) and fellowships, which would encourage trainees to join MSMEs, public sector undertakings, rural development agencies and other developmental sectors, thus generating a domino effect.

Focus on the Supply Side

A multiple entry and exit system of continuing education is planned which will take-in a school drop-out through NIOS to Certificate, Diploma, Associate Degree course each equated to different levels in work organization structure and functions. SVE will register entrants assigning Unique Identification (UID) for locating and tracking their progress. Relevant technology and syndication for using smart cards will be deployed. Incentives will be devised to induce a trainee once enrolled for SVE WIT to complete a level and try for next levels.

The same channel will be used for vocationalizing candidates with academic degrees or diploma who are unemployable. The pool of youth outside the school system will be accessed through labour contractors as channel partners. A different stream of courses will be run for contract workmen.

<p>VISION:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Livelihood, career path and all round development and empowerment of youth in line with their talents and aptitudes while meeting our country’s needs of high quality skilled manpower.</li> <li>• Work ethic based social values and culture, with value and regard for vocational qualifications and career.</li> </ul> <p>MISSION:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Develop innovative and inclusive vocational education and career progression NVEQF models and implement through Hub and Spokes to assure livelihood and career guidance to disadvantaged youth; to carry out continual research based evaluation and alignments.</li> <li>b. Provide domain expertise and leadership including for learning institutions (universities, autonomous colleges and institutes), industry, CBOs and national level organizations - policy making bodies, funding institutions and implementation agencies.</li> <li>c. Develop and universalize talent and aptitude testing, assessment and counselling system as the standard to guide adolescent youth through career choice and selection</li> <li>d. Continual Development of contextual Learning Models integrating work and education (curriculum structure, pedagogy and Trainer resources) for current and emerging needs and profiles - along with Skill and Competency standards, measurement and certification .</li> <li>e. Develop and launch scalable community based communication Programmes for youth, parents and community to create awareness and values towards vocational education and careers and global opportunities.</li> <li>f. Installing and coordinating eco-system of institutional linkages, development partners, partnership and alliances for ‘Hub and Spokes’ delivery of work integrated training – involving institutions, companies and corporate, contractors and ensuring benefits for all stakeholders - efficiency metrics, safety, quality and remuneration etc.</li> <li>g. Develop and deploy Scaling up methodologies - e-learning platforms, simulation techniques, alliances and partnerships with built-in holistic linkages and monitoring, review and feedback. This includes ICT for conferencing, collaborative working, and shared projects.</li> </ol>
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SVE will intermediate with development financing agencies for grants and loans to trainees for the non stipend earning phase of their course.

Career progression is an important concern. In two years, the system seeks to convert the unskilled worker and novice into a Technician in two years, while providing Soaking Time to try out different trades and form work identity and personality and develop a life career. This will be equivalent to a basic vocational certification.

After some work experience, a one year course will upgrade the technician to a master technician. This is would be equivalent to trade institute or guild certification.

The next level course will take in Master Technicians to train them as Expert Technician, at a level equivalent to a vocational diploma or supervisory certification.

SVE will guide the entry level school drop-out candidates through the first and second job – i.e., job after the Master Technician Level.

### The Eco-system

SVE's vision is to create a surge for VE through WIT among youth and the community. With high employability gearing and work integrated and demand driven course, this route will be far more efficient than the ITI route as the default VE. Based on POC and Pilots, SVE will carry out advocacy for WIT based VE as the basic model appropriate for India. This should happen In three years when SVE evolves into NVU; with the universities and VTPs replicating this.

SVE's eco—system will cover linkages with industry and Skill Development policy making and implementation organizations for adoption of conducive policy and environment at workplace for WIT, treatment of workmen, changes to contracts act and adoption of work specifications and standards through VE – by industry and by Sector Skill Councils. This greatly improves the base quality of VE and technicians.

### The Development Focus

The SVE will focus on youth by providing transformational inputs to adjust from deprived childhood to be fit for a vocational career. This includes talent and capability assessment, behavioural and trade counselling to initiate him into the world of work. Pedagogy and learning process will be tailored for them.

There will be tracking and monitoring of career development through the various stages of training backed by Measurements and Metrics of all the attributes relevant to VET starting with DAT and Tests and certification based on performance metrics.

Scalability will be ensured by deploying technology and network of partners on Hub and Spokes model

### Discussion

Shambu: Does the NSDC plan to make any substantial change in its approach in states like J&K and the North East? Why does the NSDC not focus on agricultural skills?

Gopal: Even though the NSDC is owned 50% by government and 50% by companies. Further, the NSDC gives soft loans where there is no repayment for six years and 6% interest after that. Yet, in so far as the NSDC is run with the interests of large corporations as its core it will only cater to the market. Thus the funds will go to training in specific sectors like the hospitality industry, tourism, construction etc. for development of training. So the NSDC has 19 portfolios, with 70% business in construction sector. The biggest market place is SEZs, and NSDC is funding that.

Compare this to the requirement of manpower in a whole range of sectors. Skills development is being handled in different capacities by 17 different ministries in India. We don't know NSDC's view of these sector and social trades. Artisanal, agriculture are not the priorities for them.

Vasavi: The focus of the NSDC is on getting urban youth into industries. When asked to review the NSDC to bring agricultural skills into its purview, there have been wayward responses from the authorities at NSDC. The fact is that only well funded groups benefit from the NSDC's programs and funds.

Rajeswari : The entire system of funding a national programme needs to be questioned. Local bodies are big and competent enough to take up vocational education. We need to focus on fiscal decentralisation where decisions can be taken by the local populations for local systems and development of local skills. Agriculture and agriculture related trades are best handled at this level.