

The long & the short of skilling

How short-term skilling courses—intensive training in a particular field to provide professional knowledge with practical training and hands-on experience—are creating a big impact in energising Skill India



**NARAYANAN
RAMASWAMY**

Leena was over the moon. It was, after all, a worthwhile investment—the training course that she took over the weekend. She could create a dashboard for her boss using her recently-acquired visual basic skills, and that changed the way her career would move from now on. She could branch out from being a personal assistant.

Leena took what is termed as a short-term skill (STS) course. Millions of Indians are looking to do what Leena did—up-skill or re-skill to make themselves relevant to job requirements. The demand arises predominantly where there are new job responsibilities, or a change in employment, or the advent of new technology, or simply the desire to learn a new skill.

STS can be defined as an intensive training in a particular field to provide professional knowledge with practical training and hands-on experience. STS will not lead to a formal diploma or degree, but often culminates with a certificate (subject to successful completion). As the name suggests, it is a short intervention—typically from a day to a few months—but normally around a week.

The government has introduced a number of such STS courses. The ministry of skill development and entrepreneurship (MSDE) and National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) have

been spearheading this effort through Standard Training Assessment and Reward (STAR) and Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY). As a part of the flagship PMKVY, STS courses have been made available through training partners across India. Common Norms (refer MSDE, Notifications#) have been adopted to bring about standards across regions, sectors, costs, benefits, training providers for PMKVY. According to news reports, PMKVY alone has seen about 20 lakh enrolments (19,76,087, as this article was written) through a wide network of over 1,000 training partners, 32 Sector Skill Councils (SSCs), 416 active jobs roles, out of which close to 70% have already completed their training. The next phase of PMKVY aims to bring benefits to 10 million youth over four years (2016-20).

STS courses are an important part of skill development in many countries. In advanced economies such as the US, thousands of such courses are offered. In India, STS is a good means of practical exposure and experience, which is useful in the job market. Such courses have a predominant tilt towards hands-on learning.

STS is also useful in sectors and jobs where a short burst of exposure can create the required skill-sets for the industry. It is not surprising that sectors which saw maximum enrolments in PMKVY are logistics (1,35,615), agriculture (90,489), electronics (82,903), beauty & wellness (72,316), retail (65,901) and automotive (61,846).

The advantages of STS are that it does not take away much of time that a candidate would otherwise spend on earning, and it is neither expensive as these courses are for shorter duration and with lesser requirement for separate training infrastructure. STS also imparts skills that are instantly recognisable—like soft skills. From an employer perspective, it is useful for

re-skilling and training existing employees for new requirements, rather than hiring fresh talent. From the point of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), STS is a great means of quickly reinforcing existing labour. It helps corporates adapt to skill development easily. STS has created a big impact in energising Skill India. But is STS the only answer to making India the global skill capital?

While STS is the 'low-hanging fruit', we also need to look at sustainable skilling. The longer format of vocational training is more fundamental and forms the basis for developing technical labour. In a country that is looking for a massive surge in manufacturing, we need to have a robust vocational education system. The grassroots

While short-term skilling is the 'low-hanging fruit', we also need to look at sustainable skilling in parallel. The longer format of vocational training is more fundamental and forms the basis for developing technical labour, so needed for Make-in-India

of this format have to be nurtured. The efforts to bring alignment between vocational and traditional education systems through the



Illustration: SHYAM

National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) should be strengthened and standardised. We must have a complete review of our apprentice system. Industry should be co-opted in education, by making them part of the pedagogy, like it happens in Germany's Dual Vocational Education & Training model. We've to revamp our ITIs, polytechnics, community colleges, skill universities to look at a significant part (close to 70%) of training to be conducted on the shop-floor. Students need to have a first-hand exposure to real-life, state-of-the-art machinery, and not laboratory equipment, which is usually outdated or 'hand-me-down' from the industry. This industry-led training should be imparted, guided and

assessed by trained instructors. The respective SSC could be vested with this responsibility.

It is important to increase the reach of vocational training. We should look at smart utilisation of existing assets. We keep reading news reports on seats in engineering colleges not fully utilised in many states. We can effectively use these colleges to incorporate vocational education. Such attempts are not uncommon. The School of Vocational Education at the Centurion University in Odisha is a good example of one such effective usage of engineering assets. There ought to be a structured programme to include a school of vocational education in engineering institutions.

It's time MSDE helps bring about these fundamental changes in vocational education ecosystem to seamlessly integrate industry and universities. A key concern for vocational education is availability of faculty. Given the urgency and magnitude of this requirement, meta-institutions (which train-the-trainer) for vocational training should be established in every state. These institutions could work with the industry to develop in-house instructors for apprentices as well.

Skill India is one of best initiatives undertaken by our country, and at the right time too. While STS programmes have given the necessary fillip to this agenda and should continue to be encouraged and developed, it is imperative to also pay attention to the strengthening of the vocational education system in the country. A stronger interlink between education institutions and industry needs to be explored. The next few years are going to be a defining period in terms of getting this right.

The author is partner & national leader for education and skill development sector, KPMG in India. Views are personal