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Title

DEVELOPING THE WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE THROUGH WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING PROGRAM

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Abstract:

The demand for work-ready graduates, who are familiar with organizational practices in the workplace, is increasing, and so the need for greater work integrated learning (WIL) is a growing concern for the education sector. With the globalization of higher education and the cultural and linguistic challenges this brings, WIL has become a core strategic issue for many organizations. Examining WIL as a process of integration between workplaces, higher education institutions, government, business and industry, this book includes: Strategies for managing work integrated learning experiences. The what, when, where, why and who of WIL across professions Advice on building relationships between higher education and the workplace Guidance on preparing learners effectively for work Practical case studies from firsthand experience. Direct information and instruction on the use of WIL Work Integrated Learning is a practical guide that can be used by the education sector and employers alike. An integrated resource, applicable to all involved in work integrated learning, it will also appeal to pro-Vice Chancellors of teaching and learning, WIL coordinators, careers services, and all those involved with standards and competency.

Keywords: Curriculum, experiential learning, work-based learning, work-integrated learning.

Introduction:

WIL stands for work integrated learning, an umbrella term used to describe a range of approaches that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum. The most common form of WIL involves a student placement or project within a workplace. Universities, students and employers work together to design and create a learning experience that benefits all parties. The student's progress and learning outcomes are monitored and assessed by the university, with input from the employer.

The Importance of Work-Integrated Learning:

Work-integrated Learning or Cooperative Education is a form of learning whereby periods of study are alternated with periods f related work in business, industry or government agency. In

this way students are given the opportunity to effectively integrate the theory of the classroom with the practice and the responsibility of the workplace.

Work-integrated learning is a powerful vehicle for scheduling and designing educational program so that students receive built-in, on-the-job experience relating to their studies. Currently, various forms of work-integrated learning are utilized by educators in their institutions in 28 countries.

It is to be expected that in a developing society where economic growth is high, the need for a high quality workforce is vital. A quality workforce is one in which the workers are responsive to local as well as international forces. This is especially so when trading among nations of the world become increasingly liberalized. This is where learning programs such as work-integrated learning can be of immense value in inculcating such habits in our future graduates.

The benefits that can be derived from this program are manifold.

For students:

- Soft skills as well as hard skills are enhanced due to real work experience
- Increased appreciation of connection between academic material and workplace
- A means of earning extra income
- Increased employment opportunities

For institutions of higher learning:

- Development of a more relevant curricula to meet market demand
- capabilities of lecturers enhanced to meet requirements of working world
- Develop other forms of partnerships with industries, such as exchange of experts and consultants

For employers:

- Identify potential future recruits
- Facilitate HRD planning for future expansion program

- Development of other partnerships f mutual benefits

Efforts to develop human resource that is sufficient, relevant and of quality in all fields require close and well orchestrated interaction among the three major players in this human resource growth triangle. The cooperation would ensure that the benefits so derived are equally shared to achieve a case of 'win-win' for all concerned.

In reality, various degrees of cooperation in work-integrated learning already exist for selected courses at institutions of higher learning. Among the well known programs are 'internships' or 'practical training' in industries or government agencies. Some examples are practical training for trainee teachers, work assignments at publishing houses or media for mass communication and journalism students, practical training for engineers, and internship for medical students.

I strongly believe that this concept of practical training can be extended to other courses such as follows:

- Business administration studies at private sectors
- Public administration courses at government agencies or district council
- Accountancy at accounting firms
- Law studies at legal firms or courts
- Islamic studies at religious council or even mosque committee
- Science-based studies at process industries

Students who undergo work-integrated learning can be placed at various places, more so in our current situations where there is a dearth of employable workforce. It goes without saying that cooperation between institutions of higher learning and potential employers should be continuously upgraded and improved so as to provide proactive steps such as preparation of curriculum that take into account current needs of employers. Such positive relationship would surely result in partnerships that will match each sector's needs in the best possible way.

Salient features of these programs:

- ***Designed in Collaboration with Industry:***

These programs are designed after interactions with the companies in these sectors. Indeed, such programs are invariably tailor-made to suit the specific HRD needs of specific companies.

- ***Courseware that Helps Build Industry Relevant Competencies:***

The courses are designed to be closely related to their work environment and enable the learner to achieve specific competencies.

- ***Unique Blended Learning:***

These programs are offered using a Blended Learning approach that is an appropriate mix of Synchronous learning and Asynchronous learning (Interactive & Engaging Multimedia-based Self-Learning, Online Mentoring and Actionable Learning).

- ***Actionable Learning:***

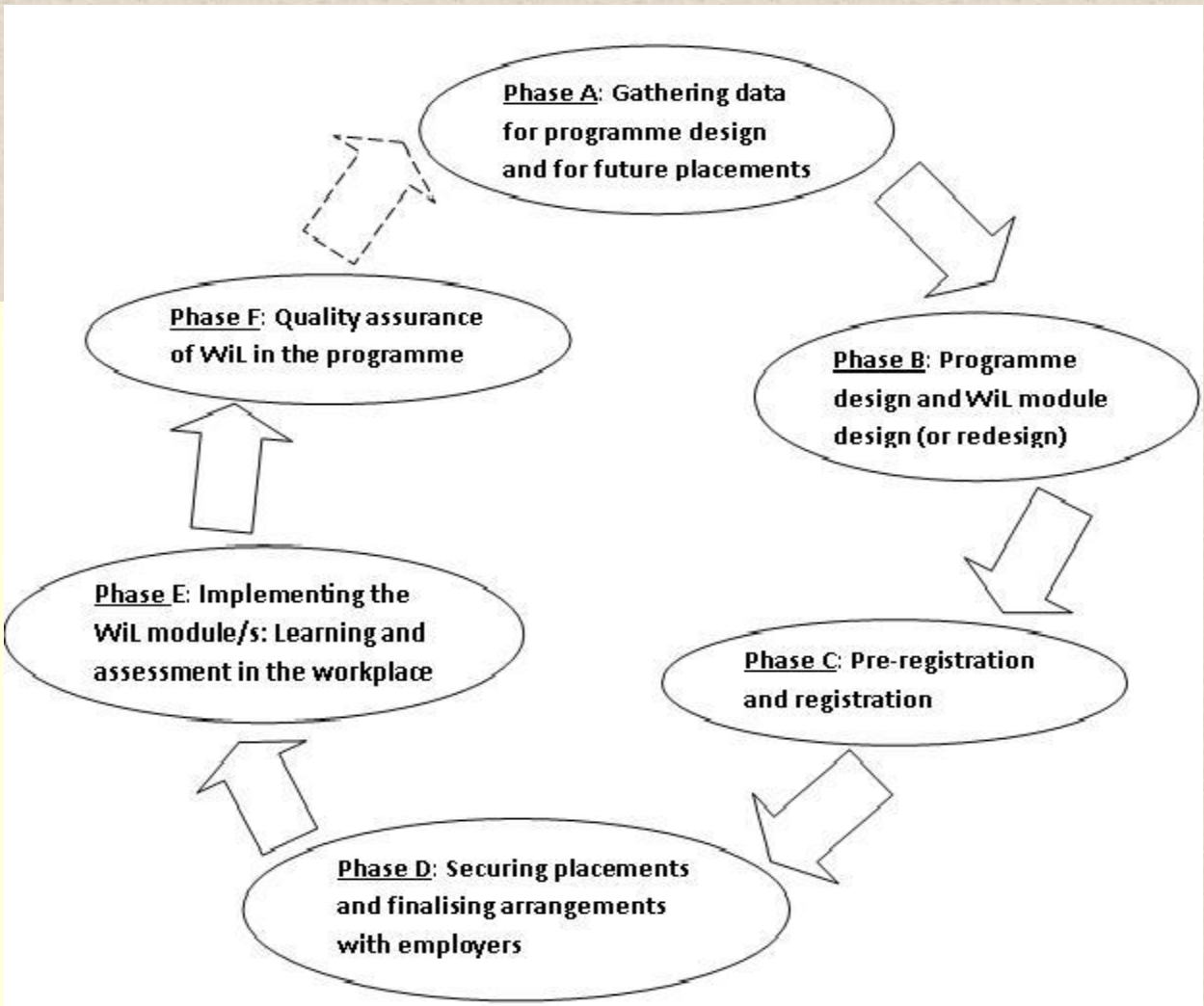
The learners can experience person-centric, interactive learning experience through the unique Actionable Learning that enables one to practice elements that require a learning item to be transformed into performance ability. The Actionable Learning modules provide scope for practice, non-invasive evaluation and complete feedback thereby enabling learners to transform mistakes into effective learning opportunities.

- ***Diploma or Degree from a University***:

These programs are offered in collaboration with Universities so that they culminate in Diploma or a Degree.

Work-integrated learning process model:

The model reflects a comprehensive work-integrated learning process; including planning of a programme, design, development, implementation, management and quality assurance.



Phase A: The gathering of data for the design/revision of a programme and for future placements of students for prerequisite work-integrated learning (WIL)

The data gathering involves a comprehensive context analysis of all factors that may influence the programme, which among others include the appropriate statutory, professional and/or vocational bodies. A clear statement of the desired knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA) of graduates is the aim of the needs analysis and/or survey of the authentic industry needs. The following are taken into consideration:

- The statutory context, e.g. legislation and regulations

- Policies
- Observation of appropriate protocol and level/s of liaison
- Day 1 competencies expected by industry from graduates
- Benchmarking against international and local best practices and standards
- Identification of potential hosts employers of students that need to complete WIL

Phase B: Programme design, including work-integrated learning module/s design (or redesign)

1. Programme design:

- Project plan for the programme as a whole
- Contextual analysis—SKAs / Day 1 competencies / overarching core ideas / main themes
- Curriculum information— outcomes, assessment criteria, etc.
- Coherent programme structure—"design down"
- Identify which part/s only or best learned through real-life work experience or service learning?
- General assessment; learning & teaching; and quality assurance approach
- Templates of standard documents used at the educational institution / in country

2. Module Design:

- Project plan for each module of the programme
- Contextual analysis—Day 1 module competency, etc.
- Curriculum information—outcomes, assessment criteria, module form, etc.
- Module assessment; learning & teaching (including mentoring); quality assurance (including monitoring).
- Industry/workplace mentors (assessment & training of mentors)
- Develop formal agreements—including commitment from mentors (and training)
- Detailed assessment plan (e.g. portfolio of evidence requirements/logbook); learning & teaching resources (WIL guidelines for students, mentor materials/guidelines).
- Posing the appropriate questions that would unlock learning from experience

- Developing resources
- Develop manuals for industry assessors

Phase C: Pre-registration and registration

The emphasis of this phase is on alerting students upfront about compulsory WIL; the nature thereof; enabling the recognition of prior learning (RPL) where appropriate or feasible; and identification of students in need of placements for WIL.

Phase D: Securing placements of students for compulsory WIL and finalising arrangements with hosting employers

This phase needs proper structure and a database listing host organisations and the available placement opportunities. Identification of host employers and the building of partnerships should be driven by the academic department.

Phase E: Implementing the WIL module/s — learning and assessment in the workplace

Successful implementation comprises several elements:

- Criteria to be complied with in order to be a mentor, e.g. appropriate registration with professional/statutory body.
- Formalised mentorship agreement, including incentives (e.g. CPD points for mentoring new entrants) and/or remuneration.
- Training of mentors on, among others, assessment through video conferencing, online or workshops.
- An assigned mentor (workplace supervisor) and orientation of students (house rules / code of conduct).
- Cost implications of preventative inoculations (e.g. aspects of animal health WIL) and potential liabilities.
- Professional guidance (spectrum of soft skills); mentor training and mentor guidelines.
- Mentor involvement in assessments and student's presentation of completed project and/or portfolio of evidence.
- Proper IT and administrative support in College for tracking of students.
- WIL coordinator per department.

- Allocation of students to lecturers.
- Monitoring of students and employers.
- Conditions and criteria with regard to RPL.

Phase F: Quality assurance of WIL in the programme

The sixth phase feeds back into the first phase, enabling continuous revision and improvement.

Connecting education and the workplace:

WIL gives students the opportunity to gain industry or professional practical experience in the workplace while studying. Also known as work experience in industry or industry-based learning, WIL is usually unpaid, but formal credit is often awarded for assessment. WIL programs can be internships, guided industry projects, clinical placements, mentoring and/or a combination of these workplace-oriented activities.

There exist three types of WIL where work experience in industry is integrated into courses at the following levels.

Industry placement

- internships
- work placements
- practicum
- clinical placements

Industry component

Applied learning, as opposed to the immersed learning of industry placements including:

- applied research projects
- industry projects
- production workshops

Industry interaction

- field trips
- industry visits
- site visits
- guest lectures

Employers participating in work integrated learning programs find the benefits run both ways. Work integrated learning (WIL) provides opportunities for higher education students to apply the theory and skills they learn at university in a workplace. For students, the experience is invaluable and plays an important role in their preparation for the work force. For employers, the experience goes beyond altruistic outcomes; the student can –and often does– add demonstrable value to workplaces in small, medium and large businesses.

Employers want workplace ready graduates:

Employers are increasingly demanding graduates with workplace-ready skills. They want employees with job skills such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving. They need new employees to be ready to learn and to be ready to work. They recognise they can play a vital role in developing the workforce of the future by being a part of the education experience. In partnership with universities, they can have a real impact on graduate employability and workplace-readiness.

Clear gains for employers from WIL:

Employers participate in WIL programs for different reasons. For some employers, it is a recruitment pathway; an opportunity to closely examine the skills and suitability of students before they graduate. For others, it may provide an enthusiastic, short term

'employee' who can undertake projects or tasks which might not otherwise get done while providing existing employees opportunities to learn valuable mentoring and management skills. Some employers report that students bring fresh ideas and approaches to the workplace, sharing the latest research and thinking in the field they study.

Other employers look at WIL as an opportunity to contribute to their industry, and the communities they serve. Participating in WIL may also bring opportunities for employers to contribute to curriculum design and to develop research or other relationships with a university.

While the motivation for contributing to the development of students' skills and experience may differ between employers, the results are clear; students who have experienced workplace learning graduate from university with workplace-ready skills.

And that benefits students, universities, government, employers and industry.

Positive return on investment:

Employers participating in WIL programs contribute time and resources to students' workplace learning experiences, supervision and assessment, acknowledging the positive return on investment to their business and industry.

Partner universities also make substantial matching investments by working with employers to agree WIL programs tailored to their business needs, preparing students for a productive placement and providing ongoing support to employers.

Concluding remarks:

Employers have indicated that students are often not prepared for the workplace and call on universities to produce more employable graduates by providing transferable skills that can be taken into the workplace. Students' subject matter knowledge is usually satisfactory but by improving and developing their competencies such as interpersonal skills, teamwork, communication and problem solving skills, value will be added to their intellectual capabilities making them more employable. Employers are expecting graduates to be work-ready and demanding a range of competencies and qualities of them. Educational institutions should be critical of their programme offerings and question if they are nurturing the appropriate competencies and consider how best to ensure these are developed.

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