IDEA GROUP PUBLISHING
701 E. Chocolate Avenue, Suite 200, Hershey PA 17033-1240, USA
Tel: 717/533-8845; Fax 717/533-8661; URL-http://www.idea-group.com
ITB10281

Chapter VI

Government Involvement in Skills Issues

Elizabeth Lahey
Elizabeth Lahey and Associates, USA

Abstract

Technology products and services make up approximately one-third of the U.S. economy. The statistics are similar around the globe. Governments are concerned because this industry sector significantly impacts employment and productivity rates. The birth of the information age and the criticality of knowledge workers had great potential. To date, however, the benefits are not fully realized. The rate of change in the industry has instead created a significant gap between the needs of employers and the skills of the workforce. While technology professionals cannot find jobs, employers claim they cannot hire workers with necessary skills portfolios. Government agencies are taking action to coordinate state, national, and international projects to bridge this skill gap. One project currently underway in the United States is the development of national skill standards for the information and communications technology (ICT) industry sector. It is funded by the Department of Labor.

Introduction

It is important to explore governmental skill development efforts because government wants to stimulate cooperation across companies, educational institutions, and support agencies, all of which have a vested interest in the end product, skill standards. Government legislation is a major tool because it can provide funding to create and promote national acceptance and global endorsement for developing skill standards. In the information and communications technology (ICT) industry sector, government coalitions can create skill standards that reflect extraordinary levels of rigor.[1] Individual companies could never hope to create such a set of skill standards, no matter how well researched, developed, or marketed. Skill standards that are accepted by ICT stakeholders facilitate skills planning and coordination at all levels. The country that implements such a schema has an inherent advantage in the global economy.

ICT is one of the most significant economic industry sectors in the world. Nations across the globe are scampering to make sure that they do not get left behind in the technology race. Knowing the skills necessary to update and support their employee base is vital to this effort. Governments are therefore deeply interested in identifying, maintaining, and disseminating an accurate set of skill standards they can share with their potential worker population. To have any chance of competing in a global economy, technology skills are essential to the success of even the smallest nations. In an information-based economy, size is irrelevant.

This chapter describes skill standards—not skill portfolios—because good skill standards facilitate the development and use of skill portfolios. Since creating and promoting skill standards is important to governments, I begin by explaining what is meant by the phrase "skill standards." Once this terminology is established, it will be easy to understand why governments are particularly interested in skill standards for the ICT industry sector. Statistics are presented to illustrate the impact of this sector on the overall national and world economies.

The information and communications technology industries have evolved over almost 50 years. Some may question why skill standards do not already exist for this sector. Others may wonder why governments are interested in developing and promoting skill standards at this point in the sector's history. This discussion is an overview of the ICT industry sector's impact on world labor