WORKFORCE GENOME PROJECT

TO: The learning industry, governments and private companies creating skill ontologies.

RE: Why I believe an open and shared skills catalog is critical to meeting the challenges faced by the world's economies.

Learning Needs a Workforce Genome Project

Skills, particularly micro-skills, are a necessary organizing unit for matching human capital activities with today's work economy. The dis-integration of careers into "gigs", diplomas into certificates, and jobs into a collection of tasks requires a system of learning and development, based not on role-focused courses, but on skills. The speed of change dictates a need for interoperability and rapid upgrades. "Job" training, like buying a new phone based on who we call, or buying new software in response to the need for new features, feels wildly out of date. We need a shared language, a workforce genome, that can increase workforce fluidity, accelerate innovation and improve global participation.

Human capital, like its monetary sibling, seeks its best opportunity for potential return. In order for capital to flow into new markets, or select amongst existing opportunities, investors require a common set of descriptors. As geographic limitations are reduced by technology, human capital can now look up the global ladder for opportunities. Through the lens of skills, not jobs, workers can also look across a global lattice for opportunities to deploy their human capital. A common view of skills also benefits enterprises and economies by allowing development investments to be targeted to high leverage skills that have wide application or high value skills that drive competitive advantage. Of equal importance is the agency a common skills map could provide workers, allowing for an informed development and monetization of their own capital.

The Workforce Genome Project would transform the Learning and Development industry by reducing inefficiency, redundancy and inequity. The current L&D industry structure is an inefficient and overlapping combination of industry, content, modality, and service segments. An industry anchored by a common skills map could improve learning solutions through specialization, apples-to-apples comparisons and a more efficient buying process. With predefined skill sets, learning designers could increase their investment into the methodologies and tools of knowledge transfer. With a rapidly growing body of knowledge regarding "how" we learn, designers' limited resources could be applied to greatly enhance the effectiveness of learning experiences. A skills-centric approach could also erase artificial segmentation between corporate sponsored learning and public workforce development initiatives delivering needed quality and innovation into FOIA sponsored efforts.

The US corporate L&D market exceeds $300 billion per annum. The value of this investment is currently limited to the corporate sponsor (productivity), and in rapidly decreasing amounts, the learner (skills), the sponsor's industry (skilled workforce), the corporate learning industry (best practices) and the rest. A shared skills genome would allow the benefits of this investment to spread further, with less degradation and a circular quality. Not only would skill acquisition extend across industries but improvement in skill transfer techniques would be rapidly disseminated to the benefit of all. The agreement on a standard skill genome would position the US to become the leading exporter of what is rapidly being recognized as the world's most valuable asset: learning. The Workforce Genome Project would make the achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 less of a moonshot and more of a 3-year plan.

I recognize that there are existing efforts in this space, both proprietary and public, underway or in existence. These efforts face all value limiters. Proprietary efforts, in seeking to add value to the enterprises they serve, are inherently limited based on adoption and lack of interoperability. Public efforts, seeking to add value to the economies they serve, suffer from limited resources and industry ownership. And in neither of these efforts does the value to the worker have equal import. The Workforce Genome Project would create a shared language allowing the worker, the enterprise and the economy to achieve the maximum return on their human capital. This would in no way limit the value to be created by proprietary ventures. In fact, it would increase the opportunity for innovation built on this standard. As the past year's events have shown us, when there is a shared genomic platform world-changing solutions are possible. Let's change the world.

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