

EMPLOYER-LED EFFORTS TO CLOSE THE SKILLS GAP VIA UNTAPPED TALENT PIPELINES

Jaimie M. Francis

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation

ABSTRACT

At a time with an increasing focus on return on investment, employers must adopt business strategies that are scalable; driven by their own data; and inclusive of students and workers of all ages, experiences, and backgrounds. Talent Pipeline Management® (TPM) is a workforce strategy that focuses on the development and delivery of talent from classroom to career. The TPM approach is designed to give employers the tools they need to feel confident managing career pathways for students and workers, and creates shared responsibility between employers and their talent provider partners to establish successful talent pipelines. This piece will examine the methodology and its application for uncovering untapped talent pipelines.

Keywords: skills gap, employer engagement, workforce development, talent pipeline

INTRODUCTION

Recent data from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation (February 7, 2020) reveal that the skills gap persists. To combat that gap, employers are relying on valued relationships with their talent providers. In particular, employers are looking for new ways to deepen those partnerships and to better align what is taught in the classroom with what is required of a career to make people more employable.

How can we position employers to clearly and efficiently communicate their most critical job needs to their partners in education? How can we help education and training partners gain a better understanding of the in-classroom and out-of-classroom experiences that prepare their students for the world of work? Can we make students and workers more aware of the career opportunities available to them and how to access those career paths?

At a time with an increasing focus on return on investment, employers must move forward with a strategy that is scalable; driven by their own data; and inclusive of students and workers of all ages, experiences, and backgrounds.

WHAT IS TPM?

Talent Pipeline Management® (TPM) is a workforce strategy that focuses on the development and delivery of talent from classroom to career. The TPM approach gives employers the tools to feel confident managing career pathways for students and workers, and creates shared responsibility between employers and their talent provider partners to establish successful talent pipelines. As a demand aggregator for the workforce development system, the TPM approach helps employers get the talent they need to close their skills gaps and gives students and workers better employment opportunities through more streamlined pathways. It might sound too good to be true, but it works.

Through TPM, employers organize into employer collaboratives, a group that comes together around a shared pain point. These collaboratives proactively organize and manage their talent provider partners to create performance-based talent supply chains. This approach creates shared value for students and workers, talent providers, and employers. Students and workers are connected to in-demand careers and learn what it takes to advance in that industry. Talent providers receive the information they need to best prepare students for transition to the workplace or advance in the workplace. Employers have reliable access to the talent they need to fill open jobs.

TPM Background

In 2014, the Chamber Foundation launched TPM with a white paper describing how supply chain management principles—commonly used by businesses to run their day-to-day operations—could be applied to talent. As a result of a national call to action, seven business-facing organizations stepped up to pilot TPM and take it from theory to practice, resulting in the creation of a six-strategy framework that guides employer collaboratives to more effectively organize and manage their partnerships.

The transition from theory to practice was formalized with the launch of the TPM Academy®, an in-person training for business leaders interested in learning the TPM approach. The training includes an original curriculum, data collection tools, and access to a growing network of peers and practitioners. More than 300 partners have graduated from the TPM Academy and are overseeing collaboratives that involve thousands of employers from a variety of industries, such as manufacturing, healthcare, construction, utilities, information technology, and more.

Over time, the resources offered through the TPM Academy are regularly tweaked and refined to provide continuous support to the evolving needs of TPM practitioners. As more TPM practitioners are supporting efforts to diversify talent pipelines in their communities, the adult learner population is a commonly untapped talent pool to the detriment of industries eager for employees.

TPM Resources

Now in its third edition, the TPM Academy curriculum serves as a guidebook for implementing talent supply chain solutions. Whether an employer is focusing their efforts on new hires that commonly come from external talent sources or upskilling their existing

workers for new or advanced jobs, the curriculum lays out a process that relies on employer data to determine solutions. This approach tends to lead to better, more precise solutions that tie directly to the employers' pain points. This resource is available to the public so that any organization interested has access to these practices. Strategy by strategy, the curriculum includes an overview of key considerations for employer collaborative members as they work through the TPM approach, including exercises, data examples, and action plans to track progress.

Most recently, a committee of experts worked to adapt the TPM approach to internal talent pipelines, or as some call it, upskilling. Committee members, particularly those who have implemented TPM-based upskilling solutions, identified key considerations and processes for employer collaboratives focused on upskill efforts. This intentional exercise not only added additional value to the TPM curriculum, but it also resulted in a new report, *Upskilling with Talent Pipeline Management*, that highlights real-life case studies and best practices from those who have used TPM to upskill, as well as lessons learned from those experiences that are relevant for any industry.

HOW TO MAKE TPM WORK FOR YOU

The TPM approach broadens an employer's understanding of potential talent sources as they seek new partnerships to help fill their demand. Whereas many employers anecdotally attribute their best hires to a couple of particular institutions, upon collecting actual employee data, they may realize their best hires come from a staffing agency that provided a particular training program, or a community-based organization that was able to offer training at a time that works best for adults who are currently employed or have family obligations during traditional "school hours." Adult education programs are more easily discoverable as a result of this process and can help employers get organized and think outside the box in identifying what partner can be most responsive to their needs.

For upskilling, employers may realize that certain feeder jobs lead to more successful transitions to higher-skills jobs, or that a specific training program best positions their current employees to move up within the organization. This strategy uses employer data to take opinions out of partnerships decisions so employers are able to see that *solutions may be in unexpected places*.

The TPM curriculum provides the framework, and the TPM network has examples to share of how this methodology has worked for them.

CONCLUSION

Adult education programs have an opportunity to stand out as a leading untapped pipeline for employers of industries of all kinds. If you are interested in gaining a better understanding of the TPM approach, we suggest starting with the TPM Academy Curriculum's orientation, which provides an end-to-end overview of the TPM approach, as well as an assessment to see if TPM is a good fit for workforce challenges in your community. ☞

Jaimie M. Francis is the Executive Director of Programs and Policy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Center for Education and Workforce (CEW). Ms. Francis develops and oversees CEW's programs for postsecondary education and workforce development. She manages its Talent Pipeline Management® (TPM) initiative and its 300+ member National Learning Network of TPM practitioners. Ms. Francis is a faculty member for the TPM Academy®, an in-person training for state and local chamber, business association, and economic development agency leaders, as well as employers, to learn the TPM approach to drive partnerships with their education and training providers based on industry need.

WEB RESOURCES

TPM Academy <https://tpmacademy.uschamberfoundation.org/>

TPM Curriculum https://tpmacademy.uschamberfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/TPM-3.0_Curriculum_FINAL.pdf

TPM Map <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/talent-pipeline-management/tpm-map>

Example of TPM in Action <https://www.forwardontalent.org/>

Upskilling with Talent Pipeline Management® (TPM) Report (January 2020) https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/2020USCCF_TPMUpskillReport.pdf

REFERENCE

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation (February 7, 2020) Hiring in the Modern Talent Marketplace. U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/2020_USCCF_ModernTalentMarketplaceHiring.pdf

FIGURE 1. TPM PROCESS



FIGURE 2. SIX TPM STRATEGIES

