

## **Multiskilling the Craftsman**

*(Prof. Kaushik Sahu, Director-R&D, KIIT-DU)*

An online job advertisement on the Internet goes like this:

*This employer is ideally seeking a former craftsman with Mechanical Engineering and multiskilling experience, capable of organising and leading a group of craftspeople. Role(s) that best describe this job: Mechanical Engineer or Mechanical Supervisor. Qualification: Trade qualification. The salary range is dependent upon level of experience. Job type: Contract.*

Note the word “multiskilling” – a very important quality that is needed to be imbibed by the craftsman of the future in a globalized economy. Before the industrial revolution, the craftsman was the owner, producer and also the salesman of his own hand-crafted work. With the advent of industrial revolution came the mass production era and these entities got separated - the owner moved up in the hierarchy, the salesman moved closer to the market, and the worker (our craftsman of the early days) was “trained” to standardize his skills to become the extended arms of the machine. This resulted in a business era where the manpower requirement was advertised through posters saying “hands wanted” – sort of implying that you don’t bring your brains to work. Training was imparted only to develop standardized skills in different trades and creativity in the workplace was not given any recognition. I have personally come across some ITI trained personnel with brilliant and innovative ideas which got little recognition in their respective places of work. Some of them gradually lost all their motivation in coming up with new ideas. In a not-so-competitive economy, the reward systems were not in place to recognize the innovative skills of such workers.

With markets opening up, things have started changing. There are much greater opportunities available in the unorganized sector for technical entrepreneurs wanting to convert their ideas into commercial realities. From a 2003 ILO-based study conducted in the states of Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra we note the following:

- There is a huge requirement of skills in the unorganized sector than in the organized sector. The unorganized sector employs 92 per cent of the national workforce and produces 60 per cent of GDP.
- The report concludes that the development of skills for the unorganized sector should be incorporated into the formal skills training system.
- Some ITI principals have highlighted the importance of an occupation called *fabricator* – a truly multi-skilled occupation giving scope to enter the unorganized sector.
- There are requirements for industrial trades and non-engineering trades (for feeding the service sector). Some important sectors with high employment growth are agro-business, forestry, tourism, community and personal services.
- Establishment of community services center as an entry point to self employment. These centers engage various workgroups for rendering support to communities.
- There is a need to reform the craftsman training system by making it more market oriented. Further, there is a need to improve the internal efficiency of the training institutes.

Other opportunities are highlighted in a strategy document drafted by the National Manufacturing Competitiveness Council (NMCC). It has submitted its recommendations and the Government of India has recently approved a proposal for the ten year national manufacturing initiative. NMCC recognizes the importance of skill development in the manufacturing sector and highlights the need for 20 million skilled workers by the year 2015. The nation needs to produce 1.5 million technically skilled workers per year. To meet global competition the country needs to produce a variety of complex products in large volumes. As stated in the strategy document “manufacturers will require **workers able to use judgment and other thinking skills** in the operation of advanced manufacturing processes and in the maintenance and repair of complex automated production equipment”.

A recent press release (see box) from the Prime Minister's office shows the Government of India's intention of promoting the Industrial Training Institutes of India with public-private partnership.

### **Manufacturing Competitiveness Initiative to be launched**

**January 13, 2006  
New Delhi**

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh chaired a meeting of the National Manufacturing Competitiveness Council. The meeting covered a wide range of issues relating to the development of domestic manufacturing sector. The following important suggestions of the Council were approved by the Prime Minister:

1. A ten-year National Manufacturing Initiative will be launched, with a focus on firm level and macro economic initiatives required to make domestic industry globally competitive.
2. The time-bound implementation of the recommendations of the NMCC will be done through a Mission mode. A Manufacturing Competitiveness Mission will be launched to ensure implementation of policies recommended by the NMCC by relevant ministries.
3. The NMCC will review periodically the implementation of its recommendations by various stakeholders.
4. The policy work of various ministries related with manufacturing sector will be coordinated through an apex mechanism on the lines of the existing Trade and Economic Relations Committee.
5. The Government of India will take up on a priority basis with State Governments the issue of upgrading and increasing training institutions for blue-collar, skilled and semi-skilled workers. The meeting recognized the urgent need to quantitatively and qualitatively improve the supply of labour force in a wide range of industries. State Governments will be encouraged to promote public-private partnership in the management of industrial training institutes (ITIs).

The Ministry of Science and Technology has also initiated programs for supporting innovative ideas. Their Technopreneur Promotion Programme (TePP) aims to support the creative technical entrepreneur who is keen to undertake innovative community-based projects with immediate commercial implications.

Finally, as the job ad above shows, times have changed. We are moving to an era of mass customization where customers will be looking for variety in the form of goods and services – at an affordable price. And the workplaces will be looking up to craftsman with cross-skills and multiple skills.

#### Reference:

1. Industrial Training Institutes of India: The Efficiency Study Report (2003) by the Subregional Office for South Asia ILO, New Delhi.  
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/ampro/cinterfor/news/gasskov.pdf>
2. The National Strategy for Manufacturing (Draft 2005-06) by the National Manufacturing Competitiveness Council (NMCC), Udyog Bhavan, New Delhi and InFocus Programme on Skills, Knowledge and Employability (IFP/SKILLS) ILO, Geneva.  
[http://nmcc.nic.in/publications/strategy\\_paper.pdf](http://nmcc.nic.in/publications/strategy_paper.pdf)

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