

PRO/CON: U.S. companies need more skilled workers

By Tribune News Service, adapted by Newsela staff on 02.12.15

Word Count **995**



Job applicant Rafael Ferrer, 49, (left) meets with a representative of the Hilton Bentley Miami Beach Hotel during a job fair at the Hospitality Institute, Jan. 23, 2015, in Miami. Photo: AP Photo/Lynne Sladky

PRO: Making a "supply chain" of workers

WASHINGTON — Millions of Americans can't find work. Jobs are out there. That's not the problem. Businesses just can't find workers with the skills they need. The jobs go unfilled. It's a cruel situation.

Education and worker training are the problem. If nothing changes, it will get worse. By 2018, there will be 5 million jobs with no one to do them. We won't have enough skilled workers to keep up with the needs of businesses. It is called a "skills gap."

For years it's been seen as an education problem, so it's been left to our political leaders in Washington and educators to fix. Yet companies need to hire workers now.

Colleges And Companies As Partners

Our business leaders are now trying to solve the problem their own way.

A number of companies and universities are taking a new approach. They're applying the lessons of supply chains. Businesses work with suppliers they trust. It makes sure that they have what they need, when they need it.

Companies use supply chains to get parts, money or information.

Now they're using that idea to find workers. It is called "talent pipeline management." It isn't much different from a supply chain. It is about partners working together when each has a need. In business it is called demand. There are suppliers, and customers who need supplies. In this case, the suppliers are schools and the companies need the students.

Rolls-Royce tried this when it built its huge \$170 million auto factory in Virginia. Before spending all that money, the company wanted to be sure that it could get a supply of skilled workers.

So it partnered with community colleges in Virginia. Together, they built a program to teach car building. They designed courses and trained students on the machines at the factory.

Everybody Wins

It is a plan that helps everyone. The company wins by getting a supply of workers who have the skills to do their jobs. The school wins by being able to say it found jobs for its students. In turn, that makes new students want to go to that school. Then those new students get an education that leads right to a job.

Through talent pipeline management, we can design education and train workers based on demand. It will give students better chances and make sure businesses have the workers they need.

ABOUT THE WRITERS: John R. McKernan Jr. is president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. William D. Hansen is president and chief executive of USA Funds, a group of business leaders dedicated to preparing America's college students for jobs in the 21st century economy. Readers may write them at U.S. Chamber, 615 H Street, NW Washington, DC 20062-2000.

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CON: We need more vocational schools

BALTIMORE — It sounds like a good idea: have businesses partner with universities and colleges to design courses to teach skills. That way students can easily find good jobs at companies.

There's just one problem. The purpose of education is to develop a wide range of skills. Students need more skills than just those for one job, at one company.

That's why the plan by business groups is wrong. They just want a supply of skilled workers going straight to them from universities.

Take A Look At Germany

Of course it's true that students who finish college earn more money than those who don't. However, the problem is that far too many start college and then drop out. Then they owe money that they borrowed for school. Without jobs, they have a hard time paying it off.

No wonder. Many high schoolers don't really want to go to college. They just want to start working.

Schools should not just make new, easier courses for students who aren't meant for college. Instead, the answer is more vocational training, which teaches skills for a certain trade such as auto repair, farming, plumbing or even working in tourism jobs or running shops.

In Germany, students who would do well in college are separated from those who may do better in vocational training. It happens right before high school.

More than two-thirds of German workers received vocational training from technical schools, groups that teach trades, and training programs at companies. In 2012, German companies hired and trained some 600,000 workers.

An Academy In A Factory

It is working. In October, 13 out of every 100 young people in the U.S. could not find jobs. It was much better in Germany. There, just 8 out of every 100 young people couldn't find jobs.

In Germany, vocational students learn both in the classroom and on the job. Usually they go to vocational schools two days a week. Three days a week they apprentice at a job they choose. About half of Germany's students are vocational students.

German companies are even setting up the programs at factories they own in the U.S.

Volkswagen has a huge auto factory in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The company runs its Volkswagen Academy inside its factory. Students who complete a three-year program earn \$22 an hour to start. After, they can work at German auto factories anywhere in the world.

It's time to follow Germany. Many Americans don't need a university degree, but all of them need a well-paying job.

ABOUT THE WRITER: Whitt Flora, an independent journalist, is a former chief congressional correspondent for Aviation & Science Technology Magazine and a former White House correspondent for the Columbus Dispatch. Readers may write him at 319 Shagbark Road, Middle River, MD 21220-3903.

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Quiz

- 1 Read the PRO authors' claim.

Through talent pipeline management, we can design education and train workers based on demand.

Which sentence from the CON article would make the BEST reply to the PRO authors' claim?

- (A) They just want a supply of skilled workers going straight to them from universities.
 - (B) Many high schoolers don't really want to go to college.
 - (C) Students need more skills than just those for one job, at one company.
 - (D) Of course it's true that students who finish college earn more money than those who don't.
- 2 Fill in the blank. The PRO and CON authors would likely agree that
- (A) companies should partner with schools to train their employees.
 - (B) the German system of education is superior to the American system.
 - (C) high school and college students should focus on their dream of working in a car factory.
 - (D) all students should attend college whether or not they intend to finish.
- 3 How do the PRO authors support their viewpoint?
- (A) by comparing training and education to a car company
 - (B) by comparing training and education to a supply chain
 - (C) by summarizing the problems with American education
 - (D) by summarizing the benefits of German education
- 4 How does the CON author support his viewpoint?
- (A) by making predictions about the future of college students
 - (B) by making predictions about the future job market
 - (C) by describing the American education system
 - (D) by describing the German education system

Answer Key

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