

Process Technology Talent Sector Council

Meeting Summary

February 26, 2016

Attendees

Companies

- o Buckman – Shawn King
- o GP Memphis Cellulose – Dacry Harris
- o GP Memphis Cellulose – James Barnes
- o KTG – Fred Ceruti
- o KTG – Ann Fleck
- o Penn A Kem – Amy Cook
- o Penn A Kem – Joe Rohr
- o Valero – Roger Fields

Staff

- Greater Memphis Alliance for a Competitive Workforce
 - o Pauline Vernon
 - o Latanyua Robinson
- Greater Memphis Chamber
 - o Anita Brackin
 - o Delories Williams

Workforce Resources

- Arkansas State University Mid-South
 - o Pete Selden
 - o Janice Coleman
 - o Mark Wilson
- Southwest Tennessee Community College
 - o Naomi Earp
 - o Antonio Jenkins
 - o Mike Stephens
- Workforce Development Board of Eastern Arkansas
 - o David Barch
- Workforce Investment Network

Guests

- The Manufacturing Institute, NAM
 - o Brent Weil
 - o Katherine McClelland

Welcome and Introductions

- Pauline Vernon (Greater Memphis Alliance for a Competitive Workforce) provided an overview of the work of the partners in the Greater Memphis Alliance for a Competitive Workforce (GMACW), including initiating sector councils based off of the recommendations of the [Brookings Focus Report: A Roadmap for Transforming the Metro Memphis Economy](#), and the alignment of the GMACW partner schools to better meet the talent needs of the high demand regional sectors.
- Roger Fields (Valero) welcomed the group and explained the importance of a united sector voice to meeting the talent needs at Valero and in the community and thanked the group for their participation, and noted his work with the schools in the GMACW consortium on curriculum.

- Employers indicated their interest in knowledge sharing and noted a particular interest in working with schools on STEM curriculum, in understanding the resources available and plans for continued growth of the training programs in the region, and noted the value of the Industrial Readiness Training (IRT) developed at Southwest Tennessee Community College (Southwest). They also expressed interest in internships around process control to help fulfill their needs for competent, ready-to-work process technicians.

The Regional Skills Gap, Need for Process Technology, and Role of GMACW Partnership

- Brent Weil (Manufacturing Institute) gave an overview of the current and projected skills gap in process technology across the nation and specifically for the Memphis Region and highlighted the diversity in process technician positions and occupations, including the education and career pathways each position.
- Latanyua Robinson (GMACW) provided an overview of MemphisWorks.com, the online platform for students, educators, and employers designed to increase interest and connection points for future jobs and careers.
- Pauline Vernon and Roger Fields initiated a discussion around the formation of a sector council or talent team, similar to the already established Medical Device Council, to provide a united voice for the talent needs in the process technology sector. It was noted how much louder the voice of the medical device sector has become because of this strong organization (which was organized into a 501(c)6).

Key Employer Themes, Discussion, and Takeaways

- There is strong interest in additional opportunities for internships and experiential learning, for new employees and incumbent workers looking to improve skills and work their way up.
 - Pete Selden (Arkansas State University Mid-South) shared a best practice from ASU Mid-South for internships, where employers are involved in identifying high school graduates to receive scholarships for their program, then partner for an internship the summer between their first and second year of school, before graduating and entering a 90 day training period to receive a full offer.
- Many employers cited concerns over currently having a mature workforce that is nearing retirement, and their ability to replace talent that has a long-term knowledge and understanding of the processes
 - As an aging workforce leaves the workforce, employers will need to advance their current talent, and new employees will need to have a fundamental understanding of the skills needed to move up. They would like to hire talent that is “ready” but do not currently have a common definition or understanding of what “ready” is.
- There is a need for better data on employer demand. Companies may ask for a program through the schools, but they have a hard time quantifying how many jobs there will be for students who complete.
 - The council could help to aggregate demand across companies in the region needing similar skills.
- Employers agreed that the council or team would provide a great opportunity to better assess the fundamentals of process technology and have these translated into the academic programs and competencies students are gaining coming out of the process technology programs.
 - The IRT program could be explored in more depth in future meetings. Although KTG found it a very strong model, other companies reported they were unable to hire out of

it. It was noted that a company (or perhaps the council in aggregate) could sponsor a class and that usually gives better results to what the sponsor needs.

- Skills mentioned were: analytical skills, mechanical aptitude (at the entry level), problem solving, computer technology/programming, gages, vials, pumps, ability to read graphics, levers, basic math and reading capacity, fundamentals of chemistry, and soft skills (including ability to interact with other employees).
- Employers also expressed concerns over the curriculum being rigorous enough to be an indicator of future success and competency, as well as ability to learn on the job.
- The council can provide additional information to employers about the resources already available at the community colleges, as well as resources around internships and tuition reimbursement opportunities.
 - Southwest is starting a flex class in March (Introduction to Process Control). There is also a 3-hour Industrial Safety course beginning March 18.
- KTG expressed its success with engaging Southwest on curriculum design and internships, telling the group that it has become engaged early in helping to select the talent that will go through the programs then hiring from there, instead of waiting to find out who will graduate.
- Much of process technology is changing from “an art to a science” and with that there are new requirements employers are looking for in process technology courses, including E & I, PLC programming, electronics proficiency, and more analytical skills.

Moving Forward

- The participants agreed to meet quarterly and will use the next meeting as an opportunity to appoint a chair for the council, once roles and responsibilities have been defined.
- The next meeting will take place late April or early May.