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Paolo Patruno

WORK -BASED LEARNING

Lessons learned and methodology developed in establishing work-based learning in Rwandan schools.

AN ENHANCED WORK-BASED LEARNING CURRICULUM FOR RWANDAN SCHOOLS

In designing the Akazi Kanoze 2 (AK2) model, it was clear that students transitioning to work needed real, hands on experience where they could practice and demonstrate the skills that employers have indicated they want most:



the soft skills found in the work readiness curriculum: communication, time management, collaboration, problem solving, and professional workplace behaviors

AND



the skills that can only be gained through practical work experience: familiarity with a workplace environment, flexibility, trainability etc.

Given that the concept of Work Based Learning (WBL) was new in Rwanda, AK2 facilitated numerous stakeholder discussions with public, private, civil society and local implementing partners on the ground. Over the course of the AK2 project, EDC developed a comprehensive WBL curriculum that, in its first year on implementation, showed promising results. **Here the journey towards an effective WBL curriculum is traced using lessons learned through project implementation and qualitative research.**



THE NEED FOR WORK-BASED LEARNING



Not well prepared
for the workplace



For most general secondary students in Rwanda, their first exposure to the formal work place often only occurs after they graduate and obtain an entry-level position. Qualitative follow-up research with Akazi Kanoze 2 students and parents showed that the task of approaching employers was daunting as it was usually the first time these youth had entered a place of employment as a job seeker.

Vocational and technical training students had access to an internship as part of a requirement for their studies, but they often did not know how to make the most of this experience as they had no prior familiarity of what a work environment was or what skills they needed to focus on gaining during their internship. Additionally, it was often the technical school that took the lead in finding an internship placement for the student.

Adapting EDC's Existing Workforce Transition Model

The original USAID-funded Akazi Kanoze Youth Livelihoods project (AK1), which took place between 2009 and 2016, targeted out-of-school youth in Rwanda. Under this project EDC developed the Work Ready Now! curriculum which was accompanied by workforce transition services for participating youth. Trainers from Implementing Partners (IPs) helped youth transition from training to employment by assisting youth in finding internship or employment placements. Over the life of the AK1 project, 5,432 youth reported being employed in formal sector jobs which was in large part due to the transition to work support they received as part of the program.

When the Mastercard Foundation-funded Akazi Kanoze 2 project started, EDC utilized the work readiness curriculum that had been created under AK1 and adapted it to fit the in-school classroom context. In order to allow students to practice the soft skills they were learning, EDC adapted the AK1 workforce transition model and established the first iteration of the School to Work Transition (STWT) program. IPs assisted students in securing a 2-3 month internship during their school holidays once they had completed the work readiness curriculum in class.

The role of the IPs in this model was key. In 2015, the first full year of the AK2 project, **5,152** students received internship placements, which was the **first time in Rwanda that General Secondary School (GSS) students were pursuing work experience while still enrolled in school**. In addition, IPs worked hard to build relationships with private sector entities who then agreed to provide internship opportunities. Notably, **2,209 employers agreed to take at least one student for STWT**, which created a significant support base for future groups of interns. Without building this initial level of understanding with the private sector, future iterations of STWT would likely not have succeeded.



Making the STWT Model Fit for Institutionalization

This first iteration of STWT under AK2 was undoubtedly important because it built significant private sector support and understanding in regard to the idea of taking student interns. However, as the project continued, it became clear that further adaptations were necessary to make the model fit for institutionalization.

One of the key goals of the Akazi Kanoze 2 project was to scale-up soft skills training in Rwanda by institutionalizing EDC's Work Ready Now! curriculum in Rwanda's secondary school entrepreneurship curricula. This meant that once the Rwanda Ministry of Education took over implementation of the curricula after the project was completed, it would be teachers - not IPs - who would be the resource points for helping students connect to STWT opportunities.

In Rwanda, it's common for upper secondary

teachers to teach multiple grades which results in an intensive workload. Given this systematic constraint, it would be unrealistic to ask them to directly help each student find a STWT opportunity without additional financial and human resources. Especially considering that in the first year of the AK2 project, IPs reported that it took, on average, 8 points of a contact when engaging with private and public sector employees before securing a STWT opportunity for a student.

If teachers weren't feasibly going to be able to be heavily involved in student placements, the other key actors who could be mobilized in an in-school setting were students themselves and their parents. Thus, EDC began thinking through what it would look like to revise the STWT model for scalability and potential institutionalization in secondary schools in Rwanda.

A MINDSET SHIFT

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During the first year of AK2, as the STWT model was being tried and tested, a number of implementing partner organizations realized that they had hundreds of students who went home for the holidays outside of their intervention area. This meant that those students had to find placements for work experience themselves, which was surprisingly very effective.

With an introduction letter from their schools, students used the network of their parents and neighbors to find a placement close to their home. Teachers,

as best they could, followed up with youth over the phone and took calls from employers to recommend their students. This was helping a larger number of youth access STWT opportunities while also empowering the students, giving them an even more meaningful work exposure experience.

Given the success of these students, EDC decided to test this idea further in the second year of AK2. From the group of schools participating in the randomized controlled trial, they created a treatment arm of 14 schools. The implementing partners associated with these schools were not allowed to do direct STWT placement for the students. Instead, they were given an alternative STWT manual and training that focused on harnessing the connections students and their parents could find in their own communities. IPs worked with schools to hold meetings with parents to explain the rationale behind STWT and the process in order to find work experience during the long school holiday. Students were also prepped by teachers before they went home for the holidays on what would be required of them to find a placement.

The placement rate for these 14 schools ranged from 0% to 93%, which was a similar distribution to all AK2 schools that year. Further qualitative follow-up demonstrated that the schools who had the highest placement rates, implemented the STWT process with fidelity: the school administration was actively involved, letters were sent home, and meetings were held with parents. Those with low placement rates, did not follow the same steps and it was clear that students in those schools didn't feel prepared to search for placements during their long holiday break.


While the results were varied, students in these 14 schools did manage to find placements on their own without the direct involvement of an IP, helping EDC recognize that it was feasible that this adapted STWT model could be successful in a broader in-school context.


A REFINED WORK-BASED LEARNING MODEL


As students completed their work exposure experiences in January 2017, the EDC team went out to the field to explore the best and worst of the 14 treatment schools to better understand the accomplishments and challenges they had faced and what contributed to them.

These are the lessons that were learned:

- 1** **The head teacher and dean of studies' support is key:**
Equipping teachers with the training and tools needed to support students in their work-based learning exposures is key. However, given teachers' many competing priorities, it is essential that they have the backing of their head teacher and dean of studies to make sure that their oversight on work-based learning is giving priority in their workloads.


- 2** **Start early**
The preparations can start at the beginning of the school year and progress gradually. The most successful schools encouraged students to visit employers during the April and August holidays as practice.


- 3** **Provide support letters from schools**
It is practically unheard of to have a youth in secondary or vocational school ask for an internship on their own in Rwanda. Thus, it's key that students have backing from their school in the form of a letter so that employers can understand exactly what students are asking to do and be more likely to accept them.





Engage parents early

The most successful schools held several meetings with parents and sent home letters. They harnessed the parents' social and professional networks.

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Students are excited about work experience

The overwhelming majority of students, even in the lowest performing schools were anxious to get work experience. They clearly saw the value, but needed guidance on entering the workplace.



Give students tools to explore the workplace gradually

Asking employers for an internship is really scary. Several students reported practicing the conversation with their friends and siblings beforehand. Others said that they asked to work for only one day in order to prove themselves to the employer. Few students created these mechanisms, but those who did received fewer rejections from employers.



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Developing the Work-based Learning Curriculum

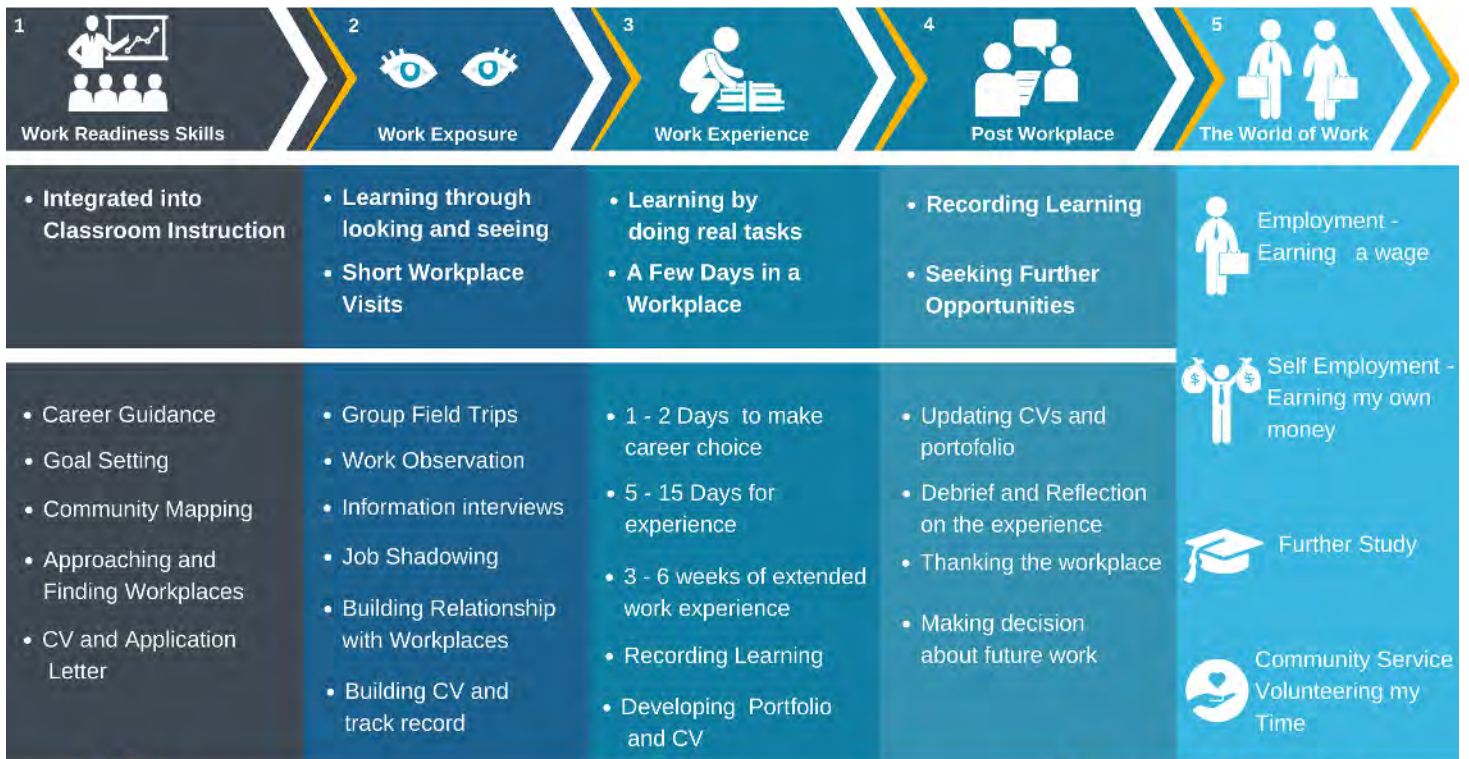
Based on the information gained, EDC designed and piloted a new work-based learning (WBL) model in March 2017. They brought in an expert who built out a work-based learning continuum based on the lessons learned from the STWT model.

The WBL Curriculum consists of 9 modules emphasizing a continuum of work experiences starting with work exposure and work observations in local workplaces, then moving towards brief work experiences, and finally securing 2-3 month internships. The new WBL Curriculum was piloted in 2017.

In May and June, EDC and their implementing partners conducted a series of Training of Trainers (ToT) in 2017 on WBL for School Liaison Officers (SLOs) and teachers from 97 Rwanda Education Board (REB) and Workforce Development Authority (WDA) schools. Trained teachers returned to their schools with WBL teaching manuals, resource posters, and action plans for preparing students for work exposure activities. In June and July, students from these 97 schools participated in workplace observations and employer interviews in local workplaces. While teachers helped prepare students for this work exposure, students largely organized the visits themselves. Over the holiday in August, REB students participated in 2-week work experiences, while WDA students secured 2-month internships. **In total, 3,188 students participated in at least one work exposure or experience before and during the August 2017 holidays.**

This was a refined and improved process for students in comparison to what the STWT model had originally introduced. Rather than having students go straight into applying for an internship at the end of work readiness training, they were introduced to the working environment in a gradual process, as soon as they had completed the first foundational modules.

The Work-based Learning Continuum



There were a number of benefits to this model:

- First, students began building relationships with employers early on, which made it easier to secure longer term internships during their long holidays.
- Secondly, students had the chance to 'try out' a work environment before committing to a long-term internship there. Some students thought they were interested in pursuing a career path, but realized it was actually far different in reality than what they had imagined. Realizing this in one of their work observations or job shadowing gave them a low-stakes chance to reevaluate their career goals while still building their soft skills during work readiness training in the classroom.
- Finally, for students in an in-school setting, it was a good job preparation experience to be responsible for building relationships themselves rather than relying on someone else to find placements.



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THE PRELIMINARY RESULTS

As the WBL curriculum was developed in the final year of the AK2 implementation (2017), there is still a need to collect large-scale numerical results on the effectiveness of WBL.

However, the qualitative evidence from students is an encouraging sign that the WBL curriculum is on the right track.



A FUTURE DOCTOR

Enock is a S5 student at St. Andre Secondary School. After studying work-based learning in his entrepreneurship class, he went out and did short-term observations at a tutoring-based youth organization and a publishing company. He felt that both weren't the right fit for him - he wanted to pursue a vocation that allowed him to help people in a more direct way.

He then went to the Kanombe Military Hospital to inquire about gaining work experience there. He is now shadowing a neurosurgeon and - at age 17 - has already had a first glance look at the medical world, having even observed his mentor at work in the operation room.

"Work-based learning has helped me get my career choices straight. I am now even more motivated and determined to pursue my studies, and follow the medical path to become a neurosurgeon."

A FUTURE HAIR STYLIST

Devothe has long dreamed of becoming a hair stylist. However, because the majority of skilled hair stylists in Rwanda are male, it's not straightforward for a female student to enter into this sector. This heightened the importance of WBL for Devothe.

After completing a day-long observation at a hair salon close to her school, Devothe, a student at VTC Centre des Metiers Assomption Kabuye (CMAK) in Kigali, found a two-month internship at a bustling salon in Kigali.

Speaking about her experience, Devothe shares:

"The skills I learned through Akazi Kanoze's Work Readiness Curriculum gave me the confidence to approach the manager and ask for an internship."

The staff here are very skilled, they have so many clients, and I've learned so much from them. I'm confident that my experience here will help me achieve my dream of opening my own hair salon one day."



A FUTURE BAKER

Samuel is a S5 student at GS Gatenga. An orphan, he has often struggled to find the school fees he needs to complete school.

After studying work-based learning, Samuel was inspired to go and observe what kind of work might interest him. He first went to a car wash and asked if he could shadow their work for a few days. He realized he wasn't really interested in that, so he went on to shadow a cook at a small canteen and eventually ended up at a restaurant where he asked for a few days of work experience. He really liked it and acquired some practical skills in *chapati* (local bread) making.

Using that knowledge, he opened his own small business selling *chapati* and now uses that income to pay for his school fees. He maintains a good relationship with the restaurant and they often call him back for short term contracts - a connection that will no doubt be helpful when he graduates next year.

WORK-BASED LEARNING CONTINUES! LOOKING AHEAD

Based on the initial success of the WBL pilot in 97 schools, there is a lot of support from the Rwanda Education Board (REB) and the Workforce Development Authority (WDA) to continue building this program and integrating it into the formal education system – just as the work readiness content has been integrated.

The recently approved Education Strategic Sector Plan (2018/19 – 2024/2025) identifies the insufficient cooperation between the public and private sector in education as one of the six national challenges. With over **8,000** students that have already completed a school to work transition experience, EDC's work-based learning program is already contributing to bridging this gap.

Going forward, EDC will continue to monitor work-based learning in the pilot schools through a Whatsapp group with participating teachers. As more research is needed to understand the impact of the work-based learning model versus the original school-to-work transition approach, EDC is conducting qualitative follow-up research with the first cohort of students who participated in the entire work-based learning cycle. This research will provide lessons learned for scale-up and will inform EDC and the Government of Rwanda on the viability of embedding work-based learning in the national curricula.

Globally, EDC is scaling the work-based learning approach in its programs in Africa and Asia. In the USAID-funded Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training project, EDC has developed instruments for students and lecturers to use in workplaces. In the J.P. Morgan - funded AWARE in the Philippines and Indonesia, EDC is using a guide for teachers that helps students get 5-10 days in a workplace, and is now testing a virtual work experience dashboard. In Huguken Dukore in Rwanda, EDC has integrated some work-based learning exposure activities into the WRN! modules, and will now develop a strategy and process for guiding youth who are out-of-school and not in structured training groups to get more work exposure and experience.



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