

Key theme: Leadership and Management in Higher Education for Sustainable development

Sub-theme: Building linkage between institutions and communities/enterprises

Title: **Significance of forging linkage between higher education institutions and industries from the perspective of POHE project**

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#### **ABBREVIATIONS:**

- HEIs: Higher education institutions
- QA: Quality assurance
- WoW: The World of Work
- WoWAB: World of Work Advisory Board
- POHE: Profession-Oriented Higher Education
- HUA: Hanoi University of Agriculture
- HCMNL: Ho Chi Minh University of Agriculture and Forestry
- HUAF: Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry
- VINH: Vinh University
- HYTUTE: Hung Yen University of Technical Education
- TUAF: Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry
- TUE: Thai Nguyen University of Education
- NEU: National Economics University
- MoET: Ministry of Education and Training

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## **ABSTRACT**

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, globalization and integration have had great impacts on economic, cultural and political issues in Vietnam. Education, particularly higher education system, is not immune from this tendency. HEIs have been known as a “knowledge producer” in the global knowledge based economy where stakeholders always expect graduates to satisfy with emerging demands and requirements of the labor market. This paper firstly in short addresses initial findings of ten POHE programs carried out in eight selected pilot universities under the PROFED<sup>3</sup> project during the period of 2005 and 2009. The best practices from the project universities clearly indicate the necessity and significance of growing engagement of the labor market i.e. the WoW<sup>4</sup> in developing flexible and open POHE study programs, defining key qualifications of POHE students and designing methodology of learning and assessment for students based on competency. Then the study also proposes a list of challenges to overcome, description of conditions for sustainability and long term recommendations for the project partners on how to successfully improve POHE education process and foster effective and mutual collaborations with the WoW in a sustainable way.

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<sup>3</sup> The project named “Institutional Strengthening for Selected Vietnamese Universities in Profession Oriented Higher Education”

<sup>4</sup> The term is used as a short reference to the professional career/world students are educated for. WoW i.e. the labor market are enterprises that recruit new graduates. WoW may be from the public, private, semi-public sectors, and joint venture companies etc. It is an integral part of POHE education process.

## **BACKGROUND OF PROFED PROJECT**

In response to opportunities and challenges in globalization and integration tendencies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Vietnamese HEIs have been under increasing pressure to ensure that their graduates can catch up with increasing demands geared to the labor market where HEIs have been seeking opportunities and solutions to challenges emerging from social community. Such pressures have been calling for a development of a closer linkage between University-Industry of which HEIs are required to be more effective in delivering outcomes i.e. university graduates meeting the demands of social actors. Considering such impacts, Prof. Dr. Banh Tien Long in his keynote at the national workshop on “*Profession-Oriented Higher Education in Vietnam*” on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2008 stated

the social-economic developments and current and future market conditions in our Vietnamese society and the world at large are the driving force to transform our higher education system. It is urgent for Vietnam to improve the quality of human resources. If Vietnam is not ready to invest in its higher education system, it will miss opportunities.

However, there are also a number of barriers deteriorating University and Business interactions. The industry finds difficult to employ new graduates as they should make a successful transition into a performing professional, whereas tertiary institutions are struggling to help industries in aligning their study programs geared to the social demands. Nguyen (2005) added that higher education system in Vietnam still has serious shortcomings in terms of the abilities and responsiveness to the labor market and accessibility. Valley et al. (2008) pointed out that 50 percent of Vietnamese university graduates are unable to find jobs in their area of specialization, indicating that the disconnection between classroom and the needs of the market is large.

The Dutch cooperation project, PROFED was launched in March 2005 in that above-mentioned context, which aimed to strengthen training capacity of tertiary institutions and initially to build up strategic development of POHE study programs. The project attempted to improve students' career options by developing educational programs in responding to the labor market and it was in line with Resolution No 14 “*Fundamental and Comprehensive Reform of Higher Education for the period 2006-2020*” where it mainly focused on forging a linkage between research and training process with the WoW’s needs that, by 2020, 70-80% of higher education students in Vietnam are enrolled in these professional oriented study programs.

## **KEY FINDINGS FROM UNIVERSITY – INDUSTRY COOPERATION PERSPECTIVE**

Generally, the POHE programs succeeded in targeting educational needs of the working world - the labor market where the educational achievements were clearly specified in building professional competence and demonstrating the POHE graduates’ knowledge, skills and professional attitudes.

On mentioning the effectiveness of the project from the perspective of University and Industry Cooperation, Banh (2008, p.2) described two outcomes. The first outcome, on the one hand, was its ability to increase “awareness at the university level that the knowledge, attitude and skills required by the labor market must be taken into account in the educational content and methods of teaching and assessment”. On the other hand, the second outcome was related to “new ‘demand-oriented’ concept and approach of curricula development formulated through knowledge, attitude and skills of graduates defined by the needs of the labor market”.

Firstly, the eight universities initially achieved substantial benefits in establishing a closer relationship between the courses and the labor market through developing practical skills and producing well-educated and confident students. Such collaboration also changed traditional university lectures’ and students’ concepts that, only when education and training processes were well implemented at the WoW’s workplaces, instead of on campus, were the students more accessible to the WoW thanks to extensive internship in companies or official agreement.

Secondly, thanks to the WoWAB’ role, the POHE programmes also established a collaboration with the WoW i.e. representatives from companies, research institutes, enterprises or recruiters. In such situations, the WoWs worked like supervisors, visiting lecturers from the business world, and gave their feedback on students’ assignments, course projects, and graduation theses. Such direct and active involvements enabled students to understand what was happening. Furthermore, the WoW was aware of their social accountability to higher education system, especially educating their future qualified human resources. Through the typical POHE activities, the WoW understood how a training process operates. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2012) added that the closer linkage between HEIs and the WoW had an influence upon the traditional training model. In the traditional higher education system, the training activities had been mainly associated with university campus. Meanwhile, the POHE model itself is designed to develop a sustainable relationship with the WoW’s workplaces i.e. the labor market full of useful experiences. The professional oriented higher education has contributed to the change of traditional training system in the Vietnamese tertiary education system. In some major universities, internships or fieldtrips were flexibly arranged in order to help students experience their practice skills. In addition to this, the university –industry cooperation not only helped improve quality of education and training activities through practical assignments or fieldtrips but also fostered possibilities as well as opportunities for students to be employed. For example, through Day of Work Fair, students were able to find appropriate and potential jobs upon their graduation and they are working at the companies where they used to conduct their graduation theses.

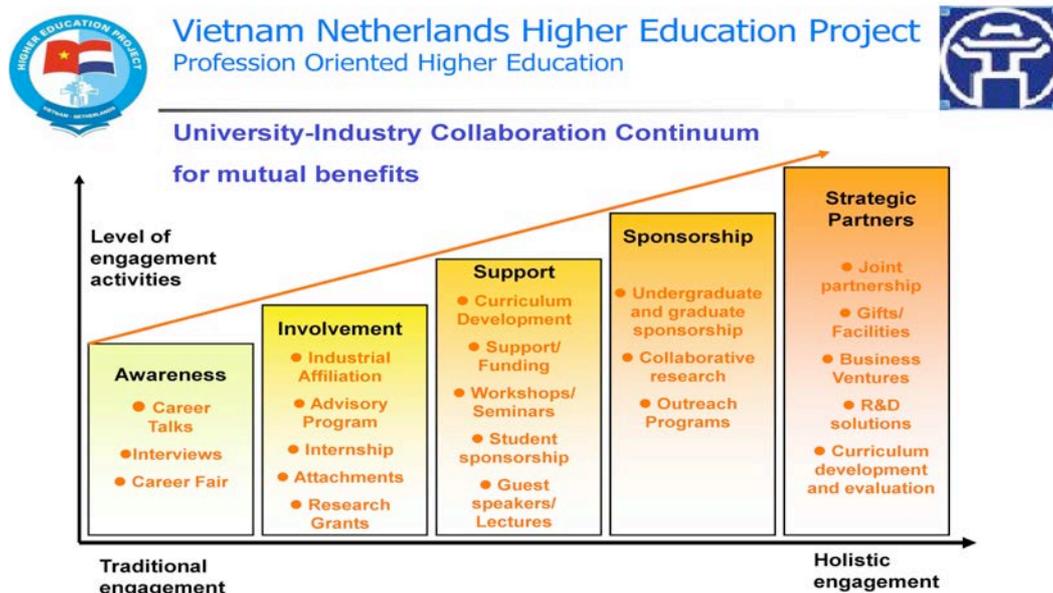
One of the substantial achievements leading to such diversification was the unique interactions between university and industry. Noticeably, the POHE lecturers were inspired to change their traditional notions as well as viewpoints in formulating the POHE curriculum thanks to extensive

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contacts or discussions with leaders or representatives from the WoW. Such considerable changes led to a combination of the latest knowledge and teaching methodology which motivate professional skills and attitudes necessary for students upon their graduation. The linkage between the WoW and implementation of the POHE curriculum were core values and decisive factors on creating emerging changes of educating qualified human resources. The WoWs were of great importance of changing students' studying methods and constructing professional attitudes, concepts about future development aims and potential advantages. Sharing the same viewpoint on such issues, Terpstra (2009) appreciated the substantial achievements from the project as he could see positive feedback from the project universities, the WoW and the POHE students. He strongly believed that the Vietnamese POHE graduates have been provided with up-to-date knowledge, skills and attitudes. He added that the project universities succeeded in formulating the POHE curricula from extensive work surveys and set within the Vietnamese context.

### THE WoW'S ENGAGEMENT LEVELS

The typical activities under the POHE project where HEIs and industry engaged in developing the POHE curriculum were described in the following chart (Leeters, 2008, p.1).



Accordingly, the WoW helped HEIs provide input for the professional framework and curriculum development. They were frequently invited for dialogues with the university through WoWAB. The WoW periodically welcomed students in doing their professional internships and helped supervise their graduation theses through applied research projects. They also worked as guest lecturers or evaluators of students' academic progress. In such academic activities, HEIs should be self-motivated and flexible in creating favorable conditions so that both training institutions and the WoW were able to set up their strategic plans and arrange activities in training processes. Preparatory activities, such as fieldtrips or surveys at the WoW's workplaces during the project phase began at the beginning of the POHE development stage, were continuously maintained and

carried out periodically. Through exchange activities such as workshops, seminars or meetings, the WoW had opportunities to deeply get involved in sharing their viewpoints on how to develop the curriculum, training methods and themes of modules or assignments. The WoW also helped HEIs evaluate and revise goals and objectives of the curriculum, existing facilities and equipment to design well-prepared programs so that POHE graduates may achieve the intended skills, knowledge and attitudes geared to satisfy emerging demands from the industries.

From the industry's side, the WoW helped specify local business or industries who might create favorable conditions for students' learning experiences, employment and placement opportunities. Noticeably, the WoWAB were said to function as a bridge to translate and promote the POHE curriculum and quality of graduates to communities, business and industries. In such context, existing centers for career orientation and job support or likewise to develop students' and lecturers' professional competences, and approach with society need were implemented at many universities, and they became multipliers to foster professional competence geared to the society need.

In short, the POHE project has so far successfully developed a society need driven education and a modern teaching methodology implemented. The positive outcomes, to some extent, have reinforced the significance and necessity of linking a mutual relationship between project partners and the labor market. Universities have become partners of the WoW in providing right training courses and their active and continuous participations. And the WoW have involved into collaborative activities through the WoWAB as described. A successful case for such relationship happened to TUE where a POHE program of Thai Nguyen English teacher was in collaboration with the Dutch NHL teacher training department. Accordingly, teachers, students, university leadership, and the WoW in both countries were co-operating in a much broader perspective than originally intended in the Profed. High schools, the WoW of the English teaching training program, in Vietnam and the Netherlands built an on-line network and communicated intensively with each other. The Dutch students carried out their internships in Thai Nguyen and Thai Nguyen teachers came several times to the Netherlands for further training; and the same was true for several Dutch teachers who came to Vietnam to upgrade their knowledge and skills. For the case of HUA, Pham et al. (2009, p.7) emphasized the role of the WoW's direct involvement in designing and implementing the curricula, occupational competence profile and students' performance which were mainly developed and evaluated according to extensive labor surveys.

## **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES FROM UNIVERSITY-INDUSTRIES COOPERATION**

The first challenge is to balance mutual benefits between the WoW and HEIS. It has been clearly seen that the POHE programs have satisfied the employers' demands and created higher education values for graduates but such programs cost much. Higher cost for the POHE programs will be potential barriers for HEIs themselves to multiply POHE programs in a broader scale. A challenge

in terms of training cost is whether the POHE programs may educate better qualified graduates under the scope of the institutional budget limitation or not. The implementation of education and training activities according to POHE in a broader scale must require more surveys on the labor demand in terms of such social impacts caused by the POHE programs such as arrangement of students' internships to the WoW's workplaces.

The second challenge falls to industry. Within the POHE project, eight universities faced some problems of embedding POHE programmes to the universities' systems, so how to align POHE programmes with the whole universities' systems gradually geared toward research-oriented programmes is the key challenge for the WoW. The cooperative and collaborative activities with HEIs must not cause further costs and they should see future benefit in such relationships. Tertiary institutions emphasize an emerging need of promoting the community and the labor market in understanding the social accountability of the WoW in educating the POHE students through internships or fieldtrips. We assume that the insufficient understanding of such social accountability has limited the effectiveness of students' internships at the WoW's workplaces. Pham et al. (2012) added that the private sectors did not automatically respond to such emerging needs from HEIs. In addition to this, how to specify works copes or workloads for both the WoW and students through extensive internships as described in the expected learning outcomes under the POHE curriculum is also a potential obstacle. Training institutions should arrange their internships which fit the business type and size of enterprises.

Finally, how to foster the significance and role of the WoW through WoWAB in the POHE training programs in a broader scale is really challenging. The POHE at phase 1 indicated that the WoW i.e. the WoWAB was so vague. The findings from POHE have shown that there are not many considerable cooperation or linkages between university and industry i.e. public sectors, schools or enterprises.

## **CONDITIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE LINKAGE BETWEEN UNIVERSITY- INDUSTRY**

In order to successfully implement typical activities under the POHE in a broader scale, both HEIs and the WoW should specify clear responsibility and tasks that the POHE graduates will perform upon graduation. Universities also need to understand the workplace culture through the POHE activities such as teamwork or project management. Meanwhile, the WoW should translate real life problems and cases from their workplaces in project courses and graduation theses and provide HEIs and students with sponsored test equipment or laboratory with full commitment of the top management and the WoW. On the other hand, the following two conditions should be applied.

The first condition is to develop legal framework and policies in developing POHE. From the institutional level, Pham et al. (2012) indicated that the leadership commitment should not be simply indicated in the mission or strategic direction, but detailed in specified policies, regulations.

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Specifically, this includes resources for equipment, practical teaching, university-industry cooperation activities, and flexibility in management that allows the POHE module's approach survive in the university's credit system. These policies are considered to create more motivations and to encourage academic and supporting staffs as they are core factors in the POHE training process.

From the State level, it is necessary to intensify and forge this relationship by issuing macro policy such as tax-exemption policy for businesses on education-related activities. It is the MOET's responsibility to develop an appropriate legal framework in line with the POHE programs. The existing regulations or legal frameworks which have deteriorated the POHE training process should be adjusted. Additionally, MOET should also facilitate university-industry cooperation by requiring the WoW's engagement into developing new POHE programs through typical activities as described in the phase 1. Moreover, University Council should be required to function as it is. That means public university is enforced to involve industry into University Council in order to improve university's social accountability to the WoW. In addition, MOET should soon work with relevant governmental bodies to issue and to implement a tax- exemption policy for the industry's spending on education and training-oriented activities in terms of human resource and scientific research developments.

The second condition is to promote 'demand-oriented' concept and approach of curricula development formulated through knowledge, attitude and skills of graduates defined by the needs of the labor market to the community so that all stakeholders value the POHE significance and contributions to the human resource development and economic growth. It is necessary to propagate the features, characteristics and benefits of the POHE to the public i.e. provincial leaders, parents, enterprises and potential students. This is one of the prerequisite conditions to implement the POHE programs in a broader scale.

## **CONCLUSION**

Education geared to the society needs is a renovated step of professional education and higher education. Universities, central ministries and sectors, local authorities, communities and entire society all take their responsibility for this renovation. The project was deemed to foster a breaking policy in "society need driven education" which created a "model of profession-oriented higher education policy (Banh (2008, p.1). The key findings have shown considerable changes of the approach, concept as well as perception by the leadership position as well as academics on the POHE geared to the market demand. They all value the role of HEIs in developing a sustainable linkage with the WoW in order to produce expected learning outcomes. However, the execution process during the first phase foresees potential challenges in implementing the POHE programs.

They are challenges in terms of human resources, mechanisms, legal framework or even culture. These factors need more efforts from HEIs, MOET and the WoW.

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