



POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA

WELCOMING SPEECH

BY

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ON

**THE OCCASION OF THE INDUSTRY CONSULTATIVE
BREAKFAST WORKSHOP**

23 NOVEMBER 2012

POLYTECHNIC HOTEL SCHOOL

WINDHOEK

Director of Ceremonies

Our esteemed industry partners

Senior Management at the Polytechnic

Distinguished guests

Representatives of the media

Ladies and gentlemen

World-wide experience shows clearly the fact that bringing together industry and academia is the best way to develop students to become employable professionals.

But experience also teaches us that it's a tricky business. Prof William Latham likens it to *“a high school dance at a boys public school where the girls are bussed in at night from the local girls public school; both schools’ “fittest” group are interested in each other, realising that each has a lot to offer, but no one knows where to start. At the end of the evening everyone exchanges phone numbers and promises to ring, the girls get back on the bus, everyone blows kisses and waves goodbye and the boys wander back to their dormitories to imagine what it could have been.”*

Today I believe all of us would like overcome our “dating’ dilemma: it’s our wish, and it’s also your wish. Here in Namibia, we have a

wealth of experience, thanks to you, that shows that industry and academe are indispensable partners in developing skills in every profession and at every level. That is why **research projects, practicals, excursions, practical experience, in-service training, job attachment, job shadowing and work integrated learning** are essential and mandatory part of our curriculum. **This is our underlying philosophy as a technical university, otherwise known as a university of technology or a university of applied sciences.**

And it has all been possible because business and industry, public and private sectors have understood the benefits of the symbiotic relationship and are our pillars in developing the requisite skills in our students.

With this in mind, on behalf of the Polytechnic, allow me to extend a word welcome to all of you at this important occasion of the Polytechnic as we meet as partners at this **Industry Consultative Breakfast Workshop**. I also want to thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to attend this workshop and I hope it will allow us to engage one another, so that we can strengthen our relationship as we go into the future.

To **captains of industry, public sector leaders, small and micro enterprise owners and budding entrepreneurs**, this is an exciting time for the Polytechnic of Namibia. It is always an exciting time for us to have an opportunity to engage with our principal stakeholders –

and that's you – business – employers. For, it is ultimately **employers who decide whether our products are of value**. We have established some meaningful ways of ensuring continued value addition in all our qualifications through the following means: **curriculum advisory boards, professional accreditation, external moderation, and international benchmarking**. These are essential criteria for a technological university, and they allow for **valuable input on course requirements** and the **overall content and direction of any programme**, so that our **graduates can effectively compete in today's market place**.

Today, we are living in a rapidly changing world, where technology is a driving catalyst for organisations to share knowledge, embark on professional development and network extensively. Consequently, universities are rethinking their partnership relevance with business and society. While information technology might be precipitating these changes, however, they also reflect a key aspect of human condition, namely the natural power of engagement. **People want to be connected with people, ideas, and knowledge through unlimited engagement at home, in the workplace, locally, globally and continually**. This morning, the Polytechnic as your partner would like to say we need to **deepen our engagement** with you to enable that we work together to develop the workforce of the future.

The reasons are manifold. First, our primary task as a university is to **produce high level skills** to be deployed in different sectors in order to drive the economic development of our country and globally.

Secondly, the report of the **NCHE on “Tracer study of graduates from higher education institutions, 1999-2008”** made the following recommendations amongst others that:

- Collaboration and in-depth dialogue with employers should be intensified and that such interactions should add relevance in the eyes of the employers;
- Higher education institutions should **assist students to find employment** before they leave the institution and exposure to possible employers be facilitated;
- Higher education institutions should seek to **continuously improve the quality of the learning experience** of students; and
- Attention should be given to **internships, work experience** and exposure of students to employers and workplace.

In order to remove some of the awkwardness and little impediments in our university/ industry collaboration, the Polytechnic believes that change will have start with us as an institution. Since **engagement of industry** is an important activity of the institution, **at policy and strategic levels** we have prioritised this area and it is being managed, resourced and monitored. One of the critical steps we have taken was to **embed business/ industry engagement into the**

business processes of the institution such that across the institution there is a shared understanding why we need to engage with industry. We have also taken note of the fact that one of the key requirements of partners in business engagement flexibility and speedy response or action.

Another important development at the institution was the establishment of the **Centre for Cooperative Education (CCE)** two years ago and was charged with the function to facilitate, amongst others, the liaison and cooperation with industry, the public sector and the general community; to coordinate Work Integrated Learning (WIL), which allows our students an opportunity to apply theory into practice. It is the CCE under the leadership of the Director, Mr Carva Pop who, I believe you all know him, made it possible that we meet today.

The Centre has been engaging with the **World Association of Cooperative education (WACE)** as well as the **Southern African Society for Cooperative Education (SASCE)** to ensure that we not only follow best practice in this field but we as the Polytechnic community is also part of the broader co-op community.

At national level, the influence of the Centre is beginning to be felt, for example it contributed to the resolution that was passed at the education conference to promote the issue of internships on the Namibian agenda. Again we are proud that we have been included

in the Ministers task team to look into the development of a national strategy for internships.

For partnerships to be sustainable they require that partners are equal and more importantly, there should be mutual benefit. Therefore, the question is what is to gain for business in this partnership? It is known that as employers you are increasingly demanding graduates with workplace-ready skills and therefore by participating in internships for students you have an opportunity to closely examine the skills and suitability of the student before they graduate; it may provide you an enthusiastic short –term ‘employee’ that might not otherwise get done; it provides existing employees opportunities for learning valuable mentoring and management skills; and above all it is an opportunity to contribute to your sector as well as the communities you serve.

Furthermore, I would like to convey my sincere appreciation to you for having assisted us by accommodating our students throughout the years for the purpose of WIL. Beyond that many of you have identified specialised skills in your workforce and have supported us through their input on our programme advisory boards. This again allows us to bridge the divide between the classroom and the coalface. As industry partners you are the key stakeholders in this relationship, and we feel that your presence here today yet again reinforces our ability to provide quality in our classrooms, quality in our WIL programmes and ultimately quality in the Namibian workforce, and globally. We appreciate your time and as you go to

the breakaway sessions each of one to be led by our deans' we ask you to make your inputs and I assure you that we are here to listen to what you have to say.

Let me welcome you once again to the Polytechnic and wish you fruitful deliberations in your discussions. I thank you.