

# Reflections on Methodology

12 May 2023, Johannesburg

Skills for Industry team

# Skills for Industry team (present)



**01.**

**A Journey  
in Five Parts**

# Ho Chi Minh City, June 2018

## Focus

- Building a foundation for the research
- Co-designing the survey instrument
- Learning how to work together

## Rear mirror

- More clarity and a common understanding of the purpose of our work and concepts
- More time dedicated to how we work and learn effectively together, as an international team from different disciplines, and with diverse skills and languages

# Vientiane, March 2019

## Focus

- Sharing initial analysis of the survey covering 847 companies
- Designing a Theory of Change
- Stakeholder workshop

## Rear mirror

- We pushed back against some (external) scope enlargements but kept enlarging otherwise
- We did not find clarity whether to focus on individual programs or the skills formation system as a whole, and which type of training and focus to explore

# The great disruption, 2020 - 2021

## Focus

- Conducted and coded 108 company case studies
- Kept assessing the survey data
- Upon approval, prepared for phase 2 and developed instruments for stakeholder interviews

## Rear mirror

- The combination of company survey and case study worked well and provided much data.
- Among the wealth of data, there is a feeling that we did not sufficiently assess phase 1 data before starting the next phase, affecting our mixed method approach's effectiveness.
- Deeper understanding of quantitative findings would have enhanced our qualitative analysis

# Phnom Penh, September 2022

## Focus

- Analysis of cross-country findings using phase 1 and 2 data, investigating variances
- Identification of stories for policy and knowledge generation
- Forming teams for agreed-upon publications

## Rear mirror

- Engaged discussions, but it also became clear that some of the questions didn't fully translate across country context.
- The limited engagement on some of the concepts made the discussions on the findings uneven

# Johannesburg, May 2023

## Focus

- Working on the publications
- Reflected on how the research project has been implemented and what we have learned about evaluating impact
- Prepared for this space – a key opportunity to share the findings (and one we need to build on across countries within and beyond the study)

## Rear mirror

- Pending!



**02.**

**Learnings from doing  
research in the skills space**

## 1. Make the hard decisions regarding scope

- Cross-country comparisons looking at skills formation (systems) are extremely complex
- We can do better justice to this complexity by doing some comparisons rather than many
- One strategy could be to begin on a smaller scale and gradually broaden the scope

## 2. Spend a lot of time on design

- To make the above-mentioned hard decisions, but also to find out how to best add value to the academic and policy discourse, how to best leverage the comparative angle etc.
- Concepts need to be well understood and factored into the analysis; this might need (more) contextual analysis
- Sequencing is important (e.g. qualitative before quantitative)

## **4. Formulate a comprehensive strategy for the analysis**

- Mixed-methods integration has been great, especially given the comparative focus
- But quantity and diversity of data has been overwhelming; not all data has been exhaustively assessed
- There was also a strong feeling that subsequent data gathering was not sufficiently informed by previous assessments

## **5. Be systematic about learning and knowledge management**

- In a project involving that many people and spanning over many years, knowledge management becomes extremely important
- In terms of learning and strengthening capacity, it's worthwhile to develop an agenda what needs there are in the team, and how they are best addressed

## 6. About getting a map with contours ...

- We could have made greater efforts to embed our study in theory, and undertake more preliminary research to understand the context, key factors, and the extent they can be assessed (e.g., through QCA)
- This highlights the complexity of bringing the research and evaluation world together, and thinking through the different perspectives evaluators and researchers bring to the table
- Much of our focus was engaging with companies; and even though we did a large survey and followed-up with case studies, it still felt we were skating the surface (limited time, sensitive subject, social desirability)
- There are always trade-offs: While a smaller scope might have provided more details, looking at the broader picture was certainly helpful too.

**Thank you!**