



HOW TO GO AND HOW FAR TO GO

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15 million youths in India enter the labour force each year, but more than 75 percent of them are not job-ready. India will need 700 million skilled workers by 2022 to meet the demands of a rising economy. This stark imbalance, due to the absence of technical and soft skills, plugs towards the dynamic and rising need to make young Indians job-ready, focusing on young graduates to supplement their employability.

For example, the country presently faces a huge scarcity of sales associates, computer operators, beauticians, hair stylists, medical sales agents, mobile repair engineers, plumbers, electricians, sewing machine operators, masons, bartenders, painter-decorators, etc.

Yet, the limited concern we have for vocational training and skill development has led to decades of neglect with regard to skills training in these domains. There is a growing need to make drastic amends to resolve the great Indian talent conundrum. To make the most of the demographic dividend that we as a country own, we should embrace these necessary skills and fully appreciate their need and importance with an open mind, just like China.

Once this due respect to skills is given, there is a necessity to support technological growth with investment in skills and knowledge to prepare for the future. Revamping the education system can help bridge the aptitude gap staring at

us, particularly at the school and college levels, as these form the stepping stones for entry into the professional world. Colleges need to work together with industries to draw out a curriculum that entails and incorporates technological education and essential skills training.

Challenges:

It is generally held that knowledge, skills, and ingenuity of persons are critical to achieve development and social and economic action in an information society. Given the current high-paced development and lively investment climate in India, the call for knowledge workers with high levels of practical and soft skills will only increase. With growth taking place across different sectors - banking and financial services, retail, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, SMBs, outsourcing/off-shoring companies, service providers, etc. - there already exists a huge requirement for IT talent.

The gap between demand and supply is worsening the prevailing situation; a look at the Indian education system will reveal that the number of technical schools in India, plus engineering colleges, has, in fact, more than trebled in the last decade. Several professionals believe that top-level leadership plays an important role in shaping skill development efforts and ensuring that these are accomplished. Thus, connecting education and skills via joint programs of the Ministry of Human Resource & Development (HRD) and the Ministry of Labour will deliver clarity of action to the performing bodies and avoid administrative difficulties. Top talent for management roles can be attracted

by proposing better pay and freedom in decision making. This would inspire ITIs/ITCs to engage more effectively with industry and deliver a rich exercise experience to students.

Limited growth has been achieved in integrating skills-based training at the school level. Developed European countries like Germany, Switzerland and Finland have a well-established policy outline to introduce vocational education at a young age. While some initiatives have been started in Karnataka, this remains a big area of concern in most of India. Further, the legal regime in this nation poses obstacles to reaching potential in skill building, whereas the absence of regulation across courses, informational asymmetry and industry-curriculum misalignment are some of the other tests that impede the delivery of quality skill education.

Ideas to bridge the skill gap in India

The Indian government has taken numerous initiatives to support SMEs. It recognises that these industries contribute hugely to the country's economic progress and also hire a large number of people. They have the perspective to compete with most global industrial hubs. Yet, they continue to face significant constraints.

The scarcity of skilled manpower is one of the main areas of concern for Indian SMEs. While about 15 million applicants enter the workforce every year, nearly 75% are not job-ready. This acute disparity, due to the absence of practical and soft skills training, highlights a crucial need to increase the employability of young graduates.

SMEs today face a tough task to recruit, train, and guide such workers. Here are some ideas that can help us bridge this gap if implemented in the right way:

• Revamping the education system

In India, vocational education is mainly observed as a one-down career, fit for those who have not been able to progress in the formal educational system. This insight needs to be reformed. The need of the hour is an official degree in different trades of vocational education.

We also need to cultivate a strong association between the industry and the academia for creating job-relevant curriculums and providing lucrative apprentice breaks to students. Such an association will ensure that scholars have the right amount of exposure and exercise of the most appropriate skills and aptitudes necessary in a job-scenario. 'Educated but jobless' is a common story for millions of students in the country. The problem of skill gap in our country is as much about skill mismatch as that



of the absence of skill in our labour market. This important gap of skill development in India is the main concern and needs to be bridged for us to remain competitive in the world market.

• **Creating standard assessments**

Over the years, a necessity for a standard, nation-wide skill valuations and authorisation methodology has been strongly felt. By setting up a central skill development university, that follows international standards in assessment and testing, we can set up a reliable, sustainable, and robust apparatus. Such a step will be supportive for students (by offering a nationally recognised degree), and will serve to build transparency and reliability for the hiring SMEs.

• **Vocational training programs**

Very few SMEs have the capital and means necessary for offering all-inclusive skill development for their employees. This leads to a skill gap within the organisation, producing either disguised unemployment or higher abrasion. To prevent

this, a government incentivised vocational training program can be incorporated. Alongside skill training, this will also help in increasing employability.

One of the models for bridging the skill gap is through Public Private Partnerships. The present Indian government, through Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) and the National Skill Development Corporation India (NSDC), have offered several prospects for tycoons to step-up and create ventures for imparting skill education.

Industry-Academia Partnerships

One of the important means through which to solve the problem of mislaid job inclination in the Indian IT sector is partnerships between the industry and academia. Many IT companies are connecting with engineering colleges and universities.

Infosys has launched a platform called 'Campus Connect' to calibrate the education being provided at numerous engineering colleges with the requirements of the industry. Wipro, another Indian IT giant, has also come up with a program called the Wipro Academy of Software Excellence in collaboration with BITS (Pilani) to prepare fresh alumni for careers in software programming and provide them with the essential skills. With over 147 centres across Mumbai, the programme has trained nearly 3500 students in various fields like hospitality, automobile, healthcare, etc. The CEDP Skill Institute in Mumbai has also taken a step ahead in the ongoing skills revolution in our country. Many multinationals have also recognised associations with theoretical institutions

on specific initiatives covering faculty up-gradation, residencies, curriculum revision workshops, research incubation, etc., combining the designers of the new global economy.

The Cisco Networking Academy (NetAcad) also aims to address these challenges. Their core curriculum integrates hands-on experience when training students about computer networks. At present, there are over 160 Cisco Academies (across 26 states and union territories), with 7,600+ students presently registered in the program and 4900+ professionals having already graduated from CCNA.

Conclusion

By making skills training an important duty, the government can pave the way for youth in rural India to realise their hidden potential and become a formidable part of nation-building. Vocational training, skills development, and value education need to be made available to youth in the distant and rural areas. It is high time now for us to restart the Indian education system and act on various joint initiatives by the industry and academia in plugging the talent gap in the years to come.

Certainly, the country's ability to capitalise on the chances available to its young population completely depends on its ability to tackle the issues afflicting the domestic education and vocational training sectors. Moreover, businesses must find the right equilibrium between building skills for today and preparing for an uncertain future, which demands nimble learning systems that are mountable, technology-driven, and inventive.

