



Learning and training for tomorrow's digital India

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As the old saying goes, change is often the most permanent thing; at no time has this been truer than today. All around us we see continuous change – from the way we shop or sell, access services, participate in governance or indulge in entertainment. Indeed, we are seeing massive shifts in key sectors like healthcare, agriculture, education, retail, and others. Almost every aspect of life is changing as technology becomes more ubiquitous and innovation disrupts the 'status quo'.

This technology driven change opens new pathways and employment opportunities for skilled workers as India looks to achieve the goal of becoming a five trillion-dollar economy by 2025. As different sectors of

the economy embrace technology, the availability of skilled workers will be the necessary condition to fuel this digital transformation.

An early lesson in change management

If the last decade is an indicator, the future will be drastically different. Whether it is drones delivering groceries and medicines or the profusion of blockchain technologies, we must prepare for a very different tomorrow – one in which new age concepts from 3D printing to robot assisted surgeries become the norm as technology gets weaved into the social and economic fabric of the country.

The pace at which change is happening is breath-taking! The pandemic has already given us a sneak peek into how difficult situations can drive change rapidly. As the world struggled against a microscopic yet potent enemy, millions of students and teachers retreated from physical learning institutions to log in to classrooms from home. Following a period of experimentation, new forms of pedagogy emerged. Students now have easier access to course materials, live teaching, and recorded sessions along with more personalized attention. Learning didn't stop; it just reinvented itself. The change in learning that was much needed over the decades happened in less than two years! It is now time to assess how much we have learned and what are the learning needs of tomorrow.

Time for a reboot

As we look to prepare workforces for tomorrow's economy where AI, Big Data, connected devices and 5G, to name a few, reign supreme, we have to relook at existing methods of learning and training. In other words, as we propel ourselves at light speed towards a knowledge-oriented economy, we must have flexible, agile, and relevant methods of learning to ensure that workforces are skilled, reskilled, and upskilled.

Earlier and more formal methods of learning will need to be augmented with skills training that will enable workforces to negotiate ever changing requirements. As technology disrupts the education sector, methods of pedagogy and its delivery will change. Already, virtual classrooms have taken lessons beyond the walls of classrooms. Tomorrow, students and workers may have more choice and assistance in adopting more personalized and AI driven learning programs that will help them make the most of the opportunities that a technology driven economy provides. At NIIT too, we have the NIIT Digital platform, which has provided students and professionals with a plethora of new learning opportunities delivered over the online medium. Committed to its mission of deepening the skills of the country's youth, NIIT Digital not only provides new age, online, instructor-led tech courses, but also provides placement assurance to truly transform the lives of the learners.

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Indeed, the “Future of Jobs Report 2020” by the World Economic Forum postulates that automation and the pandemic will create a double disruption for workers. As technology adoption transformstasks, jobs, and skills by 2025, skills gaps will persist as in-demand skills across jobs change in the next five years. The report mentions that around 40% of workers will require reskilling of six months or less and 94% of business leaders report that they expect employees to pick up new skills on the job, a sharp uptake from 65% in 2018.

As of now, only 10% of the Indian workforce received formal skills training; according to Aspiring Minds, “a mere 26% of engineers and fresh engineering graduates are employable, and our students are not ready for the next decade”. To add to this, as per a 2020 survey by OECD, 30% of Indians aged 15-29 are neither enrolled in online education nor in skill training.

At the same time, all news isn't bad. While the WEF estimates that by 2025, 85 million jobs may be displaced by a shift in the division of labour between humans and machines, it states that even more jobs – 97 million – may emerge that are more adapted to the new division of labour between humans, machines, and algorithms. It is these opportunities that must be made the most of with the most effective and adaptive learning and training programs. An NIIT – Josh Bersin Academy research report from November 2020 pointed out that adaptive learning is the way forward as Adaptive Learning Organisationscan sense and forecast future needs and adopt a proactive stance even as they evolve for a sustainable future.

This also calls for fresh approaches and deeper collaborations between the industryand edtech firms to build greater and more extensive acceptance of digital learning certifications.Edtech firms can play a solid role in providing supplemental education that augments graduate courses and provides the skills needed for a productive first day in office. Flexible collaborations can not only strengthen learning programmes but also extend their scope beyond the metros by developing tailored programmesfor different regions of the country and the opportunities they provide.

If we are to make the most of the opportunities that will be provided by a technology driven economy in the coming days, we must ensure that we are ready with learning capabilities which will be a must have resource for new age workers. It's about time we invested in skilling our workers and augmenting their formal education with the skills needed for a productive first day in office.

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