

Industry and academia boost partnerships to fix digital skills shortage

Vignesh Anantharaj

vignesh.anantharaj@livemint.com

BENGALURU

The rapid digitization brought on by the pandemic is bringing Indian industry and academia together to produce more skilled labour.

Companies such as UiPath, Automation Anywhere, Salesforce and IBM

along with educational institutions like Manipal University are partnering to promote skills in artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, automation and other emerging technologies.

In November, for instance, robotic process automation

(RPA) company UiPath said it has increased academic collaborations by 50% as compared with the previous year. Over 50 such academic institutions have partnered with the firm to integrate AI and automation into their curriculum, as per the company.

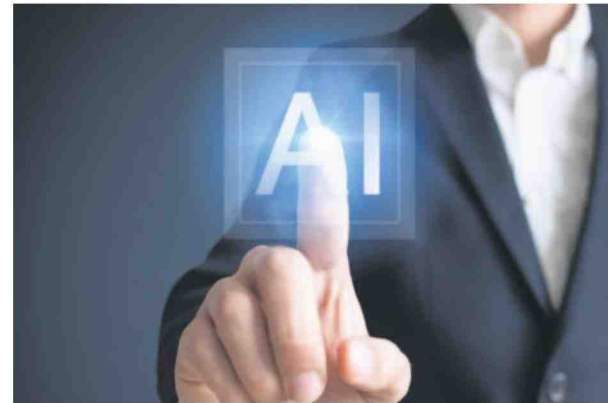
UiPath also partnered with the government's upskilling entity the ICT Academy on 30 November to add automation to the curriculum of over 1,000 other institutions that have a collaborations with the academy.

Developing such skills is a key part of the agenda set out by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the ministry of electronics and IT (MeitY).

Automation Anywhere has partnered with academic institutions to train faculty in order to inculcate industry skills among students.

"Companies are expecting academic institutions to enable the significant shift from mere RPA awareness in campus to deep dive engagement with curriculum integration and hands-on practice followed by students passing out with industry recognized certificates," said Milan Sheth, executive vice-president, India, Middle East and Africa at Automation Anywhere.

The company has set up over 100 labs, which it calls 'botlabs', each equipped with 40-100 computers that run on its proprietary enterprise soft-



The rapid digitization is bringing Indian industry and academia together to produce more skilled labour. ISTOCK

ware. The labs are situated in educational campuses.

Similarly, Manipal global education services, part of the Manipal Education and Medi-

cal Group in Bengaluru, collaborated with customer relationship management giant Salesforce last month to equip students with skills in automa-

tion and Internet of Things (IoT). Manipal said it plans to introduce entry-level developer programmes in the university's curriculum across India and abroad. The education chain aims to integrate the Salesforce programme into the final semesters of course curriculum.

"Demand for AI, and talent with AI expertise has surged in recent years and more so

since the pandemic. Globally, on our Trailhead platform, through the pandemic (between March 2020 and March 2021) AI

related certifications/badges saw an increase of 148% followed by blockchain related certifications/badges at 54%,"

BRIDGING THE GAP

RPA firm UiPath has increased academic collaborations by 50% as compared with last year

IBM India tied up with CBSE in July last year to develop a curriculum for AI and automation

said Deepak Pargankar, vice president, solutions engineering at Salesforce.

"By developing company- and industry-specific curriculum, organizations can more easily provide re-skilling resources to not only retain talent, but expand skill sets,"

he added.

According to Kashyap Kompella, CEO and chief analyst at analysis firm rpa2ai Research,

there is a trend in the software industry called "developer evangelism/developer relations" which companies use to attract developers to their platforms.

"The partnership with academia is a natural extension of that trend. It is a win-win situation for the college and the companies," he added.

While UiPath, Automation Anywhere and Salesforce are comparatively newer firms, 110-year-old IBM Corp. is no stranger to collaborations with academia either. IBM India partnered with the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in July last year to develop a curriculum for AI and automation, to be taught in Classes XI and XII.