

Reskilling for the future of work

Today's imperative for reskilling carries the extra dimension of pace. The breakneck speed of digital transformation compels businesses to move quickly with a clear strategy

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ACCELERATED BY TECHNOLOGY forces, the future of work has made an early landing in the present. Automation, analytics, artificial intelligence, robotics and cognitive tools are cascading rapidly to both disrupt and reinvent jobs and roles.

In the light of this reality, the observations made by the authors of 'The 100-Year Life: Living and Working in an Age of Longevity' are compelling. Employees, they say, will face career spans of 60 to 70 years. They peg the average tenure in a job at 4.5 years and the half-life of a learned skill as 5 years.

How does this pan out for future work scenarios? How should individuals reskill and reinvent themselves to stay relevant? And how should companies align competency frameworks and reskill employees to match the pace of disruptive technology?

Getting to tomorrow is different from how we arrived today. For individuals, this is the first truth they must confront. Employability no longer rests on gained knowledge but learnability. Professionals will need to move out of their comfort zones, demonstrate skills adjacency and agility to gear themselves for better roles. When seen as opportunities rather than compulsions, the vision gets clearer and more positive.

Individuals will do well to realise that technology is set to replace cognitive and manual routine tasks. The cue, therefore, is to look at fulfilling roles in non-routine tasks and newer technologies like cloud, big data, analytics, design thinking, digital marketing and DevOps. If willing and ready, investing in oneself in such skills will bring opportunities to grow further.

While technology disruption is leading the shift and change, professionals should also stop short of being obsessed with fears of technology alone. While it is true that tasks are being automated, the core business skills of communication, problem solving, strategic and



creative thinking, emotional and cognitive intelligence, customer orientation, and decision-making are the skills that are critically required to augment automation and robots.

A 'design decision' for organisations
Organisations need to design their workforce strategy to encompass the true meaning of work and the roles of employees in the redefined workplace. This involves asking the following questions:

■ What will be the human value-add in automation initiatives? What will be the new roles that will involve managing data and machines? — Design a learning blueprint for such skills.

■ How can we speed up reskilling efforts? — Leverage technology and the right investments.

■ Does the workplace need to be redesigned to be more digital and collaborative? — Invest to inspire high performance.

It really is design thinking and journey

In this urgency, however, it is important to remember that there is an additional responsibility of rewriting the cultural mindset—of both organisations and professionals—to align to changing customer expectations

mapping at its best. Starting from a workforce vision, it moves to assessment of work that can be automated, the range of talent segments and technologies that can be used and, finally, to designing competence and skill maps.

It involves merging talent and technology across multiple dimensions. Business and HR need to jointly create a robust understanding of essential human skills and the technology that will augment it. Competencies, career paths and relevant learning roadmaps have to be written based on the reality that the

shelf life of skills will continue to decrease with the reinvention of work. Annual workforce planning will have to give way to future work scenarios to identify long-term skill needs. It is undoubtedly an opportunity for cross-functional collaboration.

Road ahead for Indian IT-BPM industry

With a total of about 3.7 million employees, India's IT and BPM industry created 170,000 new jobs in the last one year and 600,000 jobs in last three years. According to NASSCOM, digital technology is projected to clock a growth from the current 5% to 38% over the next decade. About 5-10% of existing jobs are expected to be automated in the next 10 years, leading to significant changes in existing skills across job functions. New jobs will, however, be created in the areas of biotech, nanotech and smart technologies, to name a few.

With technology and automation rapidly

taking centre-stage, NASSCOM estimates that 60-70% of the existing workforce needs to be reskilled to meet future needs. Currently, roles in domain specialisation, analytics, big data, software engineering, augmented reality and business skills are in high demand.

Today's imperative for reskilling carries the extra dimension of pace. The breakneck speed of digital transformation compels businesses to move quickly with a clear strategy. In all this urgency, however, it is important to remember that there is an additional responsibility of rewriting the cultural mindset—of both organisations and professionals—to align to changing customer expectations. Organisational and HR leadership need to take the lead in redesigning roles relevantly, motivating self-learning, and spreading a culture of innovation.

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