

# Skills need level interventions

**LEARN-EARN-LEARN** In a global economy where technological change is constant, re-skilling is critical. E-tutoring may be of help, but there is also a need for tax breaks to help individuals to evolve with the times

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Only 30 years ago, Remington and Olivetti were considered successful brands—and if they have faded out, it is because typewriters have. The arrival of personal computers and workstations—and the culture of self-tying executives—led to the decline of typists and stenographers, but along came data entry professionals and software programmers.

We live in a world of creative destruction in which success and survival are simultaneous, depending on which part of the industrial planet one is. For India's business planners and policy makers alike the challenge in this context is to prepare for opportunities and deal with uncertainty.

It is not easy: skilling, re-skilling and upskilling require a new paradigm in thinking where the focus shifts from the economy, retirement and job security to re-education, employability and value creation.

There is a crisis at hand as a demographic shift signals the emergence of tens of millions youths looking for jobs.

China has an expression called "Mang Liu" – a reference to the blind influx of rural people into the cities without definite job prospects. Skilled employment is the best way to prevent such influxes.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Make in India" can be located in that context, but the challenge is that over-dependence on capital-intensive infrastructure could make the game difficult. Skills that attract foreign direct investment may make the progress easier.

In October, Modi launched his "Shramya Jayate" (Work Alone Triumphs) initiative that included, among other things, an "Apprentice Protsahan Yojana" that will support industrial establishments by reimbursing 30% of the stipend, paid to apprentices during the first two years of their training.

There is already a major public-private partnership (PPP) in the form of the National Skill Development Corporation

(NSDC) set up in 2008 which has already walked its talk in its aim to contribute 30% of skilling or upskilling 600 million people in India by 2022, mainly through private sector initiatives. It has so far skilled a little over 2 million people and helped employ a little over half of them.

NSDC has been developing the necessary framework for stands, curriculum and quality assurance in skill development. At a detailed level, these include YouTube videos in Hindi and a reality show on Doordarshan called *Hunarbaaz*, in which the government joined with NSDC, National Innovation Foundation and industry chamber FICCI to help millions of young Indians become aware of the ways in which they can upgrade their skills. NSDC also has a call centre helpline to aid youngsters seeking career advice.

Such informality is critical to quickly skill up millions of Indians. Technology might provide cheap tools to do this. Internet videos, e-tutoring and online tests may bridge the knowledge gap, but there is a need to focus on constant re-skilling. Perhaps there is a need for the human capital equivalent of "depreciation" – such as tax breaks that may help individuals constantly acquire new skills.

In the 1980s, companies like NITT Ltd used the franchise model and short-term courses to boost software skills, which helped India reap opportunities that came its way in the 1990s. NITT's Chief Executive Emeritus, Sugata Mitra, even spoke of "skilletts" – quickly acquired skills that would help workers the same way as "just-in-time" inventory management helped Japanese manufacturers.

It pays to remember that climate change and robotics are emerging as strong determinants in a fast-changing global economy. Apart from conventional, manufacturing-centric thinking, there is a need to keep in mind emerging paradigms, if we are to avoid Remington-like relics.

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