IT Firms Reskill Staff to Bridge Digital-talent Gap

Amid forecast for 1.8 lakh new jobs in IT in 2018, trained talent in DevOps, UX design are rare

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Bengaluru: IT services companies such as Infosys, Wipro, Cognizant and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) are reskilling thousands of employees to take up roles in digital technologies, where ready talent is rare in the market.

The requirement of skillsets has changed in the IT market, where Indian companies traditionally provided low-cost but labour-intensive backend and support services. The demand is now in areas like DevOps, user experience design, machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI).

Staffing companies predict the IT industry to add nearly 180,000 jobs this year to its current headcount of 3.9 million. But a chunk of these new roles will be in emerging technologies, where companies will have to find talent within their existing workforce.

Until the middle of last year, both large and mid-size companies were encouraging their employees to get trained in technologies such as UX design, AI-driven data analytics and machine learning.

The pace at which demand for digital technology services is growing has forced them to scale up talent faster, and train staff internally. "We want to scale up and no single (training) provider can give us that scale," said Saurabh Govil, Wipro's chief HR officer. The need for skills for new businesses is different and large-scale reskilling is crucial, he added.

Until mid-2017, IT companies made efforts like getting trainers to create content, and letting employees learn on their own, or put up employees on to a course or subscribed to learning solutions, said Mohan Lakhamraju, CEO of Great Learning, a digital technology training provider.

"Going forward, what I am seeing is companies are also looking forward to enable large-scale reskilling and upskilling, internally and externally."

Lakhamraju's observation seems practical since there is an acute shortage of trained talent in digital technologies.

Staffing agency ManpowerGroup's India president, Manmeet Singh, said his company had to interview as many as 65,000 candidates over 18 months to hire 1,400-odd employees for three of its IT services clients, primarily in roles such as DevOps, data analytics and UX design.

AN Rao, the global head of Cognizant Academy, said in 2017, they had reskilled and upskilled more than 100,000 professionals in high-end digital skills through the academy. Also, Cognizant "associates are encouraged to be accredited through external certifications and costs of more than 200 global certifications in newer technology areas are reimbursed", he added. While Cognizant, like Infosys and TCS, has created dedicated platforms for reskilling, it has retrained 30,000 employees through gamified courses.

Infosys recently brought in programmes to strengthen its people in the New Foundations of IT — the new ABCDs: AI, automation, Big Data, blockchain, cloud, cyber security, digital and DevOps that combines software development and IT operations. "These programmes have been created by our in-house subject matter experts as well through our partnerships with learning partners like Udacity, Coursera and others. We have also created technology platforms that can provide our people access to learning programmes from anywhere," said Infosys executive V-P Srikantan Moorthy.

None of these companies disclosed the money allocated towards reskilling employees. Digital technology training providers said the per-person cost for a data analytics or DevOps course would range from ₹20,000-50,000. In fact, Wipro has taken a 'build and buy' approach, or acquiring a company to get access to its employees trained in these areas.

The New Chapter

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Has created dedicated platforms for reskilling

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Q These companies do not have much option but to develop talent in emerging technologies internally
Krishna Kumar, CEO, Simplilearn