The Future of Work and Reskilling the Indian Workforce

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Abstract

In the recent past, digital technology has changed industries, and it is rapidly changing how people commute, communicate, learn, and work. Experts and researchers describe the technological progress in this digital era as both exponential and digital. Human Resource Development as a function, needs to take cognizance of the unique challenges that the workplace of the future characterized by digitalization and virtualization present so that young professionals can be prepared adequately for the workplace. The skills of employees working for the institutions required to be upgraded to make them competent in tune with the changing scenario. Defining it as a major change in the Indian scenario which finds a number of companies in the digital, virtual space of creating, delivering products and also offering services, it is a fertile ground for a meaningful exploration as a Future of Work concept (FOW).

The objectives of the study based on research gaps identified are to identify key characteristics of organizational adaptation mechanisms in the Indian Future of Work context and explore various inter-firm and intra-firm collaborations in the areas of talent acquisition, retention and career growth.

As far as the methodology is concerned, we will have both qualitative and quantitative focus depending on the scope. A framework for development and training on FOW employee competence is a plausible outcome of the study.

Key Words: Future of Work, Upskilling, Employee Competence

Introduction

The world is passing through cataclysmic changes in the era of globalization. As people form part of society their aspirations and demands also vary with the changes taking place in society.

Investing in people has not been given due importance in the transformative phases of globalization. Now it is all the more important to value human capital to equip individuals with the adequate knowledge and skills to respond to paradigm shifts. This empowerment helps people to take active roles in creating a more inclusive and sustainable world. Education plays a fundamental role in acquiring basic skills leading to promotion of inclusive growth and opportunities for all. Reforms in education, focusing on life skills, to create necessary faculty in people is the key to open economic opportunities in their work and businesses in this new world order.

As per the "2018 Future of Jobs Report", about 70 million jobs will no longer exist by 2022 in the world's major economies. This can be attributed to newer technologies such as digitization, Artificial Intelligence and automation changing the way we work. But these new technological advances will also create 130 million new job roles that would allow people to work with machines and algorithms in parallel to meet these demographic and economic changes.

Economies with these life skills pioneer the way to tackle the challenges and opportunities of globalization. India, by observing the developments taking around it started moving towards a 'Knowledge economy' with more focus on knowledge society and skill development. In tune with this the Eleventh Plan focused on advancement of skills.

Reskilling Initiatives in India

Skill India program initiated by the Government of India on July 15, 2015 intended to equip and train the nation's massive, enviable workforce with employable skills and knowledge. It was expected help in contributing substantially to India's industrialization and economic boom. It was proposed to train about 400 million men and women in the country in various industrial and trade skills by the year 2022. It was also aimed at enabling Indian economy and industry to benefit from the country's young work force. Accordingly, measures have been initiated to impart skill education and training. In India, acquiring skills happens through two structural streams, formally and informally. The informal structure is albeit very large. As far as the

formal stream is concerned, the knowledge gets imparted by the following ways:

(i) higher technical education

(ii) vocational education in schools

(iii) technical training in specialized institutions

(iv) Apprenticeship training.

Some agencies as mentioned below impart vocational education/training for skill development in India.

- National Skill Development Corporation by Government of India.
- Indian Institute of Skills by Government of India.
- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana by Government of India.
- Skill India Programme by Government of India.
- Skill Knowledge Providers by A.I.C.T.E.
- Community College Scheme by A.I.C.T.E.

The World Economic Forum finds the need for reskilling of more than 54% of India's employees/workforce in 12 sectors by 2022. It is also reported that by 2025, machines will overtake the humans in workplace in 12 key industry sectors. According to the World Economic Forums 'Future of Jobs' Report 2018 globally, automation will cut the workforce needs of global corporations by 50% in the near future.

Impact of Automation

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), 60% of the formal employment in India will be prone to automation. Thus, automation has implications bot at a micro as well as a macro level. Automation will also bring changes in skill demand, gender disparity in workforce and re-organization. The concept of ‘skill’ will increasingly denote worker’s adaptability to work with or around automation.

The table below shows some of these changes.

#	Parameter	Past	Future	Remarks
1	Predictability of Jobs	High	Low	The predictability of jobs would reduce in future
2	Skill set required for repeating/manual work	Low	High	Most of the manual work would be automated leaving behind only the very highly skilled manual work for humans
3	Data Dependency	Low	High	Dependency on data would increase in the future
4	Structure of work	Routine	Novel	Employees would have to do novel work more frequently in future
5	Work Locations	Near Customer	Locations where cost is lowest	The work locations would shift to places which would reduce the organization's cost
6	Type of Employment	Permanent	Freelancing	Freelancers would become the majority in future
7	Ease of earning regular livelihood	Difficult	Universal Basic Income	Governments would turn to universal basic income for the welfare of people
8	College Education	One-time enrolment for one course	Lifelong enrolment and learning multiple short-term courses	Once in a lifetime college education would be supplemented by lifelong learning and continuous upskilling
9	Offices	Dedicated	Co-working	Co-working spaces would become

		buildings	spaces	the office model of the future
10	Middlemen	Lots of them	Very few	Technology would bring the buyer closer to the seller almost eliminating middleman
11	Nature of work, Jobs and Tasks	Jobs	Tasks	Some of the tasks would be automated leaving behind only creative tasks for humans

Policy Challenges

How should the government of the day regulate this 'gig' economy with flexible jobs, wages and risks? There are three major areas that require attention in the coming years - data security, skill development and social policies. First, leveraging the benefits in a 'gig' economy will require high investment in digital infrastructure and upgrade of communication networks in India.

Automation involves reskilling existing workforce, positioning others to new tasks and retooling potentially new workers studying in various universities.

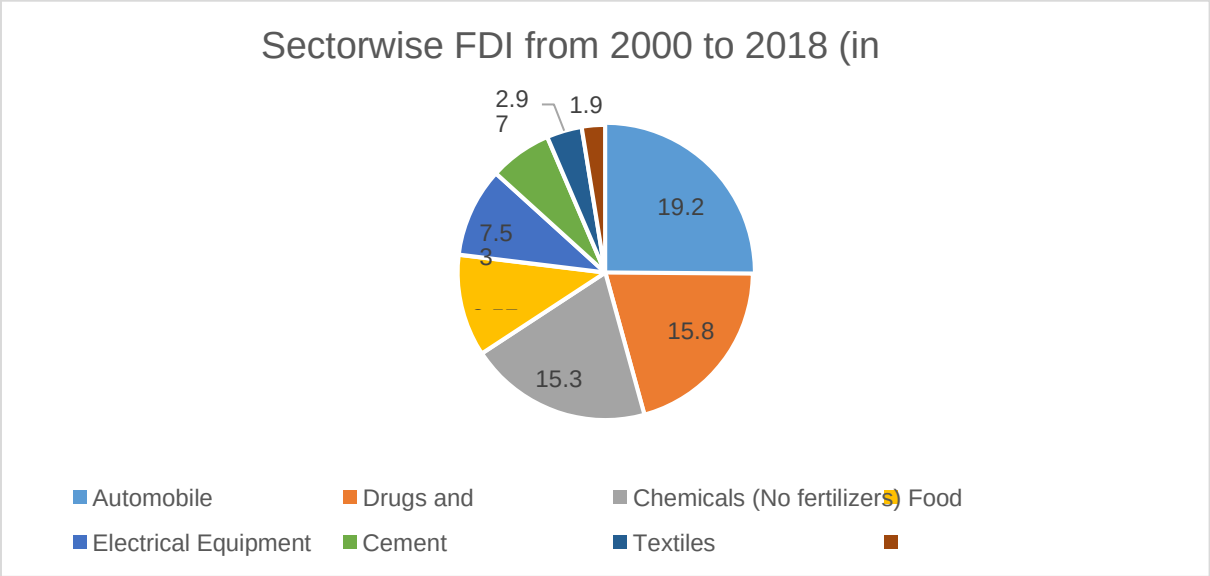
Furthermore, the concept of 'smart' work and demand for specific skills will encourage educational institutions to redesign higher education and training and train students to be job ready.

The challenges that this digital transformation taking places before the Indian policymakers is both technical and ethical.

Discussions around rising unemployment stereotyped on weak domestic demand and outsourcing to developing economies, with little attention given to structural changes in the domestic market.

In this context, we believe that in future the employment scene will be dramatically be transformed by the exponential growth in computing power and the spread of "Artificial Intelligence".

Over the next 20–30 years, we believe that robots would substitute humans across several sectors of the economy. Governments will fall in the vicious circle of funding social welfare programs compounded by lesser tax revenues.



Government of India has initiated several flagship interventions across the continuum of education to prepare for these changed circumstances. 'Atal Innovation Mission' under NITI Aayog was started in 2014 to set up tinkering labs in Schools across the country. Over 5500 such labs have already been set up until December 2018 to inculcate the spirit of innovation, design thinking, creativity, problem-solving, environment consciousness, sustainability, etc., and provide training on new-age skills like AI, coding data analytics, etc.

As the India Secretariat for the BRICS Business Council, FICCI is heavily involved with the government in developing a cohesive ecosystem for new age skill development in India. Another initiative by FICCI was the publication of Future of Jobs in India – A 2022 Perspective (FICCI, NASSCOM, & EY, 2017) which was published in 2017, this report was the first of many indigenous research papers on the future of jobs in five key sectors in India, namely, Information and Communication Technology-Business Process Management (ICT-

BPM), Retail, Textiles & Apparel, Automotive, and Banking Financial Services and Insurance (BFSI). The findings were based on conversations with over 100 Chief Executive Officers (CXOs) in India. These reports amongst several others sparked discussions on Industry 4.0 related preparedness in India.

Engineering colleges in India coming under the aegis of Ministry of HRD, Govt. of India, and State Education Departments and regulated by AICTE predominantly supply the white-collared workers for the manufacturing sector. In the recent past, AICTE has undertaken several initiatives for the growth of technical education, maintain standards, and to keep the curriculum contemporary.

Early in 2018, AICTE, set up a working group (including FICCI) to recommend the short-term and medium-term reforms in technical education. One of the key reforms recommended was introduction of undergraduate engineering programs exclusively focused on Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, Cyber security, Quantum computing, Blockchain, Robotics, Data Sciences, 3D Printing & Design, Artificial Reality, Virtual Reality and to bring in a greater focus on multi-disciplinary engineering courses, especially in mechatronics. Biomedical engineering. Computational biology, biotechnology, aerospace, agriculture, and environmental engineering.

MHRD, GoI launched the Scheme for Higher Education Youth in Apprenticeship and Skills (SHREYAS) and to provide industry apprenticeship opportunities under Apprenticeship Act 2016 and enable coherence between education and skill development. The idea is to enhance the employability of Indian graduates of higher educational institutes by providing ‘on the job training”.

The grey and blue-collared workforce is predominantly from the ITIs. Many ITIs are adopted and mentored by large corporations like L & T, Maruti Udyog, TATA Sons, Reliance, Future Group etc., for training programs relevant to industry needs. These findings were a catalyst in the development of National Occupational Standards (NOSs) and Qualification Packs (QPs) leading to the introduction of short-term skill based courses in ITIs, Training Providers, Universities and Higher Education Institutions. Alignment with Ministry of Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) is being worked upon as industry is unorganized. Success of the

"Make in India" mission is dependent on productivity and efficiency of the SME sector with better skilled workforce and use of technology.

Employee Management Practices in India

Literature review in relation to understanding of employee management practices in the Indian context has been very generic in nature, studying the Indian way of managing human resources across wide spectrum of the Indian industry. The focus has been on what HRM signifies in the Indian context across the industries and how does this discipline help Indian firms cope against competition from MNCs.

Research related to Indian organizations have tried to understand the unique value systems and cultural context of the country in relation to its counterparts in the western world.

India has always been a land of paradigm. Western nations had always portrayed this country as a land of mythology, spirituality, and mysticism – a perception that took a long time to erase even with globalization and economic liberalization. Today the country proudly exhibits its diverse culture, considerably huge population (a strong factor for growth given the dynamics of a young population), and economic disparity catapulting its status as one of the fastest growing developing nations in the world arena. The nation has the largest English-speaking population and the world's largest base of middle class that has contributed to the growth curve even during times of recession in the western nations.

Several research papers are available on forthcoming technological changes and its impact of labour market and jobs. In recent years, the debate on how Industry 4.0 technologies, shortened to I4.0, will change the labour market both in industrial and developing countries including India has been fueled with number of studies that have been published on the topic.

Resizing in the Indian IT/ITES sector

The middle- and senior-level employees were mostly engaged in allocating engineers for projects, managing software quality, and training fresh hires and layoffs are also predominant here as per a Crisil insight carried out in 2014.

However, over the past few years, there has been a transformation in the internal operations of the IT/ITES sector. Most of the jobs involving remote monitoring, testing, and quality assurance have become completely automated ((The) Economic Times, 2017) and the middle level managers are averse to acquiring new skills. Hence to cope with this conundrum, organizations are hiring and training fresh engineering graduates at a nominal salary. This eliminates underperformers from job roles. However, the basic purpose of downsizing is cost reduction, but these strategies denude the morale of employees. In total, 31 per cent of downsized organizations found employee' morale declined severely, while 40 per cent reported a significant decline in workforce productivity (Beylerian and Kleiner, 2003).

Employee engagement

Employee engagement is a psychological condition of an employee's involvement and commitment at work (Kahn, 1990). An employee's attachment/detachment to various job roles depends on his interaction in the workplace. Kahn's (1990) theory of personal engagement states that an individual is deeply involved in the organization due to several factors: relationships with peers/supervisors/subordinates, role performance, meaningfulness of work, psychological and physical safety, and availability of resources. When an employee has opportunities for learning, promotions, career and succession planning, skill, and competency development, while performing several roles in the organization, she/he would find the job to be more meaningful.

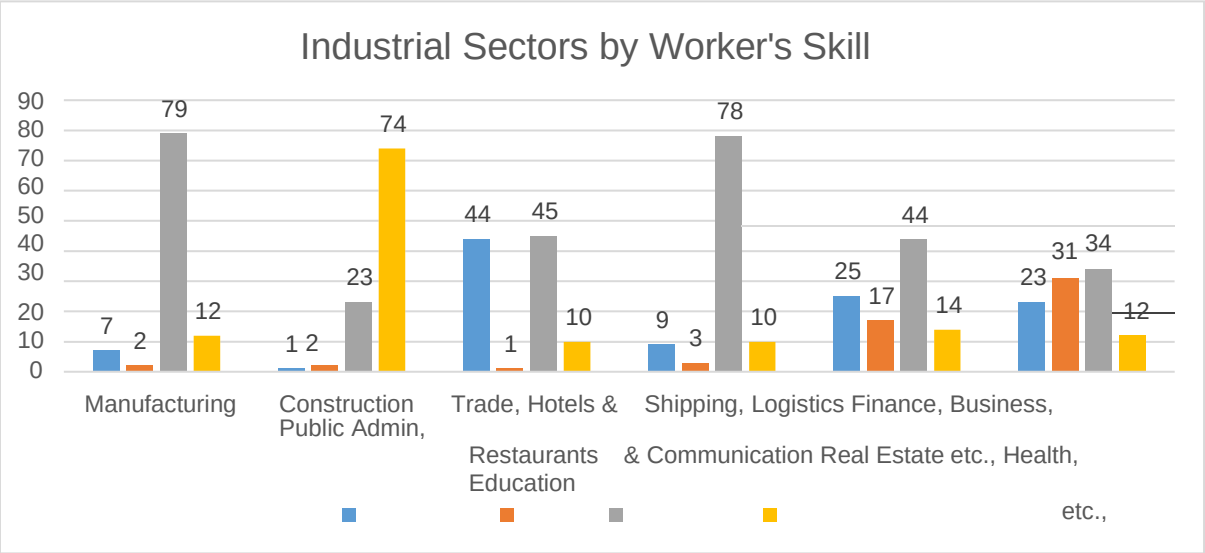
Engaged employees seek out, accept responsibilities, and exercise self-direction in accomplishing firms' objectives. This is in congruence with the Theory Y concept of Douglas McGregor. This theory states that engaged employees feel self-motivated, exercise self-control, and enjoy their physical and mental work duties and responsibilities, thus establishing high-quality relationships (McGregor, 1960). However, economic crisis and massive competition in the industry have resulted in breach of psychological contract of employees.

Therefore, the questions arise:

Q1. Can an organization revive its competitive position when its employees are disengaged and have low morale?

Q2. What measures do organizations need to adopt to be competitive in the ever-changing business environment?

Q3. How can organizations keep their workforce engaged?



Source: report on Fifth Annual Employment – Unemployment Survey (2015-16)

Recommendations

Formal Protections in the Digital Economy

The platform economy, which India's informal urban workforce increasingly participates in, certainly represents an incremental improvement over the complete insecurity of unorganized work, but workers in the gig economy are still a long way from engaging in the kind of decent work promised in Sustainable Development Goal. Workers for these platforms are overwhelmingly not accustomed to the protections they have a right to, having come from the informal sector, but since the platforms themselves operate entirely within the formal sector, the government has no excuse not to develop new regulations to enforce improved working conditions in the evolving digital economy. Required policy measures include access to formal social protections like the Provident Fund, collective bargaining rights, grievance mechanisms, and contract and pay transparency. Platform workers can kickstart this advocacy process by leveraging ICT themselves to organize, share information and complaints, and begin the process of collective bargaining. If such efforts are successful, the platform

economy should be encouraged to expand and more thoroughly formalize the unorganized sector.

Redistribution of Technological Gains

The digital revolution has been and will continue to be responsible for rapid productivity gains and explosive earnings growth for the owners of the technologies in question. Without proactive, assertive, and conscious policymaking, though, these gains will not be shared with the rest of an already highly unequal society. If these gains are shared inclusively, they could finance sweeping social programs such as universal basic income, free universal healthcare, and expanded higher education to both improve the welfare of the general population and to increase the average Indian's likelihood of participating in the new economy. Notable international proposals for redistributing technological gains have included Bill Gates' robot tax and redistributing employment itself by limiting weekly hours per employee. The most probable current approach in India is NITI Aayog's proposed labour utilization fund, which would issue grants to increase workforce skill levels and competitiveness to businesses considering automation.

Re-Skilling and Up-Skilling

Skilling initiatives are the classic response in developed nations to industries facing disruption or displacement, and they have their place for younger workers who have not tied their identity and sense of self-worth to their specific job in the way that older workers often do. Yet a single pass is insufficient, given the continuous disruptions that will take place as 3IR and later 4IR technologies fully take hold in India. Young people entering the workforce today are likely to work for as many employers as their parents held job titles, meaning that incubating a culture of self-improvement and lifelong learning is critical for mitigating the inevitable turmoil from these disruptions. Education initiatives should be expanded to be made accessible to not just youth, but also adults of all ages who could potentially engage in the workforce.

Management of Technological Trajectories

The free market has been the main driver of automation and 4IR innovation, but it cannot be expected to innovate technologies to address India's most challenging and intractable development challenges. Not applying the immense energy and potential of a new Industrial Revolution to bend India's development trajectory would be a tragic waste. Fortunately,

policy can play a role in shaping these incentives. Policies have already been rolled out to support 4IR adoption in the health, agriculture, and education sectors. These efforts can be improved upon by expanding them from individual patchwork solutions into a mutually reinforcing experimental network that learns proactively and takes the lead in establishing the foundations of a hard and soft digital infrastructure. Through a comprehensive approach that implements 4IR best practices, as identified through thorough experimentation in the field, across all domains of sustainable development, India can leverage the new technological revolution not to divide its population, but to ensure an inclusive society for all.

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