

Education, work culture must evolve with the times

IT industry leaders discuss roadblocks in efforts to reskill workforce

BL ROUND TABLE

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As the chorus for reskilling grows louder, industry experts feel that there has to be a concerted effort by companies, educational institutions and the government to create a workforce with ability to handle new technology platforms. The \$169-billion IT industry, which employs around 3.6 million people, is facing a huge challenge of reskilling a large part of its workforce in AI and analytics.

"Some functions are disappearing. Machines will take over some jobs, and what a machine can't do, those jobs are becoming higher in value. Earlier, you could take any engineer and train him. In today's world, the education system needs to be fixed. We

have announced a trillion-dollar dream, but with the gap in implementation and execution, in people and skills, I don't think we are ready," C P Gurnani, CEO and MD, Tech Mahindra said at a round table discussion organised exclusively for *BusinessLine* at the Nasscom Technology Leadership Forum.

Being industry-ready

One of the key issues facing the industry is the lack of enough employable engineering graduates. There are currently 16.8 lakh seats across colleges in the country, and last year around only 8.2 lakh seats got filled. "Capacity is being added without any planning. Only about 50 per cent of the graduates are employable. Even after they join work, the employer has to train them for 3-6 months. There is a need to review the quality of education in the



(From Left) C P Gurnani, MD&CEO, Tech Mahindra; BVR Mohan Reddy, Executive Chairman, Cyient; and Amit Aggarwal, Nasscom, Future Skills, at the *BusinessLine* round table meeting at the Nasscom Technology & Leadership Forum in Mumbai on Wednesday PAUL NORONHA

country. We need to develop the faculty, teaching methods are outdated. There has to be a multi-stakeholder approach to deal with this," said BVR Mohan Reddy, founder and executive chairman, Cyient.

Skills, which once formed the backbone of the IT sector, have become a thorny issue, as companies have scaled back their hiring plans considerably with business models shifting. But newer technology platforms are throwing

up new job opportunities. "There is a mismatch in what clients look for, and the skills the industry offers. Companies are doing whatever they can do to plug this gap. Industry is spending about ₹10,000 crore a year on training and development," said Amit Aggarwal, CEO of IT/ITES, Sector Skill Council, Nasscom.

So, does that mean the role of a person working in the tech sector would dramatically change? "Requirements

of an engineer has not changed so much from the skill side but the requirement is more to become ambidextrous," said Gurnani.

In this backdrop, customers are asking companies to solve probable futuristic problems. "For a lot of contracts, companies are anticipating a digital impact, and doing forward calls in their bids. In the past, it was about taking over a process and building tools over it to make it efficient. Requirements are different. Unless we start re-wiring from the 3rd or 4th standard, I don't think we will become ready," said Gurnani.

Adapt to changes

In the heydays of the IT sector, parents pushed their children to take up engineering and later find their way in companies like TCS and Infosys. During the go-go days, many of weaknesses were hidden. Now, all that has changed. The customers of multinational corporations are seeing a change in their business and

the earlier model of sending people abroad and working as per specifications does not cut ice any more. According to Reddy, there is also a need to bring a cultural shift. "Earlier, the philosophy was that the customer knows best, so we told engineers to follow customer's requirements. Now, the customer is asking, 'tell me what should I do'. From a situation where we were following instructions, I now am in a situation where questions are being asked about the process and I need to be able to come up with new solutions," said Reddy.

Gurnani said that companies, including Tech Mahindra, are giving enough opportunities for people within different age groups to acquire new skills. "We've seen some of our sales reps learning AI and analytics in order to remain relevant. I think that's something everyone will need to do going ahead," He said the tools are available, it is up to the individual to use them to reskill themselves.