

How To Revive Our IT Workforce

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It has all the signs of being one of the most amazing paradoxes in modern business. The whole world is making a beeline for India to get their technology developed and processes optimised and managed because of the vast pool of technically trained English-speaking manpower that this country possesses. But the industry itself is crying hoarse — where are the people?

The malaise pervading the industry has set off a war for talent with companies all vying for the same pool of people resulting in salaries going through the roof. There are many known and some latent issues that need to be addressed. First and foremost are the weak academic processes in many of our hallowed institutions of learning — an outdated curriculum, pathetic quality of teaching, ancient chalk-and-talk pedagogy, and the general apathy of venerable institutions like the University Grants Commission and the AICTE, who see themselves more as regulatory bodies than resource-enabling organisations. Small wonder then that while the IT industry continues to mop up all the available engineering talent available at the cost of the traditional manufacturing sector, there are real fears that the shortage of the right people will reach hundreds of thousands by the end of the decade and put a spanner into the IT works of the country.

What can the policy planners do to address these very real issues that sees less than 10 per cent of India's 300,000 engineering graduates every year finding jobs in the IT sector? Prof Arun Nigvekar in his tenure as the UGC chairman had developed the concept of the technical development centres (TDC) in all colleges, including the liberal arts institutions, which could be supported and fostered by the industry in an attempt to bridge the gap existing between the industry and the academia. Today under the aegis of the NASSCOM IT Workforce Development Programme, a few firms have picked up the gauntlet and are working with institutions to demonstrate the efficacy of this idea. A TDC coming up in a reputed college in Pune will demonstrate the feasibility of engaging students and faculty members in state-of-the-art development methodologies and frameworks, and make the vast majority of students industry ready before they graduate.

However, many of these experiments will do little more than make the recruitment processes of a few firms and the placement efficacy of a few colleges more effective. What is needed is a complete revamp of the academic processes in our country. Walk into any IX or X class in schools all over the country and the calibre and capability of the Young India truly shines. But the wasting of potential begins for all those who are not privileged or hard working enough to make it into the Indian Institutes of Technology as they deal with mediocrity in and out of the classroom - can we address this issue in the true spirit of government-industry-academia partnerships before much more water flows down the Ganges ?

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