



How to elevate India's talent model for the next decade

Our sponsored research highlights the importance of adding new skillsets—while retaining the traditional ones.

India's talent model continues to reinvent itself, from the first waves of IT and business process outsourcing through multiple waves of digital transformation. But the cold, hard economic reality of a post-pandemic world throws the fragile balancing act between technical and non-technical skills that underpin the nation's dominance of global delivery into sharp relief. India's secret sauce—its people—must face the change ahead in terms of capability and delivery.

Our latest research, in partnership with HFS, highlights a challenge that India's service provider community is intimately aware of. Global buyers of Indian capability are seeking out a more diverse range of skills, at greater depth, developed and delivered faster than ever before. All this is happening while traditional skill sets (COBOL or Unix) hold their position as core building blocks of what it takes to be a modern business.

India's talent pools, then, must be ambidextrous. They must retain traditional skillsets that all businesses rely on while evolving capabilities with new, emerging, and sometimes unproven technologies. HFS Research calls out the emergence of 5G—which according to the survey data is already under-resourced by the existing talent class. Yet the enterprise 5G boom is still nascent. Soon leading enterprises will approach India's tech talent for more, and the demand will grow exponentially. 5G is just one part of an increasingly complex digital ecosystem that drives demand ever

outwards—greater adoption of enterprise-class 5G pushes up demand for other technical capabilities around The Internet of Things (IoT), edge computing, cloud, analytics and artificial intelligence (AI). The list goes on. The challenge is how an industry at the top of its game keeps up with larger and more frequent waves of demand.

The research also highlights the growing importance of non-technical skills to buyers of what India and its delivery model offers. When IT and business service providers assemble a team of India's best and brightest digital talent, they now must look for softer skills around innovation capability, creativity, communication, and collaboration. Buyers are looking for providers that can bring exceptional employees who will act as a true business partner, questioning the status quo and pushing back when decisions call for extra scrutiny.



The challenge facing an incredibly successful industry is how to harness new ideas, fresh perspectives, and innovative solutions to age-old challenges—in other words, how to harness what the next generation sees clear as day.

The truly interesting part from our work with HFS is that buyers see this critical shift on the horizon, and so do employees (we asked HFS to run two surveys for the report, one for each community). The findings paint a vivid picture of an industry packed with ambitious and driven employees; each keen to make their mark and develop the right skills that the industry need at a pace that all too often existing training programs fail to meet. This is at a time when valuable talent is leaving the industry. Our data demonstrates that is because career and skill development opportunities fall short of expectations—a clarion call for India's service provider community and one that Cognizant takes very seriously.

So, it falls to multiple players to build a talent model to thrive in the next decade—

the service providers that make up so much of India's vibrant talent ecosystem; the industry bodies, like NASSCOM; the tertiary education sector and the sources of training and development programs to ensure that India does not lose its place as the destination for global delivery.

Combined, these players must strive to offer employees the critical opportunities they are clearly so hungry for, providing the resources they need to satisfy the insatiable enterprise demand for key skills. And they must do so at a pace and scale that can restore the fragile balancing act between enterprise demand and skills supply. This is no easy task, but one all invested in this great country must tackle. Based on the HFS Research, there are three key battlegrounds that need tackling now:

Provide more modular skills development resources.

This would enable employees to build training and development pathways through current working patterns and practices. It's not good enough to lead skills development as an annual activity or frontloaded at the start of a career. Employees must have the resources, support, and agency to build their own development framework in order to meet personal ambition, but also to ensure skills evolve organically as industry demand changes.

Build out data-driven programs that anticipate market demand.

Why wait for the emergence of new streams of enterprise demand and ramp up skills at a lag when insight-driven decision-making will enable India's talent resource to anticipate changes intuitively? For example, players should be ramping up training for the AI-driven future in which it will be critical to ensure that human workers and machines function smoothly together.

Develop closer, more collaborative partnerships.

These partnerships must work across

industry but also across broader economic ecosystems and value chains. The beauty of the modern world is that skill and talent development are no longer constrained to traditional academic institutions. Now, professional development is self-directed, ongoing and a lifelong pursuit that spans start-ups and academics at one end, and corporations at the other. It's incumbent on industry players to build and scale innovation through the development of new courses, qualifications, and certifications.

Cognizant believes the future for Indian talent is bright. But what worked for the last two decades won't work for the next. A three-year computer science degree wilts in the pace of current demand that requires an altogether different roadmap. Crucially, as history shows us, India's tech talent is equipped to handle change.



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World Headquarters

300 Frank W. Burr Blvd.
Suite 36, 6th Floor
Teaneck, NJ 07666 USA
Phone: +1 201 801 0233
Fax: +1 201 801 0243
Toll Free: +1 888 937 3277

European Headquarters

1 Kingdom Street
Paddington Central
London W2 6BD England
Phone: +44 (0) 20 7297 7600
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7121 0102

India Operations Headquarters

#5/535 Old Mahabalipuram Road
Okkiyam Pettai, Thorapakkam
Chennai, 600 096 India
Phone: +91 (0) 44 4209 6000
Fax: +91 (0) 44 4209 6060

APAC Headquarters

1 Fusionopolis Link, Level 5
NEXUS@One-North, North Tower
Singapore 138542
Phone: +65 6812 4000