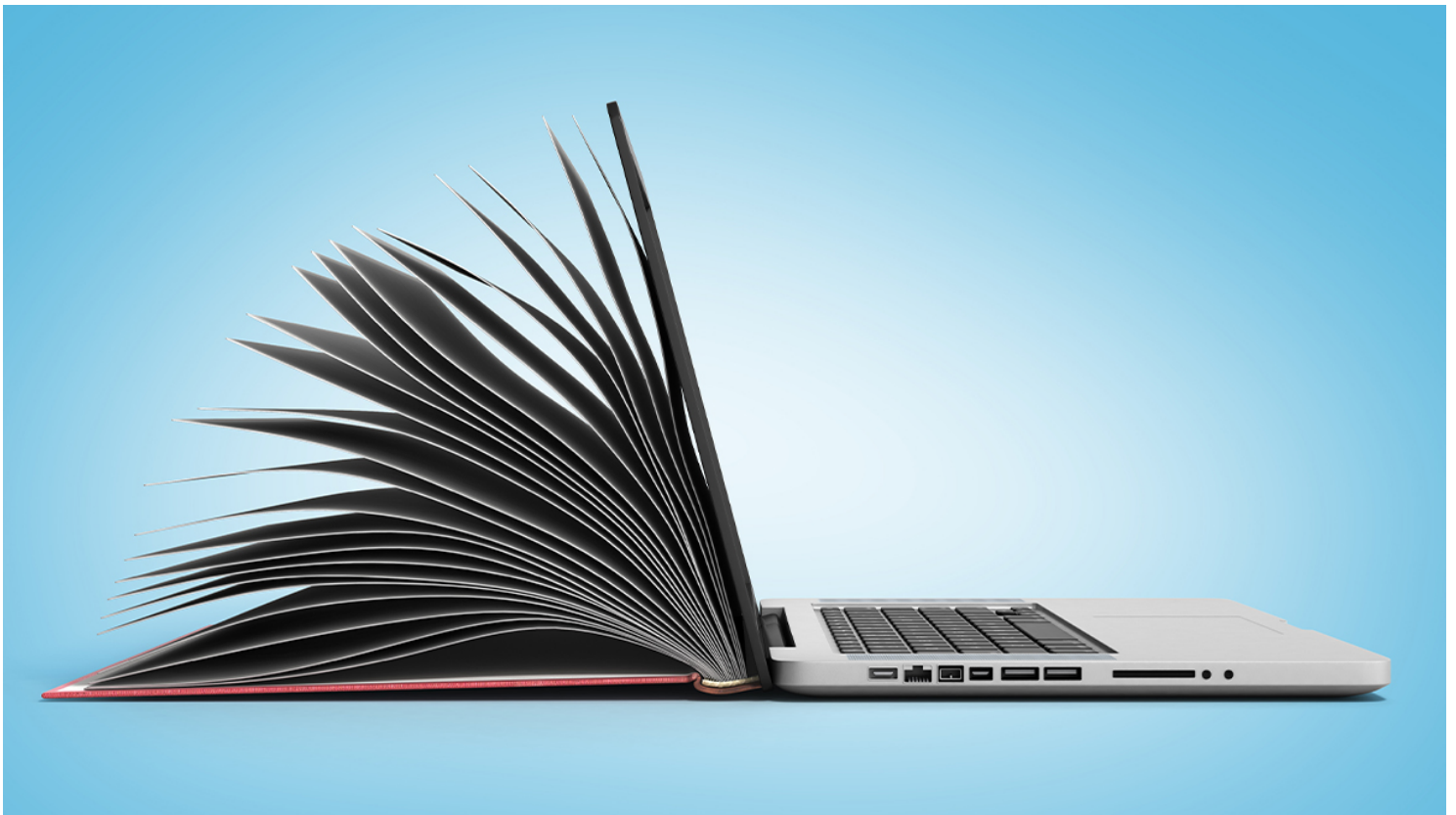


EDUCATION

Reskilling Workers Is a Central Part of Corporate Social Responsibility

by [Adam Medros](#)

October 01, 2019



NosUA/Getty Images

It's no secret that the “Age of Automation” is not just on its way; it's here. The World Economic Forum recently estimated that 1.4 million people will lose their jobs by 2026 as a result of technological change, with more than 70% of those job losses happening because the job type will cease to exist. Rural regions are also expected to be disproportionately affected, according to a new McKinsey Global Institute report.

At edX, our own research found that the most notable skills gap is in the data sciences. In our survey, 39% of respondents reported feeling less than proficient in data skills with an emphasis on analytics and computer science, and a quarter (24%) reported that

they have had to ask an outside resource how to work with a technology that their company uses. The second skillset with the largest gap is business skills and soft skills, including project management and leadership, with over a third of respondents feeling that they are lacking in this area.

As statistics like these tell the story of the challenges facing us, executives, researchers, and politicians alike are grappling with the question of not only how to prepare the future labor force for this disruption, but also who should own the solution. Will it take a federal mandate to institute reskilling initiatives in fields like data science and AI in order to see a real impact? Will it mean individuals seeking training opportunities on their own?

INSIGHT CENTER

The Future of Education

Preparing the next generation of leaders.

While those two examples could be part of a collective solution, I believe that the power to create immediate change and impact lies with corporations. Companies already implement corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs to give back to their communities and make a positive impact. They should now use these initiatives to join the fight against economic disparity and inequality to safeguard the future labor force.

CSR in the purest sense focuses on impacting the corporation's broader community, and includes sustainability initiatives, memorial foundations, and volunteer programs that can have a significant impact in terms of retaining talent and employee morale. However, it could be argued that corporations are responsible for all constituents — both in the community and internally — and therefore CSR initiatives should include both of these groups. Education in this context would be a CSR initiative that invests in an organization's own workforce; protecting a company's own employees, and by extension the entire community, from the impact of technological change.

There's already a clear connection between education and its impact on the economy — an educated workforce has historically had a positive impact on both average earning potential as well as the unemployment rate — and the data proves that employees are

not only willing to accept the help, but that it would be a game changer. According to LinkedIn's 2019 Workforce Learning Report, 94% of employees would stay at a company longer if it simply invested in helping them learn.

Echoing this, edX's own research found that while a third of consumers think that employers should be responsible for leading the reskilling process, almost half (40%) don't feel comfortable asking their employer for help with paying for a learning solution. This is an industry attitude that workplace leaders have the power to change — and it starts with how they approach training and development.

Skeptics should look to companies who are already tackling skills gaps by investing in education opportunities for their workforce. For example, Amazon's Career Choice program pays up to 95% of tuition and fees toward a professional certificate or diploma in qualified fields of study, up-leveling skillsets and allowing recipients to apply for in-demand jobs. More than 10,000 employees have participated in this initiative so far. Through the Learning Together Program, Boeing reimburses college tuition, books, and fees for degree and professional certificate programs, as well as individual courses at high-quality schools. With that said, it's key to invest in high-quality learning solutions for employees that have demonstrated strong outcomes. There are many reputable learning platforms to partner with in this regard.

Organizations have the power to be the driving pressure toward a collective solution for the future of education in the workplace, empowering workers with opportunities for continuing their education. It is both a moral and economic imperative for companies to implement education programs to help safeguard the future labor force. This means a focus on removing the biggest barriers — time, cost, and location — to high quality education in in-demand fields.

The future of the workforce is in the hands of employers across industries — and by viewing training and development as a CSR initiative and investing in flexible pathways that make it easier for individuals to pursue their lifelong learning journeys, corporations can win the talent war and invest in their local communities in tandem.

Adam Medros is president and Chief Operating Officer of edX.

This article is about EDUCATION

 Follow This Topic

Related Topics: [Social Responsibility](#) | [Educational Institutions](#)

Comments

Leave a Comment

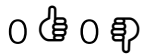
Post Comment

3 COMMENTS

Greg Anthony Hawod 7 months ago

Thanks for posting this article.

 Reply



 [Join The Conversation](#)

POSTING GUIDELINES

We hope the conversations that take place on HBR.org will be energetic, constructive, and thought-provoking. To comment, readers must sign in or register. And to ensure the quality of the discussion, our moderating team will review all comments and may edit them for clarity, length, and relevance. Comments that are overly promotional, mean-spirited, or off-topic may be deleted per the moderators' judgment. All postings become the property of Harvard Business Publishing.