

ICT sector builds solutions to skills shortages

As the world races into the Fourth Industrial Revolution, digital skills shortages have become a major challenge. Fortunately, the ICT sector that so desperately needs high-end skills has also built the tools to overcome the skills shortages, says South Africa's IITPSA.



Source: pixabay.com

Around the world, and in Africa in particular, a shortage of high-level ICT skills is threatening to derail Fourth Industrial Revolution progress. The continent needs experts in data analytics, artificial intelligence, machine learning, IoT, advanced cyber security, cyber forensics and more, to help both public and private sector to capitalise on opportunities and remain competitive in a new digital world.

In addition, Africa is challenged by the need to create millions of jobs and fast track the growth of small and mid-sized businesses, but a widespread lack of digital literacy hampers progress in these areas.

“For too long, the focus has been on traditional education systems to supply the digital skills pipeline industries and economies need to grow in the digital realm,” says Ulandi Exner, president of the Institute of Information Technology Professionals South Africa (IITPSA).

“Perhaps the time has come for us to look to the tools our own sector has created, and use them in innovative new ways to address the ICT skills shortage.”

Exner points out that academia is typically slow to adapt curricula, while the digital skills needs of industry change rapidly. In the digital world, learning must be continuous in order for professionals to stay relevant. And across developing regions such as Africa, millions of young people do not have the resources to access tertiary education, even if they have the aptitude for a career in ICT.



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18 Apr 2019



“While there will always be a place for universities and colleges, we have to start approaching skills development in more agile, innovative ways. With the arrival of high-speed undersea cables and the roll-out of lower cost - and even free - Wi-Fi access at centres across the continent, our youths now have an opportunity to use this access to start acquiring the skills they need to enter the world of ICT,” she says.

Exner notes that for motivated youths and working professionals, vast amounts of high-end training delivered by experts in their field is now available online: “In fact, much of the courseware is available for free, and students pay only to sit their certification exams,” she says.

“This mean that if candidates are driven and innovative, they can acquire certifications and marketable knowledge and skills without going to university, and they can continue to update their skills throughout their lifetimes.”

In addition, myriad forums, tutorials, developer toolkits and other professional skills development tools are widely available to those seeking to upskill themselves.

“For example, we find that app development is a booming sector across the continent, requiring little more than aptitude, access, and widely available tools; and this is an area presenting new business and employment opportunities to innovative youth.”

Exner believes the ICT sector is uniquely positioned to overcome its own skills challenges by harnessing the very attributes that characterise it: innovation, technology and connectivity.

“If we work together, we can address skills shortages by using our own solutions to deliver quality education and training that is accessible to anyone with the aptitude,” she says.

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