

Make it your business to embrace the future

Tech-savvy collaboration is the way ahead

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The onus on higher education institutions to prepare students for the future of work is more pressing than ever. With technology rapidly changing the way we work, students will need to keep up with the expectations of their evolving prospective roles.

But we also need to stop and ask the question: Is the speed at which we teach students keeping up with the rapid pace of change set by digital transformation? At the end of their formal education, will they be adequately equipped with the skills to thrive in industries that change so frequently?

Both HEIs and businesses are slow to revamp their education and training models because they often don't collaborate with each other, according to a recent Cognizant study. Most businesses (56 per cent) and HEIs (72 per cent) are still in the process of identifying the skills required to complete the work of the future, amid a rapidly changing skills landscape, the study reveals.

As well as this, one of the key challenges facing HEIs today is developing a curriculum that is fit for both current and future jobs.

The fundamental issue is that our current education systems and workforce development programs have been slow to adapt to the new realities, creating a disconnection between how students

learn and how institutions think they learn.

Because of this, HEIs need to collaborate with businesses to overcome these challenges and begin preparing for a skills future — a future which looks vastly different to what's needed now. After all, institutions that don't consider real-world contexts can't help students develop the competencies they need to be successful.

Businesses and HEIs need to correct this misalignment. If collaboration is not achieved then we risk adding to the skills gap that we are seeing in STEM fields, where business unnecessarily looks for talent offshore.

Education needs to be personalised. The blanket solution of one-size-fits-all no longer cuts it and HEIs should be looking for new ways outside of traditional curriculum to engage students with learning content.

By collaborating with businesses and by identifying skills needed, institutions can curate flexible and adaptive learning content that is updated continuously. Such a collaborative relationship between HEIs and businesses would allow for the rapid identification of the skills needed in the future.

How? It's a mix of implementing flexible partnerships, predictive and agile approaches to skills identification and curriculum change, and digitally driven modes of delivery to prepare people for the future of work.

For example, Amazon Web Services is building ready-to-use learning platforms for individuals to engage with content such as videos to gain skills, with managers tracking their progress.

Similarly, when business and HEIs are enhancing their learning and training models they should look closely at a new breed of innovative programs that, while led by instructors, are driven by artificial intelligence.

Students today learn very differently to how their parents did, and in a digital-only world they will expect engaging content that responds to them.

But with the rapid change of skills needed in varying industries, how can businesses and HEIs streamline this hyper-personalised process?

The traditional mode of teaching doesn't fit the personal needs of the modern student

If you think of a classroom, the first thing that comes to mind is a room full of students with desks all facing one way towards a single teacher. However, this traditional mode of teaching doesn't fit the personal needs of the modern student, and it can often be challenging for teachers to keep students engaged with the content.

But when you think of making learning more personalised for the student, the first thing you'd think of is more teachers: one for every student — something that simply isn't affordable. However, there are alternative solutions to this problem available through technologies like virtual reality and augmented reality.

With the use of VR and AR technologies becoming more

widespread, the number of applications in an educational context is growing. And we've already begun to see this occur in the education and corporate sectors. Just look at how the University of Newcastle is using collaboration and technology to enhance its training and education programs, with VR as a sustainable and lasting teaching tool in the nursing department.

In a textbook-goes-Netflix fashion, publishers have also begun to introduce AI to online textbooks that include supplementary readings, quizzes, and even a virtual tutor for struggling students. This AI-driven content offers a hyper-personal approach to online learning and can help steer students away from potential shortcomings.

With advanced technology available to foster a rapid learning environment for both students and employees, it's up to businesses and HEIs to work together to unlock its full potential.

The problem is that this, unfortunately, doesn't happen enough. Without collaborating with each other, businesses and HEIs lose out on the full potential of the technology.

To get to the future of work we have to first rewrite the rules of learning, and it is the responsibility of both sides to get there.

Without fundamental recasting of how we think about human learning and skills development and effective collaboration, many individuals, communities and entire economies will be left behind.

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