

# IT SECTOR SKILL COUNCIL ACTING AS CHANGE-AGENT

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## About the Author



**Lakshmi Narayanan** or Lakshmi as he is known, is a technology industry professional, with over 30 years of experience in Europe, India, and the United States. His leadership experience includes corporate governance, customer relationship management, and organization strategy. As a founding member of Cognizant, Lakshmi Narayanan has been responsible for providing leadership for the company's high-touch customer relationship and delivery excellence model.

In his role as the Vice-Chairman of Cognizant, he guides strategic programs around customer advocacy, education, training, and leadership development. He is the Past Chairman of NASSCOM and was a Member of the Board of U.S. India Business Council.

Lakshmi Narayanan has received awards and recognition from the industry, media, and academia. He is an alumnus of Indian Institute of Science and has pursuits in inclusive growth, education, and non-profits through Cognizant Foundation and other institutions. He is also a Member of the Board of the National Skill Development Corporation.

## Chasing Dreams

The dream of every global corporation in India like GE, Google, Citi, McKinsey, Bain Consulting, KKR, and Tata is to hire top talent from IITs and IIMs before others. Consequently, the dream of every IIT, IIM and other top institutions is to get the top salary for its students and obtain full recruitment on Day Zero or Day One.

The dream of every IT, manufacturing and retail major is to be among the first to visit the top universities and colleges, and hire top talent even as they are finishing their education.

If the educated or academically qualified men and women can enjoy such opportunities, why is it that we are denying thousands of vocationally skilled men and women opportunities to work in the organized sector?

Isn't there sufficient demand for skilled resources in India? The answer is obvious. Many firms today, particularly in the construction, infrastructure and services industry, lament the huge demand supply gap that has led to delayed projects, inefficient utilisation of precious resources, huge training costs, and consequently, high levels of underemployment, churn and attrition.

Surely, we have sufficient number of people in the working age bracket, but not enough trained resources who can enter the increasing organized sector.

The answer appears to be quite simple, which is that there are no organized, leave alone reputed, skill development institutions that offer trained, qualified and certified skilled professionals - a gap that National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) has come to fill through a unique model driven by private partnership with industry.

The dream of every manufacturing, retail and hospitality firm of hiring skilled professionals, even as they are being skilled professionally, is not far from realisation. The aspiration of men and women from rural areas and inner cities to work in the organized sector with opportunities to grow professionally and also to enter the academic stream in the later years, too, is not far from being realised.

What does it take to create such an ecosystem of skill development? I want to analyse just one aspect of the ecosystem, as it applies to the IT/ITES industry and the reason for looking specifically at this sector is due to the role that ICT technology will play in the future.

### **ICT - A Foundation Skill**

Communication and Information Technology (ICT) has become all pervasive, even in India where no meaningful livelihood opportunities are available

for those who are not comfortable with technology.

Take the example of a retail outlet. While the outlets themselves are investing in technology, supply chain systems, bar coding, scanning and advanced payment systems, employees working in those stores are increasingly drawn from inner cities and rural areas. The minimum qualification requirement has also come down to school completion and no longer college degrees. Unless they are trained well, the quality of service and the overall productivity will be much less than desired.

Likewise, in the healthcare sector, with the increasing use of electronic health records and sophisticated medical equipment, nurses and paramedics are expected to have a different skill set. To be comfortable with electronic and communication devices is a minimum requirement, even for ward boys and assistants.

Finally, the overarching theme in skill development is eLearning and simulated practices. Driver training, welder training, CNC machine training and even training of paramedics happen first on computers and through computer-based simulation, before practical hands-on skills training. So much so, basic computing awareness is a foundation skill that has to be taught in high school and can no longer be postponed to being part of higher education.

### **Role of IT/ITES Sector Skill Council**

The IT/ITES industry in India is acknowledged to be well-developed, thanks to the investment in education infrastructure. While this may be so, the opportunities for gainful employment do not appear to be uniform throughout the country, but is limited to pockets where colleges and universities are well developed and where the telecom infrastructure is above average.

Also, the demand and supply equation in this industry is very unfavourable, with quality of education and training lagging the rapid advances in technology. There appear to be no standards of international repute for occupations, no acknowledged certification programs other than those proposed by NASSCOM, and very limited industry participation in defining vocational standards and building foundation skills in schools.

It is precisely for these reasons that the IT/ITES Sector Skill Council (SSC) has been formed with NASSCOM taking charge with very active industry and academic participation. Like all SSCs, the IT/ITES SSC will also focus mainly on:

- Defining vocational and educational qualifications and quality frameworks and corresponding National Occupation Standards so that there is a single set of standards that define quality and occupation standards, from the basic to the advanced levels
- Being the certifying agency for skills through a network of partners, both vocational and academic, and ensuring that the industry hires only certified professionals, again at the vocational and academic levels
- Measuring and monitoring the demand and supply in various categories of skills and proficiency and ensuring the balanced growth of this industry so that the price points are well managed
- Standardizing the affiliation and accreditation process for participation in affiliation, accreditation, examination and certification

- Establishing a well structured sector specific Labour Market Information System (LMIS) to assist planning and delivery of training and promotion of academies of excellence, and
- Planning and executing 'Training of Trainers' initiatives.

While the above key result areas are common across industries, including the IT/ITES industry, there is one area where the IT/ITES SSC has an important and mammoth role to play. We have discussed the all-pervasive nature of technology in all walks of business. Therefore, the role of providing good foundation skills at the school level so that even 8th and 10th graders can aspire to work in the organized sector such as the retail industry, BPO industry and other service industries is critical.

The foundation skills in IT at the school level will in course of time become a pre-requisite for any vocational training – be it driving or plumbing or welding or masonry, as all these vocational skills will be imparted using simulation techniques on special purpose computing platforms.

The earlier the SSC defines the curriculum and the certification exams at the school finishing stage, the faster will be skill development in all the areas, a responsibility that is unique to the IT/ITES Sector Skill Council. And this has to be a uniform national effort that will impact every school, wherever they are located.

I believe that imparting this foundation skill at an early stage and deepening it in course of time will make our vocationally trained resources globally competitive.