

AN annual global survey last year revealed that 35% of Malaysian CEOs identified “the low availability of workers with key skills” as their primary concern. This highlights that Malaysia’s 21st-century success depends not just on infrastructure and investment, but on its people – our talent.

With jobs rapidly evolving due to technology, are we equipping our talent to thrive in these changes?

The growing influence of digital technology is rapidly improving life, work, learning and interactions. While simple on the surface, technology’s complexity comes from the blurring of physical and virtual – smart cities, augmented reality, and the Internet of Things are creating a hybrid reality.

According to Moore’s Law, computing power doubles every two years, cutting costs and driving rapid growth. Similarly, Ray Kurzweil’s Law of Accelerating Returns states that technology advances exponentially, with each innovation speeding up the next. As more technologies are built on the internet, a complex, interconnected system emerges, driving unprecedented innovation.

Crucially, talent enables this. Without skilled people to build, maintain, use and innovate within the digital world, we cannot reap its benefits.

This echoes the age of exploration, where nations that developed and adapted fastest gained the most.

But this is no easy feat. Increased life expectancy creates a diverse population with varying digital experiences: Digital natives (inherently comfortable with technology) and digital migrants (adapting later in life), exhibit different proficiency levels.

To thrive, we must include everyone. Comparing my experience with the Tanzanian National Business Portal to a senior Sri Lankan civil servant’s similar efforts, we found that rapid digitalisation can worsen inequality if people aren’t prepared to adapt.

Leaving behind those who can’t keep up

Make talent emerge from complex digital world

risks missing digital boom opportunities. This leads us to today’s topic: how can Malaysia rethink talent supply and demand in this context?

Rethinking digital literacy investment

Beyond basic computer literacy, Malaysia must invest in foundational skills to empower its human capital in the digital world. It includes:

- > Data literacy: Understanding how data is collected, used, and protected.

- > Cybersecurity awareness: Knowing how to stay safe online and protect personal information.

- > Critical valuation: The ability to discern credible information, identify deepfakes and navigate misinformation.

- > Technology proficiency: Developing the ability to use various software and digital tools effectively as a lifelong learning skill.



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The focus should vary by age group – younger people may need more on ethics and risks, while older ones may require basic tech and safety skills.

Programmes like CyberSAFE and Klik dengan Bijak aim to promote safe tech use, but their reach and impact need to grow. In 2023, Malaysia saw 34,497 online scam cases causing RM1.218bil in losses.

■ Empowering our talent is critical in an increasingly complex digital world

■ Effective digital talent development requires individuals and companies to adapt and evolve

Talent investment

Malaysia has done well in supporting local businesses to adopt technology and implement digitally optimised practices.

Businesses must also rethink workflows and organisational structures.

The Human Resources Ministry should lead this effort by promoting technology adoption in workforce usage.

Practice groups or industry collaborations can share best practices and demonstrate efficient talent utilisation with new technologies. For example, instead of banning artificial intelligence, companies should be taught to use it safely and ethically to boost productivity.

We need a clearer view of how digital talent is developed in key industries where Malaysia has a competitive edge and those we aim to grow in the future.

This involves analysing the local ecosystems in each industry. Ministries should justify talent development plans with a clear vision of industry goals and their role, overseen by the Ministry of Economy.

The Digital Ministry must lead other ministries to consider emerging technologies. This involves:

- > Consistent review and risk assessment of new technologies;

- > Guiding ministries on the impact of these technologies on Malaysian industries, particularly their talent;

- > Identifying talent needs in emerging technology fields.

A value chain approach is essential to understand how these technologies affect companies, industries as a whole, and the country’s overall competitiveness.

It is important to assess the impact of these technologies at the appropriate time (for example, first assessing the impact on the industry/company level, then assessing it at the country level as adoption occurs).

A framework, not duplication

The Digital Ministry should not override ministries’ existing plans but provide a flexible framework for consistent, effective talent development in a digital world. This framework should guide and align ministries while allowing them to adapt and innovate.

Malaysia must invest in talent to lead the digital economy or risk falling behind.



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