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Bridging the Global Skills Gap: Future-Ready Corporate Training Strategies for Youth Empowerment

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Across the world, organisations face a widening skills gap driven by rapid digital transformation, shifting labour-market demands, and the increasing complexity of global economies. At the same time, millions of young people, particularly in emerging and developing regions, struggle to access employment opportunities that reflect their talents, potential, and aspirations.

This paradox presents one of the most urgent global challenges of our time: How can we equip youth with future-ready capabilities while enabling organisations to thrive in a rapidly evolving world?

Corporate training, when strategically designed and purposefully implemented, offers a powerful answer. Beyond technical skills, today's training ecosystems must cultivate adaptive mindsets, transferable competencies, and inclusive pathways that connect learning directly to opportunity. Companies that invest in youth-centered learning are not only building their future workforce, they are strengthening communities, national economies, and the foundations of a more equitable global society.

Across the world, organisations are confronting a rapidly widening skills gap driven by digital transformation, shifting labour-market demands, and the rising complexity of modern economies. At the same time, millions of young people, particularly in emerging and developing regions, struggle to access meaningful employment opportunities that reflect their talents and potential. This growing disconnect raises an essential global question: how can today's youth be equipped with the future-ready competencies required to thrive, while ensuring that organisations remain competitive, innovative, and resilient in an era of constant change?

Strategically designed corporate training offers a compelling answer by supporting young people not only with technical abilities but also with adaptive mindsets, transferable competencies, and equitable pathways that connect learning to real opportunity.

The labour landscape continues to evolve faster than many education and training systems can adapt. Technological advances such as AI, automation, and digital ecosystems have transformed industries, reducing the need for repetitive tasks while increasing the demand for advanced analytical and digital skills.

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Demographic pressures add further complexity, as youth populations rise in many regions while job creation struggles to keep pace. Many academic institutions continue to prioritise theoretical knowledge, leaving graduates without the practical and industry-relevant skills needed for real-world contexts. Meanwhile, global economic instability and geopolitical uncertainty compel organisations to prioritise efficiency and reduce entry-level hiring. The result is a persistent mismatch between what employers expect and what young people have been trained to offer.

This mismatch affects young people disproportionately, especially women, NEET populations, and youth in marginalised communities. Many face limited access to experiential learning opportunities, minimal exposure to mentors or professional networks, and structural barriers that prevent them from understanding or integrating into workplace environments. Social inequalities and geographic constraints further restrict their entry into competitive job markets. These challenges contribute to high youth unemployment and underemployment, leaving substantial human capital underutilised. Addressing these realities is not merely a corporate responsibility, it is a global development imperative that demands coordinated action across sectors.

As organisations adapt to the new world of work, corporate training has shifted from traditional, classroom-based approaches to dynamic learning ecosystems that are flexible, data-driven, inclusive, and digitally enabled. These modern ecosystems integrate online learning, simulations, artificial intelligence, and hybrid methodologies to ensure that training is not only accessible but also aligned with evolving job requirements. When executed effectively, such systems empower young people with lifelong learning abilities while strengthening the talent base that organisations rely on.

Empowering today's youth requires a balanced blend of technical, behavioural, and meta-skills. Digital literacy has become a universal requirement across industries, encompassing competencies such as data literacy, software navigation, basic coding, and familiarity with emerging technologies. These abilities are reinforced through project-based and simulation-based learning that bridges theory and practice. Equally essential are soft skills, communication, teamwork, emotional intelligence, analytical thinking, and decision-making. These interpersonal capabilities play a central role in workplace performance and organisational success.

In addition, entrepreneurial skills such as design thinking, opportunity identification, project management, and financial literacy prepare young people not only for employment but also for self-driven initiatives. Underpinning all of these is the ability to learn continuously: adaptability, self-direction, resilience, curiosity, and a growth mindset are meta-skills that ensure youth remain employable as industries evolve.

Corporations have several opportunities to help bridge the skills gap by adopting proactive and future-oriented strategies. By strengthening collaboration between industry and academia,

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organisations can influence the development of curricula that reflect real market needs. Through co-designed programs, apprenticeships, technical workshops, and internship pathways, young people gain exposure to the professional world before graduating. Work-based learning, ranging from job shadowing and mentorship programs to departmental projects and structured on-the-job experiences, provides youth with practical, hands-on insight that accelerates readiness and confidence.

Digital learning and EdTech tools have further expanded the reach of training. Learning management systems, artificial intelligence-driven adaptive platforms, mobile micro-learning, gamified content, and virtual reality simulations make high-quality training accessible to young people regardless of their geographical location. These innovations support more inclusive access to learning, especially for youth in remote or underserved regions. Additionally, many forward-looking organisations embed youth development within their corporate social responsibility strategies, offering scholarships, innovation competitions, community learning hubs, technical academies, and programs dedicated to empowering young women. Such initiatives create sustainable talent pipelines while contributing to community development and national growth.

Effective youth empowerment also depends on fostering inclusion and gender equality within the training environment. Organisations must ensure that women and marginalised youth have equal access to opportunities, benefit from safe and supportive learning spaces, and learn from diverse trainers and role models. Gender-sensitive approaches and strong diversity and inclusion policies not only enrich the learning experience but also strengthen organisational culture and innovation potential.

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping future-ready organisations. Modern leaders are expected to act as coaches and mentors, offering constructive feedback, creating development plans, guiding career progression, and facilitating knowledge transfer. When leaders embrace the responsibility of nurturing young talent, they contribute directly to succession planning and organisational resilience. At a broader level, cultivating a learning organisation, one that encourages continuous professional development, cross-functional collaboration, innovation, and recognition for learning achievements, ensures long-term adaptability and competitiveness.

Measuring the impact of youth/Women-focused corporate training is essential for ensuring its effectiveness. Organisations increasingly monitor outcomes through pre- and post-training assessments, performance indicators, engagement and retention rates, productivity improvements, and innovation outcomes. Social impact metrics and return-on-investment analysis also help guide strategic decisions and demonstrate the value of training initiatives to both internal and external stakeholders.

Global best practices illustrate the transformative potential of well-designed youth development programs. Industry-led academies in sectors such as ICT, manufacturing, and healthcare offer hands-on training, industry-recognised certifications, and direct employment pathways. Public–

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private partnerships, supported by organisations such as Interreg NEXT MED, UNDP, and Erasmus+, combine skills development with entrepreneurship training, digital access, and internship schemes.

I am happy to share this example from my country: EmpowerNEET MED is a transnational initiative co-funded by the European Union under the Interreg NEXT MED Programme, bringing together partners from Palestine, Spain, Greece, Lebanon, Tunisia, and France to support young people who are Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEETs).

The said project (started on October 2025) aims to foster inclusive economic participation and social integration by equipping NEETs with entrepreneurial and employability skills tailored to the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE). Through innovative training programmes, cross-border exchanges, mentoring, and access to ethical financing opportunities, EmpowerNEET MED seeks to transform NEETs from social marginalisation to active contributors within their communities.

The project will deliver:

- Comprehensive training modules on entrepreneurship, digital marketing, and financial literacy.
- Job-shadowing and exchange programmes connecting NEETs with SSE enterprises across six countries.
- Startup support packages and vouchers to launch NEET-led social enterprises.
- Policy recommendations and financing strategies for sustainable SSE ecosystems.

By empowering at least 300 NEETs and engaging local authorities, Empower NEET MED contributes to a more inclusive, resilient, and equitable Mediterranean region.

This integrated program and others show that meaningful youth empowerment is most effective when institutions collaborate rather than operate in isolation.

Bridging the global skills gap is both a challenge and an opportunity. Through strategic investments in youth-focused training, organisations can nurture a generation of skilled, innovative, and resilient young professionals who contribute to economic growth and social cohesion.

Empowering youth does more than fill workforce shortages, it elevates entire societies. In a world defined by rapid transformation, preparing young people with the right skills and mindsets is essential for building a more inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous global future.