Bridging the talent gap in the UK's tech sector

Earlier this year, the UK tech industry was valued at £1T, a significant milestone that only the US and China have previously reached. In fact, following record levels of venture capital investment, the UK tech industry is now home to thirteen decacorns – businesses valued at $10B or more – putting the value of the UK market at more than double that of Germany and nearly five times greater than France and Sweden.

Yet, despite this staggering boom, the UK tech talent shortage is now threatening to stifle growth. In fact, there were more than two million job vacancies in the tech sector last year – more than any other labour industry. In addition to this, a recent survey has found that almost a quarter of women working in Scotland's technology leave because they are deterred by the lack diversity in the workforce.

As a result, businesses of all sizes are now desperately scrambling in the search to secure and retain talent. So, where does the UK go from here and how can the tech sector work to effectively address this disparity?

Bridging the talent gap through education

The _tech talent shortage in the UK_ has been driven by a number of contributing factors, including the rapid digital transformation that has disproportionately accelerated the demand for skilled workers over the past two years. However, this disparity is also largely a hysteresis effect from the rapid growth of tech globally against the historic view of technical degrees being a minority subject. As a result, businesses in the UK don't have an extensive pool of adequately qualified individuals in the upper age bracket to support the current demand.

As a first step, developing a more comprehensive GCSE IT and computing syllabus which addresses the realities of tech requirements these days, rather than appeasing the skills the government believe are important, will go a long way to overhauling this shortage. There have been instances whereby secondary students are being taught binary coding – an awful choice as a teaching language as it simply doesn't resemble the modern languages in use today. At that age, we should rather be focusing efforts on office fundamentals such as World and Excel alongside crucial skills such as data analysis, visualisation and reporting – all of which would be far more useful in professional careers.

By addressing the current disconnect at secondary school level, it will give everyone the chance to understand and enjoy the creativity of technical disciplines, whether it is creating dashboards from data analytics to coding a basic computer game. The hope is that this in turn will then inspire more individuals to pursue tech-related subjects in the latter stages of their formal education and then, ultimately, in their working life.

The wider business case

At the end of the day, too many young people still see a career in the tech sector as being out of their grasp. As long as this narrative is still present in society, then the tech and digital skills gap will only continue to widen – to the detriment of business growth and the wider economic landscape.

Therefore, national conglomerates, SMEs, entrepreneurs and educators need to come together to redirect current misconceptions and make the UK tech sector inclusive and accessible for all.

Boot camps and apprenticeship programmes designed to support individuals into specific sectors have been around for years – including the tech industry. However, according to recent government figures, nearly half or all apprentices

dropped out last year. Therefore, instead of sticking to the status quo, we now need to see business leaders take charge and deliver specialised academies to teach the technical principles the UK is so desperately crying out for. Whilst companies such as Google, SAS IBM, Microsoft and Apple have done this to an extent, so far, all these efforts have been with a vested interest in teaching their own approach and on their own specific software platforms. Instead, we need to see a more agnostic approach from businesses, supporting individuals with the skills to work cross-technology and cross-industry.

The challenge so far here is that larger consultancies often don't see themselves as home to the cutting-edge knowledge and expertise required to lead such academies. Therefore, it is left to smaller, specialist consultancies, such as _ConsultMyApp_, to develop and deliver programmes – but this of course comes with the different challenge of limited capacity.

Looking ahead

The UK is a thriving hub for talent, however, with an industry coalition estimating that over twelve million workers lack essential digital skills, we are falling short in harnessing the potential of the next generation.

Now public and private sectors must work harder to invest in young talent, embrace diversity and nurture digital skills from an early age, so that the STEM sector can continue to thrive and drive forward the economic revival of nation. Valuing natural aptitude and experience over education will also prove instrumental to overcome the vast barriers to access associated with the sector and ultimately level up opportunities across the country for everyone.

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