

New outlook on skills development can solve talent shortage, fast-track coding careers

By [Jessica Hawkey](#)

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As 2023 begins in full swing, we can all be forgiven for feeling as though we have been on a seemingly endless roller coaster during the past year. However, despite the surprises and shocks, one thing remained consistent throughout 2022 and is predicted to be one of the most pressing challenges in 2023 for C-suites trying to keep up with a rapidly digitising world: there has been, and will continue to be, a chronic IT skills shortage, especially a shortage of work-ready software developers.



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Of course, this is a tragedy because alongside the software skills shortage is a crippling unemployment rate, especially among young people; while from a business perspective, C-suites in general, and CTO's in particular, are being hamstrung in fulfilling their mandates of driving effective digital transformation in their organisations because of a dearth of talent.

A rethink around skills development will empower organisations to future-proof their succession planning. Organisations can bring in young people - who are appropriately skilled, experienced and immediately employable - into the workforce quickly.

Building the engine room

Let's start at the beginning. Software development is often associated with the "IT industry". The truth could not be more different. The fourth industrial revolution has ensured that coding is not only relevant, but absolutely essential, in all industries, including financial services, telecoms, retail, healthcare, professional services, and more. Software developers are in the engine room driving digital transformation strategies.

That's all good and well, except that when we zone in on individual businesses in all these sectors, it won't be unusual to find human resource teams unable to keep up with CTO demands of a sustainable talent pipeline. Of course, the simple reason is that there is a skills shortage made worse by the fact that in the endless rush to fill positions, many organisations don't have the time or resources to train up young graduates to get them "work ready", and then onboard and retain them.



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The more complex reason is that in order to future-proof digital strategies and succession planning, businesses need to invest in their technology leaders, and they must be sure that they are leading teams in an environment geared towards talent retention, growth and promotion. CTOs, under pressure to deliver on their mandates, have a mountain to climb in sourcing scarce talent and then training them for the business requirements and technology stack, only to lose them to competitors.

Traditional degrees the world over are no longer the gold standard in the industry. Graduates, while able to code, enter the workforce "cold". In other words, they don't possess the soft skills essential in a fast-paced business environment. Companies around the world - including S&P 500 companies - are leaning towards hiring experienced developers who don't need to be trained to work within their technology stack. They are attracted to talent proficient in using coding languages relevant to their environments.



Image: Supplied

Fast-track young careers

An intentional pivot, driven by the private sector, and one that we are incredibly passionate about, has the potential to make a dent in the unemployment rate while providing a solution for the pressing challenges faced by C-suites daily. It is entirely possible to fast-track a young person's career from matric to a live coding environment. Not just that, it is possible to ensure this young person is equipped with skills to work within existing technology stacks, and - importantly - ready to hit the ground running with a full understanding and appreciation of the professionalism required in the workplace.



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By blending theory with real-world experience on live projects over the span of a single year, companies can build work-ready junior software developers already equipped with soft skills and already on board with the company culture. Essentially, this builds a sustainable pipeline of software developers despite the skills-scarce environment. Through this innovative method of experiential learning, there is an opportunity for South Africa's youth to work on your company's own IT projects, simultaneously gaining experience on your tech stack and to deliver much needed solutions to address the gap in skills and resources.

Training on live projects

By training young people on live projects, companies ensure the candidates build crucial experience on their existing workflows and technology stack. Naturally, this reduces the burden on HR and minimises the time and money spent on recruitment without interrupting a steady flow of new talent into the business. In other words, this new way of building a sustainable skills pipeline future-proofs the business while contributing positively to our country's socioeconomic transformation mission.

None of this is theoretical, nor a pipedream. South Africa's software development skills future lies in fast-paced, one-year programmes that blend theory with real-world training to develop work-ready junior developers. This solves pressing challenges for C-suites under pressure to roll out new technology while closing the experience gap for talented and young South Africans. Everyone has been fishing from the same pond - it's time to build your own.

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