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Generation INDIA

India's Workforce Ecosystem: A Thought Leadership Paper

Based on the Manthan Roundtable on

Skilling & Workforce Transformation

Manthan was a multi-stakeholder skilling dialogue convened by Generation India on 18 June 2026 in New Delhi.

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Executive Summary

India has made significant progress in building its skilling ecosystem. The next opportunity is to strengthen the connections between skills, employment, careers and economic mobility.

This was the central theme of **Manthan: The Skilling Dialogue, convened by Generation India on 18 June 2026.** Bringing together leaders from **government, industry, academia, sector skill councils, research, philanthropy and workforce organisations,** the dialogue explored what it will take to make India's workforce ecosystem more **connected, responsive and outcomes-driven.**

The discussions pointed to a clear consensus: India's workforce challenge cannot be addressed by individual programmes or institutions alone. It requires a more connected, coordinated response across the ecosystem. Ten insights emerged from the dialogue, highlighting the key opportunities for strengthening India's workforce ecosystem:

1. India's Next Opportunity Is to Build Stronger Workforce Systems – strengthening the connection between training, quality employment, sustained careers and economic mobility.
2. Start with Demand, Not Supply – aligning training with the jobs the economy will need, where those jobs will emerge and when.
3. No Single Institution Can Solve the Challenge Alone – moving beyond fragmented interventions towards greater coordination and collective ownership across the workforce ecosystem.
4. Employers Must Become Architects of the Workforce Ecosystem – involving employers more actively in shaping occupations, competencies, curricula, assessment and career pathways.
5. Workforce Systems Must Keep Pace with the Speed of Technology – making adaptability a feature of the workforce system as technology and occupations continue to evolve.
6. Future Skills Must Travel Across Occupations and Sectors – building capabilities such as adaptability, digital fluency, critical thinking, communication and problem-solving that enable people to navigate changing jobs and careers.
7. Workforce Decisions Need Better Intelligence, Not Just More Data – strengthening dynamic labour-market intelligence to inform workforce planning, investment, curricula and employer engagement.
8. Strengthen Measurement and Evidence – moving beyond participation and programme delivery to understand employment quality, retention, wage progression, career advancement, productivity and employer outcomes.
9. Learners Need Simpler, More Informed Pathways – providing clearer career guidance, reliable labour-market information and greater visibility into progression opportunities.
10. Workforce Collaboration Needs a Permanent Mechanism – creating sustained platforms for stakeholders to share evidence, shape policy, solve problems and build accountability over time.

Together, these insights point to a workforce ecosystem that must become more connected, responsive and outcome-focused. Progress should be measured not simply by how many people are trained, but by whether they move into meaningful employment, build resilient careers and achieve greater economic mobility. This requires stronger connections between labour-market intelligence, employers, skills and curricula, learner capabilities, pathways into work, and outcome data.

The implication is clear: India does not need to start again. It needs to connect what it has already built - moving from a collection of programmes and stakeholders towards a more coordinated workforce system that can adapt to change and align around shared outcomes.

Manthan: A Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue

About Generation India

Generation India Foundation is an independent not-for-profit organisation established in 2015. Its work focuses on addressing the dual challenges of talent scarcity and unemployment; by helping individuals who face barriers to employment, build the skills, confidence and pathways needed to succeed in the workforce. Through collaboration and outcome-focused skilling programmes, Generation India works to connect people to meaningful employment and economic opportunity.

About Manthan

Manthan: The Skilling Dialogue is Generation India's flagship annual platform for bringing together leaders across sectors to deliberate, collaborate and co-create solutions for a future-ready workforce ecosystem.

Manthan, a Sanskrit word signifying deep reflection and the churning of ideas, captures the spirit of the dialogue.

Why Manthan?

India stands at a defining moment in its workforce journey. Its demographic strength, technological transformation and changing patterns of investment and employment create a significant opportunity to strengthen productivity, competitiveness and economic mobility.

At the same time, the nature of work is changing rapidly. Artificial intelligence, automation, digitalisation and new models of global work are reshaping occupations and the capabilities employers require. India's 2026 talent-shortage data illustrate the paradox: **82% of employers in India reported difficulty finding the talent they need, even as the country continues to expand its education and skilling base.**[1]

India has also made substantial progress in expanding access to skilling. **NITI Aayog's 2026 Reimagining Skilling for Viksit Bharat@2047 notes that more than 7.67 crore (76.7 million) individuals have been trained since 2014–15; while also highlighting uneven outcomes and the need for a more coordinated architecture that connects learning, earning and advancement.**[2]

The next challenge, therefore, is not simply to scale training. It is to ensure that skills translate into meaningful employment, sustained productivity, career progression and economic mobility.

Recognising this opportunity, Generation India convened Manthan, a multi-stakeholder dialogue held under the Chatham House Rule, bringing together leaders from government, industry, academia, sector skill councils, research institutions, philanthropy and workforce organisations.

The objective was not merely to identify challenges, but to identify practical pathways for strengthening India's workforce ecosystem through collaboration, evidence and shared accountability.

This Thought Leadership paper synthesises the themes and ideas that emerged from those discussions. The perspectives presented are intended to stimulate further discussion and collective action; they do not represent the individual positions of any participant.

Lasting progress will depend on stronger partnerships, employer-led innovation, continuous workforce adaptation, robust labour-market intelligence and a shared commitment to outcomes that matter: meaningful employment, productivity, progression and economic mobility.

> *“The next chapter of India’s workforce story will not be defined by the number of people trained. It will be defined by the number of people who secure quality jobs, build resilient careers and contribute to the country’s long-term economic growth.”*
> - Speaker, Manthan Roundtable, June 2026

From Training Outputs to Economic Mobility: Building Coordinated, Outcome-Driven Workforce Systems

Why India Needs a Workforce Movement

India's workforce ecosystem has significant potential, with a growing network of governments, employers, training institutions, funders and civil society organisations working to prepare people for a changing world of work. Yet today's ecosystem is characterised by fragmented interventions, multiple stakeholders working in parallel, and success metrics that can prioritise training outputs over employment outcomes.

Individual organisations may deliver high-quality programmes, but greater coordination is needed to achieve systemic transformation at scale.

The paradox is increasingly visible. Employers continue to report difficulty finding the capabilities they need, while many learners struggle to secure quality employment. This points to a persistent disconnect between the supply of skills and the demand for talent.

The challenge is compounded by the pace of technological change. New technologies are reshaping occupations faster than many education and skilling systems can respond. Learners face an expanding array of courses, certifications and career choices, while employers increasingly seek capabilities that extend beyond technical proficiency to include digital fluency, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, problem-solving and adaptability.

Recent national thinking points in a similar direction. **NITI Aayog's 2026 report calls for a reimagined skilling architecture that places learners at the centre, supports non-linear and lifelong learning pathways, strengthens links between learning and work, and makes employability, progression and livelihoods primary measures of success.**[2]

These realities require a shift in perspective.

India does not need another isolated skilling initiative; it needs a workforce movement: one that aligns government, industry, academia, research institutions, sector skill councils, philanthropy and training providers around a shared vision of workforce transformation.

Such a movement must move beyond fragmented programmes to create an integrated ecosystem where labour-market intelligence informs decisions, employers actively shape learning pathways, learners can navigate clearer routes into work, and success is measured through outcomes rather than training volumes alone.

> *“The challenge is not a lack of effort; it is the absence of a common framework that connects these efforts into a coherent strategy.”*
> - Speaker, Manthan Roundtable, June 2026

Ten Insights Driving Strategic Shifts for Workforce Transformation

The discussions at Manthan revealed a broad consensus: India's workforce challenge is not one of isolated programmes or individual institutions. It is a systems challenge that requires collective action. While participants represented diverse sectors and perspectives, ten common themes emerged. Together, they define a potential new agenda for workforce transformation. These insights are not intended as definitive conclusions. They are strategic observations intended to guide future dialogue, policy, investment and action.

INSIGHT 1 OF 10

India's Next Opportunity is to Build Stronger Workforce Systems

India has made significant progress in expanding access to skilling. The next opportunity is to strengthen the connection between training and quality employment, sustained careers and economic mobility.

Enrolment, completion and certification remain important measures of reach and delivery. But a stronger view of workforce impact must also consider employment quality, retention, wage progression, career advancement and employer outcomes.

The emerging Skills Outcomes Fund is an encouraging development in this direction, linking public funding more closely to verified employment outcomes such as placement and retention.[3]

A workforce system should start with the individual, not the institution. Workforce outcomes are built over time – beginning with foundational education and career exposure, continuing through career choice, skills acquisition and workplace entry, and ultimately reflected in retention, progression, earnings and economic mobility.

The implication is significant. A person leaving a first job after three months does not necessarily represent a failed outcome if they have moved into a better-paying role. Equally, a placement should not automatically be considered a success if the individual returns to unstable or low-income work soon after. What matters is understanding the trajectory, not simply the first destination.

> *The question is no longer "How many people can we train?" but "How many people can we help move into quality employment and economic mobility – and how does that trajectory evolve over time?"*

Strategic Shift
From training outputs → to workforce outcomes and economic mobility.

INSIGHT 2 OF 10

Start with Demand, Not Supply

India's workforce challenge is not simply about increasing the number of people trained. It is about training the right number of people for the jobs the economy will actually need.

The question is therefore not how many people the system can train, but how many people the market will need, in which roles, where and when.

Participants highlighted a stark example: training 1.5 million people when employers may have demand for only 10,000 roles is not a scaling success – it is a market-alignment problem. The example is illustrative rather than a national estimate; its significance lies in the underlying mismatch between training volume and employer demand.

This requires moving beyond broad sector forecasts to more granular labour-market intelligence that can identify emerging occupations, required capabilities, geographic demand and the scale and timing of hiring. Participants highlighted the potential of AI-enabled systems to provide greater visibility at district and state levels, helping inform decisions on training volumes, occupations, curricula and investment.

The implication is significant. Training capacity should follow market demand – not determine it. A workforce system that understands where jobs are emerging can prepare people for those opportunities before demand materialises, rather than training for jobs that may no longer exist.

> *The question is no longer "How many people can we train?" but "How many people should we train, for which jobs, and where will the market need them?"*

Strategic Shift
From supply-led skilling → to demand-led workforce planning.

INSIGHT 3 OF 10

No Single Institution Can Solve the Challenge Alone

Government, employers, universities, sector skill councils, training providers, philanthropy and civil society each play a critical role in developing India's workforce. Yet, many initiatives continue to operate within separate mandates, funding structures and success metrics.

The challenge is therefore not a lack of activity, but a lack of coordination around shared outcomes.

Participants stressed that collaboration needs to move beyond periodic consultation towards collective ownership – where stakeholders share intelligence, align priorities and take responsibility for outcomes across the workforce journey.

> *The question is no longer "Who should act first?" but "How do we act together?"*

Strategic Shift
From fragmented interventions → to integrated workforce systems.

INSIGHT 4 OF 10

Employers Must Become Architects of the Workforce Ecosystem

Industry can help shape which occupations are prioritised, what competencies are required, how curricula are designed, how learners are assessed and how career pathways evolve.

Closer collaboration between employers, training providers and other ecosystem actors can create stronger pathways from learning to employment – and from first employment to sustained career growth.

The German dual vocational training system offers a useful illustration of what deeper employer participation can look like. In the Ausbildung model, workplace learning is embedded alongside classroom-based vocational education. Employers are not simply the destination for trained talent; they are active participants in developing it.[4]

The lesson for India is not to replicate the German model wholesale, but to rethink the balance between classroom learning and workplace learning. Participants pointed to the need to move "from infrastructure to internship" – giving learners meaningful exposure to real work, employer expectations and the conditions of the jobs they are preparing to enter.

This shifts the conversation from employer consultation to genuine employer co-creation, with industry helping shape the workforce pipeline rather than simply consuming its outputs.

> *The question is no longer "What skills do employers need?" but "How can employers help shape the workforce we build – and share responsibility for developing it?"*

Strategic Shift
From employers as consumers of talent → to employers as co-designers and co-investors in workforce development.

INSIGHT 5 OF 10

Workforce Systems Must Keep Pace with the Speed of Technology

Artificial intelligence, automation and digital transformation are reshaping occupations faster than traditional education and training systems can adapt.

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 estimates that **39% of workers' core skills globally are expected to change between 2025 and 2030 – a shift with direct implications for India's fast-evolving labour market.**[5] This creates a fundamental challenge for curricula, assessment models, faculty capabilities and occupational standards that are often updated through relatively slow, cyclical processes.

One participant highlighted the shift this way: For the past decade, India has largely trained people for defined job roles. But as frontier technologies change the nature of work at an unprecedented pace, the challenge is no longer simply to update existing curricula. Workforce systems need the ability to help people acquire new capabilities quickly, including through flexible, blended and modular learning models that can reach learners outside traditional institutional structures.

This could mean using digital platforms, simulations, industry-developed content and stackable, National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF)–aligned credentials to bring emerging skills directly to learners, while enabling existing degree and vocational programmes to incorporate new technology capabilities.

The objective is to make adaptability a feature of the workforce system itself – not a periodic response to technological disruption.

> *The question is no longer "How often should curricula be updated?" but "How quickly can our workforce systems adapt?"*

Strategic Shift
From periodic curriculum updates → to continuous workforce adaptation.

INSIGHT 6 OF 10

Future Skills Must Travel Across Occupations and Sectors

As occupations evolve, some of the most valuable capabilities are no longer tied to a single job or industry. Skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, adaptability, innovation and digital fluency increasingly underpin performance across sectors.

Yet these capabilities are often treated as supplementary rather than as core workforce competencies. They are also inconsistently defined, measured and embedded across training and assessment systems.

Participants emphasised that the future of skilling cannot be defined only by a list of technical skills. As job requirements change, workers will increasingly need the ability to think differently, solve unfamiliar problems, work with new technologies and continuously acquire new capabilities.

Adaptability therefore needs to be treated as a core workforce capability, not an additional "soft skill".

> *The question is no longer only "What skills does this job require?" but "What capabilities will help people adapt across jobs and careers?"*

Strategic Shift
From training for individual occupations → to building capabilities that travel across jobs and sectors.

INSIGHT 7 OF 10

Workforce Decisions Need Better Intelligence, Not Just More Data

Effective workforce planning depends on understanding where demand is emerging-not simply where training capacity already exists.

Participants highlighted the need for stronger and more accessible intelligence on emerging occupations, employer demand, technology shifts, regional workforce needs, skills requirements and future job roles.

This intelligence should inform decisions across the workforce ecosystem: what gets funded, which occupations are prioritised, how curricula are designed, where training is delivered and how employers engage.

The opportunity is to move beyond static datasets and periodic reports, towards dynamic workforce intelligence that can be updated continuously and translated into decisions at national, state, district and institutional levels.

As one participant noted, this intelligence also needs to look beyond India's domestic market. As technology-enabled work becomes increasingly global, India has an opportunity to identify emerging roles in international markets, align training and credentials to those requirements, and position its workforce for new forms of digital and global employment.

> *The question is no longer "What skills are needed today?" but "What will workers and employers need next – and how can we prepare for it?"*

Strategic Shift
From fragmented labour-market data → to dynamic workforce intelligence.

INSIGHT 8 OF 10

Strengthen Measurement and Evidence

India has built considerable capacity to measure participation, programme delivery, completion and certification. The next evolution is to measure what happens after the training ends.

A stronger measurement system should track outcomes for both individuals and employers, including quality employment, retention, wage progression, career advancement, productivity, employer satisfaction and employer return on investment.

Many of the tools required to track these outcomes already exist, including learner and alumni tracking systems, employer surveys, placement and retention tracking, wage and career progression data, and outcome-based funding mechanisms. The challenge is to bring these sources together, establish common definitions and indicators, and ensure that data can be tracked consistently over time and across programmes.

The future opportunity is therefore not simply to develop new measurement tools, but to build a more connected, standardised and outcome-focused measurement system that turns existing data into actionable evidence for programmes, policy and investment decisions.

> *The question is no longer "How much activity did we deliver?" but "What changed because of it?"*

Strategic Shift
From measuring activity → to measuring outcomes and impact.

INSIGHT 9 OF 10

Learners Need Simpler, More Informed Pathways

For many learners, particularly first-generation learners and those from underserved communities, the workforce ecosystem can be difficult to navigate.

There are multiple training providers, certifications, occupations, technologies and career options, but limited visibility into which pathways are most likely to lead to sustainable employment.

A learner-centred workforce system should make these choices easier through accessible career guidance, clearer pathways, reliable labour-market information and greater visibility into progression opportunities.

Participants also pointed to the opportunity to make learning more flexible through stackable, NSQF-aligned credentials that can be accumulated over time and, where possible, mapped to international frameworks. This could allow learners to build capabilities incrementally rather than having to choose a single, fixed pathway at the outset.

The objective should be to reduce the complexity learners face and help them make informed decisions at each stage of their journey. NITI Aayog's 2026 skilling architecture similarly places trusted guidance, non-linear pathways and portable learning at the centre of a more learner-focused system.[2]

> *The question is no longer "How do learners navigate the system?" but "How can we make the system easier to navigate?"*

Strategic Shift
From complex pathways → to clearer career pathways.

INSIGHT 10 OF 10

Workforce Collaboration Needs a Permanent Mechanism

Perhaps the strongest message from Manthan was that meaningful systems change cannot be built through one-off conversations.

India needs an enduring platform that can bring together government, employers, academia, researchers, sector skill councils, philanthropy and workforce organisations to share evidence, identify emerging challenges, build consensus, shape policy and translate ideas into implementation.

Such a platform could create continuity between dialogue and action-tracking progress over time and building a shared understanding of what is changing across India's workforce ecosystem.

The opportunity is not simply to convene more stakeholders, but to create a permanent mechanism for collective problem-solving, learning and accountability.

> *The question is no longer "How do we bring people together for a conversation?" but "How do we sustain collaboration long enough to change the system?"*

Strategic Shift
From one-off dialogue → to sustained collaboration and collective action.

Conclusion

Manthan moved beyond identifying challenges. It focused on defining a new way forward.

Underlying the discussions was a broader recognition that workforce development is not solely a skilling agenda—it is an economic development agenda. Stronger workforce systems contribute directly to productivity, competitiveness, innovation and inclusive growth.

The ten insights emerging from Manthan point to a series of important shifts: **from training outputs to workforce outcomes and economic mobility; from supply-led skilling to demand-led workforce planning; from fragmented interventions to integrated workforce systems; from employers as consumers of talent to co-designers and co-investors in workforce development; from periodic curriculum updates to continuous workforce adaptation; from training for individual occupations to building capabilities that travel across jobs and sectors; from fragmented labour-market data to dynamic workforce intelligence; from measuring activity to measuring outcomes and impact; from complex pathways to clearer career pathways; and from one-off dialogue to sustained collaboration and collective action.**

Taken together, these shifts represent a move from viewing skilling as a set of programmes to building a workforce system – one that can respond to changing demand, adapt to the future of work and remain focused on the outcomes that matter for people and the economy.

India has already built significant momentum. The next chapter is about connecting that momentum: linking labour-market demand to training, training to employment, employment to progression, and progression to economic mobility.

Manthan was convened to initiate this conversation. Its greatest value, however, will lie in what follows. This paper should therefore be viewed not as the conclusion of a dialogue, but as the beginning of a shared agenda for action.

The opportunity before India is not simply to build a larger skilling ecosystem. It is to build a workforce system capable of continuously adapting to the needs of people, employers and a changing economy. Achieving that vision will require continued collaboration, shared commitment and collective action.

Manthan represents one step on that journey – and an invitation to move beyond individual initiatives towards a shared movement for workforce transformation: one that enables every learner to access not only skills, but meaningful work, resilient careers and the opportunity to contribute to India’s long-term prosperity.

> *"Transforming the skilling landscape requires moving beyond celebratory MoUs to shared accountability. When we align with employer demand from the outset, invest in continuous career adaptability, and measure success by long-term economic mobility rather than initial placement, we transform skilling from a short-term intervention into a lifelong workforce strategy."*
> - Speaker, Manthan Roundtable, June 2026

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The perspectives presented in this paper reflect the themes and ideas that emerged collectively from discussions held under the Chatham House Rule. They are intended to stimulate further dialogue and action and do not represent the individual positions of any participant.

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Join the Conversation. Shape the Future.

Building on the insights and recommendations emerging from Manthan, Generation India is bringing together a broader community of stakeholders through a think tank focused on advancing skilling and workforce transformation.

We invite leaders and practitioners across the workforce ecosystem to express their interest in joining the conversation and contributing to this ongoing dialogue.

Write to us at: **genindiacomms@generation.org**

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