

The telecom sector's unprecedented growth has opened up several employment opportunities, creating close to a quarter million jobs in the past few years. However, getting on board skilled manpower that has the ability to learn new architectures and technologies remains a key challenge. To overcome this and ensure adequate availability of skilled manpower, the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and the telecom industry have set up the Telecom Sector Skill Council (TSSC), a non-profit organisation, with representation from academia, industry associations as well as the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. TSSC's chief executive officer, Lt General Dr S.P. Kochhar, shares his views on the skills requirement in the telecom space...

How has the skills requirement in the telecom space changed over time?

India's transition to a knowledge-based economy requires a new generation of educated and skilled people. This manpower, knowledge repositories and institutions need to be connected to one another through state-of-the-art telecom connectivity. The provision of a skilled workforce is a prerequisite for a growing economy and for the success of various government initiatives like Make in India, Digital India and Smart Cities. Due to the impact of technologies such as the internet of things (IoT), the demand for a skilled workforce in direct and indirect telecom roles will surpass 8.3 million in the next five years.

How has the government's National Skill Development Mission progressed so far? How is the sector contributing to the mission?

The nationwide skill development programmes have created scope for increased economic activity in many areas. The demographic dividend has begun to yield positive results and the accelerated economic activity is adding to the gross national product. In view of this, a significant budget has been allotted for expanding the current skill development programmes and introducing new ones. The telecom sector has registered phenomenal success in providing training to thousands of youth independently and through agencies. So far, 192,000 young men and women have been trained under the supervision of TSSC.

What role is TSSC playing in skill development? What are TSSC's key focus areas?

Being a sector skill council, we have been set up as an autonomous industry-led body for steering skill development and training. We create occupational standards, develop a competency framework, conduct a train the trainers programme, affiliate vocational training institutes, conduct skill gap studies in the telecom sector and, most importantly, assess and certify trainees on the curriculum aligned to national occupational standards. We do things as per the requirements of the industry and work in four clearly defined areas – passive infrastructure, service provider, handsets and network management. We have 601 training partners and 141 industry partners.

What are some of the key challenges faced with regard to skill development in the telecom sector?

The basic challenges come from the large spread-out population and the lack of efficient transportation of the required technology and trained manpower to impart training. A strong monitoring mechanism to ensure time-bound training is the need of the hour.

What job opportunities are likely to emerge in the telecom sector from the Digital India, Smart Cities and Make in India initiatives?

The ongoing programmes are likely to help the sector create 11 million to 12 million job opportunities in the next five years, primarily in the service segment. In the non-manufacturing and manufacturing segments, there are likely to be 7 million and 5 million work opportunities respectively for Indian youth.

What is your outlook for the Indian telecom sector?

India is the world's second-largest telecom market and has registered strong growth in the past decade and a half. The liberal and reformist policies, along with strong consumer demand, have been instrumental in achieving rapid growth in the sector. The government has enabled easy market access to telecom equipment, and the fair and proactive regulatory framework has ensured the availability of telecom services to consumers at affordable prices. The expansion in telecom infrastructure and the launch of 4G/LTE will help increase telecom penetration. This

augurs well for the country, industry, consumers and, above all, students seeking employment in the telecom space. Mobile manufacturers plan to make India a hub for exporting mobiles across the world, and substantial efforts and investment are being made in the Make in India initiative to make it a high impact success story.

What is the council's agenda for the next few years?

Being a significant contributor to the skill ecosystem, our ongoing efforts will go a long way towards meeting the high level of proficiency needed for the adoption and implementation of state-of-the-art technology in training programmes.

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