

FUTURE EMPLOYMENT

Learning of new skills vital to remain relevant throughout one's career

COVID-19 and the rapid digital transformation have triggered massive job cuts in Malaysia. These have left many out of work. The cuts have resulted in a critical skills gap that businesses are struggling to bridge.

The way we work, the skills required, and the trajectories of careers are evolving rapidly. The skills mismatch and skills churn have increased the need for continuous skilling, upskilling and reskilling throughout one's career.

According to the Labour Force Malaysia Report, the number of unemployed has increased from 764,400 in November last year to 772,900 in December last year. Although the Covid-19 vaccine is expected to control the pandemic and government initiatives such as the National Economic Recovery Plan, Prihatin, wage subsidy, hiring incentives and training assistance are expected to reduce unemployment, Malaysia's labour market will still remain challenging this year.

A new sustainable and inclusive lifelong learning model is needed to tackle unemployment.



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Policymakers, businesses and individuals need to partner up to tackle unemployment. Here are five suggestions on how lifelong learning can tackle unemployment in Malaysia.

First, the government should maintain a coherent national policy to support lifelong learning with stable funding for skills training. Lifelong education should not be exploited as a tool for political propaganda or personal prejudice.

In 2018, the government allocated RM4.9 billion to deliver applied learning via its TVET Master plan. This plan was designed to develop skills relating to the Industrial Revolution 4.0 tech-

nologies. Such skills are critical to the country's economic growth.

Additionally, in Budget 2021, the government allocated RM1 billion for upskilling and reskilling programmes to train 200,000 trainees. A coherent national policy that is supported by adequate funding for policy implementation and training opportunities are crucial in tackling unemployment.

Second, permanent cooperation and coordination of the national lifelong learning policy are fundamental to reducing the unemployment rate. A well-known global leader of lifelong learning is the National Institute for Lifelong Education (NILE), Korea, under the Education, Science and Technology Ministry.

NILE coordinates at the national level to overcome the skills mismatch and skills churn to minimise structural unemployment. Under NILE, all citizens are guaranteed equal opportunities. It also has an academic credit bank system to recognise working experience, and informal and non-formal learning.

Malaysia needs to establish a similar national institute of lifelong education to ensure greater cooperation and coordination among the relevant ministries and institutions responsible for implementing employment policy, and training and education.

Third, higher learning institutions, skill-based institutions and relevant authorities need to move away from the current highly pedagogical supply-driven system. The Singapore government has launched SkillsFuture to align their education with the industry needs. As suggested by the 70/20/10 model, applied learning will allow individuals to acquire industry-relevant skills before joining the workforce.

An industry-led programme which mirrors the real job will reduce frictional unemployment. Students can enrol online or to a face-to-face bootcamp in the first year. Subsequently, they can join the industry as an apprentice and start working full-time while studying part-time.

Fourth, employers should develop forecasting tools to upskill

and reskill the existing workforce to meet future needs. Employers must conduct a regular audit of their workforce's current skills and future-fit skills required to meet global challenges and rapid digital transformation. Employers should act as a catalyst by investing in human capital, developing a positive environment and organise a virtual social platform to encourage lifelong learning.

Fifth, T-shaped individuals will reduce unemployability. A T-shaped individual possesses deep-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary expertise. To be a T-shaped individual, he or she needs to continuously acquire new knowledge and skills outside their job scope. Individuals must cultivate a mindset that lifelong learning is part of life.

As Peter Drucker said: "The only skill that will be important in the 21st century is the skill of learning new skills. Everything else will become obsolete over time."

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