Malaysia should address skill gap, attract specialised talents in digital industry

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A total of 74% respondents says the market lacks ability to attract specialised talent, as dependency on foreign talent for IT roles continues

by S BIRRUNTHA / pic by TMR FILE

SKILLS gaps in the local labour market, as well as inability to attract specialised talent are identified as the top two barriers to having adequate digital talent in Malaysia.

According to a recent digital talent survey conducted by the Strategic Change Management Office (SCMO) and Social and Economic Research Initiative (SERI), a total of 74.5% of respondents said that the gap between the entry-level skills and advanced skills required for work to be done is too big.

A total of 74% of respondents expressed that the market lacks ability to attract specialised talent, as dependency on foreign talent for information technology (IT) roles continues.

The digital talent survey had 70 respondents across micro, small and medium enterprises and large companies, representing a variety of sectors.

Around 46% of the companies were from the technology sector, 13% from the financial and insurance sector and 7% from both healthcare and professional services industries.

Additionally, the survey also revealed that big data analytics and digital marketing were the digital skills most sought after by employers, followed by artificial intelligence (AI), data science, cybersecurity and cloud computing.

Critical thinking and analysis, analytical thinking and innovation, as well as collaboration topped the list of soft skills for digital roles, followed by English proficiency and communication.

On average, only 4.8% of respondents felt that the existing labour market fully meets their digital talent needs.

Big data analytics, data science, cybersecurity, AI and cloud computing are the tech roles which tend to remain vacant for more than three months, according to survey respondents.

Commenting on the survey, SCMO CEO Fabian Bigar said it is important for the government, private sector, academia and all relevant stakeholders to move in tandem to create a constructive synergy in accelerating digital talent development.

He added that as the world begins shifting into higher gear towards digitalisation, there is a need to establish baselines and align strategies according to the realities around us.

"Decisions must be based on actual data analytics. The focus of the digital talent survey was to seek input on efforts to build an agile and competent digital talent pool in Malaysia, which has been one of the strategic thrusts under the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint.

"It is utmostly important for all of us to move in tandem to achieve the level of collective impact that would make a significant difference to our goal," he said during a forum on "Digital Talent in Malaysia: Challenges, Opportunities and Trends" organised by SCMO and SERI yesterday.

Meanwhile, SERI CEO Dr Helmy Haja Mydin emphasised that we must not lose focus on those who may not have the means or access to upskill, reskill, or cross-skill.

He noted that a global digital workforce, gig workers included, will need to meet the rigorous demands of the future of work.

"As we educate our children for jobs which have not come into existence, this fast-evolving landscape brings challenges and opportunities, resulting in apprehension or excitement, depending on who you speak to.

"It is vital that we come together with clarity and commitment to strengthen and further existing initiatives to ensure everyone, wherever they are in Malaysia, are able to grow up or grow further with skills and opportunities," he said.

Moving on, both SCMO and SERI reflected on a joint vision that greater collaboration between the government and the private sector is imperative in building a steady pool of digital talents to support the national digital transformation agenda under the MyDigital aspiration.

They also acknowledged that the Ministry of Human Resources plays a very crucial role in shaping and producing digital talent clusters in the country.