

Workforce Training: Driven by Demand

Increasing instructional paths emerge as companies sound the call for new types of skill sets.

by Dennis Boone

It's been said for years that many of the jobs that will exist five years from now don't exist today. Five years ago, that might have been said for the types of data-scientist roles companies are seeking to fill today, robotics programming/maintenance roles that continue to proliferate, or generative AI specialists.

And a lot more of that is on the way.

Given the horse-race pace of technological advances overrunning business owners and executives in this climate, it might be easy to think that the forces of change have HR and training departments outmanned and outgunned.

Throughout the Kansas City region, employers have a huge safety net of for-profit workforce training companies, publicly supported organizations, public and private university programming, industry associations, and even K-12 instruction focused on helping high school students move directly into the workforce before graduation.

With entire corporate work forces being asked to reskill and upskill,

the corporate training market in the U.S. is forecast to grow by an astounding \$12.9 billion between 2022 and 2027, according to the data analytics site Technavio.com. That growth, it said, "is driven by the emergence of cost-effective e-learning training modules, growing emphasis on flexible learning platforms, and rising emphasis on personalization in corporate training."

HurixDigital, the global workforce training company, lasers in on factors that are reshaping the workforce

for those whose jobs are likely to be affected by trends in advances like artificial intelligence and other tech gains. Further, it said, companies are increasingly embracing personalized learning and development—crafting their programs to meet the individual needs and goals of employees rather than producing large cohorts of assembly-line workers as interchangeable pieces in a staff.

That same tech wave is adding to the demand for specialized skills among workers, who will need that



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—Jake Akehurst, executive director,
UMKC TalentLink

training world, and they go well beyond classroom instruction for K-20 students.

High on that list is the need for upskilling and reskilling for those currently in the workforce, especially

training to remain relevant in their roles—or prepare to move into new roles, jobs, or even different career tracks. And remote work, while losing some of its pandemic-era allure, will continue to present new challenges for employers competing for workers who see that as a primary job benefit. According to the research firm McKinsey, 87 percent of employees who are offered remote-work positions end up accepting.

An emerging field of HR dynamics is mental health; issues that came to the forefront during the pandemic—burnout, stress and family demands chief among them—have raised corporate awareness of the need for additional support services.

Yet another megatrend reshaping the work force: The so-called gig economy, combined with traditional (and increasing) freelance and contract employment workers. Here, the U.S.



MEETING THE NEED: Elizabeth Kennedy, president of Missouri Western State University, touring the construction site for the new CTAC career training center on campus.



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 —Michelle Markey, CEO, SkillPath

isn't alone; a study of employment in 19 developed nations showed that nearly one worker in four held a full-time gig role, which compels their contracting partners to provide additional support and resources.

That plays out across this region's training ecosystem in multiple ways—types of instruction, venues, and delivery formats, among them.

“It's really interesting; the dynamics that have changed since COVID,” says Michelle Markey, CEO of Mission-based SkillPath, which provides a wide array of training modules. “Prior to COVID, a lot of the training taking place throughout the industry was in-person. For many of our corporate customers, that was really the only way to have effective training.”

The pandemic, she said, compelled companies to pivot—in some cases, going from no training sessions as workplace closures skyrocketed to acquiescing to virtual training. “We were long-term providers of live training, but the move to virtual was something we should have done earlier and were forced to do,” with surprisingly good results.

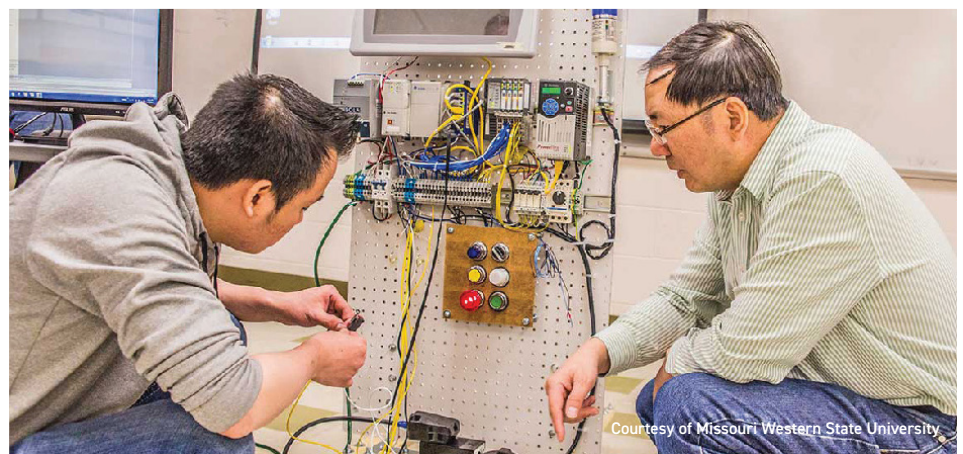
The push for more current and immediately relevant skills has taken hold at the high school level, as well.

The Talent Crunch

According to projections from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the following fields—all driven by tech advances—will see some of the greatest worker demand from employers by 2030:

- Data Science
- Cloud Computing
- Digital Marketing
- Machine Learning
- Artificial Intelligence
- Augmented Reality
- Software Development
- Cyber Security

In a collaboration between the University of Central Missouri and the Lee's Summit School district, the Missouri Innovation Center brings in students who will spend part of their junior year and all of their senior year undergoing instruction and actually logging work hours with prospective employers.



HANDS-ON: Instruction in skills for tech-reliant companies has driven an increase in numbers of courses and enrollees in regional training programs at all levels.

It began in 2011, says UCM program director Stan Elliott, because the business sector was looking for swift answers with specific goals. “One, it wanted to keep IT and engineering talent in the Kansas City region—they were tired of losing to both coasts. Two, they wanted to reduce the time to get a degree. Third, they wanted to reduce the cost of a bachelor's degree. And they wanted students to gain experience through an internship component and get their hands on talent before those kids left for college.”

More than 70 businesses and civic partners are now aligned with the MIC program, which is providing instruction for careers in fields like cyber security software development and engineering, advanced manufacturing and computer information systems, including business data analytics, artificial intelligence and machine learning.

Advanced manufacturing, in particular, promises explosive growth. Area organizations are affiliated with the Pittsburgh-based ARM Institute for advanced robotics in manufacturing. There, ARM's John Zappa says they are seeing “a real desire to make sure people have the skills they need to contribute quickly. These include certifications and short courses that can teach specific skills someone can apply. We're definitely seeing growth in certification programs that might not have been there in the past.”

The certification trend has fueled growth in enrollments and interest in programs offered at the universi-

ty level, as Jake Akehurst has seen in his role with UMKC's TalentLink program.

“A lot of what we're seeing,” Akehurst says, is an emphasis on skills, skills-based hiring, and training based on acquiring new skills,” he said. More companies, he said, are focusing on indicators of a capacity to embrace new skills.

“Skills-based hiring really shifts away from hiring folks solely based on their resume. It's an approach that says potential candidates are more than just their number of years of experience,” Akehurst said. They may have a degree in a certain field, but what are the other skills they may need—adaptability, soft skills, have they displayed experience in the work they're doing. And are there other abilities or skills they can acquire that aren't necessarily reflecting a degree path or a traditional resume?” **I**