

Upskilling efforts by the public sector

Learnings from around
the world

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New world.

New skills.



Upskilling journeys of governments around the world

In recent years, upskilling has become a focal point for many countries. COVID-19 and rapid digitalisation have further exacerbated growing skills gaps and underlined the importance of upskilling.

Governments around the world are acknowledging this fact, pursuing various initiatives to prepare citizens and civil servants to face the inevitable rise of a digital future with confidence. But the journey has not been without challenges.

Against the backdrop of the pandemic, PwC firms across the globe have intensified our support for governments in addressing their upskilling priorities and goals. Our shared experiences have given us insights into the broad challenges countries face in their upskilling journey and good practices governments globally have modelled to tackle them.

We summarise the key upskilling themes we have seen globally, learnings from various countries, and provide some examples of public sector upskilling initiatives being implemented.

While some of the initiatives may be unique to specific countries, they have a common, steadfast intent to ensure people have the opportunities to develop new skills.

We believe this collection of learnings from PwC's New World. New Skills. teams globally will provide you with ideas on how you can approach the next phase of upskilling for the nation.

Upskilling background and progress. Perspectives from across the PwC global network.



Singapore

- The government has been fostering a learning society, driving upskilling initiatives at both the citizen and public sector levels.
- Unveiled initiatives such as SGUnited, which subsidises on-the-job training opportunities in order to ensure jobs are protected during the pandemic¹.



Australia

- The government recognises that jobs in Australia are rapidly evolving.
- Intends to reform its Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems (through a new national skills agreement) to ensure upskilling funds are well-invested in relevant and high quality trainings for all Australians.⁴



Middle East

- In 2019, youth unemployment was more than twice as high⁸ as overall unemployment rates. Yet, many Middle Eastern countries continue to seek talent to fill their vacancies, suggesting a mismatch in skills.
- Initiatives to tackle this mismatch are being made by governments; for example, the UAE government partnered with LinkedIn to upskill 2,000 women for private sector jobs.⁹



Malaysia

- The government aims to attain high-income and developed nation status by 2025.²
- The government is looking to implement integrated government interventions to nourish lifelong learning (e.g. set up of TalentCorp).³
- Upskilling initiatives are geared towards achieving those goals.



Western Europe

- The European Union Commission has launched the "European Skills Agenda", with quantitative and qualitative goals set out clearly⁵.
- Skills mismatch⁶ and high unemployment rates are observed in several types of skills and regions (e.g. Spain⁷).
- Governments are implementing initiatives to understand the baseline skills of learners, and how to cater upskilling programmes to them.



South Africa

- High unemployment rates are high amongst citizens, especially youths (64% in July 2021¹⁰).
- South Africa is faced with the issue of creating jobs that are relevant for its citizens¹¹.
- While the government has limited upskilling plans to address this situation, they had pockets of upskilling success within the SA government, especially in managerial and leadership skills development.

Through our conversations, common upskilling themes and challenges faced by governments globally were surfaced, with many interesting solutions to meet these challenges shared

1

Upskilling in a pandemic

Across all the countries we have surveyed, upskilling efforts have intensified under the consistent and unrelenting backdrop of COVID-19.

While all countries experienced the pandemic intimately, differing upskilling initiatives emerged because of different situations and impact.

For example, in Australia, the government saw that the pandemic was accelerating the evolution of jobs, so they focused on helping citizens acquire skills for the future.¹²

Contrast that to Singapore, where priority was to safeguard employability by providing reskilling and on-the-job training opportunities for citizens¹³. These trainings were heavily subsidised to ensure citizens are future-ready and meaningful jobs are retained throughout the pandemic.

The media used for learning also had to evolve significantly. With the extensive closure of educational institutions, many institutions had to rethink their modes of delivering formal learning (e.g. online trainings, issuance of micro-credentials).

2

The government must take the lead

Governments must lead the charge in upskilling and businesses would follow.

Free market forces alone are not enough to push for wide-scale adoption of upskilling and learning initiatives across society. This could be due to various factors, including business priorities, absence of upskilling culture, lack of resources etc.

A cohesive national upskilling plan paired with the necessary investments can serve as the springboard to encourage more businesses and citizens to prioritise upskilling.

However, this does not mean that the private sector is free of responsibilities. Rather, they should complement the public sector's efforts by investing in skills that are critical for their business priorities. If they do not, they may risk falling behind their competitors.

Individuals, too, are responsible for taking the initiative to upskill themselves so that they are better positioned to adapt to the digital world

Indeed, upskilling does not happen in isolation, with many stakeholders like the public sector, businesses, educators, and individuals themselves playing a role. Someone must take the lead to ensure there's alignment. The government, we believe, is in a strong position to fill this role, bringing everyone together in support of the country's upskilling agenda.

Governments, businesses, and education providers should work together to build a strong and interconnected ecosystem committed to a comprehensive upskilling agenda.

- One of the four Call to Action in PwC and World Economic Forum's "Upskilling For Shared Prosperity" report

Economics of upskilling

Across all countries surveyed, large investments have been made by their respective governments in upskilling. How much and where these investments are made is key.

It may be natural to assume that the more investments poured into upskilling initiatives, the stronger the upskilling agenda. But that is not necessarily the case as there are other factors in play.

For example, compared to the rest of the world, South Africa spends a higher percentage of their GDP on education, yet basic literacy remains low.¹⁴ Weak education fundamentals may also mean South Africa's investment in upskilling for digital literacy may not result in the desired effect if most residents lack basic literacy and math skills.

This demonstrates why it is crucial to ensure upskilling funds are invested strategically only after careful studies. Assessments will have to answer some key questions: Where will we see maximum job creation opportunities? What new skills are needed for these jobs? And what gaps will exist that need to be addressed?

Upskilling needs to be planned holistically

Whether at an organisational or national level, a strong upskilling plan is one that's holistic. If that element is not present, it may result in upskilling being done disparately, which may limit success.

Our teams observed that countries with a committed upskilling agenda tend to have a more holistic and coordinated approach to upskilling nationwide.

For example, the Malaysian government outlined a clear goal: to attain high-income and developed nation status by 2030, and to build a learning society.

To this end, several upskilling initiatives were introduced, including the development of the Malaysian Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Master Plan.¹⁵ A national agency, TalentCorp, was also established to drive Malaysia's talent strategy.¹⁶



Each country faces unique challenges that the governments are addressing through various measures

Examples of some exemplary upskilling practices we have seen

Country: Singapore

Issue: Fundamental changes to ways of working disrupting the skills required of employees

Solution:

Since COVID-19, the government seized the opportunity to intensify workforce upskilling and reskilling efforts with the SGUnited Jobs and Skills Package. Through this initiative, the government subsidises companies to hire trainees for various job roles, providing not just job support, but also upskilling opportunities to its citizens.

Country: Malaysia

Issue: Urgency of upskilling is not commensurate with investment in upskilling

Solution:

The government set a clear goal and objective for upskilling its citizens - to be a high-income nation by 2030. From that vision, the Malaysian TVET Master Plan was born, where a national strategic workforce planning took place to identify workforce gaps from 2017 to 2050. TVET training programmes are then evaluated and tailored to support the closing of identified skills gaps.

Country: Australia

Issue: Coordination with multiple stakeholders involved in the upskilling agenda

Solution:

The federal government brought all state governments together to align and commit to a national upskilling programme. All relevant parties signed an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), signalling their commitment to prioritising the urgent need for reskilling citizens.¹⁷ The government then partnered with different private organisations such as 'Skills Service Organisation' to support and cascade training packages to the wider community.

Country: South Africa

Issue: Knowing what areas of upskilling to invest in

Solution:

PwC is providing skills audit services to the government, and has developed a skills framework for public agencies. As every organisation is unique, this required a careful understanding and consideration of priorities and critical skills needed. Key was to avoid 'jumping on the bandwagon' and investing in trending skills without clear objectives.

On upskilling in Singapore:

65%

of Singapore respondents are concerned about automation putting many people's jobs at risk.¹⁸

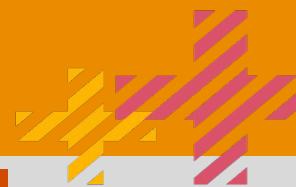
2 times

as likely for younger people to receive opportunities to improve skills than older people.¹⁹

81%

of Singapore respondents say they are motivated to learn new skills or completely re-train.²⁰

PwC's global network of firms is supporting many governments on their upskilling agendas at the national and public sector levels



Citizen upskilling

UNICEF - Generation Unlimited

- PwC is collaborating with UNICEF (a United Nations agency) to help upskill millions of young people around the world.
- The collaboration supports Generation Unlimited ²¹, a multi sector partnership aimed at helping 1.8 billion young people transition from school to work by 2030.

World Economic Forum - Upskilling for Shared Prosperity

- PwC and World Economic Forum collaborated together to make the case for upskilling from an economic perspective ²².
- This was done through PwC's economic modelling, presenting the net economic impact of closing the skills gap across industries, countries, and regions.

The Malaysian TVET Master Plan

- PwC identified and analysed the demand and supply gap of TVET workforce and graduates from 2017 to 2050.
- Evaluated and recommended improvement areas for TVET programmes offered by public and selected private TVET institutions.
- Evaluated industry involvement in assisting TVET institutions in curriculum design, industry training and instructor exchange programmes.

Australia's National Foundation Skills Training Package

- PwC developed a training package that focuses on core skills such as language, literacy and numeracy skills.
- Industry-agnostic and can be applied to all Australians.
- Embedded into existing national competency framework.

Skills Services Organisation

- PwC is supporting the Australian government as a Skills Services Organisation (SSO) to support in the development and review of training packages. ²³

Public sector upskilling

Singapore government agency competency framework and career roadmaps

- PwC supported a Singapore government agency in assessing its future job roles, identifying the critical competencies required for these job roles and career pathways available for these roles (within the agency). These were ultimately aligned to the whole-of-government's rationalised competencies.

Malaysian Digital Government Capability Framework

- PwC assessed the competency readiness of the civil service workforce, then designed a digital competency framework comprising 17 organisational and eight individual competencies.
- With this framework, the client was able to update their learning catalogue around the Digital Government Competency Framework and piloted Digital Accelerator Programme to groom selected cohorts.
- Various Digital Initiatives were further introduced as proof of concept for consideration

Talent Observatory for a municipality of a major European city

- PwC is developing a Talent Observatory for the client, an end-to-end upskilling solution using AI for skills analysis and job and training matching.
- This system will identify tech and skills trends, assess talent pipeline, understand skills gap, and match available skills profiles with open job positions.

South African whole-of-government skills framework

- PwC developed the framework together with the Department of Public Service and Association.
- Incorporated PwC's New World. New Skills philosophy and guiding principles into framework, providing clarity on the skills and behaviour required of public servants.

We have done this before. Let us support you in your upskilling initiatives



With our first-hand experience in upskilling, we can help the public sector:

- **Upskill civil servants**
- **Build the foundations of a learning culture among citizens**
- **Reform education**
- **Address attrition and motivation challenges in relation to remote/online learning**

Upskilling is more than just training. It needs to be all-encompassing, covering key building blocks.

| What skills are needed now and in the future? | What is the learning strategy? | How do you build a continuous learning culture? | How do you impart effective learning? | How do you ensure your efforts to upskill result in real change? |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| Assess for gaps | Build a skills strategy | Lay the foundation | Upskill your people | Evaluate return on investment |
| What are future workforce and skills requirements? | How should learning be imparted? | How do you drive leadership behaviour? | How do you incentivise learning? | How do you measure Return on Learning investment? |
| What are the current workforce capabilities? | How much digital vs face-to-face channels to be implemented? | How can you bring learning to life and drive bottom-up innovation? | How do you build digital skills? | How do you track employee engagement? |
| What is the current learning culture? | What courses should be driven and what is the priority? | How is learning used and implemented on a daily basis? | How do you target personal transformation journeys? | How do you measure and monitor learning outcomes? |
| What gaps exist and which one has a priority? | What should be the L&D organisational structure? | | How do you design an engaging learning experience? | |



We have teams in PwC Singapore that are specialised in workforce transformation. Guided by the principles of our upskilling building blocks above, we can help you plan, assess, and implement upskilling strategies to build a strong and resilient talent ecosystem within the nation. As change is part and parcel of transformation initiatives, we can also support you in managing change effectively through the right interventions.

Our specialists at PwC's Academy, meanwhile, can provide you not only with a range of development programmes, but also customised learning pathways in line with identified priorities.

We are committed to narrowing the digital divide and want to play our part in supporting Singapore in upskilling and re-skilling both citizens and civil servants, especially through this pandemic. With our capabilities and resources from PwC's global network, we believe we can do just that.

Start a conversation with us today.

Speak to us



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