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# APAC skills report

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## Are APAC employers providing upskilling opportunities in line with employee needs and expectations?

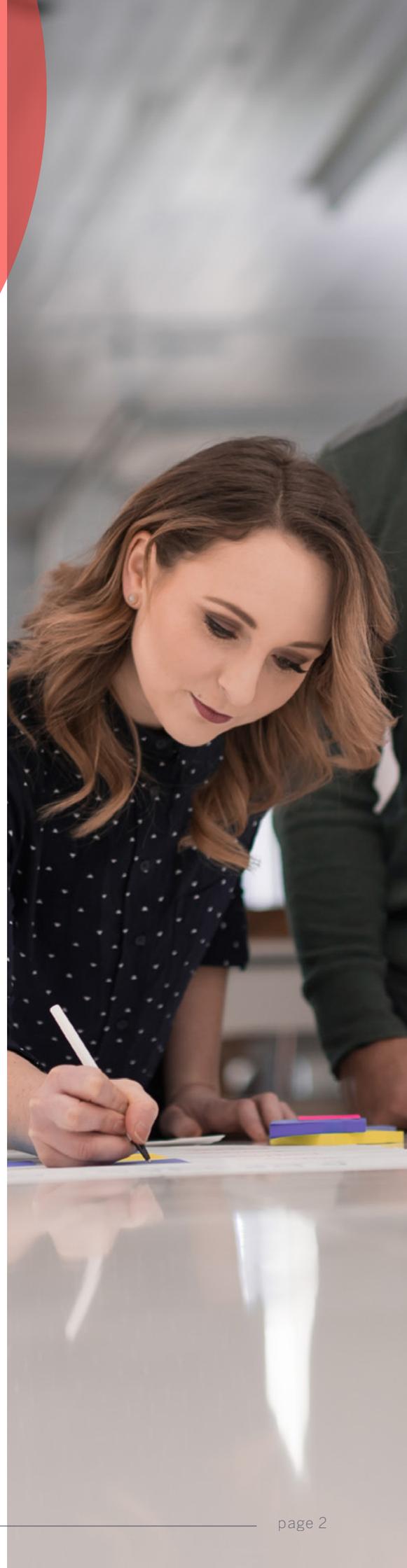
It's no surprise, Covid-19 has fundamentally changed the way we view the world. For businesses, it's driven the swift adoption of more robust and agile operating models, with those able to adapt quickly to changing market conditions better placed to maintain competitive advantage. For their workforce however, the fast-paced change may have left them contemplating the shelf-life and relevancy of their skill sets for the future.

We surveyed 620 professionals across five key APAC countries - Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, Philippines, and Singapore – to understand how employee sentiment towards skill development has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. We uncovered the skills APAC employees view as essential to develop to remain relevant in a dynamic job market, and may not be at the top of their employers priority list.

The APAC Skills Report findings suggest that a large proportion of professionals in APAC are re-thinking the future – whether this is to accelerate career progression or carve out a new path for themselves, skills development has become substantially more of a focus for professionals in APAC over the last 12 months.

If employers want to win the war on talent and create a workforce that is future-ready, and future-focused, they will need to:

1. Priorities skills development to attract and retain critical talent
2. Undertake a skills gap analysis, and increase upskilling opportunities in their current workforce
3. Make sure employee groups aren't being overlooked and provide equal opportunities for skill development, across their workforce.
4. Adopt automation, while simultaneously upskilling a workforce to take advantage of it



## Has the pandemic impacted APAC employee's skills confidence?



During the pandemic, acquiring new or furthering existing skill sets became more of a focus for employees, with 71% of the APAC professionals alerting to the fact that the pandemic has changed the skills required to perform their jobs. In India and the Philippines, 73% of employees feel their skill set needs upgrading. In comparison only 50% of Malaysian employees citing the pandemic changed the need to acquire new skills for their current role.

An evident generational gap can be witnessed in the skills survey findings. 70% of Gen Z and 73% of Millennials more concerned with the pandemic negatively affecting their current skill set relevancy. In comparison, only 43% of baby boomers show concern.

Do employees in APAC feel their skills will be completely obsolete in five years?

No, but they are less confident than right now.

89% of APAC employees are confident that they have the right skill sets for their current role, but looking ahead five years, confidence drops to just 73%. This suggests growing doubt from employees surrounding the relevancy of their current skills to enable future career ambitions and puts a spotlight and focus on upskilling to remain relevant in the labour market.

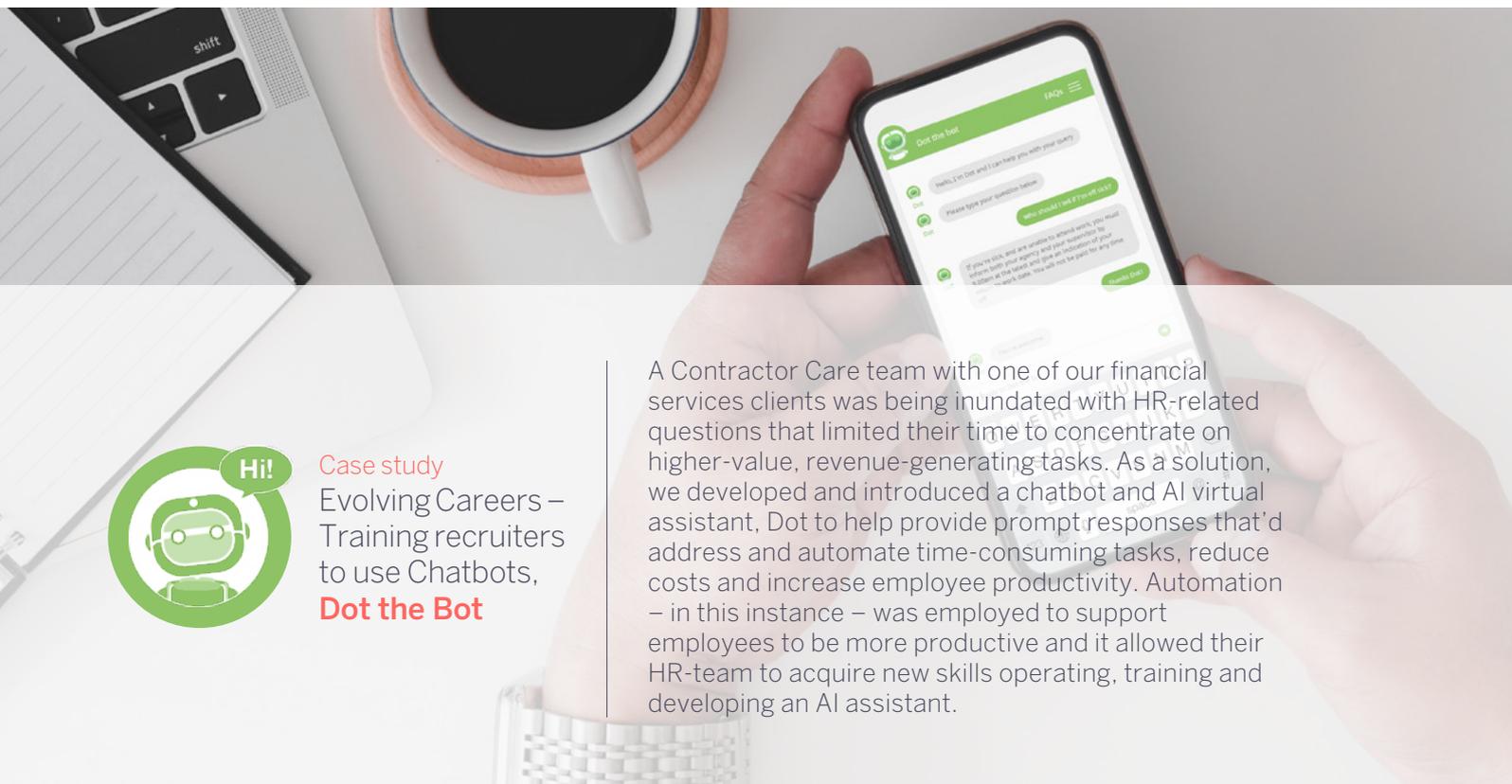


## Is automation a key concern for employees?

There is a perception among employees that automation may partially, or completely eliminate jobs in the near future. Our survey reveals that this is somewhat true. APAC employees do feel threatened by the increasing move towards automation, with 63% very or extremely concerned about automation replacing part, or all of their current job.

This concern is more strongly felt by professionals based in Singapore (69%) and India (51%) compared to those in Hong Kong (35%). Younger generations also show more concern with 70% of Gen Z feeling very or extremely concerned by automation.

At an industry-level, employees in Consulting/Professional Services (23%) are least bothered by automation whereas those in Technology/Telecommunications (73%) and Manufacturing (66%) are very or extremely concerned with the prospect of automation removing the need for their roles.



**Case study**  
Evolving Careers –  
Training recruiters  
to use Chatbots,  
**Dot the Bot**

A Contractor Care team with one of our financial services clients was being inundated with HR-related questions that limited their time to concentrate on higher-value, revenue-generating tasks. As a solution, we developed and introduced a chatbot and AI virtual assistant, Dot to help provide prompt responses that'd address and automate time-consuming tasks, reduce costs and increase employee productivity. Automation – in this instance – was employed to support employees to be more productive and it allowed their HR-team to acquire new skills operating, training and developing an AI assistant.

“Employers can alleviate concerns around automation by educating employees about the overall business benefits that automation brings and upskilling current employees into more advanced, supervisory and specialist roles in departments where automation is perceived as a key threat to employees”

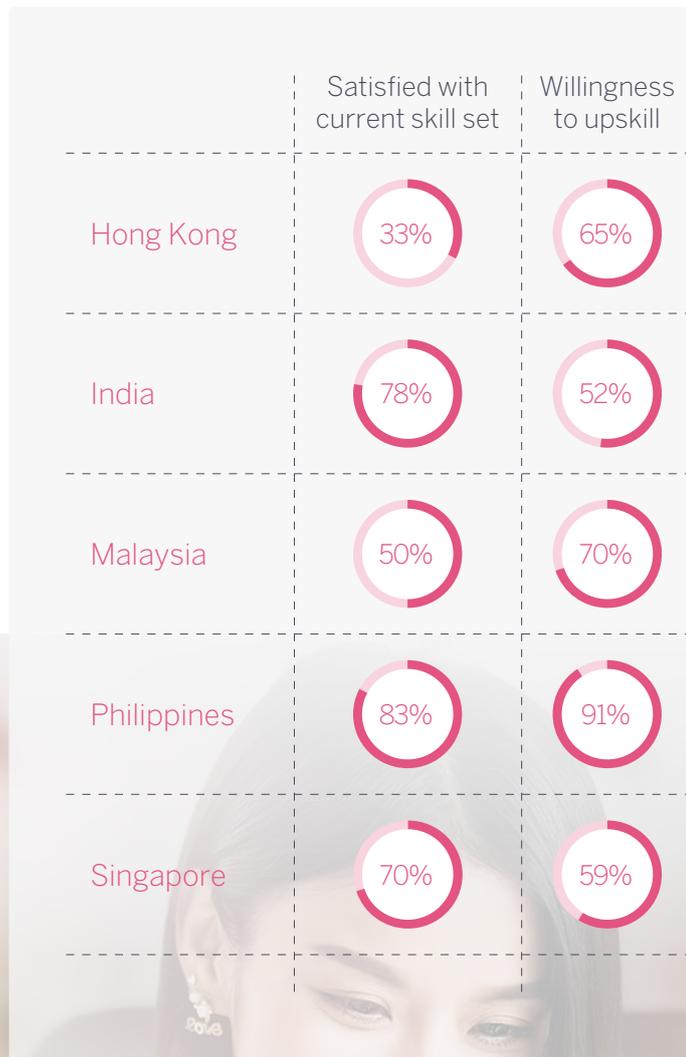
– Bhavesh Kataria, Head of India, Resource Solutions

## Which employees are more motivated to upskill and why?

The pandemic and looming prospects of automation have accelerated employee's propensity to upskill to remain relevant in their current role and be better placed for future career prospects. Employees from Consulting/Professional Services (63%), Technology/Telecommunication (59%), and Manufacturing (52%) display the most interest in upskilling.

Survey respondents from Hong Kong are the least satisfied with their current skillset (33%) but 65% report an extreme desire to upskill. This upskilling opportunity gap also exists in Malaysia and the Philippines. In contrast, employees in India and Singapore seem less satisfied with their current skills sets, and less willing to upskill. Generational differences towards upskilling were also identified in our survey findings, with 73% of Gen Z's showing extreme interest in upskilling compared to 60% of Baby Boomers.

For employers, being armed with intelligence about their employee populations current skill set, and the focus employees place of developing future skills, will help inform a robust training and development strategy that maximises employee participation and contributes to overall business goals.



## Progression or passion? What motivates employees to learn a new skill?

We've established that the majority (92%) of employees in APAC are very or extremely willing to upskill to remain relevant in the labour market, but what are the main drivers behind this decision?

Overall, skill development to facilitate 'career progression' was reported as the motivator for 35% of APAC professionals, followed by 'boost employability/future job security' (28%) and 'career mobility/enable new career paths' (25%). Upskilling to fulfill passion/sense of purpose' was a key motivator for only 12% of respondents, implying that getting ahead in work life and developing a robust skill set to enable this are key to APAC employees.

Delving into insights from employees in varying sectors it is apparent that this differs among industries, locations and by other demographics, such as age. Hong Kong employees (52%) heavily weight career progression and career mobility/enable new career paths (29%) above others, suggesting that employees look to progress in their profession as opposed to merely remaining relevant in the workforce.

Those in Technology/Telecommunications and Manufacturing had the highest percentage of employees learning new skills to 'enable career to mobility/enable new career paths' suggesting the fear of automation, which employees from both sectors see as a looming threat, may be driving the decision to upskill to enable a move in to a related or emerging field.

The youngest generation of professionals i.e., Gen Z came out as the most future-proof enthusiasts with 70% citing 'career progression' as their main motivation to upskill.

### What drives APAC employees to upskill?

1. Career progression
2. Boost employability/future job security
3. Career mobility/enable new career paths



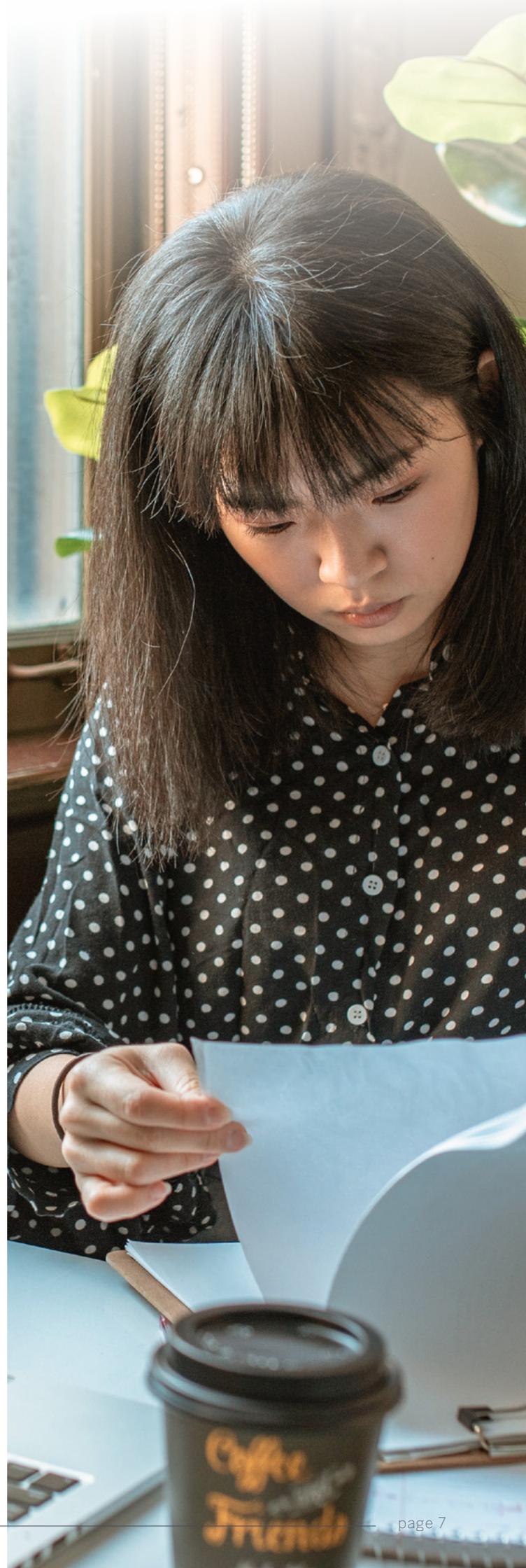
## Has the pandemic impacted employee attitudes towards skill development?

The pandemic has invariably raised the value of skill development in employees' eyes. This shift has been visible in APAC, with 76% of employees citing that skill development has become more of a focus since the pandemic began. Hong Kong and Filipino employees have the greatest focus on skill development, with 85% telling us it's become far more of a focus.



A similar pattern can be seen across industry sectors in APAC, with between 73%-76% of employees from Technology, Telecommunications, Manufacturing, Consulting, Professionals Services, Banking, and Financial Services citing that pandemic has increased their focus towards skill development.

Our findings also show that Gen Z and Millennials are more focussed on skill development (90% and 78%) whereas only 57% of Gen Y feel they have been more focused on skills development during the pandemic than at other times.



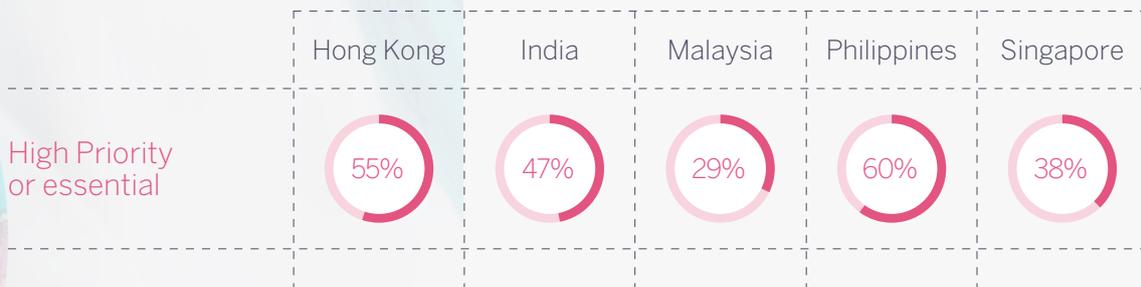


## Are employers assisting employees to upskill, in the right area, at the right time?

Whilst employees have been re-evaluating the relevancy of their skill sets over the last 12 months, have employers taken note of the growing void and communicated their commitment to, and focus on upskilling employees?

**46%** of APAC employees think their current employer sees upskilling of employees as high-priority or essential. This sentiment varies across the region, with employees in Malaysia and Singapore noting less of an emphasis on upskilling support from employers than those in Hong Kong or the Philippines.

Employer focus on upskilling employees by country



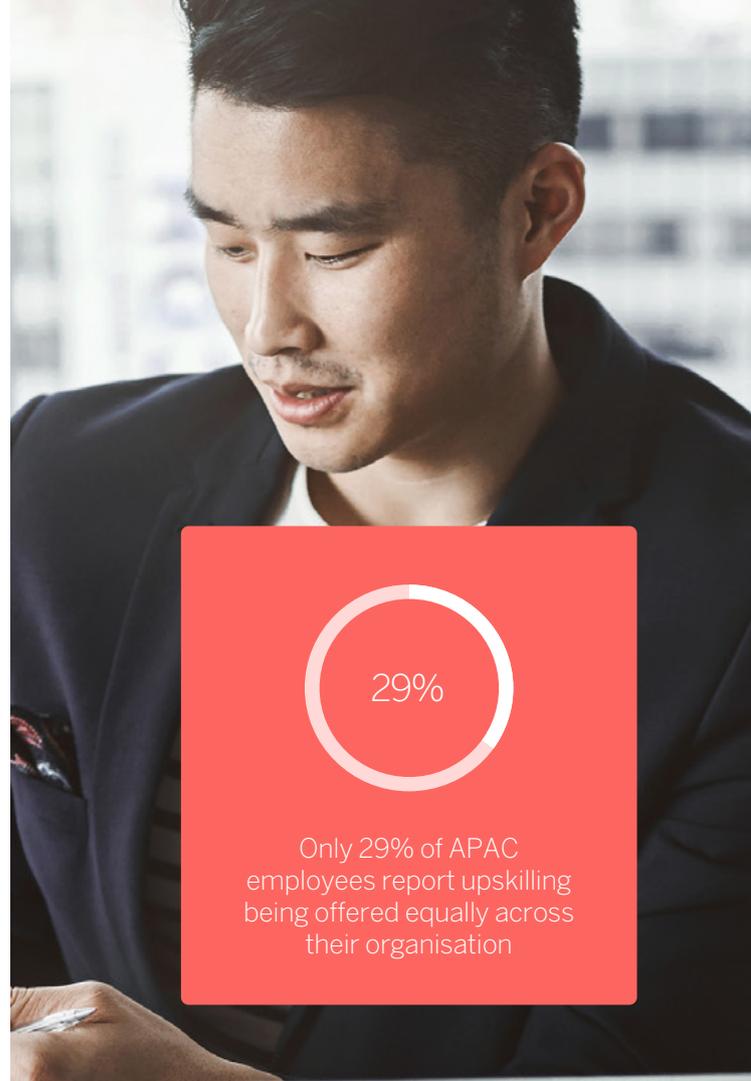
Employees in Technology/ Telecommunications (55%), Insurance (54%), Engineering (50%) and Manufacturing (48%) sectors are most confident in their employers prioritising upskilling. This drops to 35% for employees in the Banking/Financial Services, 29% in Construction and 24% in Healthcare/ Pharmaceutical sector.

Gen Z (72%) are most optimistic that their employers are prioritising upskilling for employees, as opposed to only 37% of Baby Boomers.

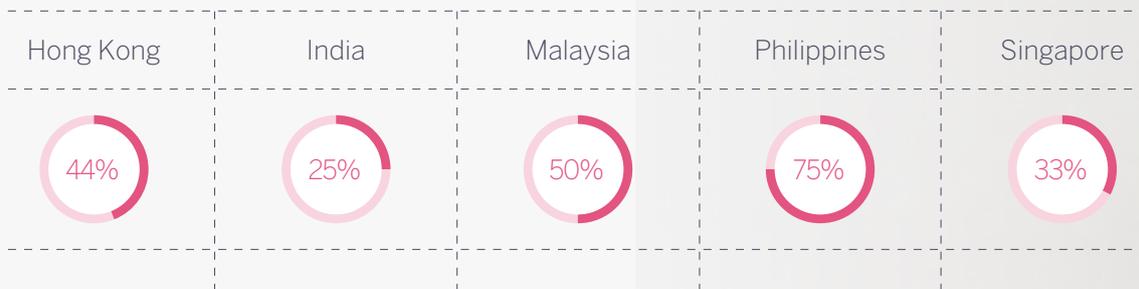
## Are employers giving everyone equal opportunity to upskill?

The good news is that 96% of APAC employers are offering upskilling opportunities, but access to it is not evenly distributed throughout organisational layers. Only 29% of APAC employees report upskilling being offered equally across the organisation, with 60% reporting upskilling only was offered to certain groups. 34% feel only managers and above are provided with the upskilling opportunities, while a further 12% report upskilling is offered to certain departments only.

This disparity is experienced across the region, with 75% of Filipino employees citing all employees have access to upskilling opportunities. In contrast, only 25% of Indian employees experience the same.



### % of employers offering upskilling to all employees



“Businesses that are struggling to future-proof their talent pipeline and succeed in an ever growing talent-short market, must seize the opportunity to create this talent from within. With 92% of APAC employees very or extremely willing to upskill themselves to remain relevant, this eager employee pool should be the first port call in creating a sustainable business continuity plan. Identifying the available, and teachable skills within your current workforce and aligning upskilling opportunities that both excite and enable your workforce to remain engaged, is the first building block in building a future-proof workforce”

– David Barr, Managing Director, Resource Solutions

## Personal or professional time. Who is responsible for upskilling?

Overall, the top two reasons employees who are willing to upskill, but are unable to do so, were 'workload' and 'lack of time outside of work' at 31% respectively. This was followed closely by a 'lack of opportunities provided by employer' at 26%.

Employees in Hong Kong and Singapore reported 'lack of time outside work' as the main reason preventing them from upskilling, alluding potentially to the longer working hour culture experienced within these countries. This differed to employees in India, Malaysia, and the Philippines where 'workload' was cited as the main reason for not upskilling.

“Whether employees view upskilling as a personal or professional objective, time, or their lack-off, seem to be a mitigating factor in enabling employees to upskill. This creates an opportunity for employers to play a bigger part in their employees' professional journey by providing the flexibility and space to upskill, at a time that works for everyone”

– Adam Whitehouse, Manager, Operational Learning & Organisational Development, Resource Solutions



### Case study

JPMorgan Chase announced a \$350 million, five-year global initiative (starting 2021) to prepare for the future of work and meet the growing demand for skilled workers.

New Skills at Work focuses on creating economic mobility and career pathways for underserved populations, and, for the first time, will help forecast emerging skillsets for JPMorgan Chase employees and proactively develop new training programs to prepare the firm's workforce for changes in technology and business.

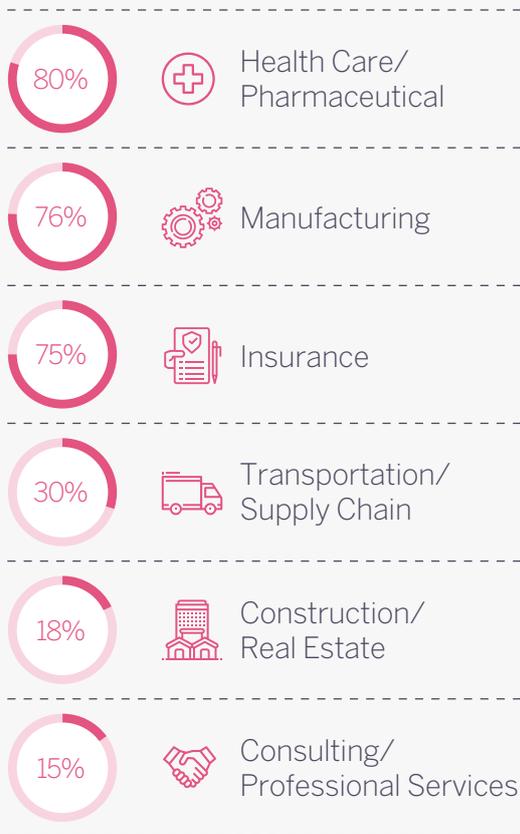
## Have employers increase upskilling opportunities for employees over the last 12 months?

Yes, but not in every APAC location. There has been increased focus from employers with 66% of APAC professionals reporting that their employer has increased upskilling opportunities for them over the last 12 months. 21% report no change in their company's development offering, while a further 13% of employers have decreased the number of upskilling opportunities for employees.

Employers in Singapore, India and Hong Kong have placed most focused on providing more upskilling opportunities for their people, with over 65% of employers increasing the number of upskilling opportunities, while for 47% of Philippines employers' training and development have remained stagnant. 14% of Malaysian employees reported a decrease in upskills opportunities by their employer over the past 12 months.

The economic downturn provided by the pandemic has affected key industry sectors, which have in turn effected the focus on upskilling opportunities for employees residing within those sectors.

## Industries with the most focus on employee upskilling over the last 12 months





## What type of skill development is on the radar for APAC employees?

With the looming sense of automation replacing jobs and the influx of technology, digital platforms and tools being introduced as a response to COVID-19, employees are looking for opportunities to upskill to remain relevant in an increasingly competitive labour market. We wanted to ascertain what types of skills are most important to develop in the eyes of employees, providing a window for employers to align the training and development of their employees accordingly.

### Companies enabling accelerated digital upskilling

Dell Technologies launched a tech skills accelerator in Singapore to develop knowledge and skills in cloud computing, data protection and management, data science, and big data analytics for up to 3,000 fresh graduates, mid-career professionals, and students.

AWS hopes to help 29 million people grow their technical skills by 2025, providing free cloud computing skills training in over 200 countries.

Microsoft is also looking to offer several digital reskilling and upskilling programs for both students and the working professionals across Indonesia, Malaysia Singapore, and Thailand.

### What skills are important?

When asked what sort of skills employees felt most important to develop, 59% of APAC respondents cited Digital Skills (including software development, cyber security, data & analytics, cloud computing) will be most important to develop moving forward. Delving into findings at an individual country-level, this resonated closely with overall findings in Hong Kong (67%) and India (63%). Those from the Philippines (39%) and Singapore (40%) also cited digital skills development as most important, but this was more closely followed by developing a mix of Interpersonal and Personal skills. Malaysian employees, in contrast, believe it most important to develop Interpersonal skills (such as empathy, influence, negotiation and conflict resolution), listing this at the top of their future skill development plans.

## Are employers offering upskilling in line with employee expectations?

With the focus on improving digital skills, what specifically are APAC employees focused on developing?

The survey findings suggest that while a mix of hard and soft skills are important for APAC professionals to develop, there is preference to develop hard skill sets. Topping the list of hard skills employees seek to develop are Data Analytics, Digital Marketing, and AI & Machine Learning. In a market where businesses need to make data-led decisions to maintain competitive advantage, employers can ensure the upskilling opportunities available to employees are aligned to driving their business forward into the future.

In contrast to this, the top three soft skills that APAC professionals are keen to develop include creativity, organisational development and analytical thinking. These skills sets are connected complex problem solving and driving innovation - both hugely important for those in, or pipelined to uptake managerial roles.

### Top 5 skills employees want

	Hard skills	Soft skills
1	Data Analyst/Scientist	Creativity & Originality
2	Digital Marketing	Organisational Development
3	AI & Machine Learning	Analytical Thinking
4	Business Development	Management
5	Information Security	Critical Thinking

The other hard skills listed as a priority for APAC employees include: Database & Network, Robotics, Strategic Advisors, FinTech, Mechanics, Active Learning, Technology use, Quality Control, Technology Instillation, Technology Design, User Experience. Additional soft skills sought by APAC employees are: Emotional Intelligence, Resilience, Stress Tolerance, Persuasion & Negotiation, Critical Thinking, Co-ordination & Time Management.

### Most wanted skills by industry

 Banking/Finance <b>Organisational Development</b>	 Hospitality/Retail <b>Data Analytics</b>
 Construction/Real Estate <b>Big Data</b>	 Insurance <b>Digital Marketing</b>
 Consulting/Professional Services <b>Data Analytics</b>	 Manufacturing <b>Digital Marketing</b>
 Engineering/Energy/Utilities <b>Software Development</b>	 Media/Communications <b>Data Analytics</b>
 FMCG/Consumer Goods <b>Business Development</b>	 Technology/Telecommunications <b>Data Analytics</b>
 Health Care/Pharmaceutical <b>AI &amp; Machine Learning</b>	

## Case study

### Reskilling during a crisis

At the height of the COVID-19 crisis, one of our healthcare clients needed to recruit and onboard thousands of people to fill various administrative and medical positions in temporary field hospitals, vaccine distribution, customer service and more. To support the recruitment team assigned to the project Resource Solutions upskilled and redeployed a large team back-office staff to support the effort activating furloughed and laid-off employees to help fill 600,000 shifts and employ 17,500 healthcare professionals. The project was a resounding success – both supporting the fight against COVID-19 as well as marshalling internal resources and meet surge in business on short notice within a tight time frame.



“Today’s skills will not match the jobs of tomorrow, and newly acquired skills may quickly become obsolete.”

– ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work, 2019

Pandemic and automation have changed the trajectory of workflows and workplaces. By 2022, 54% of all employees will require significant upskilling, according to the World Economic Forum. This has led to rethinking the validity of the job and the workforce. In both cases, the employee has to contemplate transitioning to another role or upskill to remain relevant. The organisations that reskill and upskill the workforce will be the ones taking advantage of a skilled, engaged workforce in a talent-short market.

## Contact us

Talk with one of our RPO specialists to help you find the critical talent you need to drive your future business ambitions.

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