

Leadership Strategies to Closing the Critical Skills Gap: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Skill is defined as the knowledge, competencies, capabilities, education, and traits required to do a task or job allocated to a certain individual. It is common for a lack of needed information to prevent a firm or organization from achieving its goals. Assigned individuals cannot execute the work, resulting in a skill gap. In this context, identifying talent gaps in various areas is critical. Bridging skills gaps requires effective strategy, but most importantly, it depends on a leader who acquires the proper knowledge and skills to navigate change and lead their team in upskilling and reskilling in ways that suit the organization. The principle objective of this paper is to review the skills gaps in the Canadian automotive industry and successful strategies that automotive business leaders use to fill skills gaps in post-pandemic. The primary focus is reviewing the printed and documented material on skills gaps to find successful strategies. The study findings were derived from a comprehensive review of existing literature. The results indicate that there exists a deficit of skills in both the formal and informal sectors, thereby impeding individuals' ability to secure employment. Results indicate that Canada, a developed nation with an advanced economy, ought to prioritize improving its human capital through professional development courses and programs. It is recommended that educational institutions conduct further research on the skills gaps to align their training curricula with formal and informal labor market requirements.

Keywords: leadership strategies; skills gaps; automotive industry

INTRODUCTION

The term skill can apply to broad cognitive and non-cognitive talents (formation processing skills, collaboration, and problem-solving) and knowledge and abilities related to a given job, occupation, or industry (Restuccia & Taska, 2018). According to Oliver and Turton, talents are a collection of an individual's aptitudes and characteristics. It represents a person's ability to do various tasks with distinction. Every task assigned must provide a positive outcome for the employee to be efficient and meet the company's expectations. However, incongruity occurs when a person fails to balance the skills required by the business (Hart et al., 2007).

The manufacturing industry is now experiencing a skills gap. The disparity has been progressively widening over an extended period but has reached unprecedented levels in the post- 2008 economic era. Manufacturers are now encountering challenges in filling vacant positions as a consequence of an insufficient pool of qualified and experienced candidates.

Canada is a country characterized by its diverse range of employment opportunities. Individuals may opt for a job role that aligns with their competencies, taking into account their educational background and work-related expertise (Akbar, 2022).

To mitigate potential problems, maintaining a consistent professional focus for a minimum of one year is recommended before making any significant alterations or transitions in one's career trajectory (Weaver & Osterman, 2017).

Following an extended duration of employment within a particular industry or occupation, an individual may opt to transition to a different career path based on job opportunities in the labour market and their personal skill set (Volkov et al., 2022).

The mentioned Figure 1 may appear implausible, but it is not arbitrarily derived. It is projected that the manufacturing sector would have an increase of 3.4 million employment opportunities throughout the next decade, in response to the rising demand for manufacturing activities. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that up to 60 percent of these positions would stay vacant owing to a dearth of suitably qualified individuals. Given that just 1.4 million of these newly created positions can be successfully filled by individuals, the sector would consequently face a significant deficit of 2 million personnel, as shown in Figure 1.

The skills gap is widening

Over the next decade nearly 3 ½ million manufacturing jobs will likely be needed and

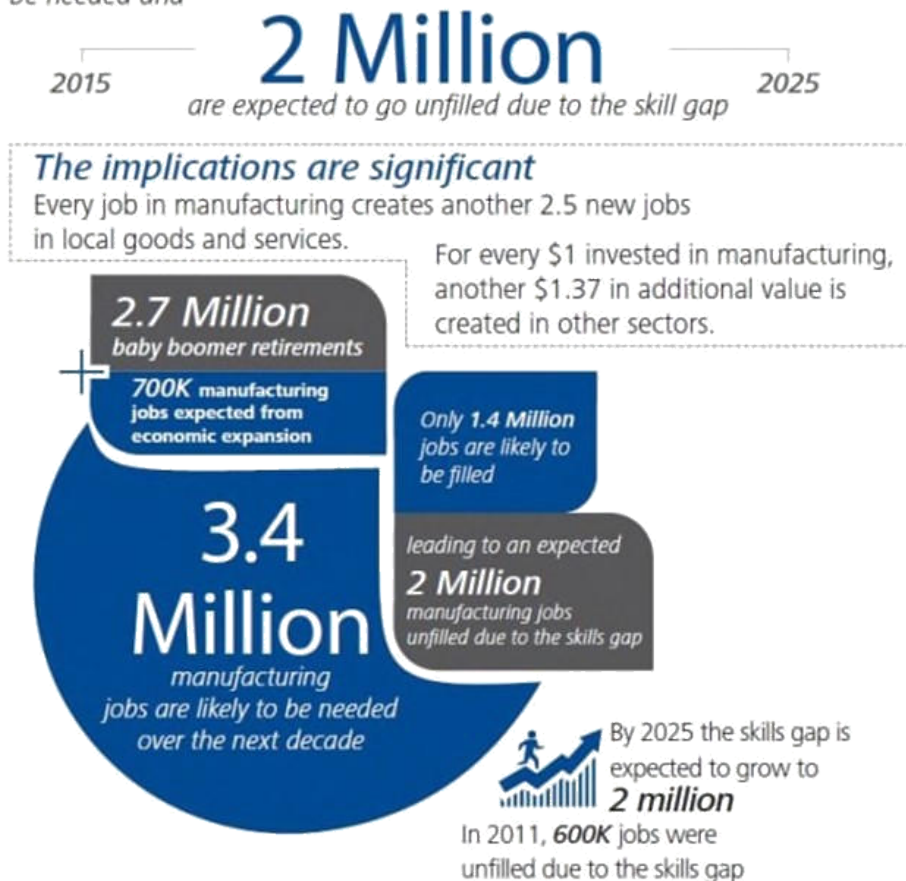


FIGURE 1: Skills Gaps Affecting the Manufacturing Industry.

Source: Deloitte and Manufacturing Institute, The Skills Gap in Manufacturing 2015 and Beyond.

According to a survey conducted by ManpowerGroup in 2018, 41% of employers reported experiencing difficulties filling job vacancies (Santandreu Calonge et al., 2019). The poll found that while high-demand positions may not necessarily mandate university-level education, post-secondary training is still a prerequisite (Santandreu Calonge et al., 2019). According to a report released in May 2018, Canada generated a total of one million job opportunities over the course of the preceding three years. During the initial quarter of 2019, the number of unfilled job vacancies exceeded 435,000 (Chand & Tung, 2019; Chen & Mehdi, 2019).

Although the number of job openings has increased annually, companies continue encountering difficulties in identifying employees with the requisite expertise and skills to fulfil their pressing requirements. To provide a contextual framework, it can be stated that a dearth of skills arises when an employer encounters difficulty in appointing a suitable candidate for a job opening, despite receiving numerous applications, owing to the absence of a particular skill set that is imperative for the given role (Abdullah, Humaidi, and Shahrom 2020). Consequently, novel methodologies are required to assess the supply and demand of talent within the workforce. The escalation in the number of knowledge workers engaged in Canada's economy and the corresponding increase in the number of companies encountering challenges in locating proficient candidates have prompted inquiries concerning the accessibility of skills in the country (Mahboubi, 2022; Zarifa et al., 2019).

The labour market may tolerate two distinct types of skill disparities. Inadequate qualification is a circumstance in which an employee lacks the requisite knowledge for the role assigned to them within the organization (Leveson, 2000; Motowidlo, Borman, and Schmit, 2014). The potential discrepancy between the competencies of the workforce and the competencies sought by employers has raised concerns among certain members of Congress regarding the broader economic ramifications. For several decades, employer reports have consistently indicated that the reason for unfilled job openings is the inadequacy of qualified applicants. There are concerns regarding the adequacy of the skill sets possessed by workers, particularly those that are considered mid-level or higher-level skills, which are sought after by employers (Motowidlo et al., 2014).

This inadequacy may hinder employers from acquiring the necessary capabilities to operate, innovate, expand, and compete, ultimately decelerating economic growth (Abid et al., 2022). Additional concerns pertain to the predicament of labourers and the proposition that disparities in competencies between individuals and the demands of their present or forthcoming occupations could constitute a significant factor in joblessness, rendering the skill sets held by certain groups of workers outdated. In the current economy that is driven by knowledge, businesses consider quality individuals and refined skills as the primary source of competitive advantage (Chen & Mehdi, 2019).

SKILLS GAP

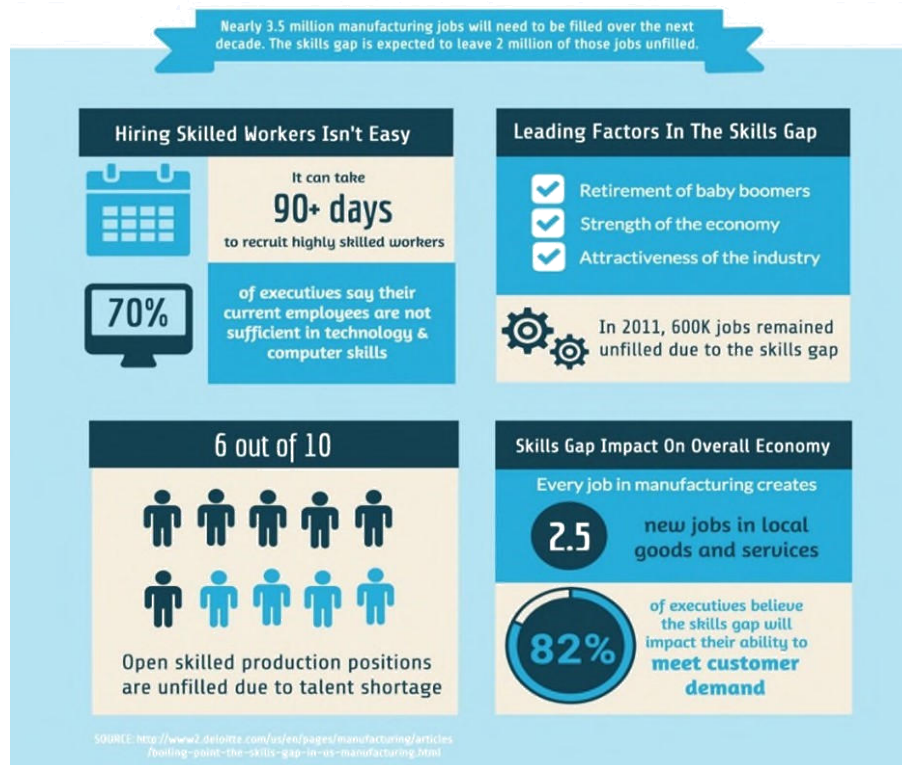


FIGURE 2: Skills Gaps in the Automotive Industry (Vanarsdall, 2023).

The skills gaps influence salaries and benefits in the manufacturing business, which is the greatest automation today (Mishel, 2022; Restuccia and Taska 2018). In 2015, the average U.S. manufacturing worker earned \$81,289 in earnings and benefits, compared to \$63,830 for nonfarm workers. Furthermore, 92% of industrial workers were qualified for health insurance (Weaver & Osterman, 2017). The automobile industry's need for trained labour is only projected to grow. According to Deloitte analysis, about 3.5 million manufacturing jobs would be required over the next decade as shown in Figure 2. More than half of those positions will remain vacant. Four of every five manufacturers report a moderate or severe labour shortage (Wilkes, 2018).

This article will explore the necessity of bridging the skills gaps through the effective tactics of leaders. Existing literature focuses on curricula and tactics companies use to teach workers who lack initial training for the vocations in which they work. This study aims to contribute to the topic by investigating how the notion of bridging skills through professional development is viewed and implemented in the automobile sector.

METHODOLOGY

Understanding the skills gaps in the automotive industry entails a systematic method for deriving useful information from published and print media resources from the existing literature. A literature review examination technique was used to understand the meaning of skills gaps and develop pragmatic information to achieve the study's objective.

RESULTS

Scholarly attention has been focused on the insufficient utilization of post-pandemic strategies by automotive industry executives to monitor skills shortages.

As delineated in the methodology section, a diverse array of sources, encompassing books, journals, peer-reviewed papers, and published dissertations, were employed to generate this literature review. The theoretical underpinning of my investigation is founded on the amalgamation and evaluation of the relevant prior scholarship, which is incorporated in the literature review. In order to locate pertinent resources, a variety of search terms and phrases were employed, including "employee turnover," "employee retention strategies," and "skills gaps."

WHAT ARE SKILLS GAPS

The existence of a skills gaps is observed when the current skill levels of the workforce are deemed inadequate to fulfil the productivity objectives of the organization (McGuinness & Ortiz, 2016; Schlegel & Kraus, 2023). In instances where this occurs, it can be posited that the organization is deficient in specialized knowledge. It could be contended that identifying skill gaps is crucial in determining the nature of employee training within an organization (Schlegel & Kraus, 2023). Failure to accurately identify these gaps may result in reduced competitiveness levels, as cited by McGuinness & Ortiz (2016). In elucidating the perception of skill disparities by both parties, it is imperative to consider the quantity of highly educated or proficient personnel engaged by the enterprise, as posited by (Cappelli, 2015). It may be posited that the significance of communication in delineating skill deficiencies is substantiated by the fact that individuals possessing advanced levels of education occupy positions within or in close proximity to the organizational hierarchy, thereby affording them greater capacity to effectively communicate or convey their discernment of skill gaps to those vested with authority within the company (Carlisle et al., 2023; Singh Dubey et al., 2022).

This phenomenon can be attributed to personnel with advanced levels of education occupying positions within or in proximity to the corporate hierarchy.

It is imperative to differentiate between pre-existing talent shortages and skill gaps that emerge within organizations during the recruitment process. The present study centres on the impact of challenging-to-fill roles on company performance. The presence of skills gaps within an organization may not solely be attributed to external talent shortages that compel companies to hire individuals with average abilities (Chan et al., 2022; Carlisle et al., 2023; Singh Dubey et al., 2022). Rather, it may also stem from internal processes that can either be enhanced or exacerbated within the organization. Due to the scarcity of external talent, businesses are compelled to hire individuals who possess average qualifications (Smaldone et al., 2022). The study conducted by (Saad et al., 2020) examined the issue of skill shortages within a sample of manufacturing enterprises in the United States, yielding intriguing findings. It has been discovered that the existence of skill gaps cannot always be attributed to individuals who possess inadequate training for performing the tasks that are demanded by contemporary business practices.

Personnel are essential for any organization's operation, growth, and triumph (Mohsin et al., 2023). Employee turnover can have a significant impact on the daily operations of a company or organization, as well as result in substantial expenses associated with the recruitment and training of new personnel (Mohammed et al., 2022). Employee turnover may be caused by a variety of variables, such as salary, business culture, and career progression opportunities (Mohsin et al., 2023). Companies frequently experience employee departures. According to Mohammed et al. (2022); Pouliakas & Wruuck, 2022; Saad et al., 2020), this phenomenon occurs when a person departs a firm voluntarily without being pressured to do so by management or fellow employees. Creating and maintaining a productive workforce, which boosts overall performance and productivity, is a goal of many businesses and organizations (Carlisle et al., 2023; Singh Dubey et al., 2022). Organizations and businesses have a significant challenge when dealing with employee turnover, which has a negative impact on knowledge management, productivity, competitive advantage, and customer satisfaction (Nazir et al., 2021). According to research conducted by Schlegel & Kraus (2023), job insecurity has a significant influence on employee turnover but does not necessarily have an effect on the complexity or performance of the work. According to (Schlegel & Kraus, 2023), employers are able to anticipate employee turnover by looking at the work environment and the job needs inside an organization. (Mohsin et al., 2023) went on to explain that despite these characteristics being arbitrary, they may provide employers with insight into the intentions of individuals to leave an organization.

According to (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017) many factors may contribute to employee turnover in a firm. Some of these factors include remuneration, the culture of the workplace, a succession plan, and career development opportunities. According to the hierarchy of needs outlined in Maslow's theory of motivation, there are a number of prerequisites that need to be satisfied before an employee may reach self-actualization (Maslow & Lewis, 1987). (Guterres et al., 2020) state that managers and leaders are necessary to develop and train staff members, serve as mentors and role models for their jobs and help enhance employee retention.

Organizations may reduce employee turnover and minimize burnout, weariness, and mistakes brought on by long workdays by applying procedures and providing flexible work-life balance for employees (Amah & Oyetuunde, 2020). According to Travis et al. (2016), excessive hours can lead workers to experience occupational fatigue, burnout, and health difficulties, all of which can increase employee turnover (Trinkoff et al., 2021). According to Hermans (2019), workers also leave businesses that often change the techniques, procedures, and criteria by which they evaluate the effectiveness of their employees' jobs, eliminating sources of stress in the workplace environment that possibly have an impact on employee behavior (Xiong & Wen, 2020). According to Robertson (2022), automotive corporations mandate that their employees participate in physically demanding prolonged work shifts to enhance productivity and output. Employees who are burdened with excessive workloads and subjected to high levels of stress often encounter a decline in their drive to perform, leading to emotional strain and a propensity to resign from their current organization in pursuit of alternative job opportunities (Lertpiromsuk, 2022). The presence of a respectful working environment has been found to have a positive correlation with increased job satisfaction and enhanced integration within enterprises and organizations.

Scholars have endeavoured to ascertain the factors that influence the decision-making process of employees to depart from their current place of employment (Kurdi, 2010).

SKILLS GAPS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

An all-encompassing examination of the scholarly works pertaining to the definition of the phrase professional development discloses multiple perspectives posited by various researchers. Professional development is a term that encompasses various forms of ongoing education and training for individuals in the workforce (Klibi, 2013). Some commonly used terms to describe

this concept includes continuing education, in-service training, continuous professional development, career-related continuous learning, professional progress, and personnel development (Abid et al., 2021). The term professional development encompasses the various ways in which an individual advances in their occupational role. Haug (2021) has referenced various viewpoints on professional development, encompassing aspects such as objectives, venue, duration, approaches, and degrees of influence.

The literature suggests that evidence-based practises should inform the organization of professional development courses, including establishing clear objectives, selecting appropriate content and techniques, determining the optimal length of study, and implementing effective assessment methodologies (Khan et al., 2021). An effective professional development programme should be impartial and relevant to the requirements of the labour market and employers (Nghia, 2018). The success of professional development is contingent upon the presence of high-quality materials. Effective professional development should prioritize curriculum and instructional practices that enhance students' learning abilities, promoting contextual teaching (Ras et al., 2017).

Regular training is a worthwhile investment for an organization to acquire the necessary skills to enhance its strengths effectively (Bühler et al., 2022).

Ejiwale (2019) identified five advantages of ongoing professional development for employees that all potential future employees should consider. The entities in question are comprised of: 1) Providing a worker with updated information regarding the dynamic trends in their respective industry. In order to maintain competitiveness in their current occupations, it is advisable for employees to actively participate in seminars or courses that facilitate their knowledge and awareness of advancements within their respective fields. Neglecting to remain up-to-date may result in the risk of being surpassed by colleagues. 2) Acquiring novel competencies to equip an individual for fresh employment opportunities.

Engaging in professional development courses can enhance an individual's prospects for advancement in their career. Enhancing the current job skills of the employees. Individuals who have developed and refined their professional skills exhibit exceptional performance and are highly motivated compared to their colleagues (Ejiwale, 2019). Pursuing further education enhances one's qualifications and value within their current professional role. Networking with other professionals in the same field is crucial for sustaining prospects (Pathan et al., 2021). In order to enhance their networking capabilities, employees should become affiliated with trade and

professional organizations that are pertinent to their respective industries (Sulaiman et al., 2020). Engaging in invaluable training programmes can grant employees access to more job opportunities and help them stay up-to-date with emerging business and professional developments (Kayan- Fadlemlula et al., 2022).

Facilitating a paradigm shift among employees by exposing them to novel perspectives. It is recommended that employees prioritize their engagement in seminars, workshops, certifications, and self-study materials such as books, periodicals, and DVDs that are outside the scope of their regular work field.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY

According to Schuetz (2017), the role of organizational leaders is to provide strategic counsel to enable the successful completion of projects, programs, and the organization's overarching purpose. According to Schuetz (2017), businesses that have strong leadership practices have a greater chance of succeeding and accomplishing their goals since the employees of those businesses are aware of the mission and objectives of the business. Cho et al. (2019) offered a concise explanation and concurred with Schuetz (2017), but they also mentioned that it may be challenging to establish which type of leadership is most effective for a particular company. Leaders have a responsibility to make financial investments in the training and development of their staff if they want their workforce to function effectively and efficiently. According to Weber (1947), the originator of the transactional leadership theory, employees are obligated to follow the directives that are given to them by their leaders. This expectation is in line with the transactional theory. According to Weber (1947), a dependent reward system is one in which management and employees agree on the objectives to be fulfilled and offer incentives or penalties based on whether or not the objectives are met. When a leader uses the active management by exception strategy, they may closely monitor and oversee the work processes and put in place remedial measures to get rid of mistakes. This is all part of the active management by exception approach. Passive management will be implemented if the managers determine that the standards should be raised to a higher level.

The laissez-faire paradigm minimizes the amount of engagement required from management while simultaneously fostering employee participation in decision-making (Herman, 2016).

EMPLOYEE RETENTION STRATEGIES

There is still a problem with companies and organizations having problems retaining their best employees. Promotions, rewards and internal marketing is a tactic for employee retention that focuses on highlighting the value and relevance of workers to the firm. According to Singh (2019), internal marketing may be a tough endeavour that sometimes requires a significant amount of money on rewards. On the other side, Yousuf (2019) noted that companies used internal marketing as a value-creation approach to improve employees' loyalty and relationships with the organization. It may be possible for leaders to keep skilled staff if they develop and implement efficient employee initiatives (Khan et al., 2021).

Sawaneh and Kamara (2019) state that organizations with good strategies can attract and retain skilled employees in their workforce. In a similar vein, Pareek et al. (2019) suggested that firms place a greater emphasis on employee engagement, as this factor plays a role in the retention of personnel. In order to increase the level of embeddedness that employees have in a company, it is recommended by Pareek et al. (2019) that managers provide employees with tasks that are both practical and achievable. The purpose of the organizational strategy known as succession planning is to develop a group of talented and competent employees who are on standby to assume leadership responsibilities. Training employees at all levels allows for the seamless movement of information across the organization, promotes continuity, and eliminates potential choke spots (Sawaneh and Kamara, 2019).

The leaders of an organization have a significant role to play in reducing the percentage of employees who leave voluntarily. Leaders need to use their imagination and creativity to stimulate their employees' commitment and investment. Keeping good employees is a challenge for every company (Cortellazzo et al., 2019). It is possible that increased employee ownership and commitment and a reduction in employees' intentions to leave might result from open communication between managers and workers (Zardasht et al., 2020). Staff member's replies to surveys and ideas can supply managers with new insights, helpful criticism, and good planning.

EMPLOYEE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Increasing an individual's capabilities via training might directly influence the output and execution of an organization (Karim et al., 2019). Training for workers has emerged as an activity of paramount significance in the economies of the 21st century. This is mostly attributable to the proliferation of emerging technologies and the intensification of competition from other companies (Rahayu et al., 2019). Training programmes that provide employees with the level of productivity

and autonomy necessary to carry out their jobs must be developed with diligence and intention by the leaders of organizations. Training helps employees become more productive in their jobs, which in turn may increase employee retention and overall job satisfaction (Dachner et al., 2021). Employee training is crucial to any human resource development plan that strives to transform behaviours and improve performance. According to Saniuk et al. (2021), human resource management contributes to an organization's expansion by coordinating its employees' responses to its sustainability objectives.

Kareem (2019) suggests increasing employees' capacities through training might promote loyalty and enhance commitment. Spending money on training employees improves an organization's efficiency and promotes proficiency in job performance.

LEADERS' SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES AND SKILLS GAPS

Strategic planning, change management, information sharing, listening, and emotional intelligence are business leaders' most significant skill shortages (Betti and Sarens, 2021). What's most concerning about this list is that it includes not just many of the "hard talents" that a workforce continuously needs in its leaders but also critical "soft skills" that are considerably more difficult to teach. Furthermore, the same talents were recognized as essential and deficient across industries, indicating that these are universal skills and knowledge gaps that HR professionals must assist executives in bridging (Saad et al., 2020).

In his work, Ejiwale (2019) enumerates five suggestions to mitigate the skills and training disparities, thereby enhancing the prospects of success for commercial enterprises and other entities. The ensuing ten suggestions are posited to tackle the underlying reasons for inadequacies in skills and training and the incongruity between available job openings and prospective candidates. Enhance the provision of STEM education and promote diversity in the industry. Incorporating employers into the process of curriculum development. It is advisable to motivate individuals who have completed their college education to pursue additional courses aimed at refining their communication abilities (Ejiwale, 2019). Several factors must be taken into account, including efficient job marketing, effective training for new employees, professional development opportunities for students to acquire learn-to-learn skills, precise estimations of the demand for STEM workers, clear identification of the skills that employers require, and educators' involvement in externships and on-the-job training. Canada, a developed nation experiencing rapid economic growth, should prioritize efforts to improve its human capital through various training

and development programmes (Ejiwale, 2019). The possession of requisite job-related knowledge and skills by employees can potentially significantly contribute to a country's progress (Abid et al., 2021). Employers should be prepared to invest in initiatives aimed at bridging the skills gaps by revising their expectations for graduates and prioritizing strategies that promote employee learning, acquisition, and integration of new competencies (Bhatnagar, 2021).

The skills gaps affect the current talent within an organization and its capacity to recruit new talent. Research that was conducted and released by SHRM in 2022 found that 53 percent of HR managers asked reported that their company is facing a skills gaps (Suh, 2022). Similarly, in a workplace survey that was conducted and published by SHRM (2021–2022), 72% of HR professionals who were questioned claimed that the lack of qualified applicants was their most significant challenge when it came to hiring talent (Suh, 2022). According to a study that had been conducted and published before on the topic of skills gaps (SHRM, 2019), seventy-five percent of HR professionals who were surveyed stated that it was difficult to discover fresh talent because candidates lacked the necessary competencies. As a direct consequence of this, the skills gaps have experienced a little narrowing over the course of the previous several years (Suh, 2022).

DISCUSSION

To have a better understanding of what talent is and how it might benefit education, further groundwork is necessary. In response to the shortage of qualified workers, the federal parties have proposed introducing efforts to assist foreign workers who are experiencing challenges on the job, with an equal focus on increasing the language training abilities of the immigrants Canada admits (Cedillo et al., 2019). In addition, the government intends to create a system that will enable a comparison to be made between the levels of education and experience held by immigrants and those held by members of the Canadian labor force in order to arrive at a solution that will be sustainable over the long run (Zarifa et al., 2019). Helping individuals explain and grasp work is the primary focus of this initiative, with the ultimate result being that job seekers will be equipped with the information and tools necessary to put their newfound understanding into practice (Tompas et al., 2020).

Transformational leadership is essential when change needs to be managed successfully, such as when an organization must navigate the challenges of upskilling and downskilling employees (Cukier, 2020). This type of leadership is also required whenever change needs to be handled. Emotional intelligence is essential to the practice of transformational leadership. Those

who can successfully identify areas that require change, design a strategy to make those changes, and then carry out the plan in a way that inspires and encourages their employees are demonstrating this leadership style (Motzer et al., 2021). A transformational leader is able to properly detect and regulate their own emotions while maintaining the appropriate degree of inspiration, individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, and influence over their team (Behie et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

The study conducted a meticulous analysis of the literature and determined that the presence of skills gaps is a significant contributor to the issue of unemployment. The findings of this research can be utilized by individuals engaged in the field of education to prioritize the alignment of professional development curricula with the evolving demands and trends of the labour market. The findings have highlighted the paramount importance of ongoing education initiatives as a foremost global concern for nations at varying stages of development. Furthermore, significant methodologies for addressing skill disparities have been delineated. The focus of this article pertains to Canada. However, it may offer valuable insights to other countries grappling with issues of unemployment and underdevelopment resulting from a skills mismatch in their respective labour markets. The article advocates for further research, specifically in regard to feasible approaches for equipping Canadian labourers in both formal and informal industries with valuable competencies.

A leader's selected leadership style for a team may not always align. Unintentionally making decisions on behalf of others can lead to disengagement, distrust, or resistance to change among team members. A proficient leader possessing the requisite expertise and competencies to effectively oversee transformations and direct their team towards enhancing their skills and acquiring new ones that align with the organization's objectives is of utmost significance in addressing a skills deficit. In order to effectively navigate the process of addressing skills gaps, a leader must possess emotional intelligence and demonstrate an understanding of their own and their team's inclinations towards change.

The individual asserted that while there is no singular solution, it is imperative to incorporate the identification of personnel exhibiting leadership potential and providing them with appropriate educational and training opportunities. Employers must enhance their employee value proposition, which may involve equipping their existing workforce with the necessary skills and knowledge to assume managerial roles.

DECLARATIONS

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Competing Interests: The Authors declare that there are no competing interests

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