



NAVIGATING CAREER PATHWAYS

Building professional digital
identity & networks



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Introduction

Youth, Employment & India

Over the past 30 years, the world has witnessed huge growth in the global economy, largely attributable to the industrialization of developing countries. This has brought nearly 2.9 billion people into the global labour market, out of which, 400 million are in India and China alone¹. This growth, however, does come with a warning sign. China's population (highest contributor to the global labour market), along with the highly developed nations, is ageing. This is already putting strains on the global demand and supply of the labour market².

Soon the world will turn to India - home to a fifth of the world's youth.

India will be the largest contributor to the global workforce in the coming decades. By 2020 i.e. next year, India will add about 110 million workers⁴. To absorb such a large workforce, that will shift into secondary and tertiary markets, the country will have to bridge the increasing employment demand.⁵

Already, **out of 1.3 billion, half of** India's population is **below the age of 25**.

And **a quarter is below** the age of **14**³.



Along with meeting the demand and supply of such a large workforce, India will also have to train, upgrade and skill its youth. According to an analysis conducted by LinkedIn, employers in 2019 are looking for candidates with a mix of both hard and soft skills. This analysis concludes that as automation and algorithms create new high-quality jobs, demands for skills such as creativity, persuasion, collaboration, adaptability and time management are only going to increase. LinkedIn Learning Editor, Paul Petrone, explains this: “The rise of AI is only making soft skills increasingly important, as they are precisely the type of skills robots can’t automate.” On the other hand, technological advancement across industries also means that there is a high demand for hard skills such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence, analytical reasoning, people management and UX Design⁶.

The demands of the global workforce are rapidly changing and India is struggling to give its youth adequate and appropriate skills needed to enter employment⁷. This is evident with more and more employers facing the challenge of finding talent with appropriate skills. Amidst this predicament, the most prominent solutions have been from digital talent platforms such as Naukri, Monster, Indeed and LinkedIn.

Currently, 57 million of LinkedIn users live in India⁸, making India its second largest user base. Over and above this, LinkedIn has 1 million company pages from India and over 350,000 weekly active job posts⁹. LinkedIn has also launched India-specific products such as LinkedIn Lite (for users with low connectivity) to help graduating students get their first job.

While the growing use of online talent platforms such as LinkedIn may have started to bridge the gap between employer demands and employee skill supply, there is still a long way to go. However, one thing is certain- in a country like India where opportunities have been unevenly distributed for generations, digital platforms such as LinkedIn are generating hope, providing youth with broader choices, more mobility and flexibility. These platforms are also challenging the traditional ways of hiring and altering the ways in which youth are searching for and demanding work.

In a report published by Mckinsey & Company, they expect that by 2025, digital talent platforms will benefit almost 540 million individuals¹⁰.

This report emphasizes the need for building a deeper understanding of how access to digital career platforms is influencing Indian youth career mindsets and their career journeys.



57 million LinkedIn users live **in India**⁹, making India its second largest user base.

LinkedIn has **1 million company pages from India**

and over **350,000** weekly active **job posts**¹⁰.

This report offers insights for all stakeholders who want to understand the forces changing Indian career mindsets. It is hoped that these insights will enable them to strategize interventions in response to the next wave of growth.

The biggest challenge for India today is equipping the youth with adequate, relevant and job-ready skills¹¹.





Introduction

Quest Alliance & LinkedIn

About Quest Alliance

Quest Alliance helps young people gain confidence in their aspirations to make informed career decisions and effectively navigate their personal and professional spaces. The organization's vision is to enable individuals to build self-learning pathways in order to make meaning of their lives.

About MyQuest

Quest Alliance designs scalable replicable solutions across programs, one of which is MyQuest. This program focuses on career development for youth. It champions the use of a blended learning approach which comprises 250 hours of self-learning, digital content in English, Life and Work Skills, Entrepreneurship and Digital Literacy. The overall aim of the program is to enhance the skills of marginalized youth to enable them to navigate competitive market spaces.

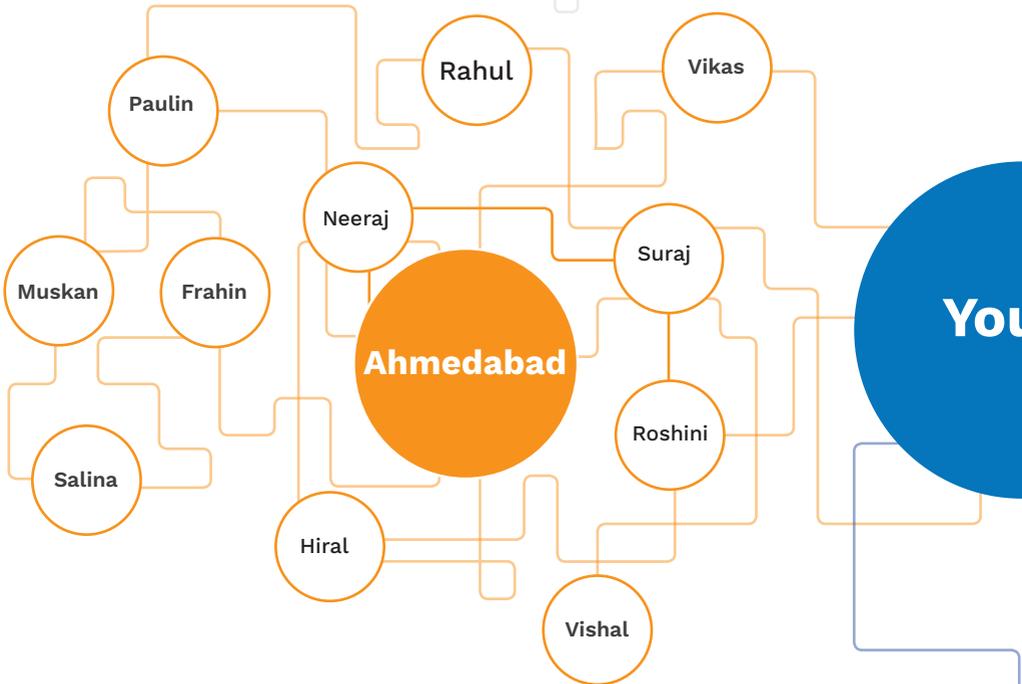
LinkedIn Intervention:

Between 2016 and 2018, Quest Alliance trained over 25,000 youth on leveraging LinkedIn to learn about careers, seek job information and connect with peers, mentors and influencers.

Meet the Youth



33 youth, between the ages of 18 and 24, from Karnataka, Gujarat and Delhi were interviewed.



Youth use LinkedIn for:

- Learning
- Motivation
- Awareness
- Self-promotion
- Staying in touch

Majority use LinkedIn on their mobiles phones.

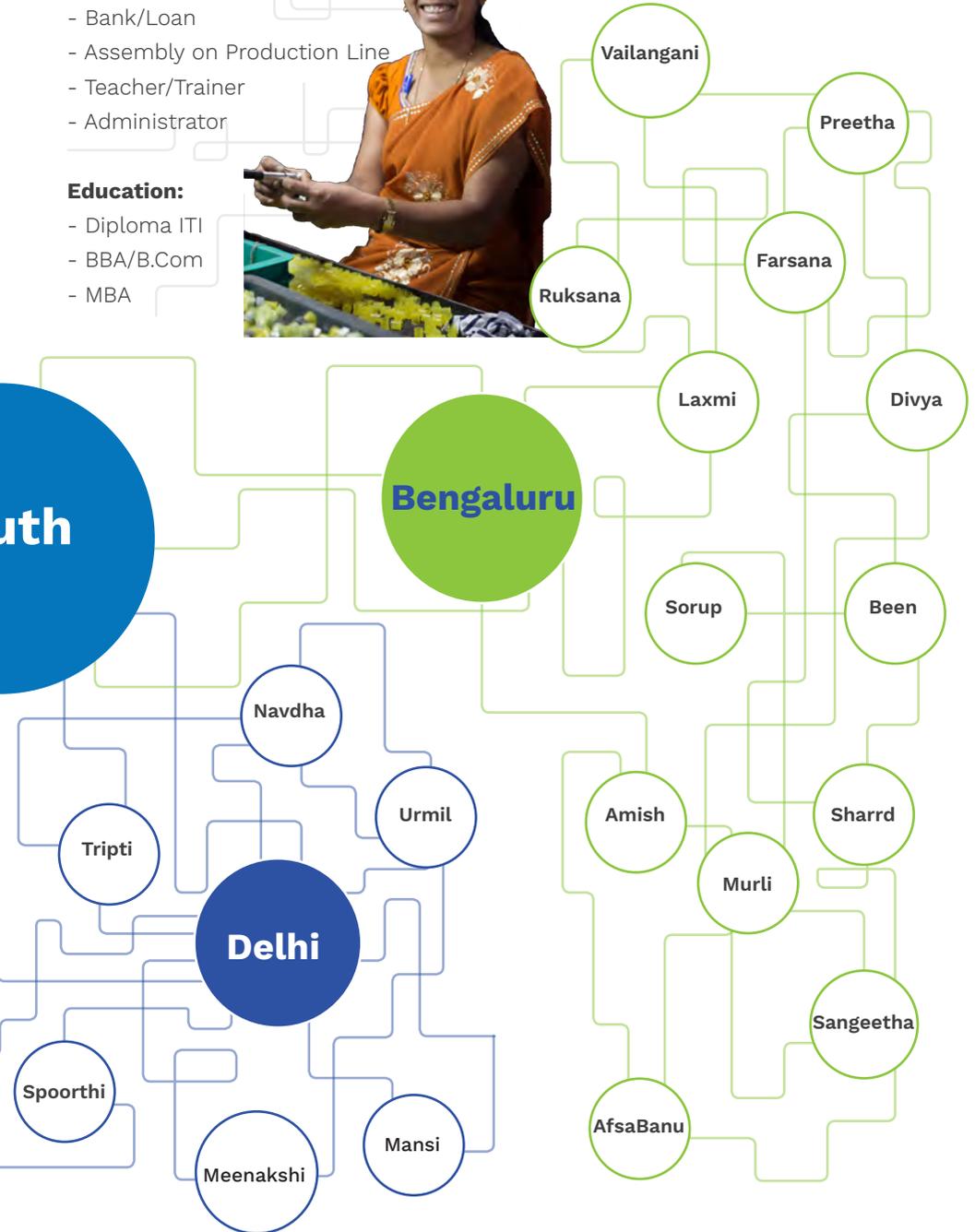


Current Employment Types :

- TeleCaller
- Bank/Loan
- Assembly on Production Line
- Teacher/Trainer
- Administrator

Education:

- Diploma ITI
- BBA/B.Com
- MBA



Introduction

Insights: Future of Work & Digital Career Platforms

A global revolution is currently taking place in education, training and employment. It is driven by the changing nature of work, the realities of the information age, an awareness of rights and the demand for equal distribution of opportunities and pay. Digital career platforms such as LinkedIn seem to be a reflection of this changing world. Business is now a real-time experience with streams of communications and operations in a network of teams¹² Furthermore, these platforms are increasingly in favour of workers. They empower them with broader choices, more mobility and flexibility¹³.



Our research indicates that youth participants are using these platforms for purposes beyond job hunting.

1 Going Beyond Job Hunting

Digital career platforms are evolving in scope and youth are harnessing their benefits. They are using these platforms for purposes beyond job hunting.

2 The Indian Gig Economy

Will digital career platforms encourage gigeconomy in India?
Will Indian youth move away from traditional career options?

3 Youth Aspirations & Autonomy

Youth entrepreneurial aspirations are on the rise and they are seeking autonomy to make career decisions. Digital career platforms are enabling youth to become self-learners and achieve their aspirations.

4 Demand for Blue Collar Jobs

The rise in youth with skills for blue collar professions is presenting platforms such as LinkedIn with the opportunity to bridge the gap between the industry and these youth.

5 Inclusive Online Participation

It is a well known fact that, compared to men, women in India, are less active online. There is a need for platforms to strategize for better gender inclusivity and active online participation.

6 Peer-led Career Guidance

Youth are already using career platforms to seek motivation and to learn. But there is also a need for them to have access to quality peer guidance through these platforms.

1 Going Beyond Job Hunting

A study conducted by the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) found that majority of Indian employees focus on using networking sites as a means to reach employment goals and to keep themselves updated¹⁴. The sheer size of these platforms, of user connect networks, powerful information and job search capabilities, expands the pool of possibilities for youth.

Our research indicated that youth participants are using these platforms for purposes beyond job hunting.

Beena, a 21-year-old from Bengaluru, was told of a job opportunity at Omega Healthcare by a relative. She immediately turned to LinkedIn and searched the company page. Once she was convinced about the company's culture and employer's requirements, she sent a message to one of the employees through the 'People' section, inquiring for an interview. This year, Beena completes one year with Omega Healthcare as an insurance claims processor.

“I get notifications in my email. I get excited when I see these messages, wondering who might have sent them and what kind of **opportunity** they might have”.

- Mansi, 21 years old from Delhi.

Beena is not alone in using LinkedIn like one would use Glassdoors (a company review platform).

The youth are also using LinkedIn as a self promotion tool. Navdha, a young architect in Delhi has been calling her faculties to endorse her skills on LinkedIn. Gitika, a young ambitious girl aged 20 years, uses LinkedIn to promote herself by staying active. They have also started to view ‘connections’ beyond the purpose of personal benefit. Hiral, a young youth facilitator said, “Connection for me means how I can help others, and how others can help me”.

These stories indicate how platforms such as LinkedIn are increasing transparency, providing youth with a space to showcase their skills, self-promote and explore the world of work. This reduces the many insecurities that the youth or their parents might have had earlier about employers and corporate culture.



Suraj, a 24 year old from Kutch migrated to Ahmedabad in search of a better education. He has known since he was a child that his purpose in life is to do social good. He is currently working and completing his education so that he can work at an NGO in Kutch. In the meantime, he is using LinkedIn to stay up-to-date with his dream organisations and see how he uses LinkedIn as a 'knowledge hub'.

2 The Indian Gig Economy

Many have speculated about career platforms such as LinkedIn having a huge influence on the rising gig economy. A 2018 Paypal report titled 'Insights into the freelancers ecosystem', indicated that India is the biggest market for freelancers¹⁵.

Culturally speaking, gig-based work is not a new discovery for many marginalized urban workers. In this context, children of these workers, are strictly looking for economic security and social upliftment from the traditional full-time roles. The parents of 10 youth among the 33 interviewed for this research, were in informal and or seasonal employment, mostly due to lack of formal education or certified skills.

Consequently, the younger generation such as the ones we interacted with, is extremely focused on finding traditional jobs such as banking, administrative roles and government jobs.

It is estimated that the gig economy is generating 56% employment in India and going to grow 25-30% per annum¹⁷. As the gig economy profession emerges in India, it promises employment solution for the unemployed students, experienced professionals, less educated workforce, retired and women who quit their jobs for family responsibilities or other reasons. Career platforms such as LinkedIn have the potential to expand their scope.

Web and mobile development, web designing, Internet research and **data entry** are some key opportunity areas that can offer an average salary of **INR 19,00,000** annually¹⁶.





Vailangani, from Bengaluru has extensive work experience for an 18 year old. She has worked at a hotel reception, a store billing counter and is currently working as a telecaller for an insurance company.

When asked, if this is her dream job, she replied “I want to work in a bank like my brother”.

3 Going Beyond Job Hunting

With the rise of access to internet, professions such as writing, fashion designing, dance, stand up comedy, photography etc. have become more accessible¹⁸. But only 2 out of the 33 interviewed were pursuing such non-traditional professions.

Divya, a 21 year old girl from Bengaluru, is pursuing an advanced course in graphic design after gaining a diploma in DTPO (Desk Top Publishing Operator). She was always interested in painting and drawing, but never thought this hobby could gain her a creative qualification. After completing her high school, Divya was considering two career options: Secretarial Practise or Journalism. However, Divya's mother discouraged her from pursuing journalism since it requires going out in the field in search of stories. Divya was all prepared to enrol into the Secretarial Practise course when a teacher at the ITI suggested her otherwise. After undertaking DTPO training for a few months, Divya's interest in graphic designing peaked. She is currently pursuing an advance diploma course in graphic design and wishes to join a company as a junior creative soon.

The country now has **40 million people** working in the creative manufacturing industry¹⁹.

Already, professions such as photography, makeup artist, personal trainers, web designer, game designer, fashion and interior design have become some of the most high paying jobs²⁰ in the country.

With the future of work looking at more creative industries, the question is how inclusive is this growth going to be? Will only the 'creative class' be part of this new growing industry? And how are career platforms such as LinkedIn going to incorporate the needs of such digitally-enabled creative or other non-traditional jobs?

In 2018, ORF conducted a survey titled **Future of Work in India** where around **half of the respondents cited interest in their field of study as the primary reason for their choice**, while only 19% reported their choices as being influenced by their families²¹.



After completing her high school, Afsa like her other friends, did not pursue a college degree. She wanted to study fashion designing but her parents did not allow her to study it. However, this has not stopped her from following her dream.

“Family is not going to send me there (college). So I am doing it at home only. From the internet”, says Afsa. She is currently using Youtube to learn.

Her friends have advised Afsa to pursue a qualification in Fashion Design via a certified online course, which she is now exploring.

The influence of family on Indian youth career and educational decisions is on the decline. Young people are increasingly seeking career paths that reflect their individual aspirations. Although, Divya made an initial education choice influenced by her mother, she is now pursuing a profession which complements her creative passion. Similarly, Afsa's perseverance to learn fashion designing via available platforms such as Youtube, is indicative of youths' desire to be independent and have autonomy in their career decisions.

In the same survey by ORF, 17% of the respondents reported being interested in entrepreneurship²².

Similarly, in our interactions, 7 out of the 33 participants either owned or were planning to have their own businesses.

Laxmi, an administrative assistant with a M.Com, wants to start a tea shop for her mother to run. Similarly, Hiral a youth facilitator from Ahmedabad hopes to start her own training centre for facilitators in the future. Tripthi, a 19 year old girl from Delhi attended a lecture at her college from where she developed a business idea.

Gitika, on the other hand, is the daughter of a businessman. Since the age of 12, her father used to allow her to spend time in his shop to watch and learn. When Gitika graduated from Secretarial Practise course, she gained experience working at the front desk in a hotel. Soon after this, she started her own hotel booking business, working as an agent for hotel bookings in Delhi. Ruksana, has older brothers who run a fashion boutique. She has followed suit by setting up her

own fashion boutique, along with being a part time direct seller. This, perhaps, demonstrates the willingness of youth from business families to start their own ventures.

Although, these stories amplify the Indian desire for job security, stable income and upward advancement, it also shows a degree of openness the youth have towards entrepreneurship and alternative forms of employment.

There is another kind of employment that is on the rise in India - Direct Selling.

Currently, direct selling companies such as Amway, Tupperware, Oriflame, QNet, Herbalife Nutrition and others employ approximately 50,000 people in India. This figure is expected to touch 18,000,000 by 2025²³.



Murli, an 18 year old boy whose father works at a petrol pump, sees great potential in opening up a cosmetics shop in his village. However, his family believes that “there are lots of losses in running a business”. They prefer that he continues working at the solar company where he currently works as a machine operator.

Similarly, Murli’s friend Sharad wants to set up an electronic shop but his parents perceive business as 'risky'.

The flexibility offered by the networking market suits many Indian women. Women contribute 53 per cent of entrepreneurs engaged in the Rs 98.5 billion direct selling industry in India²⁴.

Given this rise of entrepreneurial aspirations of the youth, how can digital career platforms engage with the potential to help youth aspirations? Can digital career platforms hone youth's entrepreneurship skills similar to how online learning material is aiding their access to knowledge?

It is predicted that skilled workforce will demand for an increase in blue collar employment which will be compounded with the rise of the gig economy. In this predictable future scenario, platforms such as LinkedIn will have to cater to a wide range of demands.





Ruksana Begam and her sister Farsana Begam both started direct selling soon after completing their Bachelor's degrees (BBA & B.Com respectively). They started network marketing with SafeShop India. Both sisters have seen so much potential for economic growth in network marketing that they have expanded their network to their mother and elder brothers, making it a family business.

4 Demand for Blue Collar Jobs

According to the Annual Report 2015–2016 by the Ministry of Labour and Employment of India, the ratio of blue collar to white collar employees is 78:22²⁵.

In the present, digital career platforms such as LinkedIn are largely catering to the tertiary, service-oriented industries.

Beena, a 21 year old from Bengaluru, city completed her Diploma in Electronics in 2017. Unable to find a well paying job within this technical field, she started to look for opportunities in the service industry. She currently works as Omega Healthcare processing insurance claims. While Beena doubts if she will be able to work with electronics in the future, she continues to hope for it.

Sorup a 19 year old, got placed via Pragathi ITI, Devanahalli after he completed diploma in the fitter trade. Currently, he works on the production line at Federal Mogul Power. But he wants to work as a machine operator. So, he has set up job alerts on LinkedIn hoping to chance upon an opportunity.

The Indian government has been pushing initiatives such as **National Skills Development** which **aims to train over 40 crore people in India in different skills by 2022**²⁶.

The internet and by effect even social networking sites, are considered to be a space where all are equal and all are welcome.



Mansi Sharma, a 21 year old from Delhi, has a similar experience to share. Mansi studied Electronic Hardware and Maintenance from Vivek Vihar ITI. However, when she started looking for jobs, she was often told by employers that they prefer male employees. She further explained that she feels there is a gap between the available opportunities and her qualifications. She often feels under qualified for the job opportunities available on LinkedIn as related to her field.

5 Inclusive Online Participation

In India, 65% of internet users say that they use the internet to socialise²⁷. This was true for our research too where youth are using LinkedIn to “connect” with friends, relatives who are employed in the government or private sector, employers, teachers and acquaintances.

However, female youth were hesitant to accept connection requests from strangers that were not 1st or 2nd connections. The main criteria for accepting a connection was actually offline meeting. Youth readily accepted connections of people they had met in person at least once in their life, knew of them through a friend or relative and had the possibility of meeting them in real life.

It is known that the lack of gender inclusivity is a result of deep seated cultural barriers. Yet, this situation presents an opportunity for career platforms to strategize for greater inclusivity. This is possible through partnerships with programs such as MyQuest and other grassroots networks that are already playing a vital role in encouraging youth to be part of a digital world.

In India, 65% of internet users say that they use the internet to socialise²⁶. Despite this evidence, gender inequality is evident on social media. For instance, it is estimated that **only 24% of Indian Facebook users are female**²⁸.



Salina and her friends are young girls aged 20 years from a small village in Modasa, Gujarat.

They have an active LinkedIn profile, but their participation is very low because of one simple aspect - lack of a profile picture. This creates a barrier for them to make valuable connections, reduces opportunity availability and therefore active user participation.

6 Peer-led Career Guidance

Most youth had chosen a degree subject or made employment choices based on their friends' opinion or experience.

Youth used social media and even networking sites such as LinkedIn to build trusted networks of young adults who assist each other in gathering relevant information regarding courses, salaries, benefit norms and job openings.

For many job seeking youth, LinkedIn offers advice in many ways.

For example, Laxmi, uses LinkedIn to find success stories of founders and co-founders which helps her stay motivated.

Roshini reads blogs or watches videos that offer tips on how to become a better facilitator. Neeraj uses LinkedIn Learning videos. Beena uses LinkedIn to know about an organization's culture so that she can prepare for potential interviews.



Meenakshi is an M.A. Literature student. When asked about her choice of subject, she expressed that just a BA degree was not enough to help her grow in the private sector. This led her to explore a Masters degree but remained confused about the subject she wanted to study. She currently works as a data operator in Noida.

Conclusion

Career Journey: A New Definition

Digital Platforms & Partnerships

It is evident that digital career platforms such as LinkedIn are going to grow in scale. These platforms are going to become quicker and more efficient in matching employees to employers, injecting new momentum and transparency into the workforce; while drawing in more and more users. This, in turn, will also reduce HR costs and resource consumption currently taken up to find the right talent³⁰.

Further, platforms such as LinkedIn will also increase transparency between employers and employees, especially regarding industry skill demands. This is bound to impact youth education related decisions and the flow of insights to the already employed, to help them remain relevant.

1 Adaptability

The key characteristic required to be agile and therefore relevant in the changing work environment.

2 Collaborative

To be agile one must also be a good collaborator. Along with the youth, organisations too seem to be adopting this trait.

3 Proactive

Borrowing from Stephen Covey, the youth are adopting this quality to excel.

4 Communicator

Youth are understanding the value of effective and accurate communication.

5 Resilient

Striving to achieve the goal despite all obstacles.

6 Self-learner

Internet access has made it easier for most youth to become self-learners. They recognize this opportunity and believe it to be the key trait required for their growth.



21st Century Youth & Careers

In order to answer how career platforms such as LinkedIn are helping youth career journeys, it is important to define career development from their perspective.

Most of us tend to associate career development with climbing the professional ladder; trying to manage our careers as an upward-only process. Today's youth, on the other hand, are re-framing professional development as a journey rather than an upward ladder.

**Youth see 'agility' and
'adaptability' as their
biggest and strongest
skill set.**



Adaptable

You are not afraid to change course. The main skill of an agile employee is the ability to adapt to what is happening around them- whether that is changing technologies or newer industry trends.

Vailangani, is a high school graduate with vast work experience.

She began her career by working as a hotel receptionist and then moved on to a billing counter manager role at a retail store. She currently works as a telecaller for an insurance company. Vailangani's brother works at a bank and she is hoping to join him as the next step in her career journey.





Collaborative

To be agile you need to be up-to-date with knowledge. By giving or sharing knowledge with co-workers, friends and colleague.

Urmil studied a computer hardware related course at an ITI, following which she pursued a Masters in Commerce. She currently works in the finance department of an organisation but her love for computer hardware remains. . And so her current manager encourages her to fix non-functional computers in the office and also learn new aspects of hardware.

This goes to shows how agile work environments are on the rise and how they are challenging traditional hierarchy and organisational systems; to enable employers to experiment and drive innovation.





Proactive

Stephen Covey's first rule to be highly effective and a key skill for success.

Roshini is a MyQuest facilitator who had to conduct two hour sessions in an all-boys ITI full of mechanics, hardware engineers and manufacturing production line trainees.

In order to conduct these sessions effectively, she used LinkedIn Learning videos to become a better facilitator. She is now able to exercise autonomy in her classrooms and continues to remain self-motivated and proactive.





Communicator

When asked what communication skills mean, the most common answer was to be able to express thoughts quickly and accurately.

The MyQuest Skills to Succeed program focuses a lot on communication skills. In the interviews students seem to have pointed this out as the most helpful skill to have learnt in their sessions.





Resilient

Youth recognise the importance of resilience to achieve their goals. Resilience is the ability to take charge of the situation and do whatever is necessary to stay on course.

Sangeetha is a 24 year old with a B.Com and an MBA in HR. She has 3 years of work experience yet she has not be able to find a job in an HR department. Since 2017, she has been working as an Implementation Executive. Yet at intervals she consults her authorities about her desire to shift to the HR department. Sangeetha also keeps herself informed about activities in the department and volunteers to do some HR roles without the promise of being shifted to the HR department.





Self-learner

The biggest attribute of an agile individual is self-learning. To be agile, one must keep learning new skills to be able to use new approaches to respond to real time challenges.

Neeraj is a young 19 year old boy from Gujarat. He is a second year B.Com student with a distinction average. The LinkedIn Learning app is his preferred online tutorial tool.

This tool allows him to practice a self leaning attitude which has helped him gain a part-time job that complements his educational training.



Going Forward

LinkedIn for Learning

We live in the “just google it” era where the youth interviewed were not any different. LinkedIn was almost always used to gain exposure and learn about newer trends related to current developments within their field. This is how they gained guidance for career development.

LinkedIn for Motivation

Almost all the youth said they felt inspired and motivated by the short impact videos/stories they came across of women and men who had progressed in their professional careers and therefore, in life.

LinkedIn for Searching Jobs

The way LinkedIn is being used differs across individuals. For instance, in many cases the job opportunity was first presented to the youth offline, often through a friend or relative. The youth used LinkedIn (as you would use the website Glassdoor) to learn about the company offering the opportunity. They then took initiative and approached the company on LinkedIn, landing a job there.

The future of work is going to be characterized by new technologies that will fuse the physical, digital and biological worlds. This will impact all disciplines, economies and industries; which will further challenge ideas about what it means to be employed.

These trends need to be taken seriously. India must take the opportunity to mobilize its young workforce to drive the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Conclusion

Observations from the Field

From December 2018 to January 2019, qualitative research was conducted with MyQuest alumni. This research was supported by LinkedIn.

The research was conducted in centres across three states: Karnataka, Gujarat and Delhi. The centres ranged in nature from NGOs to Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), Polytechnics and Community Centers.

The purpose was to engage in an active dialogue with learners about their needs and aspirations. The voices of 33 learners, most being women, in the age group 18–26.

Conversations with the youth were captured and recorded by researchers. The following section presents a glimpse of these interactions.

1 Will you work after marriage?(Part 1)

What female youth think about their autonomy regarding their career after marriage.

2 Will your wife go to work? (Part 2)

Why young boys from a village in the outskirts of Bengaluru do not want their future wives to go to work

3 What do we mean by digital access?

Is having a smart phone enough to have access to the digital world? What does digital access, digital literacy and digital participation mean.

4 How do youth seek guidance?

In a digital era when youth are surrounded by information, how accessible is guidance to them?

1 Will you work after marriage? (Part 1)

What kind of digital access do youth in India have?

In Bengaluru, 9 young women were interviewed. These girls were single, confident, had a college degree, supportive parents and a job. All of which makes them empowered young girls.

This was extremely encouraging!

When asked “Do you think it is easier for boys to get jobs than girls?”. Almost all of them replied with a firm “No”. They were further asked if they had faced any gender based discrimination at work and all of them, again, firmly replied “No”. One of the girls, Ruksana Begam went to explain “No! Both are equal”.

These answers make one believe that we have made significant strides towards gender equality. According to the India Skills Report 2019, employability continues to be highest in Bengaluru city compared to the rest of the country. It is also the most preferred city to work in by women.

Yet, data and research shows a complex and puzzling picture. The same report also shows that although women are becoming more educated, their participation in the workforce has declined from 28% in 2017 to 23% in 2018. Thus, one of the reasons for this decline is related to many women choosing to pursue higher education.

Has marriage got anything to do with this?

Yes, it does.

Based on conversations with these 9 girls, it seems that often why women choose not to engage in out-of-home work, lies in the persistence of India's traditional gender and societal norms. This stems from the authority of the in-laws and the husband.

When the girls were asked, "Will you work after getting married?" These were some of the responses:

"After marriage... family is most important. I am not saying no. For 2 years, I can work and I carry on, after that I will be with my family."

"I like to work because... I will ask my in-laws."

When further asked "What if they say no?" The respondent replied "No. I will ask."

When asked "What if your mother-in-law says you can't work?" The respondent replied, "No idea about that...I won't force anybody."

"I would love to, but I am not sure..."

There was only one answer that was vaguely positive:

"Yes... Because it depends upon me."

This picture seems daunting and even shocking. One wonders: How do we affect women empowerment from a young age? Is women empowerment only for 'women', should it not start with 'girl'. And what do we really mean by empowerment?

It is important that we investigate how we empower girls to take actions and direct the course of their own lives through all life-stages, including marriage and family.

2 Will your wife go to work? (Part 2)

What autonomy do female youth think they have regarding their career after marriage.

Earlier a group of 9 young girls were interviewed about their aspirations, jobs and career goals. Although it was extremely encouraging talking to these girls, they made a point that was worrisome. They said, they could only continue working after marriage if their husbands and in-laws allowed. So when 4 boys at Pragathi ITI in Devanahalli were interviewed they were asked for their their opinion on working women.

Devanahalli, is a rural part of Bengaluru located near Kempegowda International Airport. It also has a multi-billion dollar Business Park with two IT parks of nearly 400 acres of land. There are plans of an aerospace park, a science park and INR 10 billion financial city. To add, Devanahalli is also situated near the upcoming INR 1,500 billion BIAL IT investment Region, which is to be the largest IT region in India.

However, Devanahalli was a town that barely seemed to have been affected by technology, road connectivity, modernisation or any form of development. Most of the land seemed to be either privately owned plots or farmlands, there was some commerce on the main roads. But there was no evidence of the Bengaluru city being less than 40 kms away. Pragathi ITI and the adjoining school was certainly a landmark in this town.

The 4 boys interviewed were 19 years old, their faces were yet to be sculpted by age, their innocence was beaming through their eyes and their shy smiles. The boys wore rayon shirts and trousers with chappals. The shirts were crisply ironed and the tilak freshly put on their foreheads, probably because they were to be interviewed today.

One of their teachers volunteered to be the translator.

A few minutes into the interview, they were asked “After you get married, will you let your wife work?”

They all answered “No. Why will she need to work when I am there”.

The answer was surprising as well as expected. It was surprising because 40 kms away is Bengaluru - Asia’s fastest growing city and the fifth largest city of India. A city that is home to more than 250 high tech companies, the startup hub of India. The silicon valley of India. 40kms away is one of India’s largest tertiary, service sector whereas within the same district is Devanahalli majority of the young boys are in blue collared jobs, women are unrecognised farmers, labour force participation seems low, informal economy evident and people seem to have little social mobility.

How is it that the rapid effects of rapid economic growth of Bengaluru city and therefore modernization of infrastructure, culture or mindset has not yet arrived in this town?

Adding to this puzzle is the access to the virtual world. The digital literacy program run at their campus via MyQuest has

helped them use mobile applications. Out of the 4 boys, only 2 of them owned a smart-phones. So only two of them has access to the internet, therefore the “outside world”. But the boys said they were so busy working odd shifts of their blue collared jobs that they barely had the time to venture into to outside world virtually. So how are these boys to be part the global modernisation or mind set?

Is this a sign of non-inclusive development?

3 What do we mean by digital access?

What kind of digital access do youth in India have?

But access to what exactly?

9 girls from a lower socioeconomic backgrounds in Bengaluru city, the IT hub of India, were interviewed. Out of these 9 girls 7 could not remember their email address and password. Out of the 4 boys interviewed in Devanahalli (outskirts of Bengaluru city), 3 did not seem to remember their email address and rarely used social media. In fact, two out of the four boys did not even have access to a smartphone.

Government schools, or even privately run schools for the lower socio-economics groups do not emphasise on digital literacy. In most cases it is neither taught nor practised. Even though 'Digital India' makes government services available online, it does not give excessive emphasis on ICT infrastructure to training its citizens in becoming digital literates.

So does having a mobile phone with JIO 4G connection mean digital literacy or digital access? Also, what do we mean by 'digital literacy' and how does it define 'digital access'?

The first term digital literacy includes a variety of media, each of them representing unique advantages and challenges. While earlier digital literacy implied 'communication', today it goes beyond simple communication skills to encompass all forms of literacy-information, media and technological literacy.

It includes the ability to learn to surf the web, to find desired information and to critically evaluate it. Equally important is knowing how to contribute in an online environment. How a one composes an email, searches YouTube video, web pages or social networking profile is what it means to be digitally fluent.

To participate digitally, it is essential to understand to create and utilise content and technologies. This skill to create content and participate in the digital world, forms the core of digital citizenship. The combination of technical and social skills in digital citizenship will enable the digirati to be confident and active contributors in the digital world.

4 How do youth seek guidance?

What helps youth seek guidance

Their attempts to obtain advice were relatively haphazard, and often from unreliable sources resulting in poor outcomes.

Followings are some observations regarding guidance:

Youth who obtain advice rarely do so from a recognised advice provider. Most of the interviewed youth sought advice from peer groups (on WhatsApp generally) or from relatives that may have higher qualifications or experience.

Most youth deal with their problems independently because they fear being discouraged. When asked “Who do you go for advice?”, most either responded as their mother or expressed how friends, family friends and or relatives only confused and discouraged them.

Many who did not get any advice, regretted it. And those who tried but fail to get advice or dealt with their problems alone, were far less likely to have met their objectives. Instead they felt that gaining advice would have improved the outcome.

There is no doubt that access to internet and particularly platforms such as LinkedIn, offers opportunities to the youth to seek quality advice. However, within this research there is evidence that raises a few issues for career platforms such as LinkedIn to consider.

These are:

Most young people access advice offline. Meaning, although youth are using LinkedIn to inquire about industry trends, employer requirements etc., a large majority choose to seek advice from a known person.

Youth are far more likely to access advice face-to-face as it helps develop trust. Youth need to build trust with advisers which makes it necessary for young people to open up.

Continuity of advice is needed. Although most youth get some advice from family or friends, there is a lack of continuous support and access to advice. Career platforms such as LinkedIn presents opportunity for continuity of guidance on demand. There is also a need to provide access to career guidance earlier, perhaps in schools. Most youth were unaware of their subject or college curriculum.

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