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The Borderless Workforce: Impact Sourcing in the Digital Age



Impact sourcing programs involve employing workers from disadvantaged backgrounds to provide services to multinational clients. Impact sourcing programs improve accessibility to large talent pools while upskilling local workers, thereby bridging the digital divide. This report outlines recent trends that greatly aid employers in establishing impact sourcing programs by overcoming challenges for establishing operations in developing countries. The result is a truly borderless workforce.

Emerging economies are eager to attract multinational companies and create employment opportunities. Therefore, they are looking to build the digital skills of their people. To support that goal, businesses should support impact sourcing programs, which involve employing workers from disadvantaged backgrounds to provide services to multinational clients. Impact sourcing programs improve accessibility to large talent pools while upskilling local workers, thereby bridging the digital divide.

But impact sourcing is not just about helping disadvantaged workers. It also helps the businesses that hire them. Business leaders claim it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract job applicants with qualifications, skills, and motivation to fill certain roles. Thus, strong talent pools are a key requirement for companies when selecting locations for future offices and hubs. In addition to its philanthropic nature, impact sourcing provides business benefits to companies interested in embracing environmental, social, and governance (ESG) goals.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS ENABLING IMPACT SOURCING

Setting up skills training programs focused on job creation in a new country has challenges. For businesses to invest in a new location, there needs to be infrastructure that supports their operations, plus a mechanism to address legal and compliance issues.

Fortunately, in recent years, there have been great improvements in how job creators can access this untapped talent. In fact, these improvements were accelerated through the pandemic. Taken together, these trends greatly aid in establishing impact sourcing programs because they lessen the need for organizations to establish operations in developing countries. Rather, they create a truly borderless workforce.

1. Universal broadband access, allowing people to work remotely

Broadband became vital to work, access basic public services, and boost resilience to handle emergencies. Broadband access kept society productive during the pandemic and continues to promote hybrid and remote work options. It also provides job opportunities for vulnerable populations, rural inhabitants, those in the most vulnerable countries, refugees, and people with disabilities. "Broadband networks offer perhaps the greatest opportunity we have ever had to make rapid and solid advances in global social and economic development—across all sectors," said Houlin Zhao, Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union.

Broadband universal access, along with the next development—digital workplace technologies—provides greater possibilities for the present and future of how people in developing countries live and work. The workplace is at a point in time where it will not matter where the job applicant is from. What will matter are digital skills. Applicants from anywhere in the world will be able to exercise and utilize these skills.

2. Digital tools transforming the way we work and live

Digital workplace technologies are a collection of tools and devices that allow employees to communicate and collaborate virtually from anywhere. Taken together, they are combined into a single environment.

A digital workplace includes technologies such as email, instant messaging, shared calendars, videoconferencing, enterprise social networking, skills databases, document collaboration, knowledge sharing, content management, workflow management, virtual desktops, and unified communications. According to Avasant's report, *Digital Workplace Technologies Adoption and Customer Experience*, "These technologies allow users to communicate and work together from a distance, whether through virtual meetings, marking up shared documents, or maintaining shared folders. They also enable the optimization of work processes through automation, with the aim of increasing productivity, reducing errors and repetition, and improving output."

The digital workplace gained major relevance during the pandemic-led lockdowns, and many companies have kept the technologies in place as they adopt more hybrid and remote work models.

3. Accelerated digital skills adoption unlocking creativity and innovation

Kevin Parikh, Avasant CEO and Avasant Foundation Chairman, recently spoke about these trends, "Humanity is on the cusp of a new era where we will experience total freedom to dream and innovate. In this Imagination Age, we can envision the convergence of three worlds: physical, virtual, and augmented reality."

According to Parikh, this "Omniverse" will obliterate boundaries between nations and end the "digital divide"—the gap between digital workers in developed countries and workers lacking those skills in developing countries. We will see a world powered by digital air, hyper-accelerated human insights, and a reimagined workplace, unlocking tremendous value and allowing humanity to build custom realities. Ultimately, the Omniverse will assist in alleviating global poverty, promoting social equality and diverse workforces.

BENEFITS TO EMPLOYERS

As noted earlier, impact sourcing programs not only benefit workers but also bring great benefits to the organizations that engage in them.

1. Access to new nearshore talent pools

Impact sourcing can open new and interesting opportunities for sourcing workers. For example, North America has the Caribbean as a nearshore location with many desirable attributes. It is close by in terms of time zones. Residents speak multiple languages, including English, French, and Spanish. It has a cultural affinity with North American countries. And it has an obliging, young, and service-oriented population looking for career opportunities and income security.

2. Digital workplace technologies creating a borderless workforce

The traditional work environment is static, in a fixed geographic location with rooms, desks, and chairs. For enterprises, this limits the pool of workers to those who live in that location or are willing to relocate. Digital workplace technologies free enterprises from these constraints. They allow employers to source workers from anywhere with a stable Internet connection. They bring workers across the globe together for innovation and creativity, inclusion, and diversification, to create a truly borderless workforce.

The digital age means candidates will no longer have to relocate to find new job opportunities. Universal broadband connections, along with digital workplace tools, now allow service providers to hire remotely. Employers only need determination, a strong plan, and partnerships to access a large and untapped talent pool. Impact sourcing extends social impact outside the walls of the company, particularly to contribute to progress in emerging economies where there is a high rate of unemployment and room for improvement in fair labor conditions.

At the same time, there is a talented labor force ready to work. Unlike at any time in history, young people are entering the workplace where anything is possible. It does not matter where you are from. Believe it or not, your education is no longer a determining factor. Having the right skills, however, will make the difference. In the digital age, young people can utilize their skills from anywhere in the world on an equal playing field with anyone around the globe.

Case Study: Guyana Digital Skills for Youth

Guyana is one of the poorest countries in South America, with the largest diaspora outside Guyana, especially youth who leave for better opportunities. Young people are a sizable age group, comprising approximately 30% of the population. Guyana's economy is becoming increasingly attractive for investments as developments occur in oil and gas, which in turn, is leading the government to prioritize the construction of a robust IT infrastructure.

In 2020, Avasant Foundation proposed the introduction of Avasant Digital Skills Training (ADST). This program assists underserved youth in transitioning from education or unemployment to job opportunities by training them in job-oriented skills to make them employable. ADST's curriculum combines transversal, technical, and entrepreneurial skills to encourage employment placement among job seekers and retool and upskill currently employed students. The Foundation also conducted workshops that included resume writing, mock interviews, and mentorship to enable a smooth transition from the classroom to the workplace.

Since the inception of the training, Avasant Foundation has held regular meetings with business owners to educate them on our proposed training, and they were invited to participate in the classroom as guest speakers. Stakeholder partnerships, constant communication, and involvement greatly impact job placement.

As a result, 75%–80% of the students seeking employment found full-time jobs within two months of completing the training, and 20%–25% were either promoted or found different roles to match their newly acquired skills within their organization.

3. Achieving business goals

Impact sourcing produces a stable workforce. Because they are aware of their limited opportunities, candidates from underserved communities are highly motivated. The candidates who graduate from job-related soft skills and digital skills training like that which the Avasant Foundation offers are highly motivated to find good jobs. They feel empowered to work hard, do better, and are loyal to their employers. They are determined to live up to the employer's expectations and excel in their performance. As a result, providers that practice impact sourcing benefit from low attrition rates and upfront cost savings while providing fair wages in the markets where they hire.

4. Meeting ESG targets

Providers who commit to impact sourcing differentiate themselves in the eyes of their customers that are evaluating their ESG commitments. Achieving ESG goals requires a companywide understanding of provider impact on sustainability across the supply chain and how their sourcing strategies adapt to meet their own goals and those of their customers. Impact sourcing can drive significant economic and social change in underserved communities across the globe.

Provider commitments to underserved job seekers help overcome the poverty of individuals, families, and communities. They promote access to decent work in compliance with local labor laws. Thus, employment satisfies families' basic economic needs, such as food, shelter, access to healthcare, and education. It also has a ripple effect on the local economy as these employees and their families buy services in their neighborhoods, leading to the economic growth of their communities. Likewise, career development opportunities contribute to the reduction of inequality. This implies access to fair wages, compliance with local labor laws, and career progression.



Graduates of Avasant Digital Skills Training, Guyana

Likewise, career development opportunities contribute to the reduction of inequality. This implies access to fair wages, compliance with local labor laws, and career progression. Employers that hire workers through impact sourcing programs help employees climb the corporate ladder by mentoring them. Job creators make it possible for individuals to prove themselves and move from entry-level jobs to the top of the ladder.

GETTING STARTED WITH IMPACT SOURCING

Having seen the benefits of impact sourcing, how can business leaders get involved? There are several aspects.

1. Evaluating locations and creating jobs

As a business, consider opening an office in one of the developing countries. There are several nearshore locations that are excellent choices. To evaluate locations, consider using a platform such as Avasant's Global Equations to understand the digital and investment competitiveness of various locations. Global Equations presents investment-focused location profiles and a Digital Competitiveness Index, which evaluates the digital readiness of over 80 locations across five key pillars: human capital, digital ecosystem, enabling environment, supporting infrastructure, and financial attractiveness.

If you already have a presence in emerging economies, you can then establish an impact-sourcing hiring plan. Work with your HR team to identify entry-level jobs and map the basic skills required to be competent in these functions. Based on this information, you can then create a strategy to recruit, mentor, and hire workers under the program. Service providers may find it helpful to set a minimum quota in hiring practices to measure impact and annually increment the quota.

2. Going beyond job training to workforce development

Workforce development differs from job training by focusing more on long-term results. Instead of focusing on the knowledge needed to perform a certain job, workforce development implies a deeper commitment to grow and develop individuals over time. This will deliver better outcomes both for employees and employers. While general job training is complete when employees prove competency in particular areas, workforce development is a continuous process.

Of course, job skills are part of workforce development, but to be successful, employees need more than technical knowledge. Companies need to prepare workers to progress and take on more responsibility. So, workforce development requires training in soft skills and transferable skills such as time management, professionalism, and customer service.

3. Actively involving HR teams

For social impact hiring to be successful, HR teams should actively participate in the program. The HR team should design a workforce development plan to up-skill the untapped talent pool. The plan should give all employees the competencies they need to achieve their professional goals. It can start by identifying roles that can be potentially offered to workers. Then, list the soft, technical, and transferable skills they will need to succeed in the job. Also, to encourage workers to stay engaged, they need to be aware of career paths within the company. The HR team visits to training sessions can help the business see students' progress firsthand and the quality of training.

4. Continuously improving the impact sourcing program

An impact sourcing program is not a one-time implementation. It is a journey. Stay informed on digital skills development programs in your target region and contact the team leaders to get more information. There are several institutions committed to the empowerment of vulnerable communities through education. Employment influencers like the Avasant Foundation have a robust database of job seekers. Graduates from these training programs are craving an opportunity to get stable jobs to overcome poverty, improve themselves, assist their families, and develop their skills.

Once hired, workers in the impact sourcing program should be assigned to mentors. It is important to get the new employees to work closely with experienced coworkers or managers who can advise and guide these individuals on how to surpass difficulties and enable long-term success.

5. Giving your time

Some organizations may not be ready to fully establish their impact-sourcing programs. Such companies can still get involved by participating in programs such as the Avasant Foundation Digital Skills Training. Here you can contribute in several ways:

- **Speak to students:** Join one of our groups of top IT and HR executives to share virtually with students your life experiences and offer tips to overcome challenges and develop a career in digital technologies.
- **Conduct a workshop:** For example, one business leader shared best practices for writing an effective resume. Or you could participate in a mock interview workshop, giving young people advice on interviewing skills and how to nail that first job.
- **Become a guest lecturer:** Join the class as a subject matter expert in one of the modules offered in digital or entrepreneurship skills training. We can arrange a working session to help you prepare and get your session rolling. The sessions take place in different time zones and different countries. They are synchronous and interactive.



IMPACT SOURCING AND THE BIG PICTURE

Creating employment for underserved communities should be part of the talent acquisition and employee development program for every business. This falls under the broader ESG movement as we look to the future. And it is not just about doing good but should be embedded as part of the hiring process. It can also set apart businesses from competitors.

A commitment by a service provider toward employment creation can be a key differentiator for buyers evaluating suppliers and their ESG programs. Achieving ESG goals requires a companywide understanding of the provider's impact on sustainability and how sourcing strategies contribute to that. Borderless hires can drive significant economic and social change in underserved communities across the globe.



Graduates of Avasant Digital Skills Training, Guyana

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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