

Preparing businesses for young tech talent attraction and retention

As matrics around the country begin the final leg of their school journeys, the usual conversations around future opportunities accelerate in frequency. These conversations invariably involve ensuring that matrics study hard to get good exam outcomes because their future depends on it.



Sethu Komani, COO at WeThinkCode_ | image supplied

The pressure mounts in the context of South Africa which has a 63.3% youth population, and a 45.3% youth unemployment rate. Rightfully, efforts to turn this situation around are largely focused on creating opportunities so that young people are better positioned to be active in the economy.

However, there is another side to this conversation that needs to be unpacked, which is the readiness of businesses of all sizes to attract and retain young talent, in particular young tech talent.

When it comes to opportunities to build a career in tech, a traditional qualification is not always needed. For businesses, this adds a layer of complexity when it comes to identifying and recruiting tech talent.

The usual credentials like a degree are meant to be indicators of competency, so it becomes much harder for businesses to hire talent when tech skills are being acquired outside of the traditional channels.

[HackerRank's student developer report](#) shows that 27.4% of developers say they're self-taught, and another 37.7% say they supplemented a formal education with an online course or otherwise taught themselves.

In a technology skills market that is experiencing a shortage and becoming more competitive, capacitating businesses to be able to identify, attract and retain young tech talent is critical to competing in the digital economy.

The Department of Higher Education and Training reports that annually about 2,900 computer science graduates are out of universities nationally, which is not enough to fill the estimated 40,000 entry-level digital jobs that go unfilled annually.



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So, whilst more young people need to be trained in tech skills within alternative institutions to meet market demand, likewise the market needs to be positioned to assess tech competencies coming out of these channels.

Businesses in South Africa need to be capacitated to better identify, hire and retain young tech talent, using competency metrics that are more inclusive.

Small businesses, due to their unique attributes, tend not to have large recruitment teams to onboard new talent or adequate structures to filter talent which matches business needs. It's then a question of having the right tools and processes in place to get the right talent in and nurture that talent.

Talent acquisition strategies are critical to retention

Although there are several talent acquisition strategies that can be used to attract young techies, they can be very intentional about their job placement decisions. Often, these decisions are about the financial incentive alone. Sometimes it's about feeling connected to the business mission and being engaged and empowered throughout the orientation process.

Where we've seen businesses (and ourselves) recruit and retain talent really well, we've observed a few common trends in their internship methodology. The first thing is creating an onboarding process. Second, clear supervision and reporting must be allocated so that young new entrants know where to seek guidance and support. Lastly, after clearly mapping out everything businesses need to have a formal evaluation process.

We've seen in our own internships the impact of not having a structured onboarding process. Businesses should be mindful of this as the onboarding sets the tone for the rest of the internship and can have a significant impact on the interns' sense of belonging and productivity.



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Among other things, this onboarding process should leave interns with a clear sense of what the organisation is about, what their roles and responsibilities are, what success looks like and where to get assistance.

Supervision plays a critical role within internships because it is a learning process ideally aimed at converting into a permanent job opportunity. Interns can show up technically ready and excited to contribute but without the right guidance, this remains an unfulfilled potential.

Lastly, a formal evaluation process should be implemented to assess the intern's performance fairly based on the onboarding information and learning agreement. This is optimal for both the intern and employer. The intern gets to know where they fell short and what needs to be worked on and the employer gets to verify whether their recruitment methods lead to the desired outcomes more often than not.

There's a lot to navigate in this hyper-competitive tech skills hiring environment, what I've shared just scratches the surface. In the bigger scheme of things, sourcing tech talent is becoming more of a task for businesses and as it does, it becomes increasingly expensive to lose investments made into recruiting.

Hence capacitating businesses to ensure they have the right processes in place to attract the right entry-level talent and then have the supporting mechanisms to nurture that talent is so important.

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