

How are South Africans planning to future-proof their careers?

Only 23.8% of working South Africans believe their current skills will keep them employed in 10 years' time, according to a research report released by MasterStart this week. With the burgeoning fourth industrial revolution accelerating the pace of change in the world of work, most South Africans are looking to 'future-proof' their careers. And for 95%, lifelong learning is the key to retaining relevancy.



Andrew Johnston, CEO of MasterStart

Based on a survey with a sample group of over 1000 people across varying demographics and industries, the MasterStart South African Workforce Barometer uncovered that – while artificial intelligence (AI) and robotic process automation (RPA) are on the radar – other factors are currently seen as more immediate factors impacting job retention.

Skills awareness

Andrew Johnston, CEO of MasterStart said, “Our workforce is clearly concerned; but positively, our research revealed that people are aware that frequent upskilling and reskilling will aid them in remaining relevant and employable. In a country where unemployment is an ongoing issue, it’s imperative that we empower people to future-proof their careers by making lifelong learning opportunities continuously accessible in order to bridge critical capability gaps and compete with global standards.”

Some pivotal findings in the report included:

1. **It's tough out there:** 80% of the sample believed the job market to be tougher now than it was 10 years ago. People in media and marketing especially agreed with this (92.9%), along with those in the manufacturing (87.9%) and financial services (87%) industries.
2. **Why's it perceived as so tough?** Both macro and micro factors were listed, including the political and economic climate, increased competition, fewer employment opportunities and rapid change.
3. **Age and lack of skills are the biggest barriers:** While age was referenced most frequently as a barrier to future employment – especially for those over 50 – in the 18-24 and 25-34 year old brackets, lack of skills was seen as the most prohibiting factor.
4. **People in IT and tech felt most secure about their skills:** Collectively, just under half the sample felt they'd been

held back by lack of skills. 30% of participants in IT and tech were completely confident their skills would survive the 10 year test. Those in other industries were noticeably less secure.

5. **We're not yet comfortable sharing our workloads with robots:** Close to a quarter of respondents felt AI had already impacted their industry, but just under 20% said they were completely comfortable sharing their workload with robots or processes automated by AI. Surprisingly, 18-24 year-olds had the highest level of unease about this.

Lifelong learning is the best way to remain relevant

Whilst the Barometer found a workforce in a somewhat sombre mood, positively, people were putting plans in place to learn further to acquire the skills they need. It was good to see that 80% of respondents were planning to study in the future, with self-enrichment being the primary motivator (66%), followed by the aspiration to get further and be promoted (54%) and the desire to keep abreast with industry-related changes (41%). 58% of people favoured online learning, and a number had already completed courses.

Johnston said, "This shows a workforce that's committed to continuously learning the new hard and soft skills that'll entrench the adaptability required to survive the breakneck pace of the workplace."

Those that had already studied listed the 'big gains' as being:

- **Tangible results:** like a salary increase, promotion, skills (to be more marketable), more experience and more opportunities.
- **Higher performance:** like better knowledge, keeping up-to-date, better understanding of the way the workplace works, faster completion of tasks, and having to employ fewer people as they had the skills themselves.
- **Better motivation and soft skills:** like being better at dealing with people, the ability to explain concepts to clients, and overall improved communication skills.

"Given the competitiveness of the market – which will only increase with the rise of automation – having a sought-after skillset is the best way to guarantee ongoing job retention. This means using learning to get to grips with AI and RPA in order to build efficiencies and one's overall value-add," Johnston commented.

He said we also need to consider providing alternate adult education programmes to give young people the best chance of gainful employment, "It's important we make ongoing online learning materials easily accessible in 'snackable', bite-sized pieces to make learning easier."

Lastly, he believes a lot of learning is up to corporates, "Providing ongoing executive-level education grooms great leaders and provides turn-key or customised solutions to bridge big capability gaps to foster greater efficiency, productivity and profitability. Our research shows that South Africans are hungry to learn – so companies that provide this opportunity will have a greater chance of talent retention, and attraction."

To find out more, download the [MasterStart South African Workforce Barometer report here](#).

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