



Technology and Education Work to Align Future of Work Priorities

By Emily Younger-Barnwell

The Partnership hosted its third and final talent workshop of 2023 on Oct. 2. at Woolsey Hall on Wichita State University's Innovation Campus. The workshop, in conjunction with the Ad Astra Technology Summit and FlagshipKansas.tech, brought together tech industry and education leaders to discuss the required skills needed to meet the workforce needs today and in the future.



Partnership President Jeff Fluhr welcomed approximately 270 professionals to the highly anticipated event before they engaged in roundtable discussions regarding talent and workforce requirements, opportunities and solutions.

"The Partnership's talent workshops aim to enhance the synergy between the industry and education sectors. We have observed remarkable achievements in our manufacturing and healthcare workshops," explained Fluhr. "Today presents an opportunity to do the same with tech. We encourage you to pose challenging questions as a community so we can continue to compete and win on a global level with our exceptional workforce."



Two representatives from Deloitte, a global consulting firm that helped the Partnership develop the Talent Roadmap, then presented a summary of the future of work trends in technology.

"Tech talent is everywhere. It is needed everywhere. It's hugely in demand and it's extremely complex," said Anne-Clair C. Roesch, a senior manager at Deloitte.

Roesch and her colleague, Michelle Mabery, explained the tech talent marketplace is uniquely difficult as the pace of change increases and business demands shift in the digital age.

"The cost to replace a tech-talent resource is 100 to 150 percent of their current salary," Roesch said. "The U.S. economy stands to lose $162 billion if companies cannot solve this issue and create a robust talent pipeline."

Mabery emphasized the attraction and retention of tech talent does not rely solely on compensation. In fact, research shows tech talent is searching for meaningful and flexible employment opportunities.

"The No. 1 way to retain high-performing tech talent is by offering flexible or hybrid work environments," Mabery detailed. "They also want work-life balance, autonomy and clear career paths."



This information led to a candid panel discussion moderated by Tonya Witherspoon, associate vice president of industry engagement and applied learning at Wichita State University. Panelists included:

- Sam Alva, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency
- Kevin Colborn, High Touch
- Amanda Duncan, Workforce Alliance
- Ashley Likes, WSU Tech
- Joseph Shepard, Lead for America
- Dyane Smokorowski, USD 259
- Chris Wyant, TEC Systems

The panelists discussed the essential skills required by the technology sector and how educational institutions are equipping the workforce of today and tomorrow.

Industry representatives highlighted the ever-evolving nature of technology, emphasizing the increasing demand for skills such as machine learning and risk mitigation.

Sam Alva, an advisor with Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency emphasized the importance of understanding communication in our digital world, stating, “We live in a digital world. We are digital citizens, but we do not know how to communicate. Unless we understand that we will be in a deficit.”

Education leaders outlined various programs and state incentives designed to attract and train future tech professionals.

Dyane Smokorowski, digital literacy coordinator for USD 259, shared, “Kids as young as elementary students are learning to code. We have programs like Girls that Game. We are scaling these students up so when they get to high school, they can be

even more excited about cybersecurity, game design, etc."

Smokorowski expressed the need for educators to gain insights from companies, urging, "What is missing for us is the opportunity for educators to go into places of businesses and learn what is needed from us."

Encouraging collaboration, she and others called on the tech industry to support educational initiatives. Tonya Witherspoon emphasized, "We are importing thousands of people into our state. Here is my challenge to industry. Help us keep them. Don't just wait to hire them. Reach out and take these kids somewhere. Take them to the ballpark. Take them to your zoo. Get to know them. Show them our cities, our state. Make them want to stay here. Give them our Kansas hospitality because that is how we are going to grow."



During workshop discussions, participants explored strategies for the tech industry and education to collectively address evolving workforce needs and brainstormed new approaches to prepare the community for future talent demands.

Key takeaways:

- Open the line of communication between industry and education to increase community involvement and understanding of the future of work and future talent demands, i.e., externships and internships.
- Commit resources to enhance educational training, ensuring students are well-equipped for success in the dynamic tech workforce.
- Craft a statewide strategic plan to effectively meet and exceed the growing demands of the tech industry.