

WORKPLACE-BASED TRAINING

A new trend in training to upskill Bangladeshi youth

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Bangladesh's economy is in constant change and has the potential to grow to be worth \$1 trillion in the decades to come. This transformation has been the result of the rise in employability and smart business in entrepreneurial and industrial sectors simultaneously. Urbanisation and trend waves have increased the demand for and profitability of convenience-based products, prompting the emergence of new industries in this sector to meet the demand.

With the Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector emerging as a key driver of this expansion, the transition has been quite hopeful. Bangladesh is set to position itself to become the world's ninth-largest consumer market by 2030, with the FMCG sector projected to reach a remarkable \$5.8 billion approximately. In this extremely promising landscape, the necessity of highly skilled and employable labour, however, is a more pressing concern now that must be addressed in order to fully utilise its potential.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), in the last 15 years, consumption expenditure for rural areas has increased significantly, reaching 103 percent from 81 percent. Over the years, the shift in spending patterns also indicates the demand for more consumer-based products, and with that, the importance of creating a more employable and skilled workforce across Bangladesh.

Food, beverages, as well as personal hygiene goods and such, are all included in the product lines of the FMCG sector. As a result of its broad scope, qualified workers in a variety of departments are needed, such as production, quality assurance, and customer support.

Despite the industry's promising projection, there is a significant lack of necessary skills. According to a recent training need assessment conducted by the BYETS (Building Youth Employability through Skills) project implemented by Swisscontact with leading FMCG industries, only 30% of the workers in the FMCG sector are classified as skilled, with the remaining 70% falling into the unskilled or semi-skilled categories. According to industry representatives, traditional training programs are not meeting current industry demands. Workers in this increasingly automated and export-oriented sector need training in areas such as Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), Quality Management Systems, Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP), and finally, soft skills to stay competitive.

Due to a lack of trust in traditional training methods in mainstream industries, programs like BYETS are focusing on Work-Based Training (WBT) to equip Bangladeshi youth with essential technical and employability skills. Leading FMCG companies such as Ifad,



Square, and City Group have collaborated with the project to provide industry-specific training through customised modules. By developing a pool of expert trainers within these companies, this approach ensures that the training is sustainable beyond the project and has a lasting impact.

In addition to this, WBT offers opportunities for on-the-job learning so that staff members may quickly apply their acquired practical abilities to their respective duties. This strategy increases the efficiency, confidence, and production in organisations while also improving the individual performance of the trainees.

Golam Mostafa, deputy manager (production) and a trainee of the BYETS project at IFAD Multi-products, shares his experience of the training, "It is a great learning opportunity for both technical skills and personal skills, such as communication and management at micro-levels. Our confidence has been boosted, and we are now able to train and guide our junior trainees in their needs as well. The training module and moderator have made learning easy and understandable for all."

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Md. Zakir Hossain Mondal, head of plant operation at IFAD, says, "We are a company of 11 food-based plants with 1,200 employees. When the BYETS project of SwissContact reached out to us regarding the training program, the company board decided that it would be beneficial for our employees. The training was well designed and gave the employees scientific reasoning for every guideline they had to follow. So far, we have only provided the training to one batch of employees. Our

target is to provide the training to nine more batches," said Mondal.

The training program was divided into two parts: soft skills and food safety and hygiene. The training module incorporated both the experienced workers and the trainees so that they could meet the international standards of production. Arohi Akter Asha, a production assistant operator and trainee of the BYETS program from IFAD, expresses a boost in her confidence after attending the program. She says, "We learn about the proper implementation of hygiene and safety protocols through the training. It includes learning how to maintain personal hygiene and health, washing hands, wearing necessary safety equipment, hand gloves, nets, and so on. We also learn about the practicals of food hygiene, food safety, and environment-friendly habits. The learnings also encourage us to educate those around us on the issues of food safety and the importance of maintaining hygiene. The five-day long training program made me feel more educated and conscious."

The start of the workforce's up-skilling process via the WBT model emphasises the value of industrial, academic, and governmental cooperation. The training program focuses on inclusion and empowerment, paving the way for better education and enriching skills beyond any barriers, regardless of their roles or gender, for that matter.

A skilled workforce is undoubtedly the cornerstone of both sectoral progress and individual business growth. By encouraging and investing in employee development, organisations can cultivate a high-performing culture that fosters job satisfaction, reduces turnover, and propels the company forward. The key to unlocking the future potential of a better and greater economy is in the up-skilling of its root workforce.

The BYETS project is funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and implemented by Swisscontact

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Deadline: N/A

Eligibility:

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"Hide not your talents, they for use were made, What's a sundial in the shade?"

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Smart ways to explain your employment gap

SHAMS RASHID TONMOY

"How do you explain your time off?" is a common yet uncomfortable question that often rears its unwanted head during job interviews. Employment gaps, regardless of the reason, are difficult to properly dive into during a tense interview, especially if your CV shows long, glaring, unexplained gaps between jobs and/or education.

So, to ensure the next time you aren't stuck when asked this question, here are some smart ways to explain your employment gap to a potential employer.

Focus on skill development

The best explanation for employment gaps is stating that you took online courses or attended workshops to upskill yourself. If that is the case, show the necessary certifications or degrees to show proof of completion of any such lessons. During the interview, talk about how your newly acquired skills will be an asset in the new position, e.g. "During my break, I dedicated time to learning advanced Excel and data analytics - skills crucial for this role."

Highlight relevant activities

Even if you weren't formally employed during the gap, you likely engaged in volunteering, freelancing, or pursuing non-academic certifications. If so, focus on how these activities



helped improve your professional growth. A possible explanation could be, for example, "While I wasn't working full-time, I completed a certification in digital marketing and volunteered for a local nonprofit. I learned valuable skills there to help brands gain an online presence."

Be honest about personal reasons

If you took time off to care for a family member, pursue personal growth, or travel, it's important to be truthful about your reasons. However, focus on how the experience contributed to your personal or professional development. You could frame

the explanation as such: "During this time, I cared for a family member, which enhanced my time management and multitasking abilities."

Frame the gap as a re-evaluation period

Among other reasons, you could choose to have time off to re-evaluate your career goal and plan your next steps. If so, explain how the break allowed you to gain clarity and align your career path - specifically towards your new potential job. Say something like: "I took some to reassess my career direction. As such, I have realised my passion lies in..." and then add information about the

role you are applying to.

Acknowledge the industry context

Sometimes employment gaps occur due to external factors, such as economic downturns, industry shifts, or company-wide layoffs. If that happened to you, straightforwardly address the matter; something along the lines of: "Even though my employment gap occurred during a significant economic downturn, I remained engaged with the industry by attending conferences and staying updated with market trends. Now, I am ready to jump back in as the industry recovers."

Apple appoints Indian-origin Kevan Parekh as new CFO

NEXT STEP DESK

Apple has officially announced the appointment of Kevan Parekh, an Indian-origin engineer, as its next Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Parekh will take over the role on January 1, 2025, succeeding Luca Maestri, who has been a pivotal figure in Apple's financial management for nearly a decade.

As per the official announcement, while Parekh steps into this critical role, Maestri will transition to continue leading the Corporate Services teams, including information systems and technology, information security, and real estate and development, reporting directly to CEO Tim Cook.

Who is Kevan Parekh?

Kevan Parekh, who has been with Apple for 11 years, is currently serving as the Vice President of Financial Planning and Analysis. In this role, Parekh has led key areas such as Financial Planning, General & Administrative (G&A) and Benefits Finance, Investor Relations, and Market Research, as per the official blog by Apple.

Parekh's career at Apple began with leading financial support for Apple's Product Marketing, Internet Sales and Services, and Engineering teams. He later moved on to lead finance for Worldwide Sales, Retail, and Marketing.

Before joining Apple, Parekh held senior leadership roles at Thomson Reuters and General Motors. He is an electrical engineer with a Bachelor of Science from the University of Michigan and an MBA from the University of Chicago.

What does Tim Cook say about him?

In the official statement, Tim Cook expressed his confidence in Parekh, saying, "For more than a decade, Kevan has been an indispensable member of Apple's finance leadership team, and he understands the company inside and out. His sharp intellect, wise judgment, and financial brilliance make him the perfect choice to be Apple's next CFO."

Luca Maestri also voiced his support for Parekh, stating, "I have enormous confidence in Kevan as he prepares to take the reins as CFO. He is truly exceptional, has a deep love for Apple and its mission, and embodies the leadership, judgment, and values that are so important to this role."

The leadership transition comes at a critical time for Apple, as the company gears up for its highly anticipated fall product launches, expected to feature the most significant software upgrades for the iPhone to date. Parekh's appointment as CFO is being seen as a strategic move to ensure continuity and stability in Apple's financial operations.