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1. [Decoding the often misunderstood concept of skills and skilling in India; There are several alarm bells that have been sounded to say that India is woefully unskilled and less than 2.5 per cent of Indians are skilled. Several programs have been put in place at the national level to activate the skilling ecosystem in the coun...](#)

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**Decoding the often misunderstood concept of skills and skilling in India; There are several alarm bells that have been sounded to say that India is woefully unskilled and less than 2.5 per cent of Indians are skilled. Several programs have been put in place at the national level to activate the skilling ecosystem in the coun...**

The Financial Express

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**Byline:** Neharika Vohra

## **Body**

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There are several alarm bells that have been sounded to say that **India** is woefully unskilled and less than 2.5 per cent of Indians are **skilled**. Several programs have been put in place at the national level to activate the **skilling** ecosystem in the country. A Ministry was created in 2014 preceded by the setting up of the National **Skill** Development Corporation in 2009 with the aim to **skill India**. A goal was set to **skill** 500 million people by 2022. Many **skilling** organizations came into being and universities have been set up to fulfil the goal of **skilling**. The focus and importance of **skill** has been urgently felt and expressed in several forums. In the context of Industry 4.0 and the speed at which technology is changing Tony Saldhana Former Vice President of IT and Global Business Services, Procter & Gamble said, "Bottom line: A **skill** development strategy is non-negotiable in 2020 - if you want to make it out of the fourth industrial revolution alive, that is." Several others have similarly underlined, that for business survival **skill** development is imperative.

However, as someone who entered this field recently, I realized that there is a lot of confusion about "what is **skill**" and "what is **skilling**" and "what is **skill** development"? From the dominant conversations and also studying a variety of programs questions that arise are - Is it the learning of something for short periods of time and getting a certificate for it? Is it the getting of a job at the end of a course designed to teach a sliver of technique or aspect of work? Can **skilling** only happen in formal settings? Is **skilling** only relevant for blue-collar jobs?

NSSO in 2013 defined **skills** as, "any marketable expertise" and Srivastava (2008) explained **skills** as the ability to carry out predetermined tasks. World Bank clarifies classifies **skills** as academic, problem-solving, and vocational. As per the dictionary **skill** in its noun form is akin to accomplishment, acquirement, acquisition, attainment and is acquired by training. It has also been defined as an ability to produce solutions in some problem domain. It is the display of discrimination, judgment, propriety, reason; the possessing knowledge of any art or science, in conjunction with readiness to perform and dexterity in execution, such as, the **skill** of a psychologist, dentist, painter, coder, selling. Well known artists such as Picasso were not only talented but hugely **skilled**. Picasso painted since he was ten and painted so extensively that in Barcelona there are three large house full of painting displays of some of his paintings. A ballerina is so **skilled** at her ballet that she can perform to perfection on any stage with little orientation. A **skilled** dentist who worked on my gums would be sitting on his chair chatting with other patients but even before his assistant had completed the preparation he would be on his feet and be on my side to check if all was done well. He was hugely **skilled** not with his hand **skills** but judgement **skills**. **Skills** in their verb form are meant to convey possessing an understanding and to making a difference, to signifying something.

Decoding the often misunderstood concept of skills and skilling in India; There are several alarm bells that have been sounded to say that India is woefully unskilled....

The above meanings of **skill** make it abundantly clear that there is an element of knowledge, dexterity, and judgment that is all folded into the word **skilling**. Knowledge in my mind can only be developed by learning something intensely from books, teachers, practitioners, and others who have direct and overlapping knowledge of the field. Dexterity can only be gained by practice. Gladwell in his book Outliers advances a thesis that to be good at something you need to do it at least for 10,000 hours. Judgement, discrimination, ability to make a difference are all aspects of a **skill** that come from higher-order abstraction and learning opportunities. Reflection, ability to discursively think about consequences, deep engagement, availability of role models and meaningful feedback is how some of these **skills** are developed.

In the above context, I believe that **skilling** is not a simple problem to solve. **Skill** is not something that can be seen or relegated to blue-collar work. It is something that makes one do something more and better. **Skilling** is "involved" and requires high-quality lengthy education (formal and/or informal). While jobs have to be the outcome of education the development of **skilled** people who have the knowledge, excellence in delivery, and discernment for their work is non-negotiable. The outcome of a **skilled** workforce would be excellent work. Like a **skilled** coder would make very few errors and code parsimoniously and elegantly a **skilled** carpenter would ensure near-perfect alignment of all knobs for the door

**Skilling** thus cannot happen outside of the context of places that are seriously invested in education. It is not a quick and dirty fix. It requires intense work with the person who is being **skilled**. The barely educated eighteen-year-old boy mechanic who has worked cars since he was twelve is **skilled** when by the sound of the engine can say where the problem is while another who has the same experience in the same shop would simply be carrying out the basic repairs. It is not just the time spent or the education received that will result in a **skilled** person. It is the process of development of the **skill** and the guidance to the student that is required for **skilling**. Richard Feynman, the Nobel prize-winning physicist, said that the most valuable thing his father had taught him was "the importance of knowing what it is that one is supposed to know".

Solving for widespread **skilling** in **India** would require improving the quality of ITS, polytechnics, colleges in the short run and nudging universities to focus on **skilling** through their courses and thus creating a narrative that favours **skill** development.

(The Author is Vice-Chancellor of Delhi **Skill** and Entrepreneurship University and on leave from IIMA where she is faculty in the Organizational Behavior Area.)

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