

Empowering the Future: Igniting Philippine Workforce Competitiveness through the Digital Dynamo Initiative

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In this rapidly and inevitably evolving world being thrust into the digital age, the advent of technology and the growing influence of the digital economy have reshaped the global workforce landscape. Nations worldwide have been striving to bolster their digital workforce competitiveness.

When the pandemic hit, the Philippines, along with other countries, were tested not just on the health mitigation response but as well as on our digital preparedness in addressing the imminent and enforced change of landscape on the sustainability of the workforce to aid in the overall survival of our economy and country. Many com-

panies resulted in skeletal workforce set-ups and alternative modes of performing the task at hand. Most were constrained to continue their operations remotely. We were thrust into taking courses of action to maintain and balance the welfare of the society and the interest and necessitated demands of sovereignty. Perhaps this game-changing phenomenon, which placed the world at a standstill, was the driving force behind The Philippines to finally recognize the need to cultivate and elevate its digital workforce to remain relevant and competitive in the digital age.

The way I see it, one of our country's

recognized strategies in tackling this imperative was through the introduction and passage of the R.A. 11927 into Law on July 30, 2022, otherwise known as an "Act to Enhance the Philippine Digital Workforce Competitiveness" or more succinctly known as Philippine Digital Workforce Competitiveness Act. The act, as indicated in its declaration of policy, seeks to address key aspects critical to bolstering the country's digital workforce competitiveness. It takes cognizance that digitalization and technological advancements have a transformative impact across various sectors. And as such, the Law's primary intent is to elevate the skills and competitive edge of the

Philippine workforce. Particularly in human capabilities and digital expertise to align our digital proficiencies with global benchmarks. The Law ensures that our Philippine Workforce is as capable and equally competitive as the international industry. This framework encourages individuals to acquire new skills and update their knowledge throughout their careers, raising their relevance in an evolving job market.

Among the salient provisions of the act was the creation of an Inter-Agency Council composed of representatives from relevant government agencies. The council assist,

manage and oversee the development and execution of strategies outlined in the act, to monitor progress, and make necessary adjustments based on the evolving needs of the digital workforce landscape. One of its goals is to establish a centralized online platform that encompasses training and competency building. Through its strategies and programs, which include public-private partnerships, it aims to provide a platform for skills development, thereby creating opportunities for our workers to improve to become more highly competent individuals

Also worth noting is the importance given to Electronic readiness (E-readiness) and the crucial role that the LGUs play under this act in fostering the growth of the information and communications technology sector in their areas through its Public Employment Services Office (PESO). It helps to bridge the gap of our common workers' struggle in job searching and career matching through the conduct of virtual job fairs and providing local access to in-demand work readily made available via local access, strengthened with the promise of universal access to quality, high-speed internet by placing priority on the development of ICT infrastructures.

The passage of this Law couldn't have come at a more opportune time as it coincides with the progressive growth of the gig economy or labor markets characterized

by independent contracting, i.e., online freelance work all enabled by digital technology. The youth of today and even those budding neophytes and digital nomads ventured and realized the joys and benefits of working from home and the perks of having a work-life balance where one could travel practically anywhere without having to sacrifice their jobs or the allure of a hefty compensation.

The Philippines is the fifth largest online labor supplier in the world. With this Law enabling governments to enter public-private partnerships with industry experts, I.T. -BPO associations, and other stakeholders, it bodes well in an already increasing trend that more and more of our today's society has its eyes geared towards this preference for home-based work set-up industry (Lugtu, 2022).

Indeed, emphasizing and focusing on the need for the Philippines to be a digitally competitive nation is crucial. As a matter of perspective, we, as a nation packed with BPO industries, contribute nearly \$30 billion to the economy each year (Talmage-Rostron, 2023), placing us as one of the two top countries in the field of Business Process Outsourcing alongside India. However, in a contrasting picture, our country remains to have the lowest ranking among Southeast Asian countries in the global digital competitiveness index of the IMDB. And we are in 13th place out of 14 economies in the

Asia-Pacific region in its 2023 World Competitiveness Yearbook (Tabile, 2023).

Even the Commission on Human Rights has recognized the importance of us Filipinos to keep up-to-date with the necessary skills and expertise to thrive in the modern digital workforce. And it praised this Law for creating a legal framework that was aptly passed as an advent to propel our country's transition to being digitally competitive. It likewise recognized how the creation of the inter-agency to ensure the implementation of the programs of the aforesaid Law will help secure a smooth transition into the new normal in the lens of digital innovation and entrepreneurship.

It is, in fact, the belief by the CHR that the "efficient implementation RA 11927 can help enhance and expand the economic, cultural, and social rights of everyone through digital modes that offer exponential possibilities" (De Guia, 2022, para 6). This is supported by the former DICT undersecretary Monchito Ibrahim as published in the Manila Bulletin, the potential of Philippine Digital Workforce Competitiveness if adequately executed, "will put into motion a whole-of-government initiative to ensure the competitiveness of the Philippine workforce by providing all Filipino workers access to life-long learning platforms that will provide them with digital skills that are at par with global standards and get them ready for the work of the

future" (Ibrahim, 2022, para 1).

In conclusion, the "Act to Enhance the Philippine Digital Workforce Competitiveness" reflects the country's commitment to adapting to the demands of the digital age. By prioritizing education, skills, technical learning, industry collaboration, innovation, diversity in its multi-approach and strengthening of stakeholders, and fostering relevant partnerships, the act provides a comprehensive framework to nurture a highly competitive digital workforce. As technology continues to reshape the way we work and live, the Philippines' proactive approach to enhancing its digital workforce ensures its continued relevance and success in the global economy. And through this legislative act, we expect our socio-economic status's steady and uphill recovery to be alleviated by competent and numerous opportunities for entrepreneurship and digital careers.

