Key role of digital competencies in transforming our education system

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How can we help younger generations to thrive in the digital age? We need an education system that responds to the most essential demands of the labor market of the future, based on a dialogue between representatives of public, business and non-profit sector. Development of digital skills at schools is a bright example.

Jobs of the future may look very different. Accenture Tech Vision research has found that 74% of business and IT leaders from 31 countries say their organization is entering areas that have yet to be defined. At the same time, 65% of children starting school today will hold jobs that don't exist yet and digitally-intensive middle-skill jobs are growing 2.5 times faster than their analog counterparts.

While it is quite difficult to predict how jobs will evolve, we have decided to support the development of skills Slovak students will need to succeed in the future workplace. Accenture partnered with other companies from Digital Skills platform of Business Leaders Forum, with the ambition not only to improve the computer science education and digital skills building, but also to contribute to overall digital transformation of schools.

Within one of its flagship joint initiatives launched individually by Accenture back in 2016, volunteers from several companies delivered training to more than 1400 teachers from 439 schools across 75 districts in Slovakia under the slogan "Let's teach computer science differently". Currently, the platform members Accenture, ESET, Orange Slovakia, Slovak Telecom, Microsoft, Deutsche Telekom IT Solutions Slovakia actively participate in the joint platform's activities, which complement their individual initiatives in this area.

What do we mean by digital skills?

Preparing and anticipating for the impact of digital technologies on the workforce is urgent and it needs to be complex. Basic digital skills will be essential in up to 90% of job positions in the near future. When we look at skills that will be crucial in upcoming years, we need to immediately focus on developing digital competence in information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety and problem solving with support of digital tools. These five key components of digital competence were identified by the European Commission's science and knowledge service within the Digital Competence Framework 2.0.

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Slovakia's primary school principals believe that informatics is the 4th most important subject for the future of students, showed a recent survey carried out by the marketing and research agency Focus for the Digital Skills platform of Business Leaders Forum. However, 64% of respondents stated that their school does not employ any full-time informatics teacher, while 39% pointed out that they do not have any teachers who completed their master's degree in teaching informatics.

Moreover, there are various obstacles such as lack of financial motivation and time due to wide range of activities that have a negative impact on potential further increase of teachers' digital qualification.

Coordinators of Digital Competencies

Under Accenture leadership, Business Leaders Forum Digital Skills platform, along with other partners and supporters from the private non-profit sectors, launched the Digital Competencies Coordinators' Program, designed for primary school and secondary grammar school teachers. This comprehensive educational program is free of charge and aims at educating teachers who will cover the area of digital competencies within their schools. By creating a coordinators' community, we want to encourage knowledge exchange and mutual support. The Focus survey found that more than two thirds of principals (67%) consider the role of digital coordinator as useful and needed.

Earlier this year, the pilot group of first ten coordinators from Bratislava, Bučany, Nové Mesto nad Váhom, Teplička nad Váhom and Ružomberok joined the program. They shall focus not only on the improvement of computer science education at their school. They shall also help improve the way how digital technologies are used within the education process.

In the first phase, the program will focus on the following topics allowing teachers to improve their ability to use digital tools and innovative teaching methods:

- Methodology of Computer Science & Informatics Curricula
- Innovative tools for teaching programming and developing of algorithmic thinking
- Digital security
- EduScrum agile framework as a didactic method
- Online collaboration tools, such as Office 365

Building skills together

In October, Accenture announced its biggest brand move in a decade. We introduced a new purpose – to deliver on the promise of technology and human ingenuity. Synergy of innovation and ingenuity is a powerful way to deliver value for all.

> **We are committed to bringing our expertise into the Slovak education system.**

To create shared success, we are open for cooperation. One of the key prerequisites for the future program growth is to commence a dialogue with the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, in order to scale up the project beyond the capabilities of the business and non-profit sectors. In addition, we would like to cooperate with the ministry in finalizing the role of the digital competencies coordinator and its subsequent integration into the system of teacher education. Several Amcham members work on the agenda of the Digital Competencies Coordinators already and any private, state, or non-profit entity is welcome to join. We can make change together.