



Telecommunications Staffing Trends Report



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Telcos are in the midst of a major transformation with edge computing, quantum computing, and next-generation transportation technology to contend with alongside the continued rollout of 5G networks and the explosion of generative AI. With an ageing workforce and a constantly shifting tech landscape, the sector is in urgent need of a talent refresh, but much like other industries, telcos are navigating a tight labour market and need help sourcing candidates with very specific skill sets.

Unlike other industries, telecommunications companies have the advantage of being able to pivot to technology. By moving from telco to techco, employers in the telecoms space are positioning themselves as desirable, innovative workplaces where the next generation of tech talent can cut their teeth on cutting-edge tools and solve the problems of an increasingly connected world.



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Demand is growing for greater connectivity

By 2025, the telecommunications landscape will have expanded to include an estimated 51.9 billion connected devices worldwide. This upsurge poses new challenges for telcos as they race to amplify network capacity, optimize the speed and efficiency of data, and reduce latency, all while minimizing energy consumption. Providers are migrating their services to the cloud, rolling out fiber and wireless, private 5G, and expanding network coverage to rural or otherwise underserved areas. Shifts in the industry will cause certain skill sets to slide further into obsolescence, including those related to digital subscriber lines (DSL), 2G and 3G cellular networks, and traditional cable TV infrastructure. In their place, a new generation of talent will need to grapple with the complexities of an increasingly connected world.



New technology is reshaping skill requirements

While many businesses are struggling to wrap their heads around generative AI, for telcos, the technological landscape is far more complicated. Technology is advancing at a rapid pace and creating demand for new, highly specific skill sets. The adoption of edge computing will require deep expertise in the design, engineering, and maintenance of networks, as well as database management and security. xRAN—an open alternative to closed, hardware-based Radio Access Network (RAN) architecture—has the potential to improve cost efficiency by reducing physical asset requirements and streamlining and standardizing implementation. However, developing xRAN capabilities will demand agile working, data engineering, and expertise in solution development and testing.

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Consumer expectations around digital trust are on the rise

As data literacy increases among consumers, there's a growing expectation that the companies that handle their data will do so with the utmost care and discretion. This is especially true of the telecoms industry, where data security is central to building trust. Given the high volume of data that telcos handle on a day-to-day basis, there's a huge demand for talent with expertise in the security domain—firewalls, Intrusion Detection Systems (IDS), network and data security, among others—to help organizations build a data security infrastructure that can meet the demands of a rapidly evolving industry.



New technology is both an opportunity and a threat

Advances in technology are making everyone reconsider the way we work; AI could potentially bring about one of the most significant changes to the working day since the Industrial Revolution. The flipside for telcos is that they're now forced to compete for talent with companies that specialize in new fields such as AI, generative AI and Machine Learning (ML). Having grown up during an age of rapid technological advancement, Gen Z and millennials are naturally drawn to new technology and startups, perceiving these companies as more agile and exciting than the telecoms industry. Telcos may need to think long and hard about how to best integrate the latest tools into their business and position themselves as a destination for the next generation of tech-savvy talent.



The workforce is shrinking, and the talent pool is drying up

Workforces across the telecoms industry have been declining by between 1 to 5% annually across most regions worldwide, most likely as a result of streamlining and optimization spurred by new technology like AI. The telecoms sector is expected to hit \$2.47 trillion by 2028, and the rapid pace of technological change requires a workforce with a diversity of skills, but experts are concerned by the talent shortage across the industry. Talent issues are compounded by an ageing workforce caught in a shifting tech landscape. Telcos will either need an injection of new blood or a way to rapidly upskill and reskill the workforce.

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Telcos will reimagine themselves as techcos

With the spread of AI, the Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing, and 5G networks, customers are no longer satisfied by connectivity, they want holistic digital experiences. The industry is under pressure to adapt or risk obsolescence, leading many telcos to reposition as techcos.

Having invested in 5G networks and upgraded gear, telcos now need to see returns, leveraging their existing connectivity infrastructure to monetize their networks and offer more dynamic services to clients. For those transitioning from telco to techco, the goal is to expand their capabilities so that they can not only provide individuals and businesses with connectivity, storage, and processing power but also provide curated solutions and applications, bolstered by advanced privacy and cyber security measures.

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**AI will empower the telco frontline workforce**

Much has been written about AI's potential for augmenting the capabilities of workers, but AI integration may be of particular interest to telcos and the many frontline workers who act as the face of their business.

From technicians to call center reps, AI-powered tools have the potential to streamline tasks and improve employee wellbeing. AI and machine learning can also improve things like shift allocation, making work more flexible and desirable for employees attracted by today's hybrid working model.

As automation frees up employees, they can be redeployed to new projects and operations to deliver better customer experiences and even develop new products and services. To best achieve this, however, executive teams need to embrace AI and democratize employee access to these tools rather than acting as gatekeepers.

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Telcos will invest in security expertise to position themselves as data protectors

The interconnectedness of modern life has led to a vast increase in data with some estimating the total global volume of data will reach 181 zettabytes by 2025. The explosion of data has brought about an increased focus on consumer privacy and anonymity, turning data protection into a hot topic.

Well-publicized data breaches have hurt customer trust in several technology giants, but for telcos, there's an opportunity to position themselves as champions of privacy and cybersecurity.

As consumers grow more security-conscious, telcos will need to build a workforce that can create robust, secure, and future-ready networks that can inspire confidence in their customers. This means attracting the best of the best in network and cybersecurity, seeking out experts in privacy engineering, DevOps, network engineering and network maintenance.



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