



Connecting Minds, Transforming Futures

The Collective X's guiding principles for an Inclusive Digital Skills Ecosystem

By Deidre Samson, Executive for Insights & Strategic Supply Side Partnerships at The Collective X

In 2023, we launched The Collective X, a visionary initiative aimed at propelling South Africa into the global arena as a formidable digital powerhouse. Our mission is clear – to connect stakeholders capable of nurturing and amplifying digital skills, fostering collaboration, concentrating efforts, and devising solutions to address our country's critical digital skills shortage.

Far from being mere rhetoric, our achievements so far in expanding partner and funder networks underscore our commitment to transforming South Africa's digital landscape. The growth trajectory of our national partner network, including training providers, employers, policymakers, technology vendors, and education providers, reflects our success in bridging the gap between the supply and demand of digital skills. This network ensures the delivery of the right training at the right time for the right price, to impact South Africa's future in the right way.

The emphasis on stakeholder collaboration extends connections that drive collective action, transcending traditional boundaries.

Collaborating with Dr Michelle Weise, a global thought leader in constructing enabling ecosystems for the future of work, has supported our development of a strategy for catalysing a scalable digital skills learning ecosystem. This ecosystem intricately links stakeholders, including learners, employers, governments, and education providers, across various domains – from natural and cultural to technological and economic.

Our ecosystem thrives on a multitude of financing solutions, content, software, hardware, data, infrastructure, and diverse interest groups, often with competing missions. To ensure its growth and vitality, we focus on the scarcest resource in our value chain – the people being left behind, the millions of unemployed youth in South Africa. The health of our ecosystem depends on their well-being. By centering on their needs, we address pain points, barriers, and frictions that could otherwise hinder the development of a healthy learn-and-work ecosystem.

We adhere to five guiding principles to shape a learning ecosystem that caters to the needs of all people to thrive in the work of the future:

1. **Navigable.** Job seekers need a bird's-eye view of the job market. These include all the career pathways open to them, better information to navigate complex systems and assessments to help them translate their skills and experience into better jobs.



2. Supportive. For some of South Africa's most vulnerable learner populations, the barriers to success are often outside the classroom. Job seekers need human advisers who can coach them and help them access wraparound support services.
3. Targeted. Learners need access to a precise and relevant education tailored to their needs. They need to know that the education they choose will be worth the investment. Targeted learning experiences must provide knowledge plus the human and technical skills, professional networks and hands-on practice that equip learners for the working world.
4. Integrated. Working learners need time, funding, confidence and resources to juggle education and training with their existing responsibilities. Learning opportunities should be integrated into life and work by offering opportunities to learn while earning.
5. Transparent. The hiring process must be transparent, open and fair, and it must enable job seekers to prove their competence and skills. Only when skills become the primary currency of the job market will employers stop overlooking qualified job seekers.

The Collective X is not just a network; it is a transformative ecosystem that can unlock the potential of South Africa's youth and promote economic growth, global competitiveness, and job creation for all.

Building a learning ecosystem requires a coalition of learning partners, non-profits, for-profits, businesses, and government working together toward a common vision. If you want to learn more about our ecosystem and how you can get involved, visit thecollectivex.org or contact Fran@thecollectivex.org.



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