'Freshers' AI exposure varied, need practical application skills'

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More than 95% of IT services firm HCLTech's employees are now equipped with AI skills. The company has also built a strong pool of specialised AI talent, including over 11,000 certified AI Builders and more than 700 AI Blackbelt-certified professionals, who are helping accelerate AI-led transformation and deliver AI-driven outcomes across the enterprise and for clients.

As of June 2026, the company's total headcount stood at 223,889.

Ramachandran Sundararajan, Chief People Officer, HCLTech, told *DH* that the company has adopted a structured approach to AI capability building across three talent cohorts: AI Builders, who build AI products, platforms and solutions; AI Super Users, who leverage AI in everything they do to dramatically enhance productivity; and Human-in the-Loop AI Decision Makers, who apply AI in the right context for daily tasks.

"By investing across all three groups, we are building both AI fluency and deep AI expertise across the organisation," he said.

Talking about skilling, Sundararajan said that as AI reshapes every aspect of business, the company's focus is ensuring that its people have the skills to harness its potential and deliver meaningful outcomes for clients.

Ramachandran Sundararajan

The company added over 1,050 freshers in Q1 FY27. Asked whether freshers are coming with AI skills, he said they enter the workforce with varying levels of AI exposure depending on their academic background and area of study. While AI is increasingly becoming part of engineering education, there remains a need to strengthen industry readiness and practical application skills, he said.

Bridging the gap

HCLTech works closely with academia to help bridge this gap. "We engage with engineering institutions to improve industry readiness through curriculum guidance, mentorship, tech talks, hackathons and exposure to emerging technologies. Combined with our structured learning and training programmes, it helps create a strong pipeline of talent equipped for an AI-driven future," he said.

The company also works with its AI ecosystem partners, including hyperscalers, AI model providers, and technology leaders, to build its Forward Deployed Engineers (FDE) strength. "Through these collaborations, we drive co-innovation, gain access to emerging AI advancements, and strengthen our ability to develop and deliver differentiated, future-ready AI solutions at scale," he added.

Recently, HCLTech launched the HCLTech Pulse, a dedicated business unit focused on helping enterprises with annual revenues between $500 million and $5 billion safely scale AI, modernise their technology foundations and accelerate growth. "AI is rewriting the economics of growth. The real advantage goes to enterprises bold enough to reimagine their processes from the ground up, not just automate what already exists, and to do it safely and responsibly," C Vijayakumar, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, HCLTech, said.