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Mismatch Between Talent and Needs Hampers Russian Business

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The Challenges and Solutions: Addressing Obstacles to Business-Driven Growth panel session at the 18th St. Petersburg International Economic Forum at the Lenexpo Exhibition Complex in St.Petersburg, Russia.

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia — As Russia's economic growth sputters to a halt, the mismatch between education and job requirements has become an even more daunting challenge for the Russian and international business communities.

"There is an international war over talent," said David Gray, managing partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers Russia, speaking at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum. "The business community thinks that times will get better, that there will be economic growth. But everybody remains worried about acquiring the right talent."

PwC's 2014 "talent challenge" survey of CEOs from 69 countries found that 63 percent were concerned about the ability of their company to recruit talented staff — a 17 percent rise

from PwC's 2009 survey.

According to the business education community, the incongruence between companies' needs and the competencies available in the work force is especially acute in Russia. Soviet heritage — despite its strengths in producing engineers — is one factor contributing to this mismatch.

"No one did anything about education for almost twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union," said Anatoly Karachinsky, president of Russian software and IT services company IBS Group. "We have only started making some changes in the past few years and companies struggle to find personnel with specialized skills."

Generational challenges also continue to hinder Russia's entrepreneurial community, according to Dmitry Peskov, director of the branch Young Professionals at the Agency for Strategic Initiatives in Moscow.

"This generation is completely different from the ones we have seen before," Peskov said. "It doesn't see the difference between PR and reality. It wants to feel useful and wear nice suits. They are not rebels, they are happy to follow. We have not made a breakthrough to them."

Despite challenges in creating Russia's own Silicon Valley, certain initiatives nonetheless have contributed to adapting the workforce to corporate needs.

Andrei Sharonov, the dean of Skolkovo, a top management school in Moscow, gave the example of Rosatom, Russia's giant state-owned nuclear corporation. Skolkovo has contributed to the training of the corporation's managers, and Rosatom has its own corporate university to meet its staffing needs.

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