

# The Critical Roles Advantage

A Professional Framework  
for Finding Durable Career  
Opportunities in Nigeria's  
Labour Market



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# Table of Content

Opening Perspective

Where This Conversation Already Exists

Nigeria's Employment Question Requires Better Demand Mapping

The Core Idea: Durable Jobs Sit Close to Institutional Necessity

The Critical Role Families

What This Means for Graduates and First-Time Workers

What This Means for Experienced Professionals Seeking Career Change

How Professionals Get Better Value for Their Work

A Labour-Market Intervention: Using Critical Roles to Address Unemployment and Underemployment

The Opportunity for Higher Education Institutions, Professional Associations and Training Providers

The Critical Roles Advantage Framework

Closing Reflection

References & Academic Base

# Opening Perspective

Career decisions are becoming more consequential. Graduates are entering a labour market shaped by technology, regulation, demographic pressure, institutional fragility and skills disruption. Early career professionals are trying to secure relevance beyond their first appointment. Experienced professionals are reviewing their future with greater seriousness as industries redesign roles, automate tasks and demand new capabilities. Career coaches, professional associations, training institutions and higher education institutions are being asked to provide clearer guidance on where opportunity truly lives.

### **The central question is direct: where are durable career opportunities found?**

The strongest answer begins with institutional necessity. Durable jobs are found within roles attached to problems serious institutions cannot abandon. Every credible institution must protect licence, trust, data, capital, safety, quality, customers, patients, students, citizens, records, systems, assets, reputation and continuity. These responsibilities generate recurring demand for people who can help institutions operate responsibly, comply with obligations, manage risk, preserve standards and deliver value.

This article introduces the Critical Roles Advantage as a professional career development framework. It is written for graduates, first-time workers, experienced professionals seeking career transition, career coaches, higher education institutions, professional associations and training providers. It also contributes to Nigeria's employment conversation by identifying where unfulfilled demand for competent people is likely to exist: in the role families that protect institutional value.

### **About This Publication**

The framework is useful for graduates, first-time workers, career transitioners, career coaches, higher education institutions, professional associations and training providers. It also contributes to Nigeria's employment and employability agenda by identifying where unfulfilled demand for competent people is likely to exist.



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## Where This Conversation Already Exists

The question this article addresses has been approached by major global institutions, labour-market researchers and employability scholars. Each has examined one part of the challenge.

The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** has consistently framed employment as a question of decent work, productive work, labour protection and human dignity. In its Nigeria labour-market analysis, the ILO describes a country with a large and youthful labour force where jobs exist in quantity, while decent and productive jobs remain limited (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2024). This creates a clear development challenge: the labour market requires pathways into better-quality work.

The **United Nations (UN)** places this concern within **Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8)**, which promotes sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all. SDG 8 is especially relevant to this discussion because it connects employment with productivity, inclusion, equal pay, youth transition and labour-market dignity (United Nations, n.d.).

The **World Economic Forum (WEF)** has focused on labour-market disruption, future skills and the redesign of work. Its Future of Jobs Report 2025 projects that 22% of current jobs will be disrupted by 2030, with 170 million new roles created and 92 million displaced, resulting in a net gain of 78 million jobs. The report also identifies skills gaps as a major barrier to business transformation (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2025). This reinforces the need for career development that is anchored in capability, adaptability and changing institutional demand.

# Where This Conversation Already Exists

The **World Bank** has placed jobs at the centre of development and poverty reduction. Its jobs agenda emphasises entrepreneurship, private sector development, human capital and the ability of people to find employment while firms find workers with relevant skills (World Bank, 2025). This links employability to productivity, institutional capacity and economic transformation.

The **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** has contributed extensively to the discussion on skills mismatch, lifelong learning and changing labour-market needs. Its work shows that skills mismatch affects wages, productivity and job satisfaction, and that education and training institutions must collaborate more closely with labour-market actors (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2025).

Academic researchers have also shaped this field. Acemoglu and Autor (2011) advanced a task-based view of labour markets, showing how technology changes the relationship between skills, tasks and earnings. Frey and Osborne (2017) examined the susceptibility of occupations to computerisation, provoking a global debate on automation exposure. Deming (2017) demonstrated the growing labour-market value of social skills, especially when combined with analytical capability. Tomlinson (2012) reviewed the graduate employability debate and showed that employability must be understood within the wider labour-market context. Clarke (2018) developed a framework linking employability to human capital, social capital, individual attributes, behaviours and labour-market context. McGuinness, Pouliakas and Redmond (2018) clarified the complexity of skills mismatch and its policy implications.

# Where This Conversation Already Exists

## Synthesis of Thought

The Critical Roles Advantage builds on these streams of thought and translates them into a practical career decision framework. It asks professionals to locate the institutional problems that remain important across time, sectors and economic conditions, then build career capability around the roles designed to solve those problems.

## Nigeria's Employment Question Requires Better Demand Mapping

Nigeria's labour-market challenge requires more than broad statements about unemployment. It requires a more precise understanding of work quality, skills alignment, sectoral opportunity and institutional demand.

### NBS Q2 2024 Labour Force Survey

4.3%

Unemployment Rate

6.5%

Youth Unemployment

93.0%

Informal Employment

12.5%

Youth NEET Rate

These figures show a labour market where many people are economically active, while a large share of work remains informal, vulnerable or insufficiently productive.

The ILO's Nigeria labour-market brief adds an important development lens. Employment remains heavily concentrated in agriculture and commerce, sectors that absorb many people while generating relatively low productivity for a significant share of workers (ILO, 2024). This creates a strategic career development imperative: **people need pathways into roles that offer stronger productivity, better institutional relevance and improved professional value.**

# Nigeria's Employment Question Requires Better Demand Mapping

*The issue is therefore bigger than access to any work. It is about access to productive, decent and value-creating work. This is where SDG 8 becomes relevant. A career development agenda that helps people enter critical role families contributes directly to full and productive employment, decent work, youth transition and improved labour-market outcomes.*

## The Core Idea: Durable Jobs Sit Close to Institutional Necessity

Every institution carries obligations it must continuously fulfil. These obligations become stronger in regulated sectors, complex industries and public-interest institutions. Banks, hospitals, universities, insurance firms, pension administrators, telecommunications companies, energy firms, pharmaceutical companies, airlines, public agencies, technology platforms and utilities all carry responsibilities that affect people, money, safety, data, trust and continuity.

**These responsibilities create a consistent set of problems that institutions must keep solving:**

Regulatory compliance and licence protection.

Governance, accountability and ethical conduct.

Risk identification, assessment and mitigation.

Financial integrity, statutory reporting and resource stewardship.

Cybersecurity, information security and digital trust.

Data protection, records integrity and responsible data use.

Product, service and professional quality.

Safety, health, environmental and public protection.

Fraud prevention, investigation and misconduct management.

Operational resilience, business continuity and disaster recovery.

Customer, patient, student, investor, citizen and stakeholder protection.

Organisational culture, professional standards and workforce capability.

These problems are not occasional administrative concerns. They are recurring institutional obligations. They produce roles, shape organisational structures, influence regulatory expectations and create career pathways.

A role becomes critical when failure in that role can create serious consequences for the institution or its stakeholders. Such consequences may include regulatory sanction, licence risk, customer harm, patient harm, product failure, data breach, financial loss, audit failure, operational breakdown, reputational damage, legal exposure or loss of public confidence.

Critical roles exist at different levels. They include graduate-entry, analyst, officer, specialist, supervisory, managerial and executive roles. The career opportunity lies in understanding how these roles connect to institutional consequence.

## The Critical Role Families

Career decisions become clearer when opportunities are viewed through role families. A role family groups jobs that solve related institutional problems and require overlapping capabilities. This makes it easier for graduates and transitioners to see pathways across sectors.

Critical Role Family	Institutional Problem Addressed	Representative Entry and Transition Roles
Governance and Compliance	Licence protection, statutory compliance, regulatory readiness and institutional legitimacy.	Compliance Analyst, Regulatory Affairs Officer, Governance Assistant, Policy Officer, Company Secretariat Assistant
Risk and Control	Exposure identification, control discipline, fraud prevention and risk response.	Risk Analyst, Internal Control Officer, Operational Risk Assistant, Credit Risk Analyst, Fraud Risk Analyst
Audit and Assurance	Independent review of systems, processes, controls and institutional evidence.	Internal Audit Trainee, Assurance Analyst, Compliance Monitoring Officer, Quality Auditor
Cybersecurity and Digital Trust	System protection, digital reliability, cyber-risk management and secure technology operations.	Cybersecurity Analyst, Information Security Associate, IT Risk Analyst, Security Operations Analyst
Data Protection and Data Governance	Responsible data use, privacy, records integrity, data quality and reporting confidence.	Data Protection Associate, Data Governance Officer, Records Officer, Data Quality Analyst
Quality, Safety and Standards	Product integrity, service quality, safety assurance and professional standards.	Quality Assurance Officer, Health, Safety and Environment Officer, Laboratory Quality Analyst, Food Safety Officer, Clinical Governance Assistant
Finance, Reporting and Stewardship	Financial accuracy, statutory reporting, tax discipline, treasury support and resource accountability.	Financial Control Analyst, Regulatory Reporting Officer, Tax Compliance Associate, Treasury Operations Officer
Operations and Resilience	Continuity of essential services, process reliability and incident readiness.	Operations Control Officer, Business Continuity Analyst, Disaster Recovery Coordinator, Service Reliability Associate
Stakeholder Protection and Conduct	Protection of customers, patients, students, citizens, contributors and investors.	Complaints Officer, Consumer Protection Analyst, Patient Experience Officer, Student Affairs Officer, Claims Officer
People, Ethics and Professional Standards	Accountable culture, workplace conduct, learning compliance and professional behaviour.	Human Resources Compliance Officer, Ethics Assistant, Learning Compliance Officer, Employee Relations Officer

## The Critical Role Families

These role families create structured opportunity because they are anchored in institutional requirements. They also allow professionals to build portable capability. A person trained in risk, compliance, audit, data governance, quality assurance, cybersecurity or operational resilience can move across sectors with the right sector-specific learning.

## What This Means for Graduates and First-Time Workers

Graduates and first-time workers need stronger career orientation before entering the labour market. Degree programmes provide disciplinary foundations. Career relevance improves when those foundations are connected to institutional problems and role pathways.

A graduate in accounting, finance, law, computer science, microbiology, business administration, sociology, psychology, public administration, engineering or health sciences should be guided to understand where the discipline connects to risk, compliance, quality, data, operations, reporting, stakeholder protection and governance. The objective is to help the graduate identify a field of institutional demand, understand the vocabulary of that field, build foundational competence and produce evidence of readiness.

Higher education institutions should support this process through sector maps, role-family maps, employer engagement, professional mentorship, case-based learning, workplace simulations and evidence-based career preparation. Career services should evolve into career intelligence centres that help students interpret labour-market demand.

A graduate preparing for the labour market should be able to answer the following career-readiness questions:

Which institutional problem am I preparing to solve?

Which sectors experience recurring demand for that capability?

Which entry-level roles provide access to this pathway?

Which technical, digital and behavioural capabilities must I develop?

## What This Means for Graduates and First-Time Workers

Which evidence can I present to demonstrate readiness?

Which professional associations, certifications or communities strengthen my positioning?

How does this pathway support decent, productive and progressive work?

These questions help graduates make career choices with stronger labour-market awareness.

## What This Means for Experienced Professionals Seeking Career Change

Career transition becomes more effective when it begins with capability translation. Experienced professionals already carry valuable knowledge of customers, processes, systems, people, documentation, service delivery, finance, operations or technology. Those experiences can be repositioned into role families that institutions value highly.

A customer-facing professional may build a pathway into customer protection, complaints governance, service quality or conduct management. An operations professional may build a pathway into internal control, process assurance, operational risk or business continuity. A finance professional may build a pathway into financial control, audit, regulatory reporting, tax compliance or risk assurance. A human resources professional may build a pathway into ethics, culture governance, employee relations, learning compliance or professional standards. An information technology professional may build a pathway into cybersecurity, technology risk, data protection, systems audit or disaster recovery. A production or technical professional may build a pathway into quality assurance, safety, process improvement or supply-chain compliance. An education professional may build a pathway into accreditation, programme quality, student affairs, learning design or institutional governance.

The professional transition process requires evidence. Courses and certifications have value when they are matched with demonstrable outputs: risk registers, compliance trackers, audit checklists, policy review notes, quality improvement templates, complaints analysis briefs, data protection assessment summaries, business continuity plans and regulatory reporting simulations.

Career movement gains credibility when the professional can show applied understanding of a real institutional problem.

# How Professionals Get Better Value for Their Work

Professionals receive stronger value for their work when they can express contribution in the language of outcomes. Institutions reward work that protects revenue, reduces exposure, improves reliability, strengthens evidence, safeguards stakeholders, increases quality and supports responsible growth.

This requires a shift from activity description to value articulation. Reports should be positioned as decision evidence. Customer support should be linked to trust, conduct and retention. Documentation review should be connected to compliance assurance and process integrity. Technology support should be connected to availability, security and continuity. People management should be connected to culture, capability and performance discipline.

The professional who understands institutional value can describe contribution with greater authority:

- Risk reduced.
- Compliance strengthened.
- Quality improved.
- Trust protected.
- Data safeguarded.
- Decisions supported.
- Stakeholders served.
- Evidence improved.
- Continuity protected.
- Performance enabled.

This is central to professional development. People get better value for their work when they understand the consequence of their work, communicate that consequence clearly and build capability around problems institutions consider important.

## A Labour-Market Intervention: Using Critical Roles to Address Unemployment and Underemployment

Nigeria's unemployment, underemployment and employability challenge requires a stronger link between education, training, career guidance and institutional demand. The Critical Roles Advantage provides one practical route for making that connection.

The NBS labour data shows a workforce with high informal employment and significant self-employment (NBS, 2024). The ILO's Nigeria analysis points to the need for inclusive growth, structural transformation and better-quality jobs (ILO, 2024). SDG 8 frames the development ambition as full and productive employment and decent work for all (United Nations, n.d.). The WEF highlights job disruption and skills gaps (WEF, 2025). The OECD's skills work emphasises closer alignment between education, training and labour-market actors (OECD, 2025). Together, these sources point to a clear priority: Nigeria needs a more disciplined approach to preparing people for areas of recurring demand.

Critical roles offer a demand-mapping approach. This approach begins by identifying the sectors with strong institutional obligations, the problems those institutions must continuously solve, the role families attached to those problems, and the capabilities required for entry and progression.

A national, sectoral or institutional career development response can be organised around six actions.

### **First, map critical role demand by sector.**

Professional bodies, employers, universities, regulators and training institutions should identify the role families that recur across banking, insurance, healthcare, education, telecommunications, energy, pharmaceuticals, food production, public administration, technology and other regulated sectors.

# A Labour-Market Intervention: Using Critical Roles to Address Unemployment and Underemployment

## **Second, define role-readiness standards.**

Each role family should have clear expectations for knowledge, technical vocabulary, basic tools, ethical awareness, digital capability, behavioural competence and evidence of applied learning.

## **Third, create structured entry pathways.**

Graduate academies, transition bootcamps, short professional certificates, internship pipelines and employer-linked projects should be built around real institutional problems and recognised role families.

## **Fourth, use evidence-based assessment.**

Participants should complete practical outputs that mirror workplace expectations: risk assessments, compliance reviews, control checklists, incident reports, quality improvement notes, data protection reviews, regulatory reporting simulations and continuity plans.

## **Fifth, link training to professional identity.**

Participants should be guided to present themselves as emerging professionals in specific role families, with clarity on the value they can create and the sectors where that value is required.

## **Sixth, track outcomes beyond attendance.**

Training success should be measured through job placement, transition success, wage improvement, portfolio quality, employer feedback, certification progression, retention and career mobility.

## **A Labour-Market Intervention: Using Critical Roles to Address Unemployment and Underemployment**

This approach turns employability work into a practical development system. It helps graduates move from broad qualification to targeted readiness. It helps experienced professionals convert prior experience into higher-value positioning. It helps employers find better-prepared candidates. It helps professional associations develop market-relevant credentials. It helps higher education institutions strengthen the employability value of their programmes.

Most importantly, it aligns career development with decent work. Employment becomes more meaningful when people are prepared for roles that improve productivity, protect stakeholders and strengthen institutions.

## The Opportunity for Higher Education Institutions, Professional Associations and Training Providers

Higher education institutions have an opportunity to reposition employability as a strategic function. This requires closer engagement with employers, regulators, alumni, sector experts and professional bodies. Career services should provide sector intelligence, role-family maps, certification guidance, mentorship structures and applied career projects.

Professional associations should develop specialist pathways into critical role families. These pathways should address early career professionals and transitioners. A strong professional certificate should include technical learning, case interpretation, ethical practice, workplace tools and evidence of role readiness.

Training providers should design programmes that produce professional outputs. Participants should leave with artefacts that demonstrate applied capability. These outputs help participants speak with confidence in interviews, performance discussions, career transition conversations and professional networking.

Career coaches should use demand intelligence to guide clients. A strong career coaching process should identify the client's existing capability, map it to institutional demand, define role-family options, develop a credible transition plan and help the client build evidence of value.

Employers should open more structured pathways into risk, compliance, audit, quality, cybersecurity, data protection, operational resilience, customer protection, regulatory reporting and governance support. These functions are too important to depend only on accidental entry.

# The Critical Roles Advantage Framework

The Critical Roles Advantage can be summarised through five connected elements.

<b>Framework Element</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Career Decision Question</b>
Institutional Obligation	What the organisation must protect, prove or preserve.	What must this institution consistently get right?
Critical Problem	The recurring issue attached to that obligation.	What problem creates repeated demand for competent people?
Role Family	The cluster of roles created to address that problem.	Which career pathway sits close to this demand?
Capability Evidence	The knowledge, skills, tools and proof required for credibility.	What must I learn, practise and demonstrate?
Career Value	The professional contribution created by solving the problem.	How does my work reduce risk, improve trust or strengthen performance?

This framework helps professionals make better decisions because it connects career choice to institutional consequence.

## Closing Reflection

Durable career opportunities are found where institutional responsibility is strongest. Organisations will continue to need people who can protect trust, assure compliance, manage risk, safeguard data, improve quality, preserve safety, strengthen reporting, support continuity and serve stakeholders responsibly.

This insight is valuable for graduates making first career decisions. It is equally valuable for experienced professionals seeking transition, higher education institutions designing employability programmes, professional associations creating new credentials, training providers building capability pathways and career coaches guiding people through uncertain labour markets.

Nigeria's employment challenge requires better alignment between talent preparation and institutional demand. The Critical Roles Advantage offers a practical contribution to that agenda. It helps people identify where opportunity lives, build the capabilities that matter and present their work in the language of value.

The future belongs to professionals who understand the problems institutions cannot abandon and prepare themselves to solve them with competence, judgement and evidence.

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