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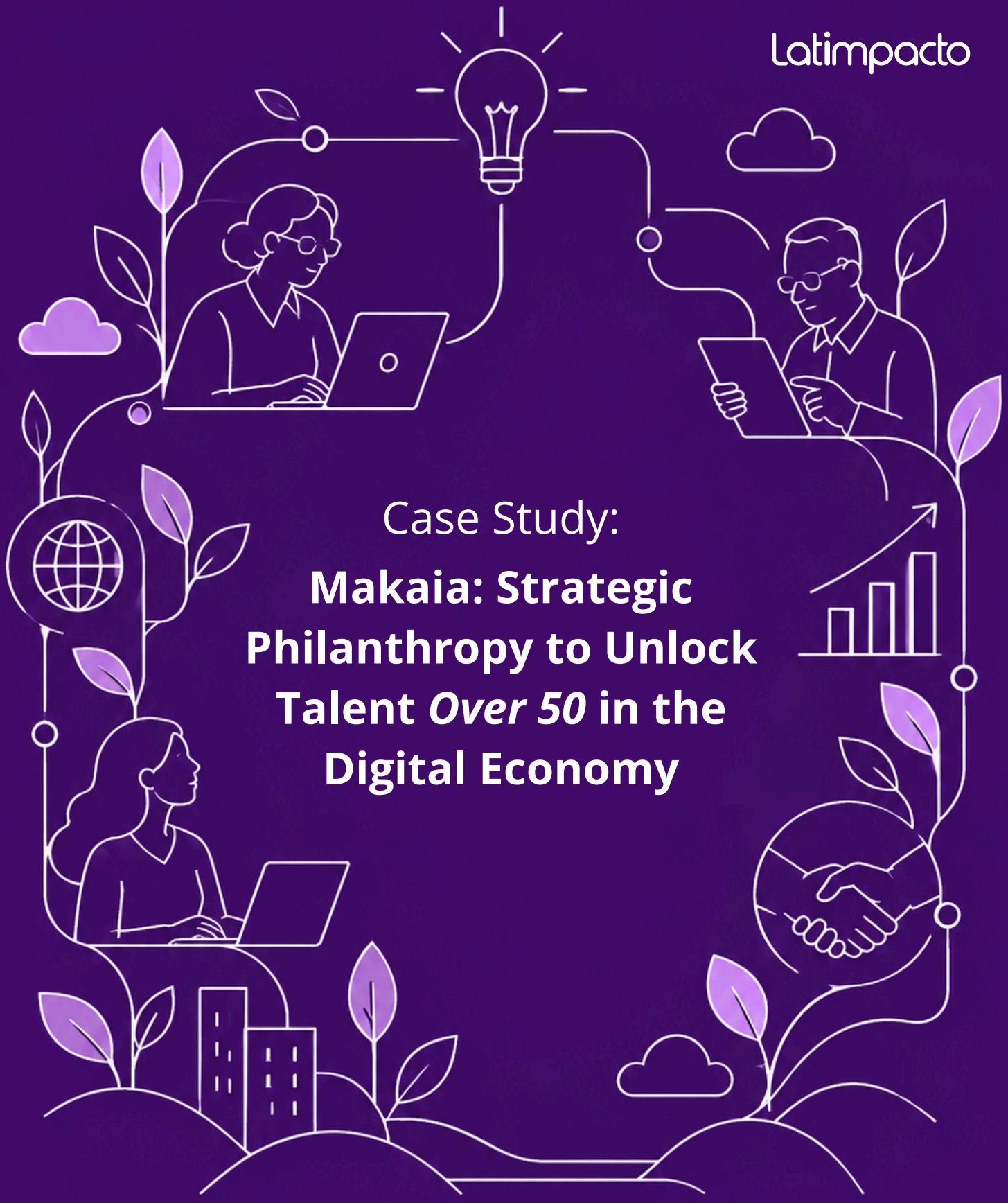

Case Study:

Makaia: Strategic Philanthropy to Unlock Talent *Over 50* in the Digital Economy

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makaia

This case study analyzes how strategic philanthropy can become a driver of innovation when used to take risks that other actors are unwilling to take, design solutions where the market has not yet invested, and generate evidence that enables new financing models. Beyond funding activities, philanthropic capital acts as a framework for learning, risk reduction, and early validation.

This case study presents the design and implementation of an innovative data analytics training model aimed at people over 50—a population historically excluded from the tech job market. The experience demonstrates how philanthropic capital can unlock underutilized talent, bridge structural gaps, and lay the groundwork for scalable solutions with economic and social impact.

The case also highlights the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships. The participation of corporate actors as funders not only broadens the resource base but also connects the solution directly to real market dynamics. When companies invest in models that impact their own ecosystem—such as talent availability, productivity, or financial well-being—philanthropy ceases to be peripheral and becomes part of the strategy. This convergence between social purpose and business vision is key to driving sustainable and systemic transformations.

About the Organization

Corporación Makaia Asesoría Internacional is a nonprofit social organization founded in 2006, headquartered in Medellín and operating in 27 countries across Latin America and the Caribbean. Its purpose is to build capacity for social development through cooperation, technology, and innovation.

Makaia operates through two strategic lines of work: Technology for Social Change and Resource Mobilization. Throughout its history, it has benefited more than 104,000 people and 47,000 organizations, raising awareness among more than 840,000 people and achieving a social investment ratio of 0.6, which demonstrates its ability to effectively mobilize national and international resources.

The Case Study

Project Name	Data +50
Sector	Silver Economy
Location	Colombia
Duration	1 year
Partners	Fundación Arturo Sesana SURA Asset Management Protección

Financial instrument	Donation
Capital raised	COP $110.000.000
SDGs addressed	SDG 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth SDG 10. Reduced Inequalities

Data +50 was conceived as a pilot program to design, implement, and evaluate an intensive training model in data analytics with artificial intelligence components, aimed at people over 50. The project mobilized COP $110,000,000 through non-reimbursable philanthropic grants provided by the Arturo Sesana Foundation, SURA Asset Management, and Protección.

From a strategic philanthropy perspective—the deliberate use of capital to take early risks, generate learning, and enable scalable solutions—the program sought to validate a model that would connect social inclusion with real labor market demand.

The Problem Addressed

First, the project addresses a historically neglected systemic gap. People over the age of 50 face a double exclusion: on the one hand, ageism in the labor market, which limits their employment opportunities and career transition; and on the other, a digital skills gap, which hinders their access to growing economic sectors.

Second, the program focuses on developing skills that are in high demand in the labor market, particularly in the technology sector, by promoting career transitions toward growth areas such as data analytics and the use of artificial intelligence tools. This approach fosters economic autonomy, productivity, and active aging, aligning with the vision of organizations that prioritize sustainable, long-term solutions over short-sighted welfare interventions.

The Solution: Strategic Philanthropy as Catalytic Capital

The Data +50 experience demonstrates how strategic philanthropy can act as catalytic capital when used to take early risks, validate innovative models, and mobilize additional partners toward solutions with systemic potential. In this case, philanthropic capital made it possible to test an intensive training model that the traditional market was unwilling to fund, targeting a population historically excluded from the technology sector: people over 50.

The program was structured as a synchronous virtual boot camp lasting between four and six months, combining technical training in SQL, Python, Power BI, and artificial intelligence tools with life skills development, psychosocial support, and employability components. The implementation included a rigorous selection process, full scholarships, and ongoing methodological adjustments to address identified gaps in basic digital literacy and the emotional burden associated with

interrupted career paths. This ability to adapt was possible precisely because philanthropic capital allowed for flexibility, learning, and iteration—elements that are difficult to achieve under traditional funding models.

In structuring the pilot, Makaia presented the proposal to the Arturo Sesana Foundation, which decided to fund part of the project and, strategically, encouraged the search for a second partner that would contribute not only resources but also expertise and sectoral alignment. This led to the involvement of SURA Asset Management, through Protección, a corporate entity whose work is closely tied to the pension business and long-term financial well-being. For SURA, working with people over 50 is not merely a social cause but a strategic opportunity linked to increasing employability, economic autonomy, and the sustainability of the pension system. The initial catalytic capital from the Arturo Sesana Foundation thus made it possible to mobilize the corporate catalytic capital of SURA Asset Management. Although there is no expectation of a direct financial return, there is an expectation of an impact aligned with the core of the business. This point is central: strategic philanthropy does not operate in isolation from the market but can trigger corporate investment when there is alignment between social purpose and business vision.

The decision to fund Data +50 stemmed from a convergence of strategic, social, and economic factors. The initial investment made it possible to design, implement, and evaluate the model, generating early evidence on outcomes related to learning, retention, and employability. This evidence helps reduce the perceived risk for future funding sources and lays the groundwork for attracting additional capital, including hybrid financing models. Furthermore, the impact extends beyond the individual level: the project expands the pool of diverse talent available to companies, helps reduce age bias in technology sectors, and addresses the shortage of qualified digital talent. In this way, the initiative not only improves personal trajectories but also influences the structural relationship between talent supply and demand.

Finally, the strategic alignment among the partners reinforces the catalytic nature of the investment. The Arturo Sesana Foundation promotes social innovation and social mobility with a focus on the elderly; SURA Asset Management and Protección promote financial well-being and active aging; and Makaia works to bridge social gaps through the strategic use of technology. This alignment of purpose, operational model, and business vision demonstrates that when philanthropy is integrated into a multi-stakeholder framework and oriented toward systemic results, it can become a true engine of transformation.

Results

- The program received **1,836 applications from 26 departments across the country**, reflecting high demand for career transition opportunities among people over 50. Following a rigorous selection process, a group of **35 participants** was formed, characterized by significant geographic, educational, and occupational diversity.
- The training program was structured into **two main modules: Fundamentals and Technical Advancement.** In the Fundamentals module, which focused on the basics of

data analysis and strengthening initial skills, **there were no dropouts**, reflecting a high level of commitment and motivation on the part of the participants.

- During the **Advanced module**, which covered more advanced tools such as **SQL, Python, and Power BI**, there were **6 dropouts**, equivalent to a total dropout rate of **17%**. These dropouts were primarily associated with the program's technical demands, the required out-of-class workload, and, in some cases, differing expectations regarding the bootcamp's content.
- In total, **29 participants** completed the program and received certification, achieving a retention rate of over **80%**—a positive result for an intensive online program aimed at adults.
- Academic results were also outstanding, with an **overall performance average of 86% out of 100**. By module, the averages were: **94% in Fundamentals, 80% in Technical Deep Dive (SQL and Python), and 86% in the development of the final projects.** These results demonstrate the ability of people over 50 to develop advanced technological skills when provided with appropriate teaching methodologies and support.
- The program combined **technical training in data analysis and artificial intelligence with life skills development, technical mentoring, psychosocial support, and an employability component** focused on both salaried employment and self-employment or consulting.
- Additionally, the pilot program **facilitated partnerships with companies interested in exploring the possibility of hiring senior talent**, including organizations such as Banco Popular, Grupo Carvajal, Grupo Éxito, Autonomic Minds, and LoveLytics, laying the groundwork for future employment opportunities.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

- ***Strategic philanthropy is most effective when it aims to address market failures and validate models with systemic potential.*** In this case, philanthropic capital was not limited to funding an intervention but served as a tool for risk reduction, learning, and iteration. It made it possible to test a model that the market was unwilling to finance, generate early evidence, and lay the groundwork for attracting additional capital through hybrid models.
- ***Philanthropic capital should be viewed as a learning tool and an innovation framework, not merely as a source of resources.*** Experience shows that investing in well-designed pilot projects—with clear metrics and the capacity for scaling—is key to producing useful evidence. This evidence reduces the perceived risk for future funders and enables expansion to new cohorts, regions, or funding mechanisms.
- ***The need to integrate basic digital literacy with intensive psychosocial support demonstrated that innovation involves adapting to complex realities.*** Catalytic

philanthropy requires patience, the ability to adjust methodologies, and a long-term vision that recognizes that labor market integration and the mobilization of additional capital have longer cycles than educational outcomes.

- ***Multi-stakeholder partnerships strengthen the catalytic nature of the investment.*** Coordination among foundations, corporations, and implementing organizations made it possible to align social purpose with the strategic interests of the private sector. When corporate actors invest in solutions that directly impact their ecosystem—such as the availability of talent or financial well-being—philanthropy transcends the donor-beneficiary dynamic and becomes a driver of shared transformation.

- ***The catalytic impact goes beyond the individual level and helps reshape structural dynamics.*** Beyond strengthening the economic autonomy of participants, the model expands the supply of diverse talent for the market, helps reduce age bias, and closes productivity gaps in strategic sectors. When philanthropic capital is used with a systemic approach and a long-term vision, it does more than just fund solutions: it helps transform the relationship between social inclusion and economic development.

- ***The evidence generated by the pilot confirms that there is a significant latent demand for career transition opportunities among people over 50.*** The volume of applications received and the geographic diversity of the applicants show that this population is actively seeking opportunities to update their technological skills and participate in emerging economic sectors.

- Experience shows that ***people over 50 can achieve high levels of academic performance in intensive technology programs***, provided that the pedagogical methodologies incorporate principles of adult education, appropriate learning paces, and sufficient opportunities for practice and addressing questions.

- The implementation of the pilot program highlighted the ***importance of incorporating diagnostic and remedial processes in basic digital literacy at the start of training,*** in order to reduce gaps among participants and facilitate more consistent progress in intensive technical programs.

- The experience also showed that ***career transition processes in later stages of life require integrating technical, emotional, and social dimensions.*** Psychosocial support and opportunities for reflection on career paths and life plans proved to be key components in sustaining participants' motivation and retention.

- The pilot project revealed that ***the occupational expectations of people over 50 are diverse and do not always align with the traditional models of labor market integration used in technology training programs.*** In many cases, participants seek to strengthen their profiles as consultants, advisors, or independent professionals, suggesting the need to expand employability strategies toward models of self-employment, entrepreneurship, or specialized services.

- The experience confirms that ***the diversity of career paths among older adults presents both a pedagogical challenge and an opportunity for collaborative learning.*** The variety of work experiences enriched discussions, strengthened the sense of community, and enabled the participants themselves to serve as sources of knowledge and peer support.
- It became evident that ***the diversity of career paths and occupational expectations significantly influences how participants relate to the employability component.*** In future programs, it will be important to segment participants from the outset according to their career goals—salaried employment, professional independence, or career transition—to provide more relevant support.
- The pilot suggests that ***raising awareness in the business sector about the value of senior talent will be a determining factor in scaling up this type of initiative.*** Beyond technical training, the labor market inclusion of older adults requires transforming perceptions and reducing age bias in hiring and talent development processes.
- Experience also shows that ***career transition processes for people over 50 may require longer time frames than those observed in programs targeting younger populations.*** Building new career paths in later stages of life involves gradual processes of exploration, skill updating, and positioning in the labor market.
- ***The participation of both retirees and non-retirees made it possible to identify significant differences in motivations regarding employability.*** In particular, it was found that retirees are less willing to engage in job placement processes, suggesting that, in programs focused on career transition, it is more effective to prioritize the placement of individuals who do not yet receive a pension. The experience also shows that, when including retirees, it is necessary to establish more specific selection criteria to ensure alignment with the program's objectives. In this regard, priority could be given to individuals whose pension does not exceed the minimum wage, thereby creating a greater incentive for their entry into the labor market.
- The pilot project revealed ***barriers from the business sector in terms of hiring talent over the age of 50, associated with the perception of legal risks related to enhanced job security.*** This perception creates uncertainty among employers regarding the possibility of terminating an employment contract when there is a mismatch between the worker's profile and the job's requirements, demonstrating that the perception of legal risk limits the hiring of senior talent. In this context, the importance of designing progressive employment mechanisms that help reduce the risk perceived by companies was identified. The implementation of programs such as internships or work experience periods creates opportunities for mutual understanding between the employer and the participant, facilitating the assessment of both technical competencies and soft skills; therefore, internships are presented as an effective strategy for reducing hiring barriers.