Building the talent you need for the future post-COVID

The pandemic has had a dramatic impact on all businesses. From companies having to shift their operations online, to workforces suddenly being made remote, all organisations and workers have been affected in one way or another. And these changes have had a significant knock on effect on workforce skills.

Temps de lecture : minute

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Indeed, over <u>58% of workforces</u> have reported skill transformations since the pandemic's onset. Ensuring your people have the skills they need to succeed, now and in the future, will be core to your business' pandemic recovery. A lack of skills is closely linked to a drop in productivity and high-quality work. Over <u>40% of workers</u> feel that their tasks take longer to complete when they don't have the right skills, and 22% say that their work is of a lower quality.

On the flip side, organisations that invest in upskilling their people reap a host of <u>benefits</u> from greater employee satisfaction and customer experience, to navigating role disruption.

The top skills to focus on

With this in mind, what are some of the skills your business must focus on this year?

Research has found that a mix of social, cognitive and technological skills are in-demand as businesses move on from Covid-19. In the UK, these are:

1. Advanced IT and programming
2. Leadership and managing others
3. Project management
4. Advanced data analysis and mathematics
5. Creativity
6. Critical thinking and decision making
7. Adaptability and continuous learning
8. Advanced communication and negotiation
9. Teaching and training others
10. Basic digital software skills

How to build these skills

Social skills will require a different skill-building approach to technological skills, and the same applies to cognitive skills. Whereas some skills can be learned through more traditional means, a growing number require more innovative thinking.

Many options

Thankfully, we've moved on from solely classroom-based learning. The days of spending countless hours in a seminar room have been replaced by more personal, modular learning opportunities. Depending on individual preferences, an employee could attend a virtual event, read a book, or listen to a podcast, and all of this counts towards their learning. As an added bonus, many of these learning resources are available for little-to-no cost.

Take, for example, learning leadership and management skills. The theory of this can be learned through various means including:

- Listening to a leadership podcast such as WorkLife or Manager Tools
- Reading a book like Brene Brown's Dare to Lead or Richard Branson's

Like a Virgin
- Keeping updated with the latest research and thinking from Gallup, Korn Ferry, Gartner and so forth
- A virtual class on Leadership and Innovation from the School of Life
- Watching a TED Talk on leadership from Simon Sinek, Lorna Davis or Drew Dudley

This knowledge can then be practiced and cemented through on-the-job opportunities to lead a team and manage a project.

Building social skills

More social skills have to be learned through interacting with others. Communication and negotiation skills, for example, can be developed on-the-job or through peer-led learning. Creating an online learning community can encourage people to share their learnings and resource suggestions, fostering the skill of continuous learning. Many people may prefer this approach — over half (55%) of employees say that they first turn to their peers when needing to learn a new skill.

Teaching others

In medicine, they have the process of "learn one, do one, teach one". A similar approach can help your people train others, improving your cross-skilling as well as building their teaching abilities. Someone who's just attended a storytelling workshop can relay their thoughts to others through a lunch-and-learn. Mentoring and volunteering opportunities can also help to build these skills.

Giving freedom to learn

Every learning activity will build valuable transferable skills. Creativity is a tricky skill to teach traditionally. To encourage people to improve their creativity, you might consider expanding your learning opportunities to

arts and crafts.

Don't be afraid to think outside the box. At Degreed, we give every employee a monthly learning budget to spend on anything that they want to learn - and employees have used this for everything from language lessons to pottery, circus school and wine tasting. This isn't just a perk, it's a way of building skills in communication, resilience and grit, critical thinking, and creativity.

Upskilling in digital skills

For more technical 'hard' skills, there are many options to fit any type of learner. The _UK Government_ has just launched over 400 free Level 3-equivalent qualifications to an estimated 11 million adults (eligibility criteria applies). The courses range from finance and business management, to digital and engineering skills. It has also launched _skills bootcamps_ that offer free, flexible 12 and 16 week courses in digital marketing, data analytics, and software development.

Similar opportunities are available through providers like General Assembly (for data and digital skills) and Code First Girls (coding courses). Meanwhile, _Accenture_ offers free short courses in digital skills like digital retail skills, artificial intelligence, social media and web analytics.

Make it personal

Whatever learning resources you settle on, make sure they are highly relevant to your business' needs (aligned with your business strategy) and personalised to individual preferences. Only _13% of employees_ rate their learning opportunities as effective, and if your learning is missing the mark, that's a lot of time and resources wasted.

It's also important to provide ways to reinforce learning. The forgetting

curve predicts that learners will forget _90%_ of what they've learned in just one month, if it's not applied. Find ways to make learning actionable, whether that's offering stretch assignments, moving someone to another team (either temporarily or permanently) or providing volunteering opportunities aligned with their new skills.

A continuous process

Your people should be building their skills day-in and day-out throughout the course of their careers. That cannot rely solely on a year-long course or a one-off event. Empower your people to mix and match their learning resources, to find the combination that works best for their style and that helps them remember and practice their skills. The opportunities you offer them today, will impact their performance tomorrow.

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