

# Pandemic learnings

How upskilling prepares your workforce for future disruption



**ProEdge**

A PwC Product



The pandemic put virtual meetings and collaboration tools in the spotlight, pushing employees unfamiliar with these platforms to build new skills to get their work done. But there were more important skills, as company executives quickly realized, needed to maintain business continuity across a remote workforce.

The ability to adapt, pivot and work differently were essential for sustaining productivity and service levels—even as headcounts were frozen or reduced. At the same time, companies realized that greater mental flexibility, and the capacity to change ways of working on the fly, are better predictors of success in the face of unexpected disruptions.

While many employees easily acclimated to remote work, others had difficulty adjusting. Those who struggled needed digital skills training and coursework that encouraged innovation and creativity in decision making and problem solving.

If companies are going to recover and drive growth in 2021 and beyond, they'll need to

upskill. Indeed, three of the top four priorities for human resources executives are tied to upskilling, according to our recent survey of HR leaders. More than 40% said their organizations should accelerate digital tool adoption, while 37% said they need to invest in tools that support innovation and collaboration for virtual teams. About one-third of HR executives want to offer employees options for developing new skills.

Companies that want to empower their employees to become sharper thinkers during challenging times should teach their staff to use new digital tools, understand and apply agile program management, and develop the soft skills needed for leadership and change management.

Lessons from the pandemic are prompting many executives to rethink how their employees work and what new skills they must have to thrive and weather the next disruption.



# How remote work inspired automation ideas

The pandemic forced some operational adjustments and behavior changes, revealing pain points around an underskilled workforce that weren't obvious before. When asked about the most enduring trends to come out of the pandemic, 78% of CEOs in our recent survey said remote collaboration, while 76% said automation.

This intense and unexpected period of change—balancing newly remote work with personal challenges like managing virtual school for kids—prompted many people to reexamine how they use their time and what impacts their productivity.

For many, automation has become an attractive alternative to time-intensive tasks. During the pandemic, workers who spend large amounts of time on repetitive tasks, like generating reports and developing digital marketing campaigns,

have become more aware of the need for data automation tools. The tools they're using are freeing up their time in more impactful ways that deliver more value to the company.

So how can these types of learnings carry over to other functional areas and industries? Supply chain and logistics group workers, for instance, could leverage agile project management skills or automations instead of relying on shared services to develop specialized technology. A retailer might use data visualization tools to analyze unexpected changes in store sales and traffic patterns to align staffing schedules with the busiest shopping times. That same data could be used to help reduce labor costs, shorten lines at the register and improve the customer experience.





# Applying grit—and upskilling—to get long-term gains

As CEOs create their post-pandemic business models, they're putting greater focus on flexibility and dynamic workforce planning. Those plans account for health, economic and societal factors, according to [the panel we conducted about emerging stronger](#).

Executives also recognize that investments in digital tools can help cultivate resilience and deepen their organization's commitment to agility and continuous learning. Embed the innovations you developed during the global crisis and fold them into your workplace's leading practices and work going forward. Continue looking for ways to keep building a culture of learning that leads to innovation that can scale. All of that can be done with upskilling.

Leaders should look for an end-to-end workforce planning and upskilling platform specifically designed to empower citizen-led innovation. Giving people a safe place to create and test their own digital tools can help boost confidence and build a stronger problem-solving mindset across all departments and groups of the enterprise.

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Upskilling can also help companies build a richly talented workforce with more grit, resilience and determination to handle unexpected challenges. That means cultivating an ability to solve unexpected challenges creatively and quickly.

More than half of companies in advanced stages of upskilling experience greater innovation and accelerated digital transformation.

Intellectual nimbleness, and an ability to analyze data in new ways, can empower people to make better decisions, solve complex problems with more confidence and bring more creativity to everything they do on the job and in their personal lives.

Give your workforce upskilling opportunities that allow them to acquire new digital skills that can improve their work now, but can also prepare them to stretch and grow into future roles. More than half of companies in advanced stages of upskilling experience greater innovation and accelerated digital transformation, compared to just 15% of those at the beginning stages of upskilling, according to our **23rd Annual Global CEO Survey**.





# Upskilling: the recruiting differentiator

Upskilling can also result in a more fulfilling employee experience.

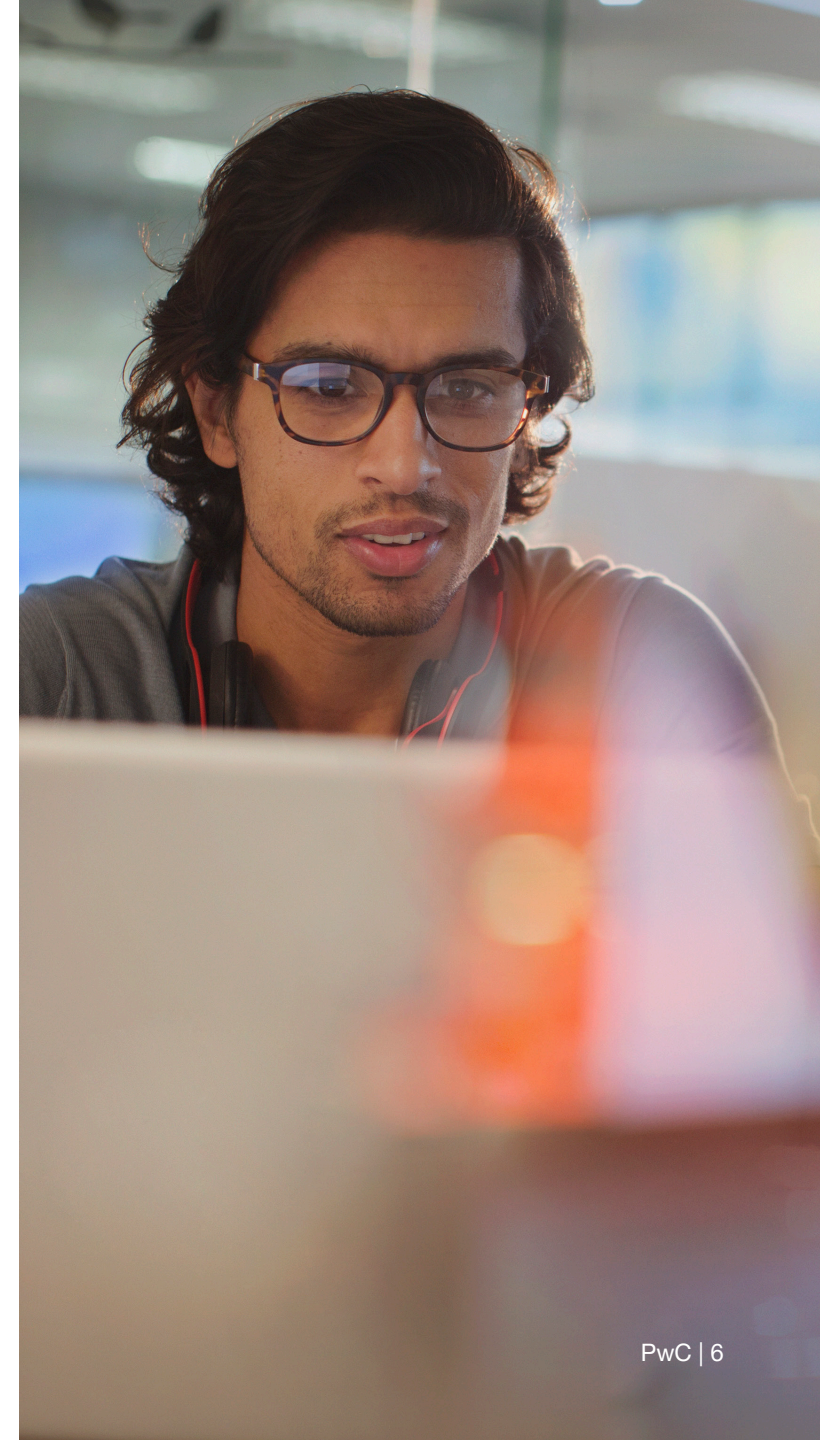
More than three-quarters of workers say they are ready to learn new skills or completely retrain in order to stay competitive and advance in their careers, according to our [Hopes and Fears 2021 survey](#) of 32,500 people. However, only 40% of people said they were able to upskill during the pandemic, which underscores the growing demand for new training opportunities.

Upskilling is so valuable to job candidates that more than one-third of respondents in our [Future of Recruiting survey](#) say they would be willing to take a pay cut in order to learn new skills. After salary and benefits, it was the most important factor in deciding whether to take a new job.

More than **75%**

of workers say they are ready to learn new skills or completely retrain in order to stay competitive and advance in their careers.

It's important for recruiters to articulate and quantify upskilling offerings, highlight them in offer packages, and demonstrate why they're a differentiator and core piece of the overall value proposition.





# The takeaways

The pandemic brought a new sense of urgency to the case for upskilling by exposing weaknesses that could present a systemic risk to growth, competitiveness and an ability to adapt when the next disruption occurs. Companies that don't act swiftly and with conviction risk falling behind.

Managers can help their teams put their new skills to work by encouraging them to deal with challenges in a newly analytical way. At the same time, they should be proactively looking for ways to help staff flex their mental muscles. They can also celebrate achievements and measure productivity gains to help demonstrate why this work is important, and draw direct connections between personal wins and corporate growth goals.

More digital literacy and mental flexibility across the workforce can help transform the organization at scale, create a culture of continuous learning and put the company in a stronger competitive position when the next disruption occurs.



# Invest in tomorrow

Stay ahead of the curve with PwC ProEdge, the revolutionary way to upskill your people and prepare your organization for tomorrow. This unique platform allows you to pinpoint critical skill gaps and effectively help close them with automatically generated personalized learning pathways. Leading curated content, coursework and hands-on learning empower your workforce to make an immediate impact through citizen-led innovation. Access to digital tools enables solution-building that scales across teams. This is how ProEdge helps your people to perform at their highest level—giving them the power to help transform your entire organization.

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