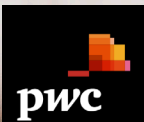# Adapting learning strategies for employees across every career stage

How flexible and personalized learning can help attract and retain your employees

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Companies often offer the same type of education to their employees regardless of who they are or how they consume content. Yet, there's enough research to show that everything from demographics to socioeconomics to the environment can influence how a person learns.

Fortunately, most want to be upskilled, no matter their background, with a recent PwC survey finding that 77% of respondents would be willing to learn new skills now—or completely retrain— to improve their future employability. They also recognize that if they don't learn new ways of working, their jobs could disappear, with 53% of people saying automation will significantly change or make their job obsolete within the next ten years. That doesn't mean they're worried: 61% feel positive about the impact tech may have on their day-to-day work.

The willingness to learn new skills is a good thing, but upskilling can mean different things to different people, especially across multiple generations. For some, upskilling means

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learning how to code or better leverage artificial intelligence (AI). For others, it might mean gaining skills like leadership, adaptability and problem-solving.

In order to help successfully upskill your workforce, you should offer learning that's tailored to the needs of individuals across different generations. What are their unique learning styles? Are they different based on experience level? What skills do they already have, and which ones will they need for future roles? How can you support their aspirations and career growth? What will it take to successfully upskill everyone in your organization?

Age alone doesn't tell the whole story—geography, education levels, health and cultural background all influence the way people learn. However, it can be helpful to understand how different generations learn and adapt to new ways of working.

For example, those new to the workforce are more likely to accept smaller salary increases if they're given the option to permanently work remotely, according to PwC's Workforce Pulse Survey. Nearly half of Gen Z (45%) and millennial (47%) employees surveyed would be willing to give up 10% or more of their future earnings in exchange for the option to work virtually from almost anywhere. In contrast, 38% of the Gen Xers, and only 14% of boomers, said they'd accept smaller pay increases.

In the same survey, Gen X and boomers were the most likely to consider problem solving—and the ability to learn new skills and apply them quickly—as critical to their careers in the next three years.

Newer workers are also slightly more willing to embrace learning than their experienced counterparts, according to a recent PwC survey of US employees. Among those aged 18 to 34, 66% said they were ready to learn new skills, compared to 60% of those aged 45 to 65. And 64% of younger workers said technology creates more opportunities than risk, while 56% of older workers said the same.

Part of the reason why so many staffers new to the workforce want to learn is that they're eager to advance in their careers. Indeed, many millennials cite a lack of career progress as one of the top reasons for leaving their jobs. Fortunately, they are getting the chance to improve, with only 16% of workers aged 18 to 34 saying they have received no opportunities to enhance their digital skills. It's a different story among more experienced workers. While they too want to learn, 38% of those 54 and older say that they've had zero opportunities to better their digital skills.

This gap has consequences. If more experienced workers aren't getting consistent training, then they're still using the same skills they've had for 20 or 30 years. Gone are the days when a person

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could graduate with a degree and assume they were finished with structured learning for the rest of their career. The rapid pace of technological change is making that kind of complacency nearly impossible.

What can employers do to get workers up to speed? And how can you retain the institutional knowledge of experienced workers, while making sure they know how to take advantage of productivity improvements digital skills provide? And what does it take to attract and retain those new to the workforce, while harnessing the power of a multi-generational talent pool? Flexibility and a focus on personalized learning may be the answer.

The importance of personalized learning

The pandemic has driven many companies to realize that their employees want to work and learn in all kinds of different ways. Many businesses started offering flexible work hours, extended leave and personalized learning programs that could be done anywhere and at any time. They started offering mobile-based learning and courses that could be completed in short segments rather than with full-day training.

These kinds of changes have been a long time coming and should continue—and expand in scope—after the pandemic. As people get back into more normal routines, companies may want to consider giving staff dedicated paid time for continual learning and create rotational or shadowing programs to give employees more opportunities to learn on the job.

Training can deliver huge benefits to the organizations that do it well. In fact, 66% of employers expect to get ROI for upskilling and reskilling within one year, according to the World

Economic Forum's Future of Jobs 2020 Report. Let's examine these terms. Both reskilling and upskilling are important, but they mean very different things:

- **Reskilling** involves teaching employees new skills so they can do different jobs than the ones they have today. It often requires looking for people with skills close to the new capabilities your organization needs. Reskilling provides a learning experience that enables a lateral move from one job to another.

- **Upskilling** is the process of teaching workers completely new skills that are applicable to their current roles, but can also help them advance in their careers. delivering continuous education to help employees advance in their careers. Upskilling, which requires continuous education, also gives employees opportunities to gain the knowledge, tools and abilities they need to incorporate constantly changing technologies into their daily work lives.

Some employees may be hesitant about upskilling because of anxiety around automation and job losses. Reassure them about your commitments to workforce investments and show them how upskilling can help them advance their careers.

To get employees excited about starting their digital learning journey, choose a flexible upskilling platform with high-caliber content and personalized pathways that can adapt to both how people learn and what they want to learn.

Learning pathways suited to individual needs (and aligned to corporate goals), can offer a more efficient and enjoyable learning experience for everyone. Individual upskilling plans that take a person's current skills into account can help them understand where they need to go next.

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A seamless, productive approach to upskilling includes:

- The ability to leverage the power of artificial intelligence (AI) to understand role- or function-related skills gaps and plot learning pathways

- Highly personalized content tailored to the learner's experience level

- Social interactions to motivate and encourage participation, as well as gamification and rewards systems to create excitement, engagement and friendly competition

- Milestones to outline progress and credentials that demonstrate experience in role-specific skill sets

- Real-world opportunities to practice and share newfound skills with others, which can increase productivity and skill retention

It also helps to have an extensive library of courses from leading providers so you can deliver relevant content at every stage. Skill-building programs that take into account human behavior and the way people learn can also aid progression and prompt additional skill development.

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To attract and retain the right talent, companies should advertise that they're willing to invest in people and prepare them for the future. Once they do, they're more likely to see results, with 93% of CEOs who introduce upskilling programs seeing increased productivity among workers. They also report improvements in talent acquisition and retention and can create a more resilient workforce.

Bringing every generation along on the journey

The bottom line: Don't assume that what's true for some millennials or Gen-Xers must hold true for all. While it might seem obvious that people who were raised with a video game console in their hands might want to learn via gamification, it's not always the case.

In addition, remember that every generation has different strengths they bring to the workplace. For example, employees who have worked for your organization for years have an in-depth understanding of both your culture and your customers. They're comfortable operating in your corporate structure, they may be mentoring workers newer to the workforce and they're adept at using the tools, systems and the vocabulary unique to your company. By developing a culture of learning, your organization can share knowledge and skills across teams and bridge potential gaps across the spectrum of workers' experience.

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No organization can make itself entirely future-proof, but by taking the time to understand the individual needs of your employees, and implementing learning solutions that can adapt to people's learning needs, all employees can be prepared for the workplace of tomorrow. Choose an upskilling platform that can help you quickly identify skills gaps and then close them by delivering content and coursework that's relevant to your people's roles, interests and aspirations.

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 at scale. ProEdge enables your people to perform at their highest level—giving them the power to help transform your entire organization.

Learn more at **ProEdge.PwC.com**

Additional resources:

- Discover what's next for America's workforce post-COVID-19 in the **PwC Workforce Pulse survey.**

- Check out the **PwC 2021 Hopes and Fears survey** to understand US employee attitudes about the future of jobs and skills.

- Discover how to **develop learning programs** that can help employees adapt and evolve.