# Three keys to unlocking your employees' true potential

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You've most likely heard about the technology skills gap businesses face as the speed of innovation increases and more and more mundane tasks get dispatched via automation. COVID-19 made it glaringly obvious that technical skills in the workforce are a must-have, not a nice to have.

Before the pandemic, 74% of CEOs said a lack of availability of the right skills—particularly tech skills—was a concern, according to PwC's Talent Trends 2020 report, based on results from its 23rd Annual CEO Survey.

The CEO survey also revealed that 37% of top executives whose companies have more advanced upskilling programs reported greater business growth, compared with only 15% at companies that were just beginning their upskilling journey. This is one of many reasons why upskilling your workforce should be part of your company's strategy for success in a post-pandemic world.

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Source: PwC Talent Trends 2020 Report

Most business leaders now agree that it's no longer a matter of whether to upskill, but rather when and how to provide tech and other skills that will be crucial to ensuring employees can do jobs effectively, creatively and with deeper satisfaction.

Three keys to successful upskilling

- Understand the extent of your skills gap.

- Provide training employees want, and give them the freedom and motivation to complete it.

- Encourage your people to apply newfound tech skills to solve problems they encounter on the job.
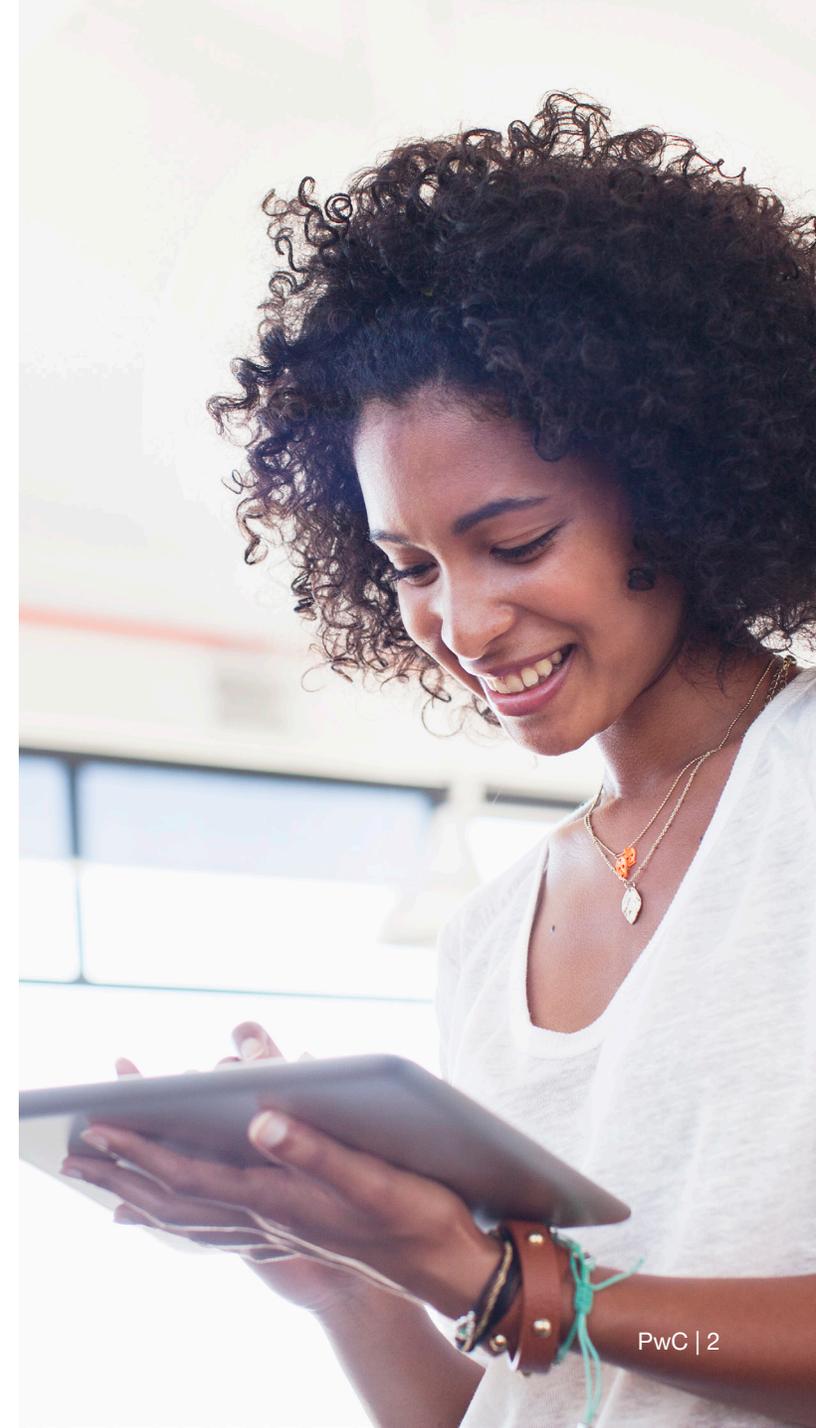
1. Measure the skills gap by assessing where you are

Ask any employee how much of their time gets squandered on mundane tasks and you'll probably get an earful. They'll list plenty of time-consuming, manual tasks that bog them down, making it difficult to do higher-impact work they aspire to. Many of these tasks have to do with accessing and extracting pertinent data for use in reports or to complete other aspects of their jobs. And yet, a **PwC Consumer Intelligence Survey** conducted in 2018 revealed that 73% of employees say they know of systems that would help them produce higher-quality work. Employees themselves know they could be doing their jobs more effectively and efficiently—and they want the training that will make this possible.

Successful upskilling starts with a thorough analysis that identifies which skills employees lack, as well as technical or other professional

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skills they know can help them be more productive, competitive and creative in their work.

The company-wide skills diagnostic should cover tactical daily needs that are revealed through conversations with employees about what holds them back. The analysis should also consider broader leadership development and strategic thinking skills that can deliver meaningful value to the business, such as how to bring an agile approach to project management, apply design thinking concepts and successfully navigate change management.

2. Provide the right training at the right time

Once upskilling needs have been identified, they must be prioritized and matched to citizen-led training and educational opportunities that will have the greatest impact on the business goals of the organization. **Citizen-led** (bottom-up) innovation differs from that which is business-led (top-down) in its embrace of employees as change-makers, taking the reins on their own upskilling journey. Leaders must guide the journey, of course, but the idea is to make employees partners in their own success which drives success for the whole business.

Many employees will jump in with gusto, while others may need more encouragement. Providing time in the workday to complete training programs—and gamifying the process to reward employees who achieve certain upskilling milestones—can help increase your likelihood of success.

Empowering employees to take a self-guided approach based on their specific needs, interests and aptitudes will likely encourage early buy-in of the upskilling opportunities being offered. It can also improve participation across departments as people share their successes with friends and colleagues.

Digital skills curriculum should be innovative and adaptable.

The digital skills curriculum itself should be as innovative and adaptable as the concepts it teaches. If modules can be taken by employees as needed and as time allows, people will have greater flexibility to gain new skills on the fly and see benefits right away.

3. Enable employees to put new skills in action

For the most part, the new skills your people will be learning will relate directly to using data to help them do their jobs more effectively and ultimately inform better business decision making. For example, an employee in the marketing department may start with a relatively simple tutorial on how to automatically sort and normalize data in the process of importing external lead lists into marketing automation or CRM solutions, without creating duplicates or overwriting existing data. These data automation skills could be acquired in a day, or in smaller blocks of time across several work weeks.

Once that employee learns how to cleanse lead lists automatically before import, they will likely have new ideas for building on those concepts. They could even create more sophisticated bots (essentially automated workflow software) to automate other tasks related to their role

Just as upskilling should allow employees to put their skills to work, digital training curricula should be interactive, with hands-on practice and do-it-yourself activities that allow people to try new skills in real time along the way.

and potentially free up more time to spend on creative or strategic work.

A realistic sandbox environment to test and iterate as ideas take shape is essential—it can build confidence by giving people a secure place to build a prototype, test it, iterate and try again. It also provides a safe place to fail quickly and learn from mistakes, understanding when to abandon or rethink ideas that sounded good on paper but didn't pan out in practice.

The ROI of upskilling

The return on investment in enterprise-wide upskilling is compelling. Among CEOs who were farther along in their upskilling journey, 93% say they were rewarded with increased productivity, according to the **23rd PwC CEO Survey**, while 95% say their upskilling programs helped them strengthen corporate culture and employee engagement.

Companies that invest in upskilling develop new organizational capabilities and competitive differentiators in the marketplace. They also build a deeply talented pool of leaders who have greater cognitive elasticity, grit and ability to adapt on the fly and find creative solutions to tough business challenges.

Millennials and Generation X employees often cite lack of career progress as one of the top

95%

say their upskilling programs helped them strengthen corporate culture and employee engagement.

Source: 23rd PwC CEO Survey

reasons they leave their jobs. But with an upskilling program, companies can support them. Employees tend to have higher job satisfaction, more confidence in the future of their work and a stronger ability to take on new roles or grow into jobs with greater responsibility.
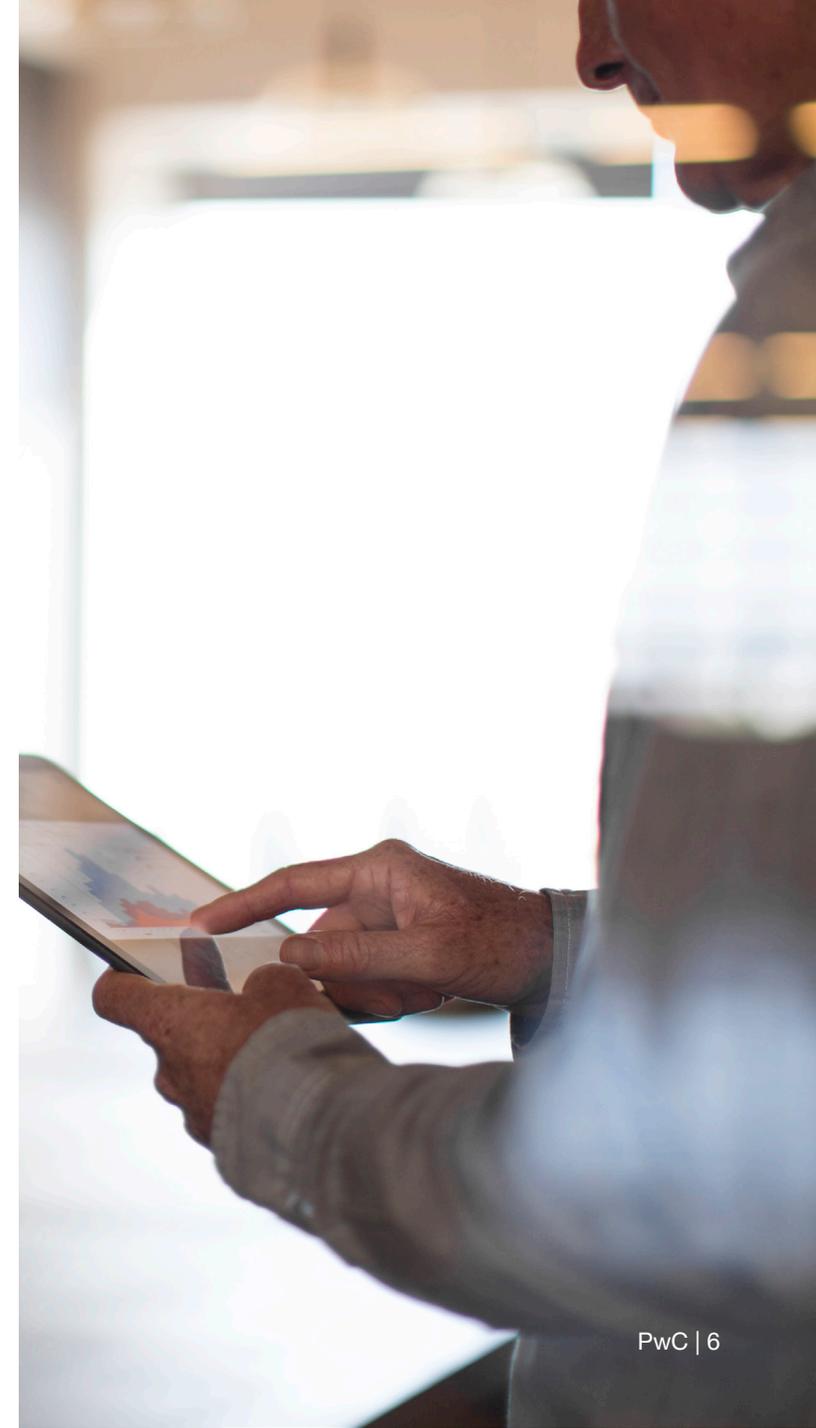
A new way of thinking

Successful upskilling may require a change in mindset. Leadership should embrace a more democratic and citizen-led way of training and retraining employees at all levels and in all departments of the company.

When making key decisions about planning, choosing, designing and implementing digital training programs, management should involve more employees from a wider range of experience levels and divisions to participate in the discussions and be in the room when choices are made.

Those employees become informal leaders and influential champions who can serve as change agents within the organization, and their early advocacy can entice peers to embark on their own learning journey.

You might consider creating a platform where employees can share and discuss their ideas, questions, new skills they wish they had, new tools they want to learn and hacks they discover along the way. Leaders should get comfortable with the idea that people are going to want to explore some skills that don't directly apply to their current job. Without curiosity and an appetite for learning it will be a challenge to succeed in a business environment that's more digital than ever but can't prosper without human collaboration and ingenuity.

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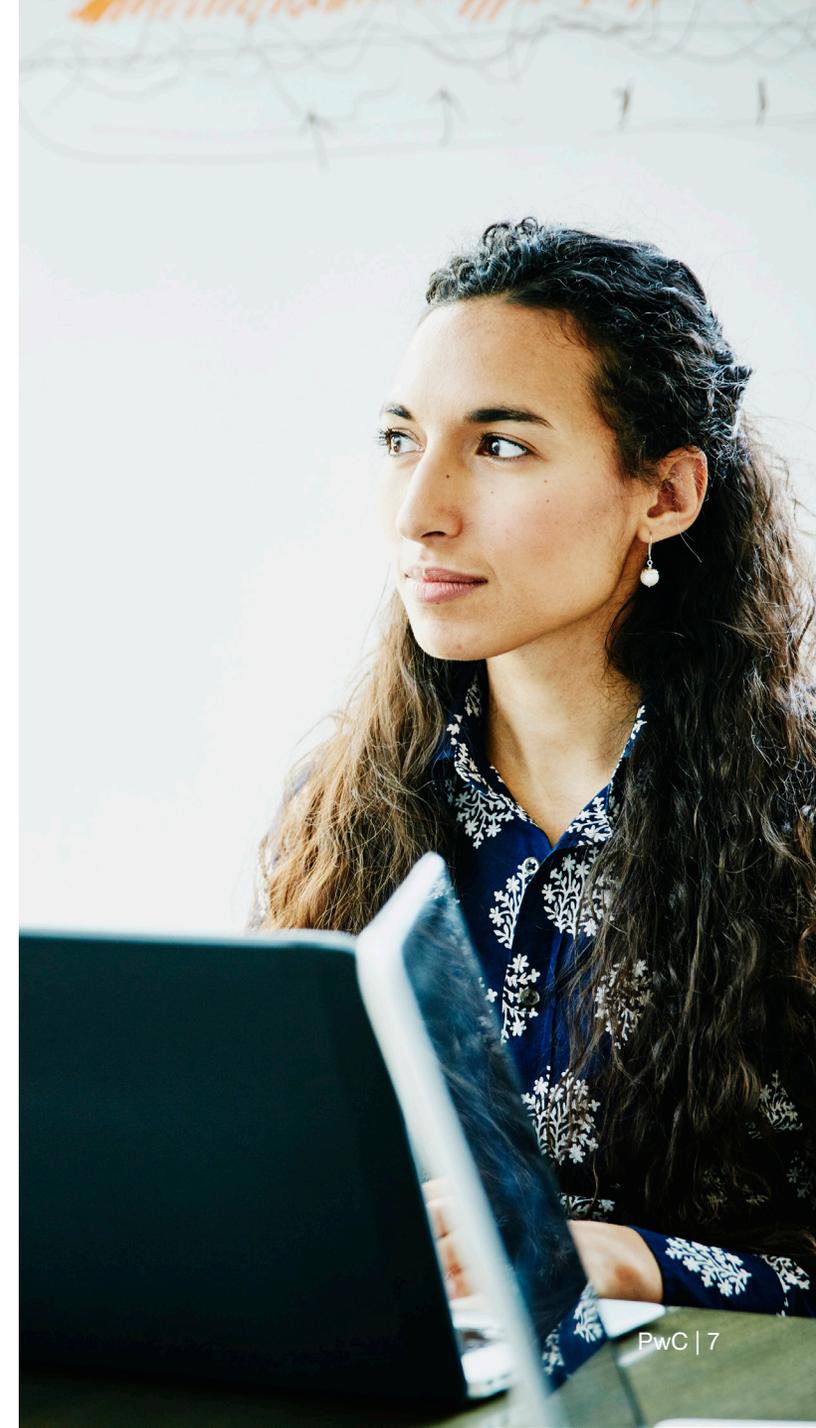
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