

White Paper

# Strategic Skills Development: Five Small Steps to Make Big Progress



# Skills development: Why is it still so hard to get it right?

PwC reports that CEOs today expect more pressure to perform over the next three years due to technology, tariffs, and nearly every other megatrend affecting global business. Because of this, it's critical that organizations are equipped with the skills to both address immediate gaps and prepare for what's to come.

However, the learner-led approach hasn't and won't help companies close the skills gap. This approach typically relies on the learner selecting the training they want to take, either based on their own development aspirations or automated recommendations based on their gaps or interests.

But learner-led skills development almost always results in the employee choosing the skills that appeal to them, and not what the

organization needs now or in the future—if they even pursue optional training at all. We've done it this way for so long because intentional skills development is a big job, and letting learners lead the way was easy.

**The key to driving meaningful results is by actively shaping the skills profile that your organization needs to succeed - now and in the future.** Skills strategies should be informed by the business, by talent acquisition, and by learning and development. And it's not easy and no one solution or company is going to solve every aspect of it. But you can get started and make a big difference.

In this guide, you'll discover the five steps to get started with an **organization-led strategy** throughout the process.

# Step 1: List critical and missing skills needed

The first step to strategic skills development is to identify the skills that your organization will need for the future. Mapping skills from a comprehensive skills ontology to your existing job codes will give you a starting point.

Innovations in AI coupled with a robust skills library can do this job-skills mapping for you, providing your team with a list of skills to consider. You may not get an exact list of what you need, but it's easier to work from a draft than a blank page.

Once you have this list, work with other decision makers, such as talent acquisition and people leaders, to identify which skills are critical or missing for the near- and long-term. Have them doing the following:

**People Managers:** Offer them the chance to suggest additions or deletions to the list. Ask them to also indicate which are the critical skills they need on their team so you know what will be essential to your organization going forward.

**Business Planning:** Based on company evolution and growth, identify which new jobs are needed so they can be included in the skills mapping exercise.

**Talent Acquisition:** Because of their role, this team usually knows what are the hardest skills to hire for. Ask them to identify these skills on your list so you have a better understanding of what you may need to cultivate internally rather than trying to bring in through new hires.

## Use your LMS to match skills

ExpertusONE leverages AI to instantly parse through our library of over 25,000 industry-spanning skills and connect the right ones to your jobs creating skills profiles for your employees.

**Bonus:** ExpertusONE's AI can also tag your courses with the skills learners can expect to acquire, increasing the chance that they may self-select into the critical skills courses.

## Step 2: Prioritize the skills to train for

In resource-constrained environments, the reality is that you won't be able to offer quality training for every single skill. This means you need to prioritize.

Leveraging your list of critical, missing, and hard to hire skills, create a priority list to focus your L&D efforts (and budget) on. Your prioritized skills list should be well-balanced to cover as much ground as possible. Some skills may be evergreen, like leadership and critical thinking, but some will be more topical like data analysis and AI literacy. Your list should also be a mix of soft skills, such as communication and teamwork, and hard skills, such as 3D printing and AWS.

Once you've got your prioritized list, review it with your executive team, people leaders, and HR teams to confirm that you've got the correct skills.



## Step 3: Source training material

Getting the right training material into your LMS will depend mainly on the skills you need to train for and you'll want an LMS that allows you to work with a variety of prepackaged training content, as well as allowing you to create your own on the fly.

There are a lot of great content providers of soft skills, such as leadership, time management, and data analysis. Training for hard skills and industry-specific skills can be supported by more niche players. eLearning offers a lot of flexibility but for those skills that require practice, working with live instructors, either via video conferencing or an in-person classroom can be worth the investment. It costs more per student, yes, but since this is a top priority skill, doing it right is worth it.

Finally, you can leverage your in-house experts to create courses. Whether they partner with a curriculum designer to create something formal or you give them a channel on which to share their insight, or a combination of the two, this can be the best way to get going while reserving budget for the essential (but pricey) courses.

### Create courses on the fly with ExpertusONE

ExpertusONE's Interaction Studio empowers anyone to rapidly develop content—all without having to learn a complex authoring tool. Interactive elements can be added to any kind of presentation or video content, and since they're HTML5 enabled, they're also 100% mobile-ready and browser-agnostic.

The best part is that there's no limit to what you can add—images, hyperlinks, multiple-choice quizzes, and more—to any presentation, MP4, YouTube or Vimeo video.

And once you've got your courses created, ExpertusONE's adaptive and mobile-friendly Digital Content Player can play them all from a single interface—even those with virtual reality embedded!



## Step 4: Identify who needs training

One of the biggest challenges in a skills strategy is not identifying what skills a person should have, but what skills they already have. You can infer skills from their job histories, but it can be a mistake to assume that because they hold job A and skill Z is associated with it, that they have that skill, particularly if the scope of Job A has changed over time.

**Skills-gap analyses** have typically relied on self-reporting by the user to indicate their possession of the skills associated with their job. There are two big drawbacks to doing this. The first, of course, is the accuracy of that self assessment. But the second is getting them to actually do the assessment, especially if there's a long list of skills associated with their jobs.

But if you're comfortable with identifying the gaps on an as-needed basis, your best bet is to push out training around your targeted, critical skills and give known cohorts who have those skills a clear avenue to show whether or not they possess them.

For example, you could infer that managers have leadership skills but we all know that's not always the case. If you have management training that needs to go out, you can choose to roll it out to first-time managers, notifying both them and their leader of the process to opt out.

For hard skills, you could have people who have these skills either submit their credentials or complete a knowledge test upfront. If they pass, then you can update their skills information so they don't get targeted again.



**Organization-led skills** training hinges on taking a proactive approach to matching the right skills to the right learners.

There are several ways to do this:

#### **Approach 1: Push training to everyone with the skill**

If you want to make sure that everyone with that skill on their job gets trained up, then go ahead and assign training across the board. This is definitely casting the widest net and could get expensive if you're paying for training by user, but if you employ the self-reporting and test out options described in the Skills-gap analysis call out, it can be a good way to get people to accurately self-assess.

#### **Approach 2: Mapping to where skills are most needed**

You may have skills on your list that are critical to the organization—but only for select jobs, departments, or regions. For example, data analysis may be a nice-to-have skill for a bank teller, but mission-critical for a cybersecurity analyst at the same institution.

#### **Approach 3: New skills introduction**

If a skill is new to your organization, you may not have it on any job profiles and therefore, have no skills gap to target. While this sounds like it will be harder to figure out who needs the training, you can tackle it by looking at where that skill would make the most sense for a job, department, or location. For example, the technological skill needed to use chatbots could be useful for marketing and customer service roles.

#### **Approach 4: Skills adjacency**

Sometimes building on an existing skill is also a good way to target a group. It may be useful for a maintainer on the factory floor with data analysis skills to learn machine learning so they're better able to implement predictive maintenance practices.

Using a combination of all these approaches is a great way to build a list of learners for all the critical skills your organization will need.

### **Manager Your Learner Groups With ExpertusONE**

Once you've identified who needs which skills training, you can easily create groups of learners based on that criteria and assign them the learning automatically. Groups can be based not just on their job, but on combinations of their location, organization, other skill proficiencies, and more. Our dynamic Skills Group tool also enables you to track their progress through the training and acquisition of the skill.

## Step 5: Assign the training and create accountability

The best way to execute on your organization-led strategic skills strategy is to assign training to learners rather than relying on them to opt into the courses for your critical skills. But this isn't just as simple as putting them into the course and waiting for them to finish. Too often work takes priority over learning.

If senior leadership agrees that upskilling is a priority, then it can't be allowed to fall by the wayside. You need to **create accountability at both the individual and manager level to ensure training isn't just completed, but the skill is actually acquired.**

This means working with the manager to ensure that they're creating an environment that supports, encourages, and most importantly makes time for employee learning. Managers should be helping employees prioritize their skills training within their normal workload—or even modifying their workload in order to help them complete critical training. You simply can't expect people to cram learning on top of a full work week.

It may also be helpful to embed skills training into overall performance goals. Employees' annual performance should be evaluated on the training they completed, while managers should also be evaluated based on their ability to support that training and whether or not it's completed. It should be part of their goal to shape an upskilled workforce.





## ExpertusONE makes skills training assignment, completion and tracking easier for you

### Embedded Learning

Our Embedded Learning tools let you put training into the systems that employees use everyday like Salesforce, MS Teams, and Slack. It's an intuitive way for them to complete lessons, share feedback, collaborate together, and more.

### AI-Personalized Recommendations

If you want to foster a positive learning environment that encourages proactive learning, create a personalized experience for them helps them feel seen and supported. Our AI can analyze learner data to tailor content, recommend relevant courses, and adjust pacing based on individual performance, which can all help drive higher engagement and satisfaction.

### Observation Checklist

You want to be able to confirm that learners have acquired their new skills. We offer Observation Checklists embedded right into our enterprise LMS. Use it to track and assess learner competency in real-time and on-the-go, all while seamlessly connecting evaluation data with other learning data for more comprehensive insights.

### Skills Groups Insights

ExpertusONE delivers critical information about your Skills Groups to you on-demand and on-the-go. Easily track learning progress, knowledge asset demand, and other key metrics. You can also quickly build your own reports with drag-and-drop report creation, an AI report assistant, automatically generated data visualizations, and more.

## Conclusion

You can get started with an effective skills strategy with some thoughtful focus on the most impactful skills for your organization. By focusing on the top critical skills that your organization needs, you will create real, tangible results. Leadership will have a pool of people at the ready as they push forward with the initiatives that will keep you competitive. Your employees will experience that career growth and mobility that's so important to them staying engaged at work. And you will begin building up records of verified employee skills while you continue to expand the range of skills that you focus on.

Our world is changing quickly and learning is the key to not just keeping up, but thriving. Create a plan for your strategic skills development, lead the way, and watch the future take shape.



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## **About PeopleONE**

Headquartered in Silicon Valley, PeopleONE helps the world's most innovative companies transform the way their employees, customers and partners learn using modern LMS technology. Our digital learning platform includes compliance, product training, sales enablement and employee development products that meet customers at any stage of growth. ExpertusONE's powerful and easy-to-use tools drive learning and expand the experience into Salesforce, Slack and other systems to meet learners right where they are—resulting in increased training adoption and knowledge retention.

