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Professional Development



How to identify and fill skills gaps in the workplace



A “skill gap” is what happens when your current workforce doesn’t have all the necessary skills to reach your business’ goals or objectives. These gaps come in different forms. Some can be small and cause little to no disruption, while larger ones can grind your business to a halt. Skill gaps can also come about in several different ways – such as through high employee turnover, business models changing direction or through an industry-wide shift.

Skill gaps not only impact business, but they can negatively impact the wellbeing of individual employees by causing them to have to work harder or longer to complete required tasks. They can also cause slowdowns or even full stops of production for businesses if not addressed. This is why it’s so important to be able to identify and remedy skill gaps as and when they appear.

Why you should pay attention to skill gaps

Not addressing skill gaps can also communicate internal issues within your workforce. Issues of motivation or lack of resources can manifest through skill deficiency, causing a decline in worker morale and productivity.

While these are things that business leaders may be able to directly address and solve internally, they should look to see if concerns around upskilling or reskilling are at the root of the problem.

Identifying skill gaps

The first step to being able to bridge a skill gap is being able to properly identify one. Not every hiccup or pause in production is indicative of a skill gap. The following tools can help business leaders properly pinpoint these gaps.

1. Perform a skill audit

A skill audit is a great way to identify skill gaps and learn more about the capabilities of your workforce. Many businesses can benefit from conducting regular skill audits, either once a year or once every six months, not just when they suspect a skill gap. Skill audits can help you:

Identify skill gaps.	Identify training needs.
Measure the effectiveness of current training.	Create or update training and development programs for employees.

It's important to note that skill audits are often cross-departmental ventures. You'll need to work with both the employee as well as their manager or supervisor to create a comprehensive image of their skills. A skill audit is done on an employee-to-employee basis. The basic steps of a skill audit include:

Creating a goal or ideal outcome.	Defining what job competency looks like.
Communicating with the auditee.	Ranking skills.
Validating information with the supervisor.	Reviewing the information.

Comparing skill audits across your entire workforce can reveal overarching gaps within the company and help your whole staff improve crucial industry skills. These can be addressed by providing large-scale training. Individual skill audits can reveal where certain employees may need more training or help, and these can be solved by incentivizing things like personal professional development.



2. Review self-assessments

Employees themselves may be best qualified to identify where they can improve their skills through self-assessments. Managers can review these assessments as a part of their skill audits to see how employees rank their own merits.

To be able to rely on self-assessments as a valuable metric, it's essential to create a healthy relationship with employees. Employees who feel valued are more dedicated to providing good work, as well as honest feedback. You can ensure your employees feel valued by having open lines of communication, addressing areas of feedback and understanding.



3. Review KPIs

Key Performance Indicators, or KPIs, are another great tool to see where your business is underperforming. KPIs can be determined and applied to both individuals and projects. They are specific, measurable goals that denote whether a project is “successful,” since success, as a metric, can mean so many different things.

If a certain project, or employee, is continually missing certain KPIs, this can point you to an area where they might need training. If a certain project keeps underdelivering on KPIs, it may be time to take a look at the resources or team around it.

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How to bridge skill gaps

Once you've identified a skill gap, then it's time to start bridging it. Some areas can be easier to bridge than others, depending on their scale – whether it's an individual gap or more widespread – and severity. There are several things that you can do as a business leader or company to help bridge a skill gap.

1. Incentivize professional development

Professional development courses are a great way for individuals to keep their skills sharp and to upskill for new responsibilities or industry trends. As a company, you can incentivize your employees to pursue these opportunities by offering things like reimbursement for course costs or PTO for course time.

2. Interdepartmental collaborations

Creating more opportunities for interdepartmental collaborations is a great way to facilitate opportunities for mentorship that can help build skills. These collaborations foster communication and teamwork, as well as skill building, all of which can help benefit work outcomes. Some examples of these collaborations could be:

- Shadowing and mentorship programs
- Co-hosted AMAs or presentations
- Collaborative campaigns

Ensuring co-workers have opportunities to work or advise in other departments helps build a network of qualified and confident employees, who understand all parts of your product or service.

3. Create skill development plans

Creating specific skill development plans can be the structure that your employees need. These plans consist of action items and goals that can help employees achieve their KPIs in a given time. There are many ways to set professional development goals, both as a business leader creating a plan for an employee or as an employee creating a plan for yourself. These can include:

- Creating a timeline.
- Identifying the resources you'll need.
- Enrolling in courses.
- Talking with mentors or supervisors about next steps.

These plans can help supervisors visualize successful outcomes without the need for micromanagement, while letting employees be responsible for their own KPIs.

Skill gaps don't have to be a cause for panic. With routine check-ups and planning, you can intervene early and make sure these gaps don't interfere with your daily business processes.

Examples of skills gaps you may be experiencing:



Information Technology

Does your IT team have a group of tenured computer programmers or software developers? While they might have many years of experience in programming and development, they may not have the skills you need for roles in project management. Professional development short courses can be a way to build skills in agile, scrum, and product ownership in weeks, not months or years.



Marketing

The last five to ten years has brought about the introduction of new social media channels and apps such as Twitter, Tik Tok, and Snapchat. Is your business is looking to leverage these channels, but you find hiring for these roles seems impossible given the current job market? Self-paced, self-led professional development courses can help your current team build the skills needed planning and executing social media marketing campaigns.



University of Phoenix Professional Development Courses

Helping employees build the skills they need to become successful can often be done through short professional development courses. Professional Development courses at the University of Phoenix give employees the ability to move at their own pace through skill building, so they won't have to take extended periods of time away from work. We offer courses in digital marketing, information technology, human resources, education and healthcare. These affordable non-credit, self-paced courses are an alternative to earning college credit and designed to help learners build real-world skills that can help make an immediate impact in the workplace.

If you are looking for a flexible alternative to upskill your employees contact us today for more information about professional development courses at the University of Phoenix at professional.development@phoenix.edu.



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