

Upskill Your Workforce For A Post-Pandemic World

American Public University System

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Introduction

Top organizations are constantly challenged to recruit and retain employees with the right skills for the job and to align current employee skills with their long-term mission. From retiring boomers and preparing the next generation for leadership to driving a more diverse workforce and adapting to geographically dispersed employees, workforce development leaders are constantly evolving their strategies to bridge the growing skills gap.

Additionally, new requirements brought on by COVID-19 have identified emerging long-term challenges from remote work and remote leadership to communication and faster automation.

The skills gap in the U.S. workforce has been growing wider for nearly a decade—millions are falling into it. Organizations now face a shortage of skilled workers coupled with challenges to worker retention and engagement.

Add to these dilemmas the fast-paced technological changes creating jobs that simply didn't exist a few years ago. This is where upskilling—training workers to accelerate productivity and innovation—comes into play.

A cohesive upskilling program designed in tandem with an education partner offers solutions needed in today's increasingly complex economic landscape.

You can help employees and attract the best talent by developing a greater understanding of your organization's skill needs through a skills gap assessment.

By working with an education partner, you will then have the unique ability to upskill your workforce, motivate employees, enhance job satisfaction, and drive an exceptional organizational strategy built for the future.

The world of work is changing and almost 50% of jobs in the U.S. could be automated in the next 20 years. What does that mean for the workers in those jobs today—how do you upgrade their skills? And what types of skills are needed for the jobs of the future?

On average, organizations are spending $4,129 recruiting for every open job requisition. Every employee who leaves can cost one-half to twice their annual salary plus the time it takes to replace them. It's costing the American economy a trillion dollars a year.

Organizations must focus on developing workers' digital, cognitive, social, emotional, adaptive, and resiliency skills. Workers, in turn, are looking down the road to gaining greater remote flexibility, better benefits, and more effective communication from their employer.

A WORKFORCE BUILT FOR *THE FUTURE*

Major Corporations are Investing Billions to Upskill and Reskill Individuals

Amazon will spend **$700 million to retrain 100,000 employees** over a six-year period. Programs will help technical employees switch to roles as software engineers, distribution workers take on technical roles in operations, and technology professionals move into machine learning.

Google pledged **$1 billion in grants** to educate people and make opportunity more readily available.

PwC is investing **$3 billion in job training** over the next three to four years. Employees will develop specialist skills in data analytics, robotics process automation, and artificial intelligence.

Home Depot will spend **$50 million over the next decade to train 20,000 tradespeople** including plumbers, electricians, and carpenters.



Part 1

OVERCOMING EMPLOYEE *SKILLS GAPS*

The gap between the skills employees have and the skills that their jobs require is expanding at a faster rate. Whether they are hard skills or soft skills—critical thinking, creative problem-solving, or leadership—employees rely on employers to provide effective solutions to grow their capabilities and future-proof their jobs.

Balancing Soft And Hard Skills In A Post-Pandemic Economy

COVID-19 has exposed an urgent need for a range of skills. Now that millions of workers are telecommuting and managers have to adjust their oversight, soft skills, such as communications and problem solving, are becoming even more vital to dispersed business operations.

Workers will also need to upgrade their hard skills around digital elements such as machine learning and analytics.

Current Top Soft Skill Needs

- **Creativity**—Originating ideas and solutions.
- **Persuasion**—Encouraging others to explore ideas, purchase solutions, or work on a project.
- **Collaboration**—Partnering with team members to produce positive results around objectives.
- **Adaptability**—Thriving in the face of change and uncertainty.
- **Critical Thinking**—Analyzing information objectively to make a reasoned judgment.

Current Top Hard Skill Needs

- **Blockchain**—Storing, validating, and moving digital assets.
- **Cloud Computing**—Designing, delivering, and maintaining cloud architecture on AWS, Azure, and other similar platforms.
- **Analytical Reasoning**—Understanding data and making conclusions.
- **Artificial Intelligence**—Mastering machine learning and natural language processing.
- **UX Design**—Making the most of the user experience through research and software and product design.
- **Business Analysis**—Exploring data for analysis, problem-solving, and presentations.
- **Affiliate Marketing**—Marketing through trusted outside channels.
- **Sales**—Potentially both a hard and soft skill due to the persuasive factor, but selling with defined commercial goals.
- **Scientific Computing**—Applying statistical and analytical approaches to large data sets utilizing Python, MATLAB, and similar programs.

> **Employers and employees tend to diverge widely when it comes to skills that are considered valuable.** *See report*

Cognitive skills aimed at redesign and innovation, enhanced problem-solving, and creativity are critical. In addition, reinforcing leaders' social and emotional skills will ensure strong collaboration, management, and self-expression. Building leadership adaptability and resilience are vitally important to building strong teams.

In the post-pandemic landscape, basic digital skills—data visualization, applied machine learning, and advanced analytics—will be crucial.



SKILLS GAP CHALLENGES & *POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS*

Skills gaps were already keeping human resources and talent development professionals up at night before the COVID-19 pandemic struck and began wreaking havoc on the global economy.

Before the pandemic, more than 75% of organizations could already see where their existing and future skills gaps might impact service delivery, customers, future growth, succession planning, and more.

Executing an effective and cost-efficient learning plan to bridge skills gaps has never been easy. In the new post-COVID-19 workplace, those challenges have only increased. Organizations that will succeed, indeed those that will thrive, in the post-COVID-19 landscape will be those that find a partner that can help drive ROI through an effective and measured learning solution.

Investments made in training and certification have, in many cases, inadequately addressed the enormity of worker skills gaps. In recent years, education assistance programs have begun to grow to meet organizational objectives.

Organizations need to ensure they are continually motivating employees to take advantage of tuition assistance or other education incentives to augment organizational training efforts. Employees can acquire new skills while continuing their career and contributing to organizational growth.

Considerations For Executive Decision-Makers

- If workers don't have the skills needed for the jobs, it limits both their career growth and their organization's future.
- Upskilling and reskilling need to be the watchwords of the moment. This is the opportunity to redefine your workforce development objectives with a focus on the challenges a post-COVID-19 world will present.
- Bolster worker competency and engagement and you bolster economic growth for the long term and keep your organization competitive in the global economy.

> **Joining with an aligned educational partner can improve your talent and succession pipelines and help your employees acquire the skills they need in order to meet your strategic objectives.**

Education Is Key

Closing skills gaps, indeed reducing future gaps, are goals that can be met when formal education programs are merged with traditional training and development programs.

Partnering with an educational institution that can align its courses with recognized skills gaps and blend essential education with training programs is imperative. Training provides workers with the skills they need to apply to specified tasks, but taking it a step further and layering in relevant education can develop the critical-thinking skills that employees can use to craft creative solutions.

> **At American Public University System (APUS), we measure learning utilizing assessment methods in the classroom and the retention of knowledge gained through sustained education versus short-term training programs.**

As the world navigates beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, workers will need soft skills such as creativity, persuasion, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence. Also high on employers' lists are hard skills including blockchain, cloud computing, analytical reasoning, artificial intelligence, UX design, business analysis, affiliate marketing, sales, and scientific computing.

Utilizing a skills gap assessment to map the knowledge needed with support from an education partner can ensure you accurately define required skills. Well-defined methodology combines higher education and organizational training to empower workers to solve problems with curiosity and confidence while exercising initiative with critical thinking.

As you consider skills, it's also crucial to hone in on reinventing the organization's culture into one that focuses on learning highlighted by action and initiative. Employee engagement and ownership of processes, problems, and solutions are also essential. Integrating education and upskilling into the culture ensures all new elements become part of a long-term strategy to drive successful employee retention.



Part 2

DRIVE EMPLOYEE VALUE WITH *SKILLS GAP SOLUTIONS*

Understanding the difference between the skills your employees possess and the skills they require to do their jobs is the first step in creating the right solutions to drive your organizational strategy.

> **A skills gap assessment can ensure that you recognize which skills are required and inform cost-effective directives around the challenges inherent in employee recruitment, retention, and engagement.**

Benefits From A Skills Gap Assessment

- Developing a clearer picture of missing skills.
- Discovering which workers require upskilling.
- Understanding how to implement workforce development programs.
- Determining gaps in order to partner with an appropriate educational institution.

Current Solutions Being Implemented To Combat Skills Gaps

- Increasing talent acquisition to include additional budget and expanded sourcing of talent from regional and global locations.
- Collaborating with an educational institution to build defined talent pipelines.
- Training, credentialing, or educating employees to promote from within.
- Enhancing compensation and benefits for a more competitive stance. This includes tuition assistance benefits.
- Utilizing veterans' skill mapping and transition programs.

Among the challenges facing chief learning officers and workforce development managers are measuring upskilling effectiveness and ROI. Did workers learn anything or learn enough to effectively close the gap once skills were assessed and training completed? How long will they retain the knowledge gained from the training? How will learning be assessed and measured? American Public University System offers a data-driven approach to continually assess outcomes and optimize its programs.

The most significant questions that need to be answered are as follows:

- Will the same gaps exist with the same employees a year later? If so, you'll have to reconsider your learning objectives to overcome negative results.
- Will the learning proactively lessen the gap that would develop with new technology or changes in the business environment? Change—technological and otherwise—was occurring at breakneck speed before coronavirus and will continue apace. In-depth focus on new technology innovations and a keen eye on what's happening in the business world can help mitigate skills gaps.

One of the toughest challenges is staying informed enough to keep abreast of rapidly shifting requirements and ensuring that workforce development solutions aren't outdated by the time they're implemented.

While training workers to complete specific tasks is important, offering them access to higher education equips them with the critical-thinking skills required to assess different situations, anticipate problems, and originate proactive solutions.

> **Creating the kind of culture that's focused on lifelong learning will ultimately prove advantageous for employees and organization alike.**



A WORKFORCE BUILT FOR *THE FUTURE*

How Skills Gaps are Limiting U.S. Organizations

92% of senior executives think American workers aren't as skilled as they need to be.

80+% of human resource professionals have had trouble recruiting workers.

There is a **widening gulf** between the skills employers require and the skills that workers have and part of the problem is an awareness gap—awareness of what happens in any specific industry.



Part 3

CREATE THE WORKFORCE OF *THE FUTURE*

The skills gap—a natural consequence of innovation and advancement—is being amplified by COVID-19 and will be with us post-pandemic. The time is now to focus on your goals and begin alleviating the skills gap issue for the long-term.

> **Organizations will continue to see gaps between workers' skills and the evolving demands of their jobs. It's just a normal offshoot of technology, progress, and growth.**

APUS offers chief learning officers and workforce development managers options that combine training and higher education to close current skills gaps and help create a culture of learning that accelerates workers' critical thinking, curiosity, and initiative, while mitigating future skills gaps.

A customized approach can help enhance employee engagement and value through a merger of organizational and personal learning goals.

A Skilled Workforce Moves From Motivation To Innovation

Your employees ARE your success. Help them continually improve their skills, and they'll help your organization improve: ROI, efficiency, innovation, and more.

Now more than ever, it is imperative to educate, engage, and create a culture of learning and continuous personal improvement in an organization.

A WORKFORCE BUILT FOR *THE FUTURE*

Building Your Strategy

Chief learning officers and chief human resource officers who sleep easy have a plan for the next three years, not the next three months.

APUS Provides An End-To-End Solution Toward Building A Strategy:

Strategic Initiative 1:
Refine your skills gaps through an assessment and grow your staff utilizing a different methodology.

Strategic Initiative 2:
Partner with an education provider to create customized learning based on the results of the skills gap assessment.

Strategic Initiative 3:
Offer employees access to opportunities that bolster education and individualized learning plans to increase effectiveness and boost retention.



Conclusion

Evolving Strategies Around Current And Future Workforce Planning And The Ongoing Coronavirus Pandemic

- Many organizations' talent markets will broaden due to infrastructure and culture shifts around working from home. Managing a remote workforce will require workers who are more autonomous, more attuned to problem-solving, more responsible, and more capable of bringing initiative to the table.
- Some organizations will be able to grow talent more easily while others will experience increased competition.
- Development will need to happen more often in remote environments.
- Organizations may find they need to increase both workers' soft and technical skills to continue operations.

Is your organization ready to compete in a post-pandemic world? What gaps need to be filled for you to move ahead with confidence?

Let American Public University System help you prepare for critical conversations with your leadership team.

GET STARTED





About American Public University System

American Public University System, recipient of the Online Learning Consortium's (OLC) Gomory Award for Quality Online Education and five-time recipient of OLC's Effective Practice Award, offers more than 200 online degree and certificate programs through American Military University and American Public University. More than 100,000 alumni worldwide have benefited from APUS's relevant, flexible curriculum and value. For more information, visit www.apus.edu.

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