



Skills-Mapping in the Workplace:
**HOW ORGANIZATIONS
WILL COMPETE IN THE
FUTURE OF WORK**



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Working at such a strategic level within your company, you're probably not worried about losing your job to a robot anytime soon. But can your employees say the same?

As we witness the expanding role of automation and digitization in the workforce—what researchers are calling the 4th Industrial Revolution¹—automation and digital technologies are bringing about incredible amounts of change in the modern workplace and driving the half-life of skills down from four to five years to 12 to 18 months.² In fact, it's estimated that 65% of today's students will graduate into jobs that don't yet exist³ and that by 2030, 375 million workers will need to switch occupational categories and adapt to co-exist with machines.⁴

Of course, it's unlikely that technology will completely take over all of the jobs that humans currently perform today. But there's no escaping the fact that as automation takes over detail-oriented, technical, and repetitive tasks, the role of the employee and the skills they need to be successful in the workplace will shift drastically, putting increased pressure on universally-useful “soft” skills like logical thinking, communication, and resilience.

For many organizations, the shrinking half-life of skills is almost exclusively a talent problem that keeps HR focused on recruiting and retaining top talent. Yet while the skills an employee walks in the door with are significant, it's just as important to proactively manage how employees develop their skills throughout their career within your organization.

That's why so many organizations are embracing skills-mapping, the systematic process of measuring and improving these critical skills within an employee population. It's also why organizations that don't learn about skills-mapping now may find themselves struggling to achieve the levels of productivity and profitability they otherwise could—a nonnegotiable advantage if you want to be competitive in our competitive global economy.

There's no getting around it—if your organization expects to succeed in the future of work, you will inevitably want to identify and implement a skills-mapping strategy.

Here's how to get started:

Universal Challenges of Mapping Skills in the Workplace

As organizations learn more about skills-mapping, it can be surprising to see what a complex process it can be. Because no matter how small or large your company, evaluating the skills levels of an entire organization is a significant undertaking—especially when you plan to extend beyond which skills each employee has to what level of skill they possess, and how to close the gap between where they are and where they need to be. Here are three universal challenges you should consider before embarking on the skills-mapping process:

1 Distinguishing between “job” skills and “durable” skills

There are two categories of critical skills in the workplace: job skills, such as technical skills that relate to a particular job or function, and durable skills, such as critical thinking, communication, and creativity that companies want to see across all employee groups. Both categories of skills are essential, but in an environment in which technical skills change year to year, durable skills are emerging as the most sought after for recruiting and professional development.

“Durable skills are particularly in demand in today’s talent pool because they indicate that an employee can be successful in different roles as their career evolves. Skills like problem-solving, resilience, and agility transcend job descriptions and speak to the lifetime value an employee brings to the table. If an organization can map these skills and develop training around them, they will have a distinct advantage in preparing employees of today for the jobs of tomorrow.”

— Kerri Manorek, Learning Strategy Consultant

2 Performance management is not synonymous with skills-mapping

Today's approach to knowledge and performance management may take an employee's skill level into account, but it stops short of providing the full value of skills-mapping. True skills-mapping closes the circle by identifying and targeting skills gaps, or potential areas for growth or areas that are missing based on the company's values and mission.

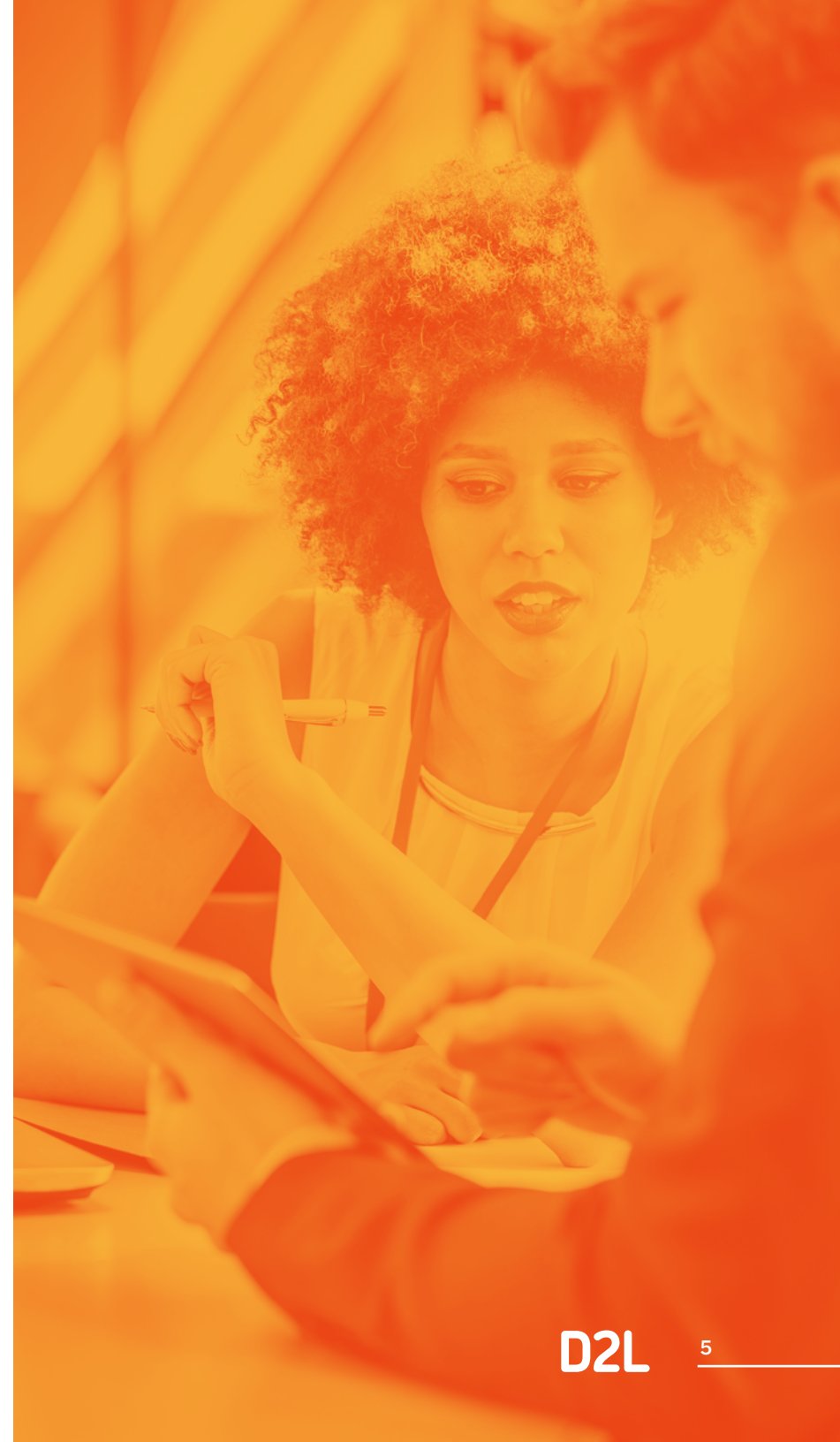
“Most organizations have a basic understanding of the skills they need today for specific jobs to be done, but what about the jobs that need to get done tomorrow? How are you staying ahead of the rate of change in your market, customer and technology? You need a day-to-day view of your skills gaps to guide your investments in learning.”

— Kerri Manorek, Learning Strategy Consultant

3 Skills are naturally cumulative

Engaged employees are constantly learning on the job. While this can be ideal for your organization, it presents a unique challenge to the skills-mapping process because skills are naturally cumulative, and therefore almost always evolving in real-time. Any snapshot of skills will be outdated almost as soon as you save the data. An effective approach to skills-mapping will account for this continuous transformation by making it easy to keep employees' skills assessment up-to-date and project their skills into the future.

“It’s one thing to take a snapshot of skills at a point in time, but employees are constantly learning and evolving,” says Kerri Manorek, Learning Strategy Consultant. “Measuring the skills of employees who are learning new things every day is like trying to hit a moving target with a moving arrow. Organizations need to be able to track progress in skills and keep their data updated so that at any time, they can extrapolate what skills are active within the organization and what skills are lacking.”



The Building Blocks of Skills-Mapping Your Workforce

For all the challenges associated with skills-mapping, it's a valuable exercise that can provide extremely actionable insights to prepare your organization for the future of work. It's a strategic way you can be sure you're developing your employees in the direction they'll need to go to be successful in the future—and it's a critical step to take to ensure your organization has the human resources it needs to compete in a more automated, digitized environment.

While skills-mapping is a complex, nuanced process that is best to pursue with the support of an experienced consultant, here's a look at the three foundations of skills-mapping your workforce:



1 Identify specific skills related to company culture or business strategy

For your first skills-mapping effort, narrow down the list of important skills to the two to three that stand out as strategic drivers for your company. You can expand this list over time, but starting small will allow you to carefully put your performance measurement efforts in place and establish a track record of success to build on.

“Some organizations see a lot of success from starting with one skill and one team or department, such as marketing,” says Manorek. “That way, you can get really specific about the organization’s cultural values and how that translates into skills that can be measured. What job skills help people do their jobs effectively? What durable skills are valued within the organization? Starting with one team will allow you to see each skill within its own context.”

2 Capture skills evidence to measure baseline skills

Most organizations track some performance metrics, but those analyses often rely solely on a qualitative review or rating system and can vary widely from supervisor to supervisor. They're also usually tied to the achievement of an individual as related to their professional objectives, not necessarily their capabilities. As a result, it's not data that can be quickly or easily aggregated to provide a bird's eye view of your employee's skills. To capture baseline evidence of durable skills, it's helpful to have tools like a learning management tool (LMS) or database and new methods of evaluation such as observational assessments, video assessments, and aptitude tests.

“Organizations must be able to trust that someone is an expert when they say they are, whether through evidence of a work product or metrics like customer satisfaction and NPS scores,” says Manorek. “But what's often missing from organizational skills-mapping is a direct tie between metrics and employee performance. If someone is rating very high in a particular skill set, that should show in their performance. Otherwise, you're just testing knowledge, not skills. It will derail trust in your system if someone scores high as an expert but consistently doesn't meet their performance goals.”

“The ROI of learning and development has always been difficult to manage because it hasn't always been tied to business metrics, but what we're finding is that when you know where you're starting from, learning and development can be really measurable in terms of impact. When you can see what skills employees have and at what level, and then see improvement and progress over time, you can make that connection.”

— Kerri Manorek

3 Identify skills gaps and create impactful learning experiences

As rifts grow between where employee skill levels are right now and how you need those skills to develop, you can seize opportunities to identify meaningful learning experiences that address and close the gaps. Your learning and development initiatives then become truly strategic investments that can be tied directly to your specific business goals.

“Too many organizations think you can throw an eLearning module or video at an employee and suddenly they’ll perform better, but just providing content is not enough. Companies need to use the data about employee skill gaps to craft learning experiences that help people improve performance, not just know something. Being able to measure how a specific skill has improved—not just knowledge about that skill—is invaluable.”

— Kerri Manorek

How Will Your Organization Meet the Future of Work?

The skills requirements of your industry will continue to evolve, and so will the skills of your workforce. But the only way to ensure that those skills requirements and competencies will overlap is to assess employees' current skills, map the required skills, and build a training and development program that closes the gaps. While this represents a significant undertaking, organizations that succeed will find learning and development to be a powerful strategic advantage in remaining innovative and competitive in the future of work.



Sources

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Organizations today face many challenges—shifting expectations, high turnover, decentralized management, and incredibly competitive markets to name a few. To overcome these hurdles, they need to change the approach they take to training and development by embracing more modern learning experiences.

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