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How to build a tech-enabled workforce

Establishing the training need and building an adaptable culture

Questionmark Viewpoint

April 2021

Table of Contents

Introduction: the technology revolution

Technology is revolutionizing every aspect of how we do business.

Thanks to new innovations, we can understand customers like never before. Firms can adapt quickly to changing circumstances. Workers can collaborate instantly with people from each corner of the globe.

Some of this has been possible for years. Now it is expected. Customers embraced technology to navigate Covid-19 restrictions. They have grown used to getting what they want, when they want it. Companies need to adapt to this pace. Technology grants them the capability to do so. But this comes with its challenges.

As new systems and applications permeate into every aspect of business life, so must the skills to manage them. Many workers recognize that they don't have the requisite skills. And they know that their future career prospects depend on their ability to adapt.

This report:

- Identifies the most important skills that workers must develop to make the most of technology
- Explores the barriers to training and skills development programs
- Explains the cultural shift that organizations must prioritize to build an adaptable workforce that can respond to the new opportunities technology brings

Building an adaptable workforce requires employers to have real knowledge of current workers' skills. Which skills do workers lack? What are the cultural barriers that stop workers from adapting quickly?

Employers need reliable data to identify weaknesses, expose over-confidence and create meaningful personal development goals. This report sets out how online assessments can give employers the information they need.

> ## Questionmark Viewpoint
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> Questionmark Viewpoint is a series of white papers and reports that we produce to explore the challenges that our customers are facing, and which we help them address. These papers are based on what we are hearing from customers, and on research from other experts.

Workplace technology priorities

Based on our conversations with customers, four major areas are emerging as priorities for technical development.

- **_Data analytics_** – businesses have access to more data than ever before. Leaders are keen to develop systems that help them understand it and apply lessons to their business processes. Data analysis must be owned across the business, not just by technical teams.[1]
- **_Cybersecurity_** – widespread remote working over the last year has convinced leaders to take security issues more seriously. Security spending is expected to hit $174.6 billion by 2024.[2]
- **_Cloud computing_** – the need to share and access data, files and applications over the internet, is greater than ever. Spending on public cloud services will grow by 18.4% in 2021, predicts global research firm, Gartner.[3]
- **_Collaboration tools_** – widespread remote working saw a surge in the uptake of video conferencing applications and tools that enable data and file sharing. Firms are looking to prioritize developments that better integrate these kinds of technologies with other apps and services.[4]

Developing each of these strands will require investment in systems and infrastructure. But it is also vital that the human workers who use new innovations have the requisite skills.

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[1] https://expressanalytics.com/blog/5-key-data-analytics-trends-for-2021/
[2] https://www.forbes.com/sites/louiscolumbus/2020/12/15/the-best-cybersecurity-predictions-for-2021-roundup/?sh=4157e4bd5e8c
[3] https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2020-11-17-gartner-forecasts-worldwide-public-cloud-end-user-spending-to-grow-18-percent-in-2021
[4] https://mytechdecisions.com/unified-communications/5-trends-that-will-impact-collaboration-in-2021/

The most important technology-related skills

Workers will need training, support and development to maximize the potential of technology. We have identified the following critical skills for workers to have:

- **_Digital literacy_** – team members must be fluent with the applications they use regularly. Some 38% of workers who claim to have no digital skills say that their current job requires them, according to research by the National Skills Coalition.[5] More than a third of UK workers feel they lack the necessary information technology (IT) skills to do their job properly, according to a survey for training company STL.[6]
- **_Cybersecurity awareness_** – the threat of cyber-attacks and the risk of data breaches are increasing. Some 95% of all cybersecurity breaches are caused by human error.[7]
- **_Data literacy_** – organizations have access to more data than ever before. But just 21% of global employees are confident in their data literacy abilities.[8]
- **_Artificial intelligence (AI) knowledge_** – AI increasingly affects everything from spam filters to mobile phones. Workers need to understand it.

How we can help

- **_Measure workforce skills_** – tests and assessments can highlight areas of strength and weakness across the workforce. Our enterprise-grade assessment platform instantly marks papers and compiles results. It is easy to spot patterns and trends.
- **_Ready-made assessment content_** – we have developed ready-made tests which enable employers to test workforce knowledge on data literacy and cybersecurity. The results of these tests will help employers determine future training needs.
- **_Test data literacy skills_** – our new Questionmark Data Literacy by Cambridge Assessment test enables employers to gain a clear read on the strength of data literacy skills across the workforce.

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[5] https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/05-20-2020-NSC-New-Landscape-of-Digital-Literacy.pdf
[6] https://www.stl-training.co.uk/b/stl-skills-survey-uk-businesses-display-it-skills-gap/
[7] https://thehackernews.com/2021/02/why-human-error-is-1-cyber-security.html#:~:text='Human%20error%20was%20a%20major,in%2095%25%20of%20all%20breaches.&text=Mitigation%20of%20human%20error%20must,cyber%20business%20security%20in%202021
[8] https://www.qlik.com/us/company/press-room/press-releases/data-skills-gap-is-costing-organizations-billions-in-lost-productivity

- **_Better recruitment_** – with our platform, employers can test the skills of potential team members before making the decision to hire them. This helps them make better hiring decisions.

Training is one of the crucial means of support that employers can deliver. However, developing a relevant and effective training program can be fraught with challenges.
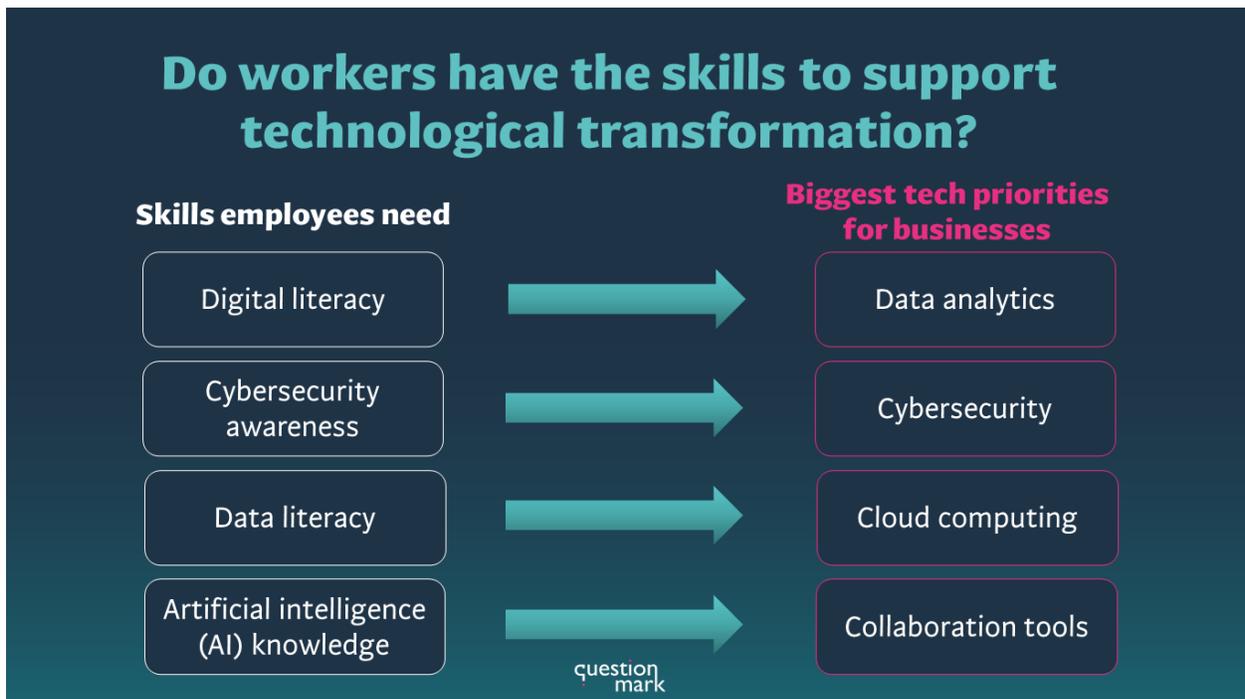
Training challenges

Staff need support to develop required skills. Two in five British workers and one in four in the United States (US) lack confidence in their technical abilities, according to research by learning software company Docebo.[9]

Training can help give teams the skills they need. But are workers receiving sufficient training? 91% of the US workforce are keen for more.[10]

The following challenges are common when creating and delivering training:

- ***Workers have different training needs*** – some workers will struggle with some skills more than others. A one-size-fits-all approach to training is unlikely to deliver, and wastes resources.
- ***Some think they are worse than they are*** – older workers are likely to assume they are less tech savvy than their younger counterparts. This is often not the case.[11]
- ***Others overestimate their ability*** – many employers have recruited self-proclaimed "digitally capable" team members only to discover that they are merely "digitally confident."[12] Misconceptions around a link between age and tech ability can fuel overconfidence.
- ***Workers are scared to admit that they are struggling*** – some 40% of workers are embarrassed to ask for help with IT issues according to research by training company STL. They worry that their need will be perceived as too basic, or as a weakness.[13] Research by the National Skills Council shows that workers who lack the skills they need spend time and energy trying to compensate for it. They depend on co-workers or family members or continue to use old paper-based systems.[14]

[9] https://www.hrreview.co.uk/hr-news/revealed-uk-workers-dont-have-the-tech-skills-they-need-to-do-their-job/117169
[10] https://www.hrreview.co.uk/hr-news/revealed-uk-workers-dont-have-the-tech-skills-they-need-to-do-their-job/117169
[11] https://www.hrreview.co.uk/hr-news/revealed-uk-workers-dont-have-the-tech-skills-they-need-to-do-their-job/117169
[12] https://digileaders.com/being-digitally-confident-and-digitally-competent/
[13] https://www.onrec.com/news/news-archive/worrying-figures-show-lack-of-it-skills-among-uk-employees
[14] https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/05-20-2020-NSC-New-Landscape-of-Digital-Literacy.pdf

How we can help

- *Identify training needs* – by measuring current skills among the workforce with online assessments, employers will obtain vital information on which skills need improving and which workers require greater support. They can tailor training accordingly.
- *Eliminate wasted training* – assessments establish where skills are strong. This stops employers from training a worker in an area they are already proficient in.
- *Anonymous testing: get a clear read on workforce strengths and weaknesses* – when test results are anonymous it can boost engagement with the assessment. This often won't be appropriate as it won't allow leaders to ascertain individual training needs. But some anonymous testing enables an accurate analysis of areas of weakness across the organization.
- *Demonstrate training need* – workers can resist training when they don't feel it's necessary. The results of the assessment will help employers prove that a team member requires training.
- *Measure the effect of training* – by assessing staff during and after the training, employers can be confident that it worked. Where it is failing to make an impact, trainers can revise the program.
- *Enhance career development* – by understanding a team member's training needs, employers can create a relevant and tailored career development plan. This can increase motivation and engagement around training, and improve performance.

The right training can play a crucial role in giving workers the technology skills they need. But are these skills enough to ensure the workforce is embracing technological transformation and the adaptability that comes with it? Employers must understand and address issues of culture and any barriers they create.

Nurturing an adaptable culture

Technology is the future. To utilize it, workers will need new skills. But upgrading technology and teaching workers how to use it will not be enough.

Integrating technology requires a cultural change. Yet organizational culture is often one of the main barriers to company success in the digital age.

A survey of global executives by management consultants, McKinsey found that the major barriers to change were cultural. Functional and departmental silos, aversion to risk and an inability to form a single view of a customer were the most common.[15]

Building the right culture means nurturing the right skills and attitudes. Crucial "cultural skills" include:

- **Adaptability** – change is the new constant. Being able to adjust to new situations and tackle new problems will become the defining characteristic of successful workers. It must be a core component of corporate culture.
- **Curiosity** – technology creates new opportunities, many of which are yet to be discovered. The curious worker is one that will innovate to find better ways to do things.
- **A customer-centric approach** – the world continues to change rapidly. Thriving in this environment requires an organization to be continually asking two questions: 1) how is our customer changing? 2) how does each aspect of our business process need to change to accommodate that? The time for tradition is over.
- **Empathy** – the ability to understand co-workers' pressures and pain points helps liberate entire teams and business functions from their silos.
- **Compliance** – a "tick box" approach to the rule of the game won't help firms navigate a world of heightened risk. Compliance must be at the heart of culture.

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[15] https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/culture-for-a-digital-age

How we can help

- ***Measure attitudes among staff*** – online assessments can test staff attitudes. This can help leaders identify likely barriers to cultural change.
- ***Create relevant training*** – having identified the saliant barriers, employers can tailor training and support accordingly.
- ***Build a culture of compliance*** - assessing staff knowledge of regulations and attitude toward risk can give employers the information they need to help nurture a culture that is safe and compliant.
- ***Recruit the right "cultural fit"*** – when an employer is clear about the culture they are trying to nurture they must ensure that those joining the team will contribute to it positively. Assessing the attitudes of potential team members before making the decision to hire them can help employers chose the best-placed candidate.

Conclusion: training skills and building culture

Technology is at the heart of success. Organizations that understand how to maximize the potential of technology will be the ones that thrive.

This means that employers must prioritize the developments that are right for their business environment. Workers must learn how to integrate innovations into their business processes. Leaders must create an adaptable culture that responds to new insights and drives future innovation.

Measuring current skills gives employers the information they need to build an adaptable workforce. They can focus technical training on those that need it most. They can make better decisions on team structures, personal development goals and recruitment. Crucially, they can identify cultural barriers to change and work toward nurturing a responsive and agile culture.

We work with employers around the world helping them make the right decisions about upskilling workers and building the right corporate culture. If you would like to speak to us about how we can help, please get in touch.

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About Questionmark

We help organizations and their people unlock their potential to deliver better performance.

Questionmark provides a secure enterprise-grade assessment platform and professional services to leading organizations around the world, delivered with care and unequalled expertise. Its full-service online assessment tool and professional services help customers to improve their performance and meet their compliance requirements. Questionmark enables organizations to unlock their potential by delivering assessments which are valid, reliable and fair, which can be defended.

Questionmark offers secure powerful integration with learning management systems (LMS), learning record stores (LRS) and proctoring services making it easy to bring everything together in one place. Questionmark's cloud-based assessment management platform offers rapid deployment, scalability for high-volume test delivery, 24/7 support, and the peace-of-mind of secure, audited U.S., Australian and European-based data centers.

Working with Questionmark

To further explore how Questionmark could work for your organization, or to book a free consultation and demo, please see: https://www.questionmark.com/request-demo/

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