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REPORT

# Modern skills for a post-pandemic world

*Preparing workers with the skills to thrive in today's ever-changing business environment*



Questionmark Viewpoint

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[www.questionmark.com](http://www.questionmark.com)

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## Introduction: an urgent need for modern skills

Half the workforce will need reskilling by 2025, according to the World Economic Forum.<sup>1</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic, coupled with increasing automation, has caused a revolution in the modern skills firms need to thrive.

Companies have accelerated their plans to deliver services and business processes digitally by three to four years.<sup>2</sup>

Changes in consumer behavior enforced by the pandemic will impact customer habits forever. People have raised their expectations. They demand greater choice.<sup>3</sup> Speed is no longer seen as an acceptable sacrifice for quality. People demand both.

Many firms recognize the need for a radical rethink. They are examining how they structure teams, serve customers and respond to ever-changing circumstances. To do this, they need a new range of modern skills. These will:

- **Accelerate agility** – new technologies enable firms to move quicker than before. But do workers know how to use new tools?
- **Make better decisions** – workers need the cognitive skills to make better decisions about a range of new problems. These decisions matter.
- **Face the future of work** – maintaining a productive culture amid new working arrangements demands a new range of cultural and teamwork skills.

Firms must focus on nurturing modern skills among their workforce. This report demonstrates how measuring employee skills gives leaders the starting information they need to make better decisions on training, development and recruitment.

### Questionmark Viewpoint

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.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/top-10-work-skills-of-tomorrow-how-long-it-takes-to-learn-them/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/how-covid-19-has-pushed-companies-over-the-technology-tipping-point-and-transformed-business-forever>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/industries/retail/our%20insights/how%20covid%2019%20is%20changing%20consumer%20behavior%20now%20and%20forever/how-covid-19-is-changing-consumer-behaviornow-and-forever.pdf>

## The technology skills to accelerate agility

Technology is enabling employers to reimagine every aspect of how their organizations operate.

But to enjoy the potential that new digital tools promise, workers must be proficient in using them. And those skills are in short supply.

Despite the shortage, only half of employers test the digital literacy of their workforce, according to research by IT consultancy Helastel<sup>4</sup>, making it harder for them to identify who could easily upskill.

Crucial technology skills include:

- **Digital collaboration** – tech enables teams to work together more efficiently. Yet workers report they spend 45 minutes a day searching for information between different technology platforms. Less than half of workers have been given sufficient training on relevant coworking tools.<sup>5</sup>
- **Digital communication** – 53% of employees say that “excessive emails” are a major issue that reduces productivity, according to intranet provider, Lumapps.<sup>6</sup> Sharper skills and tools can reduce wasted and excessive communication.
- **Cybersecurity awareness** – the threat of cyber-attacks and the risk of data breaches are increasing, especially with people working from home. Human error contributes to some 95% of breaches.<sup>7</sup>
- **Understanding AI** – artificial intelligence (AI) increasingly affects everything from spam filters to mobile phones. Workers need to understand it.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.helastel.com/workplace-digital-literacy-strategies-what-decision-makers-and-employees-think/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://apnews.com/press-release/business-wire/6b48dea3e4c7411fb5eedb1a0ebcd0ab>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.lumapps.com/blog/internal-communications/improve-digital-communication-workplace/>

<sup>7</sup> <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>

## Decisions matter: sharper cognitive skills

Organizations that adapted quickly to the challenges of the pandemic were those that were able to break down silos within their teams, according to research by the National Safety Council.<sup>8</sup>

The employees that will help their firms thrive in the future will be those that have the cognitive skills to make a range of decisions and solve a variety of problems irrespective of their job roles.

These cognitive skills include:

- **Critical thinking and problem solving** – the ability to analyze a situation as objectively as possible and to make a reasoned judgment. Many employers are concerned that these skills are not sufficiently developed in the education system.<sup>9</sup>
- **Data literacy** – organizations have access to more data than ever before. But just 21% of global employees are confident in their ability to understand, articulate and communicate with data.<sup>10</sup>
- **Communication** – workers must be able to tell a story, ask the right questions and actively listen to the answers. Communication was one of the top skills that employers said they were looking for in a survey for human resources services provider, Hays, earlier this year.<sup>11</sup>
- **Creativity** – workers who are creative can often find imaginative new solutions to problems, driving innovation at the same time. According to the World Economic Forum, “creativity is a uniquely human trait that no algorithm can replace.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> <https://nsccdn.azureedge.net/nsc.org/media/site-media/docs/workplace/safer/state-of-response-future-world-of-work-report120820.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://reboot-foundation.org/the-state-of-critical-thinking/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.qlik.com/us/company/press-room/press-releases/data-skills-gap-is-costing-organizations-billions-in-lost-productivity>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.skillsplatform.org/blog/the-skills-you-want-vs-the-skills-employers-need-in-2021/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/11/ai-automation-creativity-workforce-skill-fute-of-work>

## The cultural skills for the future of work

The pandemic has forever changed the way we work.

One in three United States companies intends to leave half or more of their workforce working from home post-Covid, according to a survey for asset management firm Mercer.<sup>13</sup> More than 60% of United Kingdom businesses plan to adopt hybrid working, with workers splitting their week between home and the office.<sup>14</sup>

Some 73% of companies that will seek to adopt more flexible working conditions recognize that they must think seriously about protecting their organizational culture.<sup>15</sup> To ensure they maintain and strengthen a cohesive working culture, employers must prioritize a range of cultural skills.

These cultural skills include:

- **Accountability** – 38% of managers confessed to the Harvard Business Review that they struggled to trust remote workers.<sup>16</sup> Home workers need to ensure their work is visible and maintain strong relationships with their managers.
- **Collaboration and teamwork** – working together as a team was one of the most commonly cited challenges during the pandemic.<sup>17</sup> Returning to physical workspaces will doubtlessly ease some of those struggles. But when some people are in the office and others are at home, there will be new obstacles for teams to overcome.
- **Compliance** – leaders will still be held accountable for ensuring their staff abide by the rules, even when they are out of sight. Creating a “culture of compliance” is essential.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.mercer.us/content/dam/mercer/attachments/north-america/us/us-2020-flex-working-survey-results-infographic.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.insider.co.uk/news/more-60-businesses-planning-adopt-24013018>

<sup>15</sup>

[https://app.keysurvey.com/reportmodule/REPORT5/report/41506990/41214286/c523180dbe03fd9f349de61e08091c7d?Dir=&Enc\\_Dir=9c3e87c1&av=lxnlBAm77ac%3D&afterVoting=6d40c87c1307&msig=0285f81640c6488d88ee37dc1785f3ce](https://app.keysurvey.com/reportmodule/REPORT5/report/41506990/41214286/c523180dbe03fd9f349de61e08091c7d?Dir=&Enc_Dir=9c3e87c1&av=lxnlBAm77ac%3D&afterVoting=6d40c87c1307&msig=0285f81640c6488d88ee37dc1785f3ce)

<sup>16</sup> <https://hbr.org/2020/07/remote-managers-are-having-trust-issues>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.business2community.com/workplace-culture/5-tips-to-encourage-effective-teamwork-while-remote-02326981>

## Staff assessments: real information about modern skills

Practical solutions to all of these problems stem from understanding what the starting point is, knowing who has the modern skills that are needed, and who has the aptitude to pick them up.

With the Questionmark platform, employers can create a range of assessments to test skills across the workforce.

This enables them to:

- **Measure current skills of workers** – leaders must decide how to equip their workforce with the modern skills they need. This is impossible without first understanding the strength of skills across teams. Online staff assessments give employers real information about areas of strength and weakness.
- **Reduce wasted training** – testing potential participants ahead of training ensures that only those that need it take part, so the investment is not wasted on those it's not right for. It also helps identify training needs across the board.
- **Measure the effectiveness of training** – testing employees during and after training indicates whether the training is working, or if the investment is being wasted.
- **Check skills of potential employees** – by measuring the skills of people during the hiring process, leaders can ensure that they are bringing the right people into their teams.
- **Check skills of new recruits** – similarly, measuring the skills of new recruits will help employers tailor their individual development programs to help them develop more quickly.
- **Measure attitudes** – assessments can indicate an individual's values and attitudes. The results of these tests can help managers identify and address any potential barriers to nurturing the right culture.
- **Build a culture of compliance** – employers need to ensure and demonstrate that staff understand the rules of the game. Assessments show whether team members know what is expected of them. The results serve as evidence, enabling leaders to demonstrate to stakeholders and regulators that proper measures have been taken.

Questionmark also provides a range of ready-made assessment content that can help employers measure specific skills and knowledge:

- ***The Questionmark Cybersecurity for Home-Based Workers assessment*** is a ready-made test that enables employers to measure the level of cybersecurity awareness across the workforce.
- ***Questionmark Data Literacy by Cambridge Assessment*** enables employers to measure data literacy skills across their team. The results indicate which employees can understand, apply, communicate with and evaluate data in their job role.
- ***Questionmark Thinking Skills by Cambridge Assessment*** helps employers measure the critical-thinking and problem-solving abilities of staff and potential recruits. It helps employers identify high-potential team members and candidates.

## Conclusion: identify the modern skills gap

Employers must urgently act to equip their staff with the modern skills they need to thrive. The pandemic has accelerated trends that make current skills increasingly redundant. Those that do not prioritize the development of modern skills will be unable to adapt to the challenges of an ever-changing business environment.

Before they can address the problem, employers must understand the extent of the modern skills gap within their own workforce. Staff assessments give employers the information they need to equip the workforce with modern skills. The results of assessments reveal the extent of the skills gap. They pinpoint training need and demonstrate whether measures to strengthen skills are working.

We work with organizations around the world helping them discover if their teams have the modern skills they need. Please get in touch to talk to us about how we can help.



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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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