Empowering the Tech Workforce of the Future: A Guide for Identifying, Mapping, and Bridging the Skills Gap
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Guide for Identifying, Mapping, and Bridging the Skills Gap

The way we work is always changing. New technologies, processes, markets, and customer expectations require today’s organizations to assess whether they have the right skill set in place to meet current and future requirements. Given this highly competitive environment, success is largely dependent on an organization’s ability to continuously adapt its IT workforce to meet these dynamic demands.

However, identifying, mapping, and bridging the skills gap is an enormous responsibility fraught with unknowns. What skills do you currently have? What technologies will be prevalent in the future? What tech platforms or coding languages will be redundant or likely to be phased out? How do you acquire new tech skills and at what cost? How can you map skill sets to business objectives?

Workforce Planning teams, learning and development (L&D) teams, and people managers are tasked with answering these difficult questions, but a lack of visibility into the current workforce’s abilities and expertise make it extremely difficult to know how to move forward. As a result, many organizations are flying blind when it comes to ensuring they have the skills necessary to compete today and in the future.

The answer? Data. Relying on verifiable skills and credentials is the most accurate and scalable way to continuously identify, map, and bridge the skills gap. This data-based approach puts science at the center of your workforce planning strategy—eliminating the need to rely on gut feel or assumptions when aligning skill sets with existing and future needs.

Read on to learn how HR leaders and people managers can best identify, map, and bridge the skills gap in their organization.
**Tie Skills Assessment to Verifiable Credentials**

Basing skills assessment on data rather than resumes eliminates much of this uncertainty. The ability to know exactly how many developers in your organization have a skill or, better yet, have been certified on a platform, provides a specific data point that helps determine whether the organization has the required expertise in house to kick off a project or build out an achievable product roadmap.

Encouraging employees and prospects to verify their credentials in a single, consolidated platform is a great way of capturing this data and deriving insights. For example, data from Credly’s digital credentials platform shows us that the most popular technology skill acquired since March 2020 is ‘Cloud Services’ followed by other cloud computing skills such as ‘Cloud Infrastructure,’ ‘Cloud Storage,’ ‘Cloud Security,’ and ‘Cloud Architecture.’ ‘Amazon Web Services’ and ‘Azure’ are also listed in the top 10 of acquired technology skills. Workforce planning teams can dive into this data to determine existing skillsets in the organization, what skills are currently being acquired, and where a gap exists.

**Skills-Based Hiring Reduces Bias**

A bonus to this approach is equity and fairness. Assessing talent on verified digital credentials puts the focus on an employee’s skills and abilities rather than outdated proxies—such as who you know, where you’ve worked, and where you went to school. These outdated proxies limit your talent pool, especially when you consider that 40% of white Americans hold a bachelor’s degree compared to only 26% of Black Americans. Does it really matter if a python developer went to a four-year college as long as they have the right certification? Focusing on skills-based talent assessment combats bias in hiring and helps organizations build diverse teams with the right expertise.

**Mapping the Skills Gap**

Once you gain visibility into current skills and expertise, it’s necessary to then determine the skills you need to acquire to get where you want to go. This starts with an honest assessment of your company’s mission and goals and how your senior leadership team expects to get there.

**Alignment of Strategy and Skills is Critical to Success**

It’s one thing to set goals and develop strategy. It’s another to actually execute on the executive team’s roadmap for the business. Success largely depends on the grunts in the trenches, the foot soldiers, the people...
who actually do the work. Tight alignment between strategy and human resources is absolutely critical to ensuring the right skills are available to execute the company’s mission.

While each organization may require a specific set of skills depending on the platforms or languages they currently use, understanding the trends in the industry can help workforce planning teams, L&D teams, and people managers forecast future skills. In some cases, this can be fairly simple and straightforward. An organization looking to modernize its application stack should be able to identify the necessary skills in agile development, cloud networking, and network security. An organization planning a migration to SAP can easily find administrators with the required certifications. It’s when so-called “soft skills” come into play that can derail mapping required skill sets.

**Soft Skills are Human Skills**

A lot of people call communication, collaboration, management, and giving and receiving feedback ‘soft’ skills, but there’s nothing soft about them. An organization can employ the best developers in the world, but their talent would be wasted if a skilled manager couldn’t focus them on the task at hand. Instead of calling them ‘soft’ skills, it’s important to remember that these are human skills. Fully autonomous robots are not about to take over standup just yet. Organizations still need people to make critical assessments and decisions that a machine can’t.

Data from Credly’s digital credentialing platform shows that ‘Communication’ is a top 10 desired skill in today’s tech workplace, which indicates the growing importance of interpersonal human skills. These skills, however, have been historically subjective to measure and often overlooked in skills gap assessments when compared to hard, technical skills. Some solutions for tracking this type of skill growth include assessment tools, 360-degree feedback, and employee engagement surveys. Another solution is looking at skill-focused digital credentials and badges specifically designed to challenge and measure these skills in an unbiased way. Human skills are essential, and workforce planning teams need to ensure that employees have and continue to grow these ‘soft’ skills.

**Key Takeaways:**

- Success toward achieving business goals requires tight alignment between strategy and skills
- Using a data-based approach to tie verified certifications and badges to required skills ensures accuracy and reliability
- Don’t forget so-called ‘soft’ skills such as communication and management
- These human skills are just as crucial for getting the most out of your employees

**Bridging the Skills Gap**

Acquiring the skills your organization needs is a mission critical task—yet, most organizations struggle with skills development. Today’s market leaves companies with two choices—either acquire the required talent through hiring or develop the skills within through upskilling. However, both approaches require a new way of thinking about skills acquisition.
The Great Resignation is Exacerbating the Skills Gap

As if the uncertain future of work wasn’t enough, the Great Resignation over the past year has caused many organizations to scramble just to maintain current skill levels. According to the latest [jobs report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](https://www.bls.gov), more than 4.5 million Americans left their jobs in November 2021—continuing the longest string of months with more than 4 million resignations since the statistic has been recorded. The need to replace skills has overtaken acquiring and developing skills for future needs as a priority.

The race is on to reverse the trend and keep critical skills from leaving the organization. Most employers could be doing more. According to HR analyst and author [Josh Bersin](https://www.joshbersin.com), only 11% of companies offer formal career advancement programs for their employees—creating a scenario where the only way to advance for nearly 90% of the global workforce is to leave their current employer for a new opportunity.

Dissuading people from leaving the organization through career development, employee recognition, and upskilling can alleviate many of the concerns frustrated and stagnant workers have about their current employers—giving them a greater sense of purpose and responsibility in their existing jobs. Done right, these programs can stem the flow of skills outside the organization and attract new IT professionals with desirable skill sets to join the team.

Option 1: Upskilling

Upskilling is the process of teaching your employees new skills so they are better prepared for the changing workplace. Upskilling ensures the organization has the necessary IT skills it needs to compete in the future while giving employees higher job satisfaction and a sense of career growth. Updating your workforce’s skills will help them transition to new roles that are being created through innovation, automation, and new technology.

Another way to give employees a sense of value and purpose is to recognize their hard work and expertise through an employee recognition program based on digital credentials. The benefits of recognition programs for employees can be extremely valuable. More than just a repository of badges and certifications, an effective employee recognition program powered by digital credentials allows employees to communicate their achievements, exemplify their unique skills and knowledge, showcase their qualifications internally, reflect on their career development path, and promote and amplify their personal brand. Capturing this data in a centralized credential management platform gives L&D teams and people managers the insights they need to continuously develop talent, map, and bridge the skills gap.

Option 2: Hiring

Developing skills through upskilling existing employees is exponentially more cost effective than bringing in new talent through hiring. According to [Business Insider](https://www.businessinsider.com), the estimated real cost of recruiting a new employee is upwards of 50 percent of a person’s salary. And making a mistake in the recruitment process that leads to resignation or firing can cost an employer between half and two-thirds of the employee’s annual salary through advertising costs, recruitment fees, interview time, human resources, and training expenses.

However, sometimes the only way to acquire a new skill is through recruitment. If you go this path, it’s important to use the same talent acquisition approach of relying on verifiable skills and credentials that organizations use to acquire skills internally. This data-based approach ensures you are hiring the right person for the job with no implicit bias.
Empower Your Tech Workforce

Preparing for the future of work by developing or acquiring skills is mission critical given the dynamic nature of innovation and the upheaval in the job market. Credly is an important part of an organization’s HR tech stack that allows employers to identify skills gaps and opportunities for advancement, learning and development, and more.

Contact us at sales@credly.com to learn how Credly can help you identify, map, and bridge the skills gap in your organization.

Key Takeaways

The disruptions of the Great Resignation are making it clear that skills development is mission critical in today’s competitive market.

Upskilling and employee recognition programs allow you to preserve existing skills and develop new skills that are needed in the future.

Hiring can also help you acquire the necessary skills, but it is a much more expensive option than upskilling.

If you do have to hire, make sure you make decisions based on verifiable skills and not self-reporting resume information.

About Credly

Credly is helping the world speak a common language about people’s knowledge, skills, and abilities. Thousands of employers, training organizations, associations, certification programs, and workforce development initiatives use Credly to help individuals translate their learning experiences into professional opportunities using trusted, portable, digital credentials. Credly empowers organizations to attract, engage, develop, and retain talent with enterprise-class tools that generate data-driven insights to address skills gaps and highlight opportunities through an unmatched global network of credential issuers.
About Credly

Credly is helping the world speak a common language about people’s knowledge, skills, and abilities. Thousands of employers, training organizations, associations, certification programs, and workforce development initiatives use Credly to help individuals translate their learning experiences into professional opportunities using trusted, portable, digital credentials. Credly empowers organizations to attract, engage, develop, and retain talent with enterprise-class tools that generate data-driven insights to address skills gaps and highlight opportunities through an unmatched global network of credential issuers.