

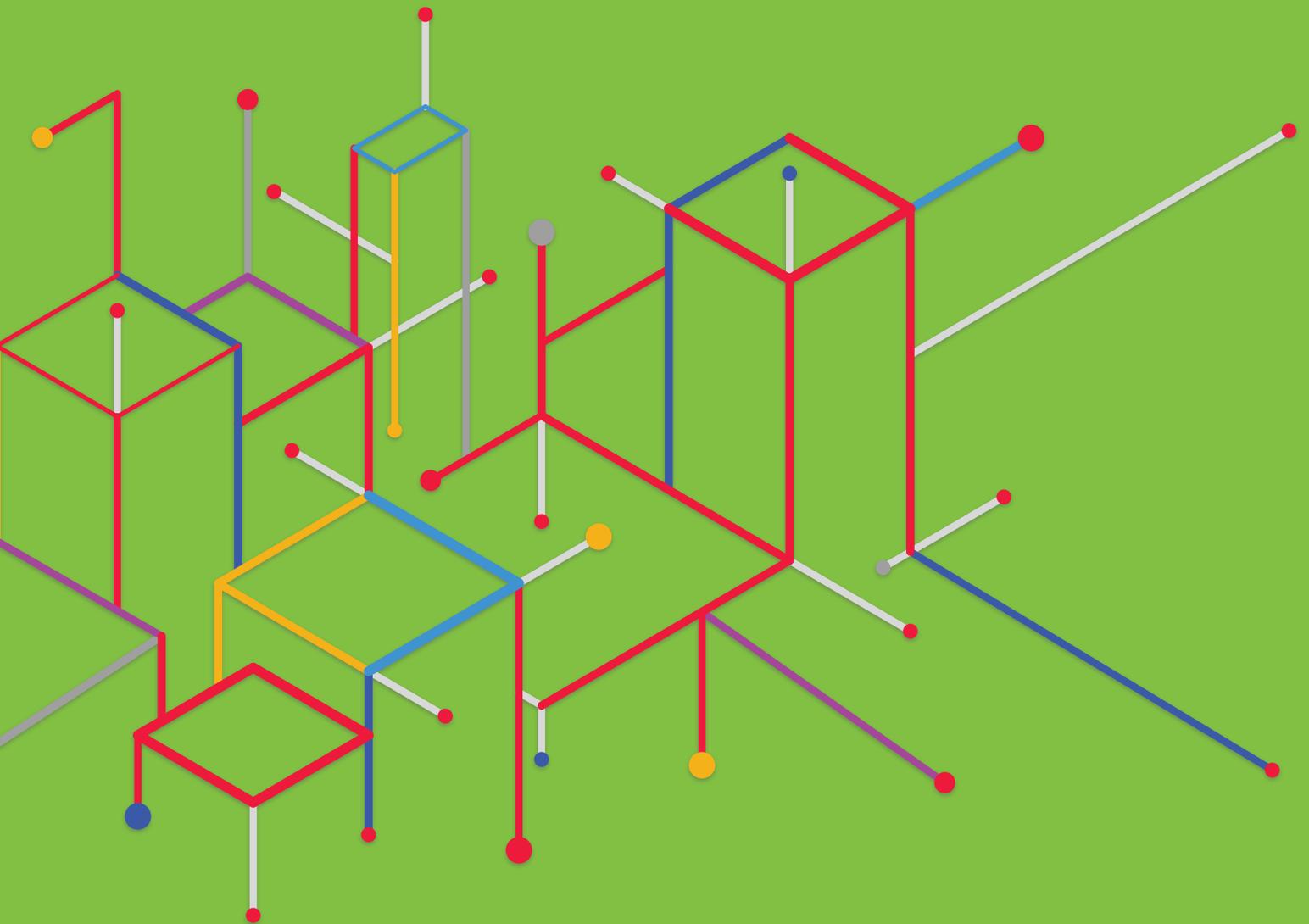
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TIPS, TOOLS & INTELLIGENCE
FOR DEVELOPING TALENT

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Future Skill the Workforce

Patty Gaul



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FUTURE READINESS

FUTURE SKILL THE WORKFORCE

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To say that today's world of work is not the same as our parents' is an understatement. The pandemic has fast-tracked many of the business changes we were talking about prior to 2020, including the digital transformation, remote work, gig workers, and project work.

The changes require technological skills, the ability to quickly partner with others, and swift and seamless adaptability to change. For talent development professionals, the changes mean revisiting how they develop workers and ensure a culture of retention or creation, especially in hybrid or remote work environments. Further, they must interact differently with the C-suite, managers, and learners. The shift in how they do work and the necessary capabilities require TD professionals to go beyond upskilling and reskilling employees to future skilling.

CTDO Next—a group of TD executives who want to shape the future of the profession—explains that “*Future-skilling* suggests a broader, forward-thinking mindset. It involves preparing people for success in areas we haven’t identified yet. It encompasses resilience, agility, and innovation. It espouses thriving in an uncertain future. It’s about nourishing continuous and sustainable skills that are intertwined with the organization’s purpose, culture, and goals.” In the article “3 Reasons to Rethink Our Use of the Terms Reskilling and

Upskilling,” CTDO Next further notes that future skill-
ing isn’t only about training and development but rather
the entire employee life cycle and experience. It’s about
a philosophy and a commitment that “is integrated into
the fabric of the organization.”

The group adds that, “As TD professionals, we are cre-
ating a culture of continuous learning. And our employees
are investing in themselves and their careers.”

The Conference Board, a nonpartisan, nonprofit
research organization, also uses the term *future skilling*.
“Companies can mitigate the challenges of talent short-
ages and declining productivity by investing in rigorous
future-skilling programs and leveraging their talent for
maximum agility. But for such efforts to be effective and
sustainable, they must be intertwined with the organiza-
tion’s goals on an ongoing basis.”

Every organization is different, with unique needs
in terms of skills, people, and culture. In this issue, I will
explore common themes around developing skills for the
future and helping employees perform at their best. I will
also highlight companies that are adapting to the chang-
ing world of work and have been future skilling workers
with a strong focus on culture. Whether a nonprofit, for-
profit, or government agency; small, large, or in between;
US-based or global, the leaders at these organizations are
transparent and willing to take risks. That creates a busi-
ness where individuals want to work.

In this issue of *TD at Work*, you will learn:

- How to determine which skills your company will need
now and in the future
- The importance of culture to a skilled, productive
organization
- How to create a culture of continuous learning
- About companies with innovative programs focused on
some of today’s most pressing talent issues

My hope is that this issue will spur creative thinking
about efforts you may consider in your organization.

Why Now?

Jobs, products, and services have always changed over
time, so you may wonder why the emphasis on skilling
now. Consider the technological advances and the way
people are working now as well as the pace of change.

Ahead of COVID-19, no one could have predicted the
sudden shift from services to goods as people stayed
home and ordered what they needed and wanted. Apart
from the pandemic, consumers are looking to invest in
goods and services that align with their values, and indi-
viduals want to work at companies that do the same.
That is changing customer demands and what companies
need to produce.

In the US, for example, Ford Motor Company is spend-
ing \$3.7 billion in plant expansions to allow for electric
commercial vehicle manufacturing. As part of the initia-
tive, the company is increasing efforts to improve the
worker experience. “Each job for an automaker in the
US creates nearly 11 other positions in industries across
the economy, according to the Alliance for Automotive
Innovation based on data through 2020,” writes Phoebe
Wall Howard and Dave Boucher in a *Detroit Free Press*
article. Similarly, Consumers Energy in Jackson, Michigan,
has a goal to close coal-fired plants by 2025 and expand its
renewable generation portfolio, committing to retaining
employees and upskilling them during the process.

Individuals are stressed from the pace of change—
whether from worrying about their and their family’s
health to tending to their children’s education to seem-
ingly working nonstop. According to an article from edX, a
massive open online course provider, “Studies have found
workers are more stressed than ever, with a staggering 81
percent reporting that they feel at risk of burnout and one
in five saying that working for a company whose values
don’t align with their own is the cause of that feeling.” The
article continues, “Workers are also fighting to keep pace
with change. Remote work, e-commerce, and automation
are all reshaping work as we know it.”

Many employers granted workers a great deal of flex-
ibility the past two-plus years, and employees don’t want
to go back to the way things were. They also realize that
to stay competitive, they need to continually develop
themselves. The future of learning and working is not
something companies can simply do and be done with.
Yes, training courses will be part of the development
process but so will many other components that will
be critical to business success. There will be a need for
continual development; for example, managers will need
to coach their direct reports on an ongoing basis. And

leaders will need to lead with more empathy and active listening skills to hear what employees need and want in their well-being as well as their growth opportunities.

Getting Started

Tennis great Arthur Ashe is credited with saying, “Start where you are, use what you have, do what you can.” That is true of beginning the journey of future skilling your organization. Start small, and as you continue, remember that you won’t be able to begin an organization-wide, comprehensive change effort if you don’t have key leaders’ support.

In the TD magazine article “The TD Team Doesn’t Need to Go at It Alone,” TD and HR professional Catalina Rivera advises that a talent strategy focused on sustainably growing a talent pipeline is too broad for one team to take on by itself, especially if you’re a small team with limited resources. She writes, “Having executives and key stakeholders talking the TD language and understanding how to prepare and support development activities as part of their daily job—and even thinking it was their idea in the first place—significantly expands the talent department’s reach.”

Partnerships—both internal and external—are a necessary component of a comprehensive talent strategy. That

means the TD team needs to work with IT, business units, HR, senior leaders, managers, and employees to develop a culture that embraces L&D, making the time for it and rewarding it. The team also should partner with local educational institutions, businesses, nonprofits, and the government to access resources.

Consider your current organizational environment. Do you have leadership’s support for a major change initiative to future skill workers? Are employees engaged and motivated to work and learn? How successful are your current development programs? First get a sense of business skilling needs. Determine which skills you have within your organization and which are most important to business success. Likewise, take the pulse of employee engagement.

Business Environment

The disruption during the past few years has shown that even businesses that seemed on solid footing are at risk. For example, the service-focused market turned into a demand for products, and supply chain issues arose to disrupt product availability and delivery. Further, inflation is increasing around the world with the real possibility of a recession. How will those changes affect the products and services that contribute to your company’s

Work Without Jobs

In their book *Work Without Jobs: How to Reboot Your Organization’s Work Operating System*, Ravin Jesuthasan and John Boudreau argue that the future of work will focus on skills rather than jobs. As the two write in their *MIT Sloan Management Review* article, “Organizations are held back by the obsolescence and stubborn inertia of a traditional work operating system that was built for the Second Industrial Revolution, with work defined as ‘jobs’ and workers defined as ‘job-holding employees.’”

Jesuthasan and Boudreau recommend a work operating system based on four design principles. First, they say, start with current and future tasks; then combine humans and automation; follow that by thinking about the possible human work options, such as gig, project-based, and full employment; and finally, allow a “flow to work” rather than dedicated, permanent jobs. Many tasks, the two write, are “best performed if bundled into a job, but the rest are better done with one or more alternative engagement options.” In other instances, employers may use internal talent marketplaces for short-term talent and skills for projects or bring on contract hires for particularly busy times.

There will be challenges and questions along the way. Jesuthasan and Boudreau encourage asking questions and experimenting as well as using Agile principles.