Closing the Skills Gap

with Continuous Learning

Creating a resilient workforce has emerged as a top priority for business leaders. A review of the past few years highlights both abrupt changes and slower evolutions that together are shaping the skills and roles organizations need to thrive in today's – and tomorrow's – marketplace.

What skills are needed now? Which are essential for future work? How can employees and organizations keep up? Here are five steps to closing your workforce skills gap with continuous learning.

ONE. Prioritize Adaptability

It's no secret that the pace of change continues to escalate. Knowing that each company (and employee) needs a mix of durable and perishable skills, it pays to take a longer-term view of what's needed to succeed.

The One Brief from Aon reminds us that the pandemic required many businesses to shift on the fly and deal with crises. "Helping employees develop skills that will make it easier for them to adapt as needed will contribute to their resilience," the article points out.

> When you're refreshing your competency model, include skills and competencies that arm employees to be adaptable in the face of change.

TWO. Pinpoint Skills Gaps in the Workplace

A "skills gap" is a disconnect between the skills an employer needs in its workforce and those that its employees currently possess.

There are many moving parts. Industries, communities, companies, and technologies all are shifting what's required from employees. And employees come and go. They also learn, grow, and gain experience. The net result is a constantly shifting gap that's important to measure and track.

> To pinpoint where you have skills gaps in the workplace, conduct skills assessments at least annually.

THREE. Take a Holistic Look at Work

Closing skills gaps is something that happens in the context of the work environment. Before employees can take on learning and

development at work, they need to be actively engaging with their work.

A recent Gartner article on workforce resilience emphasizes this point. "One of the biggest drivers of workforce resilience is leaders themselves, and their ability to both understand and address the barriers that are preventing employees from having a healthy work — as well as life — experience.

Managers can make work easier by engaging employees with empathy, both personally and professionally."

> As you're assessing skills and career paths, take a holistic look at the work environment to set up employees for success.

FOUR. Develop Learning Plans and Programs for All.

Once you and your employees have identified skills gaps, a natural next step is to establish learning plans to guide and support skill development. Just remember to be inclusive!

Honeywell recently issued a white paper, entitled *Building a Resilient Workforce for the Future*. In it, the authors point out that it's the office-based staff who primarily benefited from continuous learning focus and investment, with many tools and much support to drive workplace productivity. They go on to say, "In contrast, the working tempo of industrial workers has changed little over the years. Any development tools that do exist tend to be antiquated or limited in scope, focusing on upskilling for specific tasks, for example, rather

than holistic education that puts them in the driving seat of change. Adding to the development challenge of industrial workforce development is the fact that 50% of plant personnel are due to retire in the next five years and that 38% are actively looking for a new role at any given time."

Let us not forget the industrial workers.

In fact, let us not stop at simply supporting white collar and blue collar jobs and learning opportunities. Take a holistic look at workforce learning. This recent *"Rebuilding learning equity: The key to overcoming the skills gap"* article in Chief Learning Officer charges, "Put simply, workplace learning is not fair. Some workers have access to robust talent development offerings. They can make time for in-depth learning programs and access subject matter experts in their moments of need. Other employees do not have this access or flexibility. They may rely on their peers and managers for support. But, more often than not, they're left to figure things out on their own. These opportunity gaps foster inequities within the workplace that extend beyond talent development. They hinder mobility, reduce engagement, increase frustration, deepen inequality, and impede performance."

> Be sure you're connecting the dots across your competency management program, your learning and development programs, and your Diversity Equity and Inclusion initiatives to reach every employee with learning that matters.

FIVE. Monitor, Measure, Listen, and Improve

What we're outlining here isn't a one-time effort. It's the idea of establishing a continuous learning culture that's built on data about skills and competencies. It's a culture of inclusivity. And it's constantly refreshed to align company goals and needs with employees' career success and skill development.

To make it work takes work. It takes ongoing skills assessments. It takes collaboration – across leadership and between leader and employees. It takes listening – to the market, customers, and employees. But it's worth it.

> Fine-tuning your continuous learning will close skills gaps and set up your employees and company to thrive. As the Chief Learning Officer article states so clearly:
> *"An organization can only transform as fast as its people can learn."*

Are you working to identify and close your workforce skills gap? **Contact us** to find out how Avilar's **WebMentor Skills**™ can help with your competency plans and skills assessments.

Or **schedule a demo** to learn how our performance management software, built with continuous learning in mind, can help you optimize your staff and drive results for your organization.

About Avilar

Avilar – The Competency Company™ is a leader workforce planning and development with web-based competency management and learning solutions for corporations, government, and non-profit organizations. Formed in 1997, Avilar was a pioneer with its award-winning WebMentor™ product line and has built itself on the basis of superior customer service and highly adaptable product design.

Avilar consultants are recognized as industry thought leaders and have decades of experience in implementation and analysis. Let Avilar help you transform your organization from ordinary to extraordinary.

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