



Developing Employees

How We Teach Digital Skills at PwC

by Mike Fenlon and Sarah McEneaney

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Across our society and in all industries, leaders and their organizations are racing to unlock the value of data, tech-enable business processes, and create better, more digitally-enhanced experiences for customers, clients, and employees. They are working to disrupt their own businesses before somebody else does. This cannot be done without substantial investment in talent. With about 500,000 unfilled tech jobs in the U.S., a number that's widely anticipated to double by 2020, executives know they can't hire their way out of the need for upskilled employees. And workers are keenly focused on organizations that will invest in their development and help secure their future in a digital, data-driven economy.

Executives find themselves confronted with decisions about whether to acquire expertise from outside the company, through recruiting, partnerships, or acquisitions. But they can often overlook the idea of upskilling their current workforce. Upskilling can be a key enabler for driving the data, digital, and technology agenda of a company while also helping employees secure their own personal future and relevance. While employees must opt in to their own digital upskilling, and invest the time and effort required to acquire knowledge and new skills, leaders also need to commit to not leaving anyone behind and to making investments that support the lifelong learning that's essential for the 21st century. Digital upskilling is fundamentally about culture and people experience — and bringing to life a shared growth mindset among individuals and teams, and across the entire organization.

At PwC, for example, we have developed a comprehensive workforce upskilling strategy to build the “digital fitness” of all of our people, equipping them with a broad base of knowledge across a variety of domains — such as data, analytics, AI and automation, blockchain, and design thinking — that we believe are critical for all business people today. This digital upskilling strategy is a core business priority, sponsored by our chairman.

We develop digital fitness through tech-enabled learning — including podcasts, gamification, immersive skill building, multimedia content, and quizzes pushed through mobile platforms, not limited by the traditional boundaries of classrooms. We also built a Digital Fitness app that provides each of our employees with a personalized assessment of their digital acumen, and guides them to the tools and learning resources they need to fill gaps and make improvements. This app provides a customized learning path, while generating valuable information for workforce planning and skill development strategies.

Digital Accelerators

The future-proofing of our workforce includes a variety of fast-track developmental efforts. For example, we are enabling employees who are motivated to further accelerate their skills to do so by offering them a “career pivot” to become what we call “Digital Accelerators”. Accelerators rapidly deepen their skills in digital specialties, such as data, automation, AI, and digital storytelling by learning a variety of self-service tools and coding languages and applying these skills across our business.

With a recognition from our firm leadership that embedding and distributing advanced skills throughout our teams was a critical pillar to our upskilling agenda, we invited all employees across our entire business to opt in and apply for the Digital Accelerator program in a competitive selection process. Roughly 3,500 employees applied for what would ultimately be about 1,000 spaces in 2018.

Learning, Community, and Rapid Application

Almost a year was invested in creating a flexible, forward-thinking learning experience that initially brings Accelerators together for an immersive in-person onboarding, followed by a personalized development path for each person. To ensure the protection of time needed to achieve rapid application of learning, the investment includes clearing the plates of hundreds of Accelerators by taking away their regular responsibilities. They focus on client work full-time while applying these skills for at least two years in this role. Freeing up time for them to learn, collaborate, and execute is a vital part of the program. Genuine digital upskilling isn’t something that can be piled on to other work.

Our Accelerators are already using intelligent and robotic process/desktop automation to improve processes that had, until now, been manually intensive. This can take tasks down from, in some cases, 1,000+ hours to just minutes or seconds, creating capacity for staff and their clients to

focus impact on higher-value matters. As Accelerators demonstrate progressive mastery of knowledge and skills through application, they also earn recognition through our Digital Badging program.

Another key is building community among Accelerators and empowering them to self-organize in ways that amplify their successes. Staying connected, working together, and sharing learnings that can elevate the entire organization is essential. That sense of connection is tech-enabled, of course. But it's the human element that makes it remarkable. The social element of the program encourages accelerated learning through sharing among peers. And it means the benefits of digitization efforts can quickly come "out of the lab" and scale. Now, automations of traditionally manual tasks are available for use by thousands of people across PwC, many of whom have never met before, and most of whom are not in the formal Digital Accelerator program.

Lessons for Executives and Organizations

What did we learn along the way that can help other organizations who wish to put such programs into place? A few key things:

1. **Digital upskilling is a business and a people priority.** It's important that managers at all levels recognize development and upskilling as a CEO-driven business priority.
2. **Tech-enabled learning can't happen without the right investments, assets, and processes in place.** Employees should be empowered not only with digital tools and resources, but also, the time to apply that learning. The acquisition of new skills and demonstrated impact needs to be celebrated — and credentialed.
3. **Focus on building a growth mindset culture.** Commit to leaving nobody behind — as long as they choose not to be left behind. Being committed to lifelong learning is simply table stakes in a digital and data-driven world. Organizationally-enabled learning is an implicit

“contract” between the business and the learner/employee, who must be willing to opt in to what’s available.

The work we’re doing is tied to business outcomes and directly linked to culture change. Fundamentally, our digital upskilling is broad, scalable, flexible, fast, and already delivering results not just in terms of transforming our business — but in transforming our people experience.



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