7 Strategies to Level Up Your Team

The tech upskilling playbook to
boost employee engagement, strengthen
skills, and achieve outcomes

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Traditional upskilling can't keep up with technology

Why organizations need adaptive, outcome-based tech skill development

Tech is constantly changing—but skills often lag behind the latest advancements, leaving teams ill-equipped to quickly use and get value from emerging technologies.

> **78% of organizations have abandoned projects because they lacked the right IT skills.**
>
> **2024 Technical Skills Report** ↗

Adaptive tech skill development **vs** Traditional tech skill development

Outcome-based

Teams learn new skills and use them on the job to contribute to organizational outcomes and improve the customer experience.

Engagement-based

Teams learn new skills but lack opportunities to apply their knowledge on the job for projects that impact the bottom line.

Skill-based

Teams upskill and cross-skill to stay current with emerging technologies and respond to disruptions, enabling better problem-solving for initiatives that span multiple domains.

Role-based

Teams learn only skills for their role, deepening their knowledge but limiting them to a specific set of competencies and unable to quickly adjust to changes or projects that call for other abilities.

Built into the flow of work

Continuous learning and just-in-time learning is embedded into daily work, giving teams immediate opportunities to apply new skills and support outcomes.

Off-the-job training

Teams must learn new skills outside work hours or dedicate hours at a time to lengthy training programs without the chance to apply their learnings on the job.

Tech & L&D partnerships

Tech and L&D leaders develop upskilling strategies together with a skill development partner, using benchmarking and analytics to ensure teams have the resources they need to learn the right skills to drive outcomes.

Developed in siloes

Tech and L&D leaders develop upskilling strategies in silos, without support from a dedicated learning partner or benchmarking analytics, causing a disconnect between learning resources, skills needed, and broader goals.

Cohort-based

Learning is part of organizational culture with communities of practice that support and celebrate knowledge sharing and mentorship.

Individual-based

Individuals learn on their own, with few opportunities to share their knowledge and learn with others.

Building the foundations: Embed tech skill development into your culture

Adaptive, outcome-based learning may sound good on paper, but actually implementing it in your organization can be a challenge. How do you equip your teams with the skills they need to deliver and innovate in an ever-changing world?

It starts by fostering a culture that embraces and celebrates learning. This involves more than giving employees access to a learning platform. It means embedding skill development into every day routines and creating a culture of continuous learning where employees feel safe to learn and grow.

This won't happen overnight—creating culture takes time. But at its best, tech skill development is an always-on effort built into the flow of work. It's not something separate—it's part of work itself.

Cross-skilling is also key to staying agile. When employees develop skills adjacent to their core expertise, you build a productive workforce that's able to adapt to changing priorities.

Continuous learning strategies, like creating learning paths and developing leaders, can help you integrate learning and cross-skilling into your culture.

To measure the success of continuous learning efforts, look at metrics like:

- **Engagement:** How many people are actively learning? How many new or returning learners do you have?

- **Employee turnover rate:** How many employees have left the organization?

- **Internal mobility rate:** How many employees have switched to new roles within your organization?

- **Skill proficiency:** How have employee skill assessment scores changed?

- **Self-advocacy:** Are learners advocating to be included in technical work?

> " **IDC predicts that by 2028, organizations that invest in a culture of continuous learning will outperform competitors by up to 68%.**
>
> **IDC FutureScape: Worldwide Future of Work 2025 Predictions** ↗

Taking upskilling to the next level: Supercharge skills with targeted activations

Once you've integrated skill development into your organization's culture, build on that foundation with additional upskilling plays to supercharge your teams' skills.

If continuous learning strategies are all about integrating upskilling into everyday work, targeted upskilling plays are focused on building skills for specific projects or outcomes. These are comprehensive strategies with defined start and end dates that require concentrated planning, time, and effort to succeed.

Targeted upskilling strategies, like certification challenges and skill blitzes, work best when you need to build critical skills for upcoming projects with just-in-time learning or want to change learning habits and behaviors long-term.

To measure the success of targeted upskilling plays, track metrics like:

- **Engagement:** How many people participated in the challenge or blitz?

- **Skill proficiency:** How have employee skill assessment scores changed?

- **Certification completion:** How many people successfully earned a certification?

- **Time to proficiency:** How long does it take new hires to become proficient in their role?

- **Project timelines:** How have timelines for projects or tasks changed after employee skill gain?

Continuous skill development

Integrate learning into your organization's culture and celebrate continuous upskilling and cross-skilling.

Targeted skill development

Build critical skills for upcoming projects or change learning habits and behaviors.

How to get started with adaptive, outcome-based tech skill development

Leading organizations are already drawing clear connections between business goals, technology initiatives, and learning and development investments. But not every organization is there yet. You might be struggling to build buy-in for skill development, improve employee engagement, or foster a safe learning culture.

To implement adaptive, outcome-based tech skill development in your organization, start with continuous learning plays to integrate upskilling and cross-skilling into your culture. Then slowly begin adding targeted strategies when you need to develop new skills fast.

The exact plays you choose will depend on what you want to achieve with skill development, as well as the amount of time and resources required. Consider:

- **Program manager effort:** Who will manage and/or implement the play? How much time will it take?

- **Employee effort:** How much time do employees have to learn? When do they need certain tech skills?

- **Leadership involvement:** Do you have manager and executive buy-in? Will they support tech skill development?

- **Audience:** Who are you upskilling? Every employee? One department? Just a few teams?

- **Cost:** Do you need meeting space, prizes, points, or food, in addition to your learning platform or resources?

Leader development

Leader development consists of virtual or in-person meetings that give team leaders the knowledge they need to support skill development in their teams.

During the first session, a program manager explains the need for tech skill development, clearly tying it to organizational objectives, culture, and team KPIs to hold managers accountable.

Subsequent sessions focus on different ways managers can encourage learning in their team. This might include:

- A demo of your tech skill development platform, including leader-focused features like analytics.

- Insight into different types of upskilling data (like skill assessment scores) and how to use those metrics to coach teams.

- Meeting templates to help managers embed learning into sprints, weekly team meetings, or 1:1s.

- Suggestions on how to cross-skill teams in related competencies.

- Tips to accommodate different learning styles, celebrate upskilling wins, or recognize learners for their work.

Employees need time and psychological safety to learn within the flow of work. If team managers don't accommodate learning time or encourage skill development, employees may be forced to learn off the clock—or not learn at all. That's what makes leader development crucial to any upskilling efforts.

ⓘ PLAY POINTER

Create a community of practice to support learners in your organization. Communities of practice help learners feel more empowered and have a greater sense of belonging. This makes them more likely to put the skills they learn into action.

+ Requirements

This is what you need to kick off leader development:

- A program manager to plan and hold enablement sessions, including onboarding for your skill development platform.

- Messaging to get leaders on board.

- Messaging and meeting templates managers can use to get their teams started and encourage learning.

- Team managers to facilitate skill development in their teams.

✦ Real-world example

A financial services company wanted to give their engineers more time to innovate and experiment. But their managers didn't have enough data to understand their current culture and make improvements for employees to grow.

They enabled leaders and gave them access to upskilling data, like skill development platform usage and team members' skill assessment scores. The result? Managers who encouraged upskilling and used analytics to measure it had lower attrition rates in their teams than managers who didn't.

Cohort-based learning

In cohort-based learning, employees learn and progress as a group, supporting and engaging each other along the way.

Start by grouping employees into cohorts. This could be teams or a group of employees who need to earn a particular certification or topic. Then set up time for each cohort to get together virtually or in-person on a regular basis (weekly, monthly, or bi-monthly) for one hour.

During these sessions, cohort leaders (program or team managers) kick off brief introductions and help learners get to know each other They then encourage learners to turn off their microphone and camera and spend the rest of the session learning.

Everyone learns independently while remaining on the call. Five minutes before the end of the timeslot, the cohort leader gathers the group together again. They encourage learners to share highlights with the group, providing an opportunity to share knowledge and learn from each other.

Don't have time to facilitate cohort-based learning yourself or want to give your learners more support? Bring in external experts to teach, answer questions, and provide guidance. Led by expert practitioners and gifted educators, **Pluralsight's instructor-led training** offers engaging programs with hands-on learning to get your teams up to speed.
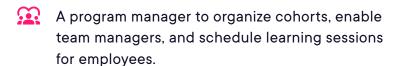

ⓘ PLAY POINTER

Get team managers involved. Cohort meetings provide dedicated learning time, but employees will still need to learn outside of that hour, and they'll need support from their boss to do that.

+ Requirements

This is what you need to get cohort-based learning started:

- A program manager to organize cohorts, enable team managers, and schedule learning sessions for employees.

- A regular calendar invite and host for each session to encourage and engage learners.

- Employee advocates who are passionate about learning and bringing others on board (optional).

✦ Real-world example

As one Fortune 500 pharmaceutical company underwent a cloud transformation and tech stack modernization at the same time, they needed to get their tech professionals up and running.

They set up an internal tech skill academy with a focus on building a culture of learning with cohorts. They created five cohorts across 14 different critical skills, resulting in more than 2,900 skillups.

> We launched manager enrollment for the cohort. And that manager enrollment is very simply us telling the manager, 'You're going to give your person time to learn. And if you don't like it, you can call me, and I'll tell you, you're going to give your person time to learn because that is a pillar of our strategy. It's not optional.' That has had a huge impact on the feedback. Our scores have gone way up. People feel supported in their desire to learn.

AVP of Cloud & Infrastructure Technology

Curated learning paths

Curated **learning paths** are lists of learning materials selected by program or team managers to guide learners on their journey and provide direction amidst a sea of content.

Curated learning paths are tailored to different needs and skill levels, listing the courses, hands-on labs, and training resources a learner needs to complete to develop technical skills for a project, earn tech certifications, reach a promotion, or achieve other goals.

To build impactful custom learning paths, consider the skills teams need to achieve your objectives. Then assess skill levels. What knowledge does each group already have? What cross-functional knowledge do they need? Where do they have skills gaps that will prevent them from reaching the goal?

Then gather the learning resources needed to build those skills. This might include video courses, hands-on labs or sandboxes, webinars, or instructor-led training.

Having too many choices can overwhelm learners. Curated paths provide a clear direction for more effective upskilling. In fact, Pluralsight users improve their skills by 36% when following personalized learning recommendations and curated learning paths.

ⓘ PLAY POINTER

It can be tempting to include every relevant learning resource in your learning paths. But paths are meant for targeted learning—when they get too long, they actually become less effective. Keep the length of these paths in mind: When do your teams need to learn these skills? How many hours per week do you expect tech professionals to dedicate to learning? Do you provide on-the-job training time?

+ Requirements

This is what you need to build custom learning paths:

📂 Access to learning resources (video content, hands-on labs, internal documentation, etc.)

⤴ A program leader to build the learning paths.

🌐 Somewhere to host your learning paths (Ideally, this is integrated into your skill development platform, but you can also create paths in Slack channels or spreadsheets, if needed).

👥 Team manager involvement to engage employees.

ⓘ PLAY POINTER

Building learning paths can be time-consuming. Use a tool like **Pluralsight's AI Assistant, Iris** to to create custom learning paths for your teams based on their experience, skills needed, and time frame.

✦ Real-world example

Prudential, a leading financial services company, wanted to enhance their cloud capabilities and nurture existing talent instead of relying on hiring.

To achieve their goal, they launched an integrated technology and data strategy initiative, providing a mix of course content, interactive labs, and skill assessments. Learning paths were key to tying these resources together in an intuitive way.

They created 11 learning paths aligned to priority job families across the organization. Since then, they've seen a 200% increase in skill-ups, with an average skill gain of 53%.

↗ **Read the full story**

STRATEGY #4 **TARGETED**

Tech onboarding

Onboarding is often a combination of other strategies, typically skill assessments and learning paths. By folding skill development into onboarding, you help new hires get up to speed with your organization's tech stack, processes, and programming languages faster.

Start by assigning relevant skill assessments to new hires to gauge their current skills, strengths, and opportunity areas.

Then direct them to learning paths tailored to their experience level and/or role. What skills do they need for their role? What skills do they already have based on their skill assessment results? What courses, hands-on labs, or internal webinars and documentation would empower them to get started?

You don't need to build custom learning paths for every single new hire, but having a few different paths for different roles and skill levels allows you to create a custom, scalable onboarding program.

> **ⓘ PLAY POINTER**
>
> Keep the upskilling momentum after onboarding by pairing this play with one of the continuous learning strategies. Think about the explosive rise of AI. Your tech stack is evolving—your teams will need to keep their skills sharp even once they're a veteran employee.

+

Requirements

This is what you'll need to build tech upskilling into onboarding:

📂 Access to learning resources, including video courses, hands-on labs, and internal documentation or materials.

🎓 A skill assessment tool like Skill IQ.

☺ A program leader to build the learning paths and coordinate with team managers.

🌐 A platform to host your learning paths (Ideally, this is integrated into your skill development platform, but you can also create paths in Slack channels or spreadsheets if you don't have a dedicated tool).

👥 Team manager involvement to engage employees.

✦

Real-world example

One global data, technology, and services company wanted to get new hires up to speed fast and improve employee retention to better deliver cutting-edge solutions for their clients.

They built tailored learning paths into their onboarding program to help new hires quickly bridge skills gaps and jump into their environments. As a result, their renege rate decreased from 45% to 12%, and their retention rate jumped from 75% to 98%.

Skill blitz

A skill blitz is a dedicated timeslot for employees to take skill assessments and benchmark their abilities.

An executive invites their team to an in-person or virtual meeting. They explain what skill assessments are and why they're helpful. To build trust and transparency, they also share their assessment results with the team.

For the rest of the meeting, each employee goes off camera and completes a few skill assessments aligned with their team's goals or projects. The meeting ends with a quick recap from the executive leader.

As they take skill assessments or complete courses, everyone, including leaders, share their progress in real-time in the collaboration channel. This channel also gives the program manager a place to share prizes and recognize accomplishments as they happen.

After the meeting, continue to provide employees with skill development resources and support from management. Once three months have passed, conduct a re-blitz using the same format. Gather the same group of people to retake the skill assessments and see if their scores improved.

ℹ️ **PLAY POINTER**

The word "assessment" can immediately raise alarm bells for employees, especially if you don't have a strong learning culture. During the kickoff meeting, emphasize that assessments are for benchmarking purposes only. They'll help everyone identify opportunities for growth. They won't be used for employment decisions. It's critical for this message to come from the executive sponsor.
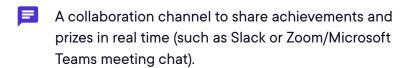
+

Requirements

Here's what you'll need to start a skill blitz in your organization:

- A skill assessment tool like **Skill IQ**.

- A program lead to coordinate the blitz, prep the executive, and manage other logistics.

- An executive sponsor who can take a skill assessment, share their results, and help facilitate the kickoff meetings.

- A collaboration channel to share achievements and prizes in real time (such as Slack or Zoom/Microsoft Teams meeting chat).

✦

Real-world example

Global financial technology leader FIS aimed to reduce cash spend by enhancing their operational performance. They needed to understand where they had gaps that would prevent them from achieving this vision and upskill their tech professionals accordingly.

They turned to quarterly skill blitzes, alongside continuous learning efforts like dedicated upskilling time, to assess and close skills gaps. As a result, they reduced the percentage of novice-level employees from 47% to 13%.

↗ **Read the full story**

> The assessments are absolutely key. They give you the journey where you should go and provide metrics and KPIs that have credibility with the team, showing what you understand and what you don't.
>
> **Christopher Parkins, SVP Product Development Group**

Gamification

Gamifying tech skill development encourages participation by awarding points, badges, or other prizes for upskilling. This is just one way to add gamification to your upskilling and cross-skilling efforts.

Over the course of about 4 weeks (depending on how much time you have), learners earn a set amount of points for each upskilling activity they complete. For example, if someone completes a skill assessment, they earn 10 points. Finishing a hands-on lab earns them 18 points. When learners earn a certain amount of points, they earn a badge.

Each week, the program manager shares learners' progress and highlights top scorers. Leaderboards work best to encourage upskilling and show the top achievers and teams with the most points, but you can also use a dedicated Slack channel or email blasts.

ℹ️ PLAY POINTER

Prizes for learners or teams with the most points can further incentivize learning. You don't need to spend big money—a 30-minute coffee chat with an executive leader can be a strong motivator.

Requirements

This is what you'll need to gamify skill development in your organization:

- Learning resources to gamify (like courses, hands-on labs, etc.).

- A program lead to update leaderboards, send communications, and manage other logistics.

- A leader to kick off the challenge.

- A leaderboard or system to track and communicate points.

- Badges or prizes to reward learners.

Real-world example

A multinational consumer goods and personal care corporation needed to innovate to stay ahead of their competitors and new players who had sprung up seemingly overnight.

They created a digital university and used gamification, including a badge challenge and "March Madness" style bracket for courses and skill assessments, to help their teams develop tech skills and pivot quickly in an ever-changing competitive landscape.

Their skill inventory shifted from 20% to 45% of employees being "above average" or "expert." And it took only 41 days for teams to learn a new skill—less time than it takes to open a requisition and start interviewing.

STRATEGY #7   **TARGETED**

Certification challenge

A certification challenge encourages teams to earn a certain tech certification after 3-6 weeks of studying and preparation.

It starts with a 30-minute kick-off call, typically led by the program manager (or a leader if you need to build more buy-in with top-down support). They explain why they're hosting a certification challenge and the benefits of certifications for employees, including professional development and promotion opportunities.

They then direct learners to a channel or collection of **certification prep materials**, including courses, hands-on labs, and practice exams, to guide the learning journey. Throughout the challenge, periodically encourage learners to continue their studies and celebrate their successes. You might also hold a session to help learners book their exam and answer questions about the exam process.

> ⓘ **PLAY POINTER**
>
> It's called a challenge for a reason. Studying for (and passing) certification exams is rigorous. Encourage team members to post on social media when they earn their certification, and amplify their posts on company accounts to recognize their efforts. Here's a sample post to help employees get started.
>
> > *Thrilled to share that I have successfully earned my <Name of Certification>, thanks to the incredible resources from <Your Organization> and <Pluralsight or Your Skill Development Partner>! This has significantly boosted my <Cloud Provider or Tech Topic> technology skills and helped me level up in my role.*

+ Requirements

This is what you need to implement a certification challenge:

- Certification prep materials, like courses, learning paths, and practice tests.

- A program manager to share kick off invites, send communications, and set up exam booking sessions.

✦ Real-world example

A large healthcare company with over 7,000 IT employees needed a way to use talent development to keep hiring costs under control and help teams build the tech skills needed to deliver some of the largest healthcare projects in the world.

Through their certification challenge and tech academy, 72% of participants achieved their Cisco CCT certification. Additionally, 25% of participants were promoted to network engineers after gaining new skills.

Conclusion

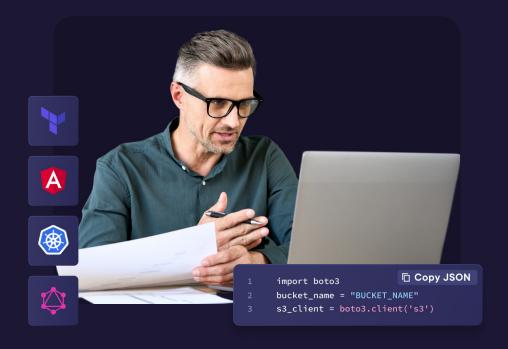## Accelerate innovation and outcomes by continually refining skill development

At the end of the day, maintaining your upskilling momentum requires more than rolling out one-off strategies. It also requires adjusting those strategies to meet learner needs and changing business objectives.

After implementing each strategy, gather feedback from learners and measure the play's impact against your KPIs. Use those learnings to inform your next play or adjust ongoing learning efforts. This will ensure you continue to align upskilling and cross-skilling with shifting tech and organizational priorities.

Tech is changing fast—make sure your team's skills can do more than just keep up with tech skill development that helps them innovate and reach results faster.

Need help getting these strategies off the ground? Our team of experts can help you implement adaptive, outcome-based upskilling in your organization. Build the skills you need to put these plays into action with our hands-on tech skill development platform.

Chat with us

```
1   import boto3
2   bucket_name = "BUCKET_NAME"
3   s3_client = boto3.client('s3')
```
⎘ Copy JSON

Need to get your teams up to speed on a specific tech stack by a certain date?

Our ProServ instructor-led training (ILT) is your ticket to success. We shorten the learning curve to building mission-critical skills—so your software, IT, and data professionals can contribute to time-sensitive projects more quickly.

Each ILT course is tailored to specific roles, with a mix of hands-on activities, lectures, case studies, and discussions to reinforce learning. Let's say your business leaders need a crash course on generative AI. In our **Generative AI for Business Leaders ILT course**, participants will get an overview of different generative AI models, how to use the tech for business outcomes, and tips to ensure responsible, ethical AI use through real-world case studies and discussions.

Learn more about ILT

About Pluralsight

Pluralsight is *the* learning partner for today's technology teams. With our hands-on skills platform built by vetted tech innovators and practitioners, we help organizations like yours develop their tech teams, build job-ready confidence, and accelerate business outcomes.

Our bite-sized learning segments and one-click labs and sandboxes give technologists the power to fit learning into their workflow and practice skills so they actually stick.

Equip your teams with the skills they need to confidently adopt new technologies, execute strategic initiatives, and deliver improved outcomes.

Learn more about Pluralsight

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