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## A Study on Skill Gaps and Recommendations among Employees

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Peer Review Information	Abstract
<p><i>Submission: 13 March 2026</i> <i>Revision: 0.2 April 2026</i> <i>Acceptance: 16 April 2026</i></p>	<p>Every organisation's true strength lies not in the machinery it operates or the capital it holds, but in the knowledge, adaptability, and competence of its people. Yet, a quiet crisis has taken root across industries in the present decade one where the capabilities employees bring to their roles are increasingly falling behind what those roles actually demand. This study examines that widening divide, investigating the nature of skill gaps among employees in contemporary organisational settings, the multiple forces that produce them, and the practical measures through which they can be narrowed.</p> <p>Drawing upon responses gathered from over 150 working professionals, HR practitioners, and team leaders across sectors, this research adopts a mixed-method design to evaluate skill deficiencies across four dimensions: job-specific technical ability, digital and technology fluency, leadership and decision-making, and workplace communication. The findings bring into focus what this study terms the "Readiness Deficit" a pattern in which employees possess academic credentials and prior experience yet remain underprepared for the evolving demands of their current positions.</p> <p>The research further establishes that the gap is not uniform. While shortfalls in digital tools and data interpretation are most visible and frequently cited, deeper and costlier gaps exist in areas such as independent problem-solving, emotional self-regulation, and the capacity to learn continuously under pressure. The study concludes with a Strategic Skill Development Framework a structured model encouraging organisations to combine real-time competency diagnostics, personalised learning pathways, and manager-facilitated coaching to build a workforce that is not merely qualified for today, but genuinely prepared for what comes next.</p>
<p><b>Keywords</b></p> <p><i>Skill gap analysis, workforce readiness, digital skills, employee competency, organisational development</i></p>	

### Introduction

If one were to describe the defining challenge facing HR leaders in the mid-2020s, it would not be recruitment or retention in isolation it would be the persistent and accelerating mismatch between what organisations need their people to do and what their people are currently capable of

doing. This mismatch, broadly referred to as a skill gap, has evolved from a manageable inconvenience into a structural problem that quietly undermines productivity, innovation, and long-term organisational health.

The sources of this problem are layered. On one level, higher education systems continue to

reward theoretical knowledge and examination performance over practical problem-solving and crossfunctional thinking. Graduates arrive at workplaces equipped with certificates but without the applied readiness that modern roles require. On another level, organisations themselves bear responsibility. Training programmes are often designed once and repeated indefinitely, with little attention to whether they address the actual gaps in the actual workforce. The result is investment without impact well-intentioned learning initiatives that leave the real deficiencies untouched.

Simultaneously, the pace at which job requirements are changing has outrun the pace at which individuals naturally update their skills. Automation, artificial intelligence integration, and the shift toward data-informed decision-making have reshaped what competence looks like in almost every function — from marketing and finance to logistics and customer service. An employee who was fully effective in their role three years ago may find themselves operating below the required standard today, not through any failure of effort, but simply because the benchmark has moved.

This research engages with all three of these realities. It seeks to identify where skill gaps are most concentrated, understand what produces them, measure what they cost organisations, and ultimately present a coherent set of recommendations that HR leaders and line managers can translate into action. The goal is not an abstract academic analysis but a practically useful study that speaks to the challenges organisations and their people are navigating right now.

### Objective

The guiding purpose of this research is to conduct a rigorous, evidence-based examination of skill gaps among employees mapping their nature and distribution, tracing their causes, and identifying the most effective approaches to address them in a structured and sustained way. The study is built around five interconnected objectives that together provide a comprehensive view of the issue.

The first objective is to identify and categorise the most prevalent skill deficiencies present in today's workforce, distinguishing between shortfalls in technical competencies and those in interpersonal or behavioural capabilities. The second is to analyse the institutional, organisational, and individual factors that allow these gaps to form and persist over time. The third objective is to assess the measurable impact of unaddressed skill gaps on employee

performance, team effectiveness, and broader organisational outcomes. The fourth is to evaluate the effectiveness of existing Learning and Development practices, identifying where current approaches succeed and where they consistently fall short. The fifth and culminating objective is to formulate a Strategic Skill Development Framework that HR leaders can adopt to close gaps systematically, using both technology-enabled learning and human-centred coaching.

### Summary of Objectives

- Identify and classify prevalent skill gaps across technical and behavioural competency domains.
- Analyse the root causes institutional, organisational, and individual behind skill deficiencies.
- Measure the business impact of unaddressed gaps on performance and organisational productivity.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current L&D practices and identify critical gaps in their design.
- Develop a practical, data-informed Strategic Skill Development Framework for HR practitioners.

Taken together, these objectives position the study as both a diagnostic tool and a strategic guide one that moves beyond describing the problem of skill gaps to actively proposing the means by which organisations can resolve it. The framework that emerges from this research is intended to be adaptable across industry sectors and scalable across different organisational sizes, offering relevance to both large enterprises and growing mid-sized firms navigating workforce development challenges in 2026.

### Methodology

The research methodology adopted in this study is designed to balance depth with breadth capturing both the statistical patterns that reveal how widespread skill gaps are and the lived experiences that reveal why they exist and what they feel like from the inside. To achieve this, a Mixed-Methods Research Design is employed, combining structured quantitative measurement with open-ended qualitative inquiry in a Convergent Parallel format, meaning that both types of data are gathered and analysed simultaneously rather than sequentially.

The quantitative component involves a structured questionnaire distributed to a sample of 150 working professionals drawn from diverse sectors including manufacturing, services, information technology, banking, and retail. Respondents were asked to self-assess their

competency across six defined skill domains using a Five-Point Likert Scale, ranging from "Significantly Below Required Standard" to "Exceeds Required Standard." These self-assessments were then crossreferenced with manager evaluations of the same employees where available, enabling a Gap Score to be calculated for each individual and each skill domain. Descriptive statistical analysis covering mean scores, percentage distributions, and frequency tables was applied to identify which gaps are most common and most severe.

The qualitative component involved semi-structured interviews conducted with fifteen HR managers and senior team leaders selected through Purposive Sampling, ensuring that all interviewees had direct involvement in employee performance management and learning initiatives. Interview responses were analysed using thematic coding to surface recurring patterns in how organisations currently diagnose and respond to skill gaps. The combination of these two data streams allows the research to triangulate its findings confirming patterns identified in the quantitative data through the richer explanations provided by interview respondents.

Strict ethical standards were observed throughout the data collection process. Participation was entirely voluntary, all responses were kept anonymous, and no identifying information was linked to individual survey responses. This ethical rigour not only protects participants but also strengthens the credibility of the data, as respondents were more likely to answer honestly when assured that their responses carried no professional consequences.

## Review Of Literature

**Workforce Readiness and the Education-Industry Divide:** A recurring theme in workforce development scholarship is the structural misalignment between what academic institutions teach and what employers actually require. Researchers across management, economics, and education disciplines have consistently documented what some scholars describe as a "preparation gap" the distance between the competencies graduates believe they possess and those that organisations discover are missing within the first year of employment. Industry surveys conducted between 2022 and 2025 across emerging economies consistently identify communication, applied analytical thinking, and digital tool proficiency as the three competency areas most frequently found deficient in new hires, regardless of educational background or field of study.

## The Technical Versus Human Skills Debate:

Much of the early literature on skill gaps focused almost exclusively on technical or "hard" skill deficiencies gaps in programming languages, machinery operation, financial modelling, or domain-specific certifications. However, a significant reorientation occurred in academic and practitioner literature from 2020 onwards, driven by the recognition that purely technical training programmes were failing to produce the performance improvements organisations expected. Research attention shifted toward the role of "human" or behavioural skills adaptability, emotional intelligence, collaborative problem-solving, and the capacity to navigate ambiguity as the more consequential deficiencies in modern workplaces. Studies from this period argue that technical skills define a candidate's entry point into a role, while human skills determine how far they will progress within it.

## Organisational Learning as a Systemic Response:

The concept of the learning organisation an entity that actively cultivates the conditions for continuous individual and collective development has been positioned in the literature as the most durable structural response to skill gaps. Rather than treating development as a discrete event triggered by a performance shortfall, learning organisations embed development into the rhythm of daily work. Managers function as coaches rather than evaluators. Peer learning communities allow knowledge to flow laterally across departments. Failure is treated as diagnostic data rather than a cause for reprimand. Research findings consistently show that organisations which successfully build this kind of learning culture experience lower rates of skills obsolescence, higher levels of employee engagement, and stronger retention of high-potential talent than those that rely solely on periodic, externally designed training programmes.

## Technology and Personalisation in Learning Delivery:

The emergence of AI-powered Learning Experience Platforms has introduced a new dimension to the literature on skill gap remediation. Unlike traditional learning management systems that deliver uniform content to all employees regardless of their individual gap profiles, modern platforms use behavioural data, assessment outcomes, and role benchmarks to generate personalised learning recommendations. Scholarly and practitioner research from 2023 to 2025 documents significant improvements in both learning engagement and post-training performance transfer when content is tailored to the specific

competency needs of the learner. This finding has important implications for how organisations structure their L&D investments pointing away from broad, cohort-based programmes toward more granular, individually responsive development architectures.

### Issues And Challenges

#### **The Accuracy Problem in Needs Assessment:**

Before any skill gap can be closed, it must first be correctly identified and this seemingly straightforward requirement turns out to be one of the most persistent failures in organisational development practice. Most organisations rely on annual performance appraisals, manager observations, or employee self-declarations as their primary mechanisms for identifying development needs. Each of these sources carries significant limitations. Performance appraisals are retrospective by nature, capturing deficiencies only after they have already cost the organisation something. Manager observations are coloured by personal familiarity and subjective impression. Self-assessments are notoriously unreliable because individuals tend to rate themselves more competent than they are in areas where they have some familiarity but limited mastery a cognitive phenomenon that consistently distorts training needs data and leads to misallocated development resources.

#### **Speed of Change Outpacing Development**

**Cycles:** A challenge that did not exist with the same urgency in previous generations is the rate at which job requirements are being redefined by technology. The average useful lifespan of a specific technical skill set has shortened dramatically over the past decade, with some digital competencies becoming functionally obsolete within eighteen to thirty months of acquisition. This creates a structural problem for organisations whose L&D calendars, content libraries, and training delivery mechanisms are designed around yearly or even multi-year development cycles. By the time a new training programme is designed, approved, piloted, and rolled out at scale, the skill it addresses may already have evolved into something different. Organisations must therefore fundamentally rethink their development architecture moving from periodic, project-based training toward continuous, modular learning systems capable of rapid iteration.

#### **Low Engagement and the Motivation**

**Challenge:** Even the most thoughtfully designed skill development programme will fail if employees do not engage with it meaningfully. Low training engagement is one of the most

consistently reported challenges across organisations, and its causes are well understood: content that feels irrelevant to the employee's day-to-day work, delivery formats that are passive and time-consuming, a lack of visible connection between skill development and career advancement, and the absence of managerial encouragement or recognition. What the literature reveals is that adults learn most effectively when they can see a clear and immediate application for what they are learning, when they have some degree of autonomy over how and when they learn it, and when the organisation around them visibly values the effort they are investing in their own development. Where these conditions are absent, even well-resourced training programmes produce little measurable change.

#### **Generational and Cultural Heterogeneity in**

**the Workforce:** Modern organisations typically house three to four distinct generational cohorts within their workforce simultaneously each with different relationships to technology, different expectations of workplace learning, different communication styles, and different definitions of professional development. Designing skill development programmes that are equally accessible, relevant, and motivating across this diversity is a genuine challenge that many organisations underestimate. A digital-first, self-paced learning platform that resonates strongly with employees in their twenties may feel alienating and impersonal to experienced professionals who prefer structured mentorship or classroom-style learning. A coaching-heavy development culture that older, established employees find natural may feel bureaucratic and slow to younger professionals accustomed to instant, on-demand information. Navigating this heterogeneity requires a degree of customisation and flexibility in L&D design that most organisations have not yet achieved.

### Recommendations

#### **Build a Living Competency Map Aligned to Business Strategy:**

The foundational recommendation of this research is that organisations must establish and continuously maintain a dynamic Competency Map a structured document that defines the precise skills, behaviours, and proficiency levels required at every role level within the organisation. This map should not be a static document reviewed every few years; it should be a living framework updated in real time as job requirements evolve, as new technologies are adopted, and as business strategy shifts. When a competency map is built and maintained correctly, it becomes the

backbone of every other talent management process from recruitment and onboarding to performance management, promotion decisions, and succession planning. Without this foundation, skill gap identification remains impressionistic rather than systematic, and development resources continue to be allocated based on assumption rather than evidence.

**Deploy a Personalised, Blended Learning Ecosystem:** The research findings strongly support a shift away from uniform, cohort-based training programmes toward a blended learning ecosystem that combines personalised digital micro-learning with structured human interaction. The digital component delivered through an AI-enabled Learning Experience Platform should provide each employee with a tailored development path based on their assessed competency gaps, learning history, and career objectives. This ensures that every hour an employee invests in development is directly relevant to their specific needs rather than being diluted across content designed for the average learner. The human component delivered through regular coaching conversations with line managers, structured mentoring relationships, and peer learning communities ensures that applied skills are practiced and reinforced in real work contexts, where the transfer from learning to performance is most likely to occur.

**Embed Development Accountability into Leadership Roles:** One of the clearest findings of this research is that skill development programmes succeed or fail largely on the basis of whether direct line managers actively support them. When managers treat development conversations as a genuine priority scheduling them regularly, discussing specific competency goals, providing honest feedback, and celebrating visible progress employees experience development as a supported journey rather than a solitary responsibility. This requires organisations to formally incorporate team development into the performance expectations and appraisal criteria of every manager. Managers should be evaluated not only on the business results their teams deliver but on the observable growth in competency and confidence that their team members demonstrate over time. This structural change shifts the culture of development from optional to embedded.

**Connect Skill Acquisition Visibly to Career and Reward Progression:** Sustainable motivation for skill development cannot be manufactured through exhortation or

compliance requirements alone. It must be grounded in a clear and credible connection between the effort employees invest in developing their capabilities and the tangible career outcomes that follow. Organisations should design transparent Skills-to-Career Pathways that specify precisely which competencies, demonstrated at which proficiency levels, qualify an employee for promotion to the next role, access to high-visibility projects, or progression to a higher salary band. When employees can see this map clearly and when they observe colleagues advancing on the basis of demonstrated capability rather than tenure or relationship the motivation to engage seriously with development becomes genuinely intrinsic. This alignment between skill growth and career reward is the single most powerful long-term driver of a learning culture.

### Conclusions

The central conclusion of this research is straightforward, even if its implications are far-reaching: the skill gap is not a temporary disruption that organisations can wait out or patch over with occasional training. It is a structural reality produced by the convergence of rapidly evolving job requirements, historically underprepared educational systems, and organisational development practices that have not kept pace with the speed of change. Organisations that continue to treat skill development as a background administrative function will find themselves increasingly disadvantaged not in dramatic moments of crisis, but in the slow, compounding erosion of performance, engagement, and adaptability that characterises a workforce falling behind its own job requirements.

The research also establishes that the costliest skill gaps are often the least visible ones. Shortfalls in specific software tools or technical procedures are relatively easy to identify and relatively straightforward to address through targeted training. The deeper gaps in adaptive thinking, emotional self-regulation, the ability to communicate across difference, and the capacity to lead through uncertainty are harder to see, harder to measure, and considerably harder to develop. Yet it is precisely these capabilities that determine whether an organisation's response to disruption is resilient or fragile. Investing in their development is therefore not a soft option but a hard strategic necessity.

The study also highlights an important truth about the relationship between organisational culture and individual development. Skill development cannot be successfully outsourced

to an external training provider, mandated through a compliance requirement, or delegated entirely to the individual employee. It requires an organisational environment in which learning is expected, supported, and recognised where managers actively invest in the growth of their people, where honest feedback is given and received without defensiveness, and where the connection between capability development and career progression is clear and consistent. Building that environment is the most important thing any organisation can do to close the skill gap over time.

Ultimately, this research affirms that the organisations best positioned to compete in the 2026 talent market will not necessarily be those with the largest training budgets or the most sophisticated technology platforms. They will be the organisations that have made a genuine cultural commitment to the continuous development of their people treating every employee not as a fixed asset to be deployed but as a growing capability to be invested in. In that sense, closing the skill gap is less a technical problem to be solved and more a leadership choice to be made.

There is also an equity dimension to this challenge that deserves acknowledgement. Skill gaps do not affect all employees equally. Individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, those with limited access to digital infrastructure, or those working in geographically remote locations frequently face steeper development barriers than their more privileged counterparts. Organisations that design development programmes without accounting for these structural inequities risk reinforcing the very disparities they claim to be addressing. A truly effective skill development strategy must therefore include provisions for accessibility ensuring that every employee, regardless of their starting conditions, has a meaningful and supported pathway toward the competencies their role and career require. This is not merely a matter of social responsibility; it is a matter of organisational self-interest, since the talent that goes undeveloped in one generation represents a compounding loss across the next.

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