



Upskilling and futureproofing your remote team

Why upskilling should always be a priority, but especially now

Barriers to learning at work and how to overcome them

How to make an online learning classroom more interactive

Developing higher-order thinking skills to future-proof your organisation

Chapter 1: Why upskilling should always be a priority, but especially now

Giving your employees the opportunity to upskill at work has never been more important. In the current climate of economic uncertainty, broadening your team's skill set will allow them to easily adapt to evolving roles, offer them new challenges, and improve your company's employee retention.

However, upskilling should be a priority year round. A recent Hays survey of 1,253 employees found that 96% considered upskilling to be 'important' or 'very important'. Additionally, 84% wouldn't consider a role without skill development opportunities, while 47% would not want to join a company that didn't provide opportunities for training.

The good news is that implementing a program to offer learning opportunities to your staff does not need to be costly or time consuming.

COVID-19 social distancing measures have had a massive impact on large gatherings, live events, and face to face interaction on all but the smallest levels. It is highly likely you will have employees who are feeling displaced, especially if their roles involve regular person to person contact.

Currently, there is no definite end date for this situation, so now is the ideal time to explore ways to upskill these employees. Providing them with an opportunity to learn new skills will help them successfully pivot to changing demands in their role, and benefit other areas of your company.

Heighten employee engagement

Providing role specific training for your employees is an attractive proposition, which will both strengthen the skill set of your workforce, and increase staff engagement. However, it is also a worthy investment to offer your employees the chance to take on a personal learning project, whether it be improving their design skills, practising a new language, or learning to code.

By encouraging your staff to extend their knowledge in an area of their choice, it will heighten their engagement during a time of distraction and change, and also provide them with new skills, which can benefit your company long term.

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Reduce staff turnover costs

Hiring new staff is a costly, time consuming, and labour intensive process. Firstly, you have the obvious costs of advertising the role and time spent assessing applications, whether that is done through an agency or your own HR staff. On top of this, research by MIT Sloan found that new hires take between 8 and 26 weeks to start working at full productivity levels. This drop in productivity reduces a company's overall annual revenue by 1-2.5%.

On the other hand, upskilling current staff members will require an initial investment, but the ability to transfer them into new roles will save your company huge amounts of time, money, and effort which are inevitably required during the hiring and onboarding process. The MIT Sloan research also noted that internal transfers reach full productivity levels in around half the time that new hires take.

There are many easy and cost effective ways to implement upskilling opportunities at your company. Lengthy and expensive external courses are not always the best solution. Here are a number of methods you can use:

Stretch opportunities

Stretch opportunities are when an employee takes on a project or task outside of their usual role and skill set. This can be a fantastic method of on-the-job upskilling. As an added bonus, your team will further develop their collaborative skills and problem solving abilities.

Stretch opportunities generally require a staff member to shadow another colleague (or be mentored by one). This learning experience can also be supplemented with online training modules. This assists employees with developing the skills required for unfamiliar tasks, while also reducing the amount of time their colleagues need to spend training them.

Learn at work

Offering self led learning opportunities in the workplace gives your employees the chance to develop skills and knowledge that will benefit your company.

A survey of Generation Z workers found that 'opportunities for growth' was their number one priority when searching for a new job, ahead of generous pay, job security, flexible hours, and healthcare benefits.

Even without the ability to deliver training in person, online learning platforms such as Go1 provide a huge variety of learning opportunities for remote workers, as they are accessible from any device at any time.

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Micro-learning

With the average employee having just 24 minutes per week to dedicate to learning, micro-learning modules are an innovative method to incorporate into your company's L&D offering. Micro-learning breaks training down into small, bite sized chunks, with lessons that generally include a short text or video element followed by a quick assessment. These can often be completed in 10-20 minutes, which makes them a very effective way to maximise the limited time your employees have for learning.

Providing upskilling opportunities for your employees is incredibly beneficial to both individual staff members and your company as a whole. Not only does it increase employee engagement and company loyalty, it makes your team more adaptable and well rounded, and drastically reduces your hiring and onboarding costs.

In the current economic climate, upskilling is particularly important. However, as mentioned, it should be a focus for your company year round. [Go1 Content Hub](#) offers thousands of courses in a wide variety of areas, which suit all levels of competency. Our content is suitable for all departments and regions.

Chapter 2: Barriers to learning at work and how to overcome them

As technology advances, learning at work is no longer a luxury. Senior commentators at Deloitte explain that “in a competitive external talent market, learning is vital to an organisation’s ability to obtain needed skills.”

Despite this need for employees to engage, there are multiple barriers preventing them from doing so. Here, we look at the challenges associated with learning at work and offer suggestions for how to overcome them.

What is preventing employees from learning?

While online learning tools have made it easier for employees to access study materials appropriate to their needs, it can be difficult for them to make the most of the content available. Even getting started can be a challenge.

Although some employees won’t have long graduated high school or university, many would have finished formal learning years ago and may need help reconnecting with the process.

Those in leadership positions are also contending with other hurdles when trying to encourage employees to engage with learning, including:

- A lack of sense of community;
- Employees not connecting to the broader purpose of professional development;
- Busy schedules;
- Distracting environments;
- A lack of technical skills;
- Resistance to change;
- Overwhelming complexity;
- An underdeveloped learning culture.

Working to remove these barriers

Let’s look in more detail at how organisations can overcome some of these challenges and make learning at work a more realistic goal.

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Lack of sense of community

When working remotely, access to technology enables us to work whenever we want, wherever we want. However, with this shift, the sense of community employees once had in the office has diminished.

Professional development also relies on networks. According to the 70:20:10 model, 20 percent of all learning occurs through incidental social interactions. We have many ways to keep in touch for work related matters, but fewer opportunities for spontaneous conversations around learning.

To solve this, encourage employees to meet up virtually during the learning process. Adding a social element can boost motivation and give employees a chance to explore any concepts they find challenging in a more relaxed environment.

Lack of purpose

Many employees might have had negative learning experiences in the past. School might have been tedious or stressful, meaning they aren't interested in any more formal study.

However, for those in leadership positions, it is essential to show that learning today is far removed from the strict classrooms of old. Participants can select the content that is relevant to them, as and when they need to. Alternatively, they can work with their colleagues to complete courses in groups. The process is far more flexible and personalised, making it more engaging.

Busy schedules

Finding the time for learning is also a significant barrier in a time-poor world. There is always something more pressing to do, and upskilling often sits at the bottom of the pile.

In this working environment, it is crucial for organisations to prioritise learning and communicate this to employees. If staff understand that their development is valued and integral to the overall company strategy, they are far more likely to set aside time for it.

While it can be tempting to complete five minutes of study here and there (and ultimately this is better than nothing), setting aside half an hour specifically for learning will help new information or skills to sink in better.

It might also be helpful for team leaders to allocate formal learning time. Structured sessions can make the process more social, while also easing time pressures on employees.

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Distracting environments

Perhaps the most significant barrier to learning is finding a space to focus and get started.

Although the standard working environment has changed considerably to suit the needs of millennial employees, working remotely poses a new set of challenges and distractions.

Interruptions like children and pets can be particularly problematic when it comes to learning, which requires 100% focus and attention to be useful. There is also the constant barrage of emails and messages to attend to, which can easily take up the entire day if left unmanaged.

With this in mind, we suggest the following tips to make your learning space as quiet and calm as possible:

- Avoid all other distractions when learning;
- Allocate quiet times or areas;
- Try to focus on one task at a time;
- Set boundaries over communication from other colleagues;
- Use noise-canceling headphones.

Lack of technical skills

While online courses have simplified the learning process in many ways, platforms can still be clunky and awkward to use. Additionally, some staff members may not have the necessary technical skills.

If these issues are troubling your employees, it might be helpful to find out which team members are finding the process challenging and why. You can then focus on equipping them with the required knowledge, or show them how to navigate the portals with confidence.

If they are still struggling, it might be more useful for them to read a book or shadow another employee as a way to gain more knowledge. While online learning can streamline the workplace learning process and improve engagement, don't be afraid to use more traditional tools when appropriate.

Chapter 3: How to make an online learning classroom more interactive

The online learning environment is a convenient and flexible way for employees to engage in professional development. Regardless of location or time, participants can upskill and develop expertise in their own time, at their own pace.

While there are many benefits of online learning for both employees and organisations, the learning experience can feel isolating for participants. For learning designers, the challenge is to create opportunities for social interaction for online learners in ways that will add value.

Here, we will explore why discussion between learners is beneficial, and consider how to incorporate more opportunities for interaction into online courses.

Why communication between learners is beneficial

When learning online instead of face to face, communication between participants is a crucial part of the process.

Research suggests that asking the right questions is a helpful place to begin. In their journal article *Designing Discussion Questions for Online Adult Learning*, Berge and Muilenburg explain this concept in more detail:

“Online learning environments, web-based or otherwise, are often more learner-centered than traditional brick-and-mortar classrooms. Online classrooms that use computer conferencing are discussion-oriented, authentic, problem and project-based, inquiry focused, and collaborative (Berge, 1997). In this type of environment, it is usually more important for the instructor to ask the ‘right questions’ than to give the ‘right answers’.”

With this in mind, it’s beneficial to look at ways to make online learning more interactive.

How to make online learning more interactive

There is no doubt that it is challenging to create authentic opportunities for social interaction with online courses. However, learning and development professionals can enhance the online experience. The following suggestions might be a useful starting point:

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1. Choose or design modules with the right questions

As explained above, the questions and activities set in an online course will determine both the quality of learning and interaction between participants. It is essential that those responsible for learning and development review the lessons they choose for employees to engage with, and ensure that they are asking the 'right' kind of questions.

But what does this mean? Berge and Muilenburg go on to explain that the quality of questions can be assessed using Bloom's Taxonomy.

Questions that generate more interaction between participants tend to encourage higher-order thinking skills, such as creativity, reflection, and analysis. In contrast, if participants are asked to recall facts as part of a learning activity or asked to consume content, they will have very little reason to engage with each other.

2. Make use of discussion boards

In a review of making classroom discussions more interactive, Amy Peterson points to discussion boards as a handy tool. She explains that in a traditional classroom, a select few learners participate in discussion, while the others remain silent.

With online discussion boards, each participant can contribute to the debate without the social pressure of answering in front of a large group. When online courses use discussion boards effectively, this means more learners can actively participate in the learning process and engage with other students.

Another advantage of discussion boards is that the size of the group can be controlled, allowing for closer interaction between participants when the class size is smaller. Learners can form closer bonds with fewer people, making it much easier for them to collaborate. Groups can also rotate to give depth to interactions and help participants engage in a variety of different learning interactions.

Again, asking the right questions is key to facilitating high-quality discussion. Discussion prompts that are open-ended will be particularly helpful, as well as those which encourage students to give real-life examples. Students can also lead the conversation, and use prompts to guide the dialogue.

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3. Create opportunities for face-to-face interaction between learners

An online course alone can offer learners many opportunities for discussion and interaction. However, learning and development professionals can build upon these discussions either physically in the workplace or via video link.

Although not always possible, physical interactions are preferable as they enable participants to experience a full range of communication when interacting with each other. For example, they can read each other's body language and pick up on changes in tone of voice.

4. Build in opportunities for reflection on learning

Learning and development professionals can also build upon the discussions generated in an online course by providing more opportunities for participants to reflect on learning.

A well-structured online course will include opportunities to reflect on the learning process. However, it might be helpful to allocate time for further reflection and discussion beyond the online course.

For example, if a module is focused on teaching participants a particular skill, they could be encouraged to apply their learning during the following week. At the next team catch up, they could then bring their reflections along to generate discussion.

Chapter 4: Developing higher-order thinking skills to future-proof your organisation

As technology progresses, organisations are under increasing pressure to upskill and equip staff with the necessary skills to thrive in the modern workplace.

Learning and development of individuals is rated as a key challenge organisations have to engage with. Accordingly, opportunities for workplace learning are crucial to both engaging employees and retaining them long term.

Higher-order thinking skills, such as innovating, creating, and critical thinking are now in high demand, and this trend is likely to continue as the need to develop new products, ways of working, and technologies increases.

Despite this, there is a significant gap between the skills students are leaving school with and the skills necessary to make an impact in today's working world.

The current structure, composition, and delivery of learning has an important role to play in this, particularly in the types of skills students are encouraged to develop. In schools, there is little time allocated to focus on the creative, divergent thinking skills that organisations need to remain competitive.

In this chapter, we are going to explore higher-order thinking skills and the benefits of teaching employees to develop them.

What are higher-order thinking skills?

To understand the different thinking skills people can draw upon for learning and work, Bloom's Taxonomy is a useful place to begin.

Developed by Benjamin Bloom and his team in the 1950s, learning and development professionals continue to implement this research, finding it is as relevant today as it was then. Learning and development professionals can use the taxonomy to choose engaging learning content.

The following diagram shows the ranking of different thinking skills in the taxonomy, with higher-order thinking skills such as designing, building, constructing, producing, inventing, judging, and critiquing appearing at the top:

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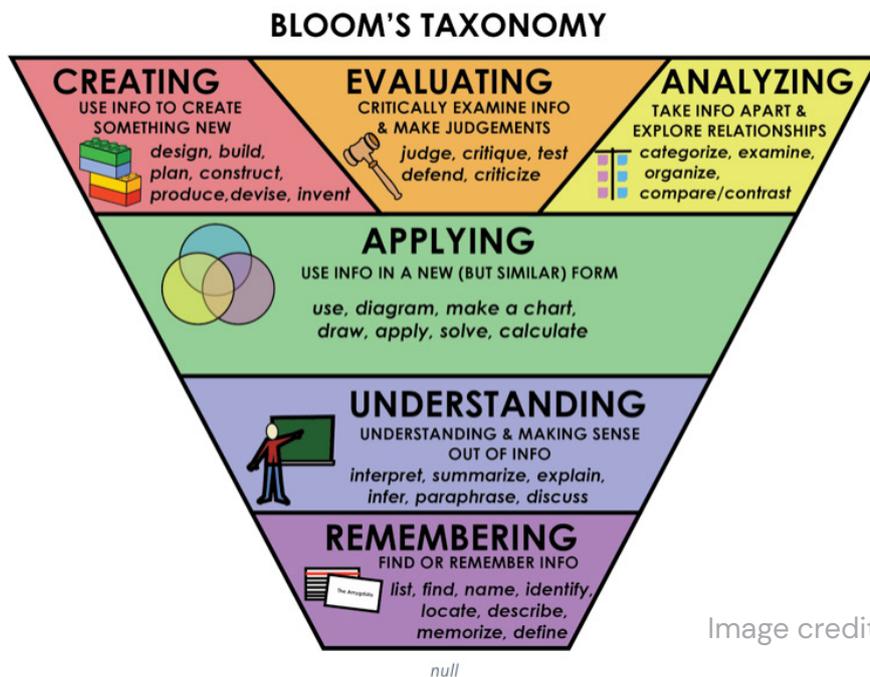


Image credit: Rawia Inaim

In the context of an online course, learning designers might encourage higher-order thinking by asking learners to come up with a unique way to solve a problem specific to their field or industry.

In a training course for workplace health and safety, learners might be presented with

a potentially dangerous scenario and asked to explain what they would do to make it safe and meet workplace health and safety requirements. Learners might then be encouraged to share their thoughts with each other and use communication tools to discuss the differences in their responses.

The benefits of developing higher-order thinking skills

For learning and development professionals and organisational leaders alike, understanding which courses or activity types will help learners to develop higher-order thinking skills is highly beneficial.

More than ever, employees are required to use their knowledge to create, innovate, or design to add value. If they are given an opportunity to develop these skills through workplace training, the learning will be all the more valuable.

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Here, we explore the broader benefits for organisations when they focus on developing higher-order thinking skills with their staff:

1. Participants build skills for creativity and innovation

The ability to create and innovate are among the most important skills required of employees today. As technology advances, organisations and employees need to adapt to the rapidly changing environment to keep up.

While the ability to think creatively and innovate comes naturally to some people, for others, this skill needs to be developed. Unfortunately, as creative thinking is not currently a focus in schools, many new graduates enter the workforce without having been encouraged to use these skills. This becomes an issue when they enter the fast-paced modern workplace and feel unprepared.

2. Learning becomes more interesting

When learners are encouraged to engage with higher-order thinking skills, this requires far more of their attention and utilises more of their brain capacity. As a result, learners become more engaged in professional development, while online learning courses that implement these activity types are often more applicable in real-life scenarios.

Better engagement in workplace learning has also been linked to increased staff retention. Staff retention is a problem across organisations in the modern workplace, and has a direct impact on productivity.

3. Increased potential for innovation within organisations

When employees engage with learning tasks that give them the confidence to be innovative, the potential for new ideas within an organisation will quickly increase. As technology progresses, the ability to innovate will be a key advantage for organisations to remain competitive. Already, those who can quickly adapt as the market shifts are more likely to survive digital transformation.

4. Learners build transferable skills for real-life scenarios

When learners are engaged with higher-order thinking skills through online courses, they will also be more likely to apply this knowledge after the training is over. Learning tasks which encourage divergent thinking develop skills which can be applied to a broad range of situations, and are not bound by specific topics or the unique requirements of a role.

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5. More opportunities for collaborative learning

Learning activities which encourage higher-order thinking are often more conducive to employees working collaboratively. While finding ways for learners to work together can be challenging with online learning, tools such as discussion boards and information sharing allow participants to share their ideas during the learning process.

With ongoing uncertainties around COVID, coupled with the rapid rate of technological advancement, it's almost impossible to predict what next week might bring – let alone next year! As such, upskilling and futureproofing your team has never been more important.

If you're ready to start your upskilling journey, [Go1 Content Hub](#) has all the tools you need. With a constantly growing library of learning content, containing thousands of resources from top training providers around the world, Go1 Content Hub has resources to suit any team and any style of learner, at any time.



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