

What can you do today, to prepare for the workforce of tomorrow?



WHAT DOES THE FUTURE OF WORK HAVE IN STORE FOR US?

It's impossible to predict the future – we all know that – yet many of us still try to do it in one way or another. We love to hear predictions, even though most who attempt them tend to get it wrong.

Human beings, in general, are pretty obsessed with trying to figure out what's going to happen next, and it's understandable why. We all have a fundamental need to feel in control. We want certainty. If we can see what's coming, then we can figure out the best course of action to achieve our goals and avoid potential challenges. Accurate predictions lead to better decisions. Nobody wants to be flying by the seat of their pants, playing catch-up. We want to be ahead of the curve.

Many leaders ask us questions like, “What are people going to need to know in the future?” and “Are we set up for that?” There are thousands of articles with headlines like, “What are the top 10 job skills for the future?” – some of which are referenced in this paper. But the only thing we do know for sure is that **change is constant**.

Trying to predict the future is the
wrong strategy.

Preparing for **continuous change** is the
only strategy.

You need to constantly be looking at new technological breakthroughs, cultural trends, and industry disruptions, and figuring out how to adapt to these shifts. You also need to understand the people already inside your organization as well as your new hires, so you'll always have the right people in the right roles to meet your organization's current and future needs.

FUTURE SKILLS EXPLAINED.

According to the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report, workers will need dramatically different skills to thrive in our future job market by 2022. Half of all employees will need reskilling by 2025.

- Complex problem solving
- Critical thinking
- Creativity
- People management
- Coordinating with others
- Emotional intelligence
- Judgment and decision making
- Service orientation
- Negotiation
- Cognitive flexibility



THE BIGGEST MISCONCEPTIONS AROUND FUTURE SKILLS

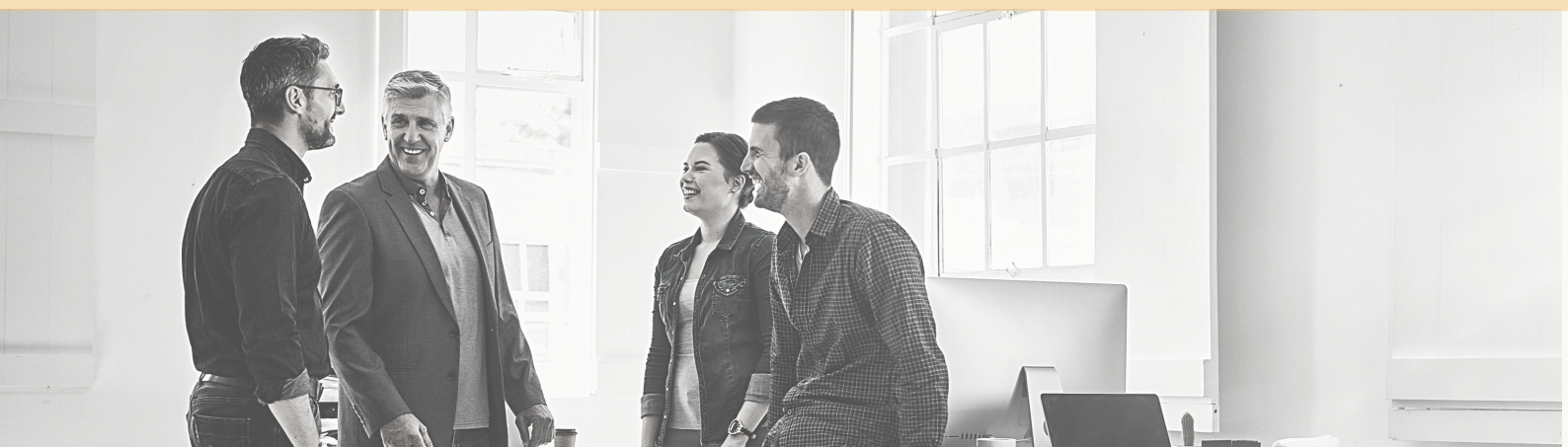
Employers need to think about what skills their employees will need in the near and distant future. That's a give-in. However, the current dialogue and research around this topic will make you think that there is a universal list of future skills that all employees will need, and that just isn't true. More specifically, these are the two biggest issues we have with the future skills hype:



FOCUSING SOLELY ON TECHNICAL SKILLS IS (IRONICALLY) SHORT-SIGHTED.

There will always be new technologies, new disruptions, and new industries to which we'll need to adapt. There will always be a new set of skills. And sure, we can forecast some of these trends; there are many others we can't. Take the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance. Remote work has been growing in popularity for years, but there was no way to predict that organizations would need to start working remotely and transform their operations overnight.

Rather than focusing solely on skills, leaders need to learn how to build an organization equipped to do the job today and continuously evolve and adapt to the business's future needs and goals.





THE FUTURE OF WORK IS ALREADY HERE.

We all have been waiting for the future of work to come, and it came faster than expected. Just a year ago, everyone was talking about how the future of work will be entirely digital. Today, digital is the new normal for organizations worldwide that completely transformed and digitalized their business processes in the wake of the pandemic.

COVID-19 has had an enormous impact on online working environments and accelerated the shift toward the future of work. Some experts believe that the world of work will never be the same. The coronavirus has fundamentally changed every aspect of business – from eliminating our commute to work to how we interact and collaborate with our colleagues. The pandemic has also accelerated other future work trends like automation, the gig economy, and increased connectivity.



WHAT CAN YOU DO TODAY TO PREPARE FOR THE WORKFORCE OF TOMORROW?

The future of work is a popular phrase right now; the truth is that we've been talking about how to optimize our workforces for decades, and we will continue to do so. We will always need to adapt to market changes and embrace new technologies.

Right now, you can start preparing for the marketplace changes and future-of-work topics that are currently top-of-mind, such as AI, optimized workspaces, and automation. However, in two to three years, there will be additional innovations, challenges, and trends.

So rather than fixating on the 'future of work' or future skills,' the best thing you can do is to bring your attention inward and focus on gaining as much insight as possible into your business's specific needs and goals as well as the people you have to deliver those goals.

01

CREATE ALIGNMENT BETWEEN GROWTH GOALS AND LEARNING PRIORITIES

Most organizations have a business growth plan that provides:

- A clear picture of your business's current strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities
- A vision for where you want your company to be in the next three to five years
- An action plan to achieve your vision, including who will do what and by when



However, as your business evolves, so will your talent needs, so you should ensure alignment between your growth goals and your company's learning priorities. For example, if you're planning to release a new product line in the near future, rather than hiring new workers to fill your skills gap, take a closer look at the talent you have.

Are there any top performers who would want to take on more of a leadership role and oversee this project? Or employees who would be interested in moving into product development or marketing? Can you provide them with training and coaching to help them upskill? If you don't have the answers to these questions, consider using CareerSpark's [people intelligence platform](#) to gather more robust, data-driven insights into your workforce.

Not only will focusing your efforts internally save you the time and resources required to hire externally, but it can also help with retention and engagement, by providing your employees with professional development and career growth opportunities.



02

HIRE PEOPLE THAT ARE ADAPTABLE AND OPEN TO CHANGE

In today's quickly evolving workforce, you need employees that aren't just comfortable with change but thrive under such conditions. From entry-level employees to management to the C-suite, workers at all levels need to recognize and anticipate changes, take action, and quickly come up with solutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a perfect example of the importance of adaptive thinking. While many businesses shuttered, others quickly responded and kept their business running by switching to virtual options or embracing e-commerce.

For a long time, so-called ‘job hoppers’ or people with not-so-linear career paths have been seen as a liability. However, in our rapidly changing world of work, these people should get a second look. We hire people based on their resumes which tell us what they’ve done, but it doesn’t illustrate who they are or what they can or should do. It simply highlights how focused or flexible they’ve been.

Instead of discounting people who haven’t been doing the same thing all their lives, dig into it a little more. Ask candidates questions like, “Have you demonstrated in the past that you’ve made a shift or made changes?” or “Have you made a personal pivot?” and, if so, “Why?”. Their answers may surprise you.

Think about the skills and talent you need today and what you need in the future and build this into your talent acquisition and career pathing and development processes. For example, let’s say you hire an entry-level employee who’s also interested in an aspect of your business that you know will be more of a priority in the future. Ensure they have access to the training or coaching from the get-go, so they’ll be ready to support you when you need it most.

03

FOCUS ON DEVELOPING A LEARNING ORGANIZATION

Future-thinking organizations need to be learning organizations, which are organizations “made up of employees skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge.” These are people who can help their companies “cultivate tolerance, foster open discussion, and think holistically and systemically,” and can adapt to uncertainty more quickly than their competitors would.

Three broad factors are essential for cultivating a culture of learning and adaptability within an organization: **a supportive learning environment, concrete learning processes and practices, and leadership behavior that reinforces this approach to work.**



LET'S BREAK THESE 3 ELEMENTS DOWN EVEN FURTHER:

»» FOCUS ON DEVELOPING A LEARNING ORGANIZATION

A supportive learning environment is psychologically safe (i.e., one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes). There should be an appreciation of differences, openness to new ideas, and ample time for reflection.

»» CONCRETE LEARNING PROCESSES AND PRACTICES.

For maximum impact, knowledge sharing must happen in systematic and defined ways. This could look like regular post-audit or debriefs after a project is completed, peer mentoring programs, or even monthly lunch and learns hosted by employees or subject-matter experts. Knowledge sharing can happen at an individual level, within groups or departments, or across the entire organization, but the key is to ensure that learning doesn't happen on an ad-hoc basis but is built into day-to-day company processes.

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THE FUTURE OF WORK: LOOKING BEYOND THE TRENDS



The “future of work” and “future skills” are some of the most hot-button topics in business today.

And sure – there are a few overarching trends that will impact us all (i.e., automation, machine learning, the gig economy), but the reality is that the future of work and work skills will look different for everybody.

As an employer, the best way to prepare for the future is to figure out, *right now*, what skills and talent you’ll need to achieve your specific goals. You need an in-depth, holistic understanding of your employees: not just of their skills, education, and experience, but also their performance and career goals. When you know what’s driving their success, you can start thinking about how to optimize their performance or get more employees like them.

Collecting all of this data might seem like pretty hard work, but Career Spark’s people intelligence platform simplifies it. The insights you’ll gather will help you identify relationships and patterns which you can use to empower people to take action and solve business problems, both now and in the future.

So what will the future of work look like for your organization? Only time will tell. But staying ahead of the curve starts with yourself and your team with the right insights and knowledge to make better decisions.



Career Spark's Smart System is a revolutionary career-pathing and employee development platform that continuously gets smarter at predicting the likelihood of employees performing well and staying longer - based on how they compare to an organization's own top performers.

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