WANT TO CLOSE THE SKILLS GAP?

Skills!

Human resources and talent development professionals – from executives to thought leaders to vendors – are all talking about skills.

Skills ontologies. Skills marketplaces. Skills clouds.

The shift to skills represents a new perspective for many L&D teams. It also raises an important question: is your learning ecosystem ready to accelerate reskilling and upskilling priorities across your workforce?

Building transferable skills has been a fundamental workplace learning concept for a long time. So, what went so wrong to cause 65% of organisations to report significant skills gaps in *The Reskilling Revolution* by The Fosway Group? Why do only 39% of frontline employees feel prepared to do their jobs properly in the current environment according to the 2020 Axonify *State of Frontline Employee Training Report?*

How did we get here?

WE CERTAINLY HAVE ENOUGH CONTENT

Many talent development professionals have moved beyond vague definitions of 'hard' and 'soft' skills. Instead, they're classifying skills based on their focus (operational vs human) and longevity (perishable vs durable). Durable, human skills

FIRST, BRIDGE THE OPPORTUNITY GAP!

BY JD DILLON

– such as collaboration and critical thinking – are often cited as a primary focus of reskilling programs, given their inherent transferability. But why do so many people lack these foundational skills?

It's definitely not a lack of content. For instance, LinkedIn Learning, Coursera and YouTube have plenty of information on 'critical thinking'. Plus, most corporate learning management systems are filled with courses on these kinds of skills. If people already have access to content on subjects their companies value so highly, why don't they possess the related skills?

The fact is that the skills gap is not the real problem. It's an effect, not a cause. It's the downstream result of something fundamentally broken in how organisations help people develop, regardless of the topic. Skill priorities are going to change, but they all require a right-fit human experience to enable meaningful development. This is where you must begin to properly address the skills gap.

SHIFTING PERSPECTIVE FROM SKILLS TO OPPORTUNITY

Widespread skill gaps have amassed for one main reason: the lack of learning equity. You can build great content that aligns with a detailed ontology, but it won't matter unless people have meaningful, right-fit opportunities to build their knowledge and skill. The opportunity gap is the cause. The skills gap is the effect.

'Opportunity gap' may be a new term, but it's really the amalgamation of familiar challenges. All these issues limit a person's ability to focus on meaningful skill development, causing them to fall behind the change curve.

The mindset gap represents how the organisation, including everyone from frontline employees to senior management, view the role of learning within the workplace. Is learning seen as a critical business capability or just something people are required to do?
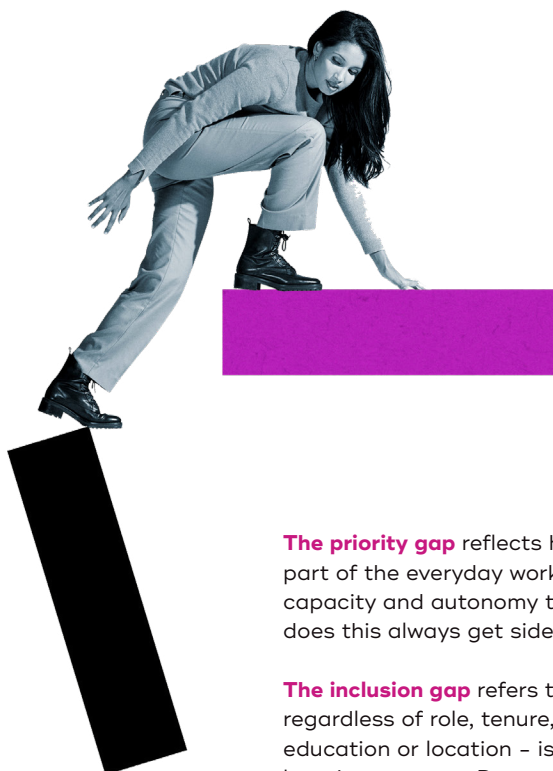
The priority gap reflects how learning is/isn't prioritised as part of the everyday workflow. Are people permitted the time, capacity and autonomy to focus on their development, or does this always get sidelined by the next business priority?

The inclusion gap refers to how effectively everyone – regardless of role, tenure, background, demographic, education or location – is included in an organisation's learning strategy. Does every person have consistent access to meaningful growth opportunities, or is development limited to select groups?

The reality gap explores how well you understand the day-to-day context of the people you support and your willingness to align your learning strategy accordingly. Do you build training that can be experienced during the limited time available in a busy workday, or do people have to adjust how they do their jobs to fit training in?

The digital gap measures how broadly technology is used to enable learning experiences that meet the unique needs of the entire workforce.

Just like skills, these ideas aren't new. However, they are usually discussed in isolation, without consideration for the way they collectively create gaps in the employee experience, limit skill development and reduce organisational agility. The skills conversation gives L&D the chance to solve these problems in service of a major business priority.

> ## BRIDGING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP IS A CRUCIAL STEP IN ARCHITECTING A DISRUPTION-PROOF, SKILLS-FOCUSED ECOSYSTEM.
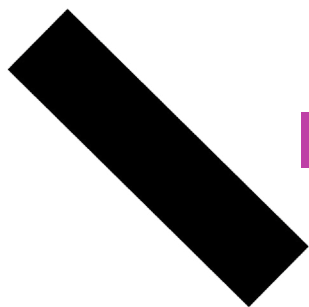
BRIDGING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP

The good and bad news is that we're talking about systemic issues that have hampered workplace learning for a long time. Bridging the opportunity gap is a crucial step in architecting a disruption-proof, skills-focused ecosystem. L&D must take a hard look at the ecosystem and make the changes needed to become more agile, consistent and scalable.

- **Educate your stakeholders.** Share real-world stories that demonstrate the bottom-line impact of workplace learning. Showcase new methods, tactics and technologies to expand their mindset and connect skill development with business transformation.

- **Overcome the time challenge.** Apply tactics like microlearning and personalization that help people balance their development. Make sure everyone has the resources to solve today's biggest problems without losing focus on their long-term skill priorities.

- **Shift from equality to equity.** Stop trying to build one-size-fits training that doesn't fit anyone. Elevate learning equity by designing experiences that provide everyone with the skill development resources they really need.

- **Go to the audience.** Apply a persona-based approach to solution design. Ground yourself in the everyday realities of your audience so you can provide training and support that really fits into the flow of work.

- **Apply tech with purpose.** Stop hunting for a technology unicorn that will solve every problem. Communicate a clear purpose and value for each tool as you architect a simple, integrated learning tech stack.

While many companies have admirably navigated their way through the disruption created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the experience has also exposed some major gaps. Companies now know just how fast they're able to move – and they want to get quicker. It's time for L&D to take its seat at the table and demonstrate its ability to build the skills people and organisations need to thrive in the future workplace.

> A business can only transform as fast as its people can learn. To overcome the skills gap, people must have the opportunity to make learning a real part of their everyday jobs.

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