A GUIDE TO UPSKILLING AMERICA'S FRONTLINE WORKERS

A Handbook for Employers

Deloitte.

in collaboration with

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

🍃 THE IMPORTANCE OF UPSKILLING FOR AMERICAN BUSINESSES

The US economy is continuing to experience a strong recovery and is creating millions of jobs along the way. But still, there are not enough skilled workers to fill these jobs. In fact, as of January 2015, five million jobs remained unfilled in the United States.[1] Employers consistently report they are facing a major skills shortage challenge. Thirty-six percent of employers report that a lack of employee skills has resulted in problems for their organization in terms of cost, quality, and time.[2] Strong economic growth has also resulted in a climate in which employees have increased employment choices and demands of their own. Employers who are able to retain key talent by building from within will have a clear advantage over the competition.

Senior business leaders have identified talent-driven innovation as the number one determinant of competitiveness.[3] While finding and hiring key talent is a critical organizational competency, associated turnover costs can hurt an organization's bottom line.[4] By comparison, training and developing existing employees may be one of the most effective ways to address the skills challenge and to develop a sustainable talent strategy. Rather than finding a quick fix with external talent, take a look at "upskilling" your existing workforce first.

Upskilling refers to the skills development and training of employees, with the purpose of:
- Enhancing skill sets of employees to provide better performance in their current positions
- Equipping employees with the skills and opportunities required to advance to higher paying positions
- Meeting the increasing need for higher level skills to support higher value-added activities in the economy
- Providing opportunities to "backfill" vacant slots with other employees positioned to move up the organization

Twenty-four million frontline workers face little to no upward career mobility.[5] By upskilling America's frontline workers, employers would be helping existing employees move into higher-skilled roles, thereby filling existing jobs and furthering employee engagement and retention, enhancing culture, and satisfying the organizational mission to do good while doing well.[6] The need to develop frontline workers is well acknowledged. It is a business imperative.

A CALL TO ACTION

While organizations, national coalitions, and nonprofits have been working to train and develop America's frontline workers, the movement has received clear support from the president.

"Today we are partnering with businesses across the country to **UpSkill America**. To help workers of all ages earn a shot at better, higher paying jobs even if they don't have a higher education. We want to recruit more companies to help provide apprenticeships and other pathways so people can upgrade their skills. We are all going to have to do that in this new economy."

— President Barack Obama, State of the Union Address, January 2015

WHAT IS THE END GOAL?

- Provide 24 million frontline workers the training and opportunity to fill hundreds of thousands of vacancies that employers have *right now* in mid-skill, better-paying jobs.
- Focus on ensuring that every American who works hard and plays by the rules gets a fair shot.
- Create the view that entry-level jobs are the stepping stones to robust career pathways into the middle class, and to the American dream.

UpSkill America[7] is a joint effort by employers, educators, technology innovators, unions, training providers, cities, states, and nonprofits to help turn entry-level jobs across the country into stepping stones to the middle class.
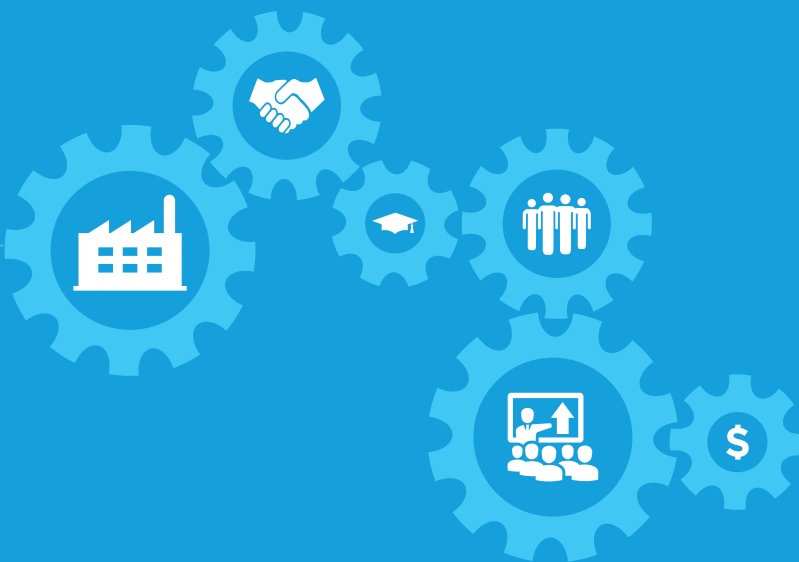
UPSKILL AMERICA'S THREE-PART MISSION IS TO:

1

Recognize leading employers that provide expanded career opportunities for their workers

2

Promote the widespread adoption of business policies and practices that increase economic opportunity

3

Cultivate public-private education and workforce development efforts that support and advance these initiatives

THERE ARE OVER
24 MILLION
FRONTLINE WORKERS IN THE UNITED STATES.[8]
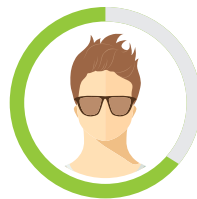
33%

ONE-THIRD ARE UNDER AGE 35

33%

ONE-THIRD ARE IMMIGRANTS

>50%

MORE THAN HALF ARE BLACK OR HISPANIC

66%

TWO-THIRDS OF THE YOUNG (AGES 16–24) LOW-SKILLED POPULATION ARE MEN

60%

NEARLY TWO-THIRDS OF THE LOW-SKILLED ARE EMPLOYED

+33%

OVER ONE-THIRD OF THE LOW-SKILLED HAVE DONE VOLUNTEER WORK IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS

OVERALL,

ONE IN SIX US ADULTS HAS LOW LITERACY SKILLS

&

ONE IN THREE HAS LOW NUMERACY SKILLS

Basic literacy and numeracy skill levels of US adults have remained stagnant over the last two decades

The youngest learners are not improving their skill levels either

In contrast, young adults in many other countries score well above older adults and outpace their American peers

- Frontline workers are half as likely to receive career-relevant education as their high-skilled counterparts

- Are at the lower levels of the pay scale

- Majority have a high school education but have not completed college

- Typically hold operational roles at the lower rungs in the organizations

EXAMPLES OF FRONTLINE WORKERS ACROSS INDUSTRIES INCLUDE:

TRANSPORTATION
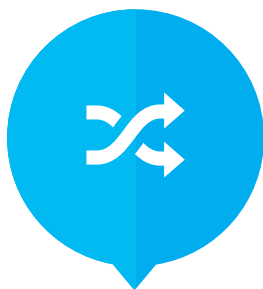LONG HAUL TRUCK DRIVER

MANUFACTURING
ASSEMBLY LINE WORKER

CONSTRUCTION
DAY LABORER

HEALTH CARE
ORDERLY

CROSS-INDUSTRY
CALL CENTER WORKER

RETAIL
CASHIER, SHELF STOCKER

FINANCIAL SERVICES
BANK TELLER

This handbook was created to expand upon the commitments and efforts that many of you have already made to advance the skills and careers of your frontline workers. It is intended to be used by people in various functions and roles, within organizations of various sizes across industries and sectors. In this handbook, you will find a maturity model that can help you assess your organization's current ability to advance the skills and careers of your frontline workers as well as understand the leading practices that employers have already implemented to effectively upskill their frontline workers.

The handbook also provides a business case you can use to educate your organization and its leaders about upskilling and the opportunities it can create for your organization. Securing support and engagement from senior business leaders is critical to launching and sustaining your upskilling initiatives.

If you are a:	This handbook applies to you because:	Your company can benefit because you can:
CxO (e.g., Chief Executive Officer, Chief Finance Officer)	– You own final decisions regarding how financial and nonfinancial resources are deployed in the organization – You own, oversee, or govern business relationships with the major functions in your organization – You are the driver and champion of large-scale change within your organization	– Demonstrate visible commitment to talent as a key organization asset – Understand and recognize the business drivers for investing in frontline workers – Demonstrate support and engagement in your organization's upskilling initiatives
Functional/ Business Leader	– You understand the critical skills and behaviors expected of your frontline workforce and are responsible for conveying those needs to CxOs and HR/Learning	– Recommend potential upskilling investments and prioritize implementation – Clearly communicate the need for upskilling to upper level leaders – Serve as the liaison between frontline managers and senior business leaders in terms of managing expectations regarding upskilling investments
Manager/ Supervisor	– You understand the skill requirements of a role or position to provide input into training curricula design and development – You have a unique line of sight into the day-to-day workings of your frontline workforce, including their development needs and career aspirations	– Demonstrate active support and engagement in your staff's development – Clarify and reinforce upskilling initiatives that are being rolled out – Ensure frontline workers have access to information about upskilling initiatives and facilitate participation

If your function is:	This handbook applies to you because:	Your company can benefit because you can:
HR	− You are responsible for talent management, including recruitment, onboarding, training, and engagement	− Coach the business and/or learning organization to assess the maturity of your upskilling efforts against the maturity model outlined in this handbook − Partner with the business and/or learning organization to identify focus areas and recommendations for immediate and long-term upskilling initiatives and models
Learning	− You are responsible for learning and development in your organization	− Assess your upskilling efforts against the maturity model outlined in this handbook − Identify opportunities to bridge maturity gaps and provide recommendations to enhance upskilling efforts
Technology	− You are responsible for the technology platforms, processes, and systems used by your organization	− Assess where and how your organization is applying technology as an enabler to upskilling, and how technology can be enhanced to maximize learning resources

IDEAS FOR ACTION

1. Share this document with others in your organization.
2. Go to UpSkillAmerica.org to learn more about how you can get involved in a national discussion.

YOU SHOULD USE THIS HANDBOOK BECAUSE IT:

- Describes why upskilling is a necessary talent management strategy for preparing your frontline workers to compete in today's dynamic marketplace

- Builds on the existing upskilling initiatives you may already have in place

- Outlines upskilling practices that employers have effectively applied to train and develop their frontline workers

- Translates ideas and theoretical assumptions into practice through employer and employee case studies

- Provides checklists and tools to help you get started **now**

UPSKILLING IN ACTION: MANUFACTURING

A small engineering company embarked on an aggressive strategy to incorporate industry certifications into its hiring processes and train existing employees. The company first began offering current workers the opportunity to build on their existing knowledge through an online training system, which was provided onsite. Workers were rewarded with $100 for each of four modules they passed and were awarded an additional $100 if they passed all four modules, which earned them an industry-recognized training credential. The strategy had a significant positive impact. Productivity improved by 31 percent since the training program was launched, setting a new standard within the organization. The company also reported fewer accidents, increased quality improvements, and a more self-directed, confident, and engaged workforce. Workers themselves reported improvements in morale and engagement: Immediately following the launch of the training initiative, employee engagement as indicated in an organization survey increased from 62 percent to 90 percent, leveling off at a consistent 85 percent, an overall gain of 23 percent.

! ISSUE	**⚙** ACTION	**✓** OUTCOME
– Low employee morale – Poor employee engagement	– Introduced industry certifications into hiring processes and training of existing employees – Provided online training to employees onsite – Provided financial reward to employees for completion of training	– Employees achieved an industry-recognized training credential – Increased productivity – Enhanced safety and quality measures – More self-directed, confident, and engaged workforce

MAKING THE BUSINESS CASE FOR UPSKILLING

America's unmet need for skilled workers means that many job roles remain unfilled; moreover, forecasts predict this trend is likely to continue and worsen.[9] The demand for skilled workers has far outpaced the supply. Filling these jobs by finding external sources and training new hires will require time – time that many employers do not have in today's rapidly changing marketplace. Many senior business leaders see developing their existing workforce as an effective way to remedy the problem. Focusing on upskilling existing employees may be one of the most efficient ways to manage this talent pipeline issue.

UPSKILLING EXISTING EMPLOYEES MAKES SENSE TO BUSINESS LEADERS

Ninety-four percent of senior business leaders agree that internal training and development programs are among the most effective workforce development strategies, and 72 percent agree that involvement with local schools and community colleges is effective.[10]

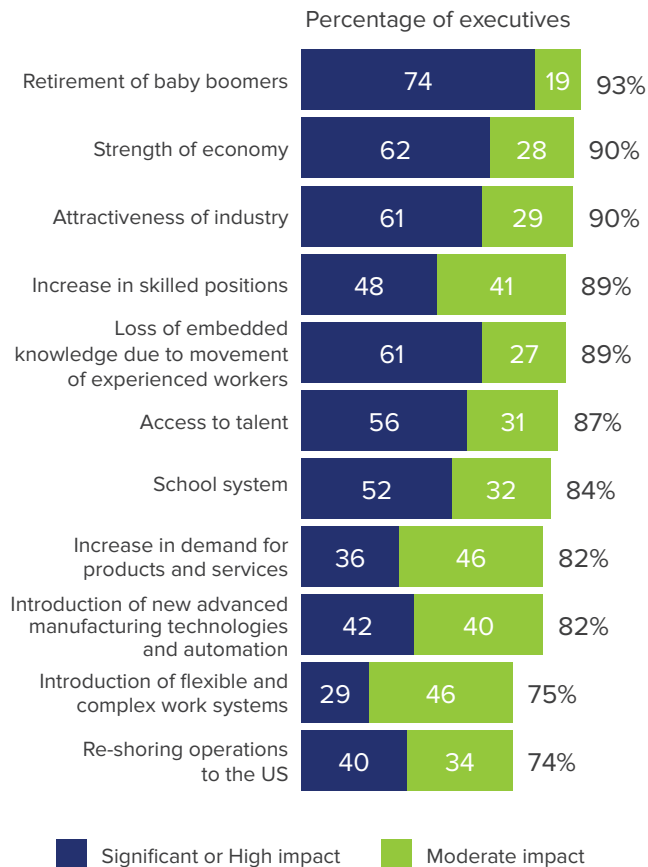So, why does upskilling make business sense? Three reasons:
1. Addressing the skills shortage
2. Retaining talent
3. Strengthening your organization culture and brand

ADDRESSING THE SKILLS SHORTAGE

Employers are grappling with a multitude of human resource challenges that require more dedicated attention than ever before. Learning and development today has become a business-critical priority. Senior business leaders increasingly see a shortage of skills as a major impediment to executing their business strategies. In Deloitte's *Business Confidence Report 2014*, approximately one-third of CxOs cited a shortage of skilled workers as their reason for lacking confidence in their organizations' ability to address market disruptions or overcome obstacles to growth.[11] Given the encouraging economic growth, the market for high-skilled talent has and continues to tighten even further, increasing the need for employers to act to secure the talent they need today. Employers recognize they cannot simply recruit all the talent they need, but should consider developing it internally.

There are two major contributing factors to the widening skills shortage – baby boomer retirements and economic expansion. An estimated 2.7 million jobs are likely to be needed as a result of retirements of the existing workforce,[12] while 700,000 jobs are likely to be created due to natural business growth.[13] Hiring, retaining, and developing a skilled workforce will be increasingly difficult in the face of changing workforce demographics. As a greater number of older and experienced employees retire, finding younger talent to replace them will likely become increasingly difficult, with the resulting loss of institutional and job knowledge further

Percentage of executives

Factor	Significant or High impact	Moderate impact	Total
Retirement of baby boomers	74	19	93%
Strength of economy	62	28	90%
Attractiveness of industry	61	29	90%
Increase in skilled positions	48	41	89%
Loss of embedded knowledge due to movement of experienced workers	61	27	89%
Access to talent	56	31	87%
School system	52	32	84%
Increase in demand for products and services	36	46	82%
Introduction of new advanced manufacturing technologies and automation	42	40	82%
Introduction of flexible and complex work systems	29	46	75%
Re-shoring operations to the US	40	34	74%

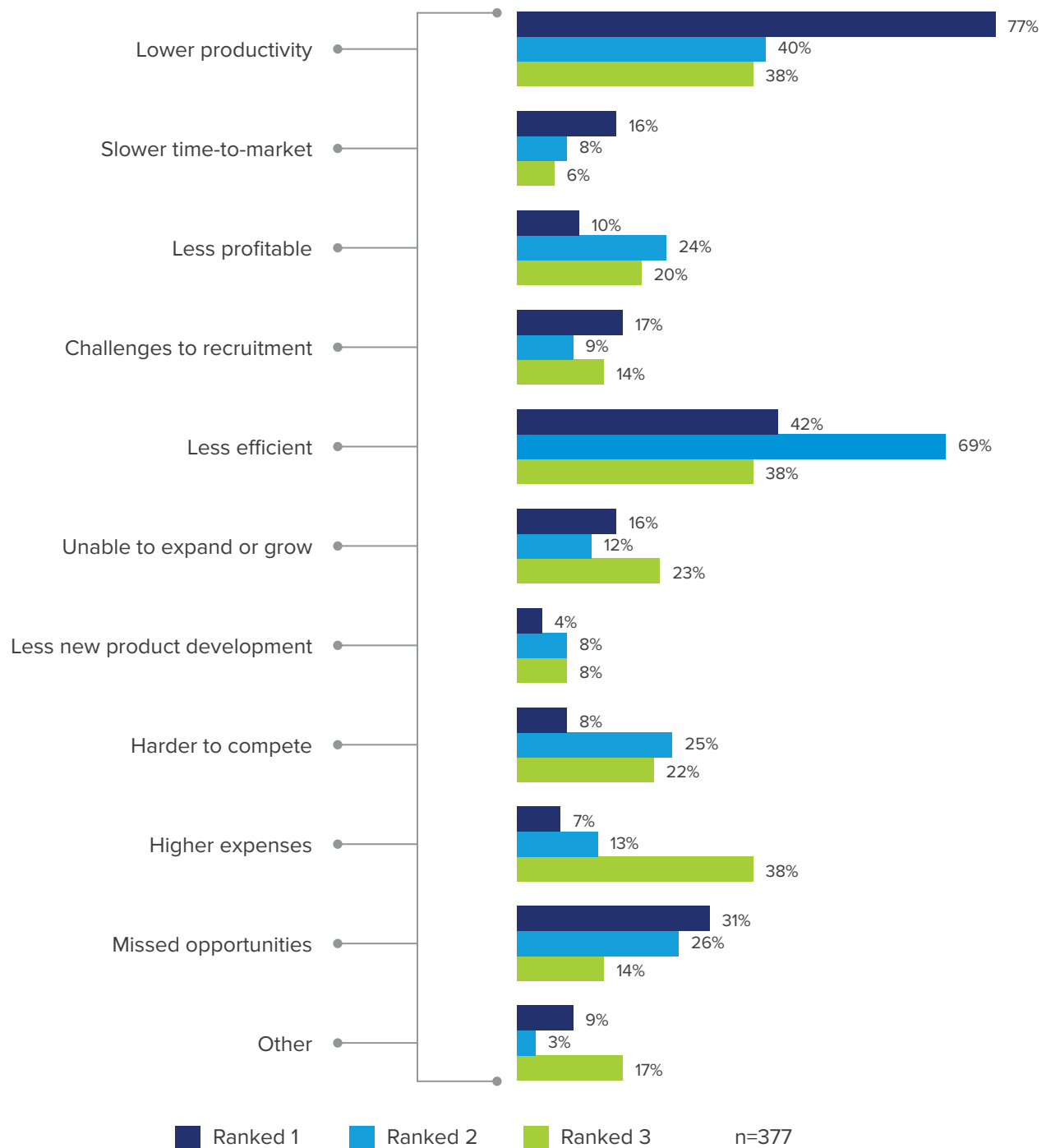■ Significant or High impact   ■ Moderate impact

In addition to retirements and economic expansion, other factors contribute to the shortage of skilled workforce, including loss of embedded knowledge due to movement of experienced workers, lack of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) skills among workers, and a gradual decline of technical education programs in public high schools.[14] By 2018, employers will need 22 million new workers with postsecondary degrees, but, without a dramatic change in course, will fall short by three million workers.[15] Employers can invest in their current workforce now and potentially experience gains later due to an increase in employees' productivity and skill sets.

◢ INTO THE SPOTLIGHT: IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING JUMPED 25 PERCENT IN ONE YEAR, BUT EMPLOYERS ARE STRUGGLING[17]

Employers are starting to rethink and reconsider their role developing existing employees, particularly their frontline workers, as they confront the increasing skills shortage. In Deloitte's *Global Human Capital Trends 2015* report, leaders ranked learning and development as their third most important challenge, a notable change from the eighth place ranking it received in 2014. At the same time, however, fewer respondents feel their organizations are ready to address it. Only 40% of respondents rated their organizations as "ready" or "very ready" in learning and development in 2015, compared to 75% in 2014. Companies are struggling to redesign the training environment, incorporate new learning technologies, and use the vast array of digital learning tools now available.
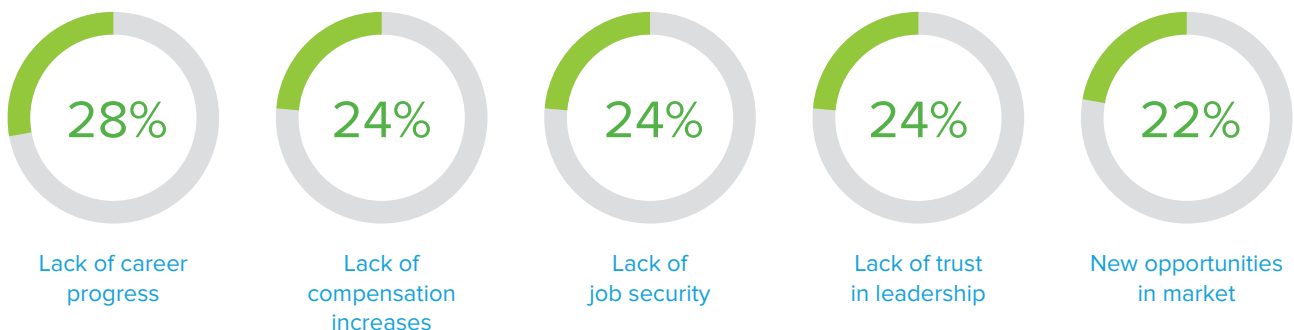
Respondents were asked to rank their top three choices.

Business Impact	Ranked 1	Ranked 2	Ranked 3
Lower productivity	77%	40%	38%
Slower time-to-market	16%	8%	6%
Less profitable	10%	24%	20%
Challenges to recruitment	17%	9%	14%
Less efficient	42%	69%	38%
Unable to expand or grow	16%	12%	23%
Less new product development	4%	8%	8%
Harder to compete	8%	25%	22%
Higher expenses	7%	13%	38%
Missed opportunities	31%	26%	14%
Other	9%	3%	17%

Ranked 1   Ranked 2   Ranked 3   n=377

RETAINING KEY TALENT

As cited in Deloitte's report *Talent Edge 2020: Building the recovery together*, opportunities for career progression — or lack thereof — are both the No. 1 retention incentive and the No. 1 driver of turnover.[19] When asked what would keep them with their current employer, 54 percent of employees surveyed cited opportunities for promotion/advancement over compensation, bonuses, benefits, or any other reason. Conversely, 28 percent cited "lack of career progress" as their top reason for looking for a new job, followed by "lack of compensation increases," "lack of job security," and "lack of trust in leadership," each at 24 percent.

As Baby Boomers retire and leave the workforce, the upcoming cohorts of Generation X (born 1960s to 1980s) and Millennials (born 1980s to 2000s), will make up the majority of the workforce. How is your organization preparing for the shift? When it comes to ranking the top turnover triggers, Generation X and Millennial employees placed "lack of career progress" first at 38 percent and 30 percent respectively. Act now by investing in the careers and development of these employees as a way to retain them later.

Doing so could also be a real competitive advantage for your organization. Nearly half (48 percent) of employees surveyed who plan to leave their current jobs believe their companies are doing a "fair/poor" job managing and delivering effective training programs; just 24 percent rate training programs as "excellent/very good." More than half (53 percent) of employees surveyed believe companies do only a "fair" or "poor" job of creating career paths and providing challenging job opportunities.[20] This points to a significant opportunity for companies to distinguish themselves as employers of choice by investing in high-quality training and providing a clear path for employees to put that training to work. It can also support the overall corporate and employment brand: For many employers, the betterment of their people is a core component of their mission.

DEPARTURE DRIVERS AND RETENTION INCENTIVES[21]

WHAT WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO LOOK FOR NEW EMPLOYMENT?

28%	24%	24%	24%	22%
Lack of career progress	Lack of compensation increases	Lack of job security	Lack of trust in leadership	New opportunities in market

WHAT WOULD KEEP YOU WITH YOUR CURRENT EMPLOYER?

| 53%	39%	34%	30%	21%
Promotion/Job advancement	Additional compensation	Additional bonuses or financial incentives	Support and recognition from supervisors or managers	Additional benefits (i.e., health and pensions)
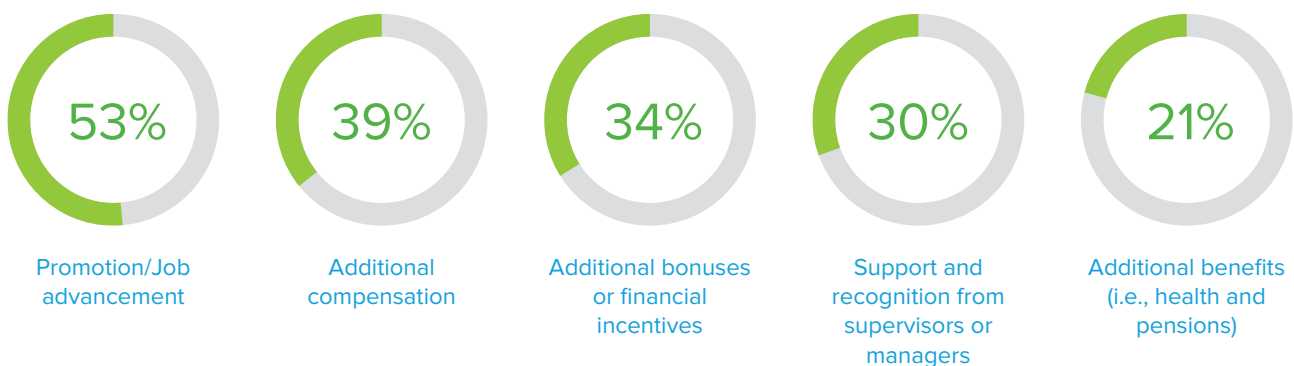
The visible commitment to offer educational opportunities and career development is an important strategy for improving both the retention and engagement of employees, issues that HR and business executives collectively ranked as the most important to their organization.[22] Organizations with mature succession and talent mobility approaches self-reported as 2 times more effective at improving employee engagement and 1.7 times more effective at improving the retention of high-performers.[23] Organizations with strong learning cultures are more likely to get to the market faster, have more productive employees, be better able to control costs, and

STRENGTHENING YOUR ORGANIZATION BRAND AND CULTURE

Upskilling frontline workers is not only about doing better, but also about doing good. Many of today's consumers evaluate a business's commitment to corporate citizenship when making buying decisions. Out of 1,270 adult consumers surveyed in 2013, just 7 percent believe businesses only need to be concerned with their bottom line, and 88 percent are eager to hear how businesses are supporting social or environmental issues in some capacity. In addition, when buying products, 85 percent of consumers consider whether a business supports local communities. Showing consumers your commitment to doing good by supporting and upskilling your frontline workers can help your brand reap benefits.[25]

Millennials, who will comprise 75 percent of the global workforce by 2025, believe that a business's measure of success should be more than just its financial performance, with a focus on improving society among the most important goals it should seek to achieve.[26] In fact, 70 percent of Millennials surveyed consider a business's commitment to the community in their decision to work there.[27] Retain your younger workers by showing them you're committed to addressing this critical issue facing our nation.

Millennials value an organization's commitment to corporate citizenship as much as two times more than their predecessors do.[28]

Baby Boomers — 13%   Generation X — 24%   Millennials — 32%
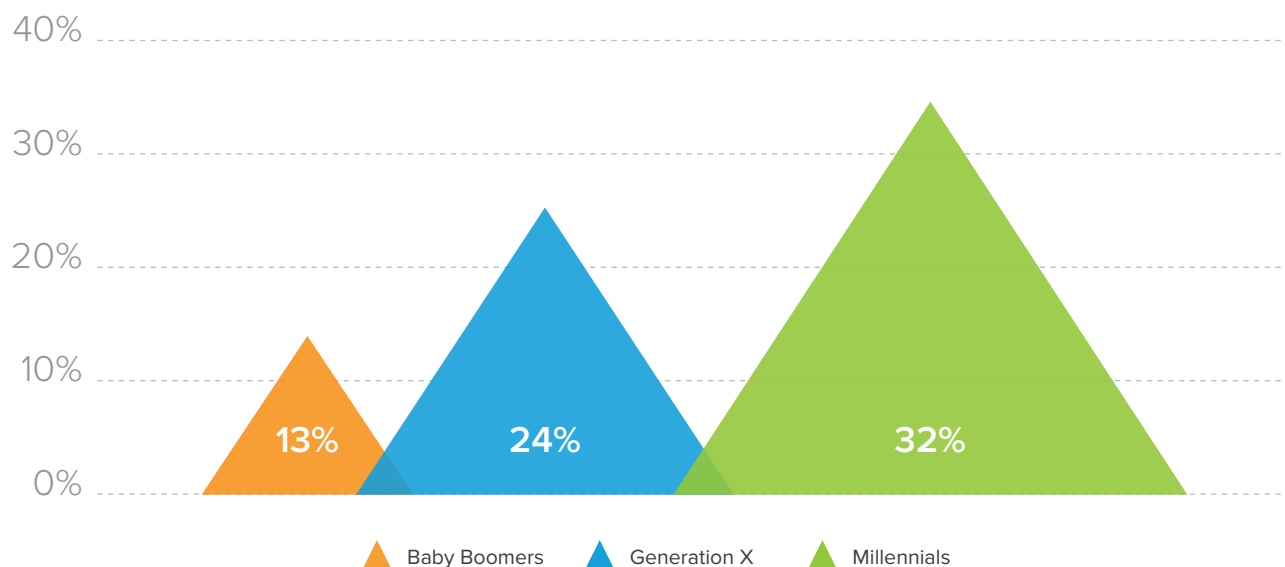
As employers continue to face extraordinary competition for top talent, establishing your organization as an employer of choice is more critical than ever. Leading organizations are already using talent development programs and career paths to develop and retain multifaceted talent and build a competitive talent brand. In fact, more than executives, employees are growing in credibility with customers,[29] so engaging and empowering your employees to become ambassadors may be one of your best channels for building your brand — and your business. Organizations with high employee engagement levels have 3.9 times earnings per share compared to competitors within their industry.[30]

Organizational culture is among the top HR concern for leaders these days.[31] Disengaged employees have a lower productivity level and on average take 11 more sick days per year than their engaged counterparts, costing employers an average of $1,815 per employee each year.[32] By focusing on upskilling initiatives, your organization can create a culture in which employees feel empowered and recognized as an important part of achieving your organization's goals. By fostering employee engagement, your organization can build commitment, increase retention, provide a sense of community, and drive business results. Losing employees is costly and time consuming — research has shown that the average cost of replacing an employee can reach as much as two times their salary.[33] By providing clear career pathways and the training and development that will move employees along this path, you could go beyond employee engagement and create an employee for life.

In short, engaged employees provide a bigger bang for your buck by producing more while costing you less.

UPSKILLING IN ACTION: HEALTH CARE

Since 2005, a large retailer and health care company has placed more than 1,500 colleagues in Registered Apprenticeship career tracks in retail pharmacy and management and is committed to doubling that number over the next five years. As the first employer to launch a US Department of Labor Registered Apprenticeship program for pharmacy technicians, the company considers it part of its overarching mission to prepare the workforce it needs for its stores and pharmacies and an expansion of the clinics it operates across the country. A senior business leader who focuses on workforce development strategies for the organization has recognized that apprenticeship programs are a powerful tool, benefiting both the apprentice and the organization. Participants of the apprenticeship program receive hands-on experience, industry-recognized credentials, and, in some instances, college credit, while the organization itself develops a pipeline of talented and skilled employees needed to fill current and future roles.

ISSUE	ACTION	OUTCOME
− Rapid growth − Unfilled roles	− Doubled apprenticeship program	− Met organizational growth and expansion needs − Achieved better prepared and skilled workforce − Created steady pipeline of talented and skilled employees to fill existing and imminent job openings

UNDERSTANDING AND ASSESSING YOUR UPSKILLING ABILITIES

A MATURITY MODEL: ASSESS YOUR ABILITY TO UPSKILL YOUR FRONTLINE WORKERS

Before you make a change in your organization, you should know where you stand. Deloitte has developed a maturity model related to skill growth and career advancement of frontline workers. Our model is the result of research and conversations with government representatives, educators, and employers who are leading the field in this area along with feedback from coalition organizations that are regarded as experts in this field. The model describes three maturity levels — basic, progressive, and leading — and provides descriptions at each level to guide you in finding your place on the spectrum.

BASIC

A stage in which a strategy, process, or program is undocumented or first coming into existence, and/or driven in an ad hoc or reactive way.

"We have a few programs and/or are just starting to develop them."

PROGRESSIVE

A stage in which a strategy, process, or program is standardized, produces consistent results, and improves over time.

"We have documented programs in place and are improving them."

LEADING

A stage in which a strategy, process, or program continually improves efficiency, effectiveness, results, and quality through incremental and innovative enhancements.

"We have innovative and data-driven programs or practices."

HOW TO USE THE MODEL

1. Examine your skills development and career advancement practices for upskilling frontline workers.
2. Determine where your organization currently falls along the maturity continuum, and where you'd like to be.
3. Use the behaviors and practices of leading maturity level organizations as a guide to advance along the continuum, noting the specific differences between your current

🌿 BUILT AROUND THREE CORE PILLARS

This maturity model is built around three core pillars: Foundational Components, Upskilling Initiatives, and Enablers and Tools.

Pillar 1: Foundational Components are building blocks that are fundamental for organizations to put in place prior to embarking on specific upskilling initiatives. These foundational components establish the beginning of the "upskilling journey" and include role definition, skills identification, and career paths.
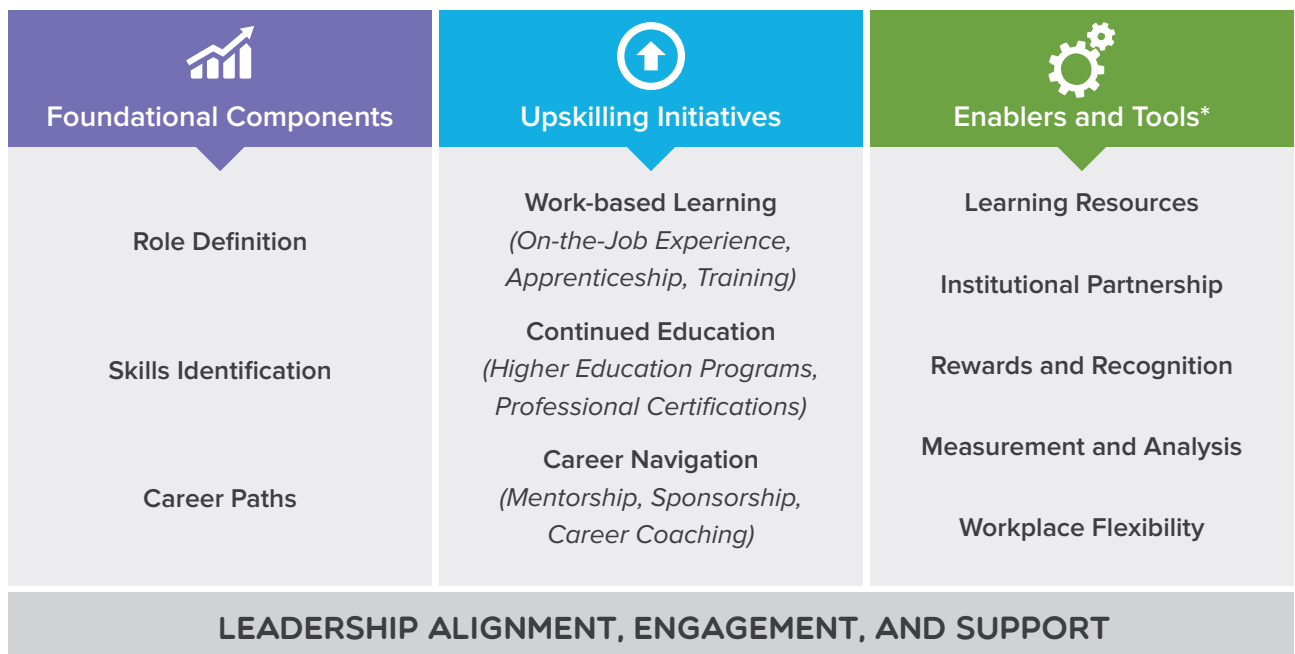
Pillar 2: Upskilling Initiatives are specific efforts to enhance the skills and advance the careers of frontline workers. These efforts fall into three broad categories: work-based learning, continued education, and career navigation. Each category contains numerous programs, varied in terms of their ease of implementation and resource requirements, that you can begin to implement.

Pillar 3: Enablers and Tools are internal practices, policies, or procedures that help you execute upskilling initiatives. This maturity model includes five enablers: learning resources, institutional partnerships, rewards and recognition, measurement and analysis, and workplace flexibility.

Underpinning the three core pillars is *Leadership Alignment, Engagement, and Support*, which refers to securing support at the highest levels of the organization and committing senior business leaders to champion and embed upskilling practices into the organization's culture.

Foundational Components	Upskilling Initiatives	Enablers and Tools*
Role Definition	Work-based Learning *(On-the-Job Experience, Apprenticeship, Training)*	Learning Resources
Skills Identification	Continued Education *(Higher Education Programs, Professional Certifications)*	Institutional Partnership
		Rewards and Recognition
Career Paths	Career Navigation *(Mentorship, Sponsorship, Career Coaching)*	Measurement and Analysis
		Workplace Flexibility

LEADERSHIP ALIGNMENT, ENGAGEMENT, AND SUPPORT

*Including applicable technology

PILLAR 1: FOUNDATIONAL COMPONENTS

Before deciding which upskilling initiatives to pursue, it is critical to assess the foundational components that lay the bedrock for an effective upskilling initiative.

ROLE DEFINITION

Is captured in profiles that provide up-to-date, accurate, and clear details of an employee's day-to-day responsibilities and requirements in a given role. These provide clarity for employees currently in the role as well as employees who desire to advance into the role.

SKILLS IDENTIFICATION

Refers to documentation of the skills, knowledge, or abilities expected of an employee to fulfill a particular role. This enables employees to analyze their skills against expected levels and plan development priorities.

CAREER PATHS

Are roadmaps that provide transparency by showing possible lateral or vertical career moves between different roles. These enable employees to explore possible career destinations and align their long-term goals with their skills, abilities, and development needs.

IDEAS FOR ACTION

1. Share this section with your HR or supervisory staff and ask for an assessment of where the company stands in the maturity model vis-à-vis role definition.
2. With HR or supervisory staff, identify 3 to 5 key skills among frontline occupations that are critical to the performance of your company's key roles. Survey frontline staff and supervisors to assess the prevalence and strength of these skills.
3. Identity any programs at community colleges or other workforce development organizations that develop and implement career pathways for workers in your industry. Call the program manager and ask how your company might get involved.

	BASIC ✓	**PROGRESSIVE** →	**LEADING** 📈
Role Definition *Creating accurate role profiles that clearly define the day-to-day jobs of your employees*	− Role definitions are generic in nature and are generally standard (or include minimal variations) across a function − Role definitions are not updated on a regular basis	− Role definitions articulate generic job requirements, expectations, and roles and responsibilities − Role definition are reviewed on a somewhat regular basis to align to business strategy and strategic priorities	− Roles are defined to drive and own business objectives, rather than day-to-day tasks − Role definitions are reviewed and updated on a regular basis to reflect changing business and work demands
Skills Identification *Understanding the capabilities and skill sets of your employees*	− Few skill requirements have been identified for jobs in the organization, and they have not been defined for each role − Skills terminology and definitions are specific to each role, as established by individual supervisors or managers − Expectations about skill requirements are communicated on a limited basis, but no formal mechanism is in place to facilitate consistent messaging	− Multiple skills matrices may exist for different groups, but they are disjointed and not linked to business strategy − Skills terminology and definitions are somewhat consistent within functions, but not across the entire organization − Shared understanding and awareness exists of how skills are tied to daily behaviors and linked to individual performance and achievement of business strategy − Skills assessment tools are available, but not consistently applied across the organization	− Skills matrix includes associated descriptions and behaviors, which are communicated to employees and managers to align performance expectations − Standard dictionary of skills exists and is used consistently (e.g., for job postings) throughout the entire organization − Skills are role-specific, future-oriented, and tailored to culture, vision, values, and strategy of the organization and have meaning for employees − Structured, validated skills assessments, including some that are technology enabled/games, are used by managers to determine skill training needs, and by employees to assist in career development planning

❓ HOW DO I IDENTIFY AND ASSESS THE SKILLS MY WORKERS HAVE?
The Employability Skills Framework is a one-stop resource for information and tools to inform the instruction and assessment of employability skills, defined as general skills that are necessary for success in the labor market at all employment levels and in all sectors.

As the nation's primary source of occupational information, the US Department of Labor's Occupational Information Network (O*NET) is a great place to begin any job skill analysis. Visit the Business Center and view the Testing and Assessment employer's guide.

	BASIC	**PROGRESSIVE**	**LEADING**
Career Paths *Providing a defined and realistic career lattice for employees to progress through the organization*	− Career paths exist informally; if formal programs exist, they are inconsistent in form and not mapped to learning/developmental assignments − Talent is mostly sourced externally to fill desired positions − Existing organizational norms and practices do not support active exploration of career advancement and growth; career discussions occur on an ad hoc basis	− Career paths are defined and clearly communicated − Tools that identify career paths are in place, but are not integrated within an overall HR information system that provides ability to match skills, career aspirations, and available developmental opportunities − Open positions are communicated to existing employees if external talent cannot be acquired − Career discussions are formalized and aligned with the annual performance process	− Career paths are consistent, well defined, and in place for pivotal roles across the organization, with a clear connection to other talent processes − Career paths are supported by various career development opportunities (e.g., apprenticeships, job rotation, task force committees, special assignments) − Career paths and internal mobility options are adjusted as needed based on changing internal/external conditions and business drivers − Business leaders provide visible support and are trained to have effective career planning discussions with

UPSKILLING IN ACTION: MANUFACTURING

Having survived years of harsh economic conditions, a small Midwestern industrial parts company was looking for a way to boost its workforce development strategy and find a new approach that would help ensure its future survival. The company began to cultivate a highly efficient and innovative workforce by cross-training its frontline workers. By clearly defining roles and the skills required for those roles, it created a skills matrix to identify each employee's skills and abilities. The company used this skills matrix to create pay incentives for additional training that would help advance frontline workers from one level to the next. Employees now earn as much as an additional $1 per hour or 5 to 10 percent of hourly pay for acquiring new skills. By emphasizing cross-training, the company has cultivated a highly efficient and productive workforce. It has experienced significant growth, resulting in part from increased product innovations, an outcome of the growing number of frontline workers who have in-depth knowledge of the functionality of multiple product lines and how various products satisfy customer needs.

ISSUE	ACTION	OUTCOME
− Economic pressures − Rapidly changing marketplace (e.g., regulatory changes)	− Cross-trained frontline workers − Defined roles − Developed skills matrix − Created pay incentives for additional training	− Cultivated a highly efficient and productive frontline workforce − Increased earnings by employees − Achieved organizational growth − Increased product innovations

A NOTE FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED EMPLOYERS

Although there are frequent mentions of the HR and Learning functions in this document, the concepts still apply even if your organization does not have these specific functions. Take a broad look at the recommendations and practices, rather than focusing on ownership, and prioritizing your upskilling efforts to help manage time and resource constraints.

Before you start thinking about programs and initiatives to upskill your frontline workers, you should **understand the skills your employees already have**. Having the knowledge of both the current skill sets and associated needs will help you lay a foundation for subsequent upskilling initiatives. To get started, think about the following as you evaluate the skill sets in your organization.

CONNECT WITH AMERICA'S SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTERS (SBDCs)

There are more than 900 local SBDCs throughout the United States that offer free business advising, mentoring, and training classes to help business owners improve management skills and business profitability. For more information, visit CareerOneStop's Small Business Development Centers page.

Consider your business goals: To determine the skills your organization needs, first think about your business objectives. Then, understand how each of the roles within your organization helps achieve those objectives. Finally, what are the skills needed to deliver effective performance in each role?

Collect and analyze data: Work with your functional leaders to create a skills inventory (paper-based, online survey, etc.) to document the skills needed for each role within your organization. Then evaluate the skills your employees currently have against the skills needed. Interpret the data and report on critical skills gaps, including areas such as soft skills, customer service skills, technical competencies, and the like.

UPSKILLING IN ACTION: UTILITY

Utility companies across the country continue to face a shortage of skilled workers. One utility company responded to this challenge by establishing a career development program clearly laying out various career paths for its employees and ensuring that training and development initiatives are in place to train the next generation of workers. The organization has enlisted the collaboration of local community colleges, the public workforce development system, and unions to increase the talent pool of qualified candidates for frontline positions. This program is recognized by a national energy organization as a leading practice program. The organization has gone one step further and set an ambitious goal of filling 75 percent of management vacancies over the next five years from within the firm, up from the current rate of 60 percent. This initiative is intended to provide frontline workers with the opportunity for real upward mobility and growth. One program in particular is a leadership development program that leverages the success of programs originally designed for more senior-level leaders. Participants learn about the firm's core business priorities and build their leadership effectiveness through self-assessments, on-the-job experience, education, coaching, and feedback.

ISSUE	ACTION	OUTCOME
− Shortage of skilled workers	− Developed career paths − Introduced new training and development programs − Initiated collaboration with community colleges	− Increased employee awareness of business priorities − Fulfilled vacant roles − Increased opportunities for upward mobility and growth for frontline workers − Earned industry "leading practice" program recognition

John had spent more than five years working on an assembly line, doing repair work for a shipping company. For the last few years, he had been thinking about returning to school to complete high school and earn his GED. He wanted to improve his skills and to have better opportunities for a higher paying job that he could use to support his family, but was caught in a tough situation. In order to return to school, he would have to cut back on his work hours, which would mean less money for him and his family. He was nervous about how well he would be able to navigate a return to school. A conversation with his manager revealed that John's organization had a program that supported employees who wanted to return to school. As John studied to pass the GED exams, his manager informed him about other certifications and technical training that he could also work toward, many of which were also supported by his organization. After earning his GED, John pursued a technical certification and learned of the associated career paths that were now available to him. With coaching from his manager, he was able to map out a career path and the steps he would need to take to reach his goal, starting with a promotion to a new job. In his first year on the new job, John gained a 12 percent pay raise and was on track to receive another promotion within the next two years. Importantly, the path for how he would get there was clear and felt manageable to him.

Foundational
Components

Upskilling
Initiatives

Enablers and
Tools

PILLAR 2: UPSKILLING INITIATIVES

The upskilling initiatives have been segmented into three broad categories.

WORK-BASED LEARNING

Consists of structured learning that occurs at the workplace and includes:

- On-the-job experience
- Apprenticeship
- Training

CONTINUED EDUCATION

Consists of post-secondary learning activities and programs and includes:

- Higher education programs
- Professional certifications

CAREER NAVIGATION

Consists of providing guidance, assistance, and advocacy for employees to find the most suitable opportunities for skills development and career planning purposes. It includes:

- Mentorship
- Sponsorship
- Career coaching

ONLINE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO YOU

Visit CareerOneStop's searchable database of local training programs to find community colleges, four-year colleges, universities, and skill training programs in your local area.

Visit CareerOneStop's Program Finder for information about education and training programs funded by the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) Program.[34]

		BASIC	PROGRESSIVE	LEADING
Work-based Learning *Providing employees opportunities such as on-the-job training and apprenticeship as means to learn and develop*	**On-the-Job Experience** *On-the-job experiences that complement and supplement the career development provided in formal programs*	− On-the-job experience is an informal development opportunity focused on manager-employee and peer-to-peer learning (e.g., answering questions) − Learning and development includes some blended formal learning options and experiential learning (e.g., case studies, simulations) − Participants are provided with sufficient foundation to support a successful experience (e.g., learning objectives, learning activities)	− Informal on-the-job experience is intentionally communicated to managers as means to develop their employees; they are encouraged to provide guidance, mentor, answer questions, etc. − Assignment-based learning is included in career development plans for staff − Ongoing on-the-job learning is supported by micro learning opportunities such as videos, job aids, and social collaboration sites	− On-the-job experience is a critical aspect of employee talent programs and development plans, and is structured based on defined competencies − Organization encourages a variety of informal on-the-job learning options (e.g., feedback, networking, stretch assignments) as well as opportunities to demonstrate what employees are able to do, regardless of where or how they learned it − Employees are allowed and encouraged to collaborate and generate on-demand content via new technologies that enable peer-to-peer learning
	Apprenticeship *Upskilling employees through a combination of on-the-job training and related instruction under the supervision of a seasoned worker*	− Apprenticeships are not a standard practice within the organization, though internships are available − Skills that will be delivered by the apprenticeship are not clearly defined or communicated	− A registered apprenticeship program exists, but is in pilot mode, not yet tied to business or talent strategies − An apprenticeship program exists, but only used for a few traditional occupations − Skills that will be delivered by the apprenticeship are defined based on organization-specific needs, and not tied to any industry standards	− Registered apprenticeship program is designed to meet job and business needs, and is widely used throughout the organization in a variety of occupations − Delivery of apprenticeship is planned to suit the employee and supervisor (e.g., work flexibility, open learning) − Program embeds industry-recognized skills certifications and results in a Certificate of Completion issued by US Department of Labor upon program completion

		BASIC	PROGRESSIVE	LEADING
Work-based Learning (continued) *Providing employees opportunities such as on-the-job training and apprenticeship as means to learn and develop*	**Training** *Teaching employees new skills and capabilities through in-person and online mediums*	− Training is focused on equipping employee to effectively and safely perform day-to-day tasks − Training is offered on a reactive or unstructured basis − Ad hoc collaboration between the learning organization and the business − No standard platform for sharing knowledge content	− Training is focused on developing employee skill sets beyond what is required for their current job type or role, and can be somewhat personalized to address an employee's unique needs (including foundational skills such as literacy, numeracy, and communication) − An organization-wide training curriculum exists and is reviewed regularly against training needs analysis − Training is coordinated by a role in the organization (e.g., Learning, HR, Operations), but may not be consistently used throughout the organization − Content sharing platform exists, but is not widely known or leveraged	− Training is focused on providing employees with long-term, transferrable skills that are valued both in the organization and in the marketplace − Training occurs with purpose to create a continuous pipeline of talent (e.g., to allow backfilling of positions) − Integrated training curriculum that aligns to organizational, functional, and role-based learning needs − Training is linked to performance objectives and business requirements − Learning platform supports on-demand employee access to content, including new apps and mobile technologies that enable workers to learn on the go and track employees' progress and scores
Continued Education *Supporting the learning and development of your employees through their pursuit of higher education, training, or professional certifications*	**Higher Education Programs** *Structured initiatives that actively support employees attaining higher education degrees*	− No formal policy to support employees pursuing continued education opportunities (e.g., degrees, training certificates) − Limited collaboration between learning organizations and the business to communicate learning needs	− Programs exist for employees to pursue continued education, but they are not widely or consistently used, tracked, or communicated to employees; criteria to enroll in program are not defined − Tuition for programs is reimbursed to employee after they complete course(s), and only if they do so on a specific time frame and meeting specific grade requirements − Functions share business needs with the learning organization as they arise, or on an ad hoc basis − Employees may not be able to have costs such as books or necessary assessments covered by the higher education benefits	− Flexible education programs support employees through the attainment of degrees and certifications, including prior learning assessments that award credit for prior learning and accelerate the path towards a credential or degree − Tuition for programs is provided to employee or directly to institution; employee does not need to provide tuition funds up front − Functions and learning organization regularly communicate in real-time to consistently convey business needs and influence higher education programming − Employees can use benefits on all necessary school-related expenses, including books and supplies

		BASIC	PROGRESSIVE	LEADING
Continued Education (continued) *Supporting the learning and development of your employees through their pursuit of higher education, training, or professional certifications*	**Professional Certifications** *Recognizing and supporting employees who gain industry-specific certifications*	− Professional certifications are based on completion of courses relating to a specific skill or role; they are company-specific (e.g., internal badges) and not recognized within the marketplace − Professional certifications are not considered a key evaluation criteria in the employee hiring process or factored into promotion or career advancement decisions	− Professional certifications are focused on a standard set of employee skills, and employees can earn a credential or certification that is valued by multiple employers in the industry, while on the job − Professional certifications are considered a key evaluation criteria in the employee hiring process, but are not factored into promotion or career advancement decisions − Professional certifications are somewhat mapped to role and integrated with employee learning and development plans	− Professional certifications are focused on exhibited capabilities and ability to do the job rather than routine "check the box" exercises; they are an accurate signal of ability − Employees who gain industry-recognized certifications are recognized during performance reviews and encouraged to continually develop and expand their credentials − Business leaders engage with relevant industry associations to develop standard, industry-wide certifications that are valued by multiple employers

APPRENTICESHIP RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO YOU

Apprenticeships offer a proven, high-caliber training strategy for workers to learn the skills that employers need for American businesses to grow and thrive in a competitive global environment. Customizable and flexible Registered Apprenticeship programs can match employers' changing demands. Find quick facts on apprenticeship.

The US Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship works in conjunction with State Apprenticeship Agencies to administer the Registered Apprenticeship system nationally. Download a Registered Apprenticeship Quick-Start Toolkit, your guide to building a registered apprenticeship program.

Learn more about ApprenticeshipUSA, which offers employers in every industry the tools to develop a highly skilled workforce to help grow their business.

What is the Registered Apprenticeship-College Consortium (RACC)?
The RACC is composed of employers, labor management groups, and associations that have Registered Apprenticeship programs (known as sponsors) and two- and four- year postsecondary institutions. The classroom instruction for apprenticeship can be taught by a community college (for credit), by a career and technical education provider, or by other trained professional educators.

		BASIC	PROGRESSIVE	LEADING
Career Navigation *Providing employees with guidance and support to help them navigate their careers and company politics*	**Mentorship** *Focusing on the professional and personal development of employees by means of a role model who provides feedback and advice*	− Mentorship is an informal process that is most often initiated and managed by the employee, rather than by HR or management − Employees can start their own employee resource groups, but no formal organization or structure exists	− Formal mentor/mentee relationships exist, as determined by the functional leaders, but no overarching program is in place − Formal employee resource groups exist, but only in limited locations and/or focused on very limited topic areas	− Mentorship program is institutionalized across the organization and is focused on both personal and professional development − Employer offers online and technology-enabled tools for personally connecting mentors and mentees based on shared interest and unique potential to benefit one another − Formal employee resource groups are plentiful and widely used across the organization
	Sponsorship *A platform that high-performing employees can use to earn stretch assignments and potentially accelerate their development and promotion time frames*	− Informal sponsorship awareness training exists on an ad hoc basis and is available to limited parts of the organization − Organization fosters sponsorship relationships by creating informal opportunities for leaders to engage with high-potential talent − Informal understanding of sponsorship as a leadership behavior exists within one or more functions, but is not a documented leadership behavior across organization	− Formal sponsorship awareness training is available and required across the organization − Organization creates both informal and formal programmatic exposure opportunities between leaders and high-potential talent; specific organizational focus/programs exist to expose leaders to diverse talent − Sponsorship is a consistent and documented behavior within functions and across organization	− Sponsorship dynamic is well-understood across the organization and a key component of employees' learning and development − Leaders and protégés regularly and proactively leverage informal and formal exposure opportunities to form sponsorship relationships − Sponsorship is a required behavior for advancement at leadership levels across the organization
	Career Coaching *The process of working with employees to help assess their talents and provide performance feedback*	− General guidelines are provided, but no formal programs exist to support career coaching − Informal coaches exist in some business units or functions to help employees identify their development needs	− Formal coaching program exists to support career development; organization sponsors regular conferences and other events intended to promote awareness of and strategies for effective career coaching − Leaders are trained to have effective career planning discussions with their direct reports	− Application of an integrated learning approach that institutionalizes support networks (i.e., coaching) across the organization − Biannual coaching check-ins are conducted to evaluate employee goals and provide guidance and feedback − Feedback from career coaches to leadership is reviewed regularly and incorporated into talent strategy − Online resources and tools enable employees to self-assess their strengths and suggest potential career guidance

MENTORSHIP PROGRAM FAQS

What is a mentorship program?	A mentorship program is a powerful personal development tool and an effective way of helping workers advance in their careers. The program pairs a mentor with a mentee to focus on overall engagement and professional development, with a focus on networking and emotional support for the mentee.
What is a mentor?	A seasoned role model who shares knowledge and advice to help the mentee grow professionally
What is a mentee?	An employee who is interested in growing personally and professionally within the workplace, and is seeking new development and networking opportunities
At what stage of the career life cycle is it most important to have a mentor?	Mentorship is most important to those at the junior to middle management levels
What is the preferred level of a mentor?	• Mentors can be at any level of the hierarchy within the organization • Peer-level mentors are becoming increasingly popular • Mentors can also come from other companies or external organizations
How many mentors should an employee have?	Employers can have one or more mentors. Mentors can mentor one or many simultaneously.
What is the primary function of a mentor?	• Provide emotional support, feedback, advice • Help navigate corporate politics • Focus on personal and professional development • Serve as role model

HOW TO DERIVE VALUE FROM TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS (TAPs)

For years, many organizations saw tuition assistance programs (TAPs) as a benefit, a way of retaining employees but not a way for growing talent. That perception is changing. Organizations are increasingly aligning tuition assistance with their talent management strategies (86 percent in 2012), targeting investments toward skills needed by the organization. Contrary to popular belief, the majority of employees who participate in a TAP do not leave their organizations; 71 percent of organizations surveyed reported that the majority of TAP graduates stay with the company in the year following graduation.[35]

Leading TAP practices:
1. Align tuition assistance with the organization's talent strategy.
2. Leverage tuition assistance in support of learning and development objectives.
3. Centralize the program.
4. Establish and maintain an agile program management approach.
5. Maintain strong executive engagement.
6. Promote the program to key stakeholders.
7. Celebrate employee achievements gained through tuition assistance.
8. Develop a comprehensive top-down, bottom-up budgeting process.
9. Enter into strategic partnerships and alliances with schools.
10. Develop and deploy a comprehensive program evaluation system.
11. Use program design to drive participation among frontline workers, for example, by paying for tuition up front instead of on a reimbursement basis.

A confluence of events, including the push for college completion, has created momentum for Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), which is intended to help students earn credits faster and at a lower cost, as well as significantly contribute to students' ongoing progress – or persistence – toward a degree.[36]

UPSKILLING IN ACTION: MANUFACTURING

A small Midwestern organization that supplies parts for use in commercial construction and hardware manufacturing recently implemented innovative employment practices to upskill its frontline workers. The organization offers new employees an 8,000-hour apprenticeship program with a curriculum that is overseen and approved by a national certifying organization. The initial apprenticeship focused on one of the three available career ladders within the organization. Within each ladder, frontline workers acquired a range of knowledge, skills, and abilities, including mathematics, reading, technical drawing, measurement, and safety. They also had the opportunity to receive training on their written and oral communication and interpersonal skills. Forty percent of workers have now achieved a top-level certification and are able to apply for recertification according to government standards every two years. The organization invested an average of 5.5 percent of its payroll on workforce development. As workers upgraded their skills, they were able to earn 15 to 20 percent more than the national average.

ISSUE	ACTION	OUTCOME
− Address increased market competitiveness − Sustain continued growth	− Provided clarity to career ladders available to employees − Offered apprenticeship program − Provided training on needed skills (e.g., communication)	− Frontline workforce achieved top-level certification − Increased earnings by employees

A NOTE FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED EMPLOYERS

Small to medium-sized enterprises face some particular training challenges. For one, training expenditures may be determined in large part by the professional requirements of the government or the industry itself. Some companies may not have as much flexibility to determine the training initiative they want to focus on, because training may be dictated by regulation or industry requirements.

Another challenge is reliance on institutional partnerships. Small and medium-sized businesses generally do not have the resources or capacity to provide in-house training, or even a dedicated HR function. This translates to a heavier reliance on external resources to plan and deliver training – government, partners, industry associations, and others. The good news is that some great resources are available. A good place to start is your sector's trade association, which may have "turnkey" resources such as learning curricula and industry-standard capabilities that you can leverage. Also, the UpSkill America initiative provides numerous resources in terms of financial incentives, training, and educational partnerships as well as tools to help small and medium-sized business adopt upskilling initiatives. This handbook is just the starting point.

A large global American clothing retailer has dedicated training dollars to providing its frontline workers with continuing education opportunities while employees continue to earn a paycheck in its stores. The company understands that many of its frontline workers come to it straight out of high school and then feel they are unable to leave to pursue further training or education because they are earning a basic living and may have a family to support. Flexible college programs help the organization both retain high-potential employees and further develop and engage them. The response has been strong and favorable. Employees who have had the opportunity to further their education without giving up their weekly paycheck are seeking to build their careers within the organization, and senior leaders are acting on that interest and engagement, holding conversations with promising frontline workers about possible career paths toward leadership and management positions. The company has integrated this new initiative with an existing career advancement and management program, resulting in opportunities for hundreds of emerging leaders this year, and paving the way for thousands in the years ahead. These efforts complement the company's ongoing commitment to supporting the development of job and life skills for thousands of frontline workers of diverse backgrounds to get hired and succeed in the job market.

ISSUE	ACTION	OUTCOME
− Low employee engagement − Retention challenges	− Provided continued education opportunities − Provided mentorship to employees	− Improved employee engagement − Retained talent − Sustained organization commitment to frontline workforce

Directly out of high school, Carol started working for a small but growing company that specialized in printing t-shirts for special occasions. She was quickly identified as someone with a bright personality and optimistic outlook, and over the years assumed many informal leadership roles. But her lack of a college degree was holding her back from a formal supervisory role. When an email from HR alerted her to a new company tuition assistance program, Carol ignored it at first; she had looked at the policy years ago and knew she still couldn't afford the program. Later, as she was cleaning out her inbox, she decided to learn more about the new program. She looks back on that day as a life-altering moment. At the meeting, Carol discovered that her company had partnered with a continuing education program, which would fund her entire education, provided she remained engaged and active in the program. Having completed her associate's degree, Carol is now on her way to earning a full bachelor's degree in business administration. She made a lateral career move to a more customer-facing role, giving her the interaction she desired. Her salary also increased, and she was well-informed about a number of roles that would be available to her upon completion of her degree. Carol highlights the importance of the organizational support she received, the camaraderie with her colleagues who also enrolled in the same program, and the one-on-one career coaching she received as a large part of what made her upskilling journey manageable. She says she has recommended the program to others, and has become a true brand ambassador for her small but growing organization.

IDEAS FOR ACTION

1. Form a working group composed of a few managers who have successfully advanced from frontline positions. Ask them to identify a frontline employee assignment or job rotation strategy that would equip these workers with the skills and experiences that enable them to grow and develop within the company.
2. Contact the apprenticeship office in your state to explore options for establishing or growing an apprenticeship effort in your company.
3. Consider how marketing or plan design might increase frontline workers' use of tuition assistance benefits.

PILLAR 3: ENABLERS AND TOOLS

We have identified five enablers and tools that are important to consider when planning your upskilling initiatives. Certain enablers may be more relevant depending on your organization size, industry, resource availability, and the maturity of your upskilling initiatives.

LEARNING RESOURCES

Online learning databases, access to training videos, an employee intranet, books, training equipment, and facilities are just some of the resources that enable upskilling initiatives.

INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Universities, colleges, trade and technical schools, and community colleges can provide a range of training and bring the added benefit of providing qualifications and certifications. Employers can offer to subsidize or cover the cost of education or training. Depending on the requirement (and the size of the company), these institutions may be able to work with your organization to develop customized educational programs.

REWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Rewarding and recognizing employees for behaviors such as exceptional service, consistent attendance, and positive contributions, among others, help enable upskilling initiatives by creating an environment in which employees feel seen, heard, and part of the effort to contribute to the organization's larger goals and mission.

MEASUREMENT AND ANALYSIS

A well thought-out system of tracking and analyzing the impacts of upskilling initiatives is essential to creating sustainable initiatives. Tracking initial measures, both before new intervention and after the intervention has had time to take root, is an important method for uncovering the intended and unintended consequences of various upskilling initiatives.

WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY

Granting employees the ability to stay clocked in while completing course credits and training initiatives, along with providing a higher level of flexibility and predictability in work scheduling, allows frontline workers to focus their attention during training without feeling the pressures of maintaining working hours to earn a sufficient living. Also helpful is making online content that could be relevant to employees interested in pursuing more senior roles freely available for them to access at their convenience.

	BASIC	PROGRESSIVE	LEADING
Learning Resources *The enabling tools, technologies, and resources used to support the learning and development of your employees*	− Learning consists of a number of training courses available in a one-size-fits-all format with few internally designed programs supported minimally by technology − A general learning strategy exists, but learning staff do not translate or adapt it to meet the specific needs of the business − Learning organization consists of generalists and functional specialists and is mainly an administrator of learning services	− Learning consists of a suite of interconnected training courses available in various formats (i.e., classroom, online, blended) that are available across the organization − Learning strategy is in place that supports value drivers and enhances business performance − Learning staff are developing into strategic advisers to the business, centers of excellence are developing for strategic areas, and most learning administration is centralized	− A broad learning program and learning management system (LMS) is in place to manage personalized development plans that are tied to performance management − Learning strategy is integrated into talent processes, leveraging job profiles and skills frameworks, and is effective in helping the organization achieve short- and long-term business strategies − Learning organization is focused on business improvement and value creation; broad-based centers of excellence are in place for program and policy development
Institutional Partnerships *Relationships with local, regional, or national learning institutions*	− Relationships with local, regional, or national learning institutions are informal and used as a talent pipeline source (e.g., recruiting) − Any partnerships with local learning institutions do not encompass tuition discounts for employees − External learning opportunities are pursued on a case-by-case basis	− Awareness of national and local learning institutions exist, and they are used on a regular basis as a recruiting source, and as learning and development needs arise − Some partnerships with learning institutions enable employees to receive tuition savings above and beyond the employer's higher education benefit − Job-driven training partnerships with a few learning institutions are established to provide learning opportunities to employees; engagement on learning curricula is infrequent	− Broad partnerships with learning institutions are used to complement and enhance the organization's learning and development strategy − Partnerships with learning institutions result in significantly reduced tuition in addition to employer benefits − Frequent and ongoing feedback is provided to help define the learning curriculum and tailor it to unique workforce needs; employees are getting credit for what they already know and learning the exact skills they need to succeed at the company
Rewards and Recognition *Recognizing your employees for the efforts they make to learn new skills*	− Recognition or rewards for additional certifications achieved through training or higher education are presented on an infrequent and case-by-case basis − Recognition is awarded in formats that are valuable within the company (e.g., employee of the month) − A promotion process exists and is dependent on employee seniority, rather than on defined skills needed for the next career level	− A formal incentive process in place for employees who achieve professional, industry-recognized certifications, but it is managed at the functional level − Recognition is awarded in a variety of financial and other formats, based on the most valued incentives by employees − Promotion decisions are based on weighted criteria that favor skill levels and career development potential	− Attainment of higher degrees, professional certifications, or completion of training courses are rewarded and consistently recognized and communicated to employees during the performance review process − Recognition is awarded in formats that are transferable, and that employees could relay to future employers (e.g., new title, increased wages) − Promotion decision guidelines are in place that include skills-based performance criteria, including skills learned on the job as well as professional

	BASIC	PROGRESSIVE	LEADING
Measurement and Analysis *Actively and regularly tracking the metrics within your learning organization and understanding the effect they have on employee performance*	– Learning and development data is tracked using spreadsheets and home-grown databases, but no formal or systematic approach to evaluating contribution of learning to the organization exists – Measures to monitor and evaluate learning are effective; impact to the overall business is not established at every function	– Tracking of course offerings and training metrics (e.g., training hours per year) by division and business unit exists, but not formally shared across the organization – Learning metrics (e.g., learner participation) are tracked, recognized, and monitored by leaders, with some impact to business results and accountability	– Metrics of learning program are clearly defined and centrally managed across business units; training evaluation is part of continuous improvement process that tracks trends and areas of improvement – A clear link exists between learning objectives and achievement of "value-based" outcomes – Predictive analytics and other learning metrics are used to make decisions about learning investments, and are shared across the organization
Workplace Flexibility *Promoting a flexible and predictable work culture so that your employees can pursue extracurricular learning opportunities*	– Workplace flexibility programs are provided to accommodate non-work-related education opportunities on an ad hoc basis and approved by individual managers	– Formal policies are in place to provide employees with schedule flexibility and are managed at the functional level by local HR leaders	– Workplace flexibility strategy and program is in place and widely used by employees pursuing higher education; program is employee-led and supervised by oversight committee or management to ensure fairness and equal opportunity – Work flexibility is a key part of the organization's learning and development strategy

UPSKILLING IN ACTION: FOOD AND BEVERAGE

A large restaurateur is putting upskilling initiatives to use to increase employee engagement and keep the business moving forward. While the organization has long offered tuition reimbursement programs for its staff, it recognizes that tuition assistance is most valuable when employees pursue education that is engaging and that also provides a good return on investment for the organization. Challenged by the high cost of private educational institutions, the organization has had to rethink its continuing education strategy. In partnering with a local community college, the organization was able to provide frontline workers with relevant, high-quality education that serves both the employees and the organization. The community college program helped to equip employees with the skills, tools, and knowledge they could immediately apply on the job, and the program itself quickly became a tool that employees use to share knowledge and experiences with their peers. The organization in turn experienced immediate returns on its education investment. Employees felt engaged and invested in the organization and willing to go the extra mile.

ISSUE	ACTION	OUTCOME
− Low employee engagement − Retention challenges	− Continued to offer tuition reimbursement − Reformulated continuing education strategy − Partnered with a local community college to provide job-relevant education	− Equipped employees with needed skills − Applied new skills on the job immediately − Improved employee engagement

A NOTE FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED EMPLOYERS

Some organizations may not have the resources available to focus on all, or any, of the enablers and tools described above. For organizations where this is the case, we offer these suggestions.

1. *Learning is fluid:* Even if your organization does not have modern learning technologies or a dedicated learning function, you can still make efforts to upskill your employees on the job. Use existing "technology" such as simple spreadsheets to document skills and mastery. Consider using free online training tools, such as Khan Academy, to offer your employees the opportunity to learn new skills. Connect with other employers, or seek out intermediaries that can facilitate connections to other employers, with similar training needs to purchase customized training together.

2. *Rewards are not always financial:* If your organization does not have the resources to reward your employees financially for achieving higher education degrees or certifications, think about alternative employee recognition initiatives that you can leverage. Creating an employee of the month award, highlighting accomplishments in newsletters, or creating a plaque for employees who make efforts to increase their skills are simple, yet effective means to increase employee morale and encourage your staff to continue upskilling.

3. *Flexibility is key:* Flexibility can be challenging, especially for small organizations. There are ways to provide flexible working conditions while limiting business disruptions. For example, if standard work hours cannot be shifted due to resource limitations, consider allowing your employees to work from home or from a satellite office on certain days. Or, evaluate when, where, and how work is accomplished in your organization, and use that information to determine whether other flexible working arrangements, such as compressed work weeks, may be beneficial.
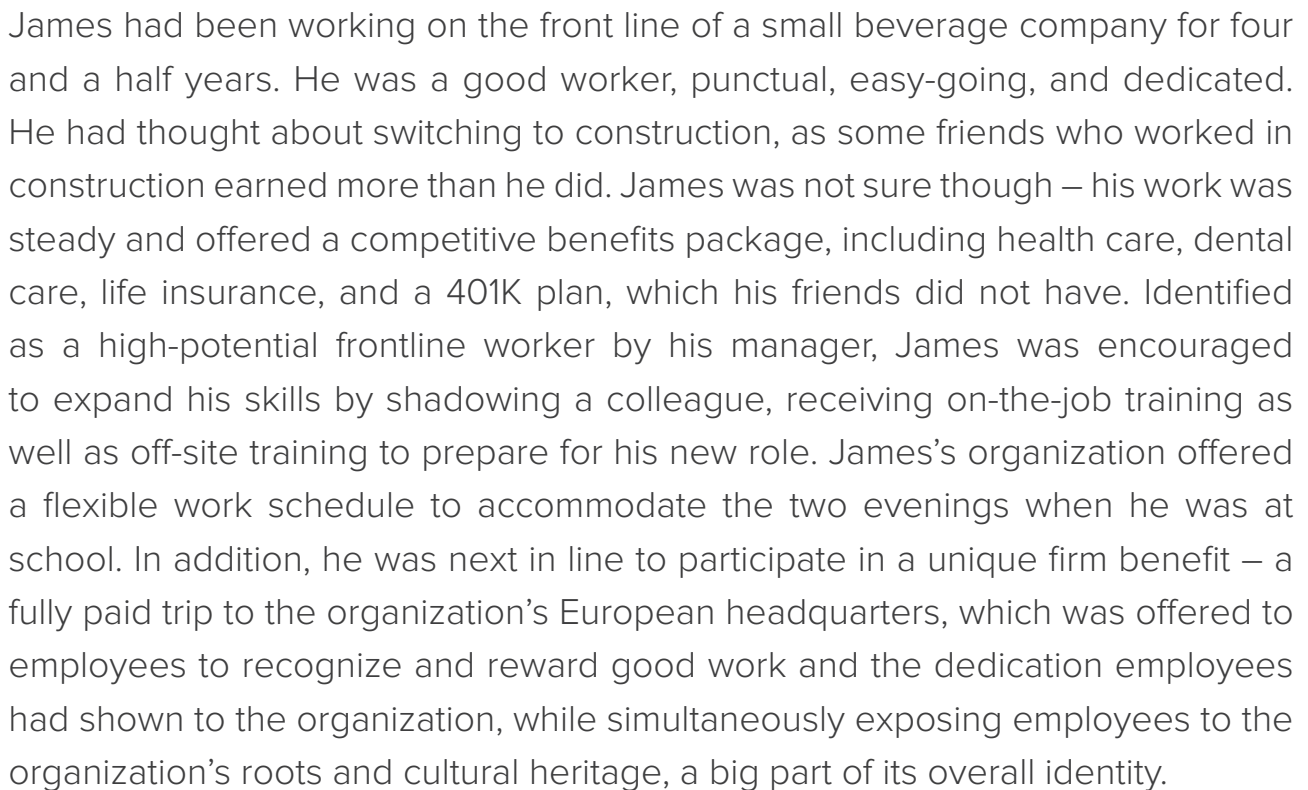
While there are no specific federal laws that provide for the right to request a flexible schedule or the right to receive one, states and local communities have enacted policies regarding job scheduling for employees. The organization Better Workplaces, Better Business serves as a useful resource for employers who want to learn more to provide better workplace scheduling to enhance and support their upskilling initiatives.

UPSKILLING IN ACTION: IT MANUFACTURING

An IT manufacturing organization launched an in-house training program to allow its frontline workers to earn up to four different certifications, which if completed in full would allow workers to earn a certified industry-recognized technical credential. As interest in the training grew among workers, the organization partnered with a nearby state college to deliver the training. A wide variety of flexible options were offered to workers to enable them to attend the training – workers were able to attend classes two nights per week, watch a live broadcast using a phone-in connection, or view previously taped broadcasts over the Internet. This flexibility allowed workers to take advantage of training based on the times that fit with their work and life schedules. The cost of the program was shared among the organization, the state, and a federal funding grant. To increase the application and transfer of training to on-the-job roles, the organization recently instituted a mentor program so that graduates were able to provide support to their colleagues who were still in training. This not only increased the learning impact for those placed in mentorship roles, but also had the added benefit of boosting confidence and engagement among both mentors and learners.

ISSUE	ACTION	OUTCOME
– Need for higher skilled workers – Need to address training demands by employees	– Launched in-house training program – Introduced flexible schedules – Introduced mentorship program	– Employees achieved industry-recognized technical credentials – Increased participation in training programs – Increased level of career support provided to frontline workforce – Increased confidence levels and employee engagement

James had been working on the front line of a small beverage company for four and a half years. He was a good worker, punctual, easy-going, and dedicated. He had thought about switching to construction, as some friends who worked in construction earned more than he did. James was not sure though – his work was steady and offered a competitive benefits package, including health care, dental care, life insurance, and a 401K plan, which his friends did not have. Identified as a high-potential frontline worker by his manager, James was encouraged to expand his skills by shadowing a colleague, receiving on-the-job training as well as off-site training to prepare for his new role. James's organization offered a flexible work schedule to accommodate the two evenings when he was at school. In addition, he was next in line to participate in a unique firm benefit – a fully paid trip to the organization's European headquarters, which was offered to employees to recognize and reward good work and the dedication employees had shown to the organization, while simultaneously exposing employees to the organization's roots and cultural heritage, a big part of its overall identity.

IDEAS FOR ACTION
1. Institute a "Learner of the Month" program to publicly recognize and reward employees that are gaining certifications, degrees, or other key skills.
2. Set up a meeting with staff at a leading educational organization for your community or industry. Use the meeting to assess current partnership efforts (if any) and to brainstorm new or deeper training partnerships focusing on frontline staff.
3. Ask the HR or supervisory team to identify two or three measurable objectives for learning and training among frontline workers. Create data and measurement systems to provide regular updates or real-time information on progress to supervisors and management.

GETTING STARTED

If you'd like to focus on...	Consider your ability to provide...
Productivity and workflow efficiency	• Innovative training programs using new technologies (for example, social learning, personal technologies, mobile) • Customized training through educational partnerships • Opportunities for frontline workers to partake in special projects to improve business performance (e.g., think tanks, training development)
Employee engagement	• Training in skills that will improve employees' ability to contribute and add value (such as soft skills, communication, working with others, leadership) • Career planning and guidance to employees through mentoring or coaching • A transparent career ladder with clear wage differential at each rung • Learning benefits that speak to your corporate culture (for example, rotational assignments)
Staffing flexibility	• Cross-training for frontline workers • Job sharing without causing disruption to the work or other employees
Frontline worker commitment and dedication	• In-house training, specifically targeted at helping workers navigate career paths • Opportunities for frontline workers to participate in the design of training programs (i.e., user-generated content) • Financial and nonfinancial incentives to formally recognize frontline workers for acquisition of new skills
Turnover	• Adequate employee communications and change management as an integral part of the learning environment (e.g., reminders to employees to learn) • Ongoing discussions between managers and employees to set expectations, offer feedback on performance, and provide career guidance • A competitive wage and benefits package, including tuition remission or tuition reimbursement • Flexible work schedules to allow frontline workers to attend training courses • Partial or full benefits for the duration of education or training courses

LEADERSHIP SUPPORT AND ENGAGEMENT: THE ESSENTIAL UPSKILLING INGREDIENT

Are you a senior leader?
Did you know that your support and engagement are critical elements in creating the right conditions for the success of your upskilling initiatives? Employees rely on the words and actions of their senior leaders to understand how things get done, what is important, and what gets rewarded.

Ask yourself:

- **What** steps have I taken to create a sense of urgency regarding upskilling our frontline workers?
- Can I clearly explain **how** upskilling our frontline workers aligns with our business strategy?
- Have I identified **who** will serve as a passionate champion within my leadership team, at the functional level, and in a supervisory role for upskilling our frontline workers?
- Have I clearly communicated **when** our upskilling initiatives will be rolled out?
- Do I know **how** we will measure the impact of upskilling our frontline workers?
- **What** do I do on a daily basis to model visible commitments regarding upskilling our frontline workers?

◢ LET'S GET STARTED CHECKLIST

So, you're ready to begin or continue investing in upskilling your frontline workforce, but where do you start? Consider the checklist of items below and decide what makes the most sense for your business **now**.

☐ Set up a meeting with HR or Learning leaders to discuss upskilling opportunities and gain awareness of what's available for your employees – focus the conversation on the key concepts outlined in the maturity model.

☐ Begin to build a business case for upskilling using the key concepts and tools in this handbook, aligned to your own organization's learning and development policies and resources.

☐ Create a list of key stakeholders for this effort across your organization – including individuals from HR, Learning, and Technology functions. As you do this, assess the need for leadership support for this effort and which key leaders should be engaged and aligned throughout the process.

☐ Consider incorporating upskilling into one function's talent strategy as a pilot initiative to understand how the effort may affect the broader organization.

☐ Track spending, retention, employee performance, and other key metrics as a way to measure your organization's return on investment and demonstrate the value of the upskilling initiatives to leadership.

☐ Designate an upskilling champion within your organization. Encourage the champion to explore upskilling opportunities and advocate for frontline workers with the decision makers for learning and development. Make it clear to the Learning and HR organizations that the champion has the buy-in of the organization's leadership on this issue.

☐ Get employees excited! Sometimes the challenge can be getting employees to take advantage of existing learning opportunities. Implement a year-long company-wide upskilling challenge (or something similar) with rewards (financial or otherwise) for employees who gain new skills, certificates, or degrees within a 12-month period.

☐ Connect with a local community college or other learning institution to learn what courses and options are available for your employees. Also consider exploring online learning institutions if in-person learning organizations are not available. Ask peer employers what online and technology-enabled learning tools they have found effective.

☐ Spread the word! Share this handbook with three of your colleagues, including a peer, a manager or supervisor, and a leader.

IN CONCLUSION: ADVANCING THE CAREERS OF AMERICA'S FRONTLINE WORKERS

The business reasons for investing in skills development and career advancement of frontline workers are clear — national economic competitiveness, business-critical priority, and employee engagement are just a few. To stay competitive, employers will need to tap into the abilities of all Americans, including their own frontline workforce. Consideration for and implementation of upskilling initiatives start at the top and need to be supported by senior business leaders. As part of this employer-led movement, your organization has much to gain by supporting the UpSkill America initiative. And you are not alone; the issue of upskilling America's frontline workers is one that must be reconciled through cooperation and collaboration between government, employers, academic professionals, educators, nonprofits, and other national organizations.

This handbook serves as just one tool toward supporting employers in this initiative. It serves as an additional resource to your organization; the business case, maturity model, recommendations, and tools provided are a starting point for driving change and establishing or improving upskilling initiatives that you may already have in place.

Broader efforts are required to bolster business investment in worker education and training to help grow America's middle class. Ultimately, the goal is to provide 24 million frontline workers with the training to put them on pathways to fill hundreds of thousands of vacancies that organizations have today in mid-skill, better-paying jobs. Join fellow employers around the country in advancing an economic opportunity agenda that can both grow the American middle class and build your business edge in the process.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As the economy continues to improve and more and more people get back to work, the role of the federal government and federal training programs remains important in equipping more Americans with the skills and opportunities they need to advance. Here are a few of the more recent steps that align with some of the goals of UpSkill America:

- January 2014: The federal government set in motion a review of federal programs in the workforce and training system to help equip American workers with skills matching the needs of employers looking to hire. The review has resulted in significant reforms in the way federal programs train and retrain workers. Since then, this review has continued to spark new public-private efforts to help hardworking Americans get ahead.

- July 2014: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)[37] helps to match employers with the skilled workers they need and helps job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market.[38] WIOA presents an extraordinary opportunity to improve job and career options for our nation's workers and job seekers through an integrated, job-driven public workforce system that links diverse talent to businesses. It also provides the workforce system greater flexibility to engage employers in developing the workforce for a regional economy — from preparing entry-level workers to retraining transitioning workers to upskilling incumbent workers.

OTHER USEFUL LINKS

Visit Career One-Stop Business Center, your source for help to hire, train, and retain a strong workforce.

The American Job Centers provide information about local and federal resources to assist with business decisions, including marketing and economic development opportunities. American Job Center Locator provides contact information for your nearest American Job Center.

Business Services Toolkit, an online resource, provides access to virtual workforce planning tools and resources that any company can use as well as links to more specialized workforce development services offering a range of tools for customized solutions to your workforce needs.

Most provisions of WIOA take effect on July 1, 2015. The DOL WIOA Resources Page will include updated technical assistance, tools, and resources.

- July 2014: The US Department of Labor announced an impending Online Skills Academy that will offer open online courses offering high-quality, free or low-cost pathways to degrees, certificates, and other employer-recognized credentials. Courses will be free for all to access, although limited costs may be incurred for students seeking college credit to be applied toward a degree. Other providers can use and augment the open content to provide in-person or other wraparound services and offer their own degrees or certificates. The online skills academy will leverage the burgeoning marketplace of free and open-licensed learning resources, including content developed through the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant program accessible through the US Department of Labor's online repository, to ensure that workers can get the education and training they need to advance their careers, particularly in key areas of the economy. For more information, [view the full document](#).

- September 2014: The US Department of Labor announced $450 million in grants to community colleges and universities around the country for the development and expansion of innovative training programs in partnership with local employers. The grants are part of the TAACCCT grant program,[39] funded by the US Department of Labor, which provides community colleges and other eligible institutions of higher education with funds to expand and improve their ability to provide education and career training programs, ensuring that our nation's institutions of higher education are helping adults acquire the skills, degrees, and credentials needed for high-wage, high-skill employment while also meeting the needs of employers for skilled workers.

- October 2014: The US Department of Labor announced approximately $150 million in grants to expedite the employment of Americans struggling with long-term unemployment.[40] The grants are part of the Ready to Work Partnership (Ready To Work) initiative to provide those experiencing long-term unemployment with a range of training and supportive and specialized services leading to rapid employment in middle and high-skilled jobs. Ready To Work projects incorporate work-based training models with earning components for long-term unemployed workers through models such as on-the-job training (OJT), paid work experience, paid internships, and Registered Apprenticeships.

- November 2014: US Secretary of Labor Perez launched *The Skills Working Group*, an effort to maintain focus and attention around interagency, collaborative efforts of the Job-Driven Training Initiative as well as emerging opportunities around cross-agency skills coordination. Thirteen federal agencies, the White House National Economic Council, and the Office of Management and Budget make up The Skills Working Group, including the departments of Labor, Education, Commerce, Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development, Veterans Affairs, Transportation, Energy, Defense, Justice, Interior, and the Social Security Administration. The Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education has been an active contributor to this work and leads the career pathways and upskilling work streams.[41]

- December 2014: The US Department of Labor funded a $100 million American Apprenticeship Grants Competition. The competition will use $100 million or more of H-1B funds to award approximately 25 grants to partnerships between employers, labor organizations, training providers, community colleges, local and state governments, the workforce system, nonprofits, and faith-based organizations that:
  - Launch apprenticeship models in new, high-growth fields
  - Align apprenticeships to pathways for further learning and career advancement
  - Scale apprenticeship models that work

For more information, visit [the competition's website](). In addition, Skills for America's Future is launching an online collaboration space for apprenticeship providers and foundation funders to connect. And the Advanced Manufacturing Partnership Steering Committee, building on new apprenticeship programs, is launching a "'How-to" toolkit to help other employers launch apprenticeships.

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- Seminars, which help participants reflect on what they think makes a good society, thereby deepening knowledge, broadening perspectives, and enhancing their capacity to solve the problems leaders face.
- Young-leader fellowships around the globe, which bring a selected class of proven leaders together for an intense multiyear program and commitment. The Fellows become better leaders and apply their skills to significant challenges.
- Policy programs, which serve as nonpartisan forums for analysis, consensus-building, and problem-solving on a wide variety of issues.
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Deloitte and The Aspen Institute, in support of the National Economic Council (part of the Executive Office of the President), seek to help advance economic opportunity for America's frontline workers, and ensure a competitive workforce for the nation's employers. Through this unique collaboration, Deloitte and The Aspen Institute seek to build a stronger economy by creating tools for employers to help enhance workforce development practices and practices to move the needle on addressing the national workforce skills shortage.

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