



SKILLS LEAP PLAYBOOK

Designing the **Workforce of the Future**

From foresight to capability and skills. A practical guide to planning your workforce around what the business will need next, not the language of the past.

01	Planning the future with the language of the past
02	Reading what is coming
03	How it all connects
04	Capability, clusters, skills, tasks
05	Reframe workforce planning
06	Redesign the organization
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We are planning the workforce of the future with the language of the past.

Most workforce plans still count bodies. They forecast how many people, by function, by quarter. The number fills the box. The box does not reflect the strategy.

The result is a familiar gap. You hire, you train, you promote, and you still cannot execute the plan. Nobody mapped the chain from strategy signal to capability to skill to task. So the plan looks complete on paper and stalls in practice.

Headcount Plans

Forecasting how many, not what capability. The number fills the box. The box does not reflect the strategy.

Generic Upskilling

Courses that look busy. Libraries that feel productive. Almost none of it tied to a capability gap the business can name.

Job Descriptions

Posting roles built for yesterday. Filtering on credentials and years in title instead of the capabilities the future requires.

Gaps That Surface Too Late

You only see the gap when the strategy stalls. By then it is expensive to close and slow to recover.

This is not a failure of effort. It is a navigation problem. The instruments are pointed at the wrong target. The fix is to change what you plan around.

THE SHIFT

Stop planning around headcount and titles. Start planning around capability and skills, traced back to the signals reshaping your industry.



Foresight & Signals

Capability planning does not start with the org chart. It starts with what is coming. Before you can name the capability you need, you have to read the forces that will demand it.

FORESIGHT

The discipline of reading what is coming before it arrives. Not prediction, pattern recognition. Looking at where technology, markets, regulation, and customers are heading, and asking what it means for the business.

SIGNALS

The concrete, observable evidence that a shift is underway. A new competitor, a regulatory change, an AI capability that just crossed a threshold, a customer behavior that is trending. Signals are how foresight gets specific.

Foresight is the practice. Signals are the inputs. Together they tell you which capabilities the business will need next, before the gap shows up in performance.

From signals to capability

1. Start From the Signals

Take the shifts reshaping your industry, AI, regulation, market and customer moves, and treat them as the starting point.

2. Define the Org Capability

Ask what the organization must now be able to do that it cannot do well today.

3. Translate to People

Turn that into the capability you need from your people. This is where skills and tasks begin.

Why It Matters

The World Economic Forum estimates a large share of core skills will shift this decade. Foresight is how you stay ahead of that curve instead of reacting to it.

NAVIGATOR'S NOTE

Treat signals as a standing input, not a once-a-year exercise. The terrain keeps moving. Your read of it should too.



The Foresight-to-Capability Framework

The framework is a chain. Each link narrows the abstract into the concrete, ending in the actual work people do. Plan in this order and the gaps become visible early, while they are still cheap to close.

Foresight / Signals

What is the business trying to do? What is changing in the market?

Capability

What outcomes does executing that strategy actually require?

Skill Clusters

Which families of skills combine to enable that capability?

Skills

Which specific, learnable skills sit inside each cluster, each at a defined proficiency level?

Tasks

Where does each skill live in the actual workflow? What work does it show up in? Tasks are where capability becomes observable and measurable.

Read top to bottom, the chain turns strategy into something you can hire for, develop, and measure. Read bottom to top, it lets you trace any task back to the strategic signal that justifies it.

THE THROUGH-LINE

Signals point to capability. Capability breaks into clusters. Clusters break into skills. Skills show up in tasks. Every layer traces back to the strategy.



The Language of **Capability**

Precise language is what makes the framework usable. These four terms are often blurred together. Keeping them distinct is what lets you plan, measure, and develop with confidence.

CAPABILITY

The observable ability to apply knowledge, skills, and behavior to produce a specific outcome, in real context, with real constraints, under real pressure. A manager who communicates well has a skill. A manager who can deliver a restructuring message to a nervous team and keep them engaged has a capability.

SKILL CLUSTERS

A capability does not come from one skill. It comes from a family of related skills working together. Data-Driven Decision Making needs a Data Analysis cluster and an Insight Communication cluster, each with distinct skills inside it.

SKILLS

Specific, learnable, and measurable, each at a defined proficiency level. SQL querying is a skill. Proficiency 2 means you can pull standard reports. Proficiency 4 means you design and optimize complex multi-source queries independently.

TASKS

The actual work a skill gets applied to. Visible, measurable, in the flow of the job. Executive Storytelling shows up in tasks: present Q3 results to the board, reframe risk data for a non-technical CFO, design a one-page strategy brief.

WHY PRECISION PAYS

You cannot hire, develop, or measure what you cannot name. Distinct terms turn a vague intent into a plan the whole organization can act on.



Capability, Not Headcount

The first shift is the foundation. Stop forecasting how many people you need. Start forecasting what your organization must be able to do.

FROM: HEADCOUNT FORECASTING	TO: CAPABILITY FORECASTING
Forecasting FTEs by function	Name the 3-5 capabilities your strategy depends on
Filling open job descriptions	Map current levels against required proficiency
Build or buy decisions with no capability context	Make build, buy, borrow, or automate decisions from the map

THE OLD WAY

We need 12 more analysts by Q3. The number fills a box. The box does not reflect a strategy.

THE NEW WAY

Identify the future-critical capabilities required to execute strategy, then make smarter build, buy, borrow, or automate decisions.

WHAT CHANGES

Headcount becomes an output of the capability plan, not the plan itself. You hire and develop against what the work actually requires.



Portfolios, Not Job Descriptions

Same role, completely different lens. Move from a list of credentials to a profile of what the role actually requires people to do.

FROM: TRADITIONAL JOB DESCRIPTIONS	TO: CAPABILITY PROFILES
Degrees, years in title, tool lists	Core capabilities with proficiency targets
Credentials screen out capable people	Skill clusters that map to real work
Tells you what tools to have used	Tells you what the person must be able to do

THE OLD WAY

A list of requirements built for yesterday's work. No proficiency level attached to any skill. Seven years in title tells you nothing about capability.

THE NEW WAY

A capability profile defines what a person must be able to do at full performance, with skill clusters and proficiency targets, regardless of background.

WHAT CHANGES

Hiring and development target demonstrated capability at a defined level. A candidate who can do the work qualifies, regardless of pedigree.



Mobility, Not Succession Lists

When you can see capability across the organization, internal mobility stops being a guess. You are reading a map, not searching for people.

FROM: STATIC SUCCESSION PLANNING	TO: SKILL-BASED INTERNAL MOBILITY
Succession tied to org chart position	Moves based on capability and adjacency
Internal moves based on manager preference	The right person is often already inside
Talent trapped because skills are invisible	A capability map makes mobility obvious

THE OLD WAY

A spreadsheet of names in boxes, updated once a year. It tells you who is next in line, not who is actually ready or mobile.

THE NEW WAY

Use capability visibility and skill adjacency to mobilise talent fast, without always hiring external. People in adjacent roles often already carry most of the skills a new role needs.

WHAT CHANGES

A short, targeted bridge program closes the adjacency gap. Faster and cheaper than an external hire, and it keeps institutional knowledge in-house.



Investment, Not Activities

If you cannot name the capability gap a program closes, the business case does not hold. Targeted investment is easier to fund, measure, and defend.

FROM: GENERIC UPSKILLING	TO: TARGETED CAPABILITY INVESTMENT
Large library with no priority signal	Every program closes a named capability gap
Mandatory training for compliance, not capability	Targets a defined proficiency level
Leadership development with no named gap	Shows up in real, everyday tasks

THE OLD WAY

A busy learning catalogue. Completions tracked, impact invisible. Spend that does not connect to any strategic capability the business can name.

THE NEW WAY

Every program closes a named capability gap and shows up in real, everyday tasks. Targeted beats broad: focus the people who need it on a program tied to an actual task.

WHAT CHANGES

Learning and development stops being a catalogue activity and becomes a capability intervention: scoped to a priority, built around real tasks, measured by whether the gap closed.



Tips, Tricks & What To Do Next

You do not need to boil the ocean. The fastest way to adopt this is to run it once, small, on a capability that matters. Prove the chain on one capability and the rest becomes a repeatable pattern.

Tips & tricks

Start with one capability

Pick the single capability your strategy depends on most, the one where a gap would stall the plan. Name it in a sentence, not a list.

Write it as an outcome

Describe what the person can do under real conditions, not what they know. If you cannot observe it, sharpen the wording.

Set proficiency before content

Decide the level you need before you build any program. The level defines the gap. The gap defines the work.

Tie every program to a task

If a program does not change a task people actually do, it is an activity, not an investment. Anchor it in the workflow.

What to do next

STEP	MOVE
1. Name one capability	Choose the capability your strategy most depends on. Agree on it. Write it as one observable outcome.
2. Map the current state	Assess where your workforce sits on that capability today. Use direct observation and front-line input, not a survey.
3. Decide build, buy, borrow, or automate	With the map in hand, decide who is ready now, who can develop fast, what AI can absorb, and what to hire for.

WORK WITH SKILLS LEAP

If you want a partner to run this with your team, from signals to a live capability map, we can help.

info@skillsleap.com · skillsleap.info · www.skillsleap.com