

HOW TO GROW TALENT ON THE JOB

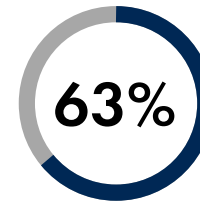
A Guide to Modern Upskilling Strategies

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

In 2021, we saw the Great Resignation. At its root were burnout, declining work-life balance, stagnant wages, and a shift in employee values, fueled by the pandemic. Fast-forward to 2024 and [The Great Detachment](#) was upon us as employees became increasingly disengaged and disconnected from their jobs.

In May 2024 alone, [51%](#) of employees were watching for new opportunities or actively seeking a new job. And long-term employee commitment was at the lowest in nine years. Among the reasons: lack of advancement, development, and career opportunities.

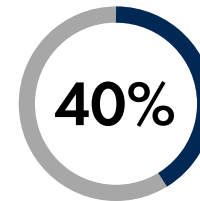
Facing talent loss and heightened competition, employers must be proactive in order maintain and grow their workforce—and their edge. Upskilling offers a powerful path forward, strengthening retention, performance, and long-term resilience. In this guide, we'll examine current upskilling approaches and help you identify which is best suited to closing your organization's skills gaps.



of employers cite skills gaps as a major barrier to transformation between 2025 and 2030.

10-15

year [half-life](#) of skills has shrunk to less than 5 years—workers lose half the value of their skills in that time.



of core job skills are expected to shift by 2030.



Contents

The Business Case for Upskilling	04
Upskilling: Financially Speaking	05
What Upskilling Looks Like Today	06
How to Get the Best of All Upskilling Worlds	11
The Added Benefit of Competency-Based Education	12
Choosing the Right Upskilling Approach	13
Spotlight: Western Governors University	14
Powered by WGU	15



The Business Case for Upskilling

Merriam-Webster:

“Upskilled; upskilling; upskills: to provide (someone, such as an employee) with more advanced skills through additional education and training.”

To organizations grappling with disruption, talent shortages, and evolving demands, upskilling is a saving grace. Yet where does your organization stand? Should upskilling be part of your workforce development strategy?



6 Red Flags You Can't Ignore: Signs It's Time to Upskill

1. **Performance Gaps:** You notice declining productivity, missed KPIs, or increased errors in work quality, especially as technology or processes evolve.
2. **Employee Frustration or Stagnation:** Your workers feel stuck, disengaged, or unsure how to advance. They may express boredom, burnout, or lack of purpose.
3. **Increased Turnover:** Your talented employees leave for jobs that offer more growth or learning opportunities.
4. **Difficulty Filling Roles:** Your open positions stay vacant too long—or new hires don't have the right skills—even after significant recruitment efforts.
5. **Falling Behind Competitors:** Your organization is slower to innovate, adopt new tools, or respond to market changes compared to others in the industry.
6. **Rising Demand for New Skills:** You're investing in new technology, shifting strategy, or entering new markets, but your team isn't equipped to keep up.

“Start the retention process when the person is still open to staying, not after they've already told you they're leaving.” — Jeff Weiner, Executive Chairman of LinkedIn

Upskilling: Financially Speaking

Investing in employee learning—upskilling—more than pays for itself.

What are the financial benefits to upskilling? First, consider that developing talent from within is more cost-effective than external hiring—especially when you review the high cost of replacing employees.

- Losing a leader or manager can cost up to [200%](#) of their salary.
- Departing technical professionals can cost companies around [80%](#) of their annual pay.
- Frontline employee turnover carries a price tag of roughly [40%](#) of salary.

Now take into account how production and loyalty are enhanced, which, in turn, help bolster your bottom line.

- Employee Retention: Training fosters loyalty and reduces turnover.
- Agility: Skilled teams adapt faster to changes in tech and markets.
- Cost Savings: Fewer external hires, reduced onboarding time.
- Stronger Leadership Pipelines: Internal mobility and career development.

Just how prevalent is upskilling? Today, talent development is gaining traction across fast-moving sectors, including:

- Business: Accounting, Human Resources, management, and MBA tracks.
- Health Professions: Nursing leadership and health services coordination.
- Education: Instructional leadership and curriculum design.
- Technology: Cybersecurity, data analytics, and cloud computing.
- Manufacturing and Skilled Trades: Automation, safety and quality control.



Organizations with strong learning cultures see [30–50%](#) higher engagement and retention rates than those without.

What Upskilling Looks Like Today

Emerging technology, online learning, practical application, mentorship—upskilling is far from conventional or fleeting.

Upskilling has a rich history. It started back in the mid-1900s with hands-on vocational training, expanding to structured corporate programs and leadership development. In the 2000s, digital tools made learning more accessible.

Today, AI meets learners where they are, delivering personalized, flexible, performance-based learning aligned to real job roles. The following formats highlight this modern shift in education.



Microcredentials

- Employer-recognized and industry-aligned.
- Targeted, short-form learning programs built around in-demand workforce skills.
- Emphasis on high-need fields like data analysis, IT support, and project management.
- Stackable toward associate, bachelor's, or master's degrees, enabling learners to earn credit as they go.

Sample Use Case

A warehouse associate with no background in tech enrolled in WGU's Google IT Support Professional Certificate, a microcredential program designed for career changers. He completed courses in system administration, troubleshooting, and networking, gaining the foundational tech skills needed to enter the IT field—while working full-time.

Outcome

With confidence and credibility gained through an industry-recognized credential, he advanced into an IT support role within his company. He then applied the certificate as transfer credit toward WGU's B.S. in Information Technology, accelerating his path to a degree.

"Train people well enough so they can leave. Treat them well enough so they don't want to." — Richard Branson



Certifications

- Validates mastery of specific competency or specific standards.
- Often linked to industry-recognized exams or licensure, e.g., CompTIA, PMP, SHRM.
- Typically completed in weeks or months and may require passing an assessment or exam.
- Valued by employers as proof of readiness for specific roles or responsibilities.
- Sometimes applied toward college credit, especially at institutions like WGU.

Sample Use Case

An elementary school teacher enrolled in WGU's English Language Learning Certificate to better support the growing population of bilingual students in her district. She sought targeted professional development without committing to a full master's degree right away.

Outcome

She gained practical strategies to strengthen instruction for English language learners. The certificate also qualified her for a district stipend for teachers with specialized ELL training, and she later applied the credits toward WGU's M.A. in English Language Learning.



Immersive Learning (AR/VR)

- Uses augmented and virtual reality to replicate real-world environments and job tasks.
- Enhances engagement and retention through interactive, hands-on experiences.
- Ideal for complex, high-stakes, or technical skills that benefit from simulation.
- Enables safe practice of skills without real-world risk or consequence.
- Bridges the gap between theory and application, boosting learner confidence and readiness.

Sample Use Case

A registered nurse with 10 years of clinical experience wanted to upskill into a nurse manager role. While she understood patient care deeply, she needed to develop leadership, communication, and team-management skills in high-pressure situations. As part of WGU's post-licensure nursing leadership coursework, she participated in AR/VR simulations designed to replicate handling staff conflicts, leading interdisciplinary rounds, making real-time decisions during a unit crisis, and communicating with patients' families and hospital administration.

Outcome

Through repeated practice in simulated environments—with no real-world risk—she gained confidence in her ability to lead, respond under pressure, and manage personnel. Her employer later selected her for a nurse supervisor position, noting her preparedness and improved leadership skills.



Scenario-Based Training

- Equips learners for customer service, leadership, healthcare, and technical training scenarios.
- Presents realistic, role-specific situations learners may encounter on the job.
- Builds critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills in context.
- Encourages active learning by requiring learners to apply knowledge in dynamic environments.
- Reinforces key competencies through repetition and feedback.

Sample Use Case

A national retail chain faced poor store leadership that drove high turnover, low engagement, and inconsistent customer experiences across locations. The company enrolled high-potential employees in a non-degree, career-aligned leadership microcredential that included scenario-based training modules, such as managing team conflict, performance issues, and customer escalations. Learners had to make critical decisions in simulated environments, receiving real-time feedback on the impact of their choices.

Outcome

Graduates of the program reported higher confidence and preparedness in managing store operations and team dynamics. Store locations showed great improvement in employee satisfaction, and external hiring for store managers was reduced, strengthening its internal talent pipeline.

“The only thing worse than training your employees and having them leave is not training them and having them stay.” — Henry Ford



Mentorship and Peer Learning

- Connects learners with mentors for personalized support, guidance, and accountability.
- Fosters a sense of community and shared growth in online learning environments.
- Encourages collaborative problem-solving and peer-to-peer knowledge exchange.
- Helps learners stay motivated and engaged through real-time human interaction.
- Builds soft skills like communication, teamwork, and leadership alongside technical knowledge.

Sample Use Case

A large multi-site healthcare network was facing a shortage of skilled Medical Assistants (MAs)—a role critical for patient intake, basic procedures, and EHR documentation. Many current MAs had strong bedside manner but lacked confidence using new digital tools and handling expanded clinical responsibilities. The healthcare system partnered with WGU to offer a certificate program in Healthcare Fundamentals, designed for working MAs. A key feature of the program was one-on-one mentoring, which helped learners balance work, study, and skill-building.

Outcome

Through repeated practice in simulated environments—with no real-world risk—she gained confidence in her ability to lead, respond under pressure, and manage personnel. Her employer later selected her for a nurse supervisor position, noting her preparedness and improved leadership skills.

How to Get the Best of All Upskilling Worlds

With one trusted education provider, you unlock the full power of upskilling—seamlessly integrated and tailored to your workforce.

Clearly, there are many upskilling approaches in play today. Creating a seamless learning experience that leverages one or many of these formats accelerates careers and drives business growth. Partnering with a single institution like [WGU](#) makes this possible—delivering all upskilling methods through one trusted source for maximum impact.

- Creates a cohesive, flexible talent development ecosystem where learning is stackable, progress is measurable, and support is consistent.
- Reduces friction by eliminating the need for employees to navigate multiple systems, timelines, or providers.
- Streamlines administration, ensures quality across programs, and scales workforce efficiently.
- Credits apply directly toward associate, bachelor's, or master's degrees, letting learners make progress step by step.

Disparate Upskilling Providers → Costly Business Disadvantage

- ✗ Inconsistent quality and standards
- ✗ Fragmented learning experience
- ✗ Redundant or overlapping content
- ✗ Administrative complexity
- ✗ Limited stackability
- ✗ Difficult ROI measurement

The Added Benefit of Competency-Based Education

CBE doesn't replace modern upskilling methods—it enables them and maximizes your investment.

To get the full benefit of upskilling and your investment dollar, it helps to anchor all upskilling approaches in a powerful framework: [Competency-Based Education \(CBE\)](#).

Unlike traditional models, CBE measures what learners can do with what they've learned, not how long they spend in training. Education providers like [WGU](#) incorporate CBE in every aspect of its career-aligned programs.

- **Mastery-Based:** Learners must show they've mastered a proficiency before moving on.
- **Personalized Pacing:** Students advance when ready, on their own time.
- **Real-World Relevance:** Competencies are aligned with job roles and industry needs.
- **Flexible Learning:** Accommodates multiple learning formats.
- **Assessment-Driven:** Progress is measured through performance tasks, portfolios, or simulations, not just exams.

What's in It for Employers? Clear ROI, Stronger Teams.

Because CBE requires learners to demonstrate mastery of specific, job-relevant skills, it results in a workforce that's not just educated, but truly prepared to contribute from day one.




- **Accelerated Learning:** Employees skip what they already know.
- **Faster Outcomes:** Apply new skills immediately on the job.
- **Trackable Returns:** Clear performance and progress metrics.
- **Scalable:** Works for individuals or enterprise-wide initiatives.
- **Retention-Friendly:** Employees see a clear path to advancement.



Choosing the Right Upskilling Approach

Once you’ve determined that upskilling is your next step, which path do you take? Fortunately, you don’t have to choose just one. With competency-based education as the foundation, each upskilling method becomes more focused, measurable, and aligned to business outcomes.

The following is a guideline as to which approach handles which challenge. But remember, upskilling can integrate into any and all approaches. Not sure which is right for your organization? [WGU](#) can help.

 Key Question	 CBE-Powered Solution	 Why It Works
Need fast, focused training on new tools or skills?	CBE-Powered Microcredentials	Short, modular, and stackable—ideal for adapting to change
Is your workforce in high-risk or hands-on environments?	Immersive and Scenario-Based CBE Simulations	Builds confidence, safety, and practical decision-making
Want to grow future leaders and retain top talent?	Career Tracks + Mentorship Structured by CBE	Provides clear development paths with coaching and support
Need to train a distributed or remote workforce?	Scalable Online CBE Platforms (e.g., WGU)	Consistent learning experience with data-driven tracking and outcomes

Spotlight: Western Governors University

Custom employer partnerships close skill gaps—successfully and at scale.

Accredited, nonprofit, and a national leader in workforce-aligned education—Western Governors University (WGU) has been at the forefront of [competency-based](#), career-focused learning for working adults since its founding in 1997. Through partnerships with organizations, WGU trains, uplifts, and grows people—and the bottom line.

“Our patients deserve the best care, and by collaborating with WGU, we ensure that our professionals have access to high-quality training.”
— Bill Cummins, Family Health West

The WGU Advantage

WGU provides flexible learning solutions—from single courses, bundles, and certificates to bachelor’s and master’s degrees in business, technology, education, and healthcare.

- CBE format enables students to move through a program faster than traditional universities.
- Fully online, self-paced programs with real-world skill alignment.
- Stackable microcredentials that build toward full degrees.
- AR/VR tools in healthcare and education for immersive learning.
- Dynamic, AI-enabled scenarios progress.
- Dedicated mentorship from start to finish.

By the Numbers

300+ organizations rely on WGU for employee education.

0 work hours an employee is expected to miss while pursuing a WGU degree.

100% of surveyed employers said WGU graduates were prepared for the jobs.

Grow Talent on the Job with Upskilling, Powered by WGU

“At WGU, we believe talent is everywhere—it’s opportunity that needs unlocking. By aligning education with the needs of today’s workforce, we help organizations cultivate skilled teams that drive growth and innovation.”
— Spencer Stewart, Vice President of Strategic Partnerships, WGU

Learn more about WGU partnerships at:

- www.wgu.edu/partnerships
- partnerships@wgu.edu

Organizations that act today will innovate faster. Strengthen retention. Drive growth.

Contact Western Governors University Now



