

A photograph of four diverse professionals (three women and one man) gathered around a table in a meeting room. They are looking at documents and talking. The room has a large window and a chalkboard in the background.

# Upskilling Playbook: Reference and Citations

UpSkill America at the Aspen Institute

June 2025

## Abstract

The *Upskilling Playbook* is a strategic guide for organizations to build, scale, and integrate skills-based workforce development initiatives that drive business performance and career growth. Despite rapid economic and technological shifts making upskilling a business imperative, many efforts struggle to gain traction and become embedded in business strategy.

This playbook cuts through the noise while preserving the depth needed to drive real change – integrating corporate best practices, academic research, and practical application. It helps organizations amplify the impact of existing initiatives or launch new efforts with clarity and measurable results. It provides a practical framework for navigating challenges, capitalizing on opportunities, and implementing upskilling at scale. Covering key areas such as workforce ecosystem development, program design, measurement strategies, and leadership alignment, it delivers actionable insights for HR professionals, business leaders, and decision-makers.

When organizations fully embed upskilling into their talent and business strategy, they create sustainable talent pipelines, improve retention, and future-proof their workforce against industry shifts and technological advancements.

# Overview Chapter

## SHRM - Growth in Upskilling Demand

- 700% increase in “reskilling,” “upskilling,” and “on-the-job training” references in job postings from 2020-2022.

Source: SHRM, “Not Just a Perk: Making the Case for Upskilling and Reskilling” (Nov. 2024). [Read More](#)

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## McKinsey - Skill Transitions & Automation

- Workers in lower-wage roles are up to 14 times more likely to need occupational transitions by 2030.
- 30% of hours worked today could be automated by 2030.

Source: McKinsey, “Generative AI and the Future of Work in America.” [Read More](#)

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## Accenture - Scaling Reskilling Efforts

- Only 5% of companies are reskilling their workforce at scale.

Source: Accenture, “Building Skills at Scale with Generative AI” (Oct. 2024). [Read More](#)

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## i4cp - Challenges in Internal Mobility

- 39% of organizations say it’s easier for employees to find a job externally than internally.

Source: i4cp, 2025 “Priorities & Predictions” (Jan. 2025). [Read More](#)

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### **PwC - CEO Perspectives on Workforce Skills**

- 52% of CEOs cite workforce skills shortages as a major barrier to value creation.
- 70% believe AI will significantly change the way their company operates.

Source: PwC, "CEO Survey" (Jan. 2025). [Read More](#)

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### **Gallup - Retention & Employee Engagement**

- Employees are 2.9 times more likely to stay with organizations that invest in their growth.

Source: Gallup, "In the New Workplace, Engagement Stagnates" (2023). [Read More](#)

# Ecosystem Chapter

## i4cp - Companies with Strong Skills Strategies

- Companies that prepare for skill shifts achieve 2x the market performance of their peers.

Source: i4cp, "2025 Priorities & Predictions." [Read More](#)

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## Bersin - Adoption of Skills-Based Hiring

- Only 15% of companies have adopted a skills-based approach for sourcing and headcount planning.

Source: Bersin, "Talent Intelligence Report" (May 2024). [Read More](#)

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## World Economic Forum - Digital Transformation & Workforce Readiness

- 60% of employers expect digital transformation to reshape their business by 2030.

Source: WEF, "Future of Jobs Report 2025." [Read More](#)

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## Lightcast - Changing Skills in the Workforce

- The average job has seen one-third of its required skills change in the past three years.

Source: Lightcast, "The Speed of Skill Change" (Jan. 2025). [Read More](#)

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# Types of Upskilling Chapter

## i4cp - The Impact of Upskilling Design on Business Success

- The impact of upskilling programs is influenced by how well organizations build their objectives and design elements to align with business priorities and employee development.

Source: i4cp, Aspen / i4CP Survey of Upskilling Approaches (April 2024). [Read More](#)

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# Implementation Chapter

## McKinsey - The Business Case for Workforce Development

- Companies that invest in workforce development outperform competitors by 20% in profitability.

Source: McKinsey, "A New Operating Model for People Management" (Feb. 2025). [Read More](#)

## McKinsey - Trust in Employers for AI Deployment

- Employees are 1.3x more likely to trust their employer to get AI deployment right than they are to trust other institutions.

Source: McKinsey, "Building a Thriving Workforce." [Read More](#)

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# Metrics Chapter

## RedThread Research - Workforce Technology Integration

- Advancements in workforce technology will increasingly allow organizations to harmonize disparate datasets, enabling more sophisticated workforce planning.

Source: RedThread Research, 2024. [Read More](#)

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# Maturity Levels Chapter

## i4cp - Structured Career Pathways & Business Success

- Employees increasingly view upskilling as a tool for career advancement. Companies that implement structured career pathways see up to 7x more success in business transformation efforts.

Source: i4cp, "2025 Priorities & Predictions." [Read More](#)

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## Harvard Business Review - Predictive Workforce Analytics

- Predictive workforce analytics help businesses proactively develop skills before market shifts occur, ensuring sustained growth.

Source: Harvard Business Review, "2024 Workforce Strategy Report." [Read More](#)

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## Aspen Institute - Tracking Community Impact of Upskilling

- Track community impact by measuring how employee upskilling improves local economic mobility and contributes to broader workforce development.

Source: Aspen Institute, "2024 Workforce Development Report." [Read More](#)

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## McKinsey - Tracking Economic Mobility Impact

- Companies are beginning to track the economic mobility impact of their workforce programs, demonstrating a direct tie between career growth and community economic lift.

Source: McKinsey, "Thriving Workforce Report, 2024." [Read More](#)

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### **McKinsey - Workforce Resilience & Agility**

- Ensure that upskilling investments align with long-term business resilience, fostering agility and adaptability in an evolving labor market.

Source: McKinsey, "Workforce Mobility Study, 2024." [Read More](#)

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### **Harvard Business Review - Employer Brand Impact of Upskilling**

- Assess the employer brand impact of upskilling initiatives, measuring improvements in talent attraction, employee engagement, and external partnerships.

Source: Harvard Business Review, 2024. [Read More](#)

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### **McKinsey - The Role of Purpose-Driven Work**

- Research highlights that purpose-driven work motivates employees across all generations, reinforcing the importance of inclusive, human-centered workforce development.

Source: McKinsey, "In Search of Self and Something Bigger." [Read More](#)



# Acknowledgements

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# About

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UpSkill America, an initiative of the Aspen Institute [Economic Opportunities Program](#), supports employers and workforce organizations to expand and improve high-quality educational and career advancement opportunities for America's frontline workers. We seek to create a movement of employers, civic organizations, workforce intermediaries, and policymakers working collaboratively to implement education, training, and development strategies that result in better jobs and opportunities for frontline workers, more competitive businesses, and stronger communities. Follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and learn more at [upskillamerica.org](https://upskillamerica.org).



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2300 N Street NW #700  
Washington DC 20037

[upskillamerica.org](http://upskillamerica.org)

[upskillamerica@aspeninstitute.org](mailto:upskillamerica@aspeninstitute.org)