

Getting Started With a Skills-Based Learning Strategy





Ben Cowan

Director of Skills and Talent
Strategy

Ben Cowan, the Director of Skills and Talent strategy at Degreed, helps clients demystify skills strategy and build impactful skills initiatives. Prior to Degreed, Ben worked as a talent and learning consultant at ZS Associates, a consulting firm specializing in life sciences, and was the director of content development at CorpU, a Philadelphia-based learning technology company. He is passionate about building environments where all employees feel empowered to grow their careers and pursue their passions. In his spare time, Ben loves learning about cooking, music, and the future of work.

Getting Started With a Skills-Based Learning Strategy

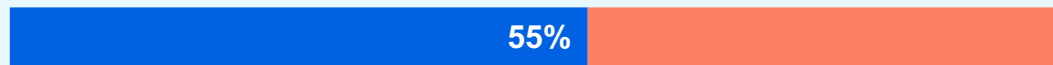
- **The Value of Skills**
- Beginning Your Skill Journey
- Aligning to Business Strategy
- An Agile and Learner-Centric Approach
- Evolving Your Strategy



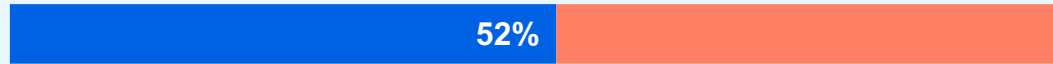
Skills are critical to the success of business objectives, and skill needs are changing faster than ever

8 in 10 CEOs say lack of key skills **IS A SERIOUS THREAT** to their company's growth

We are not able to **innovate** effectively



Our people **costs** are rising more than expected



Our **quality** or **customer experience** are impacted



We are unable to pursue a market **opportunity**



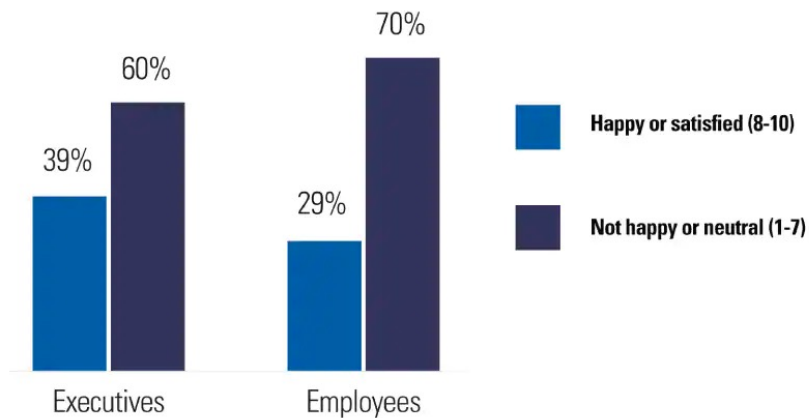
We are missing our **growth** targets



53% of talent and HR leaders believe that **between half and all** of their workforce will need to change their skills **in the next three years**

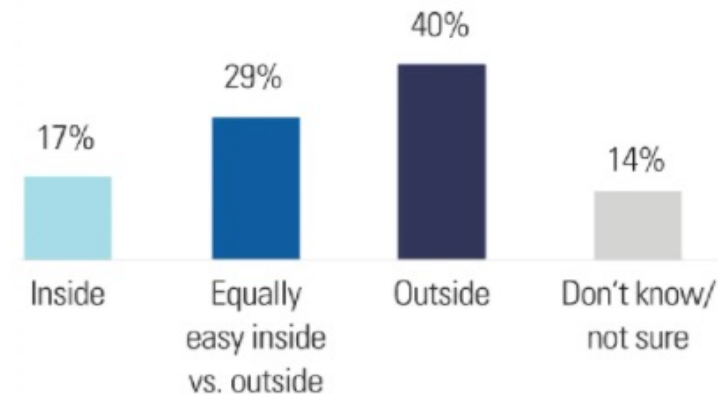
Most employees are dissatisfied with current skill development and don't feel empowered to grow internally

I am happy with my organization's investment in improving my skills and performance (scale, 1-10)



“Only 32% of employees worldwide currently work in an environment that fosters their development, and only 22% strongly agree that they are developing and expanding their knowledge and skills every day...”

Is it easier to find a new job inside your organization or outside your organization?



“Employees also have a “grass is greener” mentality. An overwhelming majority of employees (91%) say that the last time they switched jobs they left their employer to do so.”


If you aren't providing skill development opportunities, your talent will leave

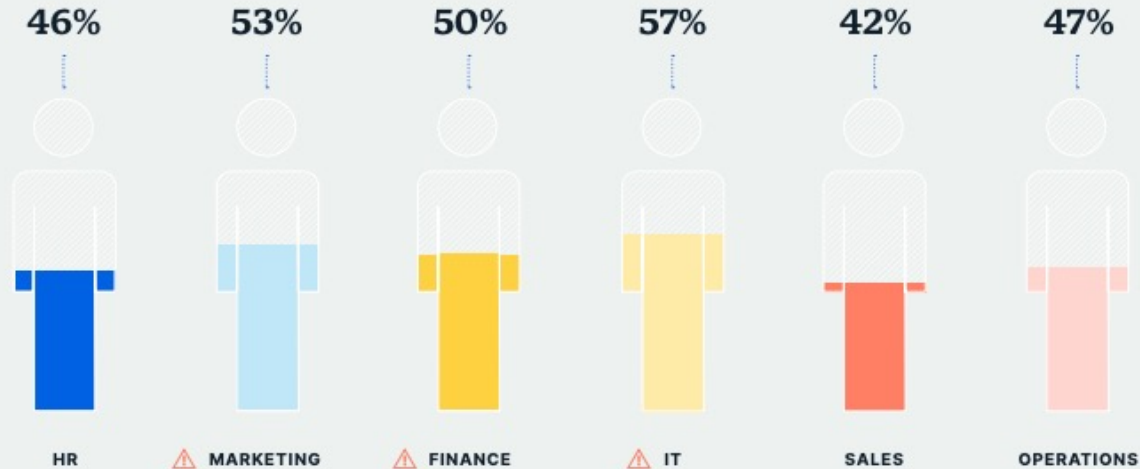
70% of workers said they'd leave their companies to fully use their existing skills, and 65% said they'd leave to learn new skills. Barely half (56%) said they have opportunities for career development within their current organizations.

– IBM, WorkTrends 2016 Global Survey

In your role

If my employer doesn't invest in me and the development of my skills, I will be more likely to leave my job.

 People in IT, marketing, and finance roles are most likely to leave their employer for a new opportunity if they don't feel an investment in developing future-ready skills.



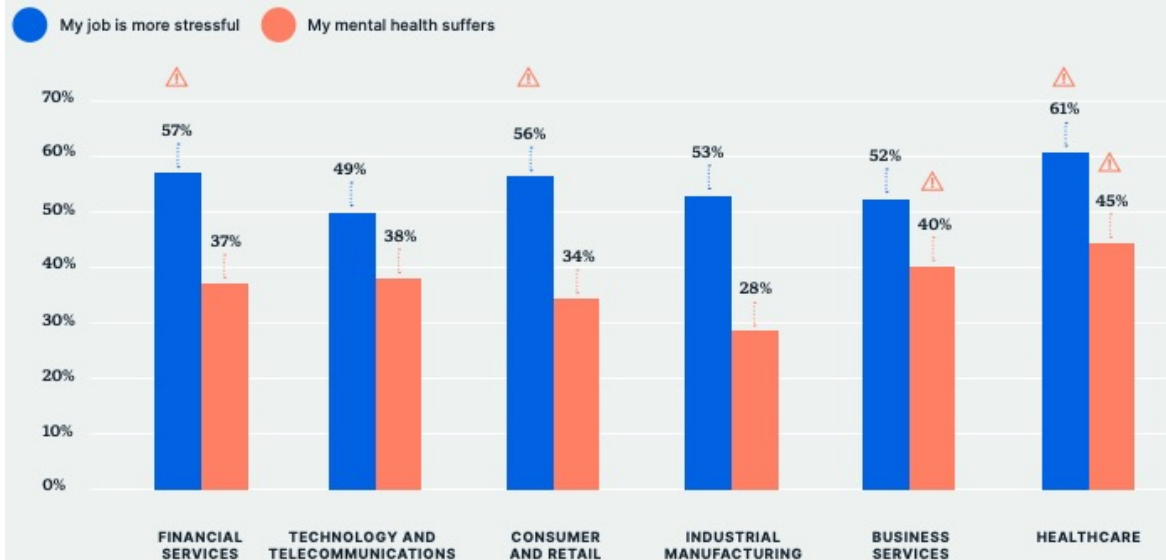
Anxiety about skills is becoming a mental health and wellness issue

- **Nearly half (46%) of workers, managers, and business leaders** believe their core job skills will be **obsolete within five years**. More than **36%** expect their core job skills to **decay within three years**.
- **Nearly 6-in-10 (55%) workers, managers, and business leaders** said a lack of confidence in their skills **makes their job more stressful**. Nearly **4-in-10 (38%)** say their **mental health suffers**.

In your industry

When you don't feel confident in your skills, how, if at all, does this impact you?

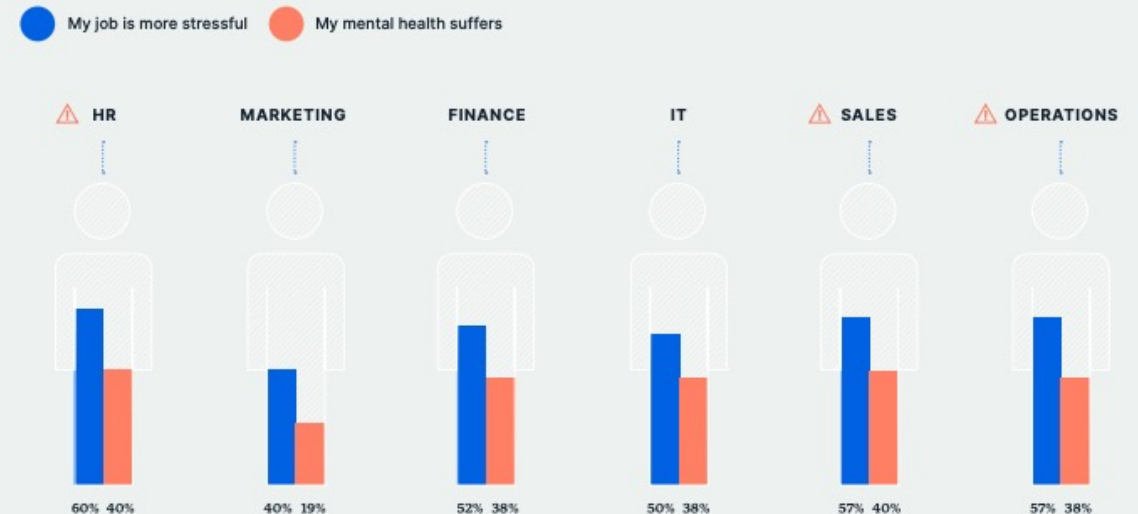
⚠ Workers in the healthcare, financial services, and retail industries are most prone to stress. Mental health is most at risk in the healthcare and business services sectors.



In your role

When you don't feel confident in your skills, how, if at all, does this impact you?

⚠ People who work in HR, sales, and operations roles are most likely to be stressed. The mental health of those working in those same roles is also most at risk.



Getting Started With a Skills-Based Learning Strategy

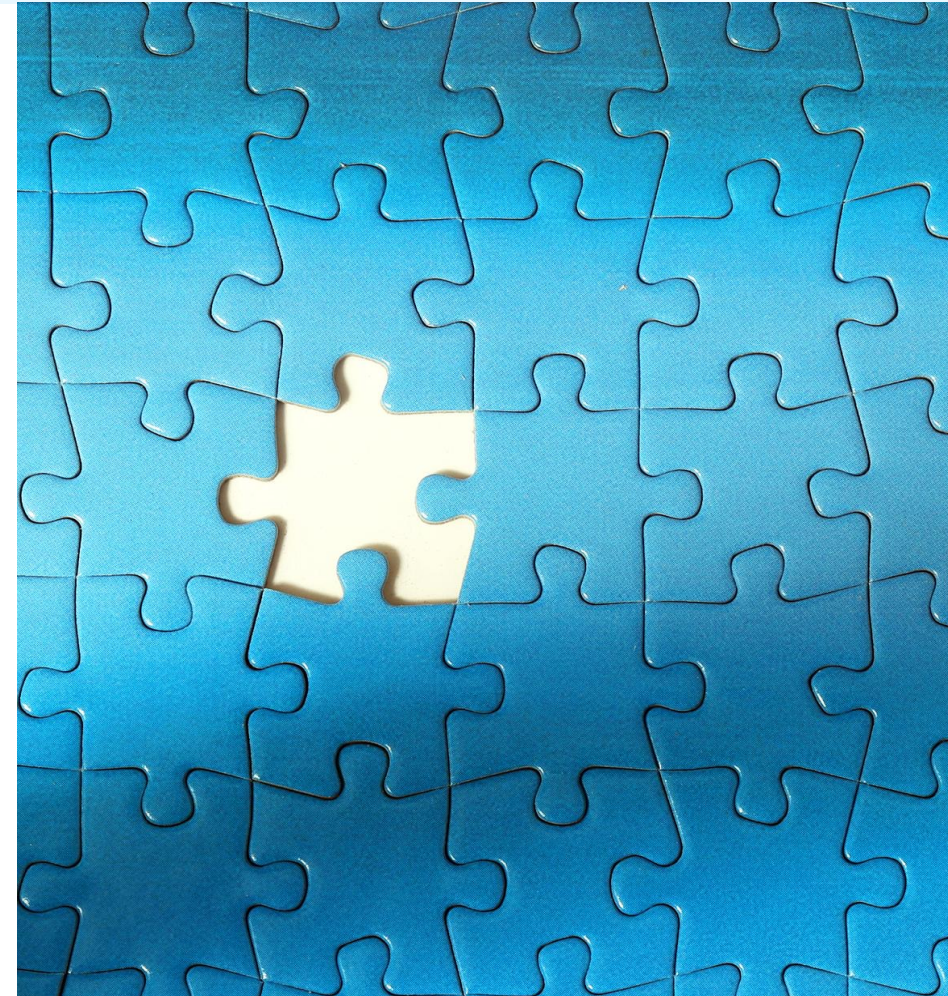
- The Value of Skills
- **Beginning Your Skill Journey**
- Aligning to Business Strategy
- An Agile and Learner-Centric Approach
- Evolving Your Strategy



Common Skills Strategy Pitfalls

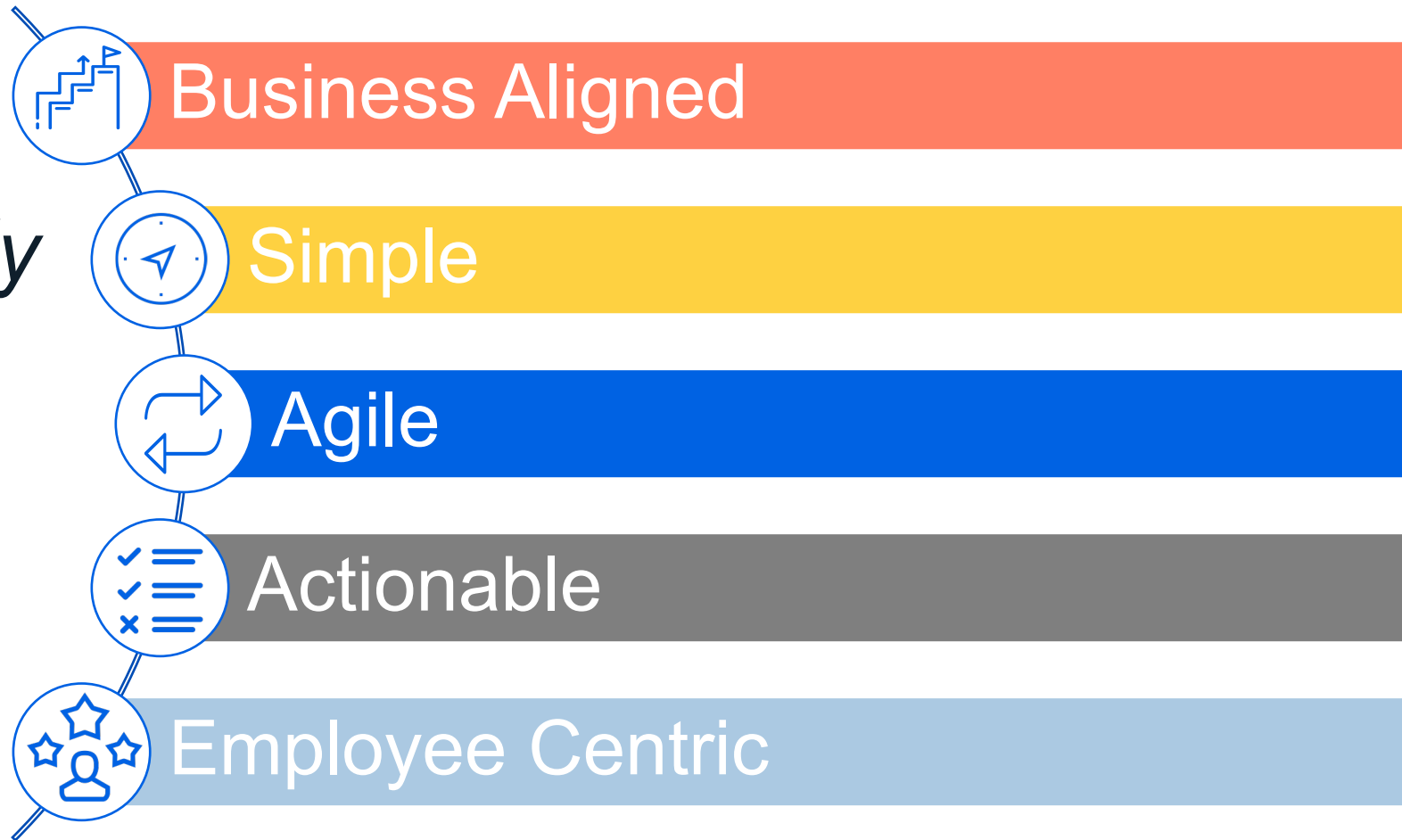
Many attempts to build and execute a skills strategy falter because they are:

- Not aligned to business strategy and value
- Overly complex and rigid
- Take too long to implement
- Lack clear action and next steps from stakeholders
- Disconnected from the day-to-day realities of employees



In the early stages of your skills journey, keep it simple to create value quickly and then build from there

Successfully Starting Your Skills Journey



What Skills Story Will You Focus on First?

1

Build Bench Strength with Deliberate Skill Building

Empower employees to move up and around the organization while simultaneously increasing operation effectiveness.

2

Time to Productivity

Decrease the time it takes to upskill learners in advanced technical and leadership skills.

3

Resource Projects Efficiently

Create an inventory of skills and put those skills in the right place as projects arise.

4

Find and Recognize Experts

Skill measurement can identify best fit for new projects, experts for leadership/mentor roles, and find new areas for innovation.

5

Internal Mobility

Employees can use skill measurement to see where they stack up for current and aspirational roles.

6

Quantify the Skills Gap

The presence, absence and levels of skills will unlock powerful data to translate into targeted training strategies and talent deployment.

7

Future Proofing / Workforce Planning

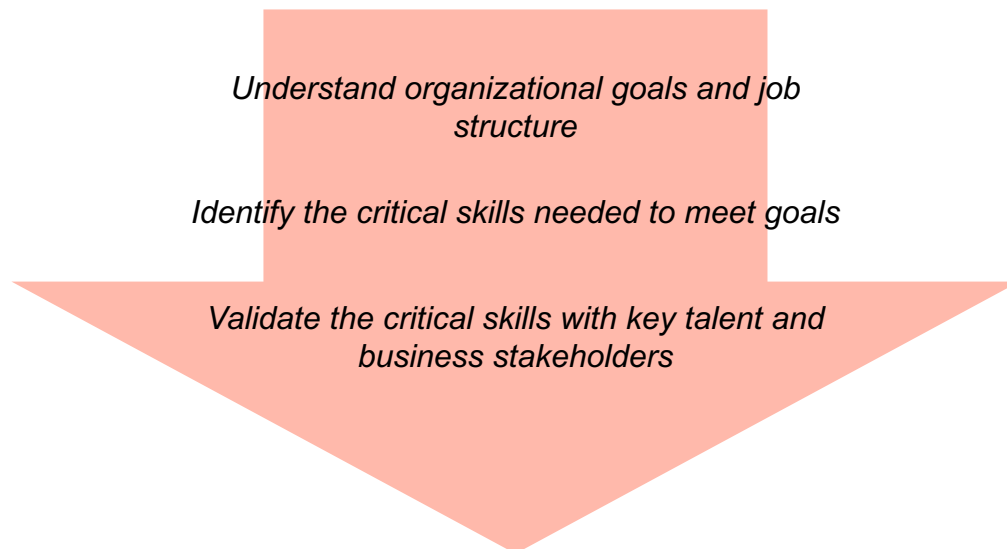
Develop the skills identified as important for the business, and monitor the progression over time.

A taxonomy is not a strategy, nor is it a prerequisite to launching a skills strategy

At some point you will need to align critical skills to roles to enable internal mobility and career pathing, but there are different ways to get there.

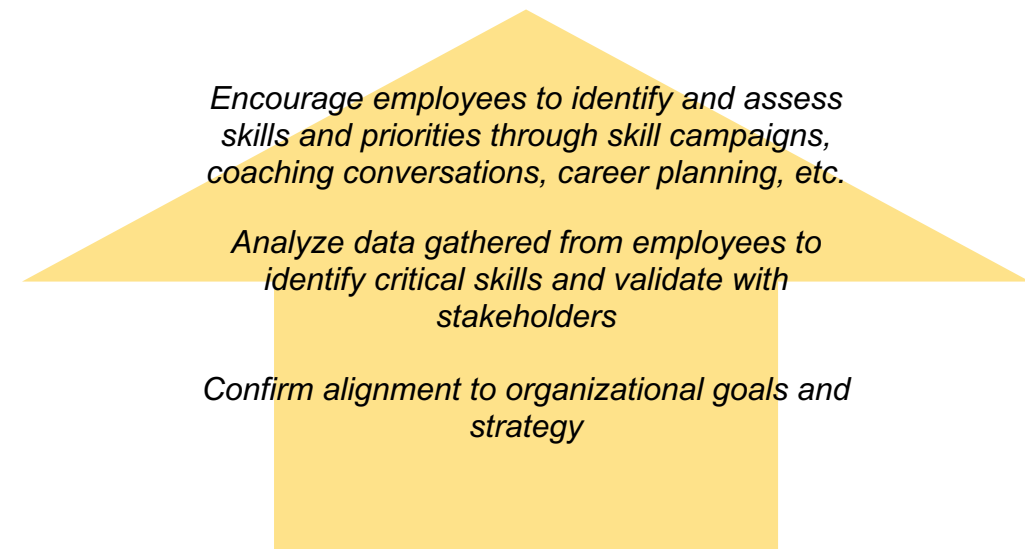
Top-Down Example

Use priorities at the enterprise level to define skills at the employee level



Bottom-up Example

Leverage employee skill data to crowd-source critical skills



The Challenges of Custom Skill Taxonomies

- Time consuming
- Limited shelf life
- Difficult to maintain
- Often not learner centric

When aligning skills to roles, first consider how you will use this information and what level of detail is necessary to achieve those goals. The more granular your taxonomy, the harder it will be to maintain and adjust to changes in the business.

Business Unit



Job Family/Persona



Job Title



Getting Started With a Skills-Based Learning Strategy

- The Value of Skills
- Beginning Your Skill Journey
- **Aligning to Business Strategy**
- An Agile and Learner-Centric Approach
- Evolving Your Strategy



What is a skill?

A skill is learning that is applied. It must be:



Developable



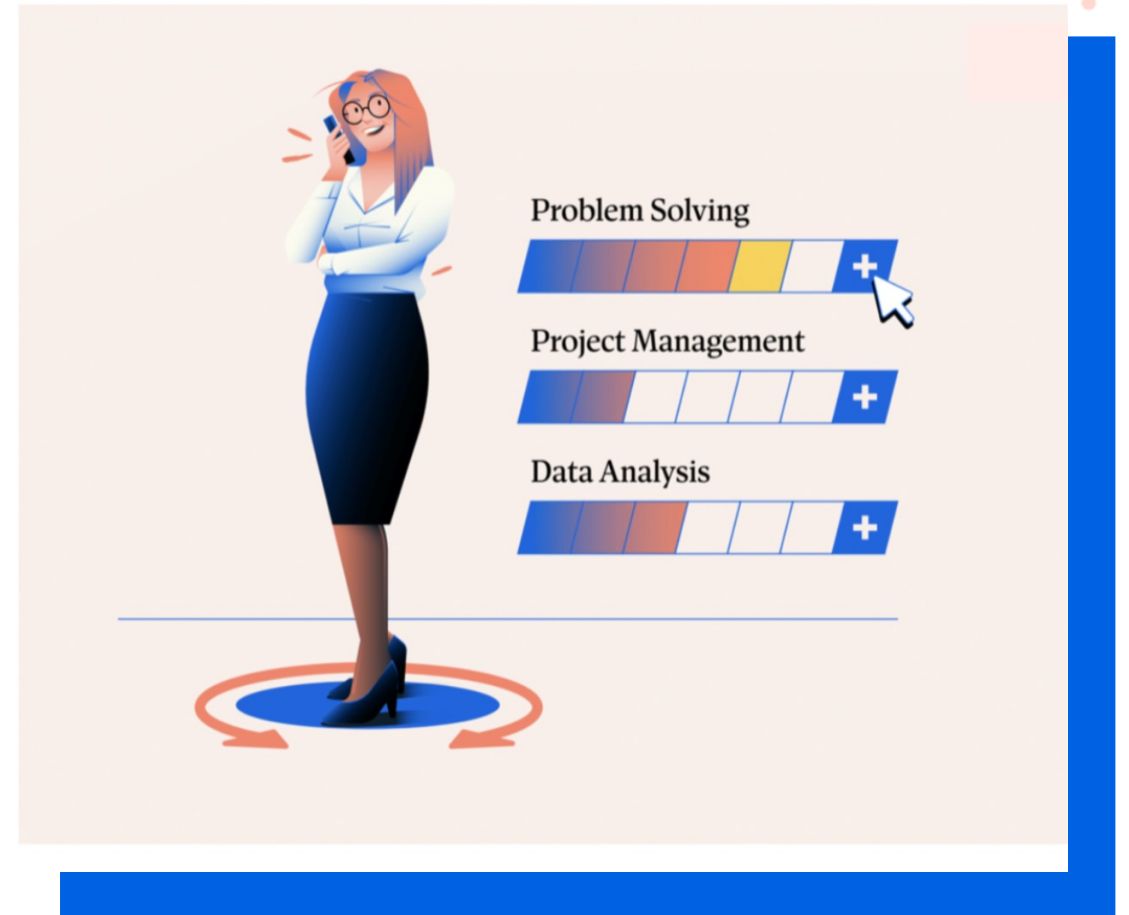
Measurable



Applicable



Transferable



Aligning with the business to identify the 'right' skills



Building the skills your organization needs to succeed

Business Strategy



Understand and Dissect

The business strategy will inform the skills strategy, but you need to understand the business

Execution Must



Critical Actions

Determine the critical things that people must do to execute the business strategy

Critical Skills



Identify Key Skills

Identify the key skills required to move forward with the actions people need to do to execute the strategy

Focused Attention



Focus Skilling Efforts

Focus your skilling efforts, learning experiences and mobility actions on a few skills, the ones that are truly critical.

Prioritizing skill needs

For many roles, there are likely dozens of skills that are technically necessary to perform at a high level. Rather than attempt to create an exhaustive list of *every* skill, focus on:

- **Future proofing:** What skills are new to the role or market?
- **Close the Gap:** What are the skills where there is a known deficit across the organization?
- **High-ROI Skills:** What skills are most associated with high-performers?



Quality Over Quantity

- Improving skills takes time, focus, and opportunities to practice. Realistically, a learner will only make meaningful progress on a few skills at a time
- Allowing users to 'opt in' to skills based on their personal goals or coaching conversations creates better engagement rather than assigning too many skills at once
- Ensure you are also equipping managers with the knowledge and skills necessary to coach their team members and identify opportunities for them to practice



Getting Started With a Skills-Based Learning Strategy

- The Value of Skills
- Beginning Your Skill Journey
- Aligning to Business Strategy
- **An Agile and Learner-Centric Approach**
- Evolving Your Strategy



An agile approach to building priority skills

- Start with a few critical skills that will have the most impact on your business strategy, then build from there
- Begin with a targeted and focused approach on most critical skills first, then build from there

Measure & Communicate Progress

Measure progress against your targets and be prepared to communicate successes and iterate strategy based on results.

Adoption & Change Management

Develop a sustained marketing and change management strategy for all stakeholder groups. All stakeholders need to understand why this is critical and what's in it for them.

Align Resources and Experiences

Ensure all learning resources and opportunities are aligned to your skill strategy to drive alignment and engagement.

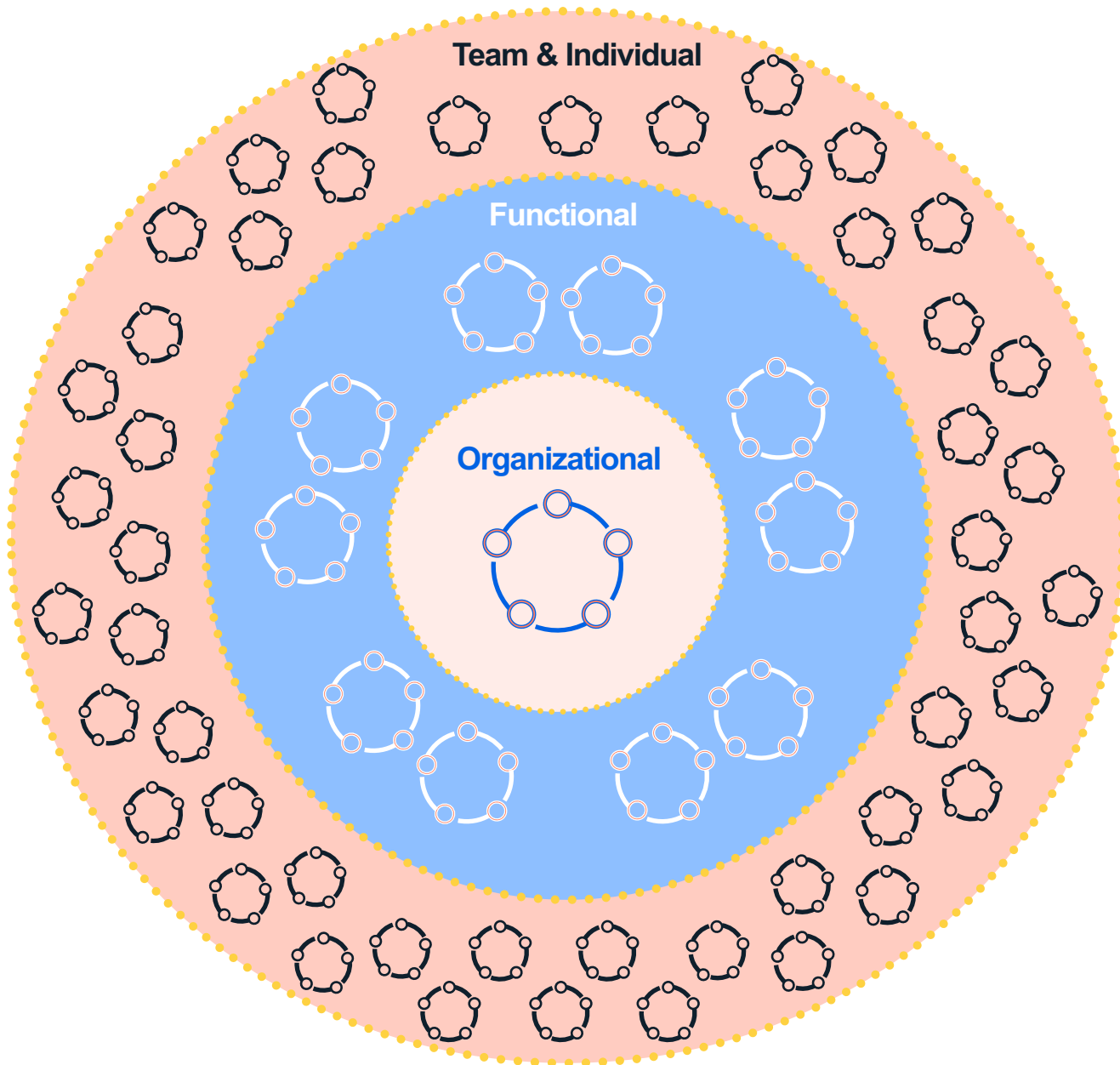
Identify Critical Skills

Identify the skills that are critical to deliver on your business strategy.

Establish Baseline & Targets

Once you've determined the skills needed, measure your employees against these skills and establish target levels for specific skill groups.





Enabling Skill Agility

A purely top-down skill strategy is too slow and too cumbersome.

L&D and Talent must create an environment where business areas and individual learners can shape their own skill journeys.

Be clear on what skill challenges must be addressed org-wide and which challenges are best left to business area L&D and leaders

An employee centric skills journey should seamlessly integrate skills at the times and places of employee need



Learner and leaders already have a clear sense of their skill needs

I know what skills I need to perform better in my current role

5% 5% 90%

I know where I have skills gaps today

7% 8% 85%

I know what skills I need to advance my career

8% 10% 82%

My manager knows what skills I have

21% 14% 66%

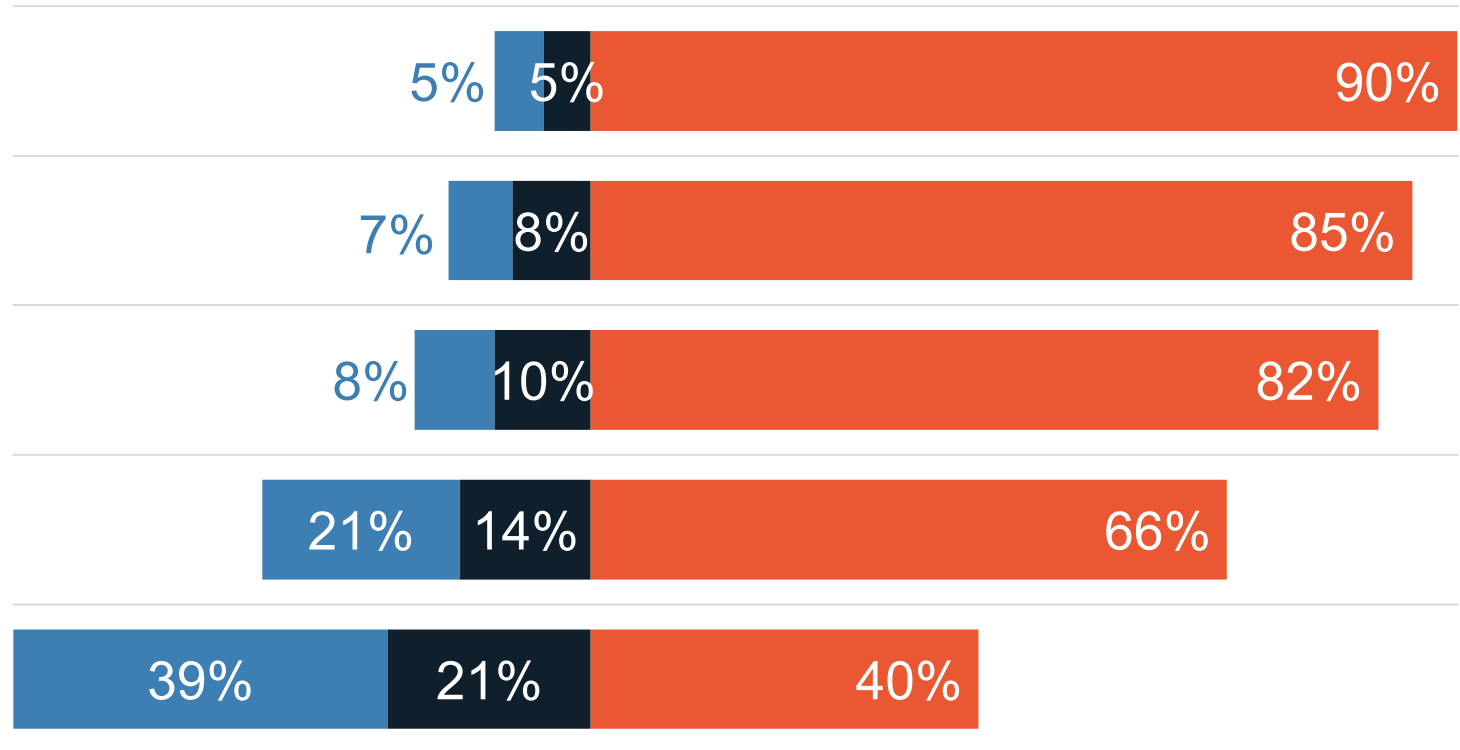
My manager helps me understand what skills I need to advance my career

39% 21% 40%

DISAGREE

NEITHER

AGREE



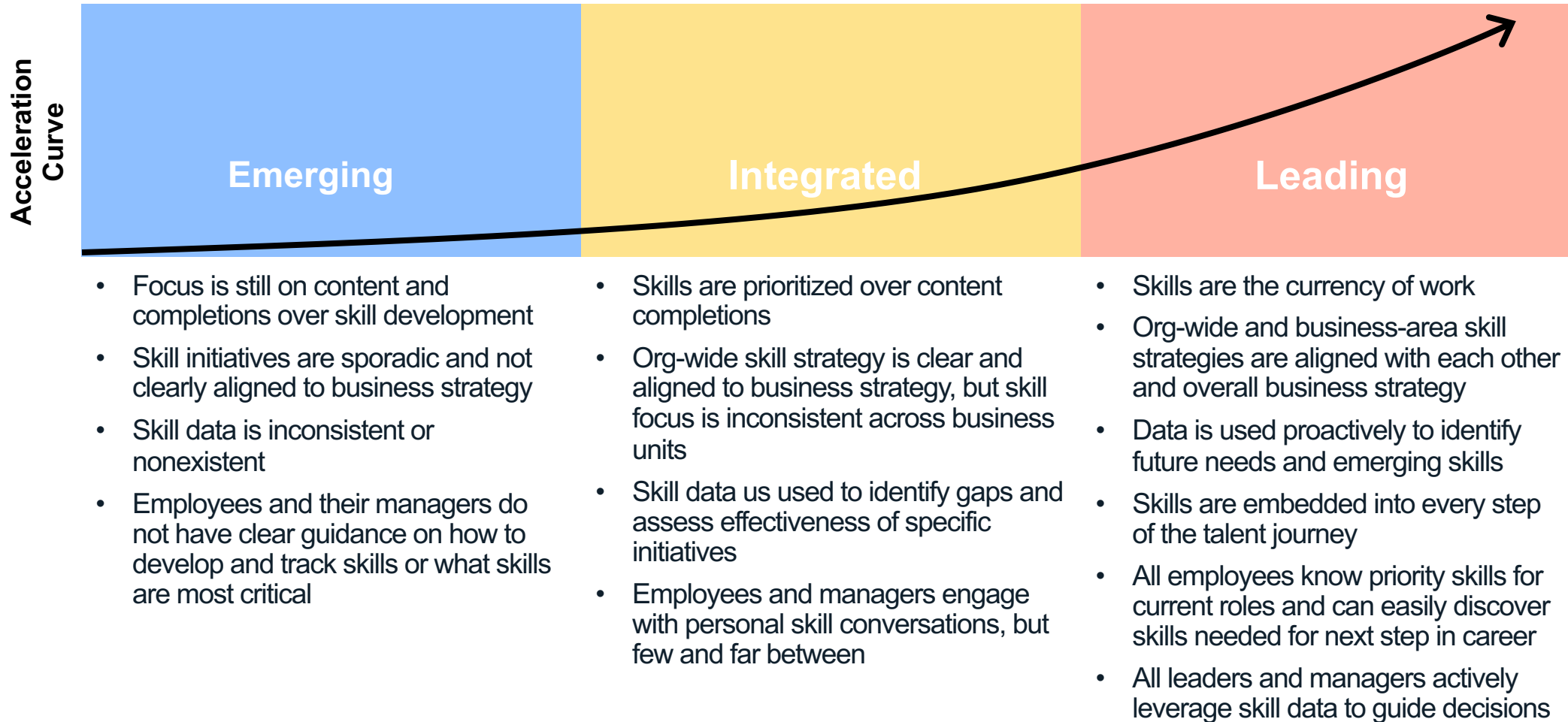
Getting Started With a Skills-Based Learning Strategy

- The Value of Skills
- Beginning Your Skill Journey
- Aligning to Business Strategy
- An Agile and Learner-Centric Approach
- Evolving Your Strategy



Evolving your skill strategy

Skills strategies take time to fully realize value. The goal is not perfection but continued growth and building on success.



What does a fully evolved skills strategy look like?

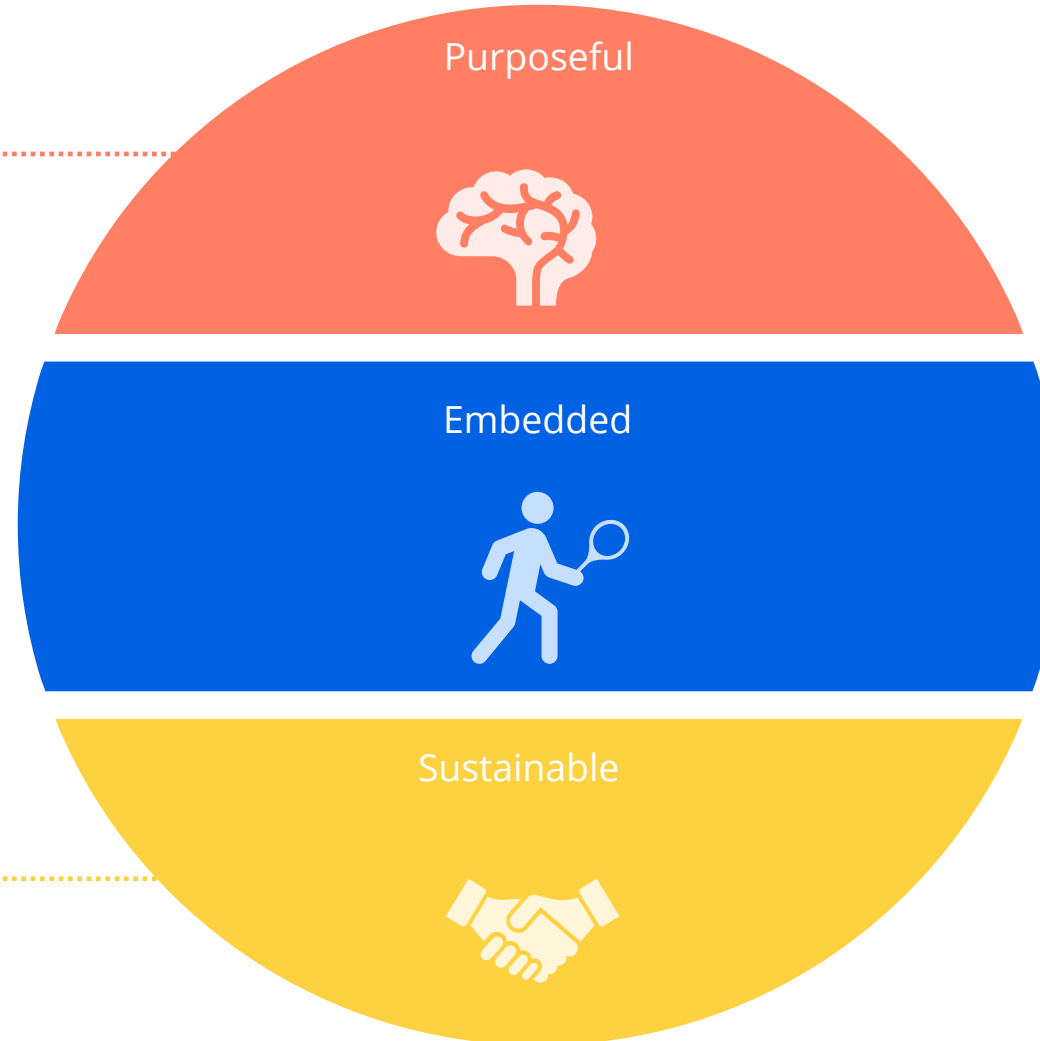
Building skills is a journey, but we need to be clear on the destination

Purposeful

- Priority skills directly connect to business strategy
- Skill priorities are defined for key roles and personas across the organization
- Clear targets and objectives are set for each component of strategy
- Agile approach with inputs from business-area L&D teams and leaders

Sustainable

- Data is regularly captured and realigned with skills/roles
- Strategy evolves as business priorities and market change
- Clear governance to maintain data while empowering leaders and learners and to identify new skills
- Volume and accuracy of skill data is maintained and analyzed in conjunction with other people and performance data

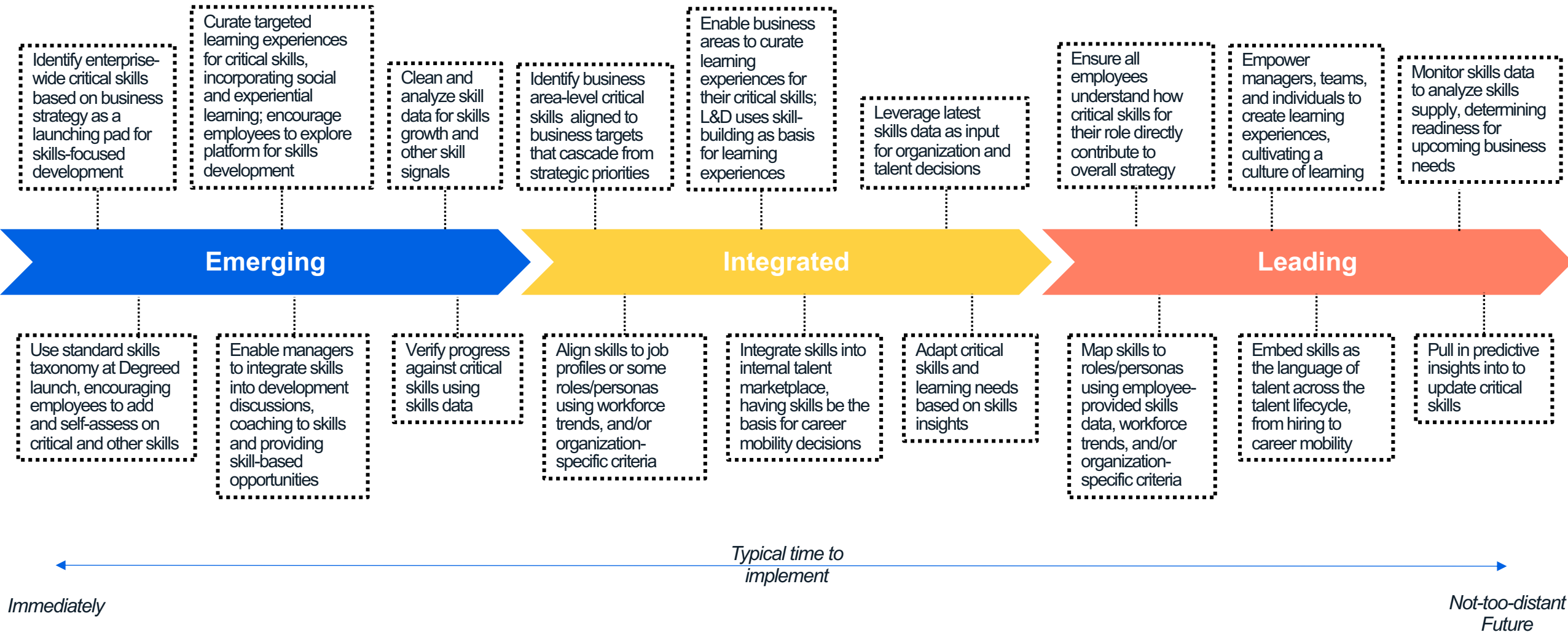


Embedded

- Skills are the language of development for everyone, not just L&D
- Integrated into all aspects of the employee journey (hiring, coaching, role definition, career planning, etc.)
- Clear tools for assessing and recording skill data
- Skills data is used to inform learning and talent strategy

An Example Skills Journey

Milestones for accelerating skills in organizations



Questions?

The State of Skills 2021: Endangered

Ultimate Skill Data Handbook

