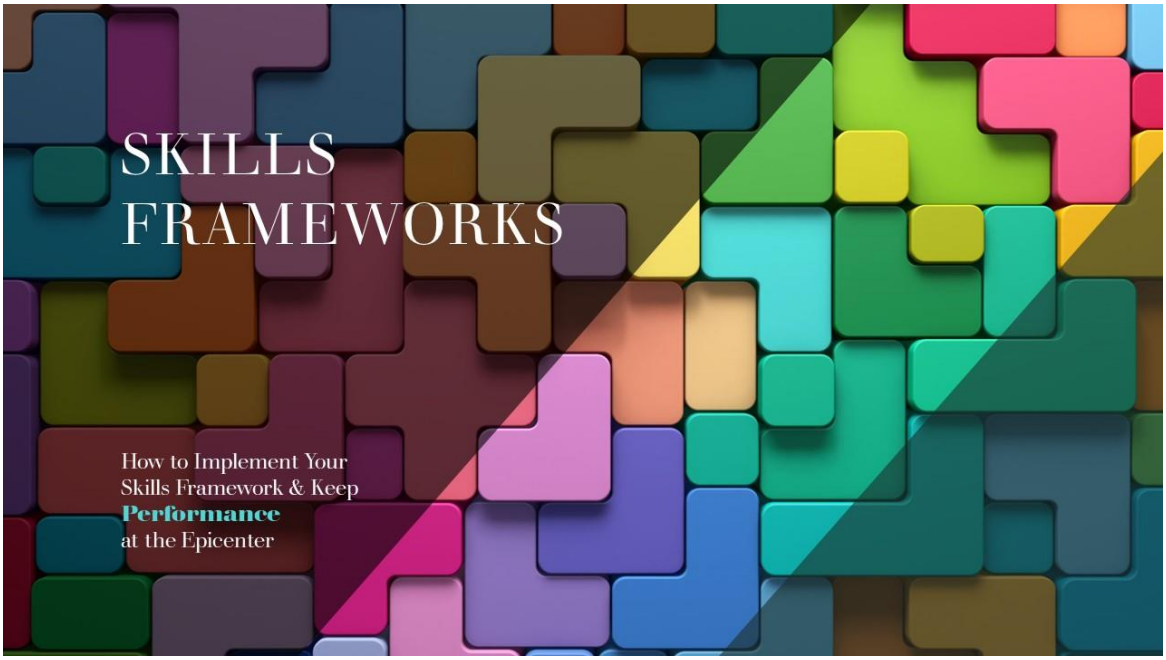

How to Implement Your Skills Framework & Keep Performance at the Epicenter

The process detailed here will enable you to create and deploy a performance-focused skills framework.

1. User-centered & co-created language

Gather insights from employees, managers, and stakeholders to create user stories and descriptions of their context, work, and tasks that are/will be carried out and the required performance needs/skill proficiency for the relevant roles.

Compile this by carrying out observations of existing workflows, wherever possible, and apply performance consulting to delve deeper. Per the SFIA definitions in "Can Skills Frameworks Close the Skills-to-Performance Gap?", this is demonstrated skill and demonstrated competency. Here, you can identify performance and non-performance needs, verifying the content you have harvested.

Additionally, assess the learning content you already have for its relevance, quality, and gaps. Is there enough for your most critical tasks and the skills needed to perform them? Crucially, this helps you to address the non-conscious nature of knowledge. Research by Richard E. Clarke and others demonstrates that 70% of experts will miss what a novice needs—but this content is especially vital for any reskilling and upskilling efforts.

2. Analyze the job(s) to be done & identify skills gaps

For new work processes this is your first step, and it requires performance consulting in action—field research to co-create the workflow, analyze the job to be done, and identify the skills gaps and which skills are most critical to the work to be done.

Strategically, this is where L&D can be involved from the get-go, making the shift from the guesswork of order-takers to data-driven order makers and evidence-based practitioners. Additionally, it is where you have the greatest opportunity to make a significant contribution to efficiency and effectiveness, vital in any economic climate. It may also involve organizational design principles. This is an ideal way to identify the future skills for your organization.

If you started with this step, then step 1 becomes your step 2.

3. Research external skills frameworks

Research external skills frameworks, particularly government and professional bodies. Many already exist, and you can use these to inform your own approach. Some you may already have— or wish to adopt—in your organization. These tend to be more prevalent in tech, marketing, finance, and HR.

This research is useful to avoid duplication, working in silos, or clashing with something already liked and embedded, as you will discover whether and how well these existing frameworks already support your performance context. The final point will influence the types of performance consulting conversations you have with your stakeholders and SMEs.

4. Describe performance needs

Being simplified and not onerous, create clear, context-driven descriptions of the performance needs, using the data and content you have collected in the first three steps. This content directly informs your content strategy and performance development methods. Include any assessments, data collection, and performance measurement methods.

This supports the movement away from a reliance on courses to resource thinking. As Guy W. Wallace points out, “When skills are derived from a model of performance they will lead to learning experiences that are more likely to transfer and have a positive impact back on the job. And isn’t that the point of addressing skills?”

5. Analyze search data in your systems

Do not rely purely on external data and reports about which skills are trending. This relates to your unique context. If you are able, analyze search data in your systems: Where do you have searches inside and outside of L&D systems, especially those with zero returns? This provides useful insights on what your employees are looking for.

If you don’t have that data, ask your employees. Again, it is vital to assess why this is in relation to your individual use case. Visualize this data so that you can see connections to the combinations of skills an employee needs. This ensures skills are not developed in isolation. Additionally, it helps create visibility on where employees and their skills can cross over to adjacent projects and/or roles, supporting talent mobility and human capital flexibility.

6. Be scalable, flexible & agile

Staying low-tech to begin with, be scalable, flexible, and agile. Prototype and test, then bring in tech to scale in predetermined areas, again focused on where you have gathered data and evidence. In enterprise organizations, this is where AI can make a significant difference to some of your processes.

For smaller organizations, using such frameworks drives efficiency—if linked to effectiveness. By focusing on specific areas, you significantly reduce the risk of a wasted investment in a huge and largely unused generic content library. You can consider and test tech when the organization grows, making automation and scalability more of a necessity.

7. Deploy robust governance

Robust governance is particularly critical when it comes to data collection, especially when you begin to use technology as an enabler. This includes how you class and code skills (again connected to any content) and skill owners; when and how reviews and updates will take place; and how you will measure progress and contextual relevance. This requires ongoing collaboration with your SMEs—or "skill owners"—and employees, field research, and regular performance-focused conversations on workflows. This is even more true if you are creating new processes.

8. Data-centered approaches

Skills-based approaches are data centered, particularly over time and as they scale. Decide how and where assessment, input, and output data will be used, and provide purposeful value. Regarding assessments, decide where subjectivity is allowable and where more objectivity is required, based on the stakes of the decisions assessments will inform.

This will be part of your governance, data strategy, and data ethics—it also links to risk management on litigation. It is important employees have transparency of where and how data will be used. Areas that will drive your approach include local data rules, as well as your values and culture.

9. Use an evaluation methodology

A methodology we recommend is Will Thalheimer's Learning Transfer Evaluation Model, which you can use alongside your use-case skills framework.

With your stakeholders, establish the performance outcome measurements and their relationship with any KPIs/OKRs. This can be combined and cross-checked with any self-, manager- and peer-skills assessments you may wish to use. You could add in performance management here too, thereby reducing subjectivity—although this process may negate traditional performance management. You will also benefit from agreeing on the metrics which are most valuable to your stakeholder. Furthermore, this data can contribute to any requirements on human capital reporting.

Business as usual

With practice this will begin to become a business-as-usual process, focused on capturing and reflecting on learning from your first use case(s), making collaborative data-driven decisions, refinement, and identifying other use cases. It is a significant step away from typical and traditional learning needs analysis.

As we stated in "Can Skills Frameworks Close the Skills-to-Performance Gap?", we wanted to not only delve deeper into challenges posed but also to present solutions—the ***how***. However, what we did not want to do is add to the plethora of non-solutions that are largely surface-level and mainly consist of soundbites, jargon, and word salad.

Thus we aim to present a well-researched, thorough, and pragmatic contribution, considered from a practitioner's lens and point of view. We hope we have achieved this aim and would welcome your feedback on how we have stimulated your thinking and action.

— Markus Bernhardt & Teresa Rose