How to put employability at the heart of corporate strategy?
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Pearson TalentLens' Employability Solutions
Acceleration of change requires reactivity and anticipation

In 2017, Dell and the Institute for the Future shared the results of their forecasting study, the main conclusion of which has been a great point for discussion: 85% of the jobs of 2030 do not yet exist. Only time will tell if the two organisations are right, but there is no longer any doubt that the skills needed are seeing a fundamental transformation.

According to OECD estimates, many adults do not yet have the skills required for new jobs or for jobs which do already exist but that are undergoing transformation, in particular from a digital and/or environmental perspective.

This increasing pace of change means that companies are having to adapt ever more quickly, and in an ever more nuanced manner. In a constantly changing world of work, organisations have to respond to two major challenges:

- **Improving the recruitment** of their employees, both internally and externally;
- **Focusing** on the continuing training of their talent.

In the first case, the HR department must ensure that any gaps between the candidate’s actual level and the skills expected for the position are identified and closed during the onboarding period.

In the second case, the organisation will need to respond to the upskilling1 or reskilling2 needs expressed by the manager and/or employee. In each case, the organisation will have to make an ambitious active commitment towards increasing employability. The question then arises as to the means, the method and the approach to be used to achieve that objective. Thinking beyond the tools to be deployed, the organisation has every interest in engaging in a process of questioning its thinking: what is a skill in 2022? Why is a particular skill more critical than another? What does it commit to the concepts of development, training, learning objectives, or knowledge assessments?

It is this whole process that will contribute to the development of a culture of “employability” in the organisation and place it at the centre of both business and HR strategy.

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1. Training to supplement or improve current skills.
2. Training to change jobs.
INTRODUCTION

Employability: needed by companies, expected by employees

The rapid transformation of jobs and the change to the skills required represent a crucial challenge concerning both employers and employees.

In 2020, the World Economic Forum estimated that one out of every two workers in the world would need re-skilling (training to acquire new skills required to change jobs) over the following five years.

40% of professional skills are expected to change by 2025.

According to projections from the Future of Jobs Report, companies will need to incorporate new job roles into their organisations in the same time frame: e.g. data analysts and data scientists, AI (artificial intelligence) and machine learning specialists, business development professionals, etc.

In all, ten mostly new professions will represent a workplace demand estimated at nearly one hundred million people.

New technical skills, backed up by essential soft skills

These staggering figures illustrate the scale of the challenge that is now facing all business sectors and companies of all sizes – from very small businesses to international groups. Their environment has become increasingly complex in recent years. In order to maintain a competitive advantage, or even to survive in the face of the emergence of new players, they have no choice but to adapt and transform themselves in order to remain agile. The pandemic has added further to this, contributing to the acceleration of those transformations already taking place, particularly in digital. More than ever before, the question arises as to the need to adapt technical (hard) skills and to improve behavioural (soft) skills in order to maintain employees’ employability.

3. Machine learning, a subfield of AI.
Such an approach is all the more important given that employees are also voicing that expectation. According to the Great Insights 2022 study, conducted by the Great Place To Work institute, employability is one of their primary concerns.

Nearly one in two employees state that they will need to upgrade their skills and/or pivot job role in the next five years, but almost a third of them do not feel that they have benefited from specific career development support over the past year.

The study also reveals that training and development programmes are becoming one of the defining criteria when choosing to work for a potential employer.

A shared culture of upskilling and reskilling

The future-of-work challenge cannot be met solely by improvisation. The whole organisation, from employees through to top management, needs to subscribe to a culture of “employability”, so that each person takes ownership of it at their own level.

Executive management sets the course and shares transparently, a strategic direction and its implications for the development of job roles; line management is responsible for implementing them by identifying development areas for its teams; while employees are the primary actors in determining their own employability.

Three major changes for 2035

The result of a year’s work involving, among others, entrepreneurs, academics, HR managers and economists, a forecasting study conducted by the consultancy firm Onepoint reveals several revolutions, including:

1. The emergence of the professional with multiple incomes: an employee who will combine on average two or three different jobs each day, with multiple employment statuses;
2. The “augmented” rather than “replaced” professional: while automation is rapidly transforming jobs, human intelligence has a major role to play in the future of work;
3. The acceleration of real-time and continuous learning: in 2035, an employee will spend an average of 2 hours and 48 minutes on training per day, compared to about 30 minutes today.

Source: “Futur du travail en 2035” (Future of Work in 2035) study (Onepoint, 2022), based on a range of forward-looking interviews.
It has therefore become essential to provide more information and communicate more about the Personal Training Account and the importance of personal development.

Possibilities opened up by the Personal Training Account

In addition to just providing information, employers can also take action: by contributing to the Personal Training Account, as part of a process of co-determination of learning pathways. According to estimates by the French Caisse des Dépôts, co-financing training makes it possible to multiply the number of training courses leading to a diploma by a factor of three and the average duration of training by a factor of ten. Alternatively, they can offer skill development tools and schemes, such as a “self-service” solution that identifies areas for improvement and suggests appropriate e-learning content accordingly.

Workers: the primary drivers to determine their own employability

Employees are becoming increasingly aware of the key role they play in adapting their skills, with the support of their employer and the use of dedicated tools and devices.

This is one of the main ambitions of the Professional Future Law (loi Avenir professionnel) of 5 September 2018: restoring the right of workers to determine their own career path and skills development. The French Personal Training Account (CPF) was intended to give them back control over their training choices. According to a survey carried out by the recruitment firm Hays, there are several motivations behind the use of the Personal Training Account: broadening the skills needed for the employee’s current job (50%) or training with a view to entering new roles (39%).

On the other hand, more than seven out of ten employees complain about the lack of information about the Personal Training Account provided by their employer, and many of them also feel that their employer does not offer them enough training.
Whether the CPF or a scheme designed and implemented by the company itself, individual employees should remain primarily responsible for their own employability. Workers are becoming increasingly aware of this: eight out of ten consider that training is above all a personal and individual responsibility and almost 70% feel that they are the principal drivers in that regard, according to a study by Centre Inffo. While essential, awareness is only the first step in maintaining employability.

Possibilities opened up by the Personal Training Account Formation

Employees must also feel motivated: it is not enough to just be able to learn; it is important that they realise that ability by identifying the main driving forces behind their motivation. However, there could be multiple factors that determine motivation, both internal and/or external, which employees must be able to identify. They may want to maintain their employability for fear of losing their job or of coming to a dead end in their professional development, or they may want to change jobs to embrace new challenges. The employer can then prove to be a valuable ally in supporting that process through, for example, coaching, or by creating questionnaires on motivations and professional interests, which will help to identify driving forces, strengths and weaknesses.

It is also essential that the company provides employees with a framework that is appropriate to developing their own employability: self-assessment solutions, 360° questionnaires for managers, regular interviews – beyond the mandatory career development interviews held every two years – with their managers and HR partners, easier access to training modules, etc. For employees, and with the support of their employers, it is a question of continuously working on several aspects: experience, knowledge levels, soft skills, emotional intelligence, career-long training and development, which work together to improve employability.

Key Figures

64% of French people consider upskilling or reskilling training to be very important.

Who agrees the most? University graduates, excluding Grandes écoles (specialised universities) (67%) and millennials.

Source: Randstad Employer Brand Research, 13th edition, 2022

5. Or Gen Y, which includes people born between the early 1980s and the late 1990s.
Soft skills: as important as professional skills

The acceleration of organisational transformations and the evolution of job roles places behavioural skills at the forefront, both for companies and for their employees.

“People with better behavioural skills adapt to changes better and more quickly. They are more resilient to change and perform better in times of major upheaval. They integrate technological advances into their daily lives more easily and work more effectively with a wide range of contacts.”

Pascale Bélorgey, Offering and Expertise Manager at the training organisation Cegos.

According to Pascale, soft skills contribute to the empowerment of employees (taking the initiative, ability to solve problems creatively, etc.) and to respecting their differences in order to realise the full potential of employee diversity.

The future of employment lies in behavioural skills

Whether relational, emotional, organisational, cognitive or conceptual, soft skills have become an essential part of the talent development process in recent years. As confirmed by CSP Docendi’s latest barometer, more and more companies are integrating them into their strategy for supporting skills development.

Six out of ten HR professionals believe that the identification and development of these skills are a reality in their organisation – eight percentage points higher than in 2021.

One out of two organisations trains, or intends to train, its employees in soft skills. And rightly so: according to a World Economy Forum report, most of the skills needed in 2025 will be in this field, whether it be problem solving, leadership, or interpersonal skills and collaborative work. In the top 10, only two relate to anything other than behavioural skills, namely the development or use of technologies.
The importance of rightly integrating soft skills into human resources management policies is no longer up for debate. However, intentions do not always translate into action. According to the employees questioned in the survey, there is a twofold discrepancy: firstly, between what companies declare in terms of how much they value soft skills and the reality of practices; and secondly, between the skills that should be recognised and those that are currently taken into account. However, companies and employees alike would benefit greatly from a soft skills culture, which has yet to be bedded into the general day-to-day reality of many organisations.

The importance of instilling change

While progress may have been made, the importance of cross-functional skills still needs to be communicated in order to drive change in practice.

According to a survey conducted by the Association Article 1 and the Fondation Mozaïk, the topic still suffers from a certain lack of awareness. However, once the concept was clarified, three out of four recruiters were convinced of the positive effects of good behavioural skills.

Hard and soft skills: a shared foundation for professional success

Behavioural skills now seem to be on a par with technical skills when it comes to professional expertise. This is, at any rate, what emerges from a survey conducted by the recruitment agencies Michael Page and Cadremploi: in the day-to-day application of soft skills, it appears that more than half of executives use them as much as their professional skills.

31% even use soft skills more than the latter. According to Marlène Ribeiro, Executive Director of Michael Page, “soft skills are and will remain the undisputed passports to a successful career. We live in a very fast-paced age; technical skills are regularly reinvented and new professions are emerging while others disappear. Managers need to be able to navigate this ever-changing environment: soft skills will guide them to success at every stage.”
Why is employability becoming a priority for companies?

Today we are experiencing extremely rapid technological change, brought about by the desire to automate increasingly complex processes. Until now, the impact of automation has manifested itself in manual or very basic tasks; now, with artificial intelligence, we are seeing a search for more “intellectual” automation. As an example, a bank has a department of lawyers, highly qualified, whose job it is to check legal documents. This activity can now be performed by artificial intelligence, much more quickly and with fewer errors. Those experts are therefore seeing the nature of their job change. The transformation which is taking place affects all professions.

EXPERT OPINION

“New responses to the employability challenge”

The acceleration in transformations affecting all professions implies a change of focus: from now on, training must give equal weight to both professional and soft skills. Valeria Mascellani, senior product analyst manager at Pearson TalentLens gives her interpretation.

1 billion people are expected to retrain in AI by 2030, according to the OECD.

However, there is a major gap between that forecast and approaches to reskilling. Companies will nevertheless have to adjust by investing in training and by shifting the tasks of their employees towards them providing more added value. Companies will have to adapt to this new reality in its various dimensions – business, strategic direction and in their HR development policies.
What role do soft skills play in maintaining and developing employability?

What differentiates us from machines is empathy, critical judgement, social and interpersonal skills, control of our emotions and ability to adapt to change. Task automation, even if it becomes particularly elaborate, will still not be able to replace this. “People skills”, such as soft skills, will remain at the heart of tomorrow’s jobs.

The development of such skills will enable workers to be more effective in the work environment and to remain employable.

For example, communicating in a clear and engaging manner will always be a key skill for a manager to facilitate team performance. The jobs of tomorrow will be characterised by the extra added value employees can bring to them, such as the ability to make good decisions. Therefore, investment in training must address essential workplace skills, but also encompass soft skills – in particular flexibility and the ability to adapt to other jobs or other assignments.

How can they be successfully developed?

The theoretical approach is important to raise awareness of the importance of soft skills, but such skills consist of knowing how to behave and how to do things, and those abilities manifest themselves in social interactions and situations where behaviour plays a role. As a result, a more concrete, practice-oriented approach is therefore also needed. There are various possibilities, such as mentoring, coaching and training, etc. Aside from tools, an individual’s process of identifying how they function and understanding what causes problems for them will make it possible to establish areas for improvement, gain skills and use them, opening up possibilities in their own professional practice. One challenge for companies will include further opening up access to skills development tools, particularly for soft skills, which are generally restricted more to certain roles or positions.

The use of tools to anticipate the technological impacts on job roles will provide a first level of assessment, a mapping of medium and long-term needs and consequences in terms of upskilling and reskilling. This process needs to be carried out at an organisational level, so as to identify which skills will be needed for the jobs of the future, and then on an individual level around employees’ current skills, potential, motivations and areas for development. On the basis of this preliminary work, the company will be able to foresee the action needed to develop behavioural skills, in line with areas of development revealed by the psychometric tests during this first assessment phase.
Training: the cornerstone of employability at any age

Employees are becoming increasingly aware of the key role they play in adapting their skills, with the support of their employer and the use of dedicated tools and devices.

March 2022

Some 30 organisations have signed the first inter-company pledge around the place of employees over 50 at work.

→ Among the ten commitments made:

To support skill development and to encourage employees to take action to develop their employability and open up new career opportunities.

Employing senior citizens requires particular attention. In France, barely half of those aged 55-64 are employed, according to Dares, while at the same time, employers are faced with a lack of skills on the market. The employability of senior citizens is therefore an increasingly crucial issue, which explains the unprecedented approach taken by these companies.
Towards a truly inclusive skills development plan

The intention is all the more commendable given that age is still associated with many prejudices among employers, who tend to exclude older workers from their talent management policies. As we are reminded by Catherine Delgoulet, Director of GIS-CREAPT (Centre for research into professional experience, age at work and the working population), “the older we get, the less access we have to training… In fact, the peak age for access to training is around 25-35. 55% of this age group receives regular training, compared to only 45% of over-50s and 35% of over-60s.”

As a result of this, organisations must undergo a real cultural revolution. The French Skills Development Plan, which replaced the Training Plan with effect from 2019, must target all employees, irrespective of their age, seniority or position. This comprehensive and inclusive approach to talent management will also benefit from one key aspect: professional development is well-received across the board by workers.

Train to adapt to changes in the labour market

More than eight out of ten say that training is effective way of enhancing skills and keeping pace with their profession.

Active workers are just as concerned about adapting their skills to their current job (71%) as they are about adapting them to the labour market in general (70%). By contrast, 18-24 year-olds are more concerned about adapting their skills to the changing labour market (83%).

The younger generation is therefore fully aware that today’s jobs are changing ever more rapidly – and that training is essential in order to respond to that accelerated change. While companies have shifted from a rationale of spending on training to one of investing in skills, awareness on the part of employees is a lever on which to act in order to foster their employability but also to maintain their commitment, and ultimately to retain them – a major challenge in a talent crisis.
Learning together in the face of skills obsolescence

While employability is both an individual and organisational issue, practical responses can be collective. In a recent podcast from Pearson TalentLens, Charlotte du Payrat, consultant in change, management and team coaching, and author, recommends “fostering a collaborative culture” and “developing virtuous cycles of learning” that contribute to knowledge transfer within a team.

Continuous learning, mentoring, team coaching and a feedback culture are some of the dimensions of that dynamic. She also reminds us of the strengths of older workers in terms of the maturity of their soft skills, which must be further enhanced to help maintain their employability. “The challenge before us is to make space for everyone – the younger generations as well as the more experienced ones – by showing imagination in order to adopt a much more collective approach to the fight against skills obsolescence.”
For one in two young workers, the pandemic has had a negative impact on career opportunities, limiting the development of a professional network or the acquisition of skills.

An HR policy geared towards the development of skills and then putting them to use has now become a differentiating element of an employer’s offerings.

A study carried out by Glassdoor also reveals that a third of under-25s consider a lack of experience to be the biggest obstacle to their employability. “To entice Gen Z employees, companies should focus on an amazing onboarding experience and on anything that creates a sense of belonging within the company: mentorship, learning and development. Investment of this sort has proven difficult for employers in the post-pandemic environment, but it is exceptionally important”, says Lauren Thomas, EMEA economist at the job search site. Investing in human capital right from the point of onboarding onwards sends a strong signal to candidates: “As an employer, I give priority to the development of skills throughout an employee’s career with the company”.

**Investing in human capital: a guide**
Using artificial intelligence to help assess skills

Businesses’ HR priorities are also aligned with the same expectation that is shared by candidates and employees. According to a study carried out by consultancy firm Mercer, one of the five key objectives of companies is ensuring the employability of their teams.

This European survey shows, in particular, that 92% of companies are now investing in AI to identify and assess the critical skills they need.

92%
of companies are now investing in AI

Other levers should be used as well, such as internal communication regarding the strategic skills needed in the short and medium term. This information, when well set out and transparent, can help employees to maintain their own employability, in the spirit of the French Professional Future Law of 5 September 2018, and help managers to focus their training needs on the skills that will foster the company’s growth.

Internal mobility across the board

HR managers may well be concerned that “reskilled” or “highly upskilled” talent will leave the company. Another workstream will therefore revolve around offering employees more opportunities to make use of their newly acquired skills, thereby meeting this major talent retention challenge.

An internal talent market platform can help with this. This is, at any rate, one of the directions taken by 90% of the companies surveyed by Mercer. More broadly, internal mobility should be leveraged across the board, depending on the specificities and challenges of the organisation. There are a wide range of possibilities: working towards an expert-level position or management, intrapreneurship, reconversion and functional transitioning, etc. It is up to each organisation to implement the toolbox that meets both its own needs as well as those of its employees.
Three benefits of psychometric tools for gap analyses

1. Offering questionnaires on personality, intellectual abilities, behavioural tendencies, motivation or interests;

2. Providing information based on quantifiable and objective data, which can be easily understood by HR managers;

3. Comparing individual-level information to a group of people assessed in the same context.

On the basis of algorithms, the responses are analysed to identify the person – candidate or employee – most likely to fit the job and meet its requirements.
Once that framework has been established, the work of designing psychometric tools will be based on the scientific literature on the concept in question, as well as on customer feedback, in order to create items. Data collection will be carried out with volunteer participants in order to test them statistically and identify those most closely related to the definition. After many iterations, we will have sufficiently valid and reliable items that we will use for normative data collection.

What are the most effective ways of assessing an individual’s behavioural skills?

Difficulty arises when it comes to assessing soft skills: such skills are concepts that are sometimes difficult to observe and objectify. For example, the ability to work under pressure is perfectly understandable in the abstract, but identifying it and measuring it in a particular context is a more complicated matter. This is where psychometrics comes into play. The discipline, which has existed for more than a century, is based on the statistical measurement of behaviour.

How can psychometric tools be used to fulfil the need to assess soft skills?

Firstly, it requires a clear understanding of the underlying concept; be it cooperation, leadership, stress management, etc. These are multidimensional concepts that are linked to the working environment and working styles.

Once that framework has been established, the work of designing psychometric tools will be based on the scientific literature on the concept in question, as well as on customer feedback, in order to create items. Data collection will be carried out with volunteer participants in order to test them statistically and identify those most closely related to the definition. After many iterations, we will have sufficiently valid and reliable items that we will use for normative data collection.

It is not the raw scores that are relevant, but rather the opportunity to assess the individual against a reference population.

By virtue of this method, the resulting measurement tool makes it possible to assess a very precise construct, soft skills being one example among many others.
What concrete use can be made of an individual’s results in psychometric tests?

The assessment will identify the individual’s strengths and areas for improvement. As a result, the HR manager will have easy-to-understand reports and dashboards to capture the skills profile and to put together steps that seem to be the most appropriate to help foster an individual’s development.

What developments can be expected in the field of psychometric tool creation?

There are currently two main trends, and the Pearson TalentLens teams are already working on them.

1. The first is around the **development of candidate ranking solutions** based on comparisons with international databases of occupations and associated soft skills and personal attributes. By establishing a “fit” against those databases, and by virtue of a more flexible presentation of the results, it is therefore possible for HR managers to easily compare candidates according to specific job profiles, while at the same time being able to look more closely at the skill/attribute profiles of each candidate in order to gain a better understanding of them. Pearson TalentLens has focused on making the results of its psychometric tests easy to access and flexible through the use of web-based dashboards, so as to enhance the HR manager’s user experience when managing their recruitment campaigns.

2. The second trend concerns the **use of the new technology, such as natural language processing**, which will, in future, make it possible to create interactive scenarios involving virtual agents, in order to carry out tasks related to the position for which the candidate is applying. Artificial intelligence will be used to provide more immersive and engaging psychotechnical tools, perhaps more in line with the reality of the workplace tasks and skills to be observed.
CONCLUSION

Moving from anticipation to prediction

Digital technologies, coupled with a dynamic vision of skills provide companies with the opportunity to better project themselves into the future.
A key measure of current and future skills

By analysing assessment results, HR is able to establish norms with a very high degree of granularity. For example:

- 20% of senior salespeople have skill A at expert level
- 60% skill B at beginner level
- 30% skill C at advanced level...

In line with this approach, companies seek to have the most accurate view of the fit between the skills held by their employees and those skills needed both now and in the future. Key aspects of strategic workforce planning (see box on next page) should be leveraged to address this need.

- It is essential to carry out – either internally or with the help of a partner – an organisational assessment of current strengths as well as the skills needed in the business of tomorrow. This is an essential prerequisite for establishing an appropriate skills development plan.

Although not an exact science, the aim is to provide each organisation with a structured, agile, reliable and dynamic barometer that helps them to navigate an increasingly complex environment.

AI and Strategic Workforce Planning

In the near future, anticipating results will become more and more closely linked to their predictive analysis.

This involves extracting information from existing data in order to predict future patterns, over more or less the long term, by proposing different hypotheses that are robust enough to guide decision-making. The breadth of different scenarios and analysis of risks are core to this approach, with artificial intelligence playing a full role in the future.

In the context of management forecasting of jobs and skills, this approach will bring together multiple variables from relevant projections around various changes (economic, technical, geographical, etc.) that affect the company’s sector, so simulations of their effect on skills can be produced. Although not an exact science, the aim is to provide each organisation with a structured, agile, reliable and dynamic barometer that helps them to navigate an increasingly complex environment.
The five principles of strategic workforce planning

Workforce and career pathway management is a key way to help promote employability. It is based on several principles:

- **Gathering** the right data – for example, the impact that the competitive environment and technological developments have on varying professions;

- **Assessing** needs accurately – by benchmarking jobs and skills as well as the age makeup;

- **Formulating** different hypotheses to anticipate the future need for skills – business context, growth prospects, career management and mobility, etc.;

- **Involving** management – to assess the level of employees’ skills and identify those needing development;

- **Establishing** a continuous improvement process – with a focus on collaborative work and feedback.

*Source: Skilled, The Media Institute Newsletter*
Pearson TalentLens

Employability Solutions

Pearson TalentLens is a leading player in the assessment and development of human potential. The group has more than 20,000 employees and distributes its products and services in just under 200 countries.

Pearson TalentLens offers scientifically-validated psychometric tests, developed in collaboration with renowned experts, to help assess soft skills (personality, values, intellectual aptitudes and professional interests and motivations) and make multiple strategic decisions around recruitment, mobility and career guidance.

The questionnaire on motivation and professional interests is emblematic of the innovative solutions that our teams develop. It allows test-takers to understand in a structured way what motivates or de-motivates them at work; as well as to discover the professions, activities, assignments and work environments that best suit them; and thus to strengthen their chances of developing and succeeding, thereby maximising their employability.

The creation of the Workforce Skills division in 2021 aims to support our vision of the world of work: a world where everyone can achieve their full potential by becoming aware of their own skills and where organisations can make better decisions around human capital.