



pwc

Preparing everyone,
everywhere, for the
digital world



The speed of
technological change
requires an urgent
global upskilling effort



Introduction

At the World Economic Forum, just about every conversation with business leaders ended with the same question: how are we going to prepare our people?



It's a new world that needs new skills. To many, that is an exciting prospect because it speaks to progress. Most of the CEOs and leaders we talk to agree in principle. But they also tell us that they are not ready. The sheer speed, scope and impact of technological change are challenging their businesses — and society at large — in fundamental ways. At the World Economic Forum in Davos, where we met with more than 150 business leaders last January, just about every conversation ended with the same question: how are we going to prepare our people?

At PwC, we have also asked ourselves this question. Our answer has been to start putting into practice the kind of measures we think organisations around the world will need to take. We have created initiatives to help our own people learn new skills for a digital age. We've started this upskilling journey in the US and are now developing plans to offer it to all of our people.

By upskilling, we mean giving our employees opportunities to gain the knowledge, tools and ability they need to use advanced and ever-changing technologies in the workplace and their daily lives.

Not everyone has to learn to code, but many people need to understand and manage artificial intelligence, data analytics, autonomous vehicles and other technologies we can't even predict — those emerging now and those that will be created in the future. People throughout every enterprise also need stronger leadership skills: the ability to inspire and empower others on their teams or in their groups to take on the challenge of continuous learning, and to make good decisions about the use and implementation of technology.

Over the next four years, we at PwC are committing US\$3bn to upskilling. This will primarily be invested in training our people, and in technologies that support clients and communities.

We are basing this endeavour on our own experience, the experience of other organisations we have worked with and the growing body of knowledge about adult learning and digital capability-building. The initiative — which we call 'New world. New skills.' — speaks directly to our network's stated purpose: to build trust in society and solve important problems.



New world.

New skills.

PwC's research shows that one in three jobs is likely to be severely disrupted or to disappear in the next decade because of technological change. This could affect almost half of all low-skilled jobs and a third of semi-skilled jobs. The World Economic Forum [estimates](#) that upskilling the 1.37m workers in the US whose jobs are threatened will cost US\$34bn in itself — or US\$24,800 per person. Multiply that by 100 to take in the rest of the world, and the sums become staggering.

Yet the cost of inaction will be worse. Already, there is a skills mismatch around the world and millions of jobs are going unfilled. It is not possible to recruit enough already-skilled people to do them. The only option is to help members of the existing workforce, those currently excluded, those starting their working lives and those in the next generation gain the knowledge and skills they need — and that society needs them to have — in the digital age.

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Technology's challenge

Upskilling is not simply a matter of teaching people how to use a new device. That device may be obsolete by next year. The upskilling experience involves learning how to think, act and thrive in a digital world that is sustainable over time.

For example: The growing use of surveillance devices is forcing us to think differently about ethics and governance. Advances in genetic engineering and artificial intelligence are raising questions about the nature of being human. The 'digital divide' between rich and poor has led us to consider what constitutes a fair economy. Social fracturing has been exacerbated by digital media, causing us to question the credibility of information. The pressures of climate change and advances in energy technology and mobility will force us to rethink our approaches to environmental sustainability.

Each nation will need to consider the demographics of its citizens, its level of tech maturity and the makeup of its economy to develop its own upskilling solution. A territory with a developed economy, an ageing population and a strong service sector will have different priorities than a region with a developing, mostly rural economy and a population in which most people are under 30. Yet for all their differences, all the places in the world have one thing in common: a growing number of its working population who need to raise their capabilities and understanding.

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Upskilling in action

At PwC, we have always embraced new technology and innovation in our ways of working, including learning and development. In 2017, we started our intense upskilling journey and devoted our attention to finding solutions that work.

We support and encourage an employee-led approach to innovation, because it is more effective to let people choose what they want to learn. We encourage our people to use their new skills to improve their jobs and their work with clients. Some of this learning takes place in classrooms, but most of it takes place through self-paced multimedia and simulation game modules, or through projects in which teams learn by building and sharing new tools.

We are focussing our efforts to achieve the greatest impact in the following areas:

Helping our people: We're rolling out a firm-wide upskilling programme that started in the US and has already reached the Middle East and the UK. For many, the journey begins with the Digital Fitness app, which assesses employees' familiarity with digital technology and helps them find resources for learning and improvement. More than 97,000 people across the PwC network have completed the assessment and have opted into a digital fitness plan. Nearly 37,000 people have already been digitally upskilled through immersive training in data analytics.

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Helping our clients prepare: We are working with other organisations in both the public and private sectors that are actively engaged in workforce transformation to achieve their business goals and drive productivity. This is not just about developing job-related skills; it's about anticipating the right skills for the future, laying a cultural foundation that embraces upskilling and developing a learning and development function that makes use of the right education technology to deliver a vastly better return on upskilling investment.


This is about anticipating the right skills for the future.

Reaching those who are at risk of exclusion: We are making upskilling a focus of our corporate responsibility initiatives. We are asking all the firms in our global network to look for opportunities to reach people who need support to thrive in today's digital world, and to replicate and scale up existing programmes and create new ones.

Some initial examples include our Access Your Potential programme, a US\$320m commitment to inspire diverse students to pursue an interest in technology. Our own partners and staff have devoted more than 190,000 hours to support that programme and have reached more than 8.3m students and teachers. Our [Digital Fitness App](#) for teachers has been downloaded by more than 17,000 elementary and secondary school teachers, and 14,000 of them have completed the assessment. We estimate more than 900,000 students have been reached with this technology and digital content.

Convening dialogues: At a global level and in every country we operate in, we are facilitating conversations with a variety of stakeholders, including business leaders, policymakers, workers and trade unions, about working together to develop solutions because the scale of the challenge is so great. In some locations, such as Singapore and Luxembourg, we are learning from government-driven comprehensive efforts to transform the workforce of a region. In other places, we are learning from businesses seeking to raise the acumen of particular employees. Everywhere we do business, we will ask CEOs to stand behind a call to action, and we will provide a forum for discussion with governments and civil society.





Join the movement

The challenge of upskilling reflects the speed and unpredictability of technological change. Our intention with this initiative is to encourage a multi-stakeholder approach, in which everyone involved in the upskilling journey can share what works, what is scalable and where the opportunities lie.

We know it is possible to motivate people to embrace new ways of working. Our experience, and that of other enterprises, has shown as much. Now it is time to build a movement, in which companies and communities around the world join together in creating the next wave of human capability.

Join us. This is a complex problem that will require decision-makers — educators; national, regional and local government administrators; and business leaders — to come together. If you would like to find out more about what we at PwC are doing, get in touch. Contact us via new-world-new-skills@pwc.com.

New world. New skills. is PwC's global programme to help millions of people around the world improve their understanding, skills and knowledge for the digital world.

Business has an important role to play in ensuring no one gets left behind unwillingly.

There is an urgent need for organisations, governments, educators and citizens to come together to address this growing problem. We'll be convening discussions and working with a broad group of stakeholders to help find solutions that work in each country. We're helping organisations in the public and private sectors anticipate the skills they will need in the future, and work together on comprehensive solutions.

Over the next four years, we are committing US\$3bn in upskilling — primarily in training our people, and also in technologies for supporting clients and communities and other stakeholders across our territories. We also will be directing more of our community initiatives to focus on upskilling.

Find out more www.pwc.com/upskilling.

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Bob Moritz is Chairman of the PwC Network, a professional services firm, providing audit, tax, consulting and deals services globally to build trust and contribute to productive solutions for the world's most pressing problems. Prior to this role, he led the US practice of PwC. Bob has been with PwC his entire career, joining in 1985 and becoming a partner in 1995. He has an audit and assurance background, dealing primarily with financial-services clients.

PwC is a founding member of the UN's HeforShe 10x10x10 Impact Champions network. Bob is also a trustee of The Conference Board, a member of the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy, and a director of the SUNY-Oswego College Foundation, his alma mater.



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Carol Stubbings is the joint global leader of PwC's people and organisation practice. She regularly talks and writes about talent, innovation, upskilling and the need for 'good work,' with a focus on the Workforce of the Future. Carol is a partner with more than 25 years of experience working with large multinational organisations. She specialises in helping them deal with their most pressing strategic challenges, and her recent work includes advising clients on global transformation, talent and culture change programmes and the implications and opportunities from market disruptors and innovations.

[pwc.com/upskilling](https://www.pwc.com/upskilling)

At PwC, our purpose is to build trust in society and solve important problems. We're a network of firms in 157 countries with over 276,000 people who are committed to delivering quality in assurance, advisory and tax services. Find out more and tell us what matters to you by visiting us at www.pwc.com.

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