

From Training Activity to Lasting Capability

How leadership and talent development
becomes capability that lasts.

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A personal note from the authors

We have been in this field long enough to know the feeling. A programme ends well, participants leave energised, facilitators report strong sessions, and three months later not much has changed. Closing the distance between a good learning experience and lasting capability is what the pages that follow are for.

Good content and skilled facilitation matter, and both sit inside a larger architecture: how capability is defined, how programmes connect to real work, how organisations create the conditions for behaviour to change, and how growth is made visible.

A second thread comes from doctoral research at IE University in Madrid, where Camiel has spent several years studying whether centrally designed leadership programmes transfer into changed behaviour, especially in multinationals where the same programme lands in ten different countries. The factors that decide it are easy to overlook: the relationship between headquarters and local teams, the freedom subsidiaries have to make a programme their own, and the role of managers and peers once it ends.

The third thread, and the most personal, is the learner. It is easy to lose sight of the person in the room: someone with strengths they may not fully see, values that shape how they lead, and ambitions that reach past any competency framework. Strong development does more than build capability, and more than fill a good day. It gives someone an experience they still talk about years later, the moment something shifted in how they see themselves. That is the bar this work should be held to.

The three threads come together here, part research, part practice, part argument. Organisations invest in strong programmes and still see too little change, and what follows sets out where that distance closes. Use it, argue with it, and start the conversation where you work.



The whole argument in nine lines

One line per section, for readers who want the argument before the detail:

01

Build around capability and development keeps pace with the work.

Organising development around capability keeps it current as the work changes.

02

Develop capability and performance holds when the pressure comes.

Capability carries knowledge, skill, judgment, character and reflection into a real situation.

03

Start with motivation and the content lands.

Development sticks when it feels chosen, builds on strengths, and connects to who the learner already is.

04

Invest in the people around the learner and capability travels.

Facilitators, managers and leaders turn a programme into a changed way of working.

05

Build once and recompose it for every part of the business.

Granular learning objectives let one curriculum flex to each organisation without being rebuilt.

06

Measure readiness and see what development is worth.

Evidence connects practice and confidence to the business outcomes a programme is meant to move.

07

Run delivery well and the approach reaches everyone.

Reliable delivery across regions and languages turns a strong idea into something real.

08

Keep the tools in the background and capability stays in focus.

Taxonomies, inference and passports earn their place by making capability more practical.

09

Keep building capability and stay relevant.

The organisations that thrive treat relevance as something they keep building.

The big picture: capability is the sum of all the parts.

1 Build around capability and development keeps pace with the work

Corporate learning has built real machinery over four decades: curricula, faculty, delivery platforms and measurement. The work it supports has moved on. The challenges people face look different from the ones they trained for, the pace of change has outrun most capability frameworks, and AI is reshaping what expertise means and which skills will matter in five years. Development organised around capability keeps pace with that.

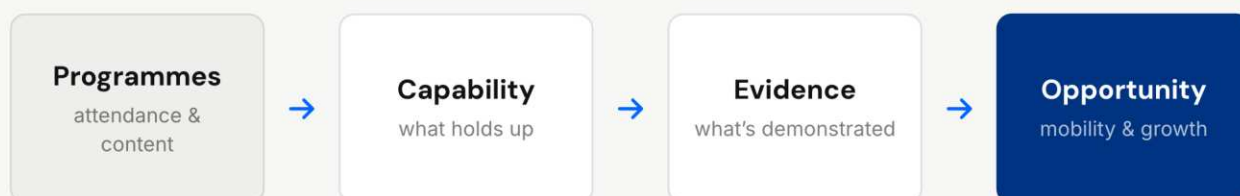
Relevance Learning was founded on a simple belief: people are at the centre. Development starts with the person, someone with strengths, values, curiosity and ambition who wants to do good work and to meet what is coming with confidence rather than anxiety. The job is to help as many of them, and the organisations they belong to, perform better now and prepare for challenges that do not yet have a name.

Delivering that across languages, cultures and business units is the hard part. The programme that makes sense in Amsterdam does not automatically make sense in Shanghai or São Paulo, and a framework designed at the centre can arrive at the edges as something between a mandate and a mystery. Learners complete it, and transfer does not follow. Ambition is seldom the missing piece; design is where these efforts break down. Learning transfers when it feels relevant to the person doing it, connects to their work, and leaves room to make it their own, so in a multinational the tension between central coherence and local meaning is the central design challenge.

For decades development has been organised around programmes. The sharper question is capability: which ones the strategy depends on, where they exist, how to build what is missing, and how to know when someone is ready. This is the capability turn. It moves the focus from attendance to readiness and makes capability, rather than the programme, the thing everything else is designed around. The point of the turn is business performance: a growth strategy needs leaders who are ready to carry it, and a transformation needs people who can work in the new way. Programmes still matter, alongside coaching, peer practice and on-the-job work, as ways to build a capability rather than ends in themselves. The pressure behind it is well documented, from the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 to the OECD. AI is a reason to double down on what makes people irreplaceable: critical thinking, creativity, the ability to keep learning, and judgment where no model was trained.

FIGURE 1

The capability turn: development moves from isolated learning activity to evidence-backed capability and opportunity.



2 Develop capability and performance holds when the pressure comes

Skill is a useful word and a narrow one. A skill is something a person can do: read a balance sheet, run a coaching conversation, plan a project. Capability is wider, the ability to bring knowledge, skill, judgment, character and reflection to bear in a real situation. A manager can know a feedback model and still avoid the conversation; a leader can understand a strategy framework and still fail to connect it to the market; a high-potential can have the skills for the next role and lack the confidence to hold it. Capability is what holds up when the pressure comes and there is no model in front of you to follow.

Relevance has a practical language for this in head, hands, heart and heels: knowledge, skill and application, values and character, and the courage and follow-through to show up when it matters. The four sit alongside Charles Fadel's model of knowledge, skills, character and meta-learning, and keep development from collapsing into either pure content or pure behaviour.

One principle follows. Capability grows faster when development builds on what someone already does

well: a gap shows where attention is needed, a strength gives the footing to take on harder work. And if capability is more than skill, development reaches past content. It needs practice, feedback, reflection and evidence, facilitators who help people make sense of what happened, and managers who turn a course into a conversation about the work. Many skills-based efforts start with a common language and stop at the label. The real work is translation, from a capability into the development that builds it.

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3 Start with motivation and the content lands

Careful design earns a great deal: a clear line from strategy to objectives, and content that holds up in the room. It lands when the person in that room has a real sense that the development is for them. The research on transfer is consistent that motivation, and above all the motivation to carry learning back into the work, comes before good content (Holton, Bates, & Ruona, 2000; Baldwin, Magjuka, & Loher, 1991).

Self-determination theory gives the most robust account of what sustains that motivation, resting on three conditions: autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Autonomy means the learner experiences the development as chosen rather than imposed; in multinationals a programme with no room for local adaptation is felt as something done to people rather than with them, which makes subsidiary autonomy a motivational condition and not only a governance preference (Jakobsen & Rusten, 2003). Competence means feeling real progress, with challenge pitched just beyond current capability. Relatedness means feeling connected to peers and to a facilitator who provides the safety that makes people willing to try new behaviour in front of colleagues who know them (Reagans, Zuckerman, & McEvily, 2004).

Much of the language of capability is organised around gaps: define the competency, assess performance, treat the distance as the agenda. Strengths do more of the work. Capability develops faster and lasts longer when it builds on what a person already does well, used as the platform for taking on harder things (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). Leadership development is an identity project as much as a skill-building one: people change less because they learned a new model and more because they have grown into a fuller sense of who they are (Ibarra, 2003; Vongswasdi et al., 2024). That argues for a real moment of self-discovery near the start: what do I bring, what do I value, and what kind of leader do I want to become.

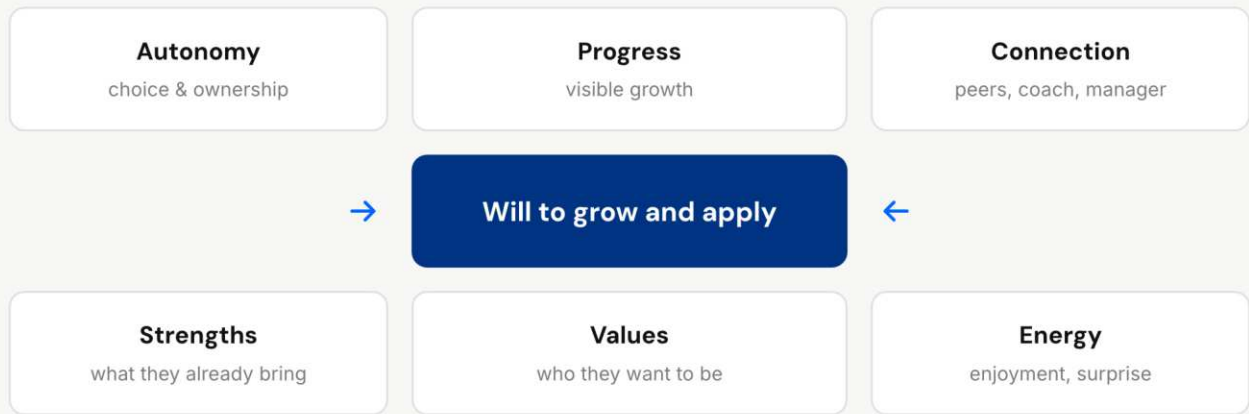
The motivation to carry learning back into the work comes before good content.

Objectives, mastery signals and dashboards each earn their keep, and none of them on its own creates an experience people remember. Emotion is part of how learning happens; deliver content without it and everything can go correctly while nothing moves (Fredrickson, 2001). It also decides whether capability lasts. A satisfying day of training competes with everything else in a busy week and fades; a great day out, the kind people still describe years later the way they describe a day at the Efteling, keeps resurfacing on its own, and what keeps resurfacing keeps shaping how someone works. Theme parks understood long before corporate learning did that what makes a day unforgettable is a few deliberate choices: a genuine surprise, something people do rather than only watch, a moment of real stakes. Designed into a programme, those are what let a capability land and

stay landed long after the room has emptied, which is the work of strong facilitation rather than a trick laid over the content (Glerum, Joseph, McKenny, & Fritzsche, 2021).

Engagement like this is designed in from the start. Before a programme, communication that speaks to the learner as an individual, with supervisors as advocates who tie it to what matters in the work (Massenberg, Schulte, & Kauffeld, 2017). During it, designing for the whole person, with discovery alongside practice and feedback that lets learners see progress (Knipfer, Kump, Wessel, & Cress, 2013). After it, keeping the energy alive, since peer support, supervisor engagement and chances to practise are the main determinants of lasting change (Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993; Chiaburu, van Dam, & Hutchins, 2010).

FIGURE 2
Engagement is built through autonomy, progress, connection, strengths, values, and energy.



4 Invest in the people around the learner and capability travels

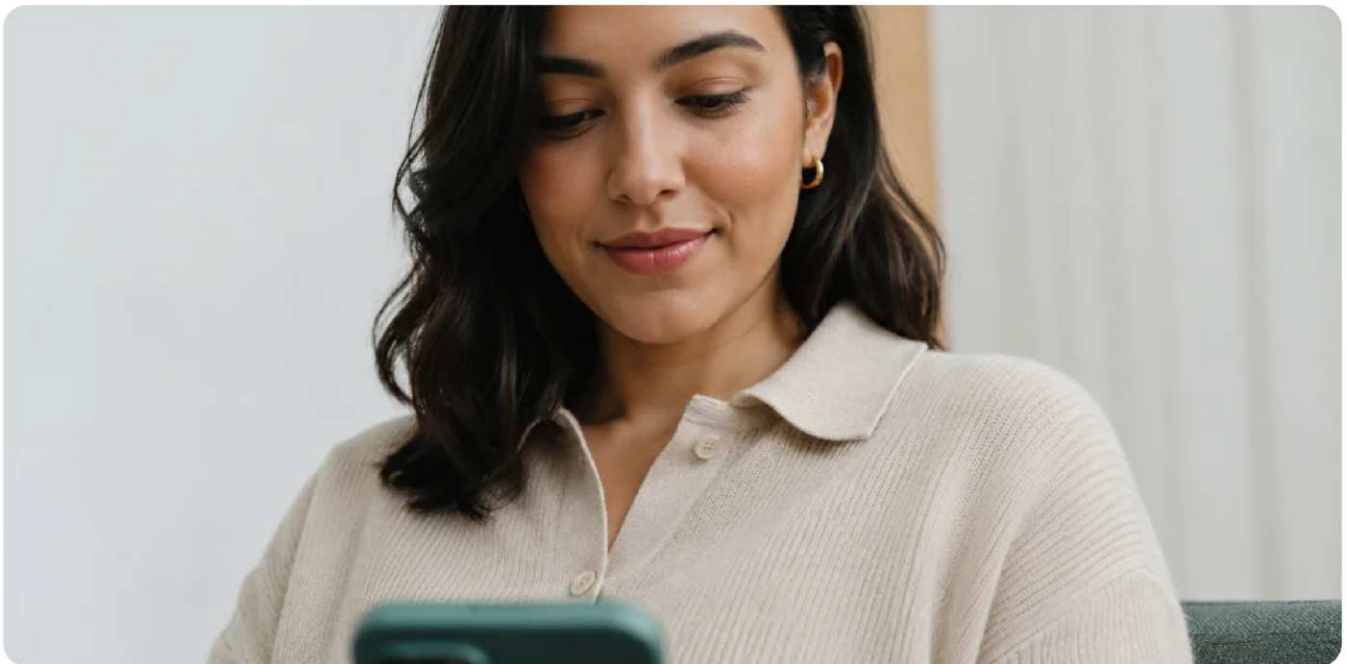
Capability moves through people: the facilitators and coaches who run the practice, the managers who follow up, and the leaders who set the conditions. As development gets more precise, these people matter more.

Accredited facilitators and coaches are the first part, and their value reaches well past delivering content. They create the conditions for practice, reflection and transfer, and the credibility that makes people willing to be challenged. The match matters: a facilitator who fits the organisation's values and context gets further than a more decorated one who does not. Managers are the second part, and often the difference between a good programme and a changed way of working: treat a course as a box to tick and people give it the attention a box deserves;

turn it into a conversation about real work and the learning has somewhere to land.

Leaders set the conditions around all of it. Where they use capability data to rank or punish, trust drains and people manage to the metric; where they model curiosity and their own learning, development becomes part of how the place works. Culture decides how much of everything else survives, and helping organisations build it is one of the places an experienced partner earns its keep.

Treat a course as a box to tick and people give it the attention a box deserves.



5 Build once and recompose it for every part of the business

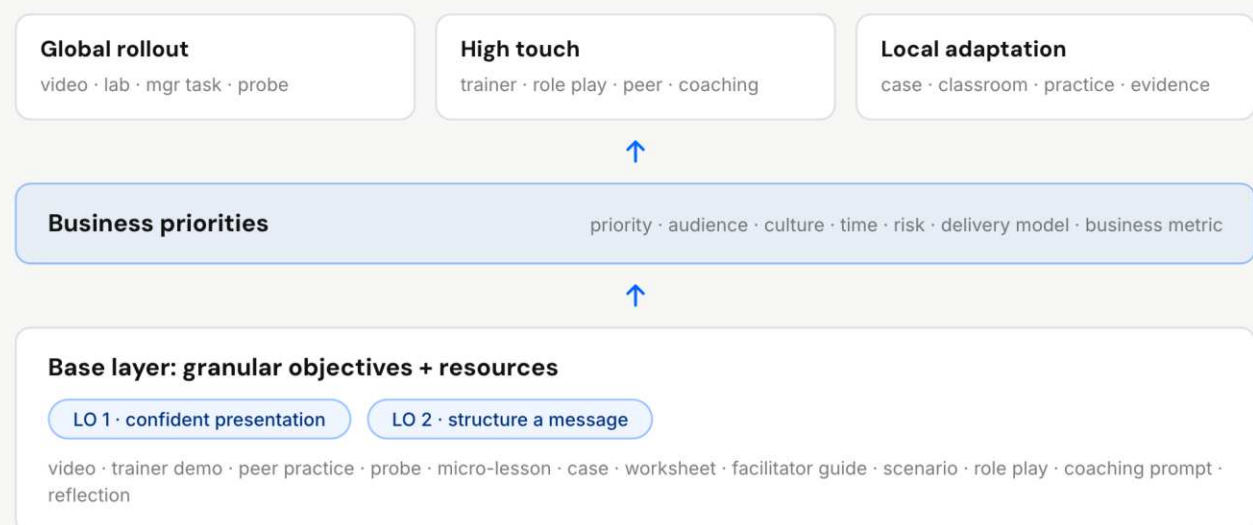
The move towards capability raises the bar for content. Organisations still need sharp concepts, credible models, strong examples, cases and simulations. What changes is how that content is organised: it reaches past large programmes that everyone follows in the same order at the same pace. The curriculum works better as a set of building blocks, small enough to combine and strong enough to trust. Some are Relevance content; others come from the organisation itself, an outside expert, a peer assignment, or a coach.

Granular learning objectives make that possible. An ambition like becoming a stronger leader is too broad to design around; a specific objective can be taught, practised, observed and evidenced, and it gives every resource a job. Take opening a presentation with confidence: one learner watches a

short explanation, another sees a facilitator model it live, a cohort practises and gets feedback, and a manager picks it up in a one-to-one a week later. The objective stays fixed while the experience flexes around it.

FIGURE 3

One base layer of learning objectives and modality options, composed into different journeys across the business.



This is where scale and relevance stop competing. Relevance holds the objective, the quality standard, the evidence expectation and the reusable resources steady, while each organisation chooses a different composition: faster global rollout, deeper cohort work, more local adaptation, or more rehearsal before a high-stakes moment. Confidence is measured alongside mastery, because capability

without confidence often stays in the room, while confidence ahead of capability creates risk. The same objectives can run as online learning, classroom facilitation, peer practice, coaching or simulation, so an organisation need not choose between a generic programme and an expensive reinvention.

The objective stays fixed while the experience flexes around it.



6 Measure readiness and see what development is worth

Granular objectives change what learning data can tell you. Most measurement circles completion, satisfaction and attendance, and those signals say learning happened around a topic. Readiness is the sharper question, and a capability system can build an honest chain of evidence for it, running from the business context, to the outcome the business wants, to the capability it needs, to the objectives beneath it, to practice, to a probe of what the learner can do, and finally to the business metric it is meant to influence.

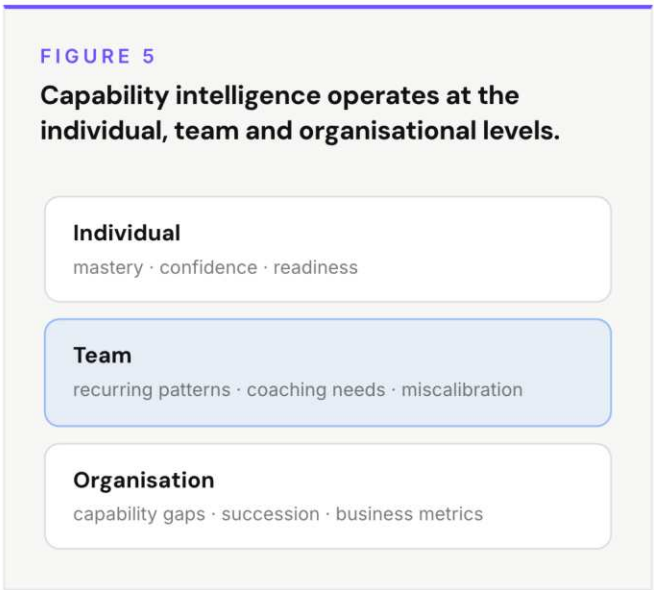
The reason to hold that chain together is simple: capability development should be tied to the result it is meant to help. A coaching programme should connect to where coaching shows up in the numbers, such as retention, engagement or internal mobility; a leadership programme to planning quality and decision speed; a safety programme to reporting culture and incidents. Learning never controls these alone, and designing with the metric in view lets an organisation check whether capability is moving the right way. This creates value at three levels: individuals see what evidence stands behind their readiness, managers see which objectives are consistently hard, and business leaders see capability across the workforce for succession and transformation.

The value compounds once capability is applied. Readiness is the early signal; the business outcome follows when people use what they can now do, often a quarter or two later. That lag is worth planning for. Name the two or three metrics a programme exists to move before design starts, take a baseline, and agree when to review them once the first capability evidence arrives. The review keeps everyone honest about what development did and did not contribute, and it turns the business case from a promise in a proposal into something both sides can steer. Organisations that close this loop treat development like any other investment: with an expected return and a moment to check it.

Confidence calibration deserves particular care, because it is where meta-learning becomes practical. A learner who performs well but reports low confidence may need more practice before something high-stakes; one who reports high confidence on thin evidence needs feedback first.

Over time the learner develops two things at once: the capability, and a more accurate view of it. A dashboard that reduces a person to a number misses this; one built around evidence and confidence keeps the focus on development.

Readiness is the early signal. The business outcome follows when people use what they can now do.



7 Run delivery well and the approach reaches everyone

Delivery is what proves a capability approach. Relevance works through a broad faculty network and supports organisations delivering around the world, so the approach does not depend on a Relevance expert being in every room. It can be carried by many qualified facilitators, in-house trainers, coaches, managers and leaders, delivering consistently.

A second kind of scale is operational. Beyond designing learning and providing faculty, Relevance runs the machinery behind large-scale delivery: schedules, cohorts, virtual sessions, learner communication, coordination with the organisation,

reporting and quality follow-up. A strategy only becomes real once it reaches the calendar, and Relevance runs tens of thousands of schedules and supports hundreds of thousands of learners in more than 60 countries each year.

A strategy only becomes real once it reaches the calendar.

FIGURE 6

Relevance combines design, curation, delivery networks, operations, and evidence.



Doing this well takes a shared way of working: clear capability definitions, facilitator playbooks, observation rubrics, evidence templates, localisation guidance, quality standards, and feedback loops that carry what is learned in delivery back into design. The aim is to scale quality and relevance while keeping learning from going grey. This is also where central design earns its authority. Slide content stays endlessly localisable; what has to

travel intact across regions is the standard that protects quality and the few designed moments that make an experience worth remembering. Those are the parts local adaptation should keep rather than sand down into something safer, because safer is what makes an experience forgettable. Getting that balance right is how global delivery can still feel local, and it is one of the clearer places where Relevance does something hard to copy.



8 Keep the tools in the background and capability stays in focus

A set of tools and standards sits behind all of this, and it belongs in the background. Taxonomies, inference models, passports and dashboards earn their place when they make development more practical, and they cost attention when they pull it away from capability, transfer and opportunity.

Public frameworks like ESCO and O*NET give shared language for work, describing occupations through tasks, knowledge, skills and abilities beyond local job titles. A map has real value, and it stays a map: a taxonomy can tell a new manager that a role calls for stakeholder management, and not how to handle the morning a trusted team member stops trusting them. Much of the slow adoption of skills taxonomies comes down to this: they classify work better than they develop it.

Technology can also infer skills from signals such as job history, role descriptions, and assessments, which helps suggest strengths and support mobility. Inference is a useful starting point, and it falls short of proof: it is probabilistic, and can be skewed by thin data, ambiguous titles, and historical gaps in who got which opportunities. Evidence asks a sharper question, what a person has actually demonstrated through probes, simulations,

observation and real assignments. Capability passports can make that evidence visible and portable, a record the learner owns rather than a list of courses attended, though the standards are still forming (W3C Verifiable Credentials, European Digital Identity, and European Digital Credentials for Learning).

The more capability data matters, the more responsible the system around it has to be. Evidence exists to help people grow, and it should never decide about someone without their knowledge and without a human in the loop. In practice that means transparency about what data is used, a clear line between inference and evidence, privacy and consent, attention to bias, and no promotion or succession decision made in a black box. The EU AI Act reinforces the point by treating AI in employment as high-risk. Without trust, none of it works.

Without trust, none of it works.

Keep building capability and stay relevant

By 2030, Relevance will stand as a capability development partner for complex organisations. The role is less about owning every tool and more about combining the right content, facilitation, evidence and delivery into development that works in practice. Holding that position takes a combination few can match: an owned curriculum, a large accredited faculty, enterprise-grade delivery operations, and a growing body of adaptive and evidence work. Plenty of providers have one or two; holding all four, and connecting them, is the real advantage, and the delivery track record is the proof.

The offer is concrete. Relevance helps an organisation define the capabilities its strategy depends on, design development people want to enter, build it through expert facilitation, coaching and a curriculum of trusted building blocks, deliver it reliably across regions and languages, show the evidence that someone is ready, and connect that evidence to mobility, succession and the business outcomes the programme was built to move.

This is what it means to stay relevant. The future of work asks for more than technology and more than

the inherited training model. Organisations need capability that stays visible, current and connected to opportunity; people need development that speaks to the work they do and the future they want. Success is human and concrete: whether more people see a credible path forward, feel themselves making progress, and become ready for work that matters. When that happens at scale, the organisation sees it where it steers: strategies that get delivered, key people who stay and grow, and successors who are ready before a role opens.

**The organisations that thrive keep building relevance,
year after year.**

Source list

Public labor-market and skills frameworks

ESCO. European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations. Official European Commission classification linking occupations and skills across European languages.

O*NET Resource Center. Official U.S. occupational information framework covering tasks, knowledge, skills, abilities, work activities, interests, values, and work context.

World Economic Forum. Future of Jobs Report 2025. Macro source on role and skill transformation toward 2030.

OECD. Skills Outlook 2023: Skills for a Resilient Green and Digital Transition. Non-commercial policy source on lifelong learning, skills systems, and changing work.

Credentials, passports, and digital identity

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Regulation (EU) 2024/1183. European Digital Identity Framework. Legal basis for the updated European digital identity framework and the European Digital Identity Wallet.

European Digital Credentials for Learning (Europass). European Commission infrastructure for issuing and verifying learning credentials.

Responsible technology and data use

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