

Everything You Need To Know About Upskilling, Reskilling, and Cross-skilling

You are a highly skilled individual. No matter your professional or educational background, you can enhance your unique skill set to land any position. By learning to upskill, reskill, or cross-skill, you can take control of your professional future.

When to revamp our skills

Nowadays, feeling trapped or stuck in a career path is a common feeling. At 17 or 18 years old, we pick a career path, spend four or more years studying it, take out student loans to finance this choice, and enter the workforce. With significant time, energy, and money invested in one career path, it is easy to feel like we need to stay in the same role until retirement to make it all worth it.

But for many, changing companies, roles, or careers is natural and healthy for maintaining job satisfaction. A change in mindset can open countless opportunities. Rather than a time, energy, and money deficit, change results in a skill surplus that is in need of some refinement. Through these investments in any initial career path, we gain a wealth of transferable skills—some that can even be highly regarded or considered rare in a different field or role.

Whether you are a graduating student, career changer, job transitioner, freelancer, current employee who is looking to move up, or someone who feels lost in their career path, reflecting on your skillset should be a top priority in the job hunting process.

When it comes to strengthening your skill set, there are a few ways to tackle this undertaking. Depending on your goals, you will look into upskilling, reskilling, or cross-skilling. These methods will help you tailor your skills to any desired occupation.

First steps

Before you decide which method is best for enhancing your skill set, you must reflect on your goals and current abilities, and evaluate how they match up. First, determine your needs: a pay increase, a different role, a new company, more responsibility, a career change, etc.

Once you have a clear objective, review your current skills in relation to your goal. What are they? To what level or complexity have you mastered each skill? What must you improve on? Where are your gaps?

With your goals set and these questions answered, you can then determine which method(s) will be best for you.

Upskilling: building upon current skills in a particular field.

Typically for those looking to stay in the same profession or a similar role.

Reskilling: creating an entirely new skill set for a completely different field.

Typically for those looking for a career change.

Cross-skilling: taking on additional skill sets to perform in multiple roles.

Typically for those looking to increase responsibility, flexibility, or opportunity.

Upskilling

If you are looking to stay in your current role and earn a raise, apply to a new company in your current role, move up within a department, or pursue a new role that is adjacent to what you currently do, you should start with upskilling. Uppskilling is the process of building upon existing skills. This includes exploring further mastery or complexity of a current skill or learning-related, ancillary skills to complement your current abilities.

How to upskill

Upskilling often takes shape through education. Enrolling in related coursework, higher education degrees and certification programs are a great way to take your current skill set to the next level. Each field or position typically has recommended pathways.

For example, those in the business sector may work their way up to the top with only an undergraduate degree. But enhancing education can result in greater opportunity and earning potential at a much quicker rate. Those working in finance may look into the CFA exam or an MBA program and accountants may look into the CPA exam or an MBA program.

However, other fields may require upskilling in order to keep their positions, move up, or earn more. In order to keep their jobs, many states require public school teachers to upskill by completing a Master's program. Once securing their graduate degrees, teachers must continue to upskill to earn raises. Rather than performance-based,

teachers must enroll in a certain amount of skill-based coursework to gradually increase earning potential. If teachers do not upskill, they can find themselves in positions to lose their jobs or never receive a pay increase.

Oftentimes, there is an opportunity to upskill in the workplace. Instead of enrolling in a program, many companies offer training or opportunities to take on higher-level responsibilities. Inquire within your company for opportunities to upskill if it is more budget-friendly or will help you move up in your role.

Benefits of upskilling

Upskilling not only provides prospective candidates with higher-level abilities, but it also provides plenty of resume builders. Additional degrees, certifications, coursework, training, and responsibilities are an excellent way to highlight your passion for the profession, willingness to learn/ improve, and ability to take on more senior responsibilities. If you are looking to remain in the same field or role, upskilling will set you apart from your competitors or result in a pay increase. Upskilling provides additional qualifications or an increase in performance.

Reskilling

Reskilling is the process of attaining a completely new skill set. Career changers are usually in the market for reskilling opportunities. A career change often requires an entirely new skill set, as their previous profession and desired profession do not have much overlap.

For example, a former nurse looking to become a lawyer *is* a career changer because they will need to learn a new field of expertise. While, an entry-level editor looking to become editor-in-chief at their publication company *is not* a career changer—since it is within the same profession and they already have the foundational experience for the job.

How to reskill

In order to start reskilling, first decide on a new career path. Do some research to figure out the desired skills or requirements for the position and develop a plan to acquire these new skills.

Enrolling in an undergraduate or graduate program to learn new concepts and skills can formalize your qualifications with a degree—especially without prior experience.

Specialized degrees may also be a requirement for certain professions, such as nursing, law, or teaching. This is often a mandatory first step for these professionals.

However, other professions may not require coursework or degrees to reskill. Oftentimes, reskilling may come from hands-on experience. For example, recruiters in creative professions will look for a comprehensive portfolio that showcases an applicant's quality of work. This allows career changers to simply practice honing their craft in their spare time and add work samples to build a portfolio.

A portfolio, satisfied clients, and positive results take the place of a formal degree or experience. Some example professions include writing & translation, visual arts & graphic design, video & animation, music & audio, programming & technology, etc.

Reskilling may entail self-taught skills, online coursework (that does not have to cost money or be credit-bearing), freelancing, entry-level positions, or starting a business of choice.

Benefits of reskilling

Switching up your career path is a major change. Reskilling takes time, dedication, effort, and patience. However, reskilling allows you to reach your professional goals, increase your quality of life, and open doors to a variety of opportunities in different fields. Reskilling can be a transformative process that brings purpose and enthusiasm to your life.

Career changers (or reskillers) are often highly regarded due to their willingness to take a risk, excitement to pursue a desired role, and dedication to learning something new. This is important to highlight in the interview process, as these qualities are universally desirable.

Cross-skilling

Ambitious, agile, and flexible professionals are frequent cross-skillers. If you are not feeling challenged, fulfilled, or enthused by your current work but want to stay in your field—cross-skilling may be for you. Cross-skilling is the process of diversifying or expanding abilities that are transferable across multiple roles and responsibility levels.

How to cross-skill

There are many different modes of cross-skilling. Companies tend to offer in-house, on-the-job, or company-sponsored training that covers transferable skills. The purpose of cross-skilling is to obtain a wide range of abilities that can be carried out in different roles.

For example, a communications employee may be cross-trained in marketing in order to maximize their potential in both areas. On the communication side, the employee's main responsibility is to effectively write outgoing material that will persuade potential buyers to become customers. The communications employee uses information provided by a marketer to write persuasive content.

Marketers research, study and monitor market trends. They then take this information to plan a marketing campaign for a target audience. A communications employee cross-skilled with marketing training will allow the employee to take on responsibilities throughout the entire marketing/communications process. They become a flexible, adaptable, and widely knowledgeable employee across both departments.

If your company does not offer the training you need, there are outside organizations that offer specific training. Research local or online training opportunities to add to your resume. Training will range in price, time investment, and in-person versus online offerings. Find what works best for you.

And as always, degrees, coursework, and certifications are always an option!

Benefits of cross-skilling

Make the most out of your job. Cross-skilling may be exactly what you need to keep things fresh and lively. And as a bonus, it can be your golden ticket to a raise, promotion, or new opportunity.

Cross-skilling provides employees with impressive additional abilities that distinguish them from others in the same role. Those who have cross-skilling under their belt are regarded as more mobile, efficient, experienced, and collaborative. Cross-skilled employees also ensure more return on investment for their employers.

Conclusion

Remember, it's all about a skill surplus mindset rather than an investment deficit mindset. Focusing on sunk costs—investments that cannot be recovered—will keep you stagnant in your career.

Your current skills are still valuable! Whether you are advancing through upskilling, developing new skills through reskilling, or expanding your skills through cross-skilling, you are *adding* to the great things you can already do!

Depending on where you are in your career journey, upskilling, reskilling, and cross-skilling will benefit you at different points along the way. Most importantly, engaging in any of these methods must come from a place of intrinsic motivation and be viewed as a positive opportunity in order to be beneficial.

Upskilling, reskilling, and cross-skilling are investments of time, effort, and sometimes money. If your current employer is pushing any of these methods to strengthen your skills, but it does not align with your goals or work-life balance or is a financial or emotional burden on your life, be sure to communicate with your supervisor.

When making this decision on your own, always align your long-term goal with the appropriate skill-enhancing technique for the best use of your time, energy, and money. Strengthening your skills should always lead to positive results!