Equipping Innovation Teams for Technology-Enabled Growth

INNOVATION RESEARCH INTERCHANGE
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Equipping teams with new technology requires more than just providing access to the latest tools—it demands a strategic approach to learning, adoption and cultural integration. Effective upskilling happens when employees build a strong foundation in key concepts while remaining adaptable to emerging advancements. The best initiatives combine structured training with hands-on experimentation, interdisciplinary collaboration and real-world application. When learning is practical and aligned with business needs, employees gain the confidence to explore new technologies. Further, a strong learning culture fosters continuous exploration, applied learning and skill refinement—three elements that not only enhance workforce capabilities but also drive innovation. Success is derived from the right training paired with a culture that encourages continuous learning and growth.

This IRI briefing summarizes best practices for equipping teams to leverage new technology effectively. It offers a concise synthesis of key insights, trends and actionable recommendations to inform decision-making and strategic planning. The practices highlighted are drawn from two primary sources. First, the IRI's Digitalization and AI Roundtables provide real-world insights through candid discussions with industry leaders about the challenges and peer-tested solutions they encounter. Second, company case studies—such as DuPont's Spark Digital Academy (Mancha, Parise, 2023) and Eastman's upskilling initiatives (2024)—offer documented examples of successful approaches on how to equip teams to leverage new technologies. This briefing focuses specifically on best practices related to training, employee engagement and building a strong learning culture.

INSIGHTS

TRAINING BEST PRACTICES:

Baseline Digital Literacy with Built-in Flexibility

Identify what a core level of technological literacy looks like for your organization and then work to get staff to that level while ensuring training programs are adaptable to emerging tools and evolving needs.

Flexible, Hybrid Learning Models

Combine self-paced modules, live sessions and interactive formats, such as discovery sessions and breakout groups, to accommodate diverse learning styles, work schedules and just-in-time learning needs. Structured, on-demand paths allow employees to engage with content when it is most relevant, reducing reliance on traditional, one-size-fits-all training programs.

Scaling AI and Digital Tool Adoption Through Internal Champions

Identify and support early adopters who can serve as internal advocates, providing peer-to-peer support and driving grassroots enthusiasm.

Iterative Training That Reflects Rapid Change

Recognize that traditional training structures may not work for fast-evolving technologies and instead focus on continuous learning through workshops, knowledge hubs, peer-to-peer networks and real-world applications.

Developing Function-Specific Training Tracks

Tailor upskilling programs to different roles within the organization (e.g., high-level views for executives, citizen data scientist opportunities for technical staff), ensuring employees see direct relevance to their responsibilities.

Balancing Structure with Adaptability

Avoid rigid training curriculums and instead offer frameworks that allow employees to engage at their own pace and based on evolving needs.

Prioritizing Ethical and Responsible AI Use

Embed governance and best practices for responsible AI adoption into training programs to ensure employees use tools safely and effectively.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES:

Meeting Employees Where They Are

Acknowledge different comfort levels with new technologies and start with familiar applications like translation tools or meeting summaries before introducing more complex use cases.

Providing Hands-on, Use-Case-Driven Training

Use real-world applications, like a basic version of Copilot, to show employees how AI can directly enhance their day-to-day work with ease.

Encouraging Peer-Led Learning Networks

Create spaces where employees can exchange ideas, best practices and lessons learned about technology adoption.

Supporting Non-Native English Speakers Through AI Tools

Leverage AI-powered translation and communication assistance to make upskilling initiatives more accessible to a global workforce.

LEARNING CULTURE BEST PRACTICES:

Encouraging Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration

Facilitate knowledge-sharing between different teams and expertise levels to help bridge the gap between tech-savvy and less tech-savvy employees.

Creating Safe Spaces for Experimentation

Create secure technology sandboxes to allow employees to explore new technologies with minimal risk, encouraging a culture where failure is seen as part of learning.

Framing Technology as a Value Generator

Help employees understand how AI and other tools create tangible business value, emphasizing benefits like efficiency, problem-solving and innovation.

Fostering Leadership Buy-in and Engagement

Ensure that leadership actively participates in training initiatives and communicates the strategic importance of digital upskilling.

Gathering Employee Feedback for Continuous Improvement

Regularly assess what's working in training programs and adjust based on employee needs, ensuring long-term relevance.

Positioning Technology as an Enabler, Not a Replacement

Address skepticism by framing AI and other tools as enhancements to employees' skills rather than threats to their roles.

Aligning Upskilling with Organizational Strategy

Ensure digital training initiatives are integrated with broader company goals, fostering innovation and competitive advantage.

CONCLUSION

Successfully equipping teams with new technology requires more than just providing tools. The integration of structured training, hands-on learning and a culture of continuous growth is crucial to achieve success. Organizations that prioritize flexible training models, practical application and peer-driven learning create an environment where employees feel empowered to experiment and adapt. Companies can maximize the value of new technologies by aligning upskilling efforts with business goals and fostering a culture of innovation to strengthen their workforce for the future.