

Skill Development: From Talk To Capability

THE CORE PROBLEM

- Everyone agrees that skills matter, but organizations struggle to define, build, and measure them effectively.
- Most companies don't have skill gaps; they have definition gaps.
- Skills are often confused with competencies, behaviors, or knowledge.



WHAT A SKILL ACTUALLY IS

- A skill = the ability to apply knowledge in a specific context to achieve a defined result.
- Skills must be observable, measurable, and tied to performance.
- If you can't see it in action, you can't develop or measure it.

BIG SHIFT: ATTRIBUTE > APPLIED CAPABILITY

- **OLD:** 'Strong communication skills' (vague, not buildable)
- **NEW:** 'Can present complex tradeoffs to leaders and secure decisions' (specific, observable)
- Applied capability = something you can practice, coach, and measure.



WHY MOST SKILL DEVELOPMENT FAILS

- Over-reliance on content and courses instead of real-world application
- Measurement focused on participation (attendance, completion, surveys)
- Lack of alignment across teams on what a skill actually means
- Avoidance of deeper issues (role clarity, incentives, performance standards)

KEY RESEARCH INSIGHTS

- **Gartner & Deloitte:** Learning only drives performance when embedded in real work.
- Standalone training has significantly lower impact.
- Organizations tying skills to business outcomes outperform those measuring activity alone.
- **Josh Bersin:** Without defined applied skills, companies default to content consumption.

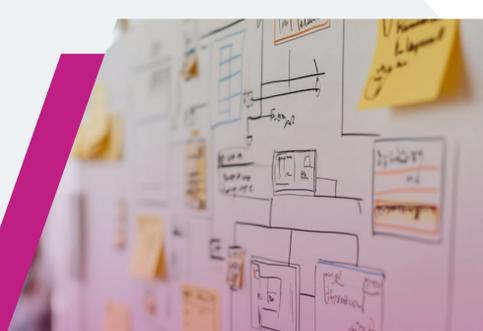


HOW SKILLS ARE ACTUALLY BUILT

- Skills develop in real work—not classrooms.
- They are strengthened through pressure, friction, and collaboration.
- Critical environments: sales conversations, leadership decisions, cross-functional conflict.

THE BUILDABLE SKILL FRAMEWORK

- **Moment:** Where does the skill show up?
- **Action:** What decision or behavior must improve?
- **Outcome:** What result should change?
- **Evidence:** How will improvement be observed or measured?



THE COLLISION PRINCIPLE

- Capability is built through real-world friction, not isolated training.
- Collaboration is the testing ground for skill development.
- If training cannot survive real work conditions, it won't drive performance.

MEASUREMENT SHIFT

- **STOP** measuring: attendance, completion, satisfaction
- **START** measuring: behavior change, decision quality, business outcomes
- Measurement must be designed at the start, not after training



SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY MODEL

- L&D defines skills in behavioral terms
- Business defines performance outcomes
- Managers observe and coach in real time
- Employees practice and improve
- Measurement is shared; not owned by one function

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Skills must be defined as observable, applied capabilities
- Development must happen in real work environments
- Measurement must link to business outcomes
- Precision in definition is what makes skills scalable
- The goal is not learning activity—it's measurable capability



Unboxed Is Ready. Are You?

Visit unboxedtechnology.com to learn more.

