Microsoft

Public Sector Insights on Skilling

Considerations and best practices for supporting technology training in Government organizations.

Microsoft's Global Customer Experience Team
Public Sector Center for Digital Skills

Why Skilling is Critical for Government Success...


Introduction by

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In today's rapidly evolving landscape, the ability of government agencies to adapt and excel hinges significantly on their most valuable asset—their people. Skilling, the continuous process of enhancing employees' abilities and knowledge, emerges not merely as a strategy but as a fundamental pillar for public sector success. This white paper, informed by Microsoft's comprehensive insights into public sector challenges and triumphs, underscores the indispensable role of skilling in empowering governments to deliver superior outcomes to citizens and communities.

Our ongoing research reveals that beyond the acquisition of new skills, the profound impact of skilling extends to heightened employee engagement, improved performance, and bolstered talent retention. Governments that prioritize the professional growth of their workforce not only enrich their organizational capacity but also forge a path toward sustainable success. Microsoft is dedicated to identifying and sharing the most effective strategies to aid public sector organizations in their quest for excellence.

Join us in exploring the transformative power of skilling—how it cultivates a more dynamic, adept, and resilient workforce, and fosters an organizational culture steeped in continuous learning and improvement. Through practical guidance and actionable recommendations, this white paper outlines how to champion a skilled, adaptable, and innovative workforce that is the cornerstone of government success and community prosperity.
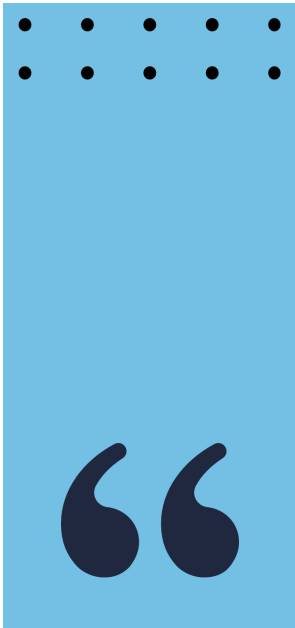
Frankly, cloud certification changes people's lives. I've seen that. I've seen people upskill from a non-technical perspective to a very technical perspective in a very short space of time, 6, 9, 12 months. So that builds confidence, credibility, and capability within the organization. ...It's been transformative for people, with their lives, their careers..."

- Govt Entity, UK

Skilling challenges facing Public Sector organizations today.

To understand the specific needs of learning and development teams within public sector, a research study was commissioned. This study gave valuable insights and captured a variety of challenges facing public sector organizations when it comes to leading their technology training and development programs. Learning and development leaders found many ways to mitigate the challenges they faced, some of which are covered in this report.

Resources and Budget

Budget for training is a continual challenge. Allocated budgets can frequently be cut as learning can sometimes be perceived as 'nice to have' where there isn't a positive learning culture. An additional challenge is having enough funding to scale across the whole organization, certain roles or technologies may be prioritized, which can often leave gaps. It is important to prove the value of the investments in skilling so that budgets are protected.

Proving the Return on Investment from Skilling

Building the business case for skilling was mentioned as a way to preserve and protect investments in skilling programs, using reporting and analytics to measure impact beyond participation. Understanding 'Return on Investment' requires modelling that proves the value of skilling. This includes evaluating the gains such as efficiency, productivity and employee retention. And ultimately citizen satisfaction. These measures take time to build, so in the short term, many learning teams use participation, engagement surveys and participant feedback to determine impact.

Making Time for Learning

Time away from the core accountabilities can be hard to justify and manage. Additionally, if there is not a culture that encourages time invested in learning, employees can feel they could be judged for taking time out. Some approaches to mitigate this challenge will be to build the culture of learning within the organization, plus to bring blended and self-regulated learning approaches – so that learners can choose when and how to learn.

Building a Learning Culture

Proactive learning within any organization brings multiple benefits, it helps employees to feel engaged and motivated, leading to retention of key staff. Learning culture will also act as a talent attractor, as prospective employees see commitment to personal development, allowing the building of future workforce pipeline and recruiting the right mix of talent. Additionally, skills development brings business outcomes such as increased productivity and performance.

Staying Current with Technology Trends

Keeping up with technology trends is essential for future planning of training needs. However, with the fast pace of change, it can be challenging to stay current. Vendor companies can support with resources such as technology roadmaps, including learning and development leaders in future planning, and sharing learning paths and resources that align to the organization goals.

Assessing Workforce Technology Skills Gaps

Identifying the technology and digital skills gaps across the organization is a critical part of developing the learning plan, but it can be challenging without assessment tools. Different entities use multiple methods to determine gaps, with some relying on top-down leadership direction on future skills required and others focusing on employee demand through survey mechanisms. All teams continually need to balance the demands for training with the resources available.

Scaling Skilling Throughout the Organization

Limited resources, multiple organization priorities and pressure on time availability are just some of the pressures that impact the ability to offer relevant training across the organization. Making full use of on-demand, free training resources can support scaling training across the organization. However, these resources can be complex to navigate and don't always incorporate public sector scenarios. Understanding what resources are available and building an employee communications plan across the organization can help to drive training scale and reach. Some organizations also used 'learning champions' to scale reach and build culture.

Bringing Creativity and Interactivity into Training

With a requirement to cater for diverse learning styles, organizations are looking for a variety of modalities that meet different learner requirements. While in-person learning is preferred, it is recognized that it can be cost-prohibitive, so where feasible, they seek live interaction features within on-demand training resources. Including badges for participation can support employee motivation and engagement.

Technology Training for non-Technical Roles

While the focus of many learning and development leaders is capability building within technical roles, many leaders shared how they are ensuring that non-technical roles are also a focus for technology training. They also seek to ensure there is a higher degree of digital literacy across the organization. Some entities also focus on delivering specific cloud training to specialist teams such as Finance.

Delivering Government Relevant Content

Much of the training content available is relevant for commercial organizations that are focused on different business goals such as driving profitability and growth. Government organizations are focused on fundamentally different goals. It would be helpful to have content that is more specific to Government needs.

Best Practices in Planning and Delivering Skilling.

Planning is essential when catering to the diverse and specific needs of the employee base, balancing budgets, departmental demands, and other resources available. Integrated into planning was a focus on defining learning outcomes and target KPIs. Strategic planning intentions were oftentimes impacted by short-term organization requirements along with changes from fluctuating budgets.

Building a Learning Culture

Some organizations had programs in place that supported learning culture, with those organizations identifying the value to the organization that skilled and motivated employees will drive. This commitment was shown through firm training budgets in place, employee recognition programs and inter-departmental participation in skills planning.

Aligned Organization & Skilling Goals, with Clear KPIs

The organizations who have clearly aligned the organizational goals with skilling had more confidence in their skilling planning process. Their measurements were well defined and KPIs were tracked and reported on.

Skilling Assessments Linked to Planning

Skilling assessments were at the center of the skilling plan and ensured investments were made in the most relevant areas. This ensured the effective delivery of workforce planning as well as future talent development and pipeline management. Assessment tools that linked directly to recommended learning were highly valued.

Agility in Execution

With the fast-changing nature of the technology landscape, changing priorities across the organization, as well as short-term impacts such as budget reductions or last-minute availability of courses, learning and development leaders needed to be agile and responsive. Those who had effective plans, including employee communication channels, were able to respond fastest to changes and opportunities.

Building Learning Culture in Public Sector.

Top-Down Leadership & Commitment

For learning culture change to happen, it needs to be a priority for the whole organization, that starts with a clear leadership position on the importance and value. This message must be reinforced through all layers of the organization through management role-modelling.

Scale Through Technology Champions

Staying current with the latest technology trends can be challenging, however there are often individuals across the organization who thrive on being up to date. Harness those individuals as Learning Champions who can share their expertise and further build culture.

Learning Time Allocation

Time invested in learning is time away from projects and other priorities. To show employees this is achievable, it is recommended to protect and support this time, such as specified learning weeks or learning days. This learning time should be seen as a positive investment and not negatively perceived as a 'day off'.

Show that Learning is a Priority that is Valued

Reinforce the commitment to learning through storytelling in all employee communication channels. Share examples at organization and team meetings of recent training undertaken by leaders and have them speak about the new skills they have gained.

Celebrate Learners who Commit

Celebrate the achievements of learners through showcasing how many hours of learning and new skills & certifications gained. Gamify the participation and create mechanisms such as leaderboards, badges and awards.

Protect and Preserve Investments

Investments in training need to connect to value for the organization, so as part of the training culture plan, it is important to communicate widely on the training efforts, the KPIs and how this training has contributed to organization outcomes.

Ways Microsoft Can Support

The research included ideas of how Microsoft can further support learning and development leaders in public sector. Here are some of the suggestions made:

- **Resource Signposting**
  Share what is available and make proactive recommendations on training that is most relevant.

- **Prove Skills Return on Investment**
  Help with examples of how skilling investments lead to business outcomes.

- **Share Microsoft Culture Journey**
  Bring Microsoft learnings on how to build and shape organization culture.

- **Provide Technology Roadmaps**
  Knowing what is coming next is critical for building proactive skilling plans.

- **Proactive Communications**
  Bring regular communications on the latest learning resources to the Learning & Development community.

- **Build Communities**
  Public Sector organizations across the world have similar challenges, build a community that connects people together.

- **One Microsoft**
  Relationships in complex organizations can be challenging to navigate. Microsoft can support customers through stronger alignment.
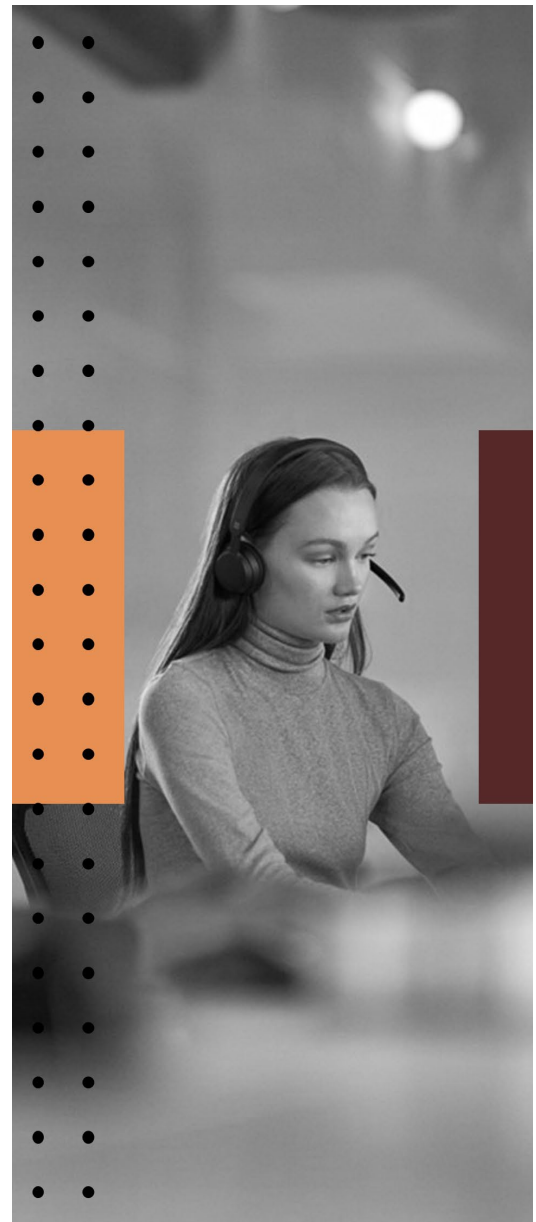
Resources to Support Public Sector Today.

- **Public Sector Center for Digital Skills:** This is a dedicated website where you can find relevant workshops, training events, learning paths, learning collections and more. Created specifically by the public sector team at Microsoft to help customers with their skilling planning.
  wwps.microsoft.com/public-sector-digital-skills

- **Microsoft Learn:** With almost 3,000 modules and learning paths of various Microsoft technologies, Microsoft Learn offers a comprehensive collection of training options and a wide array of role-based certifications.
  learn.microsoft.com

- **LinkedIn Learning:** An online educational platform that provides a wide range of expert-led courses that help employees develop business, technology and creative skills. LinkedIn has specific products for Government Agencies.
  learning.linkedin.com

- **Pathways:** This is a collection of learning journeys, organized into pathways to allow learners to navigate through learning. Created by the skilling lead for public sector in the UK, this has become a valued resource for organizations across the world.
  https://learning-pathways.co.uk/

- **Training Partners:** Microsoft certified Training Services Partners offer a breadth of training solutions including blended learning, in-person and online.
  learn.microsoft.com/en-us/credentials/support/partners

- **M365 Learning:** End users training on Office products and other solutions such as Windows, Project for the Web, Visio, Sway. Including tutorials, walkthroughs and videos to help individuals get started and more into more advanced concepts.
  support.microsoft.com/en-gb/microsoft-365

- **M365 Adoption:** Helps organizations to maximize value from their investments in Microsoft. Including a number of persona sections such as Business User, Champion, Developer and IT Professional.
  https://adoption.microsoft.com