

5 ways to overcome the manufacturing skills gap with modern learning & development

The conversation around today's manufacturing sector is filled with hot topics—from industry 4.0, to smart factories, digitalization, and the Internet of Things (IoT)—that are just as likely to generate controversy as well as positive buzz. These disruptive technologies offer opportunities from innovative R&D to digital supply networks, but the most significant threat to their potential is a quickly widening skills gap. A new study on the manufacturing skills gap released by [Deloitte and the Manufacturing Institute](#) reveals that in manufacturing, the skills gap may leave an estimated 2.4 million positions unfilled between 2018 and 2028, with a potential economic impact of \$2.5 trillion. Leading manufacturers are turning to modern learning and development (L&D) initiatives to tackle the issue, implementing flexible and interactive learning solutions that quickly teach employees the skills they need to operate new technology.

Here are five steps manufacturers can take to build a modern L&D program to help close the skills gap.

1

Evolve to a work-centered learning approach

In the manufacturing sector, it can be a major challenge to train workers without greatly disrupting production. Manufacturing companies often operate across several sites and locations, making in-person training costly, time-consuming, inconsistent, and difficult to schedule. It's clear that manufacturers need technical and soft skills training, but it must be delivered on-demand and on any device so workers can quickly pick up new skills and problem solve at a moment's notice. According to the [2019 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends](#), organizations are moving towards robust work-centered learning programs that encourage employees to upgrade their skills in the natural course of their day-to-day jobs. In other words, the way in which we work and learn should be connected and integrated into one workflow, where workers can effortlessly pull the information they need, when and where they need it.

Evolve to this work-centered approach by implementing a modern learning solution that allows workers to quickly develop technical and soft skills that are beneficial for their personal development, but also positively impacts overall business success.

2

Support the new generation of learners

The relationship between learning and work is changing at a rapid pace as a new generation enters the workforce. The skills gap in manufacturing is a critical issue, and the lack of young workers entering a skilled trade makes it even more challenging to fill that gap. A recent study by [Leading2Lean](#) found that 27% of Generation Z would consider working in the manufacturing industry—a higher figure than was exhibited in previous generations.

Whether they decide to enter through an apprenticeship or some other program, members of Gen Z represent a valuable addition to the manufacturing industry, and manufacturers must do everything in their power to adapt to the way this new generation likes to learn. The way baby boomers learned several years ago is vastly different from the fast-paced, digital, and social approach that millennials and members of Gen Z expect today. Implementing digital learning courses and simulations into these workers' day-to-day jobs will speed up the learning curve and increase retention.

3

Turn experienced workers into content authors

[Deloitte and the Manufacturing Institute's skills gap study](#) also suggests that “one of the core assets that most manufacturing companies today still possess are workforces that have extremely seasoned workers, many of whom hold intrinsic knowledge of best practices and the nuances of their workplace.” This baby boomer generation is about to retire, so now is the time to capture their incredibly valuable knowledge and use it as a competitive advantage. A learning management system can turn these seasoned workers into content authors, allowing them to easily capture their expertise and advice in the form of videos, assessments, simulations, and forums that can be used for generations to come.

4

Expand technical and soft skills

For current and future manufacturing workers to keep up with the changes brought by the fourth industrial revolution, they need high-quality technical skills training. Equally important, and often overlooked, is the need for “soft skills” training, which covers concepts like critical thinking, problem solving, and adaptability. A modern learning management system provides the crucial compliance and technical skills training that workers need to perform their day-to-day jobs, as well as training courses that improve employee soft skills. Businesses can use an LMS to create branching scenarios that simulate emergency situations, where the employee will be called to use their critical thinking skills to make certain decisions and experience the outcomes in a controlled environment.

5

Invest in long-term employee development

Learning and development should begin before the employee is onboarded and continue through every inflection point of the employee lifecycle. Use a learning management system to assess the skill level of incoming employees. Assessments will identify strengths and help match the employee to the best role for them. From there, it's important to design intelligent development guides with data that can be customized to the person and the job to drive staff performance long after the onboarding period. Investing in employee development is a crucial step to closing skills gaps that exist now, but also allows an organization to remain compliant and educated on the latest technologies as the manufacturing industry continues to adapt. According to [LinkedIn](#), 94% of employees say that they would stay at a company longer if it invested in their career development. Continuously invest in employee development and reap the benefits of a more engaged workforce, a smaller skills gap, and reduced turnover.

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