Theory of Change to close the workforce digital skills gap



Theory of Change is a standard approach used in the Not-for-Profit sector when tackling complex, multi-dimensional challenges. It provides a visual method to explain how specific interventions or set of actions lead to a social change. For FutureDotNow, it helps us connect the dots between activity, outcomes and the impact we are ultimately working to achieve.

The Challenge

Today, over half of working-age adults in the UK cannot perform all 20 digital tasks industry and government agree are vital for today's workplace, such as checking payslips online, setting secure passwords, or using productivity tools. That's c.22 million adults right across the workforce, in every sector, region and age group, including high earners and those with high levels of education.

This reality has largely been hidden in plain sight, potentially masked by assumptions that adults naturally gain core digital competence through use. Worryingly, against that backdrop, only 4 in 10 adults plan to improve their digital skills in 2024.

Closing this skills gap is not just a problem to solve, it's an opportunity to realise. A digitally proficient workforce would impact personal prosperity, drive economic growth, enhance digital transformations, and bolster cybersecurity. The rapid rise of AI heightens both the risks and opportunities, making it crucial for everyone in the workforce to develop essential digital skills to thrive now and in the future.

NARRATING

FutureDotNow is building a common agenda on workforce essential digital skills, alongside provision of authoritative insight. Expert understanding and cross-sector relationships enable us to narrate the challenge and how to solve it in new and compelling ways.

How Future Dot Now delivers change

CAMPAIGNING

Continuous communication is core to our work. FutureDotNow's campaigning mindset and strategy is designed to influence business action, public policy and ultimately individual behaviour.

CONVENING

A powerful coalition of business leaders, policy makers and experts enables us to surface practical solutions and coordinate collective action to drive systemic change through mutually reinforcing activities. We also ensure focus on impact metrics and shared measurement systems.

Five levers for change

FRAMING THE ISSUE & MAKING THE CASE

Clearly articulating the essential digital skills gap in working-age adults and the benefits of closing it, in a way that is compelling for business and public policy makers.

STRONG DATA & STORYTELLING

Surfacing and closing critical data gaps alongside qualitative content including case studies.

COORDINATION & COLLABORATION

Establishing a national challenge that requires targeted and effective collaboration to deliver scale impact at pace. Mobilising and coordinating a community of changemakers.

POWERFUL VISION & PLAN FOR ACTION

Setting clear direction, with a milestone-based programme of work that builds momentum and delivers progress.

SHARED MEASUREMENT

Developing and convening attention around a consistent set of shared metrics.

Outcomes FutureDotNow is working to achieve

A DIGITALLY EMPOWERED UK WORKFORCE WITH UNLOCKED POTENTIAL

Everyone of working age is equipped with the essential digital skills and confidence they need today and to keep pace with tech development. Improved digital confidence and capability gives people the opportunity to progress and prosper. This helps organisations improve productivity, digitally transform, and fill the talent gap, benefitting the whole UK economy.

NATIONAL

The whole UK economy benefits because people have improved digital capability and more opportunity to progress and prosper, and business have access to a future-proofed workforce that helps them improve productivity, digitally transform, and fill the talent gaps.

BUSINESS

As a result of closing the Essential Digital Skills gap in their workforce, businesses become more resilient, productive, and sustainable. Profiling the importance of digital confidence and capability leads to a more joined-up, systematic approach to prioritising and investing in upskilling.

INDIVIDUALS

People see the value of improving the digital skills they need for work and can access the resources they need to do so. Building digital capability and confidence leads to benefits in their daily lives and careers.

Learning & assumptions

Specificity on the different parts of the digital skills challenge is crucial in order to drive change. The term 'digital skills' currently encompasses everything from high-end specialist tech skills to getting the most marginalised in society online. This obscures the current level of essential digital capability across the workforce and its impact on business and economic goals.

Overestimating what digital capability people have now leads to the development of products and services designed for an idealised future rather than current realities, hampering adoption, productivity and transformation gains. The route to scale impact and accelerated change is cross-sector collaboration.

A central convening organisation is vital to deliver large scale collective impact on the challenge.

Developing a base level of digital skills increases people's confidence and capability to continue to develop and grow their skills as tech evolves.

Everyone, particularly working age adults, needs the Essential Digital Skills to prosper today, increase productivity and prepare for a changing world of work impacted by automation and Al.



Outcomes pathway to close the workforce digital skills gap

National outcomes

Common language and framework

The Essential Digital Skills framework sets the national standards and terminology for individuals and businesses. Businesses and Government work together to continuously update these standards and ensure they keep pace with technology development.

Shared view

There is a shared view on the minimum digital skill level everyone of working age requires to be digitally capable and confident, a clear understanding of the gap to be closed, and how to measure progress over time.

Taking action

There is a national strategy for development of essential digital confidence and capability for everyone in the workforce. This is accompanied by a systematic, long-term plan and appropriate funding. Business and government are working in lock step to systematically drive up essential digital skills in working age adults at pace.

Business outcomes

Business relevance

Employers see
the need to act
to help people
of working
age build their
core digital
confidence and
capability.

Training for all

This triggers a cultural shift towards prioritising and investing in building essential digital confidence and capability in working age adults. Businesses link the digital capabilities of the workforce to their objectives and ensure workers have the full suite of skills.

Digitally equipped workforce

Businesses have access to a more diverse and skilled workforce, opening the talent pipeline.

Understanding the benefit

Businesses can measure the impact of their skills-building initiatives, leading them to better understand the commercial and social value of building digital confidence and capability.

Business as usual

Addressing digital confidence and capability becomes more systematic and commonplace across businesses. Businesses have access to a digitally confident and capable workforce, ultimately increasing productivity and resilience.

Individual outcomes

Personal value

People understand why developing their essential digital skills is relevant and important to them. They prioritise developing the skills in the essential digital skills framework and are motivated to seek training where they see gaps.

Easy to access learning

Everyone knows what essential digital skills they need as a working age adult and can establish their personal capability levels in a positive way. Where they have gaps, they can easily access well-structured learning pathways and resources that inspire and enable them to upskill quickly and in a way that works for them, ultimately building their digital confidence and motives.

Growing and sharing

As they become more comfortable building their personal digital skills and can see it is easy to do and worthwhile, people start to normalise this as 'lifelong learning', removing any stigma. They encourage and support others around them to digitally upskill reinforcing that this is a constant and positive thing.

Capable and confident

Digital upskilling becomes a recognised activity that everyone of working age does regularly to keep pace with tech development. Everyone knows what digital essentials they need and how to acquire them. People become more comfortable and confident in the digital world, seeing the benefits of building digital capability and confidence in their daily lives and careers.



Digitally empowered UK workforce with unlocked potential

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