



Bring out the brilliance in your people - and your business

Making Skills Stick

6 Steps to Build a Skills Culture That Lasts



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WHO THIS IS FOR

This guide is for HR Directors, HR Business Partners, People Leaders and L&D Leaders who have launched or are planning a skills initiative and want to ensure it delivers lasting impact rather than fading after launch.



Many organisations invest heavily in skills initiatives, only to discover that enthusiasm fades after launch. Skills frameworks are created or procured, software platforms are implemented, career and learning pathways are built, but adoption stalls, engagement declines and the initiative struggles to become part of everyday working life.

The challenge is rarely the technology or the frameworks themselves; it is embedding the skills culture deeply enough that it becomes sustainable.

From our experience at Lexonis, delivering a skills programme that lasts requires more than technology, communications or training alone. It demands leadership alignment, employee engagement, measurable business value and continuous reinforcement.

The organisations that succeed are not those with the best frameworks or software. They are those that make skills part of how they think, develop talent and drive performance at every opportunity.

This guide outlines six practical steps, including a built-in self-assessment, to help you move beyond short-term initiatives and embed skills into the DNA of your organisation.

What you will find inside:

- Six proven steps for embedding a sustainable skills culture
- A self-assessment tool to identify things to work on
- Real-world examples to bring each step to life
- A ‘mistakes to avoid’ section for each step
- A scoring guide to help you prioritise your next actions

SKILLS CULTURE DIAGNOSTIC

Where Does Your Skills Culture Stand Today?

Before you dive into the six steps, take ten minutes to honestly assess where your organisation stands right now. This diagnostic will help you identify your greatest strengths and your most important gaps, so you can focus your energy where it will have the most impact.

How to use the organisational diagnostic tool:

- Rate each statement honestly on a scale of 1 to 5
- 1 = Not at all true | 3 = Partially true | 5 = Completely true
- There are no right or wrong answers – value comes from responding honestly
- Record your total score at the end and use the scoring guide to interpret your results

STEP 1

Showcase the Benefits and Prove ROI

Make the case impossible to ignore

THE CHALLENGE

One of the most common reasons skills initiatives lose momentum is that they become disconnected from measurable business outcomes. Employees, including managers and leaders, begin to see them as another HR initiative, an addition to their workload rather than a strategic enabler of growth, performance and opportunity.

WHY THIS MATTERS

When people clearly understand the value a skills initiative creates for them, not just for the organisation as a whole, adoption accelerates. Linking skills to outcomes that matter transforms a programme into a priority.

WHAT HIGH-PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS DO

- › Link skills initiatives directly to measurable business priorities
- › Demonstrate ROI through data: improved metrics such as productivity gains, attraction and retention improvements, internal mobility rates
- › Tailor the message for different stakeholder groups - for instance, what matters to a CEO differs from what matters to a line manager
- › Show individuals how skills improvement connects to their career growth and opportunities
- › Use benchmarks, case studies and success metrics to build and sustain credibility

HOW TO MAKE THIS WORK

Start by identifying two or three business outcomes your organisation is already tracking, things like service response times, time-to-productivity for new hires or retention in high-demand roles. Then work backwards: which skills gaps are most likely contributing to those numbers? Build your ROI story around that connection. When you can show a line manager that closing a specific skills gap has reduced team turnover or show an employee that completing a development pathway has historically led to promotion within 18 months, the initiative stops feeling like a corporate programme and starts feeling like a personal opportunity. The data does not need to be perfect, it needs to be honest, relevant and told in language that each audience actually uses.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- ✗ Measuring metrics such as software logins and completions, rather than business outcomes
- ✗ Presenting the same generic benefits message to all audiences
- ✗ Treating ROI as a post-launch exercise rather than building it in from the start
- ✗ Underestimating how much scepticism exists at middle-management level

SKILLS CULTURE DIAGNOSTIC: RATE YOUR ORGANISATION 1-5

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
We have clear metrics that link our skills initiative to business outcomes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Leaders and employees can articulate why the initiative matters to them personally	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
We have visible ROI data that we actively communicate	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
We tailor our 'what's in it for me' message for different audience groups	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
We regularly revisit and update our impact evidence	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐



STEP 2

Activate the Power of Communication

Shift from broadcasting to meaningful dialogue

THE CHALLENGE

Successful organisations do not simply communicate change; they create genuine conversations around it. Employees and leaders alike will have questions, concerns and misconceptions about new ways of working. If these are not addressed early, resistance grows quietly beneath the surface.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The goal of communication is not only about awareness. It is also about building understanding, trust and belief. People support what they help shape and they disengage from change that feels done to them rather than with them.

WHAT HIGH-PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS DO

- › Create two-way channels: open forums, listening sessions, feedback loops, not just broadcasts
- › Address resistance and misconceptions early and directly, with honest answers
- › Tailor messaging by audience: what a senior leader needs to hear differs from what a frontline employee needs
- › Secure visible leadership sponsorship - people watch what leaders do, not just what they say
- › Reinforce the vision consistently over time, not just at launch

HOW TO MAKE THIS WORK

Before you launch, map your key audience groups - senior leaders, middle managers, frontline employees - and ask what each group most needs to understand, believe and feel in order to engage. Informal sceptics and critics should not be overlooked, their influence on peer opinion can rival that of formal leaders, making it more effective to engage them directly and early on, rather than to work around them. Then design communication touchpoints specifically for each. Rather than a single all-staff email, consider a short briefing for leaders that focuses on strategic outcomes, a practical session for managers that answers the question 'what does this mean for my team?' and a simple, honest message for employees that focuses on what is in it for them. Build in at least one formal feedback channel from the start, a pulse survey, a dedicated inbox, or a regular Q&A session and visibly act on what you hear. People disengage when they feel communication is one-directional. They lean in when they see their questions acknowledged and answered.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- ✗ Launching with fanfare and then going quiet, communication must be sustained
- ✗ Using the same message for every audience
- ✗ Treating questions and concerns as obstacles rather than signals to address
- ✗ Assuming frequent communication alone builds understanding, without ensuring clarity and relevance

SKILLS CULTURE DIAGNOSTIC: RATE YOUR ORGANISATION 1-5

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
We have active two-way communication channels, not just broadcast messaging	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Leaders are visibly championing the initiative, not just endorsing it	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
We adapt our messages for different audiences and seniority levels	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
We address concerns and misconceptions quickly and openly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Communication is consistent and sustained beyond the launch phase	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐



STEP 3

Unleash Engagement Through Stories

Make the change real, relatable and human

THE CHALLENGE

Data creates logic, but stories create belief. People engage more deeply when they can see how a skills initiative has genuinely impacted a colleague, a team, or a career, in a situation that feels real and close to their own experience.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Stories are the most powerful adoption tool most organisations leave unused. They humanise change, reduce perceived risk and create social proof. When employees hear from peers rather than leaders, the message lands differently and sticks!

WHAT HIGH-PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS DO

- › Proactively identify and share internal success stories and quick wins
- › Highlight individual growth journeys, not just team or organisational outcomes
- › Encourage peer-to-peer advocacy by creating the conditions for employees to share experiences
- › Involve employees in shaping the programme so they have authentic stories to tell
- › Create regular feedback loops that make people feel heard and part of the journey

HOW TO MAKE THIS WORK

Identify three or four people in your organisation who have already benefited from a development opportunity: a promotion, a career pivot, a new project they could not have taken on before. Ask them to share their story in their own words, in whatever format feels natural to them: a short written post on your intranet, a five-minute slot in a team meeting, or a brief recorded video. Resist the temptation to script or over-polish it, authenticity has more impact. Then create a simple, repeatable mechanism to keep finding and sharing these stories throughout the year. A standing agenda item in your monthly leadership meeting, a dedicated channel on your internal communications platform, or a quarterly 'skills spotlight' feature are all low-effort ways to keep the momentum going long after the launch energy has faded.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- ✗ Only sharing leadership voices and corporate case studies, peer stories carry more weight
- ✗ Waiting for big success stories, small wins shared early build momentum
- ✗ Using stories only at launch rather than as a continuous engagement mechanism
- ✗ Manufacturing or over-polishing stories, authenticity matters more than perfection

SKILLS CULTURE DIAGNOSTIC: RATE YOUR ORGANISATION 1-5

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
We actively collect and share stories of individual skills development impact	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Employees regularly hear from peers about their experiences, not just from leadership	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
We have a process for identifying and amplifying success stories quickly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Employees feel involved in shaping the programme, not just recipients of it	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
We use stories as a continuous engagement tool, not just at launch	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐



STEP 4

Equip Your Heroes with Training, Tools and Support

Turn key individuals into change accelerators

THE CHALLENGE

Skills cultures become sustainable when the managers, leaders and change champions who sit closest to employees are equipped and motivated to actively support them. Too often, organisations launch ambitious initiatives without providing the practical support required to sustain behavioural change at team level.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Our experience at Lexonis tells us that managers are the single most powerful lever in any culture change and potentially the biggest blocker. Remember that managers translate strategy into daily experience. Without their active support, not just compliance, skills initiatives remain a corporate programme rather than a lived reality.

WHAT HIGH-PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS DO

- › Invest in preparing managers and team leaders specifically for their role in championing the initiative
- › Provide practical tools and frameworks that make it easy to have skills conversations
- › Offer ongoing coaching and support, not just a one-off briefing at launch
- › Build confidence in using new processes, tools and technologies
- › Create a visible sponsorship coalition across seniority levels, functions and geographies

HOW TO MAKE THIS WORK

Identify a group of people across your organisation who are respected by their peers, genuinely curious about development and well-connected across teams, they do not need to be the most senior people and often should not be. Give them early access to the tools and content, a clear brief on their role, and a dedicated session to ask questions and raise concerns before the wider launch. Then keep them connected through a regular check-in, monthly is usually sufficient, where they can share what is working, what questions they are hearing and where resistance is forming. Treat their feedback as intelligence, not noise. When these individuals feel genuinely equipped and valued, they become your most credible advocates, because their colleagues trust them in a way they will never trust a corporate communication.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- ✗ Briefing managers rather than genuinely preparing them for their role
- ✗ Assuming enthusiasm at launch will translate into sustained action without support
- ✗ Treating the manager enablement programme as an add-on rather than a core investment
- ✗ Overlooking informal influencers and champions who carry more credibility than official sponsors

SKILLS CULTURE DIAGNOSTIC: RATE YOUR ORGANISATION 1–5

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Managers are equipped with practical tools and skills to have development conversations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
We have trained change champions across different levels and functions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There is ongoing support for leaders, not just a one-off briefing at launch	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Informal influencers and advocates have been identified and engaged	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Leaders feel confident in their role in supporting the skills culture	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐



STEP 5

Honour the Victories and Celebrate Every Win

Reinforce behaviours and build momentum

THE CHALLENGE

What organisations recognise and celebrate becomes part of the culture. Celebrating progress reinforces desired behaviours, sustains enthusiasm and sends a clear signal that the initiative matters to leadership. This does not apply only to major milestones; small wins are equally important because they maintain energy and visibility throughout the transformation journey.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Recognition is one of the most underused tools in change management. In a world of competing priorities, people will naturally gravitate towards what gets noticed and valued. Without deliberate recognition, skills development competes at a disadvantage against more immediately visible work.

WHAT HIGH-PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS DO

- › Publicly recognise individual and team contributions to the skills initiative
- › Celebrate progress regularly, through team meetings, internal communications and leadership channels
- › Highlight positive outcomes and connect recognition to the broader organisational vision
- › Reward behaviours that support the skills culture, not just outcomes
- › Create visible momentum through regular celebration touchpoints across the year

HOW TO MAKE THIS WORK

Build recognition into the rhythm of the year rather than treating it as an occasional event. A practical starting point is to add a standing two-minute 'skills moment' to your regular all-hands or team meeting, a slot where one person shares how developing a skill has made a difference to their work or to a colleague. Keep it informal and voluntary. Over time, create a simple way for people to nominate peers, a short form, a dedicated channel or even a handwritten card scheme. The format matters less than the consistency. What you are really doing is making visible the behaviours you want to see more of. When people notice that skills development is being celebrated at the same level as hitting a sales target or delivering a project, the message lands: this is something that matters to our organisation, not just something that is encouraged on paper.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- ✗ Saving recognition for annual events rather than building it into the rhythm of the year
- ✗ Only celebrating individual achievement; team and community contributions deserve equal attention
- ✗ Treating recognition as an HR activity rather than a leadership responsibility
- ✗ Missing the opportunity to connect celebrations back to the organisational purpose

SKILLS CULTURE DIAGNOSTIC: RATE YOUR ORGANISATION 1-5

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
We regularly and publicly recognise contributions to our skills culture	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Recognition happens throughout the year, not only at annual events	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
We celebrate both individual and collective progress	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Leaders visibly participate in recognition; it is not left solely to HR	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Recognition is linked to the broader purpose and vision of the initiative	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐



STEP 6

Embed Skills Through Systems, Processes and Leadership

Make skills part of how the organisation operates

THE CHALLENGE

This is the step that ultimately determines whether a skills culture becomes permanent or fades when attention moves elsewhere. A skills culture cannot rely on enthusiasm or individual effort alone. It must become embedded within the organisation's systems, processes, and leadership expectations, so that it persists regardless of who is leading the organisation.

WHY THIS MATTERS

This is where the shift from programme to capability occurs. When skills are integrated into the mechanisms by which the organisation makes decisions about people, how it assesses, develops, promotes and rewards, they become self-reinforcing. The culture sustains itself.

WHAT HIGH-PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS DO

- › Integrate skills development into performance management conversations and reviews
- › Connect skills to career pathways and progression
- › Embed skills into workforce planning and talent reviews
- › Use skills as a criterion in succession planning and internal mobility decisions
- › Make skills a visible factor in recruitment, both internal and external
- › Hold leaders accountable for building skills capability in their teams

HOW TO MAKE THIS WORK

Choose one existing people process, the annual performance review cycle is usually the easiest entry point and redesign it to include a structured skills conversation. This does not require a system overhaul. It can be as simple as adding two questions to the existing review template: 'Which skills have you developed this year?' and 'Which skills would most help you progress in the next 12 months?' Then work with whoever owns that process to ensure managers are briefed on how to have that conversation well. Once skills are part of performance conversations, they naturally begin to surface in talent reviews, promotion decisions, and development planning. Each integration point reinforces the others. The goal is to reach a position where the skills culture sustains itself, not because the L&D team is driving it, but because it is simply part of how the organisation talks about and develops its people.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- ✗ Treating skills as a separate initiative rather than integrating them into existing people processes
- ✗ Building a skills framework but not connecting it to any real decision-making
- ✗ Leaving accountability for the skills culture with HR rather than distributing it to leaders
- ✗ Assuming that system integration will happen naturally without deliberate design and governance

SKILLS CULTURE DIAGNOSTIC: RATE YOUR ORGANISATION 1-5

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Skills are integrated into our performance management and career development processes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Skills data informs our workforce planning and talent decisions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Leaders are held accountable for building capability in their teams	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Skills are a visible factor in internal mobility and promotion decisions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The skills culture would continue if the programme team stepped back tomorrow	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐



SKILLS CULTURE DIAGNOSTIC

Your Organisation's Diagnostic Score

Transfer your scores from each section below, then total them up

Step	Area	Your Score /5
1	Showcase Benefits & ROI	/5
2	Communication Strategy	/5
3	Stories & Engagement	/5
4	Equip Your Heroes	/5
5	Celebrate Wins	/5
6	Embed in Systems	/5
	TOTAL SCORE	/30

WHAT YOUR SCORE MEANS

Score	Where You Are	What to Focus On
24-30	Strong Foundation	You have most of the building blocks in place. Focus on embedding skills more deeply into systems and processes - that is where lasting culture lives!
15-23	Building Momentum	Good progress in some areas, but significant gaps remain. Prioritise the steps where you scored lowest, these are your biggest levers for impact.
0-14	Early Stage	Your skills culture is still taking shape. Focus on the fundamentals: leadership alignment, clear ROI, and strong communication before adding complexity.

Your score is not a judgement; it reflects your organisation's current readiness, **highlighting both the strengths you can build upon and the opportunities for further growth**. The organisations that build the strongest skills cultures are not those that start in the best position. They are those that take deliberate, consistent action over time.

SKILLS CULTURE DIAGNOSTIC

What Happens Next?

Embedding a sustainable skills culture is not about launching another initiative. It is about creating lasting organisational capability.

The organisations that succeed are those that move beyond one-off programmes and systematically reinforce skills through communication, engagement, leadership, recognition and operational integration.

When skills become embedded into the way an organisation thinks, develops talent, and drives performance, the result is greater agility, stronger workforce capability, and long-term business resilience.

READY TO GO FURTHER?

Book a free 30-minute Skills Strategy session with a Lexonis consultant today

In 30 minutes we will review your self-assessment score together, identify your two or three highest-leverage opportunities and give you a clear, practical starting point, with no obligation.

[Register for free Lexonis Skills Strategy session](#)

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