Train Up Your Team With a **Skills Academy**

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To keep up with the pace of technology change, businesses can no longer take an ad hoc approach to building and reskilling talent from within.

A Skills Academy — built to address an organization's specific skills needs — blends the ease of digital courses and just-in-time learning with an organization's overall business needs.

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What is a Skills Academy?

A Skills Academy is a place — whether virtual or physical — where employees learn, collaborate, and share.

Skills Academies (also sometimes called Capability Academies) rely on ownership and governance from executive leaders. To create a Skills Academy, leaders must analyze which capabilities are essential for the business to thrive and stay competitive.

What exactly is a capability?

According to L&D expert Josh Bersin, it's the sum of the skills, knowledge, and experiences your employees need to help the business achieve its goals.

Why do Skills Academies matter?

According to findings from McKinsey, for organizations to compete globally, training must focus on broad capability building across all levels of the workforce to drive "deep and lasting cultural changes, agile and cross-functional collaboration, and rapid scaling."

What do Skills Academies encompass?

They're in-depth training initiatives to develop and sustain skill capabilities that support business strategies and function areas.

These types of Academies are becoming popular learning programs with Udemy Business customers. Booz Allen Hamilton is retraining thousands of employees as data scientists to accommodate an industry shift the organization sees with its clients.

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Based on Udemy Business customer best practices, we've compiled **7 components of building an effective technical Skills Academy**:

Whether your company is training for artificial intelligence, data science, web development, or cloud computing, these components will help build your program's foundation.

1   **Identify business objectives**

2   **Establish participant goals**

3   **Skills mapping & assessments**

4   **Blended & social learning**

5   **Personalized learning paths**

6   **Mentorship**

7   **Success measurements**

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1

Identify business objectives

Identify business objectives

To secure executive buy-in for a Skills Academy, your training program should be centered on your organization's business objectives.

Instead of "Train 250 employees in data science skills" — which focuses on output rather than business outcome — try to write metrics like: "Increase customer retention through targeted data-driven advertising."

The framing of the latter links the importance of education to competitive industry trends.

McKinsey suggests that establishing how training ladders into long-term organizational goals allows stakeholders across departments and levels to understand the importance of supporting capability-based training to stay ahead of competitors.

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Establish participant goals

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Establish participant goals

In addition to the business objectives for the program, the learners should also have goals they're working towards. Did they enroll in the program simply to satisfy their love of learning? Likely not.

Identify what a participant's success outcomes look like by considering what motivators drive your employees. Two common objectives include:

Certificate of completion

Just as knowledge in a technical skill like AWS is validated through credentials, organizations can offer employees who complete the training program a certification to include on their LinkedIn profiles and resumes.

Career growth opportunities

The opportunity to be fast-tracked into new roles or receive promotions based on their completion of the Skills Academy is often motivating for learners.

Help learners meet their goals with clear parameters on the structure of the program. Consider the following:

Will the participants work within guided milestones and a prescribed completion date?

Or, will it be self-paced within a longer time frame such as a quarter or fiscal year?

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3

Skills mapping
& assessments

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Skills mapping & assessments

Consider the business objectives at the heart of your Skills Academy through the following lenses:

Competency base: Which skills does your organization consider a foundational requirement for participants?

- A Data Science Skills Academy might require SQL knowledge as a **competency base** for participants.

Practitioner skills: Which competencies should experienced professionals hold?

- Data scrubbing may be a **practitioner skill**.

Niche skills: To stay ahead of the competition, which niche skills should your company cultivate?

- Creating machine learning algorithms to leverage customer data is a **niche skill** that will help the organization stand apart from industry peers.

Don't forget soft skills like communication and change management to help participants grow their emotional intelligence during their training.

Tip: Don't try to take on too much in your training academy! Focus on a set of key skills relevant to your business. For example, an AI Academy tailored to your retail business could focus on training for AI uses in retail such as using machine learning to better predict customer churn.

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Skills assessments should also be used to define when employees would benefit from taking courses before the program's start, so that everyone begins at the same proficiency level.

Work with your internal subject matter experts to identify what proficiencies are needed to have foundational knowledge.

Case study: When consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton made an <u>audacious goal of hiring 5,000 data scientists</u>, it primarily involved reskilling current employees through a data science training program. To bring everyone up to the same proficiency level, the learning team developed an initial skills assessment. Based on how an employee performed on the assessment, they were assigned online courses to complete before the program to be at the knowledge level of their peers. Completion of these courses was mandatory in order to join the program.

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Blended
& social learning

Blended & social learning

In the past, blended learning programs meant combining classroom and online learning. Today, a blended learning experience means layering classroom learning and online learning with a wide variety of digital technologies and L&D practices to grow beyond **blended learning** and become **social learning**.

A Skills Academy leveraging an engaging social learning strategy could include online courses and in-person learning sessions as well as:

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Case study webinars

Host webinars on how the technologies and skills taught in the academy can or are already being applied to company-specific projects. If these projects don't yet exist, have the host walk through industry examples relevant to your company.

Lunch and Learns

Bring online learning in person by hosting facilitated sessions where learners watch a lesson together. A host breaks up the viewing with pauses for discussion, reflection, or organizing participants into small groups to solve mini-projects, recreating the flow of work experience.

Online social forums

Workplace chat services make great learning and discussion channels. As they move through the academy, employees can use a designated Slack channel to discuss how to apply the technical skills they're learning to specific projects at your company.

Tip: Build legitimacy for the program and the mentors by having senior leaders attend some of the social learning opportunities. Their participation is crucial for the program's momentum and to keep the community strong.
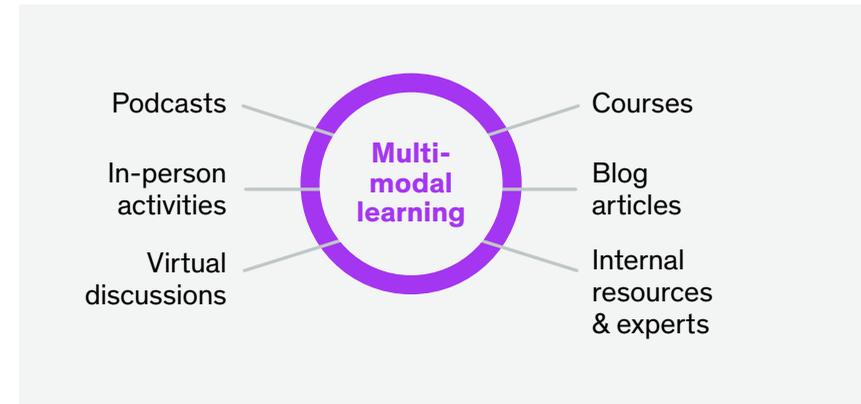
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Personalized learning paths

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Personalized learning paths

There's no one-size-fits-all approach to learning in the workplace. Build on the insights gathered from pre-assessments by tailoring your Skills Academy to employees' role and skill levels. Booz Allen Hamilton partnered with 10 internal subject matter experts when designing the company's data science program. These experts provided guidance on the content employees should learn based on their skill level with the material as well as the role they were either already in or were hoping to achieve with this new knowledge.

Since employees' competency levels may be varied within the topic your Skills Academy covers, consider making standardized Foundational, Practitioner (or Professional), and Niche learning paths. Use the pre-assessments to route employees to the learning path with content tailored to their skills.

Build a multi-modal learning path by supplementing online courses with related articles from industry insiders, podcasts on related subject matter, and in-person activities like Lunch and Learns.

Podcasts

In-person activities

Virtual discussions

Multi-modal learning

Courses

Blog articles

Internal resources & experts

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Mentorship

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Mentorship

Equip learners with a team of mentors that can guide them through their learning journey. Mentors hold learners accountable to their training goals while also acting as coaches providing encouragement and keeping spirits up. Mentors may offer help understanding new content and concepts, or they could offer insights and advice on career development opportunities once the academy is completed.

These mentors could be alumni of past training programs, representatives from the Learning & Development team, or employees who are already working within the academy's related skill sets.

Scale mentorship across companies of any size by opting for one of the following structures:

Mentor circles - One mentor is assigned to five students who they meet with individually or as a group.

Office hours - To balance your staff's non-training workloads, designated mentor office hours allow flexibility for mentors and mentees alike. Encourage mentors to book a weekly conference room or schedule a video call for students to drop in.

Tip: Are most learners distributed across locations? No problem! Both the mentorship and social learning examples we've described can be leveraged for remote teams. Use video conferencing and chat tools to engage employees wherever they are based.

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Success measurements

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Success measurements

We noted how to keep employees engaged and accountable as they progress through the Skills Academy, and it's also important for leaders to track the success measurements of the program as a whole. Consider which metrics would inform whether or not your company deems the program a success.

To measure the success of its training program, Booz Allen Hamilton looked at leading indicators (e.g. engagement and consumption) as well as lagging indicators (e.g. impact to the business). Examples of these key performance indicators may include:

Engagement and consumption

1. Engagement is measured via social learning participation across the program as well as the open rates for weekly email digests.

2. Learning consumption is measured via Udemy Business's analytics dashboard where admins can examine course enrollments and completions.

Business impact

1. The learning team monitors and reports on the retention, attrition, and employee billing rates of program graduates versus the entire company workforce.

2. A future report will include how the company's business pipeline has grown one year after the first training program cohort.

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Redefining learning to drive business transformation

As a new decade begins and digital transformation moves beyond an idea from the IT team to a competitive imperative, Skills Academies are emerging as the training model that will propel companies into future successes. Organizations will redefine business itself by moving beyond an ad hoc "library of content model," as Josh Bersin calls it, to robust programs that leverage online courses, opportunities for social learning, mentorship, hands-on projects, and collaboration.

Included at the end of this guide is a Skills Academy Workbook that will walk you through the thought processes and decisions necessary for building a successful capability-based training program for your organization.

Use this to identify the foundational practicalities of your future academy — both the possibilities and limitations for each of the 7 Skills Academy components.

We can't wait to see how your version of a Skills Academy comes to life. After you've completed the worksheet, find out how our online courses, learning paths, and customer success teams can help your Skills Academy flourish.

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About Udemy Business

Udemy's mission is to create new possibilities for people and organizations everywhere by connecting them to the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in a changing world. Fueled by the Udemy marketplace, Udemy Business helps companies achieve critical business outcomes and stay competitive by offering fresh, relevant, and personalized on-demand learning. The Udemy Business subscription is a curation of top-rated courses taught by real-world experts from the Udemy marketplace. Our content covers key business and technical topics ranging from development and IT to leadership, marketing, design, stress management, and much more. In addition to a curated content collection, we offer a platform to drive effective learning as well as tools for leaders to host and distribute their own proprietary content.

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Skills Academy Workbook

By completing this workbook, you will have an outline for implementing a capability training program at your organization. Follow the prompts for each of the 7 components of an effective Skills Academy to reflect on your business objectives, how to set employees up for successful completion of the program, and techniques for multi-modal and social learning, among many other important elements.

Let's get started!

1

Identify business objectives

Tying a Skills Academy to business outcomes is an important part of establishing executive and employee buy-in.

Below, identify **three business objectives** that inform why a focused learning program is essential to the company's long-term success.

1.

2.

3.

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2

Establish participant goals

What will motivate your learners? Is it the potential for a promotion or a certificate of completion? What learning structure would help them achieve their goals? Guided milestones or a self-paced program?

Send an initial survey to the company or a group of potential learners to understand what will drive their participationin a Skills Academy.

Draft a few of those survey questions here.

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3

Skills mapping & assessment

Consider the business objectives central to your Skills Academy. Which related competencies does your organization consider a foundational requirement for participants? Which competencies should a mid-level professional hold?

Identify those core skills on the next page. Then, consider which niche skills (for example, natural language processing in an AI Academy) are necessary for your company to innovate and stay ahead of the competition.

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Competency base skills: Note which skills your organization considers foundational for participants.
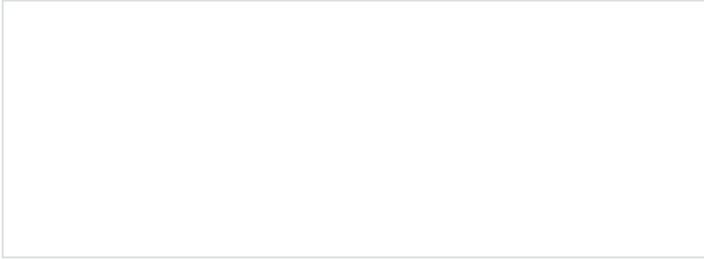
Niche skills: Note which emerging or specialized skills your company should cultivate in employees to stay competitive.
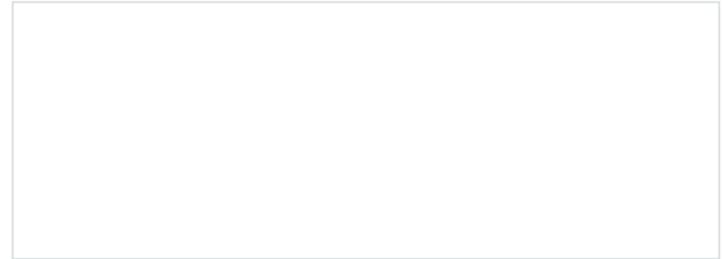
Practitioner skills: Note which skills and knowledge experienced professionals should have on this topic.

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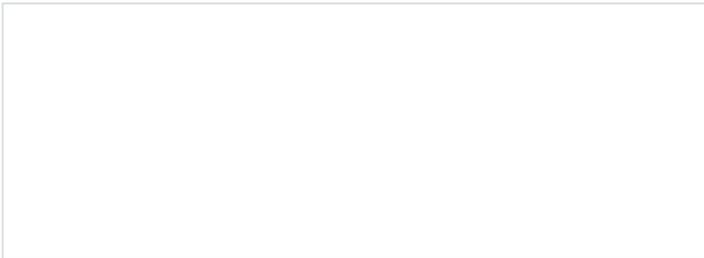
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Identify social learning opportunities

<u>Social learning is defined</u> as "the collection and sharing of information from peers and from social media."

This can include anything from group projects that apply training to real-world scenarios to cohort-based social forums where employees have real-time discussions with peers experiencing similar learning successes and challenges.

Consider the prompts on the next page and note ways social learning may be applied in your Skills Academy.

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Workshops or group projects: Build practical experience in the field your Skills Academy focuses on by offering workshops or short group projects where learners can apply their new skills in common industry applications. Not only will your employees build confidence in their own knowledge, it gives them the opportunity to get comfortable working with peers on these topics.

In the space below, outline potential projects to use in a workshop or take-home group project. For ideas, look to industry case studies or how your competitors have applied this technology to their business.
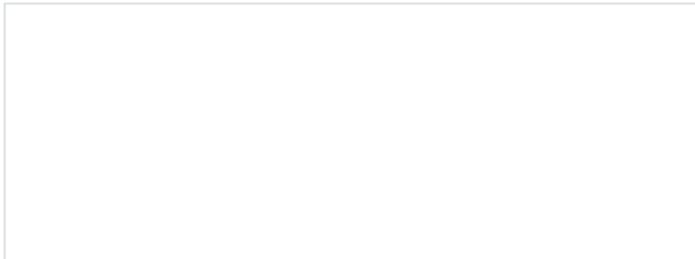
Lunch and Learns: Augment your program with facilitated learning sessions held in physical offices or on remote-friendly video calls. In the space below, identify which topics your learners may benefit from having deeper discussions on as well the internal subject matter experts who can act as facilitators.

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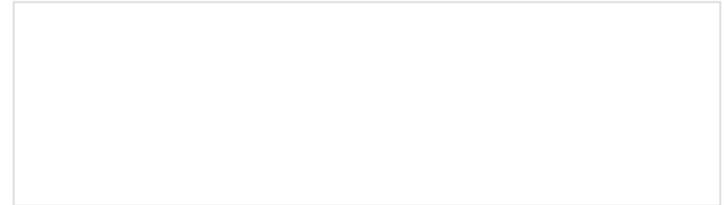
Online social forums: Leverage workplace chat tools like Slack or Teams to keep the conversation going after Lunch and Learns or between time spent watching video lessons. Create a channel where learners can recommend courses to each other or seek advice on a challenging topic.

Below, identify an internal Community Manager who can lead these online conversations with learners. Also note a weekly prompt for the Community Manager to use to encourage regular participation, like "Share one thing you learned this week from your current course."
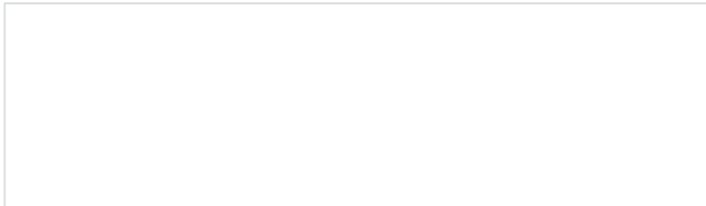
Design your own social learning: Culture greatly impacts what peer-to-peer learning looks like at every company. Work with your Learning team and technical subject matter experts to brainstorm social learning initiatives that complement your organization's existing culture and how you might want it to grow. Map out those ideas below.

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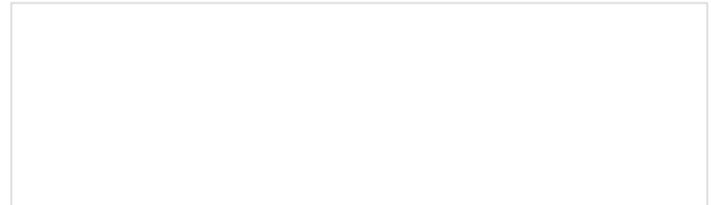
Personalized learning paths checklist

Build a multi-modal learning path by supplementing online courses with related content such as articles from industry insiders, podcast episodes, webinar recordings, and more!

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Start each learning path with a "vision document," a place for the manager or L&D leader to outline the objective of the learning path. An example may be "The content in this Foundational Skills Data Science Learning Path builds basic understanding of SQL, R, and data querying."

Your Skills Academy may have multiple learning paths varying by experience level or business objective. Use this section to outline the vision document and content for one learning path. Repeat for every necessary learning path you and your team identify for the program.
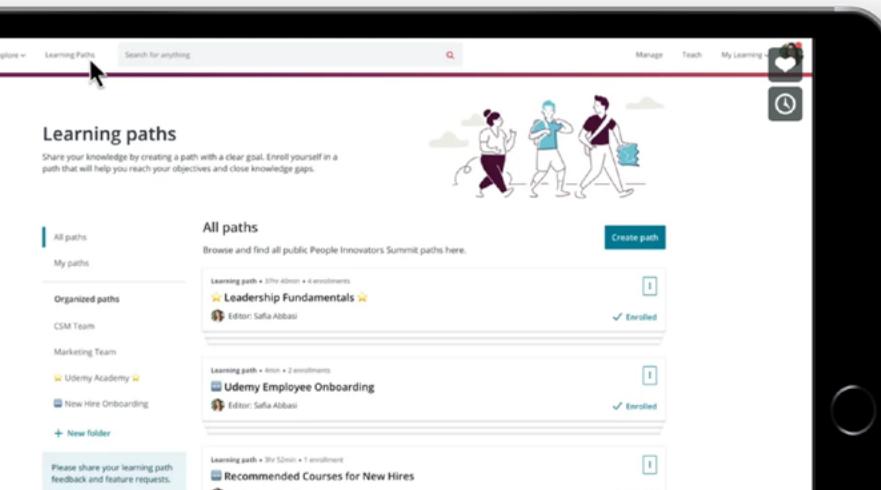
☐ Vision document

☐ Udemy courses

☐ Select lessons within courses

☐ Industry articles

☐ Podcasts

☐ Internal webinar videos

☐ Message boards

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Mentorship

A mentorship program builds systems of support and accountability for learners as they progress towards their personal Skills Academy goals.

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From mentor circles to weekly office hours to one-on-one sessions, there are many ways to implement mentorship within your company. Use this space to reflect on how your learners would best access mentor support. Examine the pros, cons, and time commitments necessary for each solution.

Mentorship idea

Mentorship idea

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Whether your program calls them mentors, coaches, or learning partners, the individuals supporting learners offer an effective way to develop an employee's skills, encourage their career growth, and nurture a positive culture. Ensure each mentor's own success with their learners by providing coaching resources. A great place to start is with conversation prompts. We've listed two sample coaching questions below; add your own in the space provided.

What do you want to achieve by participating in this program?

What support do you need from me to help you achieve your learning goals?

Mentor conversation prompts

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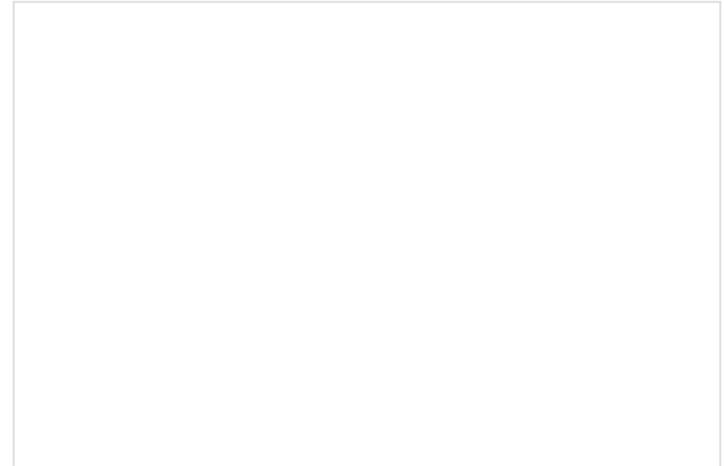
Success measurements

Maintain executive support of Skills Academy initiatives with regular reporting on success metrics. For example, Udemy Business customer Booz Allen Hamilton tracks the quarterly growth of learner engagement and consumption as well as business impact.

On the following page, outline your program's KPIs and note whether you'll report on monthly, quarterly, or yearly metrics — or all of the above!

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Learner Engagement: Identify your baseline engagement metrics for the Skills Academy's first quarter.

Consider measuring engagement by tracking participant count in social learning initiatives or the open and click-through rates of program emails.

Below, identify engagement indicators to measure.
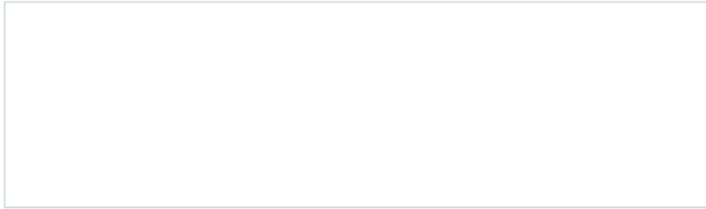
Learner Consumption: Identify your baseline consumption numbers for the Skills Academy's first quarter.

Typical consumption metrics include number of hours spent learning per month or courses completed. The admin dashboard in your learning platform can help you track most of this data.

Note below the consumption indicators you'll measure throughout the program.
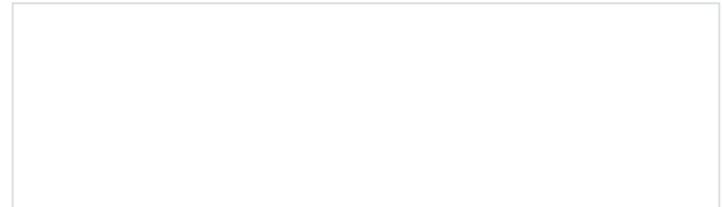
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Business Impact: In step 1 of this worksheet you identified the business objectives central to the success of your company's Skills Academy. One way to objectively measure the benefit of a scaled learning program is by noting how either revenue or business pipeline grew one year after the first Skills Academy cohort began.

Many Learning teams also speak to a program's business impact by reporting on the retention, attrition, and billing rates of participating employees versus the entire company workforce.

Note below how you'll measure business impact KPIs, whether this is quarterly or yearly measurements, and which internal teams may need to support the collecting of this data.

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