

# Business Demand-Oriented Skilling

**Kenneth Jeyseelan<sup>1</sup>, Dr. K. Sathyamurthi<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>PhD (PT) Research Scholar, Madras School of Social Work, Chennai-8

<sup>2</sup>Research Supervisor, Madras School of Social Work, Chennai-8

## Abstract

Business demand-oriented skilling refers to the process of developing the skills of employees in a manner that aligns with the specific needs and requirements of the business. This approach to training and development is focused on enhancing the productivity and effectiveness of the workforce, by providing them with the knowledge and skills that are most relevant to the company's objectives. The primary goal of business demand-oriented skilling is to ensure that employees are equipped with the right set of skills that are in high demand within the company. This can involve identifying specific areas of expertise that are required for key business functions, and designing training programs that are tailored to meet those needs. One of the key benefits of business demand-oriented skilling is that it can help companies to stay competitive in a rapidly changing business landscape. By investing in the development of their employees' skills, companies can ensure that they are better equipped to adapt to new technologies, market trends, and other emerging challenges. Overall, business demand-oriented skilling is an effective way for companies to invest in their workforce, and to ensure that they have the right talent to drive success in the future.

**Key words:** Business oriented skilling, Demand based skilling, Future Skilling, Right skilling and Top Demand Competencies.

## Introduction

As enterprises brave the economic impact of COVID and explore ways to retain and redeploy their workforce, organizations are exploring ways to turbocharge employees' careers. On the other hand, an increasingly changing global industry has been bringing incremental as well as massive shifts in customer preferences and expectations from service organizations. In the BPS industry, client organizations no longer expect mere execution of basic non-core processes by service 'providers' but rather expect them to create business value adding offerings as service 'consultants'. Technological advancements have only accelerated this shift with more and more business processes going digital and even automated. Take for instance a customer helpdesk process – what earlier used to be a direct call to a customer service representative is now replaced with a virtual AI (Artificial Intelligence) chatbot as the first line of response, followed by the helpdesk agent who needs to skilfully navigate the digital ticketing tool. With these developments, organizations are also re-aligning to offer themselves as *Enabling Partners* in customer's transformation journeys.

Naturally, the talent capabilities are also being nurtured and evolved to meet these shifting business imperatives. One of the marquee imperatives for the Learning & Development function is to build superior internal talent capability which can help in fulfilling major business demands for present as well as future skills. With this in mind, the "Top Demand Competencies Development" program was initiated in FY2021 where we have taken a focused approach to build new and fortify existing competencies by tying them

directly to high volume business demands of the unit. It is centered on strengthening Deep Domain & Technology skills for meeting current skill requirements while also equipping associates for future-readiness. A highly inclusive program, it is open to all service delivery associates across levels and roles.

**Program Vision and Overview**

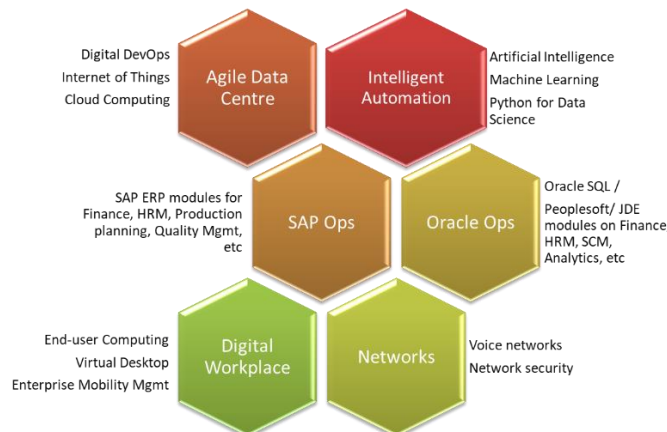
This program serves the strategic intent of moving the Talent Fulfilment needle more towards "Build" (building self-reliance in key skills) than "Buy" (hiring external talent) which has a direct impact on service delivery continuity and margins improvement for business. For associates across various levels, it provides multiple avenues for skill development in line with their aspirations, enables them in keeping their skills relevant and updated, thereby improving their deployability in suitable projects. A strong internal talent pool also equips us with an Improved Readiness to Win & Service New business deals.

Goals for the year are decided based on prevailing resource requirements raised by projects and existing competency proficiency levels of associates, to bridge the gaps. The Top Demand Competencies Development initiative is conceptualized and driven by Talent Development team in strong partnership with Centers of Excellence (COEs), Delivery teams and other HR teams. The program entails identifying the top-most demand skillsets across the Unit, create an inventory of these ‘Hot skills’ and drive sufficient learning and upskilling to ensure we have sufficiently large pool deep-skilled in these areas. Such continuous learning, supported by a holistic learning infrastructure and ecosystem, also enables faster time to productivity. Best in class talent retention with a fungible talent cloud having deep hands-on expertise helps ensure stability in delivery teams.

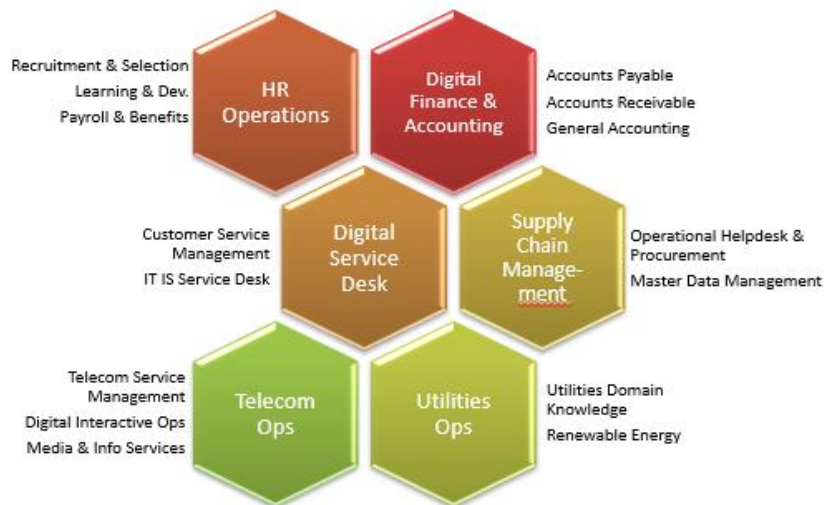
**Framework**

In this focused skilling approach, major demand areas for the year are identified within Technology, Domain and Process space, basis the workforce projections, which cover all lines of business. This allows for multiple opportunities for a BPS associate to acquire deep specialisation in industry domains such as Digital Customer Experience Management, Finance & Accounting, Supply Chain Management, Human Resource Operations, Telecom Ops, Utilities Ops, etc. or build Technology skills in emerging market-relevant digital areas like Digital Service Desk, Robotic Process Automation, Chatbots & Conversational Agents, Digital DevOps, Machine Learning, Cloud Computing, IoT, Python, BigData systems, Network Security, Digital Workplaces, and many more.

Below visual reflects some of these Domain and Tech Demand Areas and the skills under them:



**Figure 1 - Tech Demand Areas and Skills**



**Figure 2 – Domain Demand Areas and Skills**

Well-established Centres of Excellence (COEs) in each of these practice areas comprise of Subject Matter Experts who keep a pulse on industry trends and work towards enhancing these practices within the organisation ecosystem to meet our client preferences. Talent Development works closely with COE teams to identify the trending competencies which are expected to form the bulk of business demand. This is corroborated with Workforce Plan as well as Business Leadership to make it well-rounded and contextualized. The competency repository is reviewed and refreshed periodically to keep it updated and relevant.

### Learning Ecosystem

A key facet of this skilling initiative is to ensure availability of learning content across multiple competency levels which associates can leverage. Learning content readiness is assessed to identify need for new content addition or existing content modification, and the same is made available in the Learning Management System (LMS) iEvo™. Specific internal and external training sessions are arranged wherever required, and associates are encouraged to upskill or cross skill themselves at relevant competency levels. Learning content is available across varied modes such as self-paced modules, video-based trainings, virtual instructor-led sessions, assessments, external certifications, and even hands-on virtual labs for certain technologies – in line with our experiential, multimodal philosophy (Anytime, Anywhere, Any device Learning). Apart from internal courses and certifications, there is also integration of vendor partners’ technology learning platforms with LMS to enable a single-click access to entire learning eco-system. With a wide learning coverage due to enhanced accessibility, no one gets left behind. L&D SPOCs from business delivery teams also play a significant role in driving this initiative across the length and breadth of different business verticals and horizontals, as per relevance to their lines of business. Talent development joins hands with them to articulate the priorities, define vertical-specific objectives, identify associates, create customized action plans and keep the ball rolling. Recognizing the vital focus of this program, there is direct sponsorship from business leaders to encourage upskilling/cross-skilling within their units. It is also integrated in their respective annual plans and performance goal-sheets, which is a testament to its strategic impact.

Talent Development members are aligned to each COE and Business Vertical to provide dedicated attention and drive action plans. HR Business Partners help in amplifying awareness regarding available learning offerings and maximizing the reach of this initiative by encouraging associates to upskill. A user-friendly, interactive handbook for Top Demand Competencies is also designed by TD which provides visibility to associates and all stakeholders on the plethora of learning offerings available under the program. Associates can enroll for aspired competency in the LMS, in line with their project needs. Upon successfully completing the tagged learnings and assessments in system, they acquire the respective competency level. Up-skilled and cross-skilled associates are leveraged for mapping to suitable projects as per business demands in these relevant top competencies.

**Governance**

The progress against pre-determined targets is tracked via comprehensive periodic reports and dashboards. All learning efforts at individual employee level are captured in central LMS, and TD data analysts generate regular reports which help to consolidate the progress status for different stakeholders. Detailed views including business vertical-wise, COE-wise, geography-wise, competency-wise, proficiency level-wise, employee demographics-wise, help to monitor the program effectiveness and identify leading and lagging areas for further action plans. Such system-based tracking allows for standardization and uniformity in reporting.

Demand Area	Owner	No. of competencies	FY Target				FY Achieved				% Completion				Total Unique Associates Skilled	Total Competencies Acquired
			E1	E2	E3	E4	E1	E2	E3	E4	E1	E2	E3	E4		
Artificial Intelligence	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX
Cloud Computing	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX
Machine Learning	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX
Internet of Things	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX

**Figure 3 – A sample COE-wise reporting view**

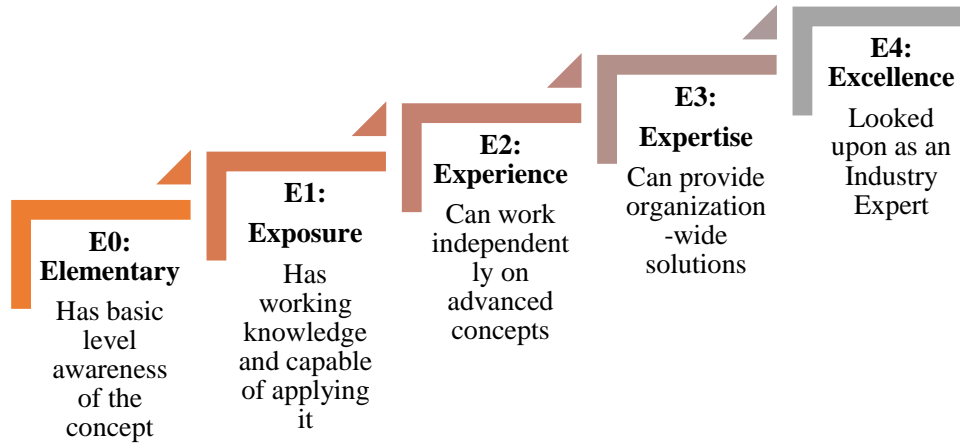
Since it is part of organizational vision of Accelerating Talent Transformation and therefore a strategic priority for Business and HR Leadership, the progress updates are also reported to them in regular management reviews.

**Key metrics tracked under this initiative are as below:**

1. **Learning Content readiness** in LMS for identified competencies – available vs in progress vs to be curated. New competencies/courses/certification curricula are created wherever requirement is found.
2. **Workforce projection (WFP) skills coverage** – program scope should cover min. 70% of the WFP skills via identified demand areas and competencies. (WFP captures the count of resources/talent required in specific skillsets raised by business projects, at any given time)
3. **Unique individuals** successfully acquiring new competencies (since one associate can acquire multiple competencies during the year) vs outlined targets. Competencies can be acquired post successfully clearing the mapped assessments along with the trainings.
4. **Competencies acquired** at different proficiency levels (ref. to visual below) vs outlined targets. Emphasis is given on E2 & above competency levels to create internal talent expertise with deep contextual knowledge.

5. Industry-relevant **external certifications acquired** by associates
6. **Associates deployed** internally post competency acquirement, and internal requirements fulfilled by leveraging internally skilled talent pool

Fig.: Below visual indicates how competencies are defined and measured at incremental levels of proficiency:



**Figure 4 – Defining and measuring competencies at incremental levels of proficiency**

### Successful Achievements

Over 2 financial years (FY21 and FY22), ~25% of our associates are deep-skilled in Technology. 33% of the Deep-skilled graduates have been deployed into relevant projects based on their acquired skills plus other applicable criteria. To enable the skilling behind this, around 300+ competencies have been identified and enabled so far. New strategic alliances with 20+ vendor partners have been formed to capitalize on their learning platform opportunities.

### Future Outlook

The aim is to keep amplifying this initiative with each financial year by taking it to the next level in terms of skills coverage and employee coverage. Rapidly increasing advancement and evolution of technology & automation is continuously transforming customer needs and expectations across all industries alike. Digital technologies – especially cloud, IoT, AI and Machine Learning – have opened tremendous opportunities to innovate and transform some or all the components of the enterprise’s operations stack – the business processes, the supporting systems and underlying infrastructure. It, therefore, also presents tremendous scope for BPS associates to re-skill and up-skill in emerging domain, technical and digital offerings. Being a Growth & Transformation partner of choice for its customers, the organisation will keep focusing on building its talent capabilities to exceed these expectations. Organic Talent Development around new age technologies will continue to be key priority to ensure our talent pool is equipped for future readiness.

1. **Continuous validation of skills relevance:** New market-relevant skills will keep getting incorporated based on industry trends and business demands, as the nature of work is fluid. For instance, this year we have endorsed Artificial Intelligence skillset to be taken up at large-scale. This will be monitored closely by all stakeholders – TD, COEs and Business teams – to encompass holistic skills coverage.
2. **Strengthen Learning Infra and Ecosystem:** Enhancing the blended learning modes to improve the learner’s experience and engagement, specially focusing on gamification, hands-on learning, and

expanded virtual tech labs setup. The learning content will also continue to undergo reviews and modifications to stay relevant.

3. **Project Deployment and career progression:** With the program launch, the focus so far has been more on enabling skilling and having more and more associates under the talent transformation umbrella. The gears have shifted to simultaneously focus on their deployment in relevant roles and this is only going to be accelerated for large-scale movements. Associates will be able to explore vertical and lateral career progression opportunities with the widening breadth of the program.
4. **Leverage deep-skilled associate networks:** Amplify success stories and create expert communities, harnessing the skilled associates to become training facilitators, mentors, TD evangelists for other associates.

## Conclusion

Top Demand Competencies Development initiative was conceptualized to address the major business demands in current as well as near-future times, and these are continually evolving. With a modular structure and robust governance in place, the initiative is agile and can be tweaked to suit even rapidly changing business needs. With a change in the units and sub-unit structures, the Top Demand Competencies Development program was altered to reflect the tech and domain demand areas relevant for the newly re-structured org, which goes to show its sustainability. The top competencies under these areas were also identified accordingly, followed by the rest of the due process.

Few key tenets which form best practices for any business-demand oriented skilling program are as below:

1. **Direct alignment to business objectives:** As its origin lies in skill requirements raised by delivery teams, it is easy to demonstrate the initiative's strategic business alignment and identify high-demand areas which should cover majority of the workforce projection. This also helps in leadership buy-in for the program.
2. **Modular structure:** Each tech and domain practice area being like an independent module, it is possible to easily accommodate new demand areas, COEs and skillsets.
3. **Strong Partnerships:** Close collaboration of TD with COEs and Delivery teams enables the targeted approach towards skilling, it becomes possible to cater to additional lines of business by extending the governance model to them.
4. **Clearly defined processes:** Key actions like learning content enablement in LMS, internal/external trainings arrangement, external certification reimbursement, and progress measurement & reporting are clearly defined, process-driven which makes it possible to replicate at scale.
5. **Leveraging scalable blended learning and Anytime, Anywhere Learning approach:** Learning material and LMS itself is designed to make it accessible and inclusive for all associates at scale and on-demand. Scalable learning modes like self-paced courses, video trainings, external Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), virtual instructor-led sessions, certifications, online assessments are leveraged. In-house qualified trainers are identified, mentored and deployed for conducting various trainings depending on their specialisations.
6. **Reimbursing Industry relevant External Certifications:** As part of this initiative, associates are also encouraged to acquire industry-relevant external certifications. On successful completion of the same, the organisation reimburses the certification fee for the associates which has been a motivating factor for their self-development at large.

7. **System-driven tracking & reporting:** All learning efforts are captured in central LMS, measuring and tracking is basis system-generated learning reports which is capable of providing employee-level data for numerous competencies at once.

**References:**

1. Bock, M., & Auer, M. (2020). Competence management: Developing demand-oriented qualification concepts for employees. *Journal of Business and Economics*, 11(2), 187-207.
2. Deery, S., & Jago, L. (2015). Skill development and training in SMEs: A literature review. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 53(4), 912-931.
3. Farrington, T., & Langan-Fox, J. (2010). Human resource development and the contemporary workforce: Notes on theory and practice. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 34(2), 95-110.
4. Hsu, M. H., & Wang, S. Y. (2018). Exploring the effectiveness of business-oriented training programs in Taiwan. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 32(1), 49-74.
5. Kibler, E., & Kautonen, T. (2011). Building entrepreneurial skills: The role of educational and learning strategies. *Education+ Training*, 53(5), 386-405.
6. Kim, J., & Kang, M. (2018). Skills development for sustainable growth: A case study of the Korean manufacturing industry. *Sustainability*, 10(3), 712.
7. Kiyonari, T., & Kameda, T. (2017). Enhancing employee skills for innovation in small and medium enterprises. *International Journal of Innovation Management*, 21(6), 1-22.
8. Ratten, V. (2011). Entrepreneurial skills and the growth of high-technology firms. *Journal of Technology Management & Innovation*, 6(1), 87-98.
9. Santos, L., & Curral, L. (2019). Skills development in SMEs: A systematic review of the literature. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 30(15), 2238-2270.
10. Van der Heijden, B. I., & Boon, J. (2017). Building sustainable careers: The role of career competencies in the contemporary career. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 100, 1-10.