



# Creating a Stronger Skills Connection

How Enterprise, Employees, and Higher Education Can Act Today to Close the Skills Gap

Almost 40 percent of American employers say they cannot find people with the skills they need even for entry-level jobs, and they admit that only 50 percent of new recruits have the skills needed for their new roles.<sup>1</sup> Another 60 percent of employers complain of lack of preparation<sup>2</sup> and only 42.5<sup>3</sup> percent feel that new hires show the required professionalism and work ethic. Yet, 89.4 percent of new graduates feel they are work-ready.

When it comes to work readiness, there is a growing disconnect between the views of employers, educators, and post-secondary graduates entering the workforce.

There is no longer just a skills gap. It is an ever-widening chasm.

The half-life of skills is rapidly falling, and nearly half of business leaders surveyed today cite the upheaval in learning and careers as an urgent problem.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, as intelligent systems and machines reshape the world of work, tomorrow's employees will need to learn entirely new skills for entirely new jobs. So while the skills crisis is significant today, an even greater crisis looms. Employers need to understand that if they are to solve the current and future skills gap, the time for action is now.

Survey	No.	Skill 1	Skill 2	Skill 3	Skill 4	Skill 5
Pay Scale (2016)	63,924	Critical Thinking	Attention to Detail	Communication	Leadership	Teamwork
NACE (2016)	260	Teamwork	Leadership/ Problem-Solving	Communication	Organization	Information Processing
EvolveScientific (2016)	142	Critical Thinking	Independence	Adaptability	—	—
LinkedIn (2016)	291	Communication	Organisation	Teamwork	Punctuality	Critical Thinking

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## A Three-Sided View Across the Skills “Chasm”

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Here’s the harsh truth. When it comes to work-ready skills, no one is very happy. While employers are generally confident in education, only 34 percent of executives and 25 percent of managers believe new graduates have the skills to be promoted.<sup>7</sup> In addition, 60 percent of U.S. employers have job openings that stay vacant for 12 weeks or longer, and these extended vacancies cost each employer, on average, \$800,000 a year.<sup>8</sup> Universities in turn are facing declining enrollments, and while most recognize the need for innovation, many institutions are slow to change and unsure of how best to adapt and align with workplace needs. For their part, graduates (many unable to find work) are questioning the value of their degrees. When asked to reflect upon their education decisions, 12 percent of adults indicated that they would change their degree, 36 percent would change their field of study, and another 28 percent would change their educational institution if able to rewind time.<sup>9</sup>



“We believe very strongly that the skills gap is a defining social and economic justice issue of our time.”

*Charlie Schilling, Vice President of Enterprise at General Assembly<sup>6</sup>*



## The Employer Skills Challenge

- How do I know what skills people entering my organization have?
- How do I find people with the right skills for the work I need done today?
- How do I know what skill gaps exist within my organization?
- How do I know that our investments in training are improving the skills of our people?
- How do I prepare people with the skills required for their next role?
- How do I plan for the skills needed for the jobs of tomorrow?



## The Employee/Graduate Skills Challenge

- How do I know what skills I have?
- How do I show my employer that training is improving my skills?
- How do I know what skills are needed to effectively do my job today?
- How do I know what skills I am lacking to do my job today and to take on future roles?
- How do I develop the skills I'll need for future roles?





## The Higher Education Skills Challenge

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- How do we know what skills graduates need today to be desirable to employers?
- How do we plan for the skills graduates will need for future work?
- How do we prepare graduates with the skills needed for career success?
- How do we help graduates showcase their skills to current and future employers?
- How do we know/assess the skills of students entering our institution?
- How do we know our curriculum is improving student skills?
- How do we expand our existing programs?
- How do we develop new revenue channels by offering workplace professional development and continuing education?

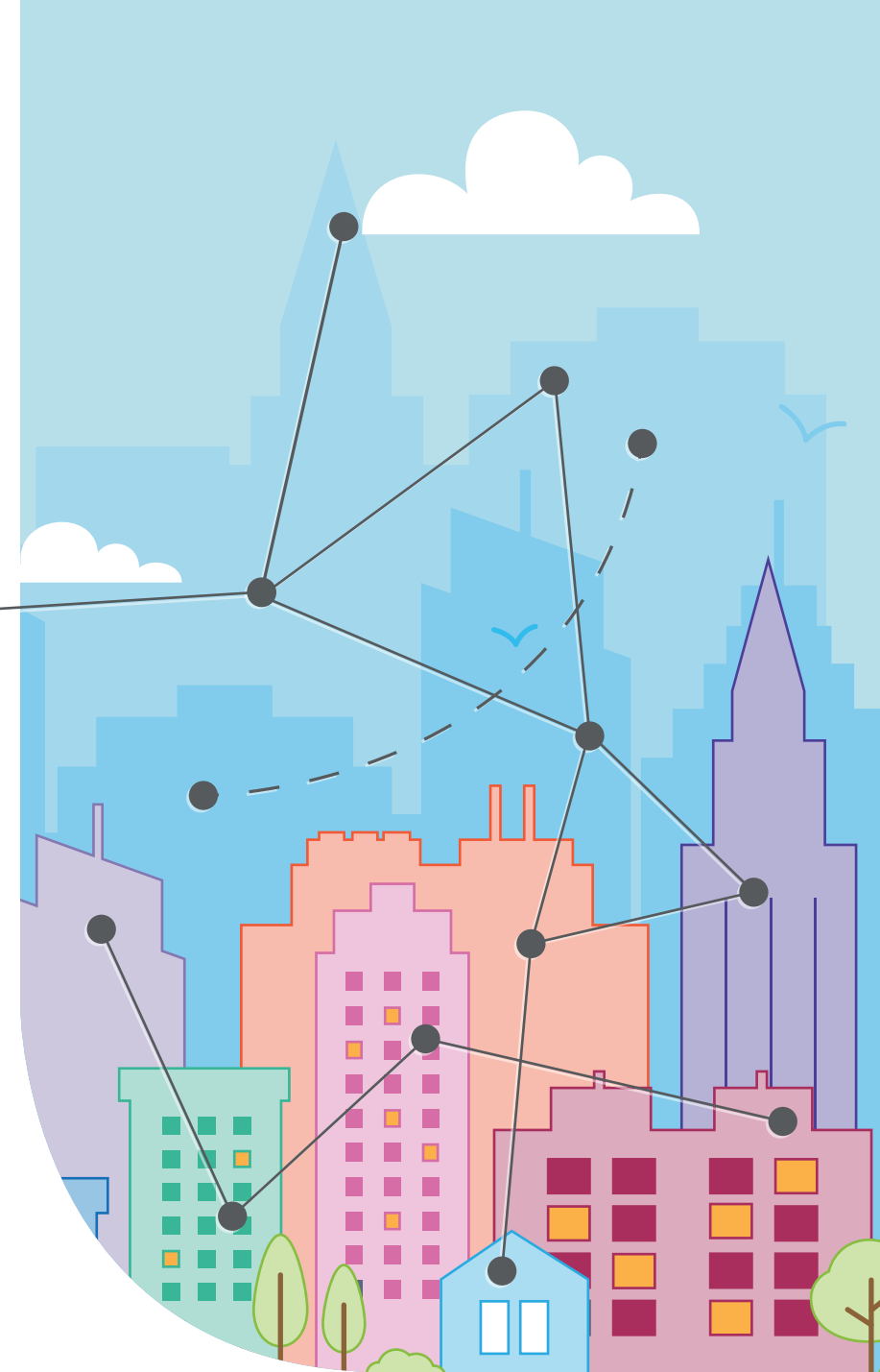


## Creating Strong Skills Connections

**\$2.5**  
TRILLION

(potential economic impact of the skills gap over the next 10 years)<sup>10</sup>

We know that companies that focus on adaptability and learning are three times more profitable and enjoy four times better employee retention.<sup>11</sup> An investment in skills drives prosperity and translates to healthier businesses. So what actions can enterprise leaders take today to solve this problem before the skills gap becomes simply too wide to close?







## What if...

### EMPLOYERS

- Could see a worker's skills relevant to the jobs in their organization?
- Could see the skills of prospective workers and how those skills map to their needs?

### EMPLOYEES/GRADUATES

- Could see whether the skills they have match the jobs they want?
- Could find learning opportunities to close their skill gaps?

### HIGHER EDUCATION

- Captured evidence of students' relevant job skill development over time
- Could provide programs to help employers close worker skill gaps?
- Could make curriculum changes based on skill gaps identified by industry?

There is good news here. Let us examine a five-step action plan that businesses can follow today to begin closing the skills gap.



# 01

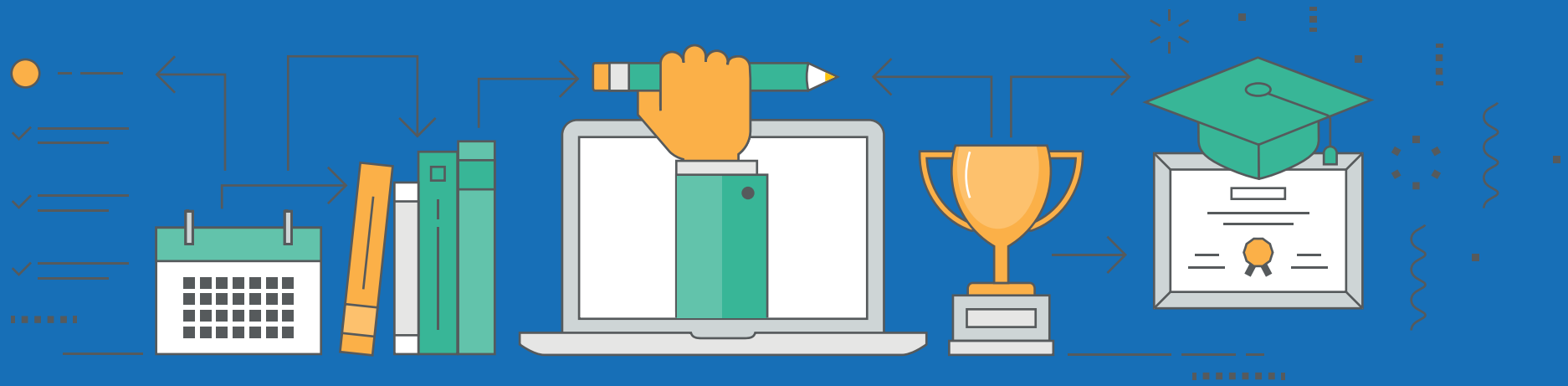
## Start by Gathering Skills Evidence

### CALIBRATE THE SKILLS IN-HOUSE TODAY

Employers need to develop a trusted way to calibrate and demonstrate the skills their employees have today. They also need a way to align that skills evidence with the core competencies required by the business today and in the future.

So, what are the pieces of data, examples, or abilities that, in aggregate, tell the story of an individual employee's skill level? It could be traditional assessment scores or grades. It could be a self-assessment, an assessment by a peer or manager, or an observational assessment out in the field or workplace. It might be examples of work showcased in a portfolio. Modern-thinking organizations are also turning to video assessments, where employees demonstrate their abilities and knowledge.





### HAVE PEERS AND MANAGERS VALIDATE

For employers, the “secret sauce” in successfully gathering evidence of employee skills is determining the right mix of information required to give someone (likely a manager) the confidence to validate the skill.

The trouble is that there’s not one method for validating skills, and there continues to be a level of subjectivity in the process. For some managers, skills evidence is validated by previous work experience. For others, it’s a gut feeling or a familiarity with a particular career path or educational background. We all have our own view of skills in mind and a frame of reference, or previous experience (including one’s own skills), that help us weigh the evidence when it comes to validation.

### HERE ARE THREE THINGS COMPANIES CAN DO TODAY TO STANDARDIZE EVIDENCE OF EMPLOYEE SKILLS:

1. **Build a consistent process for self-evaluation:** Use surveys, checklists, rubrics, and relative rankings to gather employee self-evidence, then verify that information against a skills list for specific roles.
2. **Validate with peer and manager evaluation:** Use similar tools (surveys, checklists, relative rankings) and have peers and managers validate information captured from employees.
3. **Build skills portfolios:** As employees do something new, have them capture artifacts of their work and build a skills portfolio. Portfolios have long been used in creative professions (writers, artists, graphic designers) but are in the early days of adoption for other roles.



## 02

### Build a Skills Map

#### **A VISUAL MAP OF YOUR ORGANIZATION'S SKILLS AND GAPS**

Skills mapping is the process in which employers take a collection of evidenced job skills and outline the skills related to any particular employee's job. They then identify that individual's level of skills proficiency as it relates to their job and identify personal skills that employee has that may not be part of the skills map. When a skills map is created for every employee and that information is aggregated into a total inventory of skills and proficiencies, a business can then look across the organization to get a total picture of skills at employee, team, and business unit levels and visualize where skill gaps exist. This can help leaders make more strategic investments by pinpointing where to close critical skill gaps.

## NO ONE APPROACH (YET)

As important as skills mapping is to an organization's future, it is probably where the industry has lagged the most. There's not really one standard approach or tool employers use today to create an organizational map of skills. Many employers continue to rely on static spreadsheets, which do a passable job of inventorying today's skills, but information falls quickly out of date, is difficult to keep current, and doesn't allow for forecasting or envisioning job skills required in the future.

Ultimately, your skills maps should be dynamic and ever-evolving as skills wane and emerge, and the maps should help the business make decisions today and into the future.

## HERE ARE FIVE THINGS YOU CAN DO TODAY

### TO BUILD A SKILLS MAP FOR YOUR BUSINESS:

1. **Evaluate:** Document what you are already doing today that fits into the skills mapping process. You likely have job roles with associated skills. You also may be gathering skills evidence, evaluating skills, and recommending learning content to address skill gaps.
2. **Build a baseline:** Take inventory of the jobs that exist today and the skills associated with those roles (data likely exists in your human resources information system (HRIS). Pull this together and begin looking at it as a map.
3. **Leverage the skills evidence:** Use evidence gathered at the employee level as an input to your skills map. Collect that data and map it across the employees, the teams, and the organization.
4. **Forecast:** Consider working with external skills-forecasting partners to do projection modelling on which jobs will be retired and which will emerge along with their associated skills.
5. **Work with academic partners:** Define a common understanding and language around competencies. Ideally, competencies/skills that exist in higher education should be expressed through meaningful information that can be used and developed into skill requirements in the workplace.





# 03

## Recommend Learning

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### **PERSONALIZED LEARNING TO CLOSE CRITICAL SKILL GAPS**

Once you have gathered skills evidence and created a skills map for your organization, the next step is to recommend content, courses and personalized learning experiences to help close identified skills gaps and to prepare employees for future required skills and roles.

Currently, most employers rely on learning technologies to curate, recommend and personalize learning for their employees. These technologies are most powerful when the organization is fully in tune with its existing inventory of skills and is aware of the gaps. Learning becomes more targeted, more focused, more meaningful to the employee and more aligned with business goals.





## **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) TAKES RECOMMENDED LEARNING TO THE NEXT LEVEL**

The emergence of machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI) provides huge opportunity for businesses to intelligently identify and recommend learning, and it represents a far more data-driven approach to learning than has existed in the past. Thanks to these technology advancements, organizations can track metadata related to the skills map and establish algorithms inside the organization that help to prioritize the skills gaps to fill. Machine learning and AI can also help to predict which jobs will disappear and which jobs will emerge and then proactively recommend content to help people (and the organization) prepare for the future of work.

### **HERE ARE THREE THINGS EMPLOYERS CAN DO TODAY TO RECOMMEND LEARNING AND TO CLOSE THE SKILLS GAP:**

1. **Leverage social learning and tools like Social Assessment™** to provide employees with opportunities to demonstrate and practice learning and to connect with mentors and coaches.
2. **Use adaptive learning techniques** that will assess and test employee learning and then provide appropriate learning content based on the findings.
3. **Set up automatically generated learning paths** for employees within the learning management system, based on gaps, goals, and what the system knows about the individual.



# 04

## Create an Impactful, Engaging Learning Experience

### ARE YOUR LEARNING EXPERIENCES DRIVING REAL CHANGE?

Delivering impactful, engaging learning opportunities helps close the skills gap. If we want learning to happen across the enterprise, and if we want our training efforts to truly move the needle, we need to find better ways to make learning effective for employees.

When it comes to learning experiences, there is no shortage of variety. You can have an employee read a document or manual and test them on their knowledge. You can have a person go through an online learning module, participate in a live virtual classroom, or put on a VR headset and perform a task in a virtual reality simulation. At the end of the day, what truly differentiates one learning experience from another is whether or not the learners actually acquire or improve their skills and whether the organization can empirically measure the impact of that learning.







The most modern learning organizations are now looking at learning as a combination of tactics: presenting content in a way that is social, provides for practice and demonstration of skills, allows ample room for feedback, and celebrates incremental improvement.

**WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO TODAY TO CREATE A MORE EFFECTIVE AND ENGAGING LEARNING EXPERIENCE:**

1. **Leverage social learning and tools like Social Assessment™** to provide employees with opportunities to demonstrate and practice new learning and improved skills and to connect with mentors and coaches.
2. **Encourage video-based learning** as a highly accessible way for employees to demonstrate and seek assessment of critically important soft skills (empathy, listening, etc.).
3. **Utilize ePortfolios** where employees can showcase artifacts of learning.
4. **Use badging and rewards** to encourage and celebrate learning accomplishments and to add moments of delight into the learning experience.



# 05

## Reporting and Data Exchange

### MEASURING REAL SKILLS PROGRESS

Training that results in no meaningful impact for the learner or the organization is ineffective learning. An organization can do all the basic work to understand its skills needs and its gaps, but the learning delivered needs to create measurable change. It's the difference between knowing and doing, between knowledge and applied knowledge. To that end, modern learning enterprises are now anchoring their skills evidence-gathering, skills mapping, and recommended learning efforts with key performance metrics and layered analytics to measure the impact of learning and to zero in on the channels, content, and tactics that show the most impact and improved performance and that truly affect behavioral change across the organization.





### **TALKING THE SAME LANGUAGE WITH ACADEMIC PARTNERS**

Thirty-three percent of employers today say that general business skills is one of the major areas for retraining once graduates enter the workforce.<sup>12</sup> As colleges and universities evolve to meet the needs of employers today and into the future, many are actively seeking to build stronger bridges with the corporate world to find their graduates jobs, ensure curriculum and skills taught are aligned with workplace priorities, and drive new corporate-focused revenue streams.

But if higher education institutions truly want to help employers solve the skills gap challenge, they need to be able to talk the same language as business. Higher education talks about competencies. Employers talk about skills. At the root, the sentiment may be the same, but the level of granularity and the terminology is different. Higher education and employers need to converge around consistent language and a method of data exchange that allow for the capture of skills evidence and transferable skills mapping.

### **WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO TODAY TO MEASURE PROGRESS AND BUILD STRONGER ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS:**

1. **Offer dashboard insight** to managers to monitor the learning performance and engagement of staff and teams.
2. **Leverage analytics** to capture and analyze learning metrics and to measure learning and performance of learning strategies.
3. **Define a common language** and key metrics with academic and other professional learning partners.
4. **Open gateways for data exchange** with academic and other professional learning partners.



# Real-World Companies Solving Real Skills Challenges

## Accenture

Overcoming unprecedented business challenges requires a new approach to leadership development. From helping new managers develop the soft skills they need to succeed to improving the skills and performance of seasoned leaders, organizations need to be able to adapt quickly to the changing world of work by reinvigorating their leadership pipelines.

Winning in the New (WIN) is Accenture Intelligent Operations' flagship leadership development program. The program incorporates world-class learning, reflection, practice, real-life application, networking, and coaching to help participants achieve their career aspirations. The experiential learning approach employed by WIN effectively builds practical new leadership capabilities that learners can apply right away while also deepening their leadership expertise over time. WIN is closely aligned with Accenture's leadership and business priorities and is aimed to develop high-potential managers into the leaders of the future. Brandon Hall Group recently recognized WIN with its [2018 Excellence in Technology Award](#).





## Advance HE

As part of its mission to advance professional practice in higher education, UK-based Advance HE champions teaching excellence and works with governments, ministries, universities, and individual academics in the UK and around the globe. Advance HE provides value to the higher education sector by focusing on the contribution of teaching to the wider student learning experience. In addition to providing an engaging online experience using reading groups and webinars, the organization connects communities of higher education professionals from across the globe, enabling them to learn from one another to advance outcomes for students, staff, and society.

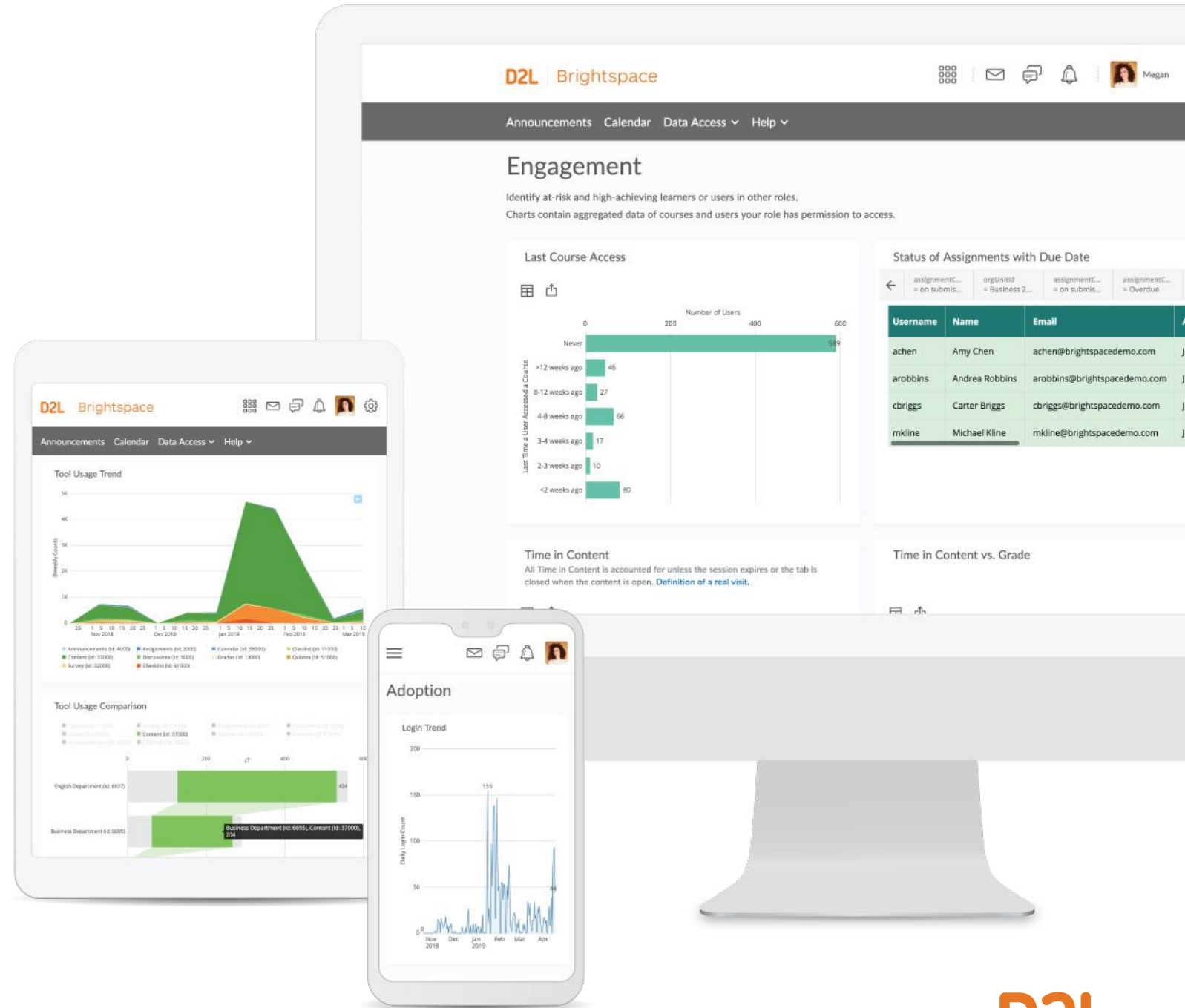


# Take the Next Step

Are you looking to close the skills gap in your organization?  
Learn how D2L can help.

Try the Brightspace platform free for 30 days, or contact our sales team to talk.

1-877-352-7329





## References

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<sup>2</sup> ibid

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.reimagine-education.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/RE\\_White-Paper\\_Global-Skills-Gap-Employability.pdf](https://www.reimagine-education.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/RE_White-Paper_Global-Skills-Gap-Employability.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/2017%20AWF%20Event%20Special%20Edition%20Skills%20Gap%20Report\\_0.pdf](https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/2017%20AWF%20Event%20Special%20Edition%20Skills%20Gap%20Report_0.pdf)

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## About D2L

D2L believes learning is the foundation upon which all progress and achievement rests. Working closely with organizations globally, D2L has transformed the way millions of people learn online and in the classroom. Learn more about D2L for schools, higher education and businesses at [D2L.com](https://www.d2l.com).

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