Title: Upskilling and Reskilling Strategies for Future-Readiness in the ITES Workforce

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Abstract

The Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) sector is undergoing rapid transformation driven by technological advancements such as artificial intelligence, automation, cloud computing, and data analytics. These shifts have rendered traditional job roles increasingly obsolete while creating demand for new skill sets. This conceptual paper explores the critical need for upskilling and reskilling strategies to ensure future-readiness among ITES employees. It discusses the theoretical underpinnings of workforce adaptability, reviews emerging skill requirements, and identifies best practices adopted by leading organizations. The study emphasizes a strategic and proactive approach involving continuous learning, personalized training interventions, and collaboration between industry and academia. The paper concludes by proposing a holistic framework that organizations can adopt to build a resilient, future-proof workforce capable of navigating ongoing digital disruption.

Keywords: Upskilling, Reskilling, Future-readiness, ITES Sector, Workforce Development, Digital Transformation, Skill Gap, Continuous Learning, Human Capital, Training Strategies

1. Introduction

The term ITES, or Information Technology Enabled Services, refers to a wide range of services that leverage information technology to deliver business solutions more efficiently and effectively. These services include areas like customer support, back-office operations, finance and accounting, human resources, data processing, and knowledge process outsourcing — all supported by advanced IT infrastructure. Unlike core software development or hardware manufacturing, ITES focuses on using technology to streamline business processes, improve decision-making, and enhance service delivery across industries.

In today's fast-evolving digital landscape, the need for continuous learning has never been more urgent. As

businesses undergo rapid digital transformation, the skills required for traditional ITES roles are shifting dramatically. This is where upskilling — enhancing current skills to meet new demands — and reskilling — learning entirely new skills for different roles — become essential strategies for both employees and employers.

The pace of technological change is accelerating at an unprecedented rate. Emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Robotic Process Automation (RPA), Cloud Computing, and Data Science are reshaping how organizations operate. Routine and repetitive tasks are increasingly being automated, reducing the demand for low-skill labor while increasing the need for high-skill, tech-enabled roles. For example, AI-powered chatbots now handle basic customer queries, freeing up human agents to focus on complex problem-solving — but only if they have the right skills.

Globally, workforce dynamics are also shifting. Companies are moving toward agile, flexible, and digitally skilled teams. The rise of remote work, gig employment, and global talent platforms means that competition is no longer limited by geography. Employees must continuously upgrade their capabilities to remain relevant not just locally, but on a global scale.

Furthermore, industry reports consistently highlight the widening skills gap in the ITES sector. Many workers lack the competencies needed to thrive in a digital-first economy. Without strategic interventions in training and development, organizations risk falling behind in productivity, innovation, and competitiveness.

This growing urgency makes future-readiness a top priority. It's no longer enough to rely on past qualifications or experience. Instead, individuals and companies must proactively anticipate changes and equip themselves with the tools, knowledge, and mindset to adapt. That's why developing robust upskilling and reskilling strategies is not just beneficial — it's vital for survival and growth in the new digital era.

2. Drivers of Change in the ITES Industry

The Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) industry is undergoing a profound transformation driven by rapid technological advancements, shifting client demands, and evolving work environments. These changes are not only reshaping the nature of jobs but also redefining the skills required to succeed in this sector.

One of the most significant drivers of change is automation and artificial intelligence (AI). Routine and repetitive tasks — which once formed the backbone of many ITES roles — are increasingly being automated using technologies like Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and machine learning. For instance, customer service inquiries, data entry, invoice processing, and even basic financial reporting can now be handled by intelligent systems with minimal human intervention. This shift is reducing the demand for low-skill labor while increasing the need for employees who can manage, monitor, and improve these automated systems. As a result, workers must now possess technical knowledge in areas such as AI, analytics, and digital tools to remain relevant in their roles.

At the same time, client expectations are evolving rapidly . Businesses today demand higher quality, faster turnaround times, and greater customization in the services they receive. Clients no longer just want cost-effective outsourcing — they expect value-added services that contribute directly to their business goals. This means ITES providers must move beyond transactional support and offer insights, strategic analysis, and tailored solutions. To meet these expectations, employees must develop not only technical skills but also soft skills like communication, problem-solving, and domain-specific knowledge.

Another key driver is the rise of digital platforms and tools . From cloud-based collaboration software to AIpowered analytics dashboards, modern ITES operations rely heavily on digital infrastructure. Employees must now be proficient in using these tools to access real-time data, collaborate across teams, and deliver services efficiently. The ability to adapt to new platforms quickly has become a critical competency in the ITES workforce.

Additionally, the shift toward hybrid work environments and digital collaboration has transformed how ITES professionals operate. With remote and flexible work models becoming the norm, employees must be comfortable working in virtual teams, managing workflows through digital channels, and maintaining productivity without direct supervision. Tools like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Slack, and project management platforms have become essential parts of daily work life, further emphasizing the importance of digital literacy and selfmanagement.

Lastly, there is a growing demand for domain expertise in verticalized services . As ITES companies expand into specialized sectors such as healthcare, fintech, logistics, and e-commerce, they require professionals who understand both the technology and the specific industry they serve. For example, someone supporting a healthcare client needs to know not just about data processing but also about medical billing standards, patient privacy regulations, and health informatics. Similarly, those working in fintech must be familiar with banking compliance, risk management, and financial technologies like blockchain. This trend is pushing ITES workers to go beyond general IT knowledge and develop deep, niche expertise in high-growth industries.

In summary, the ITES industry is being reshaped by powerful forces: automation is changing the nature of work, clients are demanding more sophisticated services, digital tools are transforming how work is done, hybrid work is redefining workplace culture, and domain specialization is raising the bar for employee skills. These drivers make it clear that traditional skill sets are no longer sufficient — the future belongs to those who can adapt, learn continuously, and stay aligned with the fast-moving digital economy.

3.Skill Gaps and Challenges

As the ITES (Information Technology Enabled Services) industry undergoes rapid transformation, a significant mismatch is emerging between the skills that employees currently possess and those that are increasingly in demand. This skill gap poses a major challenge to both individuals and organizations trying to stay competitive in a digital-first economy.

One of the most visible gaps lies in the contrast between existing skill sets and emerging competencies . Many professionals in the ITES sector were originally trained in areas such as customer service, basic data entry, or call center operations — roles that emphasized communication skills, language proficiency, and process adherence. However, with automation taking over repetitive tasks, there's now a growing need for technical abilities like cloud computing, data analytics, AI literacy, and digital workflow management . While strong communication remains important, it is no longer sufficient on its own. Employees must now be able to interpret data, understand cloud infrastructure, and work alongside automated systems — skills that many lack due to outdated training or limited exposure.

Another critical issue is the low adaptability among mid-career professionals . Workers who have spent years mastering traditional roles often find it difficult to transition into new, tech-driven positions. This resistance can stem from a lack of confidence, fear of learning complex technologies, or simply not having the time to upskill while managing full-time jobs. Unlike younger workers who may have grown up with digital tools, mid-career employees may require more structured support, mentorship, and hands-on learning opportunities to make this shift resources that are not always available. Moreover, high attrition rates in the ITES sector further complicate efforts to build long-term capabilities. The nature of the work — often involving high stress, shiftbased schedules, and limited career progression — leads to frequent job changes or exits from the industry altogether. This turnover disrupts continuity and makes it harder for companies to invest in training programs, knowing that skilled employees might leave soon after gaining expertise. As a result, firms hesitate to allocate significant resources toward employee development, creating a vicious cycle where skill-building initiatives remain underfunded and under-prioritized.

For small and mid-sized ITES firms, the challenges are even greater. These organizations often operate on tighter budgets and lack the financial capacity to invest in large-scale training or advanced technology platforms. Unlike large corporations that can afford partnerships with global learning providers or develop in-house academies, smaller firms struggle to provide even basic upskilling opportunities. This puts them at a disadvantage when competing for talent or bidding for contracts that require specialized digital skills.

Finally, there is a limited alignment between academic curriculum and industry needs . Educational institutions continue to produce graduates with foundational IT knowledge, but often fail to keep pace with the evolving demands of the ITES sector. Courses may focus heavily on theory without offering practical exposure to real-world tools and applications. As a result, fresh entrants to the workforce often require extensive on-the-job training before they become productive. Bridging this gap requires stronger collaboration between academia and industry stakeholders to co-develop curricula, offer internships, and integrate certifications relevant to current market trends.

In summary, the ITES industry faces a complex web of skill-related challenges — from outdated competencies and low adaptability to high attrition, budget constraints, and misaligned education systems. Addressing these issues will require coordinated efforts across employers, policymakers, educators, and employees themselves to ensure the workforce remains future-ready and capable of thriving in a rapidly changing environment.

4. UPSKILLING AND RESKILLING:KEY STRATEGIES

As the ITES (Information Technology Enabled Services) industry continues to evolve, organizations are realizing that simply hiring new talent with the latest skills isn't enough — they must also invest in upskilling and reskilling their existing workforce. Upskilling means helping employees learn new skills relevant to their current roles, while reskilling involves training them for entirely different jobs within the company. Both are crucial for keeping pace with technological change and ensuring future-readiness. There are several effective strategies companies can adopt to make upskilling and reskilling work for them. Let's take a closer look at each of these in simple, real-world terms.

a. In-house Training Programs

One of the most direct ways to develop employee skills is by offering in-house training programs. These are learning initiatives designed and delivered internally by the company itself.

A good in-house program starts with customized learning paths — meaning each employee gets a training plan tailored to their role, experience level, and career goals. For example, a customer support executive might follow a path that includes digital tools like CRM software, while a finance analyst might focus on data visualization or automation platforms.

Another modern approach is microlearning and modular content, where training is broken down into small, bite-sized lessons that employees can complete quickly without disrupting their daily work. This works especially well for busy professionals who may not have hours to spare but can dedicate 10–15 minutes a day to learning.

Many companies are also turning to gamification and simulation-based learning to keep employees engaged. Think of it like turning training into a game — earning points, unlocking levels, or competing with colleagues. Simulation-based learning allows employees to practice real-life scenarios in a safe environment, such as handling customer complaints or managing a cybersecurity threat, which helps build confidence and competence.

b. Partnerships with EdTech and Certification Platforms

While internal training is important, companies often partner with EdTech platforms to provide high-quality, scalable learning opportunities. Popular platforms like Coursera, Udemy, Skillsoft, and others offer thousands of courses in areas like cloud computing, cybersecurity, data science, AI, and more.

These partnerships allow employees to access industryrecognized certifications, which are valuable credentials that validate a person's skills. For example, a certification in AWS Cloud Practitioner or Google Data Analytics can significantly boost an employee's career prospects and the company's ability to deliver tech-driven services.

By providing access to these platforms, companies can ensure their employees stay updated with the latest trends and technologies without having to build everything from scratch internally.

c. Mentorship and Peer-Learning Models

Learning doesn't always have to come from formal courses. Sometimes, the best way to pick up new skills is through mentorship and peer learning.

Reverse mentoring, for instance, is a powerful concept where younger or newer employees mentor senior staff in areas like digital tools, social media, or emerging technologies. It's a great way to bridge generational gaps and promote knowledge sharing across all levels of the organization.

Companies are also forming communities of practice informal groups where employees with similar interests or roles come together to share experiences, solve problems, and learn from one another. These communities foster collaboration and continuous improvement, making learning a shared responsibility rather than just a top-down process.

d. Career Path Mapping and Internal Mobility

To retain talent and motivate employees, companies need to show clear career progression paths . When people see where they can go next, they're more likely to invest time in learning new skills.

Role clarity and lateral movement help employees understand how they can grow within the organization, even if it means switching departments or functions. For example, a finance professional could move into a business analytics role after gaining some data skills.

The goal is to create T-shaped professionals — individuals who have deep expertise in one area (the vertical bar of the T) and broad knowledge across multiple domains (the horizontal bar). This makes them more adaptable and valuable in a fast-changing environment.

e. Use of HR Analytics

Finally, no upskilling or reskilling strategy is complete without the use of HR analytics .

These tools help identify skill gaps by analyzing performance data, job requirements, and employee profiles. For example, if a department is struggling with cloud-related tasks, analytics can pinpoint which employees lack those skills and what kind of training would be most beneficial.

They also enable personalized learning recommendations — much like how Netflix suggests movies based on your preferences, HR systems can recommend specific courses or certifications based on an employee's role, past learning, and career goals.

And perhaps most importantly, HR analytics help track the ROI of learning programs — showing whether investments in training actually lead to better performance, promotions, or business outcomes.

In short, upskilling and reskilling are not just about staying competitive — they're about building a resilient, adaptable, and motivated workforce ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow. By combining internal training, external partnerships, mentorship, career growth, and smart use of data, companies can empower their employees to thrive in the evolving world of ITES.

5.. Measuring the impact of upkilling

When companies invest time, money, and effort into training their employees, it's natural to ask: *Was it worth it?* After all, upskilling and reskilling programs are not just about giving people new knowledge — they're meant to

bring real, measurable benefits to both employees and the organization.

To know if these programs are working, organizations track certain key performance indicators (KPIs) and business outcomes. Think of this like checking your health — you don't just feel better or worse; you look at numbers like weight, blood pressure, or energy levels to see how effective a lifestyle change has been.

• KPIs: Learning Hours per Employee, Certification Rate, Skill Proficiency Scores

Let's break down some of the most common KPIs used to measure the success of learning initiatives:

- Learning hours per employee : This is simply how much time an employee spends on training in a given period. It helps organizations understand whether people are engaging with the learning content. If someone isn't spending any time on training, it might signal a lack of interest, motivation, or even access to the right resources.
- Certification rate : This tracks how many employees successfully complete certifications after going through training. Certifications matter because they are official proof that someone has learned something valuable and can apply it. A high certification rate usually means the training was relevant, accessible, and well-delivered.
- Skill proficiency scores : These are assessments that measure how well an employee knows or can perform a particular skill before and after training. For example, if someone starts with a basic understanding of cloud computing and ends up scoring high on a test or simulation, that shows real progress. Over time, tracking these scores across teams or departments can show which areas are improving and where more support may be needed.

These KPIs help HR leaders and managers understand the reach and effectiveness of their learning programs. But while these metrics tell us *what's happening*, they don't always explain *why it matters*. That's where looking at business outcomes comes in.

• Business Outcomes: Reduced Time-to-Deploy, Improved Customer Satisfaction, Lower Attrition

Ultimately, the goal of upskilling and reskilling is not just to train people — it's to improve how the business operates and performs. Here's how:

• Reduced time-to-deploy : When new hires or internal transfers receive proper training, they become productive faster. Instead of taking weeks or months to learn the ropes, they can start contributing sooner. This is especially important in

fast-paced industries like ITES, where speed and agility matter a lot.

- Improved customer satisfaction : Better-trained employees are more confident, make fewer mistakes, and can handle complex situations more effectively. Whether it's resolving a technical issue or guiding a client through a service upgrade, skilled employees directly impact customer experience. Satisfied customers mean repeat business, positive reviews, and stronger brand loyalty.
- Lower attrition : Employees who feel supported in their growth are more likely to stay with a company. Training gives them a sense of purpose, career progression, and confidence in their future. High attrition is costly — both in terms of hiring replacements and losing institutional knowledge. So, when reskilling leads to lower turnover, it's a win for both employees and employers.

These business outcomes tie the learning efforts directly to the bottom line. They help answer the big question: Are we seeing real improvements in how our business runs?

• ROI on Learning & Development Investments

Now, let's talk about the big picture — return on investment, or ROI, for Learning and Development (L&D).

Calculating ROI means comparing how much was spent on training versus the financial value gained from it. While it's not always easy to put a number on things like employee morale or improved teamwork, there are ways to estimate the value of L&D investments.

For example:

- Did training reduce the number of errors made by employees? That could save money in rework or customer complaints.
- Did certified staff get promoted faster? That reduces recruitment costs and improves retention.
- Did newly trained teams handle projects more efficiently? That could lead to faster delivery times and more satisfied clients.

Organizations often use surveys, productivity reports, and performance data to estimate these returns. The idea is to show that investing in people isn't just a cost — it's an investment that pays off over time.

In simple terms, measuring the impact of upskilling and reskilling is about asking: *Did we learn what we needed to learn? Are we doing our jobs better now? And is the company better off because of it?*

By using KPIs, tracking business outcomes, and calculating ROI, organizations can ensure that their training programs are not just ticking boxes but actually making a difference — for employees, customers, and the company as a whole. transition.

6.Challenges and future outlook

While upskilling and reskilling programs are essential for future-readiness, putting them into action is easier said than done. Many organizations face real-world challenges that can slow down or even stop these initiatives from being effective.

One of the biggest hurdles is resistance to change . People often get used to doing things a certain way, especially if they've been in the same role for years. When new technologies come in or when employees are asked to learn completely new skills, some may feel uncomfortable or even threatened. This resistance can come not just from frontline workers but also from managers who are hesitant to shift away from traditional workflows.

Another common issue is time management versus training schedules . Employees already have busy workloads — adding training on top of that without adjusting their responsibilities can lead to burnout or half-hearted participation. If training feels like an extra burden rather than something that supports their job, people will likely give it less attention or skip it altogether.

There's also a lack of trainer quality and updated curriculum, especially in smaller companies or regions with limited access to expert trainers. Even if a company wants to offer good training, they might end up using outdated materials or instructors who aren't familiar with the latest tools and trends. Without high-quality content and knowledgeable trainers, learning outcomes suffer.

In addition, infrastructure gaps in tier-2/3 cities or remote (WFH) setups create another layer of difficulty. Not all employees have access to reliable internet, modern devices, or quiet spaces for online learning — especially those working from home or located in less-developed areas. Without the right tech setup, digital training programs fail to reach large parts of the workforce, leaving them behind while others move ahead.

All these challenges make it clear that implementing upskilling and reskilling strategies isn't just about having the right intentions — it requires thoughtful planning, strong leadership, and support at every level of the organization.

1. 8. Future Outlook

Despite the challenges, the future of learning and development looks promising, thanks to rapid advancements in technology and growing recognition of the importance of lifelong learning.

One exciting trend is the rise of AI-driven personalized learning journeys . Just like how streaming platforms recommend movies based on your preferences, AI-powered systems can now suggest training modules tailored to each employee's role, skill level, and career goals. These systems can adapt as someone learns, offering more advanced topics once basics are mastered. This makes learning more efficient, engaging, and relevant for each individual.

Another innovation gaining traction is the use of AR/VR and immersive technology in training delivery . Imagine learning how to handle a complex IT system by stepping into a virtual environment where you can practice without any risk. Or picture customer service reps role-playing difficult conversations in a realistic 3D setting. These tools bring a whole new level of interactivity and realism to training, making it easier for employees to absorb and apply what they've learned.

The concept of skill-based hiring and digital credentialing is also reshaping how talent is assessed and hired. Instead of focusing only on degrees or past job titles, companies are starting to look at specific skills and verified credentials. Digital badges and certifications stored on secure platforms — sometimes powered by blockchain technology — allow employers to quickly verify what a candidate knows and can do. This opens doors for non-traditional learners and helps match the right people to the right jobs more efficiently.

At a broader level, government-industry partnerships are playing a key role in scaling upskilling efforts. Initiatives like India's Skill India Mission aim to train millions of young people in industry-relevant skills through collaboration between public institutions, private companies, and training providers. These partnerships help ensure that education aligns with job market needs and that no one gets left behind in the race for future-ready skills.

Looking ahead, the focus will continue to shift from generic training to personalized, immersive, and outcomedriven learning experiences. As technology evolves and organizations become more open to new ways of developing talent, the path to future-readiness becomes clearer — and more achievable — for everyone involved.

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