

• TEAM CAPABILITY • GUIDE

## How to identify the skills gaps *hiding in your team*

You can probably feel where your team is stretched. The hard part is showing it. This is the simple, seven-step way to turn that gut feel into a clear picture you can act on, so you know exactly where to put your time and your training budget.



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**Reading time** 11 min • **Method** Upleashed 0 to 5 capability framework • **Updated** May 2026

### THE SHORT ANSWER

To find the skills gaps in a team, list the skills the work really needs, agree the level each role should reach, then score every person against each skill on one simple scale. The gap is the distance between where someone is and where they need to be. Put those scores on a colour-coded grid, a **skills matrix**, and the gaps stop hiding: you can see who is strong, where the team is thin, and what to train first.

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **A skills gap** is the distance between what your team needs to do and what it can do today.
- **Seven steps** get you there: map the work, list the skills, set the standard, score people, make it visible, read the gaps, then prioritise.
- **Score on a 0 to 5 scale.** Level 3, "Capable", is the usual target. A 0 means the skill is not needed by that person.
- **Look for four things:** individual gaps, team-wide gaps, single points of failure, and over-reliance on one person.
- **A matrix does the maths.** The colours show the gaps instantly, and the scores roll up into a single capability figure.

#### — START HERE

## First, let's agree what a *skills gap* really is

A skills gap is simply the difference between what your team needs to be able to do and what it can do right now. Getting the definition right matters, because the wrong label sends good money after the wrong fix.

### Gaps show up at two levels

An **individual gap** is one person sitting below the standard on one skill. A **team gap** is bigger trouble: it is when nobody, or far too few people, can cover something the work depends on. The first is a quiet development chat. The second is a risk to the business. A good method shows you both, because a gap you cannot see is one you cannot plan for, budget for, or close.

### A skills gap is not a performance problem

This one distinction saves real money. A skills gap means the ability has not been built yet, so the fix is training, practice or experience. A performance problem means the person already has the skill but is not using it, so the fix is clarity, motivation or removing something in their way. Send a performance problem on a training course and you will spend money and change nothing. So separate the two before you act.

## Four kinds of skill worth tracking

Teams tend to track the technical skills they can see and quietly skip the rest. A full picture covers **technical and hard skills** (the craft of the work), **tools and systems** (the software and kit used every day), **compliance and regulatory competence** (where a standard such as ISO 9001 asks you to define and evidence competence), and **behavioural and leadership skills** (coaching, judgement, the human stuff that decides whether work actually lands).

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### — WHY IT MATTERS NOW

## Gaps you cannot see are *quietly expensive*

An unseen gap rarely arrives as one big event. It leaks out slowly: training spent on the wrong things, a project that slips when one person is off, an audit that goes badly, a good person who leaves because nobody showed them a path.

39%

WEF, FUTURE OF  
JOBS 2025

of workers' core skills are expected to change by 2030. Roughly two in five of every team's skill set is on the move.

63%

WEF, FUTURE OF  
JOBS 2025

of employers say skills gaps are the single biggest barrier to transforming their business. It beats every other blocker.

87%

MCKINSEY GLOBAL  
SURVEY, 2020

of organisations have skills gaps now or expect them within a few years, yet fewer than half know how to close them.

That last number is the one to sit with. Knowing a gap exists is not the same as knowing where it is, who has it, and what it costs. Almost everyone senses the problem. The teams that pull ahead are the ones who can **see it clearly enough to do something about it**. That is all "identifying gaps" really means: turning a vague worry into a plan you can fund.

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### — THE METHOD

# Seven steps to find every gap in your team

You can do this with nothing more than a spreadsheet and an honest hour. Work through the steps in order. Each one makes the next easier, and the final picture more trustworthy.

1

## Map the work, not just the job titles

Before you can spot a gap, you need to know what "good" looks like. Start from what your team is on the hook to deliver this year, then work back to the skills that make those things happen. Treat job descriptions as a starting point, not gospel; they go out of date fast and rarely mention the soft skills that decide whether work succeeds.

**WATCH OUT** Do not grab a generic skills list off the internet. The gaps that matter are specific to your team's real work.

2

## List the skills that actually matter

Go for the vital few, not the exhaustive many. A workable team list is usually 8 to 20 skills. Group them so the grid is easy to read: core technical, tools and systems, compliance, and behavioural or leadership. A quick test for whether something belongs: a real skill is observable, gets better with practice, carries across tasks, and changes results.

**WATCH OUT** A 60-skill list feels thorough but never gets filled in. If it is too detailed to maintain, it is too detailed to help.

3

## Set the standard for each skill

A gap only means something when you measure it against a target. Decide the level each role should reach for each skill, and write down what every level looks like in plain words, so two managers would score the same person the same way. The Upleashed 0 to 5 scale below does this for you, with Level 3 ("Capable") as the usual team target.

**WATCH OUT** Undefined levels turn the whole thing into opinion. Agree what each level means before anyone scores.

## 4

### Score where people actually are

Rate every person against every skill using the same scale and, just as importantly, the same evidence. Mix your sources where you can: the person's own view, your view as their manager, and real evidence such as work samples, sign-offs, certificates or results. Then sense-check a few scores with a second assessor to take the wobble out.

**WATCH OUT** Scoring alone, in a rush, pushes everyone towards the middle and hides the very gaps you are looking for.

## 5

### Make it visible on one page

Numbers in a list hide patterns. The same numbers as a colour-coded grid show them in seconds. Put people down one side, skills across the top, and colour each cell by level so the red and amber zones jump out. That grid is your skills matrix, and it is the fastest way to turn a pile of scores into something a busy team can read at a glance.

**WATCH OUT** A matrix in your head or a private file is not visible. Share it; that is the whole point.

## 6

### Read the four kinds of gap

A good matrix shows four different things, and each needs a different response. **Individual gaps** are one person below target on a skill. **Team gaps** are a whole column of red or amber, where nobody is strong. **Single points of failure** are a critical skill only one person can do, your key-person risk. **Over-reliance** shows up where only one person reaches Level 4 or 5.

**WATCH OUT** Do not stop at individual gaps. The team-wide and single-point-of-failure risks usually hurt the most.

## 7

### Prioritise, then turn gaps into a plan

You will always find more gaps than you can fix at once, so rank them by risk and impact. A skill that is business-critical, time-sensitive, or held by only one person beats a nice-to-have held by several. Turn the top few into real actions with owners and dates: training, mentoring, cross-training, hiring or stretch projects. Then put a re-score in the diary for next quarter so you can watch the movement.

**WATCH OUT** A matrix you never revisit becomes wallpaper. The value is in the review cycle, not the first snapshot.

#### — THE SCALE BEHIND THE SCORES

## The 0 to 5 capability framework

Every score in your matrix uses this fixed, research-backed scale. The levels and the maths stay the same, so everyone reads a "3" the same way. You can reword the descriptions to suit your industry, but the numbers never move.

0

### No skill required or desired EXCLUDED

No expectation that the person or role needs this skill within the next year. Take a longer-term view here, and do not use this level for short-term assessments. A 0 drops the skill out of that person's score entirely.

1

### In training / Trainee WEIGHTING 25%

Expected to be proficient within a year. Has completed up to 75% of training and does not yet fully understand the quality requirements.

2

### Developing capabilities WEIGHTING 50%

Has completed more than 75% of training. Can probably perform the task alone, but consistent quality and productivity are not yet evidenced, so complex output still needs checking or verification.

3

### Capable WEIGHTING 75% · DEFAULT TARGET

Has completed 100% of training and shown consistent quality and productivity. Where not mandated by regulation, checks can now be omitted, releasing capacity back into the business.

4

### Subject Matter Expert / Trainer WEIGHTING 100%

Prolonged experience at a consistent quality and productivity level. Works autonomously and can train others to a high standard. If the skill has not been used in the last three months, drop back to Level 3 to reconfirm competence.

5

### Strategic ownership / Leadership WEIGHTING 100%

Can define and develop new processes and skill requirements, show cross-function expertise, and demonstrate leadership. Carries the same numeric weight as Level 4; the purple flag highlights strategic capability and helps you spot succession candidates.

#### How the score is worked out

Each level carries a proficiency weighting: Level 1 counts as 25%, Level 2 as 50%, Level 3 as 75%, and Levels 4 and 5 both count as 100%. A Level 0 means the skill is not needed by that person, so it drops out of their calculation. A person's capability is the average of those weightings across the skills their role needs. The team's capability is the average across everyone. The default target is Level 3, which is 75%, so any required skill below Level 3 is a gap.

**A worked example.** Take Sarah from the team below. Her seven scores convert to weightings, and the average is her capability:

Sarah's scores **4, 3, 2, 3, 2, 2, 1**  
become weightings **100, 75, 50, 75, 50, 50, 25**  
average =  $425 \div 7 = 61\%$  against a 75% target = a 14-point gap.

# What the gaps look like *once they are visible*

Here is a six-person customer operations team scored on the 0 to 5 scale, with each person's capability worked out on the right. The same numbers that would be invisible in a list become a story the moment they are a heat map.



#### WHAT THE GRID REVEALS

- **A team gap in plain sight.** Read down the Data analysis column: nobody reaches the target of 3. This is not one person's problem to fix, it is something the whole team is missing, and a strong candidate for group training.
- **A single point of failure.** Only Priya is strong on Compliance (KYC). If she is on leave during an audit, the team is exposed. That one green cell in a column of red is your key-person risk, made visible.
- **Over-reliance on one person.** Only Tom is anywhere near capable on Demand forecasting; the others who need it sit at 1 to 2. Fine today, fragile tomorrow. Cross-training a second person is cheap insurance.
- **A genuine strength to protect.** Complaint handling is solid across the team. Worth naming, because knowing what is working stops you over-investing where you are already strong.

#### — CHOOSING HOW TO SCORE

## Four ways to rate capability, and when to use each

No single method is perfect. The most trustworthy pictures mix two or three and then sense-check. Here is how the common approaches stack up.

Method	Best for	Watch out for
<b>Self-assessment</b>	Engagement, surfacing hidden strengths, and starting the conversation	Drift both ways; confident people over-score, modest experts under-score
<b>Manager assessment</b>	A consistent, accountable baseline across the team	One viewpoint only; sense-check with a peer to avoid clustering at 3
<b>Peer or 360 review</b>	Behavioural and teamwork skills a manager rarely sees directly	Time cost, and you need enough trust for honest answers
<b>Practical test or evidence</b>	Compliance and technical skills where proof is required	Effort to set up; save it for the skills where being wrong is costly

A reliable default for most teams: combine a quick self-assessment with a manager view, attach evidence for anything compliance-critical, and sense-

check a handful of scores with a second assessor. The conversation that happens when a self-score and a manager score disagree is often the most useful part of the whole exercise.

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— AVOID THESE

## Six mistakes that hide the gaps you are hunting for

**MISTAKE 01**

**Rating the person, not the skill**

"Sarah is brilliant" is not a data point. Score each specific skill on its own evidence, or a halo effect will paint over real gaps.

**MISTAKE 02**

**Tracking too many skills**

A sprawling list collapses under its own weight. Keep to the 8 to 20 that genuinely drive your team's results.

**MISTAKE 03**

**Leaving the levels undefined**

If "good" is not written down, every assessor invents their own. Define each level in one plain sentence first.

**MISTAKE 04**

**One person scoring everyone, fast**

Rushed solo scoring clusters everyone at 3. Add a second view and a little evidence to break the tie.

**MISTAKE 05**

**Treating it as a one-off**

Skills move. A single snapshot ages quickly; a quarterly re-score is where the real value sits.

**MISTAKE 06**

**Confusing a gap with a performance issue**

Training cannot fix a motivation problem. Separate "cannot yet" from "is not, right now" before you spend a penny.

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— FROM ONE-OFF AUDIT TO LIVING PICTURE

## The method is free. A ready-made matrix just makes it *fast*.

Everything above works in a blank spreadsheet, and for many teams that is the right place to start. A purpose-built template simply removes the fiddly parts. The grid, the fixed 0 to 5 scale and all the maths are already there, the heat map and individual roadmaps build themselves, and the capability, target and gap figures you saw above are calculated for you, live.



*The Advanced Excel Skills Matrix works the numbers out for you: current capability, target, and the exact gap to close, with the same 0 to 5 framework used throughout this guide.*

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£1

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## Quick *answers*

### **Q What is the difference between a skills gap and a skills shortage?**

A skills gap is internal: it is your team measured against the standard it needs. A skills shortage is external: a scarcity of a skill in the wider job market. You close a gap with development and smarter deployment; you respond to a shortage with hiring, retention and growing your own talent.

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### **Q How often should I reassess my team's skills?**

Quarterly is a sensible default for an active team. At a minimum, revisit when roles change, after big projects, when someone joins or leaves, or ahead of an audit. The value is in the trend over time, not in any single snapshot.

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### **Q Should people rate themselves?**

Self-assessment is great for engagement and for surfacing strengths you cannot see, but on its own it drifts. Combine it with a manager view and some evidence, then sense-check. The chat that follows a difference in scores is often the most useful part.

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### **Q How many skills should a team matrix track?**

Usually 8 to 20. Enough to cover what genuinely matters, few enough that the grid stays readable and the team actually keeps it up to date.

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### **Q What is a single point of failure in a skills matrix?**

It is a critical skill that only one person can do to standard, the clearest form of key-person risk. If that person is unavailable, the work stops. The matrix flags it the moment you read down a column and see a single strong cell among the gaps.

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### **Q Do I need software to identify skills gaps?**

No. You can identify gaps with a well-built spreadsheet, and most teams should start there. Software earns its place when you need a living, shared, mobile picture across many teams, with reminders and AI-assisted suggestions.

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Alex is the creator of the Upleashed capability framework that powers Skills Matrix Template, the award-winning Excel skills matrix. A Chartered Manager with an MBA, an LLM and a doctorate in business administration, he has spent more than two decades helping operations, HR and quality teams turn capability from a gut feel into something they can measure, manage and prove.

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World Economic Forum. (2025). *The future of jobs report 2025*. World Economic Forum.

## Stop guessing. *Start mapping.*

You now have the whole method. The quickest way to put it to work is to map a single team this week and see where the red zones really are.

[Try the free 5x5 builder →](#)

[Get the template, £199](#)

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