IT & TECHNICAL SUPPORT · GUIDE

The skills matrix *for IT support teams*

An IT support team is judged on resolution: the right person fixing the right problem fast. That breaks down when a busy domain, networking, security, the cloud, rests on too few capable people, and tickets bounce, escalate and stall. A skills matrix maps capability across every support domain and tier, so a team lead can see where demand outstrips the bench and fix the coverage before resolution times tell the story for them.

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Reading time 12 min · **Method** Upleashed 0 to 5 capability framework · **Updated** May 2026

THE SHORT ANSWER

An IT support skills matrix maps the team against the technical domains they cover, service desk, applications, networking, security, cloud, infrastructure, and the tiers they work at, L1 to L3, scored on a clear scale. Read it against where the ticket demand actually is, so the busy domains with thin cover stand out. In short: **it shows whether capability is concentrated where the support demand is, so domains carrying many tickets on too few capable people, the cause of slow, bouncing escalations, get fixed first.**

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Map domains and tiers.** Support spans distinct domains, networking, security, cloud, worked at tiers L1 to L3; map both.
- **Match cover to demand.** The question is whether capability sits where the tickets are, not just whether the team is skilled overall.
- **Thin cover on a busy domain hurts most.** A high-demand domain resting on one or two experts is where tickets stall and escalate.
- **Right skill, right tier, right problem.** The matrix routes work to the correct capability, lifting first-contact resolution.
- **Build depth where it pays.** Develop or hire for the busy, thinly-covered domains, not evenly across everything.

START HERE

Is cover where the *tickets are?*

An IT support team can look well-staffed on paper and still struggle, if its capability sits in the wrong places. What matters is not whether the team is skilled in general, but whether capability is concentrated **where the ticket demand actually falls**. A skills matrix, read against where the work comes from, answers exactly that: it shows whether the busy domains are well covered, or quietly resting on too few people.

Map domains and tiers

Support work splits two ways, and a matrix should capture both. By **domain**, the technical areas: service desk, applications, networking, security, cloud, infrastructure, databases. And by **tier**, the escalation levels: L1 first-contact and basic fixes, L2 specialist troubleshooting, L3 expert architecture, security and infrastructure work. Mapping capability across this grid shows not just who knows what, but who can resolve what, and at which level, which is what support is really about.

Read coverage against demand

The insight comes from setting capability **against ticket demand**. A domain that generates 30% of tickets needs deep cover; one that generates 3% can manage with less. The risk is a busy domain, networking, say, that carries heavy demand but rests on one or two capable people. Reading the matrix against where the tickets actually come from turns "we cover networking"

into the sharper "networking is a third of our load and only one person can handle the hard cases", which is a problem you can act on.

Right skill, right tier, right problem

The everyday payoff is **better routing**. When the matrix shows who can resolve what and at which tier, tickets reach the right person first instead of bouncing between teams, the hidden tax that adds hours to resolution and frustrates everyone. It also stops the classic waste of senior engineers buried in password resets and complex issues landing with juniors who cannot help. Matching the right skill to the right problem, at the right tier, is what lifts first-contact resolution and keeps the queue moving.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Thin cover means *tickets stall*

When a busy domain rests on too few capable people, the symptoms are predictable: tickets bounce between teams, escalate unnecessarily, and take hours longer to resolve. Mapping capability against demand is how a support lead fixes the cause, not just the queue.

8%

GARTNER, 2024

of organisations have reliable workforce skills data, so most support teams cannot see where their cover is thin.

5–10%

SUPPORT TIERING NORM

of tickets should reach the expert L3 tier; far more means lower tiers lack the capability to resolve.

63%

WEF, 2025

of employers call skills gaps the biggest barrier to change; in IT support they read as slow, bouncing tickets.

Every unnecessary hand-off in support adds hours to resolution, lowers satisfaction, and raises the cost per ticket, and the root cause is almost always a capability gap in the wrong place: a domain where demand outstrips the people who can actually resolve it. A skills matrix counters this by making **cover against demand visible**: where the busy domains are well staffed, where they are dangerously thin, and where expertise is so concentrated that one absence floods the escalation queue. Seeing this lets a support lead route work to the right capability, build depth in the domains that carry the load, and lift the proportion of tickets resolved at first contact,

turning a reactive, escalation-heavy operation into one where the right person fixes the right problem the first time.

WHAT IT REVEALS

Four things an IT support matrix reveals

Read against demand and tier, an IT support skills matrix reveals four things that bear directly on resolution speed and cost. Each turns a queue problem into a capability fix.

REVEALS 01

Where cover meets demand

By setting capability against ticket volume, the matrix shows whether the busy domains are well covered, or carrying heavy load on too few people.

REVEALS 02

The escalation pressure points

It flags domains where lower tiers lack the capability to resolve, driving the unnecessary escalations that slow everything down.

REVEALS 03

Concentration risk

It surfaces critical domains resting on one expert, so depth can be built before that person's absence floods the queue.

REVEALS 04

Where to develop or hire

It pinpoints the busy, thinly-covered domains, so investment targets the exposure rather than spreading evenly across all areas.

The common thread is matching **capability to where the work actually is**. A support team does not fail for lack of skill in the abstract; it fails when the skill it has is not concentrated where the tickets land, so a busy domain stalls while capability sits idle elsewhere. The matrix is the instrument that exposes that mismatch, so a lead can route work correctly, build depth where demand is heaviest, and resolve more at first contact, the measures that define a support team that works.

THE SCALE BEHIND THE SCORES

The 0 to 5 capability framework

A support matrix needs a scale that maps onto the tiers a team already works in. This framework, developed by Dr Alex J. Martin-Smith, does that naturally, with Level 3, resolves the domain's issues unaided, as solid L2 capability, and Level 4 plus the L3 experts who handle the hardest cases and set direction.

0

Not required for the role EXCLUDED

The domain is not part of this person's role, for example deep network architecture for an L1 agent. Excluded from their score, not counted as a gap.

1

In training / L1 basics WEIGHTING 25%

Handles basic, scripted issues with support, password resets, simple fixes. Up to 75% trained. First-contact capability on the simplest tickets in the domain.

2

Developing WEIGHTING 50%

More than 75% trained; resolves common issues in the domain alone, but complex or unusual cases still need escalation. Solid first-line, developing second-line.

3

Capable WEIGHTING 75% · SOLID L2

Resolves the domain's issues unaided across the normal range, true L2 specialist capability. The level that counts as genuine cover for a support domain.

4

Subject Matter Expert / L3 WEIGHTING 100%

Handles the hardest escalations, root-cause analysis and architecture in the domain, and mentors others. Your L3 experts, the people to build depth behind.

5

Strategic ownership / Lead WEIGHTING 100%

Owns the domain's standards, tooling and improvement, feeding fixes back into the systems. The purple flag marks your senior engineers and support leads.

Weigh cover by the domain's demand

For each domain, count how many people are at Level 3 or above, that is your real, resolving cover. But a raw count is not enough: weigh it by **demand**. A domain carrying 30% of tickets with two capable people is far more exposed than a 5% domain with two. The aim is for capability to be concentrated where the load is, so the busy domains have the depth to resolve at the right tier without endless escalation.

A worked example. Same cover, very different risk:

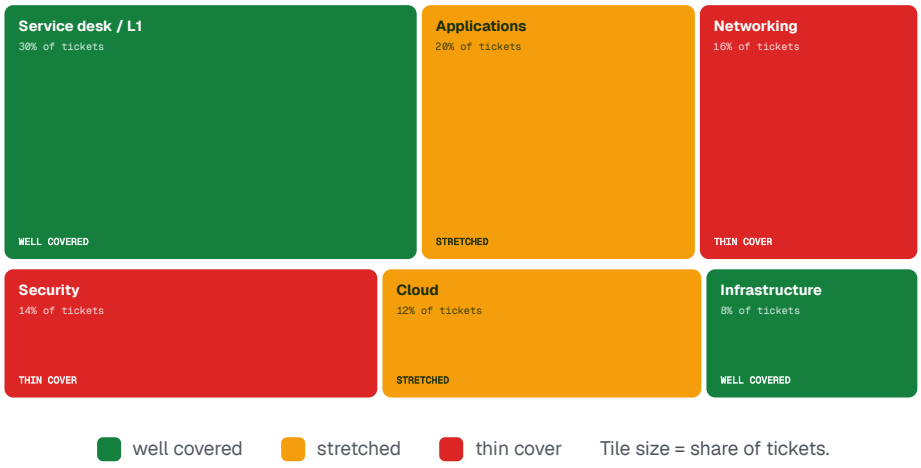
```
Networking  16% of tickets · only 1 at L3+  →  high exposure
Infrastructure  8% of tickets · 1 at L3+  →  lower exposure,
easier to manage
same headcount, the busier domain is the priority to deepen.
```

SEE THE EXPOSURE

Demand and cover, *side by side*

Here is the support load as a treemap: each domain is a tile sized by its share of tickets and coloured by how well it is covered. Big green tiles are busy and well staffed, exactly right. A big red or amber tile is the danger: heavy demand resting on too few capable people. The picture shows instantly where to build depth first.

SUPPORT DEMAND BY DOMAIN · SIZED BY TICKETS, COLOURED BY COVER



30%

of tickets are networking and security, both thinly covered (red), the biggest exposure to slow, escalating resolution

Illustrative team on the Upleashed 0 to 5 framework. Each tile is a support domain, sized by ticket share and coloured by capable cover.

WHAT THE SUPPORT LEAD READS HERE

- **Networking and security are the priority.** Sizeable tiles, together nearly a third of tickets, both red for thin cover. This is where tickets stall and escalate; building L2 and L3 depth here will move resolution times most.
- **The service desk is busy and solid.** The largest tile, a third of all tickets, and green. Exactly what you want: heavy first-contact demand met with strong cover, resolving the bulk of issues at L1.
- **Applications and cloud are stretched.** Amber: meaningful demand on cover that is holding but not deep. Worth strengthening before they slip to red, especially as cloud demand tends to grow.
- **Infrastructure is fine for now.** Small and green, low demand, adequately covered. No action needed beyond keeping an eye on its single-expert depth.

READY-TO-USE EXAMPLES

Example domains to map for IT support

An IT support matrix should map the technical domains your team covers and the tiers they work at. Here are ready-to-adapt categories, a starting

point to tailor to your environment.

Category	Examples to map (the columns)	Watch out for
Service desk / L1	Triage, account and access, basic troubleshooting, device setup	Strong L1 but no clear path to who resolves escalations
Core domains	Networking, security, cloud, infrastructure, applications, databases	A high-demand domain resting on one or two capable people
Tools & platforms	ITSM platform, monitoring, remote support, scripting and automation	Assuming tool familiarity equals domain resolution capability
Specialist / L3	Architecture, root-cause analysis, incident response, vendor escalation	L3 expertise concentrated in a single irreplaceable engineer
Service skills	Communication, SLA awareness, documentation, customer handling	Mapping only technical depth and missing the service side

Map the domains your team actually supports, scored so Level 3 means someone resolves that domain's issues unaided (solid L2), and read the result against where your ticket demand falls. Capture the tier dimension too, who can work at L1, L2 and L3, so routing and escalation are grounded in real capability. As always, map the domains that carry your load, keep the scores current as technology and demand shift, and use the picture to build depth where the tickets are, not evenly across everything.

AVOID THESE

Six mistakes on an IT support matrix

MISTAKE 01

Ignoring demand

Cover means little without context. Weigh each domain's capability against its share of tickets.

MISTAKE 02

Thin cover on a busy domain

Heavy demand on one or two experts is where tickets stall. Build depth where the load is heaviest.

MISTAKE 03

Mapping domain, not tier

Knowing a domain is not the same as resolving it at L3. Capture the tier each person works at too.

MISTAKE 04

Concentrated L3 expertise

A domain resting on one expert floods the queue if they are off. Build a second capable person.

MISTAKE 05

Spreading depth evenly

Equal investment across all domains ignores demand. Target the busy, thinly-covered domains first.

MISTAKE 06

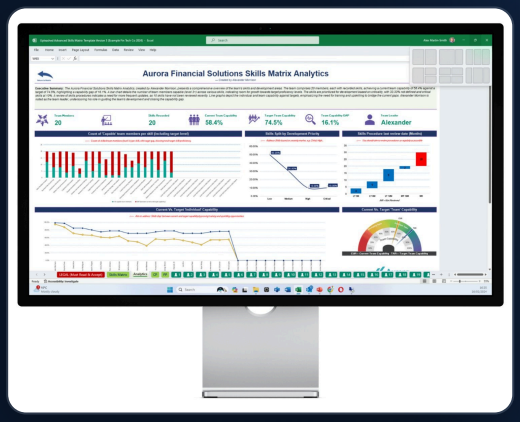
Tools as a proxy for skill

Knowing the ITSM platform is not resolving capability. Score the domain, not just the tooling.

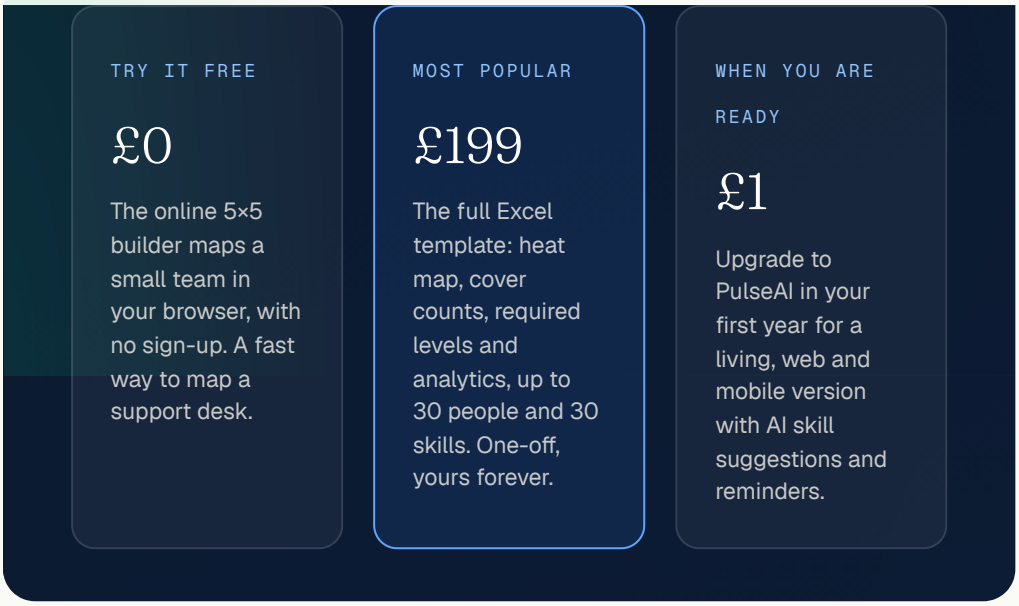
FROM BOUNCING TICKETS TO THE RIGHT FIX FIRST

The method is free. A ready-made matrix just makes the busy, thinly-covered domains *impossible to miss.*

Everything here works in a blank spreadsheet, and that is a fine place to start. A purpose-built template just makes the support view effortless: score the team on the 0 to 5 scale across the domains and tiers, and the capable cover per domain is counted for you, so, read against where your tickets fall, the busy domains with thin cover, the concentration risks and the routing gaps stand out, before resolution times and escalation rates reveal them the hard way.



The Advanced Excel Skills Matrix counts capable cover per domain and tier, the basis for reading coverage against ticket demand and spotting the busy, thinly-covered domains, all on the same 0 to 5 framework used throughout this guide.



COMMON QUESTIONS

Quick *answers*

Q What is a skills matrix for an IT support team?

It is a grid mapping the team against the technical domains they support, service desk, applications, networking, security, cloud, infrastructure, and the tiers they work at, L1 to L3, with a level in each cell. Read against ticket demand, it shows whether capability sits where the work is, and where cover is dangerously thin.

Q Why read coverage against ticket demand?

Because a team can be skilled overall yet exposed where it matters. A domain generating a third of tickets needs deep cover; one generating a few percent does not. Setting capability against demand reveals the busy domains resting on too few people, which is exactly where tickets stall, escalate and take longer to resolve.

Q How does it help with escalation and routing?

By showing who can resolve what, and at which tier, the matrix lets tickets reach the right person first instead of bouncing between teams. It prevents senior engineers being buried in basic requests and complex issues landing with juniors who cannot help, which is what lifts first-contact resolution and keeps resolution times down.

Q Should I map tiers as well as domains?

Yes. Knowing someone understands networking is not the same as knowing they can resolve a complex networking incident at L3. Capturing both the domain and the tier a person can work at is what makes the matrix useful for routing, escalation planning and spotting where a domain lacks the senior depth to resolve its hardest cases.

Q How do I prioritise where to build depth?

Weigh each domain's capable cover against its share of tickets. A busy domain with only one or two capable people is your highest priority, develop or hire to deepen it. A low-demand domain can manage on thinner cover. The aim is for capability to be concentrated where the load is, not spread evenly across everything.

Q What about concentration risk in a domain?

It is a real danger in support. When a busy domain rests on a single L3 expert, their absence floods the escalation queue and resolution times spike. The matrix surfaces these single points of failure so you can build a second capable person behind each critical, high-demand domain before an absence exposes the gap.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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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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