

• THE BASICS • GUIDE

What is a *skills matrix*?

If you have ever wondered who on your team can really do what, a skills matrix is the answer on a single page. It is the simplest tool in management for turning a vague sense of your team's capability into something you can see, measure and act on. Here is what it is, why it matters, and how to build one.



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

THE SHORT ANSWER

A skills matrix is a simple grid that maps the people on a team against the skills their work requires, with a rating in each cell showing how capable each person is at each skill. Read across a row and you see one person's profile; read down a column and you see how well a skill is covered across the team. It turns scattered, in-the-head knowledge of who can do what into **one clear, visual picture you can use to spot gaps, plan training, allocate work and reduce risk.**

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **A skills matrix is a grid.** People down one side, skills along the top, a capability rating in every cell.
- **Rows and columns each tell a story.** A row is a person's profile; a column is how well a skill is covered.
- **It makes capability visible.** It replaces memory and guesswork with one shared, evidence-based picture.
- **It is the base for everything.** Gap analysis, training plans, work allocation and risk all start from the matrix.
- **Anyone can start one.** A spreadsheet and a clear rating scale are all you need to build your first matrix today.

— START HERE

A skills matrix, *defined*

A skills matrix, sometimes called a competency matrix or capability matrix, is a visual grid that maps the people in a team against the skills their roles require, recording how capable each person is at each skill on a consistent scale. It is one of the oldest and most useful tools in management precisely because it is so simple.

It is just a grid, and that is its power

Picture a table. Down the left-hand side, the names of your team. Along the top, the skills the work depends on. In each cell where a person meets a skill, a number showing how capable they are. That is the whole thing. Its strength is not complexity but clarity: in one glance it answers a question every manager carries around half-formed in their head, **who can actually do what, and how well?** A skills matrix simply writes that down, in a form everyone can see and trust.

Read it two ways

The grid shape is what makes it so useful, because it can be read in two directions. Read across a **row** and you see one person's whole profile: their strengths, the skills they are still developing, and where they could grow. Read down a **column** and you see how a single skill is spread across the team: covered by many, by a few, or dangerously by just one. The same simple grid answers both "how is this person doing?" and "how exposed are we on this skill?".

Skills matrix, competency matrix, capability matrix

You will see several names for much the same tool. In everyday use, "skills matrix", "competency matrix" and "capability matrix" are used interchangeably. Purists draw a fine distinction, skills tend to mean what a person can *do*, competencies lean towards how they behave, but for the practical job of mapping a team's capability, the difference rarely matters. What matters is that you are making capability visible on a shared, consistent scale.

— WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Most teams' skills are *invisible*

The reason a skills matrix is worth the modest effort is that, without one, a team's capability lives in scattered notes and managers' memories, where it cannot be measured, shared or trusted. The data on this is striking.

8%

GARTNER, 2024

of organisations have reliable data on the skills their workforce currently has. The rest are largely guessing.

39%

WEF, 2025

of workers' core skills are expected to change by 2030, so a clear, current picture matters more than ever.

63%

WEF, 2025

of employers call skills gaps the biggest barrier to transformation, the very thing a matrix makes visible.

The gap is rarely a shortage of talent; it is a shortage of **visibility**. Most organisations genuinely do not have a reliable, current view of what their people can do, which means decisions about training, hiring, work allocation and risk are made on instinct. A skills matrix is the cheapest, fastest way to close that visibility gap. It does not require software or a project; it requires a grid, an honest scale, and the discipline to fill it in. Once you can see capability, you can finally manage it.

— THE ANATOMY

What every skills matrix is made of

However simple or sophisticated, every effective skills matrix shares the same four parts. Understanding them is all you need to read one, or build your own.

PART 01

People (the rows)

The individuals, or sometimes roles, you are mapping, listed down one axis. Each row becomes one person's complete capability profile across every skill.

PART 02

Skills (the columns)

The skills, tasks or competencies the work genuinely requires, listed along the top. Each column shows how that one skill is covered across the whole team.

PART 03

Ratings (the cells)

A capability score in each cell, on one consistent scale, showing how proficient a person is at a skill. A shared scale is what makes the numbers comparable and trustworthy.

PART 04

Targets & reads (the edges)

The required level per skill, plus the totals the grid reveals: each person's average capability, and each skill's coverage. This is where a matrix turns from a record into a decision tool.

Put these together and the colour-coded grid does the rest. A heat map, where green means capable and red means a gap, lets the eye find the strengths and weaknesses instantly, without reading a single number. That visual immediacy, the ability to take in a whole team's capability at a glance, is exactly why the humble grid has outlasted every management fad thrown at it.

— THE SCALE BEHIND THE SCORES

The 0 to 5 capability framework

The ratings in the cells are only as good as the scale behind them. A skills matrix needs one clear, shared definition of each level, so a "3" means the same thing for everyone. This fixed, research-backed framework provides exactly that.

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% · USUAL TARGET

Has completed 100% of training and shown consistent quality and productivity. Can work unsupervised. This is the level most roles aim for, the point at which a person genuinely counts on a skill.

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 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 grid turns into numbers

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 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. Those few rules are what turn a coloured grid into figures you can track and compare.

A worked example. Read one person's row and turn it into a capability score:

```
Sarah's row 4, 3, 2, 3, 2, 2, 1
weightings 100, 75, 50, 75, 50, 50, 25 = 425 ÷ 7
Sarah's capability = 61%
```

— [SEE IT ON A REAL TEAM](#)

A complete skills matrix, *read both ways*

Here is a full skills matrix for a six-person team. The colour-coded cells are each person's capability per skill; the right-hand column averages each row into a person's capability; the bottom row counts how many people are capable (Level 3 or above) on each skill. This single grid is the foundation everything else is built on.

	Complaint handling	CRM / Salesforce	Data analysis	Coaching others	Compliance (KYC)	Process improvement	Demand forecasting	Capability
Sarah J.	4	3	2	3	2	2	1	61%
Mark T.	3	4	1	2	1	2	0	54%
Priya R.	3	3	2	4	4	3	2	75%
James W.	4	2	1	1	1	1	0	42%
Aisha K.	3	3	2	2	1	2	1	50%
Tom G.	3	2	1	2	2	3	4	61%
CAPABLE (L3+)	6	3	0	2	1	2	1	57%

■ 1 Trainee
 ■ 2 Developing
 ■ 3 Capable
 ■ 4 Expert
 ■ coverage 0-1 · risk
■ coverage 3+ · healthy

Illustrative data on the Upleashed 0 to 5 framework. The bottom-right cell, 57%, is the whole team's capability; the row on the right is each person's; the row along the bottom is each skill's coverage.

WHAT THIS ONE GRID TELLS YOU

- **Each person's profile, at a glance.** Reading a row, Priya is the team's strongest at 75%, James the most in need of development at 42%, the kind of insight that used to live only in a manager's head.
- **Each skill's coverage, instantly.** Reading the bottom row, Complaint handling is covered by six people, but Data analysis by none and Compliance by one, clear risks made visible.
- **The team's overall capability.** The 57% in the corner is the team average, a single figure you can track over time as you train and develop.
- **Every other use starts here.** Gap analysis, training plans, work allocation, cross-training and risk all read straight off this one grid, which is why it is the foundational tool.

— WHAT IT IS FOR

What a skills matrix lets you do

A skills matrix is not an end in itself; it is the foundation for a string of everyday management decisions. Once the grid exists, each of these becomes a matter of reading it rather than guessing.

USE 01

Spot skills gaps

Compare current levels against the targets each role needs and the shortfalls show themselves, per person and across the team.

USE 02

Plan training

The gaps, ranked by size and importance, become a targeted, evidence-based training plan instead of a guessed-at one.

USE 03

Allocate work by skill

Match each task to the people who genuinely meet the level it needs, rather than whoever is free or senior.

USE 04

Reduce key-person risk

Coverage counts reveal the skills only one person can do, so you can cross-train before an absence bites.

USE 05

Develop people

Each row is a ready-made development map, showing an individual exactly which skills to build next, and to what level.

USE 06

Evidence competence

A scored, dated grid is exactly the proof of competence that quality standards such as ISO 9001 expect at audit.

— GETTING STARTED

How to build your first skills matrix

You can build a useful skills matrix in an afternoon. The method matters more than the tool, a clear spreadsheet beats expensive software used carelessly, and it comes down to five steps.

Step	What you do	Watch out for
1 · List the skills	Name the skills the work genuinely depends on, the vital few, usually 8 to 20	An enormous list nobody will maintain; keep it to what matters
2 · List the people	Put your team members down the side, one row each	Mixing roles and individuals without deciding which you are mapping
3 · Pick one scale	Choose a single rating scale and define each level in plain words	Different people scoring to different standards, so numbers cannot be compared
4 · Score honestly	Rate each person against each skill, backed by real evidence	Inflated scores that hide the very gaps you are trying to find
5 · Read & act	Set targets, read the rows and columns, and act on what they show	Filing it away; a matrix only pays off when it drives decisions

That is genuinely all there is to starting. Add a colour scale so the grid reads as a heat map, set a target level for each skill, and you have a tool that earns its keep immediately. From there you can refine it, re-score on a cycle, track the team average over time, but the first version, built this afternoon, will already tell you more about your team than you knew this morning.

— AVOID THESE

Six mistakes that make a matrix useless

MISTAKE 01

Too many skills

A matrix with a hundred skills never gets maintained. Map the vital few the work truly depends on.

MISTAKE 02

A fuzzy rating scale

If "3" means something different to each scorer, the numbers cannot be compared. Define every level in plain words.

MISTAKE 03

Inflated, evidence-free scores

Generous ratings feel kind but hide the gaps the matrix exists to find. Score honestly, against evidence.

MISTAKE 04

Reading rows but not columns

Healthy individuals can still leave a critical skill covered by one person. Always read the coverage too.

MISTAKE 05

Building it once, then forgetting

Skills change; a matrix scored a year ago and never revisited quietly becomes fiction. Re-score on a cycle.

MISTAKE 06

Never acting on it

A matrix that changes no decision is wasted effort. Its whole value is in the actions it informs.

— FROM BLANK GRID TO WORKING TOOL

The concept is free. A ready-made matrix just does the *hard part for you.*

Everything here works in a blank spreadsheet, and that is a fine place to start. A purpose-built template simply removes the fiddly setup and the maths. The grid, the fixed 0 to 5 scale and the formulas are ready, the heat map colours itself, and the analytics calculate every person's capability and every skill's coverage automatically, so you go from blank page to working tool in minutes, not an afternoon.



The Advanced Excel Skills Matrix builds the whole grid for you: the heat map, each person's capability, and per-skill coverage, all calculated automatically on the same 0 to 5 framework used throughout this guide.

TRY IT FREE

£0

The online 5x5 builder maps a small team in your browser, with no sign-up. The fastest way to see a matrix in action.

MOST POPULAR

£199

The full Excel template: heat map, capability and coverage analytics, roadmaps, up to 30 people and 30 skills. One-off, yours forever.

WHEN YOU ARE
READY

£1

Upgrade to PulseAI in your first year for a living, web and mobile version with AI skill suggestions and reminders.

Quick *answers*

Q What is a skills matrix in simple terms?

It is a grid that lists your team down one side and the skills they need along the top, with a rating in each cell showing how good each person is at each skill. It turns "who can do what?" from a question you carry in your head into a picture anyone can see.

Q What is the difference between a skills matrix and a competency matrix?

In everyday use they mean the same tool, and the terms are used interchangeably. If you want to be precise, "skills" lean towards what a person can do and "competencies" towards how they behave, but for mapping a team's capability the distinction rarely matters.

Q What should a skills matrix include?

Four things: the people (rows), the skills (columns), a capability rating in each cell on one consistent scale, and the required target level per skill. From those, the grid reveals each person's overall capability and how well each skill is covered across the team.

Q How do I rate skills in a matrix?

Use one clearly defined scale so a given level means the same for everyone. The Upleashed 0 to 5 framework runs from 0 (not required) through 3 (capable, works unsupervised) to 5 (strategic leadership), with each level described in plain words and backed by evidence.

Q Who uses a skills matrix?

Team leaders, managers, HR and L&D, operations and quality teams, and project managers, anyone who needs to know what their people can do. It is used across manufacturing, services, healthcare, software and more, wherever capability needs to be visible and managed.

Q Do I need software to make one?

No. A well-built spreadsheet makes an excellent skills matrix, and most teams should start there. Dedicated software earns its place when you want a live, shared picture across many teams, with automatic analytics, reminders and AI-assisted suggestions.

— 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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See who can do *what*.

You now know exactly what a skills matrix is and how to build one. The quickest way to start is to list your team's vital skills this week, score everyone on one clear scale, and read the rows and columns. You will know more about your team in an afternoon than you did all year.

Try the free 5x5 builder →

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