

FREE CAPABILITY GUIDE · FOR INDIVIDUALS AND TEAM LEADERS

The 2026 Skills *Index*.

The 100 hard and soft skills that matter most this year, in ten clusters of ten. Each one comes with why it has risen, and a practical route to build it. Use it to plan your own growth, or to map and develop your whole team.



100
Skills, organised into five hard clusters and five soft clusters.

39%
Of workers' key skills are expected to change by 2030 (World Economic Forum, 2025).

63%
Of employers say skills gaps are the biggest barrier to transformation (World Economic Forum, 2025).

0 to 5
Rate each skill on the same capability scale used in the Skills Matrix Template.



One list. Two *lenses*.

This index works whether you are growing your own career or developing a whole team. Skim all ten clusters first, because the most valuable gaps are usually the ones you were not looking for. Then come back through your chosen lens below.

LENS ONE · FOR INDIVIDUALS

Build your personal edge.

In 2026 employers increasingly hire for what you can actually do, not the titles you have held. Treat this index as a menu, not a to-do list. Nobody needs all 100.

- **Shortlist nine skills.** Three you already use daily, three your current role demands, three your next role will demand.
- **Rate yourself 0 to 5** on each, using the scale on the next page. Be honest. A flattering score helps nobody, least of all you.
- **Pick one gap to close per quarter.** Use the Build it route on each skill card, and favour real work over passive watching.
- **Make it visible.** Add evidence to your CV and LinkedIn profile as you go. Skills you cannot evidence may as well not exist.

LENS TWO · FOR TEAM LEADERS

Develop the whole team.

You cannot fix what you cannot see. Use this index as the skills column of your matrix, then let the heat map tell you where to invest first.

- **Select 10 to 20 skills** from this index that genuinely drive your team's results. Resist the urge to track everything.
- **Rate every person 0 to 5** against every chosen skill. Do it with them, not to them. Calibration beats precision.
- **Read the heat map.** Red zones, single points of failure, and hidden experts will jump out within minutes.
- **Use the Team leader lens** on every cluster page. Each one tells you how to spot the gap, grow it in the team, and track it on the matrix.

CONTENTS

The ten *clusters*.

<p>01</p> <p>AI and machine intelligence</p> <p>SKILLS 01-10 · P4</p>	<p>02</p> <p>Data and analytics</p> <p>SKILLS 11-20 · P5</p>	<p>03</p> <p>Software, cloud and cyber</p> <p>SKILLS 21-30 · P6</p>	<p>04</p> <p>Commercial and business</p> <p>SKILLS 31-40 · P7</p>	<p>05</p> <p>Sustainability, risk and operations</p> <p>SKILLS 41-50 · P8</p>
<p>06</p> <p>Thinking and problem solving</p> <p>SKILLS 51-60 · P9</p>	<p>07</p> <p>Self management and growth</p> <p>SKILLS 61-70 · P10</p>	<p>08</p> <p>Communication and collaboration</p> <p>SKILLS 71-80 · P11</p>	<p>09</p> <p>Influence and relationships</p> <p>SKILLS 81-90 · P12</p>	<p>10</p> <p>Leadership and people development</p> <p>SKILLS 91-100 · P13</p>

How this list was built.

We synthesised the major 2025 and 2026 workforce skills studies, then applied twenty years of capability framework practice to organise them into ten practical clusters. Every statistic in this guide is attributed. Nothing is invented.

SOURCE 01

WEF Future of Jobs Report 2025

Survey of over 1,000 global employers on the skills rising fastest to 2030.

SOURCE 02

LinkedIn Skills on the Rise 2026

Year on year growth in skill acquisition and hiring success, including a UK list.

SOURCE 03

Coursera Job Skills Report 2026

Enrolment trends from six million enterprise learners across nearly 7,000 organisations.

170M

New roles expected to be created globally by 2030, against 92 million displaced, a net gain of 78 million (World Economic Forum, 2025).

Top 3

AI and big data, networks and cybersecurity, and technological literacy are the three fastest growing skill areas to 2030 (World Economic Forum, 2025).

5 areas

LinkedIn's 2026 UK list groups its fastest rising skills into five areas, spanning AI capability, leadership, culture and communication, and commercial delivery (LinkedIn, 2026).

BEFORE YOU START

Rate yourself before you *build*.

Every skill in this index can be scored on the Upleashed 0 to 5 capability scale, the same doctoral research backed framework behind the Skills Matrix Template and PulseAI. The levels and the maths are fixed. Level 3 is the default target.





<p>0</p> <p>Not required</p> <p>Excluded No expectation that the role needs this skill within the next year. Excluded from the capability calculation.</p>	<p>1</p> <p>In training</p> <p>25% Expected to be proficient within a year. Up to 75% of training complete. Quality requirements not yet understood.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Developing</p> <p>50% Can usually perform the task alone, but complex output still needs checking and verification.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Capable</p> <p>75% · Default target Training complete with consistent quality and productivity. Routine checks can be released back to the business.</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Expert / Trainer</p> <p>100% Prolonged, consistent experience. Works autonomously, owns the skill, and can train others to a high standard.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>Strategic owner</p> <p>100% · Purple flag Defines new processes and skill requirements. Cross functional expertise and a succession candidate.</p>
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THE METHOD

How skills actually *grow*.

Decades of development research, popularised as the 70:20:10 model by Lombardo and Eichinger at the Center for Creative Leadership, points the same way. Most growth comes from doing, supported by people, topped up by study. Plan every skill you build across all three.

<p>70</p> <p>Challenging real work</p> <p>Stretch tasks, new projects, real deadlines, visible consequences. This is where capability is actually forged.</p>	<p>20</p> <p>Learning from others</p> <p>Coaching, mentoring, shadowing, feedback, communities.</p>	<p>10</p> <p>Formal study</p> <p>Courses, books, certifications.</p>
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<p></p> <p>On the job stretch</p> <p>Volunteer for the task one level above your comfort zone. Ship something real, then review it honestly.</p>	<p></p> <p>People and coaching</p> <p>Find one person at Level 4 in your target skill. Shadow them, ask for feedback, copy what works.</p>	<p></p> <p>Courses and certs</p> <p>Coursera, LinkedIn Learning, Microsoft Learn, FutureLearn and OpenLearn cover almost everything here, often free.</p>	<p></p> <p>Deep reading</p> <p>One well chosen book often beats ten videos. Each cluster in this index names the standouts.</p>	<p></p> <p>AI as your tutor</p> <p>Use an AI assistant to explain, quiz, critique and roleplay. It is the cheapest personal tutor ever built.</p>
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<p>STEP 1</p> <p>Pick nine skills</p> <p>Three core, three for your current role, three for the role you want next.</p>	<p>STEP 2</p> <p>Score them 0 to 5</p> <p>Use the scale above. Ask someone who sees your work to sanity check it.</p>	<p>STEP 3</p> <p>Choose one gap</p> <p>The one that unlocks the most value in the next 90 days. Just one.</p>	<p>STEP 4</p> <p>Plan 70:20:10</p> <p>One stretch task, one person to learn from, one course or book.</p>	<p>STEP 5</p> <p>Review quarterly</p> <p>Re-score, capture evidence, pick the next gap. Compounding does the rest.</p>
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READING THE CARDS

How to read each *card*.

<p>01 AI literacy</p> <p>Why now: Understanding what AI can and cannot do is now baseline professional fluency, the way digital literacy was a decade ago. Build it: Take Elements of AI (University of Helsinki, free) or Google's AI Essentials, then run one real weekly task through an AI tool.</p>	<p>Why now explains, in one sentence, why this skill has risen. Where it carries a statistic or a ranking, the source is named right there on the card.</p> <p>Build it gives a practical route: a named free course, a standout book, or a real work habit. Favour the doing over the watching.</p> <p>The Team Leader Lens at the foot of every cluster page shows how to spot the gap, grow it in the team, and track it on your matrix.</p>
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AI and machine *intelligence*.

The WEF ranks AI and big data as the fastest growing skill area to 2030, and AI capability dominates LinkedIn's 2026 lists. This is the cluster reshaping all the others.

01 AI literacy

Why now: Understanding what AI can and cannot do is now baseline professional fluency, the way digital literacy was a decade ago. **Build it:** Take Elements of AI (University of Helsinki, free) or Google's AI Essentials, then run one real weekly task through an AI tool.

02 Prompt engineering and context design

Why now: Named on LinkedIn's 2026 rising list. The quality of AI output tracks the quality of the instructions and context you give it. **Build it:** Study the free prompting guides from Anthropic, OpenAI and Google, and keep a personal library of prompts that worked.

03 Everyday AI tool fluency

Why now: Copilots now sit inside Office, Google Workspace and most CRMs, and the gap between fluent and hesitant users widens monthly. **Build it:** Pick the assistant inside tools you already use and commit one daily task to it for a month.

04 AI agent and workflow orchestration

Why now: The 2026 shift is from single prompts to agents that plan and execute multi step work, and someone must design and supervise them. **Build it:** Build one small automation in Zapier, Make or n8n with an AI step, then add error handling and a human checkpoint.

05 Machine learning fundamentals

Why now: You need not train models to benefit, but knowing how training data, evaluation and drift work helps you judge vendors and spot weak claims. **Build it:** Take DeepLearning.AI's AI for Everyone on Coursera, or Google's free Machine Learning Crash Course.

06 Building with large language models

Why now: Connecting models to your own data through APIs and retrieval is becoming the standard pattern for genuinely useful internal tools. **Build it:** Work through the official Anthropic or OpenAI API quickstarts, then build one retrieval tool over your own documents.

07 Responsible AI and governance

Why now: Data governance and responsible AI are named on LinkedIn's 2026 list, as the EU AI Act and UK guidance raise the bar for safe deployment. **Build it:** Read the ICO's AI and data protection guidance, then draft a one page AI use policy for your own team.

08 AI output evaluation and QA

Why now: Models make confident mistakes, so verification, testing and review are exactly where human value now concentrates. **Build it:** Define what good looks like before you prompt, then check sources, numbers and edge cases after. Make it a habit, not an exception.

09 AI search visibility (GEO and LLMO)

Why now: As buyers ask AI assistants instead of search engines, brands need content machines can find, parse and cite accurately. **Build it:** Learn schema markup and entity based SEO, then test how AI assistants currently describe your organisation.

10 Intelligent automation

Why now: Process optimisation features on LinkedIn's 2026 list, and pairing RPA with AI now automates work that scripts alone never could. **Build it:** Map one repetitive process end to end, then automate it with Power Automate, UiPath Community Edition or Make.

TEAM LEADER LENS

Where to develop your team on AI.

SPOT THE GAP

Ask each person to demo one AI assisted task from their real work. Hesitant demos and "we could automate this" said often but acted on never both reveal the gap fast.

GROW IT IN THE TEAM

Run a monthly AI show and tell where everyone shares one workflow, and pair your most fluent user with your most cautious. Fluency spreads socially.

MATRIX TIP

Add AI literacy as a core skill for every role and target Level 3. Track agent orchestration only for the roles that actually own processes.

Data and *analytics*.

Analytical thinking remains the WEF's most demanded core skill, and financial data analysis and data governance both appear on LinkedIn's 2026 list. Evidence beats opinion.

11 Data literacy and interpretation

Why now: Every function now produces dashboards, and misreading them is more dangerous than ignoring them. **Build it:** Take a free data literacy short course on FutureLearn or OpenLearn, then narrate one real chart aloud each week: what it says, and what it hides.

12 Advanced Excel and spreadsheet modelling

Why now: Still the working language of business data, and modern functions like XLOOKUP, LET and dynamic arrays have quietly made it far more powerful. **Build it:** Microsoft Learn's Excel paths are free. Rebuild one manual report with tables, named ranges and zero hard coded numbers.

13 SQL and database querying

Why now: The fastest route from question to answer in most organisations is still a well written query, with no analyst queue required. **Build it:** Work through the free SQL course on Kaggle Learn, then ask for read access to one real database at work and use it weekly.

14 Data visualisation and dashboards

Why now: Decision makers act on what they can see. Power BI, Tableau and Looker skills convert analysis into action. **Build it:** Follow Microsoft Learn's free PL-300 path or Tableau's free training videos, then replace one recurring slide deck with a live dashboard.

15 Statistics and quantitative reasoning

Why now: Averages, variance, significance and base rates are the immune system against being fooled by data, including AI generated data. **Build it:** Khan Academy's statistics course is free and excellent. Pair it with The Art of Statistics by David Spiegelhalter.

16 Data storytelling

Why now: Insight changes nothing until someone acts on it. Structure, sequencing and narrative move a finding into a decision. **Build it:** Read Storytelling with Data by Cole Nussbaumer Knaflic, then rework one past analysis into a three slide story: context, conflict, decision.

17 Data engineering foundations

Why now: Clean, reliable pipelines are the unglamorous foundation under every dashboard and every AI initiative. **Build it:** Learn the basics of ETL and scheduling with the free dbt Fundamentals course, then document one data flow your team depends on.

18 Data governance and quality

Why now: Named on LinkedIn's 2026 list, because AI amplifies whatever you feed it, including the errors. **Build it:** Define owners, definitions and quality checks for your five most used data fields, and write them down somewhere the whole team works.

19 Python or R for analysis

Why now: When spreadsheets run out of road, a little code goes a long way, and AI assistants have flattened the learning curve dramatically. **Build it:** Start with the free Python for Everybody course, then automate one weekly spreadsheet job with AI assisted code.

20 Experimentation and A/B testing

Why now: Opinions are cheap. Controlled tests settle arguments and compound learning in marketing, product and operations alike. **Build it:** Run one honest A/B test on something you own, a subject line, a page, a process, and write up the result either way.

TEAM LEADER LENS

Where to develop your team on data.

SPOT THE GAP

Ask who built the team's most used spreadsheet and what happens when they are on leave. Single points of failure here are common, invisible and expensive.

GROW IT IN THE TEAM

Set a one report, one owner, one backup rule, and rotate dashboard ownership quarterly so capability spreads instead of pooling in one heroic analyst.

MATRIX TIP

Track data literacy for everyone at Level 3. Reserve deeper skills like SQL or Python for the two or three roles that genuinely need them.

Software, cloud and *cyber*.

21 Cybersecurity fundamentals

Why now: Phishing, ransomware and supply chain attacks now reach every team, so baseline security behaviour is everyone's job, not just IT's. **Build it:** Work through the NCSC's free staff training resources, then switch on a password manager and multi factor authentication everywhere.

22 Cloud platforms

Why now: Most new systems are born in AWS, Azure or Google Cloud, and cloud cost and architecture choices shape what teams can build. **Build it:** Each provider runs free fundamentals training and an entry certification: AWS Cloud Practitioner, Azure Fundamentals or Google Cloud Digital Leader.

23 Modern software development

Why now: Software remains the highest leverage way to scale a process, and Coursera's 2026 report puts software and product development among its three in demand career areas. **Build it:** freeCodeCamp and The Odin Project are free and project based. Ship one small real tool, not ten tutorials.

24 AI assisted development

Why now: Tools like GitHub Copilot, Cursor and Claude have changed how code gets written. The skill is steering, reviewing and testing what they produce. **Build it:** Use an AI pair programmer on a real project for a fortnight, and review every suggestion before accepting it. The discipline is the skill.

25 DevOps and platform engineering

Why now: Shipping safely and often is a competitive weapon, and automating build, test and deploy is what makes it routine. **Build it:** Learn Git, CI/CD and containers through the free GitHub Skills courses and Docker's getting started guide, then automate one deployment.

26 APIs and systems integration

Why now: Modern stacks are assembled, not built from scratch, and the people who connect systems quietly become indispensable. **Build it:** Learn REST basics with Postman's free academy, then connect two tools your team already pays for and remove one manual handoff.

27 Low code and no code building

Why now: Power Apps, Airtable and similar platforms let operations people ship internal tools in days, easing the developer bottleneck. **Build it:** Rebuild one spreadsheet driven process as a simple app with Power Apps or Airtable, and add one automation to it.

28 Version control and collaboration

Why now: Git underpins how modern teams change anything safely, increasingly including documents, data and infrastructure, not just code. **Build it:** GitHub's free Skills courses cover branching, pull requests and review. Practise by versioning something you actually maintain.

29 Privacy and data protection practice

Why now: UK GDPR obligations and customer expectations keep rising, and privacy by design is far cheaper than retrofitting it after a breach. **Build it:** Study the ICO's free guidance and checklists, then run a data audit on one process: what you hold, why, and for how long.

30 Networks and infrastructure

Why now: Hybrid work, cloud and connected devices all stand on networking, which is half of the WEF's second fastest rising skill area. **Build it:** Cisco's free Networking Essentials or CompTIA Network+ materials cover the foundations. Then map your own team's setup and where it could fail.

TEAM LEADER LENS

Where to develop your team on tech.

SPOT THE GAP

Run a consented phishing simulation and count password reuse. The result is your real security baseline, whatever the written policy says.

GROW IT IN THE TEAM

Give developers protected time to adopt AI assisted workflows, and pair them so review standards rise together rather than quietly slip.

MATRIX TIP

Security fundamentals belong on every matrix row at Level 3. Cloud, DevOps and integration depth belong only on the roles that own systems.

Commercial and *business*.

Four of LinkedIn's eight fastest rising skill categories for 2026 are commercial: AI business strategy, revenue growth, financial operations and stakeholder communications.

31 Project management

Why now: Still the backbone skill for turning intent into delivery, and named in LinkedIn's 2026 UK leadership and delivery skill areas. **Build it:** Google's Project Management Certificate or APM's resources cover the craft. Then run one real project with a one page plan, owners and dates.

32 Product management

Why now: Organisations increasingly organise around products, and the role blends customer insight, prioritisation and commercial judgement. **Build it:** Read Inspired by Marty Cagan, then write a one page brief for something you own: problem, users, success measure.

33 Business analysis

Why now: Someone has to translate between what the business wants and what gets built, and AI projects have made that translation more valuable. **Build it:** BCS and IIBA publish entry level pathways. Practise by mapping one process as is and to be before any tool is chosen.

34 Financial literacy and FP&A

Why now: Financial operations and reporting is one of LinkedIn's eight fastest rising categories for 2026. Numbers fluency earns a seat at decisions. **Build it:** Take a free finance for non finance managers course on OpenLearn, then rebuild your team's budget so you can defend every line.

35 Digital marketing and SEO

Why now: Discovery is splitting across search engines, social platforms and AI assistants, and being findable now spans all three. **Build it:** Google Skillshop and HubSpot Academy are free. Pick one page or product and improve its visibility measurably over a quarter.

36 Content creation

Why now: Video and short form content now do the heavy lifting in marketing, sales and internal communication alike. **Build it:** Learn one editing tool properly, CapCut or DaVinci Resolve are free, and publish weekly for a quarter. Volume teaches faster than theory.

37 Sales and CRM craft

Why now: Account development and go to market strategy sit inside LinkedIn's 2026 revenue growth category. Disciplined pipeline work is a skill, not a personality. **Build it:** Salesforce Trailhead and HubSpot Academy offer free structured paths. Then keep one pipeline scrupulously clean for ninety days.

38 Customer experience design

Why now: Service orientation sits in the WEF's core skills top ten, and journey level thinking separates good products from loved ones. **Build it:** Map one customer journey end to end, find the single worst moment, and fix it. Repeat quarterly.

39 E-commerce operations

Why now: Online retail keeps absorbing share, and running storefronts, logistics and conversion well is a transferable operations craft. **Build it:** Shopify's free learning paths cover the full stack. Then own one metric, conversion, returns or delivery time, and move it.

40 Procurement and supply chain analytics

Why now: Supply shocks made resilience a board topic, and LinkedIn's 2026 list includes logistics coordination and process optimisation. **Build it:** CIPS publishes entry resources, and supply chain courses are free on OpenLearn. Map your top five supplier risks.

TEAM LEADER LENS

Where to develop your team commercially.

SPOT THE GAP

Ask each person to explain how the team makes or saves money in two sentences. Vague answers reveal where commercial context never landed.

GROW IT IN THE TEAM

Put one commercial number, revenue, cost or conversion, on the weekly agenda and rotate who tells the story behind it.

MATRIX TIP

Score project management and financial literacy across the whole team. Depth in sales, product or e-commerce belongs to specific roles.

Sustainability, risk and operations.

Environmental stewardship has entered the WEF's top ten rising skills to 2030, and risk and compliance management climbs LinkedIn's 2026 list. The licence to operate cluster.

41 Sustainability and ESG reporting

Why now: Environmental stewardship is in the WEF's top ten rising skills, and UK disclosure expectations keep tightening for suppliers as well as listed firms. **Build it:** IEMA's foundation courses and the GHG Protocol's free guidance are the standard starting points. Draft a simple ESG snapshot for your team.

42 Carbon literacy and net zero planning

Why now: Net zero commitments now flow down supply chains as contract clauses, so carbon numeracy is becoming a commercial skill. **Build it:** The Carbon Literacy Project runs accredited day courses. Then baseline one activity you control and find its biggest lever.

43 Circular economy practice

Why now: Waste is unpriced inefficiency, and circular design thinking turns disposal costs into recovered value. **Build it:** The Ellen MacArthur Foundation publishes free courses and case studies. Redesign one product, package or process to lose less.

44 Risk management and resilience planning

Why now: Resilience, flexibility and agility rank near the top of the WEF's rising skills, and risk thinking is the organisational counterpart. **Build it:** Learn the ISO 31000 vocabulary, then write a one page risk register for your team: top five risks, owners, early warnings.

45 Regulatory compliance and audit readiness

Why now: Policy compliance and safety monitoring appear on LinkedIn's 2026 rising list as AI regulation, data law and sector rules all thicken. **Build it:** Pick the regulation that most affects your work and read the regulator's own guidance, not a summary of it. Keep a simple evidence file.

46 Health, safety and wellbeing compliance

Why now: Wellbeing has moved from poster to duty of care, and hybrid work created risks that older policies never imagined. **Build it:** IOSH Managing Safety or a NEBOSH award covers the fundamentals, and MHFA England trains mental health first aiders.

47 Quality management and Lean

Why now: Operational efficiency is one of LinkedIn's eight fastest rising categories for 2026, and Lean thinking is its most proven toolkit. **Build it:** A free Lean or Six Sigma yellow belt introduction plus one real improvement project beats any amount of theory. Map a process, remove a step.

48 People analytics and workforce planning

Why now: Talent management sits in the WEF's rising top ten, and skills data is becoming the planning currency for hiring and development. **Build it:** CIPD's people analytics resources are a solid base. Start by analysing one dataset you already have: your team's skills matrix.

49 Learning design and knowledge management

Why now: With 39 percent of key skills changing by 2030, teams that capture and transfer knowledge quickly compound the advantage. **Build it:** Read Make It Stick, then turn one expert's head knowledge into a checklist, guide or short video the whole team can use.

50 Technical writing and documentation

Why now: Clear documentation lets processes survive staff changes, audits and AI ingestion alike. It is quiet infrastructure. **Build it:** Google's free Technical Writing courses are excellent. Then rewrite one confusing internal document and measure the questions it stops.

TEAM LEADER LENS

Where to develop your team on operations.

SPOT THE GAP

Ask what happens if your most experienced person left on Friday. The length of the silence is your knowledge management score.

GROW IT IN THE TEAM

Run one improvement cycle per quarter: pick a process, measure it, change one thing, measure again. Publish the result either way.

MATRIX TIP

Compliance basics for your sector belong at Level 3 for everyone. Sustainability and quality depth can sit with one named champion each.

Thinking and problem solving.

51 Analytical thinking

Why now: The WEF's most demanded core skill, and the foundation that every data tool and AI workflow ultimately stands on. **Build it:** Practise structured decomposition: take one messy problem a week and split it into causes, evidence and options on a single page.

52 Creative thinking

Why now: One of the WEF's fastest rising skills to 2030, because routine output is cheap now and original framing is not. **Build it:** Use structured creativity: SCAMPER prompts, deliberate constraints, and quantity before quality. Generate twenty options before judging any.

53 Critical thinking and discernment

Why now: AI generated text, images and audio make verification a daily habit rather than a journalist's specialism. **Build it:** Practise lateral reading: check the source before the claim. The University of Washington's free Calling Bullshit lectures are a brilliant grounding.

54 Complex problem solving

Why now: The problems left for humans are the tangled ones: many causes, many stakeholders, no clean answer. **Build it:** Learn a simple method and use it visibly: define, diagnose, options, decide, review. Write it up so others can challenge the logic.

55 Systems thinking

Why now: Fixes that ignore feedback loops create tomorrow's outages, backlogs and burnout. Seeing the whole system is a competitive sense. **Build it:** Read Thinking in Systems by Donella Meadows, then draw one causal loop diagram of a recurring problem your team faces.

56 Strategic thinking and foresight

Why now: Strategic planning features on LinkedIn's 2026 UK rising skills, as firms plan through technology shifts and volatile demand. **Build it:** Read Good Strategy Bad Strategy by Richard Rumelt, then write a one page strategy for your area: diagnosis, guiding policy, coherent actions.

57 Decision making under uncertainty

Why now: Waiting for complete information is now a competitive disadvantage. Probabilistic judgement beats false certainty. **Build it:** Read Thinking in Bets by Annie Duke, then record ten decisions with a confidence level attached and review them a month later.

58 Curiosity and questioning

Why now: Curiosity and lifelong learning sit in the WEF's rising top ten, and good questions are the steering wheel for every AI tool. **Build it:** Keep a question log. In every meeting, aim to ask one question that reframes the problem rather than confirms the plan.

59 Cognitive flexibility

Why now: Tools, structures and priorities now change mid project, and the ability to drop an old frame quickly is a quiet superpower. **Build it:** Deliberately argue the other side of one decision each week, in writing, before settling. It keeps the mental hinges oiled.

60 Judgement with AI

Why now: Knowing when to trust, check or override a model is fast becoming the differentiating skill in every AI assisted role. **Build it:** For one week, label each AI output you use: accepted, edited or rejected, and why. The patterns in that log are the skill forming.

TEAM LEADER LENS

Where to develop your team's thinking.

SPOT THE GAP

Watch what happens when a plan breaks. Teams short on thinking skills escalate or freeze; strong ones reframe and propose options.

GROW IT IN THE TEAM

Run pre mortems on big decisions and blameless reviews after them. Both make reasoning visible, which is how thinking is taught.

MATRIX TIP

Pick three thinking skills that match your work, not all ten. Critical thinking, problem solving and judgement with AI suit most teams.

Self management and *growth*.

61 Adaptability, resilience and agility

Why now: One of the WEF's fastest rising skills to 2030, because plans now have shorter shelf lives than the people executing them. **Build it:** After every disruption, run a two minute personal review: what changed, what I controlled, what I will do differently. Recovery speed is trainable.

62 Lifelong learning

Why now: With 39 percent of key skills changing by 2030, the meta skill is learning itself, and it sits in the WEF's rising top ten. **Build it:** Block one protected learning hour a week and keep a simple log. Aim for one skill per quarter at Level 3, not five at Level 1.

63 Time management and prioritisation

Why now: Hybrid work and AI tools multiplied the options without multiplying the hours, so ruthless sequencing now beats raw effort. **Build it:** Plan tomorrow's top three tasks the night before, and time box them in the calendar. Review weekly what got displaced and why.

64 Focus and deep work

Why now: Distraction is the default setting of modern work, and sustained attention is now a genuine competitive scarcity. **Build it:** Read Deep Work by Cal Newport, then protect two ninety minute focus blocks a week, notifications off, one defined output each.

65 Accountability and ownership

Why now: Flatter teams and faster cycles mean work increasingly belongs to whoever picks it up, and owners get trusted with more. **Build it:** Close loops visibly: confirm what you own, give updates before being asked, and flag risks early. Reliability compounds quickly.

66 Initiative and proactivity

Why now: AI handles the prescribed work. Humans add value by spotting the unprescribed problem that nobody assigned. **Build it:** Each week, fix or propose one thing outside your job description. Small, finished and useful beats ambitious and stalled.

67 Self awareness and reflection

Why now: Motivation and self awareness sits in the WEF's core skills top ten, and it is the input every feedback loop depends on. **Build it:** Keep a five minute Friday journal: what worked, what did not, one adjustment. Ask one colleague monthly what you should do more of.

68 Stress management and wellbeing

Why now: Sustainable performance beats heroic burnout, and wellbeing is now a measured leadership responsibility, not a perk. **Build it:** Audit your sleep, movement and recovery honestly for a fortnight, then fix the worst one first. The NHS Every Mind Matters resources are free and practical.

69 Growth mindset

Why now: People who treat ability as buildable adopt new tools faster and recover from setbacks quicker, which 2026 demands weekly. **Build it:** Read Mindset by Carol Dweck, then swap one statement of "I can't do X" for "I can't do X yet, and here is my next step" each week.

70 Ethical judgement and integrity

Why now: AI, data and automation hand ordinary roles decisions with real consequences, and trust is the slowest asset to rebuild. **Build it:** Use a simple test on grey calls: would I be comfortable if this decision were published? Discuss one real dilemma openly each quarter.

TEAM LEADER LENS

Where to develop self management.

SPOT THE GAP

Look at deadline patterns, not personalities. Repeated last minute scrambles usually signal prioritisation gaps, not character flaws.

GROW IT IN THE TEAM

Protect focus at team level: meeting free mornings or a no message window. Self management fails where the culture fights it.

MATRIX TIP

These skills are hard to score in public. Let people self assess first, then compare notes in one to ones rather than in the open.

Communication and *collaboration*.

Empathy and active listening sit in the WEF's core skills top ten, and LinkedIn's 2026 UK list names cross functional collaboration and cross cultural communication directly.

71 Clear writing

Why now: Hybrid and AI assisted work runs on written words, and clear writing is now indistinguishable from clear thinking. **Build it:** Read *On Writing Well* by William Zinsser, then halve the length of your next three emails without losing any meaning.

72 Confident speaking and presenting

Why now: Public speaking appears on LinkedIn's 2026 rising list under executive communications. Ideas win or lose in the room. **Build it:** Toastmasters clubs offer cheap, structured practice. Record one talk a month and watch it back. Painful, and faster than any course.

73 Active listening

Why now: Empathy and active listening is a WEF core top ten skill, and it is the half of communication most people skip. **Build it:** In your next three difficult conversations, summarise the other person's point to their satisfaction before replying. Watch what changes.

74 Empathy and perspective taking

Why now: Part of the same WEF core top ten skill, and the raw material for customer insight, teamwork and leadership alike. **Build it:** Before key conversations, write one sentence on what the other person wants and fears. Update it afterwards with what you learned.

75 Collaboration and teamwork

Why now: Cross functional collaboration features on LinkedIn's 2026 UK list, because almost nothing valuable ships from one desk any more. **Build it:** Make your work findable and your handoffs explicit: shared documents, visible status, and no surprise dependencies.

76 Cross functional fluency

Why now: Translators between engineering, finance, marketing and operations are scarce, and they increasingly set project speed. **Build it:** Learn the top ten terms and the core metric of one neighbouring function, and shadow one of their meetings each month.

77 Hybrid and asynchronous working

Why now: Distributed teams are permanent, and the skill is writing decisions down so that work moves while you sleep. **Build it:** Default to async first: a written brief before a meeting and a decision log after it. Reserve live time for debate, not broadcast.

78 Giving and receiving feedback

Why now: Faster cycles need faster course correction, and feedback is the cheapest performance technology there is. **Build it:** Read *Thanks for the Feedback* by Stone and Heen, then ask one person each week: what is one thing I could do better?

79 Conflict resolution

Why now: Conflict mitigation ranked second on LinkedIn's 2025 rising skills list, and hybrid work gives disagreements more places to fester. **Build it:** Read *Crucial Conversations*, then practise naming the issue early and privately: facts first, story second, request third.

80 Cultural intelligence and inclusion

Why now: Cross cultural communication and DEIB capability feature on LinkedIn's 2026 UK list as teams span borders and backgrounds. **Build it:** Take a free cultural intelligence course on FutureLearn, then audit one meeting: who spoke, who was interrupted, who decided.

TEAM LEADER LENS

Where to develop communication.

SPOT THE GAP

Count the clarification messages after each briefing. A high volume means the original communication failed, whoever gets blamed.

GROW IT IN THE TEAM

Set a one page brief standard for any work over a day, and rotate meeting chairing so facilitation skills spread across the team.

MATRIX TIP

Rate writing, listening and feedback for every row of the matrix. They are the three communication skills no role escapes.

Influence and *relationships*.

81 Emotional intelligence

Why now: As AI absorbs analytical routine, reading and regulating emotion becomes the distinctly human edge in every interaction. **Build it:** Read Permission to Feel by Marc Brackett or Goleman's Emotional Intelligence, and name your own state before high stakes conversations.

82 Negotiation

Why now: Budgets, salaries, supplier terms and scope are all negotiated, and a small skill gap here compounds into large money. **Build it:** Read Never Split the Difference by Chris Voss, then prepare every negotiation in writing: targets, walkaway point, and their likely interests.

83 Influencing without authority

Why now: Matrix structures and cross functional projects mean most influence now happens sideways, with no org chart to lean on. **Build it:** Read Influence by Robert Cialdini, then map the stakeholders for one initiative: who decides, who advises, and what each values.

84 Stakeholder management

Why now: Stakeholder communications is one of LinkedIn's eight rising categories for 2026, and projects die of neglected stakeholders, not bad plans. **Build it:** Keep a live stakeholder map for your main project: interest, influence, last contact. Update it fortnightly, not when trouble starts.

85 Networking and relationship building

Why now: Relationship development is named on LinkedIn's 2026 list, and opportunity still travels through people faster than through job boards. **Build it:** Adopt a give first rule: share one useful introduction, article or insight each week, and reconnect with two dormant contacts a month.

86 Customer focus and service orientation

Why now: Service orientation and customer service sits in the WEF core top ten. Proximity to the customer is proximity to the truth. **Build it:** Listen to real customer calls or read raw feedback weekly, then bring one verbatim customer sentence into every planning meeting.

87 Storytelling

Why now: Data informs, but stories move. Storytelling turns strategy, change and results into something people actually retell. **Build it:** Read Resonate by Nancy Duarte, then rebuild one routine update as a story: situation, complication, resolution, and what you need.

88 Facilitation and meeting leadership

Why now: Meetings are the most expensive thing most teams do, and facilitation is the difference between momentum and theatre. **Build it:** For every meeting you run, set a decision goal, send a one page pre read, and end with owners and dates. Cancel anything without all three.

89 Professional presence and personal brand

Why now: Hybrid work means your reputation increasingly forms in writing and on screens, often before you ever enter the room. **Build it:** Tidy your LinkedIn profile so it states what you do and the problems you solve, then share one genuine work learning per month.

90 Trust and dependability

Why now: AI can draft anything, so the premium shifts to people whose word reliably becomes reality. **Build it:** Track your own promise keeping for a month: everything committed, everything delivered. Close the gap before raising the volume.

TEAM LEADER LENS

Where to develop influence.

SPOT THE GAP

Notice whose proposals get adopted and whose get politely parked. The difference is usually influence skill, not idea quality.

GROW IT IN THE TEAM

Send people to present their own work to senior audiences instead of presenting it for them. Brief, rehearse, debrief.

MATRIX TIP

Influence skills predict who is ready to lead. Watch for Level 4s here when planning succession, not just technical scores.

Leadership and people *development.*

Leadership and social influence has climbed 22 percentage points as a core skill since 2023 in WEF data, and talent development is named on LinkedIn's 2026 list. The multiplier cluster.

91 Leadership and social influence

Why now: Up 22 percentage points as a core skill since 2023 in WEF data, one of the steepest climbs recorded. Teams change faster than org charts. **Build it:** Lead something small but real: a project, a community, an improvement. CMI and ILM offer recognised UK pathways when you want structure.

92 Coaching and mentoring

Why now: Coaching is how skills actually transfer inside teams, and it scales a leader far beyond their own hours. **Build it:** Read *The Coaching Habit* by Michael Bungay Stanier, then replace advice with questions once a day. Start with: what is the real challenge here for you?

93 Delegation and empowerment

Why now: Leader bottlenecks are now system bottlenecks. Delegation is how capability, and capacity, compound together. **Build it:** Delegate one meaningful task per fortnight with a clear outcome, authority and check in points. Resist taking it back at the first wobble.

94 Talent development and succession

Why now: Talent development features on LinkedIn's 2026 list and talent management in the WEF's rising top ten. Growing people is measured work now. **Build it:** Keep a simple plan per person: one strength to deepen, one gap to close, one experience to gain this quarter. Review it monthly.

95 Change leadership

Why now: With transformation constant, leading people through change gracefully separates adoption from quiet resistance. **Build it:** Read *Switch* by Chip and Dan Heath, then for your next change name what stays the same as clearly as what changes. People anchor on continuity.

96 Vision setting and goal alignment

Why now: Autonomy without alignment is chaos. Clear goals let distributed teams make a thousand good decisions unsupervised. **Build it:** Read *Measure What Matters* by John Doerr, then write one objective and three measurable key results for your team this quarter. Publish them.

97 Psychological safety

Why now: Google's Project Aristotle research found it the standout dynamic of its most effective teams, and Amy Edmondson's work shows why: silence hides risk. **Build it:** Read *The Fearless Organization* by Edmondson. Respond to bad news with thanks before analysis, and admit your own mistakes first.

98 Leading hybrid human and AI teams

Why now: Managers now allocate work across people and AI agents, and AI business strategy is one of LinkedIn's eight rising categories for 2026. **Build it:** Inventory your team's tasks: automate, augment or human only. Redesign one workflow a quarter, and involve the team in the redesign.

99 Recognition and motivation

Why now: Motivation and self awareness sits in the WEF core top ten, and recognition is its cheapest, most neglected fuel. **Build it:** Give one piece of specific, timely recognition per person per fortnight, tied to behaviour rather than personality. Specific beats lavish.

100 Skills based workforce planning

Why now: Skills, not job titles, are becoming the planning unit for hiring and development, and 63 percent of employers call skills gaps their biggest transformation barrier. **Build it:** Start with a skills matrix: list the skills your strategy needs, rate the team honestly from 0 to 5, and let the gaps set the plan. This index is your menu.

TEAM LEADER LENS

Where to develop your leaders.

SPOT THE GAP

Ask each manager to name their successor and their team's top three skill gaps. Hesitation on either is the development need.

GROW IT IN THE TEAM

Give emerging leaders real stretch with safety nets: a project to own, a coach to lean on, and a review that rewards learning.

MATRIX TIP

Level 5 is purple for a reason: strategic ownership, not just mastery. Reserve it for people who grow the skill in others.

From list to living *matrix*.

One hundred skills is a menu, not a to do list. Here is the method that turns this index into measurable progress, whether you are developing yourself or a whole team.

Quick answer: Nobody develops 100 skills. Choose nine, rate them honestly from 0 to 5, close one gap per quarter, and make the whole thing visible. That is the entire method.

PICK 3 · CORE

Skills every role needs

The non negotiables of your team or trade: often AI literacy, clear writing and data literacy. Target Level 3, Capable, for everyone.

PICK 3 · ROLE

Skills your job is paid for

The craft of your specific role, chosen from the cluster pages. Target Level 4 here, because this is where your reputation lives.

PICK 3 · GROWTH

Skills your next role needs

Borrow from the cluster one level up: influence, coaching, strategic thinking. Reaching Level 2 to 3 this year is genuine progress.

Team member	AI literacy	Data storytelling	Project management	Giving feedback	Judgement with AI
Priya · Analyst	4	3	2	3	2
Sam · Marketing	2	1	3	4	3
Leah · Operations	3	4	4	2	1
Tom · Team lead	1	2	5	3	4

A live matrix turns this index into decisions. Reading down a column shows cover and single points of failure: one person at Level 1 on data storytelling is a risk, a whole column of them is a plan. Reading across a row shows each person's next development conversation. Level 3, Capable, is the default target; purple Level 5 means strategic ownership, someone who grows the skill in others.

FOR INDIVIDUALS · FREE

Map yourself with Insynode

Insynode is our free personal skills mapping tool. Build your own nine skill profile, rate yourself on the same 0 to 5 scale, and track each quarter's progress. Pair it with the free 5x5 matrix builder if you prefer a spreadsheet.

skillsmatrixtemplate.com/insynode.html

FOR TEAM LEADERS

Map your team with the Skills Matrix Template

Start with the free 5x5 template at skillsmatrixtemplate.com/free-template.html. When you are ready for the full Excel system, with PulseAI summaries that turn scores into plain English actions, the complete template is a one off £199.

skillsmatrixtemplate.com/buy.html

The quarterly rhythm: rate in week one, pick one gap each, build for eleven weeks using the routes in this guide, then re rate and update the matrix. Four cycles a year, visible to everyone, beats any annual review.

References and small *print*.

Every statistic in this guide traces to a named, published source. Where no source is cited, the entry reflects editorial judgement about UK workplace relevance in 2026, clearly written as such.

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How this index was built

We started from the three largest current skills datasets: the World Economic Forum's employer survey to 2030, LinkedIn's 2026 Skills on the Rise analysis of member data, and Coursera's 2026 report on six million enterprise learners. We then organised 100 skills into ten clusters of ten, balancing hard and soft equally, and weighted the selection towards UK workplace relevance. Book and course mentions are editorial picks of well regarded resources, not paid placements. No statistic in this guide has been invented, rounded up, or borrowed without attribution.

About Skills Matrix Template

Skills Matrix Template, by Upleashed Limited, is the Excel based capability system used by over 148,000 teams worldwide, with more than 106.5 million skills assessments delivered. It uses the same 0 to 5 scale you have seen throughout this guide, with Level 3, Capable, as the default target and purple Level 5 reserved for strategic ownership. No subscription. No IT department. No drama.

Small print

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Skills gaps, made *visible*.

The free 5x5 builder and Insynode are waiting at skillsmatrixtemplate.com, and the full template turns this whole index into your team's heat map. If this guide helped, share it with one person who is planning their 2026 development.

