

# How to overcome the skills gap with the staff you already have



By [Lyndy van den Barselaar](#)

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The Covid-19 pandemic fast-forwarded the world of work to a technologically advanced future where employees can work remotely for organisations across the globe. While this has changed the view of work, giving employees a taste of flexibility they have never experienced before and opening up opportunities that never existed before, it has also led employees in search of more than just a job as they now seek out purpose and fulfilment from their work. This is driving the great reawakening or great resignation globally which, [according to McKinsey](#), has already seen more than 19-million workers in the United States alone resign since April 2021.



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While South Africa's employment landscape differs from that of the US and many other regions around the world, the country is not shielded from the great resignation or the global skills shortage that companies are facing today. This is supported by [Allianz Risk Barometer 2022](#) which ranks a shortage of skilled workforce eighth in its list of top 10 concerns for business in South Africa, up from the ninth position in the previous year. According to the report, attracting and retaining workers has rarely been more challenging, particularly in the engineering, construction, real estate, public service and healthcare sectors.

While finding new staff to fill the skills gap is a key concern for many organisations, companies should look to retaining their existing skilled staff as a first step. One way that companies can overcome employee attrition is by providing a line of sight to a career that allows employees to learn, grow, and have a positive impact. Companies that provide the necessary upskilling, training and career pathing will not only drive productivity and retention of their current talent but also help to attract the best talent in the market. To achieve this, there are a few things companies can do to build a career development strategy that will attract and retain talent.

## Broaden the definition of career growth

Ensure that your organisation has a broad definition of career growth beyond just promotions. Think of ways workers can grow within a role, grow within a function, redeploy across functions and even grow outside of the organisation.

Today, careers are much more of a lattice than a ladder and it is important to consider development outside of the organisation, like the benefits that come from volunteering in the community, on boards or committees.

## **Empower employees to own their careers**

When employees take ownership of their careers, they feel a sense of purpose and belonging. Encourage them to explore their strengths and values and how they align with those of the organisation. Ensuring employees have mechanisms for getting feedback, such as 360 tools and career assessments, can be helpful. It is also important to teach employees how to network across the organisation.

## **Train leaders as career coaches**

All managers should be expected to act as career coaches, using powerful questions to help employees explore their connection to their work. Questions such as, "What gets you excited at work?" "What is your dream job?" "How can I support you in making progress toward it?"

Through coaching, managers can help employees uncover deeper meaning and purpose as well as opportunities for growth for the future. These coaching conversations will also make employees feel heard and valued. If managers are reluctant to adopt this role or are still learning how to coach, enlist certified career coaches to assist and guide them.

## **Accelerate careers of underrepresented groups**

Business Resource Groups (BRGs) are one way to foster inclusiveness and enhance professional growth but they may not be enough on their own. Consider establishing a mentorship programme within the BRG or through another formal programme or informal network. It is also important to provide mentors with the support they need to understand their role and the specific ways they can support their mentees.

If current and potential employees see a clear career path to learn, grow, and be connected to impactful and meaningful work, they will feel motivated and far more likely to stay at an organisation, avoid employee attrition and reduce the skills gap. This necessitates alignment between individuals' career goals and an employer's approach to creating career growth opportunities.

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