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HUMAN SKILLS 2.0

THE NEW CAPABILITY ERA

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WHITEPAPER

INTRODUCTION

The workplace is evolving at unprecedented speed, driven by the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and advanced automation. While machines increasingly handle routine cognitive and administrative tasks, there is a driving need for new critical human skills to balance the load - Human Skills 2.0. These capabilities allow workers to navigate uncertainty, exercise judgement, and interact effectively in ways that AI cannot replicate.

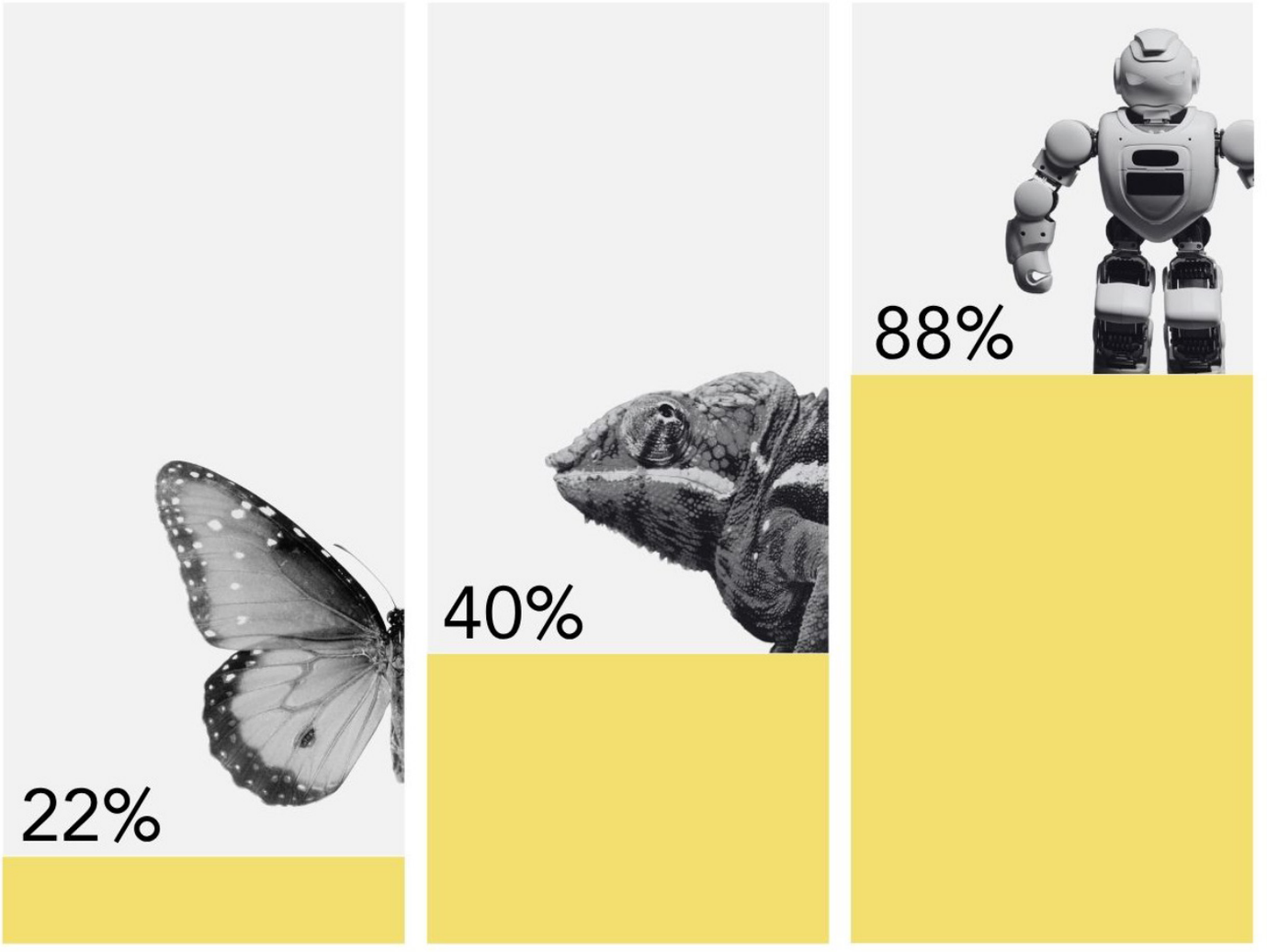
Recent surveys illustrate the rapid penetration of AI in business. McKinsey's 2025 survey found that 88% of organisations now use AI in at least one business function, up from 78% in 2024, with adoption particularly advanced in technology, media/telecom, and healthcare. Early implementations focused on automating routine tasks, such as data entry, coding, and summarisation. Today, organisations are redesigning workflows around human-AI collaboration, rather than siloed automation, allowing humans to focus on judgement-intensive and creative work.

This shift is reflected in the evolving skills landscape. As AI takes on more predictable work, demand for complex and human-centric skills is rising sharply. The World Economic Forum's 2025 Future of Jobs Report highlights that nearly 40% of core skills are expected to change by 2030, with employers placing growing importance on analytical thinking, resilience, adaptability, creativity, and leadership. McKinsey reports a parallel surge in demand for AI fluency, as employees increasingly need to frame questions, interpret outputs and integrate AI insights into decision-making. Conversely predictable or rules-based tasks including clerical roles or routine coding, face the greatest exposure to automation.

AI's strengths complement but do not replace these human capabilities. Machines excel at high-volume computation, pattern recognition and processing large datasets with consistency. They can scan millions of images for anomalies, summarise thousands of documents, and even assist in coding or customer service. However, AI struggles in novel, ambiguous, or context-rich situations, and cannot reliably exercise ethical judgement, empathy, or nuanced decision-making. Humans remain essential for framing strategy, interpreting outputs, negotiating conflicts, and leading teams, activities that define the enduring value of Human Skills 2.0.

Quantitative projections reinforce this collaborative outlook. The WEF estimates that 22% of today's jobs will be transformed by 2030, with 14% representing new roles and 8% displaced. PwC analyses of nearly a billion job postings confirms that even in highly automatable occupations, employment and wages have increased, highlighting AI as augmentation rather than replacement. High-performing organisations combine AI deployment with investments in human capital: teams with trust, empathy, and agile leadership outperform peers even as AI multiplies productivity.

The implications are clear: work is no longer a binary choice between humans or machines. Human Skills 2.0 - the cognitive, social, and adaptive capabilities that complement AI - are now central to individual and organisational success. Developing these skills is not optional; it is essential for thriving in a dynamic, technology-augmented world where continuous learning, creativity and judgement define the workforce of the future.



Jobs Expected to Transform by 2030

Core Skills Changing by 2030

AI Adoption in Organisations

DEFINING HUMAN SKILLS 2.0

As the nature of work becomes more complex, dynamic, and interconnected, the capabilities that differentiate high performance are increasingly human. Human Skills 2.0 refer to advanced cognitive, social, and adaptive capabilities that enable individuals to navigate ambiguity, solve complex problems, collaborate effectively, and make sound judgements in evolving environments. These skills build on traditional "soft skills" but emphasise higher-order thinking, deeper self-awareness, and more intentional, values-driven action.

As the nature of work becomes more complex, dynamic, and interconnected, the capabilities that differentiate high performance are

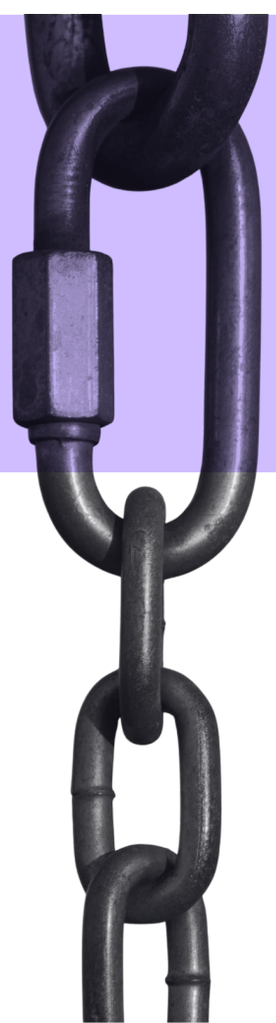
increasingly human.

Critical Thinking & Metacognition

Critical thinking involves framing problems, analysing information, and reflecting on one's own thinking. While AI and automation can process large datasets and generate outputs quickly, humans are needed to interpret results, identify bias, and ask the right questions. Research highlights a growing tension between efficiency and thinking depth: overreliance on automated systems can erode essential metacognitive skills, reducing independent problem-solving and ethical reasoning.

Creativity & Innovation

Creativity involves generating novel ideas, while innovation encompasses applying these ideas effectively to solve problems or create value. Skills such as lateral thinking, ideation, and experimentation fall within this cluster. As AI systems become capable of producing content, designs, and even patterns, human creativity distinguishes value by integrating intuition, aesthetic judgement, and cross-domain knowledge. In practice, this means using AI as a co-creator rather than a substitute, enabling organisations to pursue novel strategies, products, or services that machines alone could not envision.



Emotional Intelligence & Collaboration

Emotional intelligence, comprising empathy, social awareness, and the ability to influence and persuade, supports effective collaboration, conflict resolution, and leadership. Social sensing allows individuals to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics, while persuasive communication drives alignment and collective action. In AI-rich workplaces, where many tasks are automated, human relational skills become critical for managing teams, engaging stakeholders, and creating psychologically safe environments. Machines lack the capacity for genuine empathy or nuanced interpersonal judgement; humans fill this gap by fostering connection, trust, and motivation.

AI and Automation	Human Skills 2.0
AI an process large datasets and generate outputs quickly.	*Enable individuals to navigate ambiguity, solve complex problems, collaborate effectively, and make sound judgements in evolving environments.*
AI systems become capable of producing content, designs, and even patterns.	*Human creativity distinguishes value by integrating intuition, aesthetic judgement, and cross-domain knowledge.*
AI lacks the core components of human social interaction.	*Emotional intelligence includes empathy, social awareness, and the ability to influence and collaborate.*

Learning Agility & Adaptability

Learning agility is the capacity to acquire new knowledge and skills rapidly, reflect on experiences, and adapt to changing conditions. Adaptability complements this by allowing individuals to adjust behaviours and strategies in response to evolving contexts. As AI transforms job roles and organisational processes, workers must continuously reskill, unlearn obsolete methods, and embrace uncertainty. Curiosity and reflective practices amplify these capabilities, enabling humans to leverage AI tools effectively while remaining flexible in the face of disruption.

Emotional Intelligence & Collaboration

Emotional intelligence includes empathy, social awareness, and the ability to influence and collaborate effectively. These skills underpin trust, communication, and team cohesion, factors that are increasingly important in hybrid and AI-augmented workplaces.

Research consistently shows that AI lacks the core components of human social interaction, including meaningful emotional feedback and relational understanding. This limitation has tangible consequences: increased reliance on AI in collaborative settings has been linked to higher levels of loneliness and emotional fatigue among employees.

Conversely, emotionally intelligent leadership significantly improves team performance, behaviours, and organisational outcomes. Human empathy and social sensing are therefore essential not only for collaboration but for maintaining psychological safety, motivation, and engagement in increasingly digital work environments.

WHY HUMAN SKILLS 2.0 MATTER

As AI automates routine and technical tasks, value shifts toward the skills that complement, guide, and challenge machine intelligence. Human Skills 2.0 enable individuals and organisations to:in increasingly digital work environments.

- Interrogate and refine AI outputs through critical thinking
- Generate novel value through creativity and innovation
- Sustain effective collaboration through emotional intelligence
- Adapt continuously through learning agility
- Ensure responsible use of technology through ethical judgement

Together, these capabilities form the foundation of resilient, future-ready organisations. The evidence is clear: the most successful outcomes do not come from AI alone, but from humans who can think, create, connect, adapt, and lead responsibly in partnership with it.

SCIENCE BEHIND IT

The importance of Human Skills 2.0 is not theoretical. A growing body of interdisciplinary research, spanning cognitive neuroscience, psychology, and organisational case studies, demonstrates that these capabilities are fundamental to how humans learn, perform, and create value in an AI-driven world.

Cognitive Neuroscience: How Humans Learn, Adapt, and Innovate

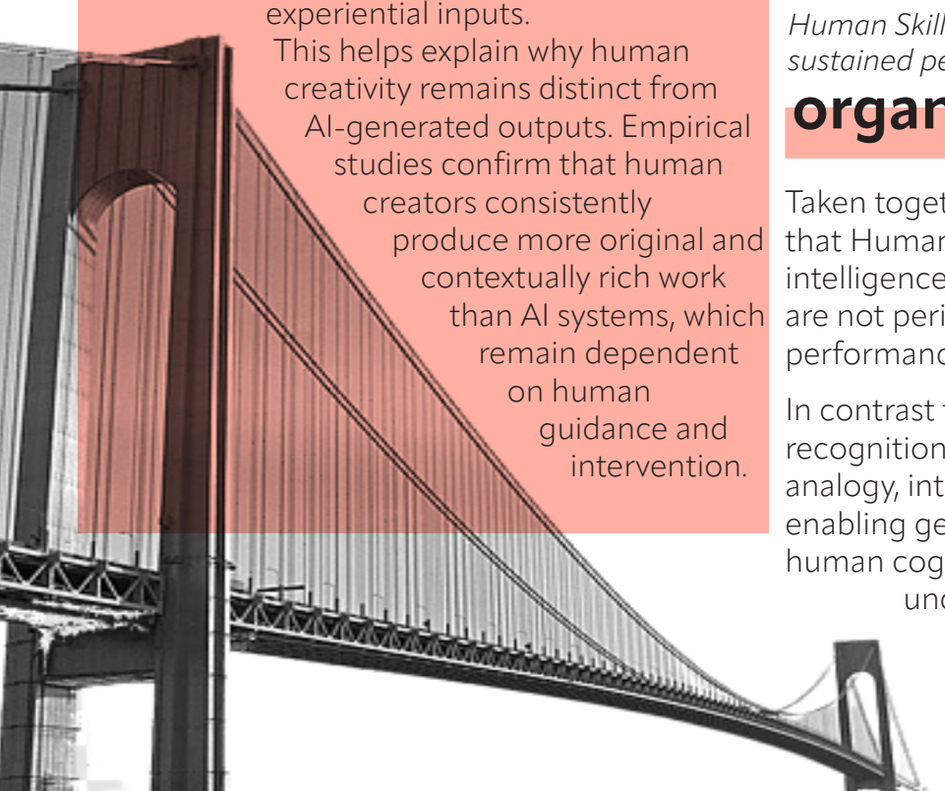
Cognitive neuroscience provides strong evidence that human learning and adaptability are rooted in the brain's plasticity, its ability to reorganise and form new neural

connections in response to experience. This underpins our capacity for continuous learning, creativity, and complex problem-solving.

Research shows that metacognitive strategies, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's thinking, significantly enhance learning outcomes. Individuals who actively engage in these processes demonstrate improved understanding, motivation, and reasoning performance.xi These findings reinforce the importance of self-awareness and reflection as core components of effective learning in technology-rich environments.

Neuroscience also highlights that creativity emerges from the interaction of multiple brain networks, integrating cognitive, emotional, and experiential inputs.

This helps explain why human creativity remains distinct from AI-generated outputs. Empirical studies confirm that human creators consistently produce more original and contextually rich work than AI systems, which remain dependent on human guidance and intervention.



Psychology & Behavioural Science: Motivation, Resilience, and Social Cognition

Psychological and behavioural research further demonstrates that performance is not driven by technical capability alone, but by motivation, mindset, and social dynamics.

Studies on learning and performance consistently show that individuals with a growth mindset, those who believe abilities can be developed, are more likely to persist, seek feedback, and adapt to change. These traits are closely linked to learning agility and resilience, which are increasingly critical in fast-evolving, AI-enabled workplaces.xiii

Social and emotional factors are equally important. Research highlights that emotionally intelligent leadership improves team behaviours, engagement, and overall performance outcomes. Teams characterised by trust, empathy, and psychological safety are more collaborative, innovative, and productive.xiv

At the same time, evidence suggests that AI-heavy environments can inadvertently undermine these human dynamics. Studies of employee-AI collaboration show increases in loneliness and emotional fatigue when human interaction is reduced. This reinforces the importance of human connection, empathy, and leadership in maintaining engagement and wellbeing.xv

Human Skills 2.0 ... are not peripheral, but central to sustained performance and

organisational success.

Taken together, behavioural science makes clear that Human Skills 2.0, particularly emotional intelligence, resilience, and social awareness, are not peripheral, but central to sustained performance and organisational success.

In contrast to AI, which relies on pattern recognition and existing data, humans bring analogy, intuition, and cross-domain insight, enabling genuinely novel thinking. This makes human cognition uniquely suited to innovation in uncertain and complex environments.

CASE STUDY: PWC

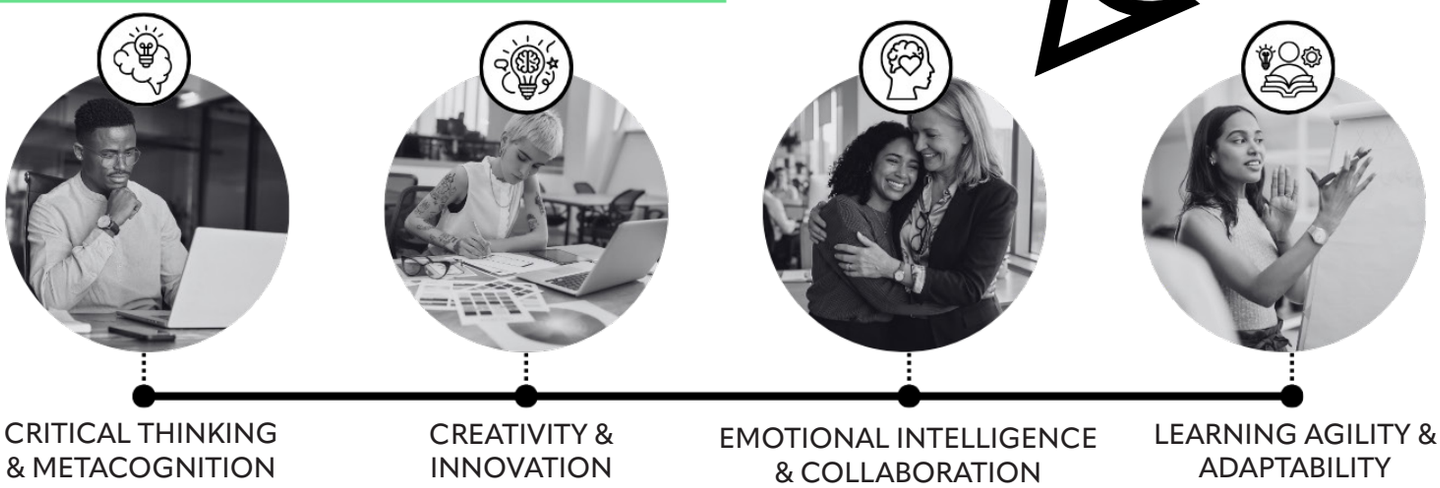
The concept of Human Skills 2.0 is not theoretical. Leading organisations are already redesigning how work, learning, and capability development function in practice. PwC provides a clear example of how human skills can be deliberately developed to complement AI at scale.

From AI Adoption to AI-Native Workforce

PwC recognised early that simply deploying AI tools would not deliver sustained value. While AI could enhance efficiency and automate routine tasks, it also introduced new risks: over-reliance on outputs, reduced critical thinking, and potential erosion of professional judgement.
In response, PwC shifted its strategy from AI adoption to building an "AI-native workforce" one in which employees are not only fluent in AI tools, but also equipped with the human skills required to interpret, challenge, and apply them effectively.xvi

This reflects a core principle of Human Skills 2.0: **As AI capability increases, the need for higher-order human judgement, creativity, and adaptability also intensifies.**

Human Skills 2.0 framework



Embedding Human Skills 2.0 into the Core of Work

PwC's approach is distinguished by its integration of human and technical capability into a single system rather than treating them as separate domains.

At the centre of this is a structured **Human + AI Skillset**, comprising:

- **AI capabilities:** data literacy, prompt engineering, responsible AI use
- **Human Skills 2.0 capabilities:** critical thinking, creativity, emotional intelligence, judgement xvii

This directly maps onto the Human Skills 2.0 framework:

- **Critical Thinking & Metacognition:** challenging AI outputs and identifying bias
- **Creativity & Innovation:** using AI as a co-creator to generate novel solutions
- **Emotional Intelligence & Collaboration:** maintaining trust and connection in AI-augmented teams
- **Learning Agility & Adaptability:** continuously updating skills as AI evolves

Rather than positioning AI as a replacement for human capability, PwC treats it as a multiplier of human potential.

Learning in the Flow of Work
A key shift in PwC's model is moving learning from the classroom into everyday work.

Through its Learning Collective and Network AI Academy:
- Over 315,000 employees have engaged in AI upskilling
- AI tools (e.g. Copilot and ChatGPT Enterprise) are embedded into daily workflows
- Learning is delivered through real projects, simulations, and collaborative problem-solving

This approach reinforces metacognition and application, key elements highlighted in the science behind Human Skills 2.0. Employees are not just learning about AI; they are learning how to think with it.

Over ...

315,000

employees have engaged in AI upskilling

CULTIVATING HUMAN SKILLS 2.0

From training delivery to capability building
As organisations seek to develop Human Skills 2.0 - such as critical thinking, emotional intelligence, creativity, and adaptability - a consistent challenge emerges: traditional training does not reliably translate into behaviour change.

This is because Human Skills 2.0 are fundamentally different from technical skills. They are contextual, behavioural, and developed through experience rather than instruction. As a result, building them requires a shift in approach, from delivering learning content to designing environments where skills are practised, reflected on, and applied in real work.

Research from the OECD reinforces this distinction, highlighting that the value of adult learning depends not only on participation, but on whether skills are actively used in the workplace. Without application, capability development remains theoretical rather than transformational.

A more effective model therefore rests on three interconnected pillars:
1. **Learner readiness** – preparing individuals and organisations to learn
2. **Experiential learning design** – developing skills through practice
3. **Workplace application and reinforcement** – embedding behaviour change

1. **Learner Readiness: Creating the conditions for development**

A critical but often overlooked factor in capability building is whether individuals are actually ready to engage in learning that challenges how they think and behave.
Across OECD countries, only around 40% of adults participate in job-related training annually, with participation skewed toward those already most skilled. This highlights a structural issue: those who may benefit most from development are often least likely to access or engage with it.

More importantly, even when training is available, effectiveness is shaped by readiness factors such as motivation, psychological safety, and perceived relevance. Without these, learners are unlikely to fully engage in reflective or behavioural change.

This is particularly significant for Human Skills 2.0. Skills such as critical thinking and emotional intelligence require individuals to:

- reflect on their own assumptions and behaviour
- engage with uncertainty and ambiguity
- be open to feedback and change

Without readiness, learning remains surface-level.

In practice, readiness is strengthened through:

- clear connection between learning and real work challenges
- leadership signalling that development is valued
- creating psychological safety for experimentation and reflection

Ensuring learners arrive not just informed, but prepared to actively engage with and

challenge their own thinking.

At Ashorne Hill, this principle is frequently utilised through pre-programme engagement and contextualisation, ensuring learners arrive not just informed, but prepared to actively engage with and challenge their own thinking. In many programmes, this takes the form of a reverse classroom approach, where participants are first exposed to core theoretical concepts and guided tasks prior to live sessions.

This pre-work is designed not as passive reading, but as an active cognitive warm-up: encouraging reflection, initial application, and the surfacing of assumptions before learners enter the learning environment. As a result, in-person or virtual sessions are able to focus less on content delivery and more on discussion, experimentation, feedback, and applied problem-solving.

This approach strengthens learner readiness by ensuring that time together is used for deeper engagement with Human Skills 2.0 in practice, rather than introducing foundational concepts for the first time. It also reinforces a key principle of effective capability development: learning is most powerful when it begins before the session and continues long after it ends.

2. Experiential Learning: Where Human Skills are developed

Once readiness is established, the question becomes how Human Skills 2.0 are built.

The evidence is clear**: these skills are not transferred through instruction; they are developed through experience.** Adult learning theory consistently shows that active, applied learning is significantly more effective than passive approaches for complex skills.

This is particularly evident when examining how different Human Skills 2.0 capabilities are actually developed in practice.

Critical Thinking & Problem Solving are strengthened when learners are required to move beyond frameworks and actively construct their own approach to ambiguity. This involves interpreting incomplete information, identifying assumptions, and justifying decisions in real time. In practice, this means working through complex scenarios where there is no single correct answer, and where learners must explicitly explain why they have chosen a particular course of action. Development therefore comes from repeatedly practising judgement, not from learning models of how to think critically.

Emotional Intelligence & Collaboration develop through exposure to real interpersonal dynamics where outcomes are not purely technical, but relational. Skills such as empathy, influence, and conflict navigation are built when individuals must respond to different perspectives, manage tension, and adjust their communication in the moment.

Structured reflection on these interactions is key, helping learners understand not just what happened, but how their behaviour shaped the outcome. This is where facilitated group work and feedback-based learning become critical to shifting behaviour.

Creativity & Innovation are strengthened through deliberate exposure to uncertainty, constraint, and iterative experimentation. Rather than seeking the "right answer," learners are encouraged to explore multiple possible approaches, test ideas quickly, and refine thinking based on feedback. This builds comfort with ambiguity and strengthens the ability to reframe problems from different angles. Over time, this process develops the confidence to move beyond conventional solutions and generate original, workable ideas.

Across all clusters, the common principle is the same:

Human skills are developed through
doing, not knowing.

This is where experiential design becomes critical, creating safe but challenging environments where individuals can practise new behaviours, receive feedback, and adjust in real time.

3. Application and Reinforcement: Turning learning into capability

Even well-designed experiential learning will fail if it is not reinforced in the workplace.

The Decay Factor:

The OECD emphasises that the effectiveness of training is determined by how far newly acquired skills are used in real job contexts. Without application, skills quickly decay or remain isolated to the learning environment.

For Human Skills 2.0, this is especially important because:

- behaviours are context-dependent
- judgement improves through repetition and feedback
- interpersonal dynamics vary across situations

This requires a commitment toward structured, ongoing application in the flow of work. In practice, this means creating deliberate opportunities for individuals to apply new skills to real challenges, reflect on their effectiveness, and refine their approach over time.

Effective reinforcement is therefore not passive,

it is designed.

It includes:

- embedding new behaviours into day-to-day work
- manager involvement in coaching and feedback
- structured reflection following real experiences
- alignment between learning outcomes and performance expectations
- facilitated, peer-based environments where individuals work through live challenges and receive feedback on how they think, decide, and interact

These facilitated environments, often delivered through action learning sets, are critical because they connect skill development directly to real work. Rather than treating learning as separate from performance, individuals are supported to apply capabilities such as critical thinking, influencing, and problem solving while actively working on meaningful business challenges. The combination of action, reflection, and peer feedback creates a continuous cycle of development, enabling skills to be tested, adapted, and embedded in context.

For example, developing resilience or adaptability is not achieved in a single workshop, it emerges through repeated exposure to challenge, reflection on response, and reinforcement over time. Similarly, critical thinking becomes embedded when individuals are consistently expected to question assumptions, justify decisions, and evaluate outcomes in their actual roles.

The implication is clear: Human Skills 2.0 are not built in isolated learning moments, but through sustained engagement with real work, supported by structure, facilitation, and reflection.

ENABLING HUMAN SKILLS 2.0 IN PRACTICE

A learning design approach that focuses on three practical principles

Human Skill 2.0

1. Preparation

- *Introduce key concepts*
- *Existing thinking patterns*
- *Real workplace challenges*

2. Application

- *Interpret ambiguity*
- *Test assumptions*
- *Make and justify decisions*

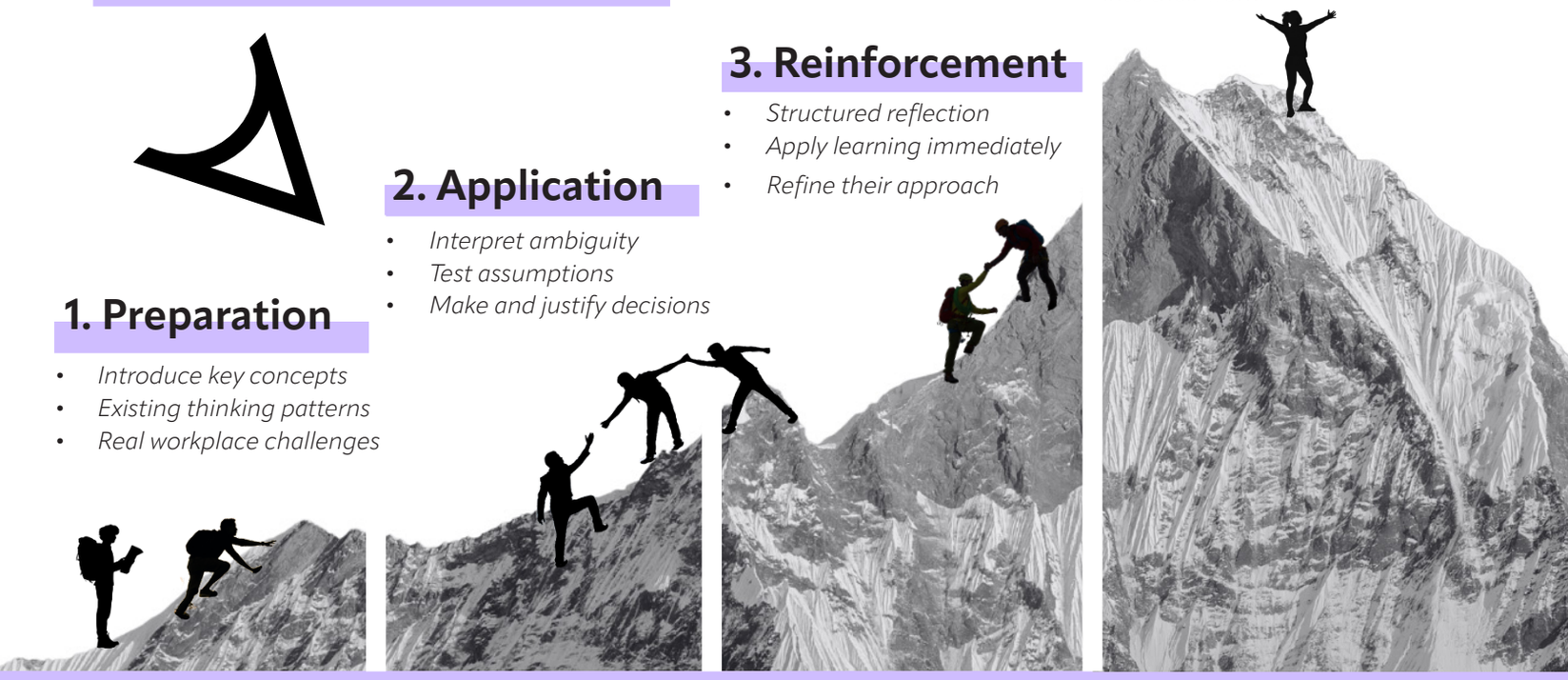
3. Reinforcement

- *Structured reflection*
- *Apply learning immediately*
- *Refine their approach*

THE OUTCOME:

Applied Capability

Embed new approaches directly into their work.



The development of Human Skills 2.0 requires more than awareness of new capabilities. It depends on how learning is designed, experienced, and reinforced in practice.

While organisations hold responsibility for embedding culture, leadership behaviours, and performance systems, learning providers play a critical role in shaping how individuals experience and develop these skills in the first place.

At Ashorne Hill, this is reflected in a learning design approach that focuses on three practical principles: preparation, application, and reinforcement.

Preparing learners to engage, not just attend

Human Skills 2.0 such as critical thinking, adaptability, and emotional intelligence require learners to actively engage with uncertainty, reflect on behaviour, and challenge assumptions.
To support this, learning begins before the programme itself.

Pre-programme engagement can be used to introduce key concepts, surface existing thinking patterns, and create early reflection on real workplace challenges. This reverse classroom approach ensures that learners arrive ready to participate in discussion, not simply receive information.

This preparation is not about content transfer. It is about readiness for behavioural learning.

Creating structured environments for practice

Human Skills 2.0 are developed through doing, not knowing.

In live learning environments, the emphasis shifts from input to application. Learners are placed into structured, facilitated scenarios where they are required to:

- interpret ambiguity
- test assumptions
- make and justify decisions

Skills such as critical thinking and problem solving are strengthened through repeated judgement in context, rather than through theoretical models.

Similarly, emotional intelligence and collaboration are developed through real-time interaction, feedback, and reflection on behaviour and impact.

This is where facilitation becomes essential, not to teach answers, but to surface thinking.

Turning learning into applied capability

The most critical stage of Human Skills 2.0 development is what happens after formal learning. Without reinforcement, even well-designed learning interventions degrade over time or remain isolated from day-to-day performance.

For this reason, Ashorne Hill programmes are designed to support application beyond the learning environment, encouraging participants to embed new approaches directly into their work.

A key mechanism for this is structured reflection, supported by real workplace challenges. Participants are encouraged to apply learning immediately, reflect on outcomes, and refine their approach over time.

Action learning sets play a particularly important role in this process. Rather than separating learning from work, they create facilitated peer environments where individuals bring real challenges, apply new thinking, and receive structured feedback on how they are approaching problems.

This creates a continuous cycle of action, reflection, and adjustment, which is essential for embedding Human Skills 2.0 in practice.

PREPARING FOR WHAT'S NEXT

The organisations that will succeed in an AI-enabled world will not be those that adopt technology fastest, but those that most effectively develop the human capabilities that technology cannot replace.

Human Skills 2.0 are no longer optional. They are a core driver of performance, adaptability, and long-term resilience.

The question is not whether to invest in these skills, but how to do so in a way that delivers real impact.

Ashorne Hill works with organisations to design and deliver capability-building experiences that go beyond traditional training, integrating learning into real work, developing critical human skills, and supporting sustained behaviour change.

To explore how your organisation can build Human Skills 2.0 at scale, get in touch or visit: **https://ashornehill.co.uk/learn/.**

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