

coursera for business

Unlocking Productivity: The Business Leader's Playbook to Generative AI Skills Training

Featuring insights from leaders at Microsoft,
Vanderbilt University, and Coursera



Table of Contents

Foreword	3
01	
Why GenAI, and why now?	4
02	
A business leader’s guide to effective GenAI skills training	6
1. Cultivate a company-wide experimentation mindset	6
2. Align executive leadership, managers, and employees	7
3. Demonstrate the value of GenAI learning to employees	7
4. Measure GenAI’s impact on productivity and success	8
5. Avoid training design pitfalls	9
6. Prioritize diversity and inclusion	9
How Coursera is putting GenAI training into practice	11
03	
Generative AI skill areas for your employees	12
For everyone	12
For leadership	13
For teams	14
04	
How Coursera customers are navigating GenAI	15
05	
Unlock productivity with GenAI Academy	16
06	
Endnotes	17

Foreword

“AI is the future of work.”

As a business leader who's responsible for upskilling talent, you're probably used to hearing that.

But the future is already here. Looking at trends from our 140+ million global learners, 1,300+ enterprise clients, and 325+ trusted industry and university partners, it is clear that generative AI (GenAI) is a top priority.

GenAI promises to transform workforce productivity and inspire more innovation than ever before. The upshot is that leaders focused on accelerating the skills development of talent finally have a much-needed seat at the table to drive quantifiable business benefits.

Yet implementing the ethical, effective use of GenAI is a tall order. While many major obstacles may be blocking the path forward, the number-one challenge facing learning leaders is content chaos¹: How do leaders with limited time and resources find up-to-date content they can trust?

Here's what we've learned: GenAI isn't just a learning initiative. It's a company and culture initiative that can supercharge talent and productivity.

The learning pathways on Coursera set the gold standard for how companies upskill their employees with GenAI. This includes more than 35 GenAI-related courses from leading institutions like Microsoft, Stanford, Google Cloud, IBM, AWS, and Vanderbilt University, which have accumulated more than 570,000 enrollments.²

We deeply believe in GenAI's ability to reshape productivity. This ethos extends through our organization: All of our employees are actively learning how to use GenAI and leverage it for their roles with Coursera's GenAI Academy.

If you're reading this, you know that effective learning only happens when business leaders understand key business outcomes and then structure their programming and content to enhance the employee skills that will lead to those outcomes.

So, how do we improve company culture and get employees to engage with the uncharted territory of GenAI? How do we deliver on a plethora of learning needs across every organizational level?

That's what this guide is here to answer. We'll help you meet the potential of GenAI with confidence to unlock a new paradigm of workforce innovation and productivity.



Trena Minudri
VP & Chief Learning Officer, Coursera

Why GenAI, and why now?

[Generative AI](#), or GenAI for short, is a subset of artificial intelligence that uses LLMs (large language models) to move from user-inputted prompts to the generation of images, text, videos, and other forms of media. Using machine learning, it continues to evolve and become predictive for the human who uses it.

At the top of Coursera’s fastest-growing skills for 2024 is ChatGPT.³ The list also prizes skills that GenAI can enhance—like generative AI modeling and development, data integrity and governance, and database management—that boost productivity and free employees to be more agile and innovative.

Leaders: get ready.

GenAI requires a large-scale shift to effectively transform an organization. Leaders must build the spirit of GenAI into company culture and empower employees through ethical use guidelines and real-world applications in their disciplines.

It’s up to business leaders to shift their teams’ mindsets to believe in GenAI; only then can individual employees understand how GenAI will impact their role and feel motivated to learn how and why to use it. As Elisa Graceffo, General Manager, Technical Content, Worldwide Learning at Microsoft, puts it: **“AI is coming to your job; it’s not coming for your job.”**

But here’s the catch: 89% of executives listed AI and GenAI as one of their top-three tech priorities for 2024—yet two out of three (66%) executives are ambivalent or outright dissatisfied with their organization’s progress on AI/GenAI so far, citing a lack of talent and skills (62%) as their primary reason for dissatisfaction.⁴

This dissonance makes sense because only 19% of HR and L&D leaders are ranking AI as a top priority for them. Mindset shifts and individual AI upskilling need to happen—and fast—so that they can meet this major inflection point in the history of technology.⁵

At the company level

When infused into the culture at large, GenAI can unify a company. It’s something everyone in the organization can learn, at the same time, whether it’s your financial analysts, marketing reps, sales leaders, C-suite, or software engineers. Everyone can benefit from prompt engineering and other foundational GenAI skills.

“Through a process of experimentation [with GenAI], we realized, ‘This saves time,’ or ‘We’re saving dollars’ on certain initiatives, and celebrating those wins [as a company],” notes Elisa Graceffo. “And we also celebrate the places where we’re learning GenAI doesn’t work as well because that’s allowed us to stay focused.”

#3

AI’s spot on the list of top priorities for employee training in the next five years⁶

60-70%

of employees’ time could be automated through GenAI⁷

50%

reduction in volume of human-served contacts through GenAI⁸

12%

more tasks completed 25% faster when workers use ChatGPT-4⁹

45%

potential increase in productivity within agent-based customer care functions¹⁰

Once every discipline buys into GenAI, business leaders can begin thinking through the lens of company strategy:

- What are we trying to achieve with GenAI?
- How will this benefit our customers?
- Will our operations change?

Business leaders can skillfully provide targeted learning initiatives around AI since everyone can benefit from understanding it. This personally tailored education can dovetail into larger company-wide goals.

At the individual level

The pandemic, the movement to virtual-first work, and a tepid economic climate have left employees feeling depleted as of late. GenAI can help remedy work-life balance and empower employees to focus on what really matters.

“If we can do our work more productively and focus on higher-level tasks that drive more value, then we have happier employees and more successful teams. We can reach company goals faster,” says Trena Minudri, VP & Chief Learning Officer at Coursera.

GenAI adopters can complete more sophisticated tasks, as the more repetitive tasks within their work can be automated or completed faster with prompt engineering. Employees will also make stronger decisions by using GenAI to examine a variety of possibilities for a given question. They’ll feel empowered to experiment and bring innovation to their discipline.

A business leader's guide to effective GenAI skills training

While GenAI is poised to have a monumental impact on how we do business, CLOs and other business leaders need to move at the right pace to integrate it. Move too fast, and you can hit ethical and regulatory hurdles. Move too slow, and you'll find yourself outpaced by your competitors.

This is how you build an AI-centric culture infused with the spirit of innovation and curiosity.

1. Cultivate a company-wide experimentation mindset

Bringing GenAI into your company culture is less about getting it right immediately. It's about nurturing an experimentation mindset—because there will be hiccups along the way, especially as you develop training.

“Psychological safety is necessary at an individual level so people are allowed to try and fail,” states Trena Minudri. “That’s the only way we’re going to achieve great things—if people are willing to take risks.”

Start with some deep thinking about where GenAI will be most impactful at your organization.

- What GenAI use cases will bring the most value to different roles?
- What’s your confidence level in bringing GenAI to different teams?

Then take test-and-learn approaches to embed AI into your company strategy.

Mindset shifts can only happen when you challenge misconceptions and assumptions about AI at the top. To do this, companies need to clearly outline GenAI use with robust guidelines, as improper practices can lead to regulatory and ethical issues.

Leadership also needs to reiterate that GenAI isn't a replacement for humans; it's a tool that allows people to do more than they could before. To be more creative, and to solve bigger problems as an extension of their mind.

Instead of looking at GenAI as an automation tool, [Dr. Jules White](#), the Director of the Initiative on the Future of Learning & GenAI at Vanderbilt University offers us a different view: GenAI as augmented intelligence.

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The real value of GenAI is when companies start thinking about how many business decisions we make every day. Thinking through the ramifications of every decision and alternative approach is more valuable in the long run than automating. We've never had anything like this in computing that could help leaders make better decisions.



Dr. Jules White

Director of the Initiative on the Future of Learning & GenAI, Vanderbilt University



How Microsoft experiments with GenAI

Elisa Graceffo, General Manager, Technical Content, Worldwide Learning at Microsoft, witnessed the synergy of GenAI firsthand at a Worldwide Learning organization event.

“We intentionally started using GenAI through a hackathon,” she noted.

“We asked teams to reimagine different parts of the business leveraging GenAI, then we looked at the results. Some processes were lower-hanging fruit than others. So we tried to do rapid experimentation to prioritize our actions. We could reduce the number of hours spent in a particular process or create a much greater output.”

2. Align executive leadership, managers, and employees

The personal productivity piece of GenAI is critical: GenAI tools will allow your employees to move faster, and that’s something they naturally want. But buy-in from the top needs to happen first to achieve true GenAI alignment across C-suite, management, and individual contributors.

Many senior leaders are reluctant to invest in additional training, though. That’s why GenAI internal communications need to connect to their outputs and impacts, discuss theory and policies, and come from a leader they trust.

Most jobs will involve the successful use of AI moving forward, so you also need buy-in from the bottom up. Six out of 10 workers are predicted to need reskilling before 2027.¹¹ In alignment with rolling out legal and compliance measures, leaders must share resonant messaging that motivates everyone to learn about GenAI.

Messaging that prompts employees to embrace GenAI needs to also come from the people whom individual contributors know and work with regularly: middle managers. Middle managers are in a unique spot; since they interact with and mentor their team, they’re positioned to not only roll out GenAI use cases, but hold their team members accountable once they’ve been enabled themselves.

3. Demonstrate the value of GenAI learning to employees

Many business leaders initially struggle to build momentum or engage employees with GenAI efforts. Employees are hesitant to embrace new and uncertain projects without a compelling reason to act, so help them understand why they should care about GenAI and how it will affect them.

Specifically, employees need to know:

- The objective of this new technology
- What training involves
- Why it's important
- Why it's valuable to them
- Why the company would recognize them for it

“There is a mindset shift that’s required to leverage AI technology,” says Elisa Graceffo. “One of the phrases we talk about at Microsoft is ‘collaborative intelligence.’ How do you take advantage of AI to help you be much smarter about how you do your work? I think that skill will be something that everyone will need to know at some point in their career.”

One caution here: Every employee’s previous experiences with online learning and digital courses will vary, so business leaders need to draw employees into GenAI-focused training with personalized outreach. If there’s no clear connection between the training and their role and career growth, they won’t be motivated to explore or experiment with GenAI.

Each manager must commit to these efforts, too; if employees don’t believe the learning will upskill or support them on the job, they won’t spend time training.

To make learning itself feel rewarding:

- **Move engaged learners** through an interactive, rewarding experience of bite-sized learning.
- **Make learning manageable** by sharing how learners are progressing through material.
- **Use positive reinforcement** to motivate employees through the content and build their skills.
- **Provide learners with recognized credentials**, improving career progression and satisfaction.
- **Maximize training impact with AI-assisted, tailored learning** in every employee’s preferred language.

But don’t stop there. “Encourage them to take the learning and apply it to their role,” notes Trena Minudri. “Identify tasks that can be done more efficiently with GenAI and see if they can reduce time spent by 20%. Make a bridge between the work day and their learning content.”

4. Measure GenAI’s impact on productivity and success

Here’s the most important question to answer following any learning initiative: Did it drive positive outcomes? Maybe the C-suite wants GenAI initiatives to increase the

With this guidance in mind, managers should focus on these elements in training:



Clear, objective learning

Set the stage with introductory, accessible materials.



Understanding of value

Make learning meaningful and tailored to each specific job function



Recognition and validation

Celebrate your employees and their efforts.

company’s customer base, retention, revenue, or market share. Or cut the time a customer sits in a support queue in half. Once outcomes are set, design a strategy surrounding how GenAI can meet them.

Only 20% of HR and L&D leaders report having effective metrics for measuring AI skills.¹²

If you can’t establish a business outcome you’re trying to achieve with your incorporation of GenAI, you need to rethink your strategy. Make sure each quantitative measure corresponds directly with a KPI that matters to company growth or progress.

5. Avoid training design pitfalls

Even the best learning initiatives won’t be successful if they succumb to these common training errors. Here are pitfalls business leaders need to avoid when planning GenAI learning:

- **Ignoring ethics:** GenAI is still new and uncertain—building out ethical use guidelines is key. Coursera’s GenAI courses feature trusted content from top universities and industry leaders. Content is carefully curated to follow high ethical standards and explain use cases. Build trust by creating credible learning content that prizes responsible use.
- **Lack of strategy:** GenAI learning initiatives won’t be successful without an implementation strategy to drive the adoption of training. Employees won’t have a compelling reason to invest time in learning, and they might be overwhelmed by information.
- **Complexity:** GenAI can seem daunting to a new user. Scaffold learning so employees understand what GenAI is, how to use it, why basic prompt engineering know-how matters, and a few use cases for their specific job function.
- **Mixed messages:** If you want every employee to understand GenAI but, for instance, a sales leader is served technical content for developing GenAI applications, learning will feel confusing. Make sure learning is aligned to specific functions and organizational goals.
- **Too much choice:** Start learners with one foundational GenAI course that can be split up into short, manageable chunks of time. Then, give learners the opportunity to branch out into more complex topics with this shared foundation in mind.

6. Prioritize diversity and inclusion

People learn in vastly different ways, and artificial intelligence can feel scary to people who don’t intimately understand the technology or consider themselves tech-savvy.

Consider incorporating your training into employee resource groups (ERGs) and other subsets within your organization, so the space feels safe and welcoming to all as people learn about GenAI.



Business needs should drive skilling initiatives. Learning programs need to align with your business metrics—and setting metrics need to be done well before you design any content. What often happens is halfway through the design or development phase, someone wonders how they’re going to measure effectiveness—at that point, it’s too late.



Trena Minudri
VP & Chief Learning Officer, Coursera



The biggest pitfall to watch is messaging around AI. Many people claim to be purveyors of AI training, and then they talk about complicated and distracting material. Your workforce needs simplicity. Show them basic prompt engineering with a language model, and make examples relevant to the learner.



Dr. Jules White
Director of the Initiative on the Future of Learning & GenAI,
Vanderbilt University

“There is a real need to make generative AI more accessible, particularly for people who don’t have a lot of experience with new technology,” shares Elisa Graceffo of Microsoft. “Offer courses that are accessible, non-threatening, and filled with plain language to bring people into the art of the possible.”

Business leaders also need to consider how to design inclusive learning initiatives, to nurture accessibility at the individual level within these spaces. Beyond training developers and data scientists who likely already understand the value of AI, learning should be tailored to the unique backgrounds and expertise of all teams throughout the organization.

“I see a lot of people who feel stuck [with GenAI] because they don’t know where to begin,” states Elisa Graceffo. “Helping people with those beginning steps is really important. Having a diverse workforce is critical for any organization moving forward. So you want to figure out how to bring everyone along in the journey and make the introduction to this technology as accessible as possible.”

“

Offer courses that are accessible, non-threatening, and filled with plain language to bring people into the art of the possible.



Elisa Graceffo
General Manager, Technical Content,
Worldwide Learning, Microsoft

Spotlight

How Coursera is putting GenAI training into practice

At Coursera, leadership set a goal for all employees to complete at least one GenAI Academy course by the end of Q1, 2024. Tactics that our learning team used to drive employee adoption include:

- Established a top-down and bottom-up communication strategy
- Rolled out consistent messaging across multiple forums, including all-hands meetings and email
- Launched a dedicated Slack channel for reflecting on learnings
- Conducted adoption and performance analysis, based on employee surveys

At the time of publication, this initiative is still ongoing, but we have already seen Courserians from a variety of disciplines participate:

 DeepLearning.AI

Generative AI for Everyone

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The esteemed Andrew Ng teaches this course, brilliantly dissecting and presenting the intricacies of generative AI in an engaging and interactive manner.

Sarah Moshel

Customer Success Director, Coursera

 Google Cloud

Introduction to Generative AI

“

An informative course to understand the fundamentals of GenAI.

Nishant Bindraban

Senior Marketing Manager, Coursera

 Vanderbilt University

Prompt Engineering for ChatGPT

“

Just completed an incredible Coursera course on Prompt Engineering for ChatGPT. Feeling empowered to maximize my utilization of large language models.

Sandra Delgado, PhD

Learning Design Consultant, Coursera

 Coursera Instructor Network

Navigating Generative AI: A CEO Playbook

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Our CEO, Jeff Maggioncalda, created probably my favourite course on Coursera so far: Navigating Generative AI: A CEO Playbook. What I loved most was gaining the hands-on GenAI experience and better using AI as a strategic thought partner.

Nader Rustom

Business Development, Coursera

Generative AI skill areas for your employees

Different individuals in your organization have different training needs. In this section, we'll explore how you can approach GenAI training for everyone, for executives, and for teams within your organization.

For everyone

Establishing a foundational understanding

A unique benefit of GenAI technology is that anyone who can speak and write or type is able to create value, prototype, learn, and engage with the technology. At a minimum, all employees need to learn basic GenAI skills. Only then can they apply them to their unique job function for enhanced productivity.*

Objectives

- Establish a common understanding of GenAI
- Encourage prudent risk management
- Drive engagement and excitement about GenAI

Course recommendations



Generative AI for Everyone

Instructed by AI pioneer Andrew Ng, Generative AI for Everyone offers his unique perspective on empowering employees with generative AI.



Prompt Engineering for ChatGPT

Taught by Dr. Jules White, this course introduces learners to the patterns and approaches for writing effective prompts for large language models.



Introduction to Responsible AI

This introductory-level microlearning course explains what responsible AI is, why it's important, and how Google implements responsible AI in their products.

*All of the following courses can be rolled out to employees through GenAI Academy. [Learn more here.](#)

For leadership

Creating an aligned executive vision

Employees who develop beginner-level GenAI knowledge can apply it to their jobs to be more productive. But what about executives, who are connecting their goals to the overall vision and strategy for the company?

Executive leadership needs to learn how to embed GenAI into their marketing strategy, business planning, and financial analysis to streamline their work—all while ethically governing the use of AI within the broader organization.

Objectives

- Understand GenAI and strategic implications
- Become familiar with different approaches for establishing a strategy
- Understand the opportunity space for driving innovation and productivity
- Understand risks and how to navigate them
- Learn how to communicate a GenAI initiative and manage change

Course recommendations



Navigating Generative AI: A CEO Playbook

Created by Coursera CEO Jeff Maggioncalda, this course for executives provides a quick-start guide to unlocking the transformative power of GenAI throughout an organization.



Building a Generative AI-Ready Organization

This brief course for business leaders provides the components needed for a successful organizational adoption of generative AI.



Voice of Change: Communicate with Teams for GenAI Adoption

In this course, Microsoft executive Fatima Kardar walks leaders through how to integrate generative AI into their business strategies, focusing on practical applications for C-Suite executives.

For teams

Enabling impact at the functional level

There are universal principles and basic understandings that all employees need to know in your company about generative AI. But some learnings are specific to each function, which will require a tailored training program that allows teams to clearly identify, develop, and adopt generative AI best practices in their function, with the tools and the skills that are specific to their functional requirements.

Objectives

- Turn experimentation into implementation
- Understand relevant GenAI technologies and tools
- Learn how to augment and automate work tasks
- Understand risks and ethics relevant to function
- Learn how to establish function-specific change management plans

Course recommendations



Build AI Apps with ChatGPT, Dall-E, and GPT-4

This hands-on course for technical professionals explores how to use the OpenAI API to add AI features to apps.



Generative AI: Enhance Your Data Analytics Career by IBM

This course for data analytics professionals provides an in-depth exploration of the fundamental concepts, models, tools, and GenAI applications.



Applied ChatGPT for Cybersecurity

This course for cybersecurity professionals explores how to use ChatGPT for hands-on SOC analyst and incident response work.

How Coursera customers are navigating GenAI

As the global platform for online learning and career development, Coursera offers 35+ courses on GenAI that have helped learners of all levels gain foundational GenAI skills and apply them to their work.

“We have clients who are jumping right in: They’re ready, their C-suite is ready, and they want to unleash it to their organization,” shares Trena Minudri. “Then we have CLOs who are pushing for it, and they can’t get direction from their C-suite. We’re trying to meet clients where they are and get them on the journey, then move at the pace that works for them.”

One customer that jumped right in is Larsen & Toubro (L&T), a Mumbai-based multinational corporation with more than 80 years of experience and nearly 50,000 employees.

With the executive team’s decision to launch Coursera’s GenAI Academy to its entire workforce, they’ve made themselves the first enterprise in India to provide comprehensive, structured digital literacy around GenAI for their team members. Coursera translated 4,000 existing courses, with the help of GenAI, into Hindi to make this possible for L&T and the 23.4 million Coursera learners in India.¹³

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L&T’s commitment to innovation and lifelong learning is demonstrated through our launch of GenAI Academy, to enhance efficiency and empower employees with AI literacy. This initiative underscores our unwavering resolve to adapt to change, stay ahead of the curve, and drive progress within the organization.

Dr. C Jayakumar

Executive Vice President & Head Corporate Human Resource (CHRO) at Larsen & Toubro

GenAI learning trends on Coursera¹⁴

35%

GenAI courses or projects with 570k+ enrollments

4x

growth for GenAI searches from 2022 to 2023

Every 60 seconds

The rate at which a learner enrolled in GenAI content on Coursera in 2023

Unlock productivity with GenAI Academy

Business leaders have a critical opportunity to bring GenAI into their organizations so they can experience greater productivity, innovation, and cohesion.

With Coursera's [GenAI Academy](#), employees across all levels of the organization can build and grow essential GenAI knowledge and skills. We've curated high-quality content from trusted GenAI experts, including Amazon Web Services, Google Cloud, DeepLearning.AI, Microsoft, Stanford, and Vanderbilt University. The collection provides learning modalities that leaders can trust, and tailored training based on each learner's level of understanding and job function.

Job-aligned, in-demand GenAI skills training is key to succeeding in a rapidly evolving technological landscape. GenAI Academy empowers three groups—everyone, executives, and teams—to harness the power of GenAI, so they can find productivity and impact in their work.

Ready to boost your organization's productivity with better GenAI training?

[Start here](#)



Endnotes

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