10 best practices to accelerate your employees' AI skills

Lessons and experiences from Microsoft's skilling initiatives

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Empowering AI adoption through skill development

We're in our artificial intelligence era. With more companies investing in AI solutions than ever, leaders are looking to capitalize on this massive opportunity. But doing so requires more than just AI technology; *it requires a workforce adeptly skilled in using AI to simplify their everyday work*.

Having the right skills to scale AI across your business is crucial to driving success, and those who effectively prepare their teams will be well-positioned to lead with AI.

Having the right skills to scale AI across your business is crucial to driving success, and those who effectively prepare their teams will be well-positioned to lead with AI. While Microsoft's AI apps and services can empower you to innovate and accomplish more than you thought possible, we understand firsthand how challenging it can be to start planning skilling initiatives for your teams.

How we are skilling our teams in AI

As early adopters of our own technology, we're also on this AI journey, continuously exploring how AI can drive economic growth, maximize efficiency, reduce operating costs, and coach employees as part of their continued skills development. A significant part of this transformation has been driven by efforts across our organization to upskill our workforce. We've been building AI skills internally with initiatives targeting different roles and experience levels across the organization to reimagine how we work at Microsoft. This paper shares insights from four of our AI-skilling initiatives across functions that are critical to how we do business—marketing, sales, and engineering—that can help support you in implementing skilling programs crucial to your AI transformation.

> In our **marketing organization**, we focus on helping employees integrate AI into their daily routines, transforming habits to fully leverage AI's transformative power. This approach encourages marketers to embrace AI in a way that enhances creativity, productivity, and customer engagement.

> For our **sales teams**, we offer structured, prioritized AI learning paths tailored to their roles, ensuring they have the tools and knowledge to apply AI directly to their customer interactions and drive business impact.

> Our **engineering and technical teams** benefit from hands-on, interactive learning experiences that foster AI fluency. Through creating a culture of curiosity and exploration, we empower these teams to engage deeply with AI, refining their skills and fueling innovation in the products they build.

> Finally, we focus on **inspiring all teams** across the organization to use AI as a core tool in enhancing their workflows and delivering exceptional customer experiences, solidifying Microsoft's role as a leader in AI-driven innovation.

These targeted skilling initiatives are helping to create a workforce that's not only proficient in AI but empowered to apply AI across every facet of our business, preparing our teams to lead in an AI-driven world. This journey is transforming how we market, sell, build, and innovate—enabling us to deliver unparalleled value to our customers while building a strong foundation for the future.

> To learn more about AI skill-building with Microsoft, read our position paper, *Accelerate AI transformation with skill building: Why organizations should invest in AI skill building with Microsoft.*
>
> > Learn more

Best practices for your AI skill-building initiatives

As customer zero of our products and services, we've had to develop the learning playbooks from scratch, often experimenting with new ways to get team members skilled in the latest AI foundations and technologies. At a global company with technical and non-technical employees, that is no easy task. During our exploration of ways to help skill our teams on AI, we've developed a series of best practices that now guide AI skilling initiatives at Microsoft. As you embark on your journey, these best practices can provide guidance to help you successfully skill your workforce and become a leader in AI. While there is no one-size-fits-all solution to AI skill building, we hope our insights and some of our experiences will help inspire and inform your own journey to get skilled up and ready to power AI transformation with the Microsoft Cloud.

1

Give space for exploration

Encourage a culture of learning by giving employees the time and tools to explore AI. Leadership plays a crucial role in creating this environment. By making it clear that learning AI is a priority and providing resources to support it, you can help your teams feel empowered to invest time in developing their skills.

2

Make learning fun

Provide easy access to AI resources and create a low-pressure, engaging environment where employees can explore and learn at their own pace. Offering a fun, interactive space where experimentation is encouraged helps spark curiosity and drives deeper engagement with AI tools and concepts.

3

Provide clear, structured learning paths

AI can feel overwhelming due to the sheer volume of information and pace of change. Simplify the learning journey with structured learning paths that guide employees. Tailor these to different skill levels and roles to ensure that everyone has a clear direction for their learning.

4

Make it role specific

AI impacts each role differently, and a one-size-fits-all approach won't be effective. By customizing training for specific job functions, you'll ensure that employees learn the AI skills most relevant to their responsibilities. This role-based approach makes training more efficient and impactful.

5

Start with foundations

Don't assume that your employees have a strong foundation in AI. Begin by providing foundational AI knowledge, then gradually introduce more advanced topics as employees build confidence. This phased approach helps learners solidify their understanding before moving on to more complex concepts.

6

Have a plan to update

AI is evolving rapidly, and your training programs should evolve, too. Regularly update learning materials and incorporate the latest AI advancements to keep your teams on the cutting edge. Be ready to adjust your approach based on feedback and changes in the technology landscape, ensuring ongoing development and relevance.

7

Drive awareness and continued adoption

Boost AI learning by offering rewards like badges or certifications to motivate continued engagement. After employees complete foundational training, encourage them to continue experimenting with AI in their role, share learnings with team members, and regularly revisit training materials as AI continues to evolve.

8

Set clear guidelines for responsible use

Ensure your teams understand the ethical implications of AI by establishing clear policies tailored to specific roles. Responsible AI use is crucial to maintaining trust and mitigating risks, so it's essential that employees are trained on how to apply AI responsibly in their daily work.

9

Let employees learn from each other

Encourage collaboration and knowledge-sharing by creating opportunities for employees to learn from each other. Peer-led learning, show-and-tells, and collaborative projects help reinforce AI concepts and inspire innovation across the organization.

10

Leverage existing resources from Microsoft Learn

Don't feel the need to reinvent the wheel. Leverage trusted skilling resources like Microsoft Learn to support your AI skilling initiatives. These expert-curated resources provide high-quality, up-to-date materials that can accelerate learning while ensuring accuracy.

Lessons and experiences from Microsoft's skilling initiatives
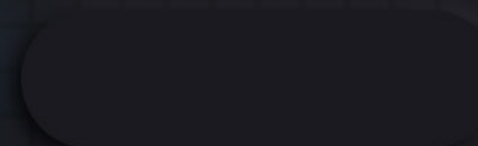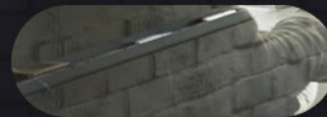
MICROSOFT MARKETING

Inspiring marketing employees to evolve daily habits to become AI practitioners

MICROSOFT MARKETING

Inspiring marketing employees to evolve daily habits to become AI practitioners

Inspiring employees to adopt new habits is challenging. Too often, after learning new skills or processes, employees revert to familiar routines. Effectively managing change takes more than just one big step; it requires consistent reinforcement through hundreds of smaller, intentional touchpoints.

To help build lasting AI habits and skills, it's crucial to not only equip teams with the right knowledge but also to help them see how new skills fit into their unique daily workflows. By encouraging small, regular interactions with AI before driving more transformative adoption, organizations can gradually build confidence and foster deeper integration of AI over time.

The AI curriculum from the Marketing Learning team and our Marketing AI practitioner hub showcase how a structured, well-rounded approach to AI skilling can transform a diverse marketing organization into a community of AI practitioners. These initiatives have empowered Microsoft's marketers to integrate AI into their daily routines, driving efficiency, innovation, and world-class marketing.

About Microsoft Marketing

Microsoft's marketing organization is a diverse collective of professionals, ranging from creative roles to business strategists and technical experts.

Learner profile

Marketers, spanning creative, strategic, and technical roles.

Learning challenge

Marketers were unsure how to begin integrating AI into their daily work and needed a structured approach to AI learning.

Approach

The marketing organization launched an AI practitioner initiative with programs to help marketers evolve daily habits, build tools and assets, and market and message AI consistently.

Key takeaways

> Define what impact you expect AI to have based on the context of role, business, or culture.

> Provide structured learning paths that are unique to the needs of different roles and organizational goals.

> Encourage collaboration and innovation through shared AI tools and best practices.

> Prioritize responsible AI use to maintain trust and uphold ethical standards.

From marketers to marketing AI practitioners

Microsoft's marketing organization is a diverse collective of professionals, ranging from creative roles to business strategists and technical experts. As AI rapidly reshapes marketing, the organization embarked on a transformative journey to integrate AI into their daily practices.

At the outset, directives around AI left many marketers unsure of where to begin. "Team members were told to 'start doing AI,' but no one knew what that meant," explained Stephenie Hanschka, Director of Marketing Communications at Microsoft. "Simply telling employees to dive into AI was not enough; they needed a more structured and functional approach to skill building."

This need led to the Marketing AI practitioner initiative, which aimed to empower Microsoft marketers to integrate AI into their daily routines, innovate new marketing solutions, and effectively market and message AI. The initiative is anchored on three strategic pillars, each tailored to a different aspect of AI adoption.

1. Evolve your daily habits: Help marketers discover practical ways to incorporate AI into their workflows and develop new habits that enhance creativity and productivity.

2. Build new tools and assets: Empower marketers to use AI to transform marketing processes.

3. Marketing and messaging AI successfully: Educate the marketing team on how to act as stewards of the Microsoft brand in the era of AI.

To help activate these pillars, the team developed the Marketing AI practitioner hub to curate AI information and resources specific to the marketing function. Complementing this effort, the Marketing Learning team created AI courses tailored to different marketing roles, enabling team members to dive deeper into AI and helping scale efforts across the marketing organization.

The Marketing AI practitioner hub

The Marketing AI practitioner hub is a centralized site with curated, relevant content, making it easier for marketers to find resources to upskill and apply AI in their roles. The hub is organized around the three strategic pillars.

Within the hub, marketers can access live learning events, on-demand courses, and 101-level training specifically for marketers. It also features Copilot Labs for Marketing, a shared library of prompts for roles like product marketing, business planning, market research, and communications management.

Additionally, the hub includes resources that encourage marketers to create new tools, assets, and customer engagement strategies. Marketers can share their AI innovations, allowing teams to learn from each other's AI marketing experiments to accelerate AI adoption and foster a culture of innovation.

Lastly, the hub helps marketers learn how to develop AI-driven content and strategies that align with Microsoft's broader narrative, ensuring transparency and maintaining trust with customers and partners.

AI curriculum from Marketing Learning

The Marketing Learning program was created to help Microsoft's marketers build the skills they need for today's challenges and future roles. It's both a learning community and a destination for developing the critical skills required to drive and transform Microsoft's business. When the need to upskill marketers in AI arose, the Marketing Learning team mobilized to meet this challenge.

The primary goal was to create relevant content—aligned to the three strategic pillars—that would help marketers understand AI fundamentals and how AI impacts the marketing profession specifically. "Many people struggled to see how AI related to their particular jobs," said Belinda Cheng, Integrated Learning Manager on the Marketing Learning team. "Our mission was to create courses tailored to different roles, ensuring the content was relevant for everyone."

The team interviewed Microsoft's marketing leaders and AI experts for testimonials and use cases. They also produced videos on how to use Microsoft 365 Copilot for marketing and created role-specific courses. These resources were designed to spark curiosity and encourage exploration.

> "To be great marketers in this new era, we all must commit to and actively participate in evolving our craft to fully leverage AI's transformative power."
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> **TAKESHI NUMOTO**
> EVP & Chief Marketing Officer at Microsoft
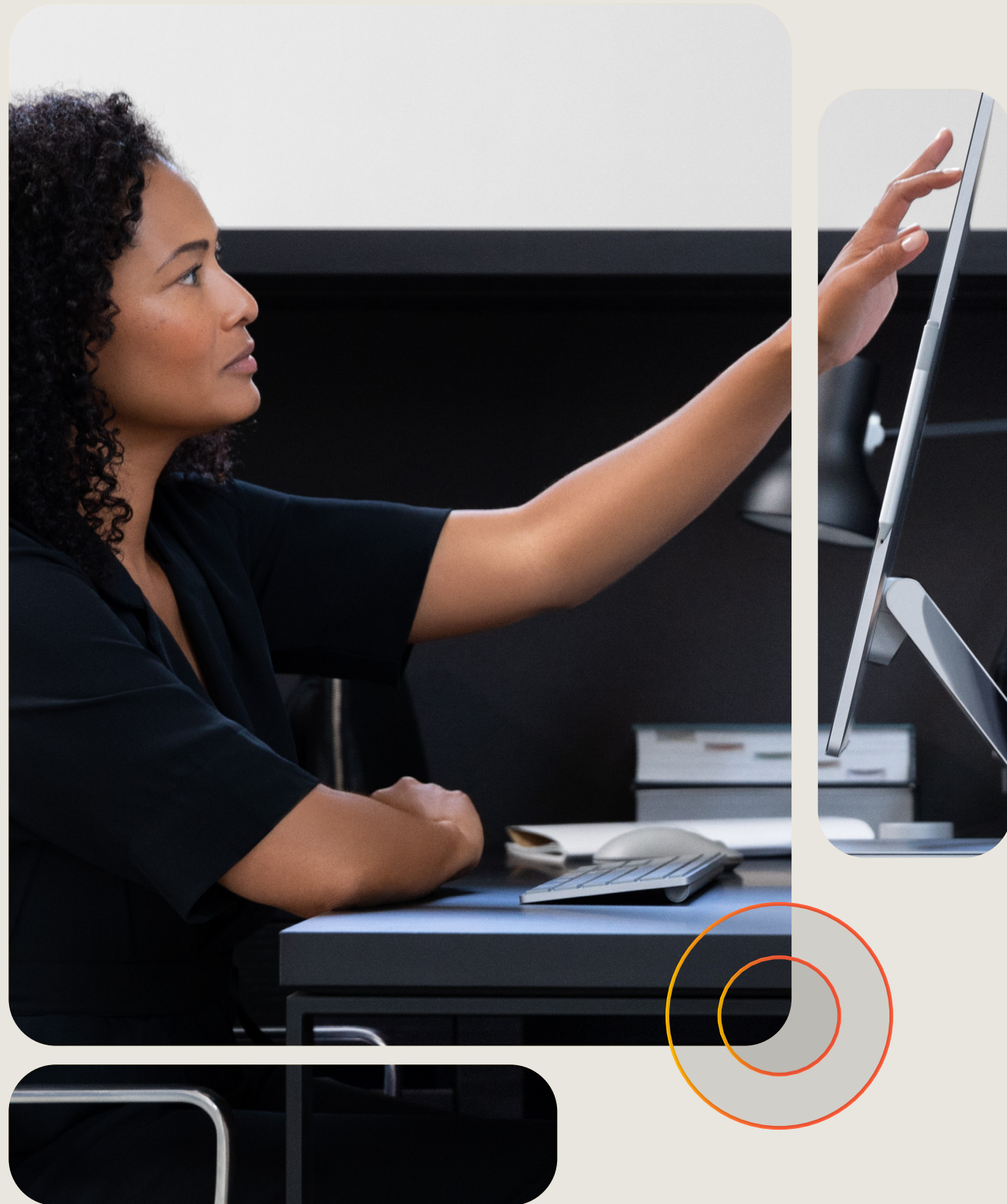
They focused on short, snackable clips that fit into employees' busy schedules. Since launching the first course, the AI curriculum has expanded significantly, now offering a variety of foundational, intermediate, and advanced courses. Most are under 30 minutes, with some taking less than 10 minutes to complete. Many courses include job aids that employees can reference after the training.

Through these efforts, the Marketing Learning team has not only made AI more accessible to Microsoft's marketers but also empowered them to become AI practitioners and drive innovation in their roles.

Building on success

Microsoft's marketing organization is working hard to upskill its teams in AI, recognizing that AI is not just a tool for the future but an essential component of marketing today. Given the diverse roles across the organization, a thoughtful and inclusive approach to AI skilling is imperative. "It's important for any company trying to transform their workforce to not leave any employees behind," says Hanschka.

Building on their success, the marketing team is now focused on refreshing existing content, developing new materials, and collaborating with content creators from across Microsoft to optimize resources for the most relevant AI scenarios, best practices, and learnings.

By combining knowledge sharing with custom content tailored to both individual work habits and broader business processes, Microsoft is empowering its marketers to become proficient AI practitioners, helping them integrate AI into daily workflows to drive innovation and efficiency in their roles.

Making AI real for every role in the organization

Just like Microsoft marketers, people in different roles are wondering how AI can effectively help them in their everyday work. To support your journey, we have live, free digital training sessions designed to help key roles in areas like Marketing, HR, Finance, or Operations learn how to use Microsoft Copilot for 365 to unlock productivity.

Explore the **Copilot for Microsoft 365** training sessions for line of business users.

❯ aka.ms/AIUserTrainingSessions

MCAPS ACADEMY

Guiding our salesforce through prioritized AI learning paths

Guiding our salesforce through prioritized AI learning paths

For many employees, the biggest learning challenge isn't a lack of resources but rather too many; facing an overwhelming amount of content can leave them unsure of where to begin and how to prioritize. As a result, they either never start or waste time on irrelevant materials.

To help address this challenge, we recommend you provide your teams with curated, relevant content that cuts through information overload while leveraging a blended learning model that integrates real-world applications. With a combination of foundational learning paired with applied skilling, you can help accelerate AI fluency and adoption across your workforce.

The approach charted by our MCAPS Academy team offers a practical roadmap for rolling out effective AI training with clear, role-specific learning paths and a focus on practice in real-world scenarios that help ensure our sales force is not only equipped to meet current AI challenges but also positioned to drive long-term growth and innovation.

About MCAPS Academy

MCAPS Academy is responsible for skilling sellers globally within the Microsoft Customer and Partner Solutions (MCAPS) organization.

Learner profile

Microsoft customer- and partner-facing roles, both technical and non-technical.

Learning challenge

Team members in these roles have limited time for training, so there was an ask for help prioritizing the most critical training for sellers.

Approach

MCAPS Academy developed role-specific learning paths that include content to help build foundational knowledge on key concepts and capabilities, as well as interactive experiences to provide practical application. For non-technical sellers, these activities include practicing customer conversations and workshops, while technical sellers engage through in-depth technical workshops.
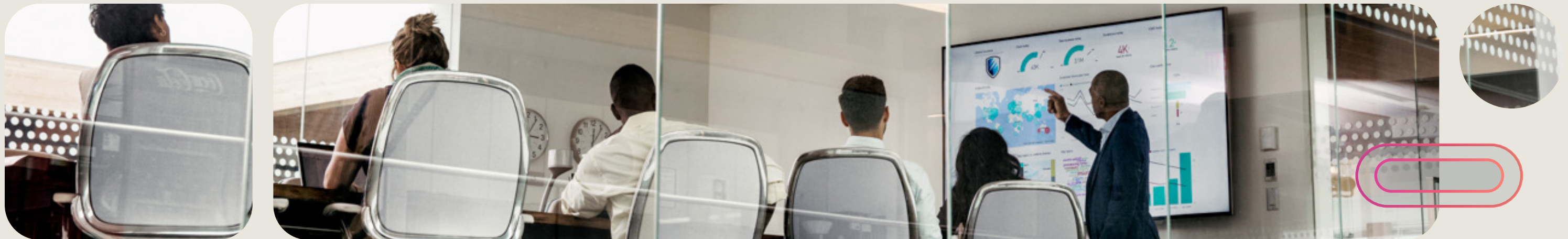
Key takeaways

> Provide prioritized, role-based learning paths to simplify AI skilling.

> Create interactive learning opportunities for both technical and non-technical roles.

> Plan short-form content to help employees stay up to date with minimal time investment.

Supporting AI training for Microsoft sales force

Microsoft Commercial and Partner Solutions (MCAPs) is the company's unified commercial go-to-market organization that helps our customers achieve their digital business and AI transformation through Microsoft Cloud solutions and services. MCAPS Academy is the team responsible for skilling Microsoft sellers globally. With the rapid rise of AI, the MCAPS Academy team faced the challenge of equipping Microsoft's sales workforce with AI skills to serve customers better and drive business success.

As AI initiatives expanded at Microsoft, multiple teams across the organization were creating an overwhelming amount of skilling content. Employees struggled to navigate the vast resources, lacking clear direction on where to start and what to prioritize. The need for a cohesive, prioritized approach to AI training became evident.

To address this need, the MCAPS Academy curated learning assets on Viva Learning[1], consolidating resources for sellers. However, this step alone wasn't enough, prompting the team to seek a more streamlined solution.

Flight Plans help AI skilling take off

The MCAPS Academy team ultimately developed Flight Plans—role-based learning paths designed to guide employees through the most essential AI training for their specific roles. Each Flight Plan focuses on key capabilities, practical activities, and includes badging for those who complete the path. The content is divided into three sections:

1. Prepare: Provides foundational AI knowledge relevant to the role. Employees can complete online courses or test out if they already possess the skills.

2. Practice: Emphasizes interactive learning through virtual, instructor-led workshops—such as the Practice and Discuss Workshop—allowing employees to apply AI in real-world scenarios.

3. Refuel: Delivers short-form updates on product capabilities, industry changes, and competitive insights to keep employees informed of the latest AI developments.

The feedback on Flight Plans has been overwhelmingly positive. One employee commented, "I really enjoyed this learning

experience. The combination of Prepare and Practice worked well, and I'm more equipped and confident now than before." After completing the Flight Plan, learners were asked: Do you agree that you are more confident in your ability to articulate the value or demonstrate the capabilities of Microsoft's AI technology to customers after completing the Flight Plan? Nearly 90% said yes.

According to Jeff Kirkwood, Director of AI, GTM & Professional Sales Skills Enablement in MCAPS Academy, and Nancy Wilson, Director, AI & Solution Area Programs Team in MCAPS Academy at Microsoft, a key to the success of this initiative was blending core content with applied learning, first building foundational knowledge and then letting employees practice and use it.

> "AI Transformation is enriching the employee experience and reinventing customer engagement. MCAPS sellers adopting Copilot are seeing immediate benefits, with 40% more pipeline and 10% better close rates. With the MCAPS Academy, we're giving our team the skills and resources to fully leverage AI, unlocking new levels of value for our customers and partners."
>
> **JUDSON ALTHOFF**
> EVP & Chief Commercial Officer at Microsoft
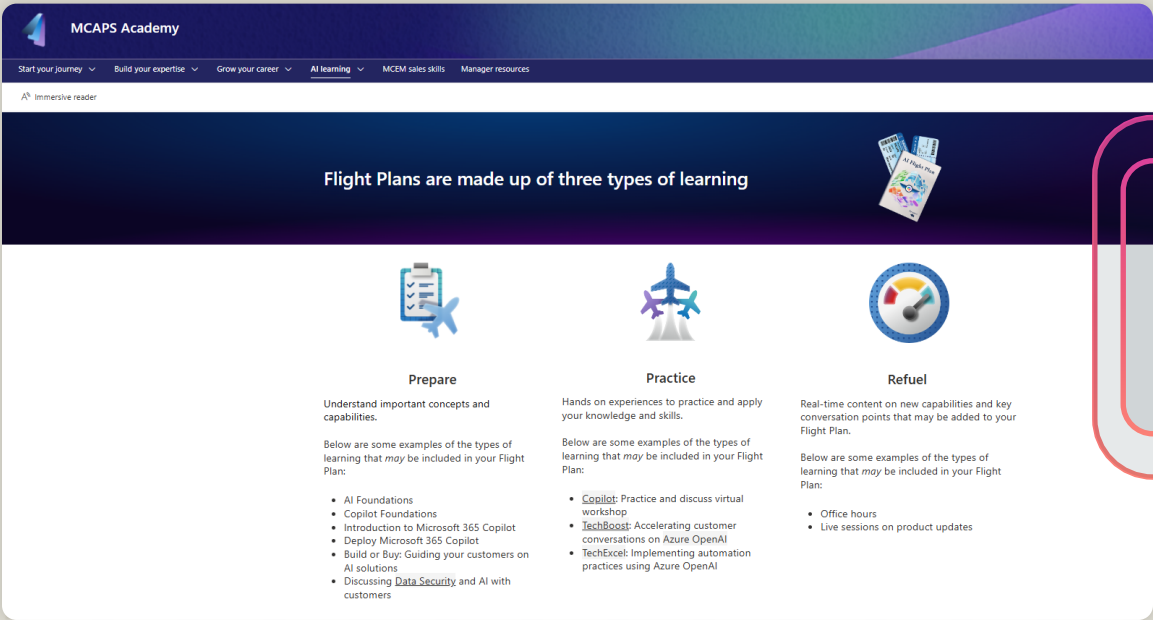
Training technical sellers with an interactive approach

Training technical sellers presents a unique challenge. Unlike their non-technical counterparts, these employees require more in-depth and hands-on training. To address this need, the MCAPS Academy developed a two-day interactive workshop. Delivered through virtual, instructor-led training, the workshop provides different experiences for technical and non-technical sellers.

Less technical sellers worked in simulated lab environments that mimicked real-world scenarios, while more technical sellers engaged in live labs for applied learning. The focus was heavily on AI, with the team emphasizing the practical application of AI tools in a controlled learning environment.

This solution ensured that all sellers, regardless of their background, received prioritized training that met their specific needs, equipping participants with the skills to implement AI in their day-to-day roles.

Evolving AI skilling at MCAPS Academy

As awareness and adoption of AI tools like Microsoft Copilot continue to grow, the MCAPS Academy team evolves its AI training, staying flexible and adapting based on feedback from sellers. Now, there is an additional focus on exploring new ways to make these skill programs more scalable for both non-technical and technical sellers, such as using AI conversation platforms and simulated labs that enable employees to practice technical skills without needing to be proctored by someone.

Additionally, MCAPS Academy is beginning to extend Flight Plans to non-seller roles within the organization as part of its "MCAPS Academy for all" initiative. With a focus on integrating foundational learning and practice, MCAPS Academy is helping to ensure that all MCAPS employees, regardless of their technical background or role, can develop the skills needed to excel in the evolving AI landscape.
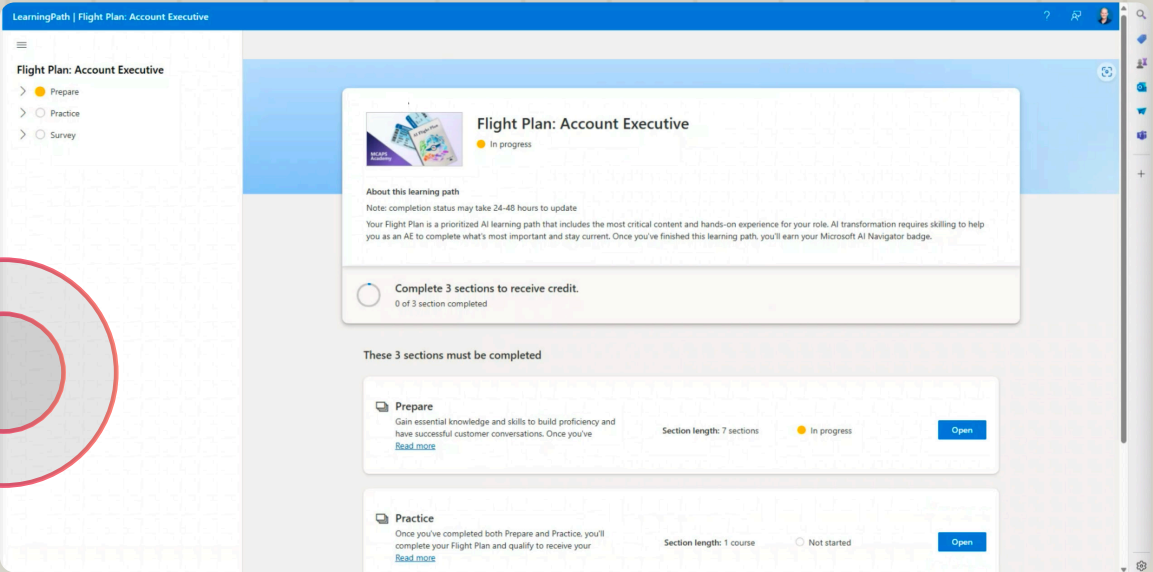
The Copilot Cup Challenge

The Copilot Cup Challenge is a fun and engaging initiative aimed at advancing internal adoption and understanding of Copilot within MCAPS. This competition, which took place during Microsoft's fiscal year 2024 (FY24), has played a pivotal role in promoting a culture of innovation and collaboration across the organization.

To encourage daily use of AI, teams across MCAPS participated in activities ranging from developing AI-powered solutions, integrating Copilot into existing workflows, and creating new use cases for AI within their respective domains. The competition encompassed not only coding and technical implementation but also strategic planning, user experience design, and business impact analysis.

Some of the activities included:

1. Copilot Tag: A contest where participants shared their favorite Copilot prompts and experiences. Weekly winners were announced, and the best prompts were consolidated and shared with the team.

2. Copilot - Name that Prompt!: An emoji-based game where participants guessed prompts based on scenarios, with exciting prizes for the winners.

3. Copilot Confessions: Participants created short videos explaining why they love Copilot. This activity aimed to foster a sense of community and shared enthusiasm for the tool.

4. Hackathons: Teams participated in hackathons to develop innovative solutions using Copilot.

The Copilot Cup Challenge is an excellent complement to the formal training from MCAPS Academy. Together, they are significantly contributing to enhancing AI proficiency within MCAPS as employees invest time in gaining a deeper understanding of Copilot to improve their day-to-day work experience and learn how to apply AI to solve business problems and deliver value to our customers.

Following the success of the FY24 challenge, the FY25 Copilot Cup Challenge has been announced, introducing Flight of the Navigators, a game-based app with interactive activities designed to provide practical experience and increase daily Copilot usage across MCAPS.

Transforming work and creativity with AI

Microsoft Copilot can transform your work and creativity, just as it's enhancing the daily routine of MCAPS employees. Explore AI tools designed to boost productivity, enhance creativity, and streamline your workflow. Get advice, feedback, and straightforward answers to your questions. Copilot—your AI companion—is ready to support you whenever and wherever you need it.

> copilot.microsoft.com

WORLDWIDE LEARNING ENGINEERING TEAM

Empowering engineering teams to explore, learn, and lead in AI innovation

WORLDWIDE LEARNING ENGINEERING TEAM

Empowering engineering teams to explore, learn, and lead in AI innovation

Effective AI skilling demands targeted approaches that address the specific needs of different roles, especially when it comes to technical teams. Engineers, many of whom are already familiar with AI, don't require the same foundational training as non-technical employees. Instead, they need guidance as they explore the latest tools, techniques, and advancements in AI.

To skill technical teams effectively, it's essential to create a learning environment that encourages exploration and knowledge sharing while also providing opportunities for deep technical engagement. By providing time

for self- and peer-directed learning alongside structured, practical experiences, organizations can ensure that their engineers stay at the forefront of AI innovation.

At Microsoft, one of the teams that exemplifies this approach is Worldwide Learning Engineering. Through a combination of light-touch content, in-depth training, knowledge-sharing, and hands-on experimentation, the team has developed a powerful model for upskilling highly technical employees in AI, ensuring they're equipped to build and lead in an ever-evolving technological landscape.

About the Worldwide Learning Engineering team

This engineering team is responsible for architecting and building platforms that support the Microsoft Customer and Partner Solutions (MCAPS) organization and some of the Microsoft skilling offerings for customers and partners.

Learner profile

Highly skilled technical engineers.

Learning challenge

Upskilling engineers who already have AI experience but need to adapt to the rapid evolution of generative AI tools.

Approach

Engineering leadership provided a mix of light-touch content, in-depth courses, and dedicated time for team members to explore AI. They also encouraged experimentation with sandbox environments and fostered knowledge-sharing across teams.

Key takeaways

> Provide dedicated time for interactive AI exploration and learning.

> Encourage knowledge sharing across peer-led groups and through show-and-tell sessions.

> Adapt learning to meet the evolving needs of highly technical users.

Training technical teams to leverage AI

At Microsoft, there are thousands of engineers who are creating innovative products that will drive our customers' successes into the future. Building AI skills among these highly technical users requires a different approach than non-technical teams. Many engineers, especially those with backgrounds in machine learning and data modeling, are already familiar with AI. Furthermore, the way they leverage AI differs significantly from their non-technical colleagues.

From light touches to crash courses

The Microsoft Worldwide Learning (WWL) organization's purpose is to inspire every person and every organization on the planet to maximize their growth through learning. To support this objective, the WWL Engineering team architects and builds apps that support our skilling offerings for customers and partners. When its leaders sought to train their team on AI, they started with light touches to spark exploration. As Andre Alevato, Principal Enterprise Architect, explains, "AI has existed for decades, and everyone on our team had

some foundational knowledge. When this new evolution of generative AI came, we didn't need to start from scratch."

Early on, Alevato began sharing relevant articles in his weekly all-team email to build knowledge and interest. He continues this practice today as a way of helping to keep the team informed about new trends in technology.

As momentum around generative AI grew, the team's leadership held crash courses on both foundational and advanced topics to accelerate skill building and AI tool adoption. Having this trickle of light-touch content intermixed with deep dives helped manage the influx of information for employees. Or, as Alevato put it, "You need to find a way to taper the fire hose because there are so many new things coming out."

Give time to explore

Perhaps the most impactful resource provided to the team for skill building was time. "When the AI boom started, leadership gave us dedicated time—about 25%—to go learn whatever we wanted to learn from an AI standpoint," according to Dade Cook, Software Engineer at Microsoft.

Given the time and space to learn and play, these engineers needed no further motivation. Cook and his colleagues quickly dove into everything they could find—from technical documentation on GitHub and Microsoft Learn to blogs to information from key influencers on social media.

Leadership provisioned a tenant for learning, pushing people into sandbox environments and encouraging them to play and create. Senior Software Engineer Chetan Hiran described the process, saying, "It took a lot of iterating as we learned how to do things correctly—a lot of trial and error—but after some time, we began to get the hang of it."

When asked for their advice to other engineers on how to gain AI skills, the team had a unified response: "Just start building." As Cook explains, "AI learning has differed greatly from learning other technologies. Where we used to try to understand how something worked and then try it, with AI, we're often testing to see how something will work and then trying to understand why. So, find the thing that excites you and just start building. I've been amazed at how easily AI can do some things for me."

"It's vital for Worldwide Learning to deeply embed AI into the skilling experiences and applications we build. We have an ongoing listening loop to hear feedback from our learners, experiment with AI to address the challenges, and then get to put them into production to improve the velocity and quality of their learning at scale. AI has helped us create faster and greater time to value for our customers, partners, and employees."

JEANA JORGENSEN
CVP, Microsoft Worldwide Learning
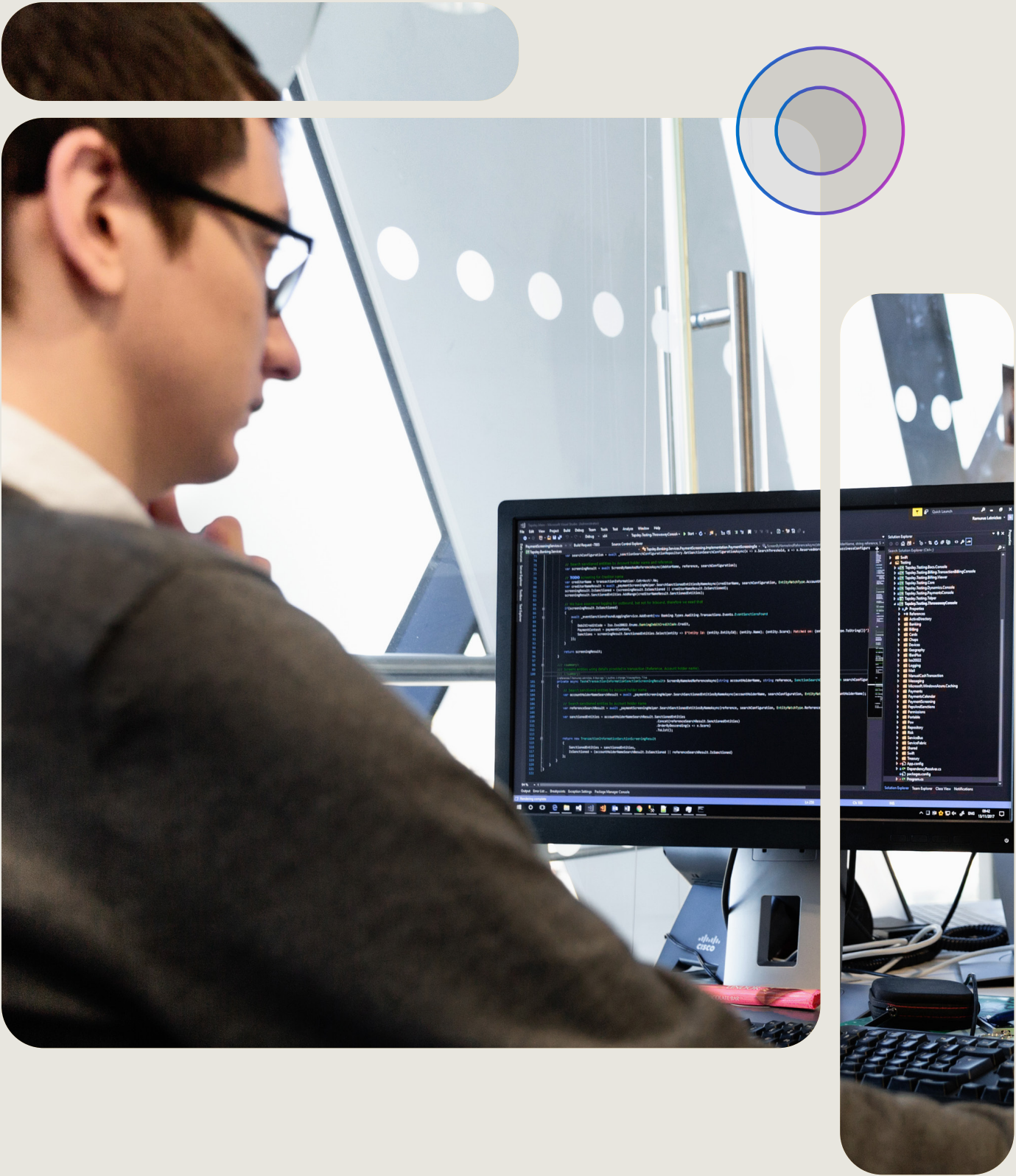
Socialize learnings across the team

Knowledge sharing has been an essential part of building skills across the team and keeping everyone up to date. The Worldwide Learning Engineering team formed an AI Champions group, which plays a critical role in sharing information, insights, and innovations in AI.

Additionally, the team holds regular show-and-tell sessions where engineers present their latest findings and experiments. These sessions provide a platform for individuals to socialize their knowledge, exchange ideas, and showcase how they're applying AI in their projects.

By combining structured learning opportunities, dedicated exploration time, and a strong culture of knowledge sharing, the Microsoft Worldwide Learning Engineering team has helped build skills across the organization and positioned itself to lead in AI innovation. As AI evolves, this approach—rooted in curiosity, collaboration, and interactive learning—provides a powerful model for developing new skills across technical teams.

Proficiency in AI for technical teams

Engineering teams like the one at Microsoft Worldwide Learning require specialized skills to build custom copilots, generative AI applications, or machine learning solutions.

Visit the AI learning hub on Microsoft Learn and find curated training content for your technical teams including software developers, data scientists, and IT professionals.

> aka.ms/AILearningHubRoles

THE GARAGE

Fostering AI fluency across all roles through interactive and creative exploration

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The unprecedented speed in AI innovation makes it challenging to stay on top of the latest developments. Employees are eager for opportunities to experiment with AI tools, integrate them into their daily roles, and find inspiration to move to more advanced applications. By prioritizing skilling programs that make AI relevant and approachable, organizations can foster a much-needed culture of experimentation with AI in both personal and professional contexts.

The Garage's approach to AI skilling, through spirited and engaging initiatives like the SkillUp AI Challenge and DOcathlon, demonstrates the power of blending AI skilling with personal, flexible experiences. Through a mix of creative, experiential learning, and practical AI applications, The Garage is empowering teams across Microsoft to build on their confidence in AI, increasing fluency across a diverse workforce and positioning the organization to lead in the AI-driven future.

About The Microsoft Garage

The Garage is an innovation platform that enables collaboration and experimentation through offerings like hackathons, workshops, talks, and skilling sessions.

Learner profile

Microsoft employees across all roles and all levels.

Learning challenge

Employees were looking for flexible ways to increase their AI fluency and explore AI tools.

Approach

The Garage developed and continues to expand its portfolio of offerings—like the SkillUp AI Challenges, workshops, talks, and skill-building exercises, plus targeted approaches like certification study groups and AI level-setting sessions for group offsites. These offerings enable personal and collaborative experimentation with AI technologies and help deepen AI proficiency.

Key takeaways

> Drive deeper AI tool adoption by providing inspired applications that are relevant to employees' roles and their daily work.

> Create engaging, flexible environments to encourage AI exploration.

> Use real-world and personal scenarios to connect AI skills to business uses.

> Continuously evolve skilling initiatives to deepen AI fluency and broaden participation.
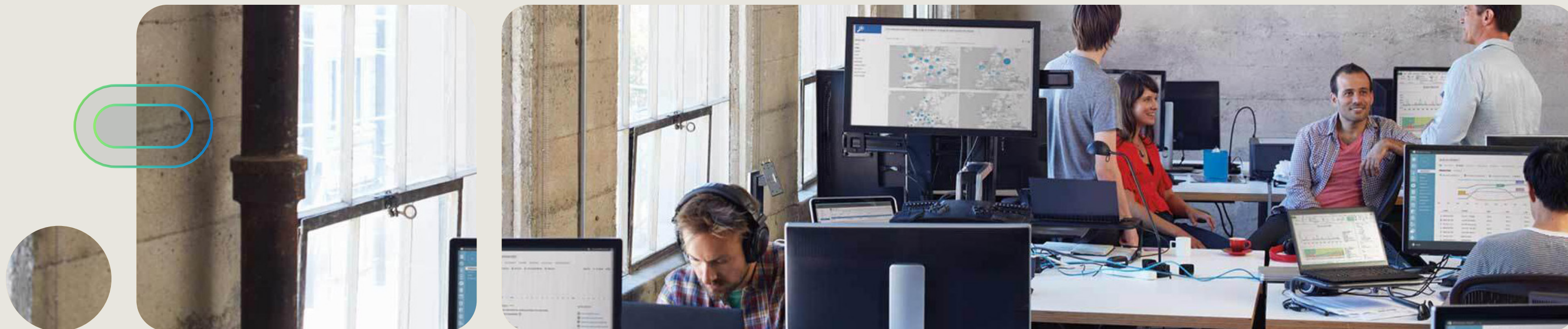
Hacking our way to AI expertise

Driven by a culture of curiosity and innovation from its inception, Microsoft has long been home to grassroots experimental projects and informal hackathons. In 2012, The Garage was officially established to expand these efforts and drive innovation and collaboration opportunities for all employees. In 2014, The Garage hosted the first global hackathon with 11,550 employees, and by 2024, it produced the largest annual hackathon ever, with 73,000 participants in more than 80 countries.

Today, The Garage engages employees across the company through physical spaces and online channels, so when the need arose for creative ways to increase employee fluency in AI, The Garage was a natural starting place. The Garage's motto of "doers, not talkers" informed the interactive approach.

SkillUp AI in The Garage

To meet the demand for an AI skilling initiative, The Garage team tapped into their deep experience with employee-facing offerings. The overall SkillUp AI program is designed to drive deeper AI fluency by encouraging employees to explore AI tools in engaging, creative ways. SkillUp AI in The Garage has several offerings: the ongoing engagements to build AI skills, including workshops and co-creation sessions, and a suite of challenges, including the SkillUp AI Challenge (originally part of the Global Hackathon 2023), the SkillUp AI Product Manager Challenge, and the DOcathlon (part of the Global Hackathon 2024).

Offerings designed for broad and engaging delivery

From the start, the design goal was to be interactive and engaging while enabling fundamental AI practices with a compelling result.

As with any learning path audience, people interested in AI are at varying skill levels. There was enormous interest in generative AI, so the challenge was to develop an experience that could accommodate a breadth of audiences and could meet them where they were. SkillUp AI exercises are flexible for less practiced learners and stimulating for more advanced users. To broaden access to AI and make it more approachable, the Garage team had several design principles in mind:

1. Be frictionless (access to what people need and quick to complete)

2. Enable personal representation to deepen relevancy

3. Have self-directed or facilitated delivery

4. Enable sharing of output

5. Build skills through creativity

The team used non-work-related scenarios to encourage participation, helping employees engage with AI in relatable ways. Through these creative exercises, participants learned AI tools that could later be applied in their professional roles. By illustrating the power of AI with personal scenarios, the program effectively bridged personal and business applications.

"The Garage fosters innovation at Microsoft through collaboration and experimentation. Programs like Global Hackathon and SkillUp AI help employees explore AI, build skills, and apply them in meaningful ways. This accelerates business growth, sparks new ideas, and equips teams with valuable AI-driven insights and solutions."

JEFF RAMOS
General Manager, The Microsoft Garage
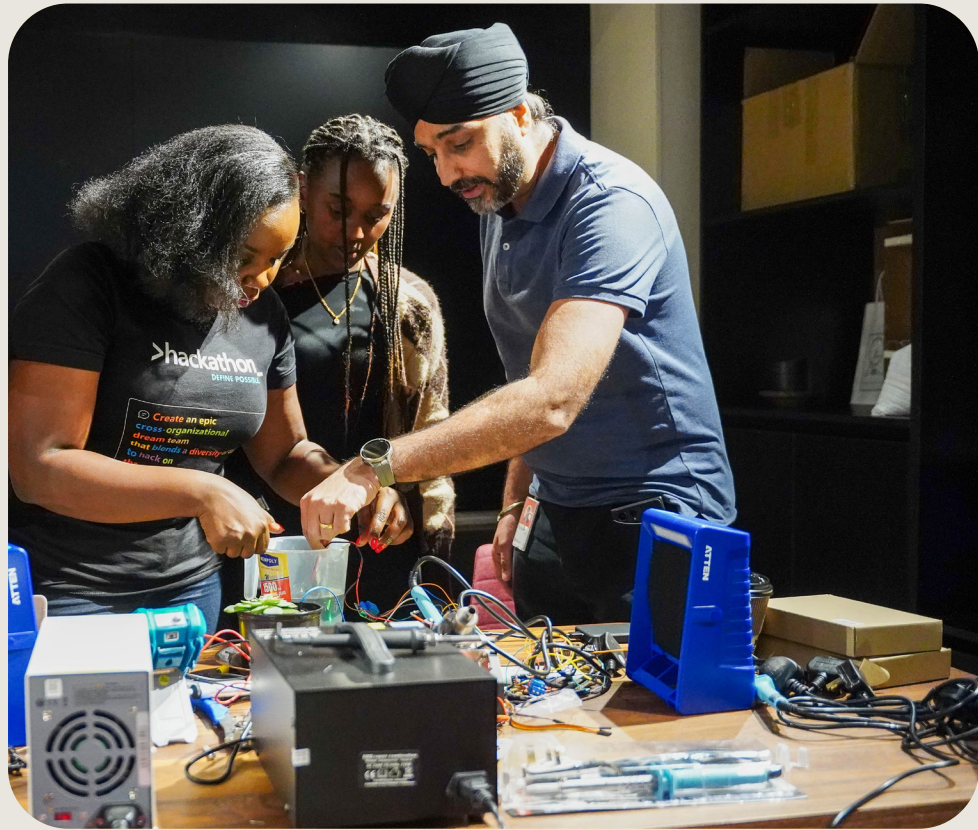
The evolution of SkillUp AI

The Garage built on the success of the SkillUp AI Challenges to develop a new challenge for Hackathon 2024. With a nod to the Olympic Games, the SkillUp AI DOcathlon featured ten 30-to-60-minute AI challenges aimed at improving participants' proficiency with generative AI.

The challenges targeted specific roles and domains, effectively skilling up work-related concepts and approaches while building AI skills and knowledge to drive tool adoption.

Employees earned badges for completing each challenge, which created a sense of achievement and recognition. The Hackathon 2024 SkillUp AI DOcathlon has transitioned to be an evergreen offering and, along with the SkillUp AI workshops and talks, continues to be incredibly popular.

Pivoting to help upskill customers

Building on the Hackathon's success, The Garage and the Microsoft Learn teams collaborated to convert the 2023 SkillUp AI Challenge into a module on Microsoft Learn, available to everyone. The "*Design a dream destination using Microsoft Copilot*" learning path introduces learners to the basics of generative AI and how to work with Copilot in Microsoft Bing.

> aka.ms/DreamwithCopilot