

# How Does Online Training Fit Into Your Upskilling Plan for 2026?



If 2025 was the year HR teams admitted the skills gap is real, then 2026 will be the year they are expected to do something meaningful about it. Hiring your way out of talent shortages is no longer a sustainable option. Canadian employers continue to struggle with productivity, roles are evolving faster than job descriptions can keep up, and external recruiting drives up salaries in a way many SMEs simply cannot absorb.

This is why upskilling is becoming one of the most urgent priorities for HR leaders across Canada. And at the heart of almost every modern upskilling strategy is online training.

It is not because online learning is trendy or convenient, although it is both. It is because the speed and scale of change require something classroom training alone can no longer deliver. Organizations need learning that is fast, flexible, on demand, measurable, and accessible to a workforce that is more dispersed than ever. They need learning that grows as jobs evolve and that does not depend on travel budgets, full day workshops, or the hope that employees remember what they learned three months later.

Online training is not a replacement for all learning. It is the engine that powers scalable skill development. And in 2026, it is the foundation of every serious upskilling plan.

## **Why 2026 Will Demand a Different Approach to Upskilling**

Canadian employers are entering a phase of accelerated digital adoption, new regulations, AI integration, and rapid automation. This shift is creating capability gaps across industries. The World Economic Forum estimates that more than 40 percent of workers will need new skills within the next three years because of technological change. Canadian data mirrors this trend. The Conference Board of Canada found that nearly half of employers believe they lack the skilled talent required for future competitiveness.

To make matters harder, access to external talent is tightening. Immigration is helping but not enough. Competition for specialized roles remains intense. Salaries for digital and technical roles continue to climb. Hiring and onboarding take too long. By the time someone is trained, the technology often changes again.

Upskilling, especially through online learning, is becoming the fastest and most cost-effective way to close gaps. Not by replacing employees, but by transforming them.

## **What Online Training Brings to Your 2026 Upskilling Strategy**

Online training gives HR something they desperately need in a skills constrained market. Control. Agility. Predictability. Scale.

Here's how.

### **It meets employees where they actually work**

Hybrid work is the norm across Canada. Employees want training they can access from anywhere. Self-paced learning means no need to coordinate schedules, travel, or classroom bookings.

### **It enables learning in small, powerful moments**

Microlearning, short modules, and scenario-based videos support retention far better than full day workshops. Employees can apply what they learn immediately.

### **It moves as fast as the technology does**

AI, cybersecurity, safety protocols, compliance rules, and digital tools shift constantly. Online libraries can update within days. Classroom curriculums cannot keep up.

### **It supports multiple learning styles**

Video, audio, interactive modules, simulations, quizzes, and case-based learning ensure employees stay engaged, even in complex or technical subjects.

### **It gives HR actionable data**

HR can track completion, competency progress, skill development, and knowledge gaps. This makes upskilling measurable instead of guesswork.

### **It opens doors for employees often excluded from traditional development**

Frontline staff, parents balancing childcare, part time workers, and remote employees all gain equal access to training.

Online training democratizes opportunity. That is one of the most powerful cultural benefits HR can offer.

## **A Real Story: When a Company Discovered Its Hidden Talent**

A Vancouver manufacturing company struggled to hire automation technicians for nearly two years. External candidates wanted salaries far beyond the budget. The company assumed the skills simply did not exist internally.

That changed when the organization launched an online upskilling program in 2025 focused on PLC basics, equipment troubleshooting, and data literacy. Within eight months, two production workers scored among the highest in the training assessments.

With mentorship, hands on learning, and continued eLearning, both transitioned into technician roles.

The company not only filled the gaps but saved on recruitment costs, reduced turnover risk, and retained people who already understood the equipment and culture.

This is not an isolated case. As online training becomes more sophisticated, it reveals potential in employees who were never given the chance to show it.

## **Where Online Training Fits in a Full Upskilling Plan**

Online training alone is not a complete solution. It is the backbone. The rest of the system is built around it.

Here's how HR leaders are structuring their 2026 upskilling plans.

### **1. Identify the roles where skill gaps will grow fastest**

Digital skills, supervisory capabilities, safety compliance, cybersecurity, AI literacy, project leadership, and customer facing communication are top priorities in most Canadian sectors.

### **2. Map required competencies**

Define the capabilities each role will need by 2026 or 2027. Online training libraries often include competency tools to speed up the process.

### **3. Select online courses that match those competencies**

The best training platforms offer curated pathways. Employees do not need to guess what to take. HR does not need to build everything from scratch.

### **4. Blend online learning with real world practice**

Simulations, stretch assignments, job shadowing, labs, and mentoring complete the picture. Online training provides the knowledge foundation so hands on practice becomes more meaningful.

### **5. Track, adjust, and personalize**

Online learning provides insights that HR can act on. If employees are struggling with specific concepts, create coaching sessions. If certain roles complete pathways faster, expand them. Upskilling becomes a living process.

## **Why Online Training Strengthens Culture, Not Just Capabilities**

Upskilling has always been viewed as a business outcome, but employees see it differently. For them, training symbolizes belief. It says the organization sees their potential. That they are not replaceable. That the company wants them to grow, not just produce.

Online training supports this cultural shift in a few powerful ways.

### **It gives people hope**

Employees stuck in stagnant roles often do not know how to move forward. A clear

training pathway changes that. It gives them a direction and a future.

### **It builds confidence**

Learning new skills, especially digital ones, boosts morale and reduces fear of change.

### **It deepens loyalty**

People stay when they feel invested in. If online training gives them new capabilities, it also gives them reasons to stay.

### **It supports diversity and inclusion**

Online learning levels the playing field. Every employee, regardless of location, education level, language, or schedule, can access the same opportunities.

This makes upskilling not only a strategic decision but a cultural one.

## **The Biggest Mistake Organizations Make With Online Training**

The mistake is assuming that giving employees access to online training is enough. It is not. Employees need structure, encouragement, and integration with performance conversations.

Online learning works when:

- Employees know exactly which courses matter.
- Managers discuss progress regularly.
- HR connects the learning to internal mobility opportunities.
- Completion is recognized and celebrated.
- Training is available in multiple languages or formats where needed.

Access creates opportunity. Structure creates results.

## **What 2026 Will Look Like for HR Leaders Who Embrace Online Upskilling**

HR leaders who integrate online training deeply into their upskilling plan will see several advantages by mid 2026:

- A more adaptable workforce.
- Shorter time-to-fill for technical roles.
- Stronger internal pipelines.
- Improved retention among high-potential employees.
- Fewer wage spikes driven by external hiring.
- Higher productivity from digital tool adoption.
- Better compliance and safety performance.

Most importantly, they will have a workforce that can grow as the organization grows.

## **Online Training Is No Longer Optional in 2026. It Is**

## **Foundational.**

Canadian organizations cannot rely on the labour market to close their skills gaps. They must build talent from within. Online training is the most powerful tool HR has to make that possible at scale, speed, and affordability.

Upskilling is no longer a “nice to have.” It is the strategy that will separate employers who thrive from employers who fall behind.

And the organizations that invest in online learning now will enter 2026 with something every HR team wants. A workforce that is ready.