Employer Led Design Guide

palette skills

palette skills

6 principles

of Palette's upskilling model

- Demand-Driven
- Rapidly Delivered
- Employer-Led
- Industry Integrated
- Potential-Focused Recruitment
- Job Placement Support

palette skills

Table of Contents

1. The Product Design Approach 2

2. Creating the Product 3
   a. Market research and validation 3
   b. Design and develop the product or prototype 3
   c. Build the feedback loop 6

3. The (Not So) Big Ask 7

Employer Led Design

This guide outlines key ideas related to employer-led design, which involves collaborating with employers to create an upskilling program that meets industry demands and needs.

If you're launching a new program, you've already conducted an employer discovery phase to determine industry needs and identify in-demand occupations and skills.

Below is a quick overview of the initial employer discovery phase:

Employer Discovery Guide Recap

Previously, in the Employer Discovery Guide, we focused on ensuring that upskilling programs are demand-driven and employer-led from the start. It's important to put considerable effort and time into gathering research and insights from your target employers before designing your program to guide your selection of an upskilling area. Here is a summary of the key steps and learnings from the Employer Discovery Guide.

Steps to Employer Discovery:

1. Identify 5-10 employers in the target region and sector through research, job boards, industry associations, and personal networks.
2. Reach out to employers, clearly explaining the purpose and confirming their interest.
3. Conduct discovery interviews to understand the target employer's
   - operating environment
   - talent challenges
   - hiring processes
   - the standards used in candidate evaluation
4. Approach interviews with curiosity, listen actively, and be open to exploring important areas.

By following these steps, you will understand the current and future hiring needs, the challenges associated with finding and acquiring new talent, and what success in talent acquisition looks like.

palette skills

The *Employer-Led Design Guide* below is the next step following the initial employer discovery phase and will allow you to harness the insights gathered to design employer-aligned upskilling programs.

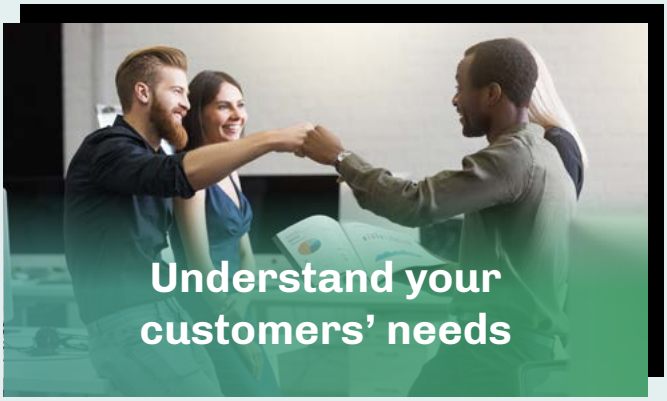
1. The Product Design Approach

Upskilling programs can be designed in many different ways. The design can be based on the goal of mastering a set of skills considered vital based on a skills framework; it can be designed with a human-centred approach, starting with the learner and their needs; or it can put employers at the centre of the design process to create a program that will result in talent that they want to hire.

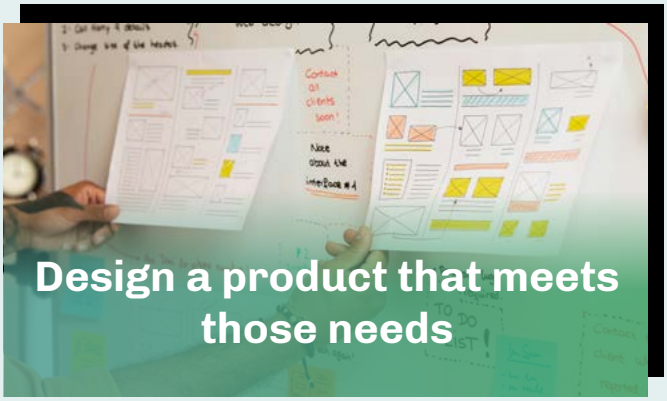
Palette Skills' model for upskilling follows an employer-led design approach. This approach is similar to design thinking and customer development, two approaches used when developing innovative new products. What all of these approaches have in common is that they don't start with an idea for a product or program – they start with a desire to understand and empathize with a customer problem. **For upskilling, the customer is the employer, and their problem is a talent gap.**

Product designers focus on achieving product-market fit to ensure a new product gains traction quickly after it launches in a market. Product-market fit is when the product you create is so well aligned with the needs of your target market that purchasing it is a "no-brainer" for a customer. The purpose of pursuing an employer-led approach when designing upskilling programs is to help you achieve a product-market fit between your program and the hiring needs of employers.

If you achieve product-market fit upfront in the design phase, it will make job placement easier at the end of the program. By doing this, you will be setting up participants to seamlessly move into the roles employers are looking to hire, and employers will be bought into the process as they were involved in its design.



+



=

palette skills

2. Creating the Product

So, understanding what a Product Design Approach is, how does it relate to an Employer-Led Design? An Employer-Led Design operates similarly to the Product Design Approach from a step-by-step standpoint. It utilizes three core steps/ principles:

a. Market research and validation

b. Design and develop the product or prototype

c. Build the feedback loop

By harnessing this design framework, you should bring in employers to help design and ultimately collaborate with you in running the program.

Here is a breakdown of the steps required to implement an employer-led design:

a. Market research and validation

At the beginning of the product design and development process, reviewing the landscape and identifying key employers who can provide feedback on program elements, help design learning requirements and structure, and validate the program is essential. To ensure that your program meets the needs of employers, it's best to engage them upfront. For a more thorough breakdown of the initial employer discovery and market research process, dive into our Employer Discovery Guide. At this stage, the goal for employer insight is quality rather than quantity. Two or three fully bought-in employers will give you more information than ten semi-interested employers.

b. Design and develop the product or prototype

Product design and development begins once you've had employer discussions and developed a sense of their needs, fears, and qualifiers. It's then time to create an MVP (Minimum Viable Product). In this case, a skeleton of the program structure and the learning requirements is the MVP.

Ultimately, the MVP will be used to workshop your program collaboratively with the employer to ensure efficacy. You can, and likely will, make adjustments down the line, but it's important to have that baseline program to work from.

Building the Minimum Viable Product

Building the MVP requires taking the insights gained from employers and translating them into core components of the upskilling program. This includes the professional and technical skills participants will learn (the learning requirements), time allocated to different topics, how the program will be delivered, and how participants will demonstrate their skills.

These insights will come directly from the questions asked to employers so far. The table below shows how specific questions feed directly into various program components:

Question	Relevant Program Component or Learning Requirement
• What topics are essential to include in the program? • What skills do candidates need to have? • What skills are nice to have?	• Identify the topics and skills that are necessary to cover in the program. • Inform talent pool development.
• What are the challenges your business faces in the next five years?	• Understand future skills concerns to build into the program. • Design interactive projects and case studies that demonstrate to employers participants' capacity to solve their challenges.
• What are the most common tasks involved?	• Design projects and activities that simulate common tasks to provide hands-on, experiential learning. • Inform talent pool identification.
• What do you find new hires need help with?	• Identify soft and technical skills that should be taught in the program.
• In your opinion, what has made previous hires unsuccessful? • What makes that an automatic yes and no?	• Identify soft and technical skills that should be taught in the program. • Identify the job readiness and career planning support that should be part of the program. • Inform talent pool development and recruitment strategies.

After analyzing these responses, you can take the following steps to organize your MVP and create a framework for your program structure:

1. **Craft Clear Course Outcomes:** Collaborate with experts to define specific and measurable learning objectives aligned with industry demands and collaborate with additional experts as needed.

2. **Define Subtopics:** Organize content into logical subtopics that build on foundational concepts and support course outcomes. Include case studies and practical exercises to give participants a better understanding of each subtopic where applicable.

3. **Determine Format, Hours & Assessments:** Choose a delivery format (in-person, hybrid, or online) and allocate hours for each subtopic. Develop formative and summative assessments to evaluate participants' progress and job skills effectively and efficiently.

4. **Integrate Hands-On Projects:** Enhance learning with industry-integrated real-world projects (co-created with employers) to provide practical experiences and industry connections.

5. **Consider Timing & Recruitment Criteria:** Accommodate industry hiring cycles and participant availability. Establish clear and objective recruitment criteria for viable candidate selection.

6. **Focus on Job-Specific Skills:** Tailor the curriculum to emphasize in-demand job-specific skills, basing this on employer discovery, market research and industry trends.

By following these concise steps, you will create a well-structured and industry-aligned upskilling program that meets the needs of employers and sets future participants up for success.

c. Build the feedback loop

Once you have created your MVP, the next step is to share it with employers for feedback. Questions you can ask that will tell you if the program will meet their needs include:

- What parts of this program concept resonate?
- What parts are missing?
- What parts are you most excited about?
- Is there anything here that is unnecessary?
- Would you hire from this program?
    - If so, why?
    - If not, why not?

This is not an exhaustive list of questions; each employer interaction will likely have questions tailored to that specific setting. The important thing is that questions are asked. Seeking feedback at this stage will set you up for long-term success, ensuring that the program includes what employers are looking for so participants are ready to hit the ground running once they complete the program. You should also consider at what other points in the future you will want to re-engage employers for feedback on the program, as the economy constantly shifts and their needs will change alongside.

3. The (Not So) Big Ask

Finally, it's time to formalize your organization's and the employer's relationship. This may seem like a big ask of the employer. Still, after going through all the above steps, you will have developed a more organic level of trust, providing the employer with the sense of security needed to make a long-term commitment to the program.

How do you make the (not so) big ask? Well, the necessary questions are more straightforward than you'd think:

- Ask to formalize the relationship to continue to work together on program design and delivery.
- Ask to continue receiving feedback on the program as it evolves and is fine-tuned.
- Ask if they would be willing to attend networking days or participate in industry-integrated activities during program delivery.
- Ask if they would be open to sharing job postings directly with you and program participants.

While you may be hesitant to ask for an employer's continued commitment and time, remember the benefit they will receive from a program tailored to their needs. For example, you can ask if they would like to continue to support the program while noting some of the benefits for them: fast access to qualified talent. Through these interactions, you are building a reciprocal relationship relationship, and you want to highlight that every step of the way.

Ultimately, upskilling programs focused on transitioning talent into new careers will be most successful when applying an employer-led design approach. When employer needs are centred in the design process, participants will be ready with the skills employers need.

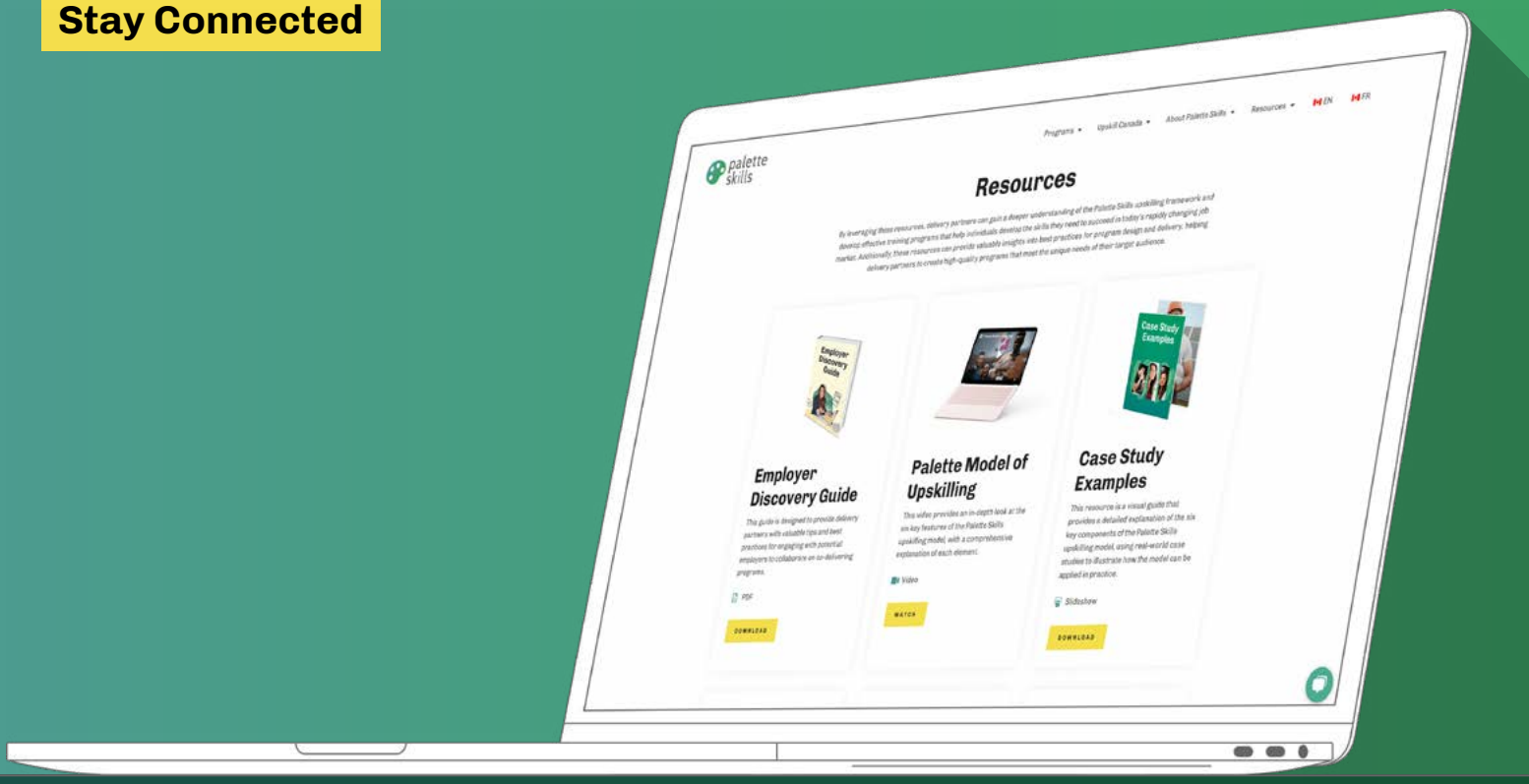
palette skills

palette skills

Palette Skills continues to build its learning sandbox guides and tools that support training providers in designing and delivering demand-driven upskilling programs.

We'd love to share updates and hear your thoughts on what resources you'd like to see in the future. Fill out the form below to stay in the loop and share your suggestions.

Stay Connected



Funded by the Government of Canada.
Financé par le gouvernement du Canada.

Canada