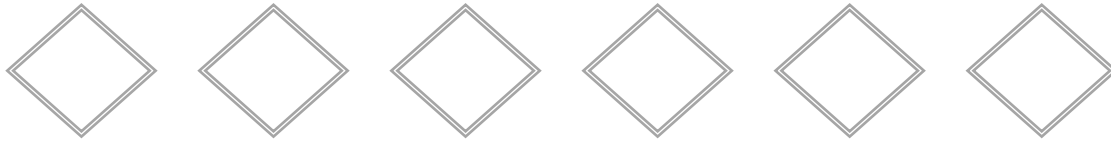


White Paper: Your Next Great Hire Already Works for You

Why developing the people you already have could be the smartest answer to New Zealand's skills shortage



Executive Summary

When organisations need new skills, new leaders or greater capability, the instinctive response is often to recruit. A gap appears, a position description is written and the search begins for someone outside the organisation who has the skills and experience required.

But what if some of the talent you need is already working for you?

Across New Zealand workplaces, there are employees with untapped potential: people who know the organisation, understand its customers, processes and culture, and have years of valuable experience. Yet they may never be considered for progression because they lack the confidence, communication skills or foundational capabilities to demonstrate what they can do.

The result is a costly contradiction. Organisations can spend significant time and money searching externally for capability while overlooking people with the potential to grow into those opportunities from within.

At Aspire2 Workplace Communication, we see what can happen when that potential is unlocked. Learners have progressed into Team Leader and Supervisor roles, taken on greater responsibility, become more confident contributors and, in some cases, surprised managers with capabilities that had previously gone unnoticed.

The lesson is simple: **before looking outside your organisation for your next great employee, it may be worth taking another look at the people already inside it.**

Developing existing employees can create a stronger internal talent pipeline, improve retention and engagement, reduce reliance on external recruitment and build a more capable and resilient workforce.

And sometimes, it starts with something as fundamental as giving someone the confidence and communication skills to step forward.

The talent shortage conversation may be missing something

Skills shortages are frequently framed as a recruitment challenge.

When an organisation needs additional capability, the questions quickly become: Where can we find experienced people? How can we attract better candidates? What do we need to pay to compete? How quickly can we fill the vacancy?

These are legitimate questions. There will always be positions requiring specialist knowledge, experience or qualifications that organisations need to recruit externally.

But external recruitment does not necessarily need to be the first response.

There is another question worth asking first:

Who do we already employ who could grow into this opportunity?

That seemingly simple question changes the conversation. Instead of viewing workforce capability solely through the lens of recruitment, organisations begin looking more closely at the skills, experience, aspirations and potential that already exist within their teams.

In many workplaces, considerable capability sits below the surface. Employees accumulate knowledge through years of experience. They understand customers, systems, equipment, processes and the unwritten ways in which an organisation operates. Some are natural problem-solvers. Others are trusted by their colleagues or have the ability to bring people together. Some have leadership qualities that simply haven't been tested yet.

The challenge is that these capabilities aren't always visible through a job title, CV or performance review.

Sometimes there isn't a shortage of potential.

There is a shortage of visibility.

Hidden talent is easy to overlook

Potential does not always look like potential.

The employee who confidently speaks in meetings, volunteers for projects and puts themselves forward for opportunities is relatively easy to notice. The quiet employee who has never considered themselves leadership material can be much easier to miss.

So can the employee who is highly capable technically but struggles to communicate their ideas. Or the experienced team member whose literacy or numeracy skills make them hesitant to take on additional responsibility. Or the employee who understands the operation inside out but lacks confidence when communicating with managers.

There may also be people whose abilities extend well beyond what their current role requires. An employee might lead a sports team, organise events in their community, manage finances for a club, care for an extended family or have previously worked in a very different occupation. Those experiences can develop leadership, problem-solving, planning and communication capabilities that may never appear in a workplace conversation.

Traditional measures of talent do not necessarily uncover any of this.

Job titles tell us what someone does now. Qualifications tell us what someone has studied. Performance measures tell us how someone is performing against their current responsibilities.

None necessarily tells us what that person **could become**.

And that distinction matters.

The skills that allow potential to become visible

Technical capability will always be important. But workplaces also depend on people being able to communicate clearly, work effectively with others, solve problems, adapt to change and have the confidence to contribute.

These human capabilities are becoming even more important as technology and artificial intelligence change the nature of work. Technology can automate tasks and provide information, but organisations still need people who can interpret situations, communicate with others, make judgements, collaborate and lead.

An employee may have excellent technical knowledge but struggle to explain an issue clearly. Someone may have an idea for improving a process but lack the confidence to raise it. Another person may understand the operation better than almost anyone but hesitate when asked to lead colleagues.

There may be someone capable of becoming a supervisor who is held back because writing reports feels daunting, working with numbers creates anxiety or speaking with senior managers is outside their comfort zone.

These aren't necessarily capability problems. Often, they are development opportunities.

This is why foundational workplace skills matter.

Communication, literacy, numeracy, digital capability and confidence don't simply help employees perform their existing jobs better. They increase the range of situations in which an employee can participate confidently and effectively.

In other words, they can help people grow beyond the job they are doing today.

What happens when confidence catches up with capability?

This is something we regularly see through Aspire2 Workplace Communication programmes.

The person often had the potential before the programme began. What changes is their ability to demonstrate it.

As confidence develops, employees begin to contribute differently. Someone who previously remained quiet might start offering ideas. Another employee becomes more comfortable asking questions rather than pretending they understand. Someone else starts communicating directly with a manager rather than relying on a colleague to do it for them.

They may begin solving problems independently, volunteering for tasks or accepting responsibilities they would previously have avoided.

The changes can appear small individually, but collectively they alter how that employee is perceived.

Managers begin to see someone who is engaged, capable and willing to take responsibility.

And sometimes that creates opportunities neither the employee nor their manager had previously considered.

From long-serving employee to Team Leader

One Aspire2 Workplace Communication programme delivered with Superior Doors provides a powerful example.

A manager described an employee who had been with the organisation for 18 years. Management had long believed he had the ability to become a leader, but his attendance was significantly below expectations and was putting his future with the organisation at risk.

As his manager explained:

“He most likely would have been dismissed if he did not change his behaviour.”

Instead, the employee participated in workplace training and began developing his communication, confidence and wider workplace skills.

The change was significant.

Rather than leaving the organisation, he progressed within it and was promoted to Team Leader.

His manager later reflected:

“The difference in him now versus 6 to 9 months ago is what makes it worthwhile for us as management to continue to support our staff.”

Consider the alternative outcome.

An employee with 18 years of organisational knowledge could have left the organisation. Superior Doors would not only have lost an employee; it would have lost almost two decades of experience and then potentially incurred the cost and disruption of recruiting and training someone new.

Instead, investment in development contributed to an existing employee becoming someone capable of taking on greater responsibility.

The capability hadn't suddenly arrived when the promotion happened.

The potential had been there. Development helped unlock it.

When an organisation discovers the leader it already had

Superior Doors saw a similar outcome with another programme participant.

This employee was promoted into a Team Leader position within a critical department containing equipment with a replacement value of approximately \$2 million.

Again, the employee was not presented as the finished product. His manager recognised that continued development, particularly around his soft skills, would be important as he grew into leadership.

But the organisation had identified something valuable: willingness, capability and the desire to lead.

His manager put it simply:

“I think he is still going to surprise us even more. He has the willingness and the desire to lead.”

That statement captures something important about internal development.

Organisations don't necessarily need to find employees who already possess every capability required for the next role. They need to become better at recognising people with the potential and desire to grow, and then consider which skills can be developed around them.

The employee already understood the workplace, the equipment, his colleagues and the operational environment. Development could then focus on helping him build the communication and leadership skills needed for the next stage of his career.

That is a very different proposition from starting again with an unknown external candidate.

Confidence can change a career trajectory

The Superior Doors experience isn't an isolated example.

Learners participating in an Aspire2 Workplace Communication programme with Bidfood Auckland South progressed into promotions, with increased self-confidence identified as an important contributor to their development.

That connection between confidence and progression should not be underestimated.

Employees don't always fail to progress because they lack capability. Sometimes they don't put themselves forward. They don't believe they are ready. They assume management wouldn't consider them. Or they lack confidence communicating what they know and what they could contribute.

Workplace development can begin changing that perception – both for the employee and the people managing them.

We have seen the same phenomenon in very different working environments.

During a recent Aspire2 Workplace Communication programme involving cleaning staff at PPCS, a learner named Mel was made a Supervisor while the programme was still underway.

Again, the significance goes beyond one promotion.

These examples come from different workplaces, industries and employees, yet they share a common thread.

Development made potential more visible.

For the employee, that can mean progression, greater responsibility, increased confidence and a stronger sense that they have a future within their organisation.

For the employer, it can mean filling capability gaps with someone who already understands the workplace.

The true cost of always looking outside

Recruitment has obvious costs. There may be advertising or recruitment agency fees, management time spent reviewing applications and interviewing candidates, onboarding, induction and training.

But the largest costs aren't always the ones that appear on an invoice.

A new employee needs time to understand how an organisation operates. They need to learn systems and processes, establish relationships with colleagues, understand customers and develop knowledge that existing employees may have accumulated over years.

During that period, other employees often carry additional workload. Managers spend time supporting the new recruit. Productivity may take time to reach the required level.

And external recruitment always involves an element of uncertainty.

A candidate can interview extremely well, have impressive qualifications and excellent references, but organisations cannot know with certainty how that person will perform in their particular environment or how long they will stay.

An existing employee brings something different to the equation.

They already have organisational knowledge.

They know the people. They understand the operation. They have established relationships. They know the customers and often understand both the formal processes and the practical realities of getting the job done.

Developing that person doesn't eliminate every risk, and internal promotion will not always be the right solution. But it does raise an important question about whether organisations are fully valuing the capability they already possess before purchasing it elsewhere.

Development is also a retention strategy

There is another side to this equation.

While organisations are searching externally for talented people, some of their own talented people may be looking externally for opportunities.

Employees want different things from work, but the opportunity to learn, grow and take on new challenges can be an important reason to stay.

When someone feels they have reached the limit of what is possible in their current organisation, their next career step may require them to leave.

That creates a frustrating cycle.

An organisation can find itself trying to recruit talent from the market while allowing its own talent to walk out the door.

Development can help interrupt that cycle.

Investing in someone's capability sends an important signal. It tells employees that the organisation sees value in them and is prepared to invest in their future.

It also creates opportunities for managers to have better conversations with their people. What would they like to learn? What responsibilities interest them? Where do they see themselves progressing? What is currently holding them back?

Those conversations can reveal aspirations and capabilities that might otherwise remain invisible.

Importantly, progression doesn't always need to mean promotion.

An employee might become more effective and confident in their existing role. They might begin mentoring colleagues, communicating directly with customers, contributing ideas, solving problems independently or taking ownership of a particular area.

Each time an employee expands what they can confidently do, the organisation's capability expands with them.

Your future leaders may not look like leaders yet

One of the dangers in identifying future leaders is that organisations naturally notice the people who already behave like leaders.

Confidence is highly visible.

Potential isn't always.

Someone who rarely speaks during meetings may have excellent ideas. Someone reluctant to complete written reports may understand the operation exceptionally well. Someone who has never applied for promotion may simply never have imagined themselves succeeding in the role.

This is particularly relevant in diverse New Zealand workplaces.

Employees bring different educational experiences, cultural backgrounds, first languages and levels of confidence using workplace English. A person's ability to communicate confidently in a particular setting can easily influence how others perceive their overall capability.

Yet communication confidence and capability are not the same thing.

An employee may understand exactly what needs to happen but struggle to explain it. They may know how to solve a problem but hesitate to challenge someone more senior. They may have leadership qualities that emerge naturally among their peers but disappear in a formal meeting environment.

When those communication barriers are reduced, organisations get to see more of the person behind the job title.

And sometimes what they discover is surprising.

Look internally before launching your next recruitment campaign

The next time a vacancy appears, it is worth resisting the urge to immediately write the job advertisement.

Instead, take a deliberate look at the people already in the organisation.

Who already understands this part of the operation? Who has credibility with their colleagues? Who demonstrates good judgement? Who quietly solves problems? Who has shown an interest in learning? Who takes pride in helping others succeed?

Then consider the people who haven't put themselves forward.

There may be employees who demonstrate capability through their actions but lack the confidence to volunteer for greater responsibility. There may be others who would like to progress but believe their communication, literacy, numeracy or digital skills will hold them back.

The most useful question may not be **“Who is ready to do this job today?”**

It might be:

“Who could become ready if we invested in them?”

That opens up a very different talent pool.

And unlike the external market, these are people you already know.

Workplace training should do more than improve today's performance

Organisations understandably invest in training to solve current problems.

Perhaps communication needs to improve. Errors need to decrease. Employees need greater confidence with numbers or digital systems. Supervisors need people to take more responsibility.

Those immediate outcomes matter.

But there is a broader opportunity.

Instead of only asking, “**What skills does this employee need to do their current job?**”, organisations can also ask, “**What skills could help this person take their next step?**”

For one employee, that step might be speaking confidently during a toolbox meeting. For another, it could be writing a clearer email or understanding the numbers behind a production target.

Someone else might need confidence having a difficult conversation, presenting an idea to management or leading a small group of colleagues.

These might appear to be relatively small changes.

But careers are often built from small changes.

A person speaks up.

Someone notices.

They are given an opportunity.

They succeed.

They are trusted with something bigger.

Over time, the employee who once lacked confidence becomes the person others turn to.

That is how organisational capability grows.

[A different way to think about the return on workplace training](#)

The return on workplace training is sometimes measured too narrowly.

Organisations understandably want to know whether productivity improved, errors reduced or employees became more capable in their existing jobs.

Those measures are important.

But consider the value created when an employee who might otherwise have left develops into a Team Leader. Or when someone capable of supervising others is identified internally rather than recruited externally. Or when an experienced employee gains the confidence to share their knowledge with less experienced colleagues.

Consider the value of retaining organisational knowledge that might otherwise walk out the door.

Consider the value of an employee who begins identifying problems rather than simply working around them.

Or someone who communicates an issue early enough to prevent an expensive mistake.

Or an employee who sees a future with the organisation because someone has invested in their development.

Those benefits aren't always captured neatly on a training evaluation form.

But they affect productivity, retention, engagement, succession planning and recruitment.

And collectively, they can have a significant impact on organisational performance.

Workplace training isn't simply an employee benefit. Done well, it is workforce strategy.

Build capability before you buy it

External recruitment will always be necessary.

Organisations need specialist expertise, additional people, new perspectives and different experiences as they grow and change.

The argument isn't to stop recruiting.

It is to stop assuming recruitment is always the first answer.

Before spending time and money searching for capability externally, take another look at the people already working for you.

There may be someone who understands your operation better than almost anyone.

Someone trusted by their colleagues.

Someone who quietly solves problems every day.

Someone who wants to progress but doesn't know how.

Someone whose confidence doesn't yet match their capability.

Someone who has never been given an opportunity to show you what they could become.

Developing that person could be good for their career.

It could also be very good for your organisation.

Your next Supervisor may already be on the payroll.

Your next Team Leader may simply be waiting for someone to recognise their potential.

And your next great hire may not need to be hired at all.

Unlock the potential already in your workforce

Aspire2 Workplace Communication works alongside New Zealand organisations to develop the communication, literacy, numeracy and digital skills employees need to succeed at work and grow in their careers.

Our workplace-based programmes are built around the real needs of learners and their workplaces. The goal isn't learning for learning's sake. It is helping people develop practical skills they can use immediately – communicating more confidently, solving problems, understanding information, using workplace technology and contributing more effectively.

For some learners, that means becoming more capable and confident in the job they already have.

For others, it creates the foundation for something more.

Greater responsibility.

Leadership.

Promotion.

A career pathway they may not previously have imagined.

And for their organisation, it can mean discovering that the talent they were looking for was already there.

Before you recruit your next employee, talk to Aspire2 Workplace Communication about developing the people you already have. <https://workplacecommunication.co.nz/contact-us/>

Build capability. Grow confidence. Discover the talent already in your team.