



Learning study • October 2026

Platforms have to solve for demand

Lessons from unlocking global interest in African talent

Executive summary

Jobtech platforms in Kenya, Nigeria and across the continent are running out of room at home, and the ambitious ones have started selling globally. We worked with founders who have (successfully) made that leap to distil the lessons learned about selling African talent globally.

One of our [ten hard-learned truths about how jobtech works in Africa](#) is that demand is everything. Africa does not suffer from a shortage of workers; it suffers from a shortage of paying customers. If you accept that, the logical next move for a jobtech platform is to go and find customers somewhere else. That means selling African talent into global markets.

But the global market for remote and outsourced work is crowded, dominated by incumbents whose reference lists African founders might not be able to match, and being reshaped by AI faster than anyone can plan around. It also carries a problem no African platform can manifest away: a lot of buyers in developed economies might hold misguided assumptions about African talent that have nothing to do with the quality of the work.

The lessons at a glance

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Buyer's problem comes before your solution

02

Quality is the key and the bar is rising fast

03

Price is a gate that opens after trust

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There are many angles on geography

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Worker mobilisation is a two-sided problem

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Building means upskilling

This learning study is about how to drive global demand. It draws heavily on our experiences with venture building support, including for [Elewa](#), [AfricaAI and Avala](#), with a particular focus on one of our portfolio platforms, [Fuzu](#).

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Platform case study

Fuzu and Fuzu Atlas

FUZU Atlas

Kenya • Finland

2015

Launched in Kenya as a career platform

3m+

Professional profiles

~20,000

New profiles added every month

2,000+

Organisations have used it

Fuzu launched in Kenya in 2015 as a career platform built on the conviction that better information would produce better hiring decisions on both sides of the market. It has been layering AI scoring into its matching for close to a decade, which differentiates it from a conventional classifieds board. It has grown into one of the two largest platforms of its kind in the country.

Despite this relative success, what the company found over that decade was a local market too small to carry the sophistication it had built. Founder and CEO [Jussi Hinkkanen](#) estimates the entire commercial talent market in a country like Kenya at \$10-20 million a year, chased by 150-200 recruitment companies. The formalisation everybody expected back in 2015 arrived much more slowly than their business plans assumed. Local corporate clients proved hard to sell to and to collect from, while an influx of grant capital left several competitors able to give away services Fuzu needed to charge for.

The response has been to build outwards from the platform instead of abandoning it, so Fuzu now runs on three legs:

Leg 1

Consumer marketplace at fuzu.com

Generates little revenue by itself while functioning as the sourcing, vetting and analytics engine everything else depends on.

Leg 2

Employability programmes and white-label deployments

Including a Mastercard Foundation programme and a licensing arrangement with the largest HR company in Scandinavia. Commercially almost three times the size of leg 1.

Leg 3

Fuzu Atlas

Connects that talent base to global demand. Traded until a few months ago as Fuzu Global Workforce.

Headquartered in Helsinki, [Fuzu Atlas](#) sells multilingual data operations, large language model evaluation and safety work, multimodal annotation and expert-in-the-loop quality assurance to AI labs, robotics companies and regulated industries across Europe and the US. The company has also begun positioning itself as a European counterweight to the large American data operations providers, at a moment when Europe is uneasy about how much of its AI supply chain runs through US companies. Operationally, Atlas maintains a price list of roughly 250 competencies with sourcing routes.

Jobtech Alliance invested in 2026 on the thesis that the future of African [digital work will be shaped by platforms owning the infrastructure layer underneath global talent supply](#), rather than the marketplace interface sitting on top of it.

Lesson 1

01 Buyer's problem comes before your solution

Most platforms tend to sell leading with the sophistication of their matching engine, their vetting funnel, and/or the sheer size of their talent pool. This is understandable given that the technology took years to build and might be the thing any founder is proudest of. But it might also be the part of the business a buyer has limited appetite to hear about first.

First and foremost, clients are interested in whether you have understood their problem, not in how sophisticated your solution is.

Buyers arrive carrying a problem they want taken off their desk. The solution is rarely sitting neatly on a shelf. Platforms therefore have an important role as architects: translating the client's needs into a clearly defined package of work that can be delivered remotely. We have written before about why [building trade routes for global demand begins](#) with this packaging work, rather than with demand that already exists in a tidy, outsourceable form.

For the AI labs and model developers purchasing this kind of work from Fuzu, for example, a model might be underperforming in a certain domain, or a model release date might have come to depend on several hundred domain specialists reviewing outputs in a matter of days.

Underneath all of this sits a very important question about what is actually being sold. The unit of sale in a managed teams business of this kind is judgment, priced by the quality of the decisions it produces. As Fuzu's CEO, Jussi Hinkkanen, put it:



We're not just selling people, but we are basically selling judgment very often. And so we are selling that governance that is crucial.

Jussi Hinkkanen
Founder and CEO, Fuzu

Fuzu argues that [good AI data should have a history](#), meaning a client can trace who did the work, how they were selected and who signed it off. Provenance of that kind can be audited, which is precisely why it survives a long cultural and geographic distance in a way that a headcount number never will.



Practical tips

- Write the pitch so that the first two minutes contain no description of your platform.
- Name the three to five problems your buyers typically have.
- Have the provenance answer ready, covering who did the work, how they were selected, who signed off and whether any of it can be audited.

Lesson 2

02 Quality is the key and the bar is rising fast

The received wisdom about African digital work is that it competes on cost. This was true of the low end of the market and is now being automated away. It was never true for the more valuable part of the market that is worth entering now.

An AI lab that has spent a very large sum building a frontier model will not put its release date at risk in order to shave a margin off evaluation labour, so the thing it spends its diligence on is quality and reliability. As Jussi put it:

Cost of that labour isn't always the primary thing. The main thing is the quality and the confidence and the trust that the client can say, 'I trust you and your judgment and the judgment of the people working through you.' When you enter these discussions, that's what they're judging: 'can I trust you?'

Jussi Hinkkanen

Founder and CEO, Fuzu

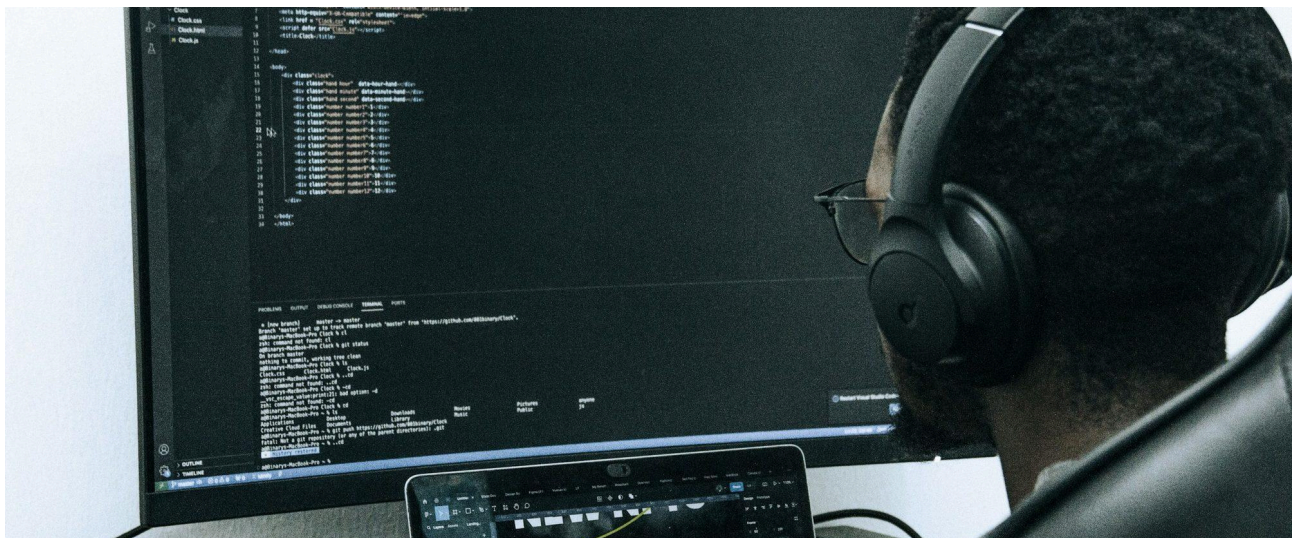
Beyond interpersonal client trust, however, there is also competence-based trust. These days, AI models absorb the easy layer of human knowledge, leaving the harder layer for experts to work with. It might engage fewer people without providing mass employment pathways, but it tends to involve higher value and more dignified work that also pays better.

Any provider whose commercial plan assumes that today's billable competence will still be billable in 18 months is planning around a market that will have moved on, as we detail in [lesson 6](#). The bar for what counts as billable human judgment keeps climbing, and climbing quickly. Again, in Jussi's words:

Two years ago you needed to understand basic biology. Now you need to be a PhD in biology for that competence to be valuable, because the models already understand the basics and they need this super advanced capability from you.

Jussi Hinkkanen

Founder and CEO, Fuzu



Practical tips

- Invest in quality assurance and governance rather than just sourcing.
- Account for what rising complexity does to headcount per contract, and anticipate changes month-on-month.

Lesson 3

03 Price is a gate that opens after trust

Price remains decisive, of course, but typically at the end of a sales conversation that has progressed well on other points, as the flow below shows.

The sequence that works

Price is the last gate a deal passes through. Geography is a delivery detail.



Source: Jobtech Alliance venture building work with Fuzu Atlas and other portfolio platforms, 2026.

A platform that opens up a sales pitch with cost competitiveness has likely glossed over the client's problem and its own capabilities, instead inviting a cost comparison it is likely to lose. But there is something deeper that a lot of founders might overlook: they do not have the agency to set the price. Markets do.

It is the global market that sets the floor price for this work, not the individual platform.

This puts African platforms under real pressure at home, from funders, from government and from workers, to pay decent wages. However, a host of African markets might not be as cost-competitive against the markets they are up against.

40%

How much more expensive one founder in an East African country estimates talent in their market runs compared with India.

This is a single founder's view, shared with Jobtech Alliance in 2026. Not a market-wide figure.

Structural factors underpin this. Economies that import heavily and depend on external financing hold their currencies at levels that might make local labour expensive in dollars, while the wage might still feel low to the worker. The social impact premium can compound this, because few global clients anywhere would pay substantially more for ethically sourced labour, and the largest buyers are not among them.

The founder's dilemma

Option A

Push wages up

The work can easily move to India or the Philippines, where it is already cheaper.

Option B

Hold them where the global market sets them

You stand accused of exploitation by people whose concern is legitimate and whose diagnosis is aimed at the wrong actor.

Sector wage floors for digital work respond to a real problem. When set above the global clearing price, they remove the work altogether.

Regulation can improve how work is governed more easily than it can change what the work pays. You need to recognise this, and funders need to be clear about which variables a platform can control. Our [quality of work definition](#) and [measurement tool](#) can be useful here, as can [our read](#) on what the adoption of [ILO Convention 193](#) means for defining decent work in the platform economy.

There is one caveat.

Price taking is not a must when the work concerns scarce competencies or extremely fast labour force mobilisation. This is where you can have pricing power.



Practical tips

- Refuse to quote until you understand the problem, to position yourself and your platform as a partner, not just a provider.
- Avoid building a business case that assumes an impact premium you have not tested with a commercial buyer.

Lesson 4

04 There are many angles on geography

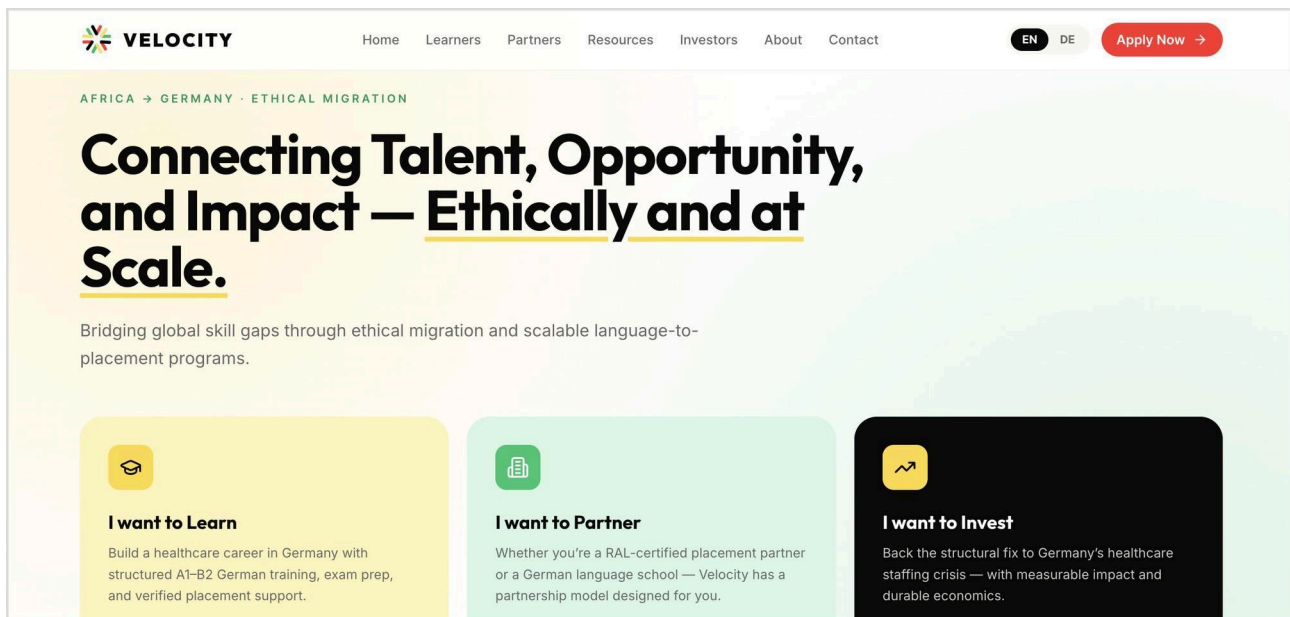
Geography means two things: where you sell from and where you deliver from. On the first, there is a rule of thumb that is obvious but somewhat contentious.

A platform selling into developed markets needs sales leadership based in those markets.

The reason has less to do with prejudice than with how the market actually operates, since it runs almost entirely on introductions. Cold calling and cold emailing achieve very little at the enterprise end. A founder in Abidjan can join every call and still be unable to make the coffee that turns into an introduction, or be in the room in San Francisco on a Tuesday. Buying decisions also depend on cultural legibility as much as on capability.

Fuzu illustrates the pattern well. Fuzu Atlas is headquartered in Helsinki under a CEO who has spent his career between Europe and Africa, and it sells into Europe and the US. That accounts for its traction.

Solving for this does not mean you need to relocate. [Velocity](#), for example, reaches German employers through accredited in-market partners who hold the client relationship.



This addresses the first half of the problem. The second half is that global clients might hold assumptions about Africa that have nothing to do with the quality of the work. There are two paths to responding to this unfortunate set of circumstances.

Route 1

Impact sourcing

Lead with where the work happens, because that is the value proposition. This can be combined with commercial pricing. However, impact framing invites close scrutiny of your own wage levels on terms you do not necessarily set.

Route 2

Competence first

Lead with the buyer's problem, your capability and your governance, and answer plainly about where your teams sit whenever anybody asks.

Fuzu Atlas has taken the [second route](#). It leads with human intelligence for trustworthy AI, names Helsinki as its headquarters, and cites more than three million profiles across over 40 countries. The platform names Kenya, Nigeria and Egypt, and writes about its African journey elsewhere on the same site. As the CEO put it:

It is relatively agnostic and in that sense opportunistic. We're transparent that the largest teams we have are in Kenya or Nigeria or Egypt, but it's not the lead angle. The problem here is not where those guys are; the

*problem is the quality of the models and the quality of the governance.
Where the talent is, is to some extent, secondary.*

Jussi Hinkkanen

Founder and CEO, Fuzu

Fuzu Atlas is also positioning itself as a European alternative to the large US data operations providers at a moment when Europe is distinctly uncomfortable that its AI supply chain runs almost entirely through US companies.

There is an important macro point here. Geography is also about which trade corridors a platform chooses to build, beyond where it sells from and delivers from. No platform can reach every market at once. The more useful question is which repeatable corridor a platform can thicken over time, a point we discuss in [how trade routes for global demand actually get built](#).



Practical tips

- Decide where your commercial presence sits before you refine how your deck reads. One is a business model question and the other is a wording question.
- Pick a positioning route and write it down, because platforms that hedge produce a deck that reads as apologetic.
- On the competence-first route, rehearse the honest answer to where your talent sits, since an awkward answer undoes the whole position.
- Reach for precedent instead of reassurance, and audit the precedent before you use it.

Lesson 5

05 Worker mobilisation is a two-sided problem

In our [chicken-and-egg study](#), we argued that [liquidity](#), the efficiency with which platforms match demand and supply, is the real problem in two-sided marketplaces. A managed teams platform meets this problem in compressed form, playing out over days instead of quarters, and with sometimes very constricted talent pools. Fuzu's CEO summed up the issue well:

In the market of scarcity, the employers are willing to pay for it. In the market of abundance, employers are not really keen on paying anything for it.

Jussi Hinkkanen

Founder and CEO, Fuzu

Mobilise too early and you have told a group of workers that a job is coming which then fails to arrive, which diminishes the pool of quality talent and demotivates the people in it. Mobilise too late and the client's window has closed. Clients often have expectations about your bench that might be disconnected from your reality. As Fuzu's Jussi recalled:

We had a case in July where we had to source, contract and mobilise 1,500 people in six days, which is an insane job.

Jussi Hinkkanen

Founder and CEO, Fuzu

The mobilisation window

The chicken-and-egg problem again, compressed into days. Both sides of the miss are expensive.

Mobilise too early

Before the deal closes

- Deal falls through.
- Workers were told a job was coming and would stop responding after the third ask.

The window

Productised and priced

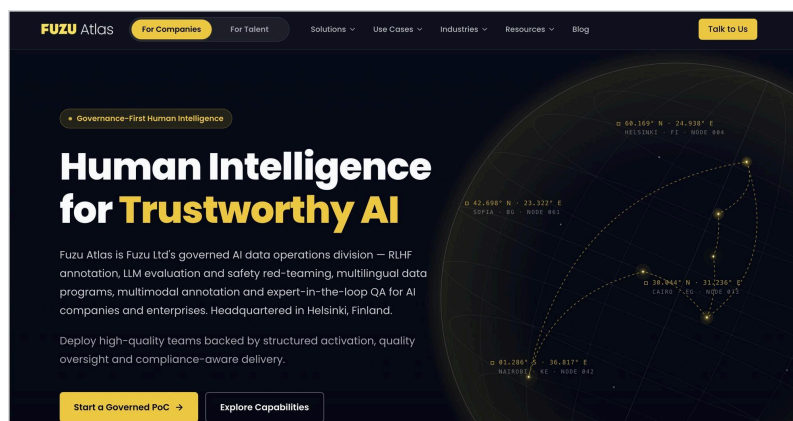
- Productised pools make this easier to hit.
- Price, location, sourcing route and time-to-live known in advance.

Mobilise too late

After the client moves on

- Client window closes.
- 'Team live in five days' is a real ask.
- Nobody has people on a bench.

Source: Jobtech Alliance venture building work with Fuzu Atlas, 2026.



Mobilisation is about velocity. Fuzu has had talent confirm availability and subsequently turn out to be in full-time employment elsewhere. The cost of that is then passed on to the client, undermining the platform's reputation.

Your talent pool is a depreciating asset. It loses value every time you spend it on a deal that does not close.

That is why Fuzu Atlas maintains a price list of roughly 250 competencies, holding against each one a price, a location, and a classification of whether the pool already exists, can be sourced, or is not yet understood well enough to sell.

Grade 1

Pool already exists

Talent is on the platform and vetted for this competency.

Grade 2

Pool can be sourced

A known sourcing route exists for this competency.

Grade 3

Not yet understood

The competency is not understood well enough to sell yet.

From this, Fuzu Atlas can tell a client honestly that a team can go live in 5, 10 or 30 business days. It also runs a 30-day proof of concept on a ring-fenced problem before anything scales. This client arrangement gets around the master service agreements and security reviews that otherwise consume months, in addition to building trust fast and de-risking the relationship, both of which founders tend to find challenging.



Practical tips

- Build a competency price list.
- Grade your pools as existing, sourceable or unknown.
- Design ring-fenced, fixed-scope trials that a cautious buyer finds easy to accept.

Lesson 6

06 Building means upskilling

Demand in AI data work moves between competencies in weeks, not months. Annotation for model training gave way to language and cultural nuance, which gave way to computer vision for autonomous vehicles, then to domain experts in mathematics and coding, then to data collection as the models exhausted what was available to them, and now to robotics and physical AI content.

How demand in AI data work has moved

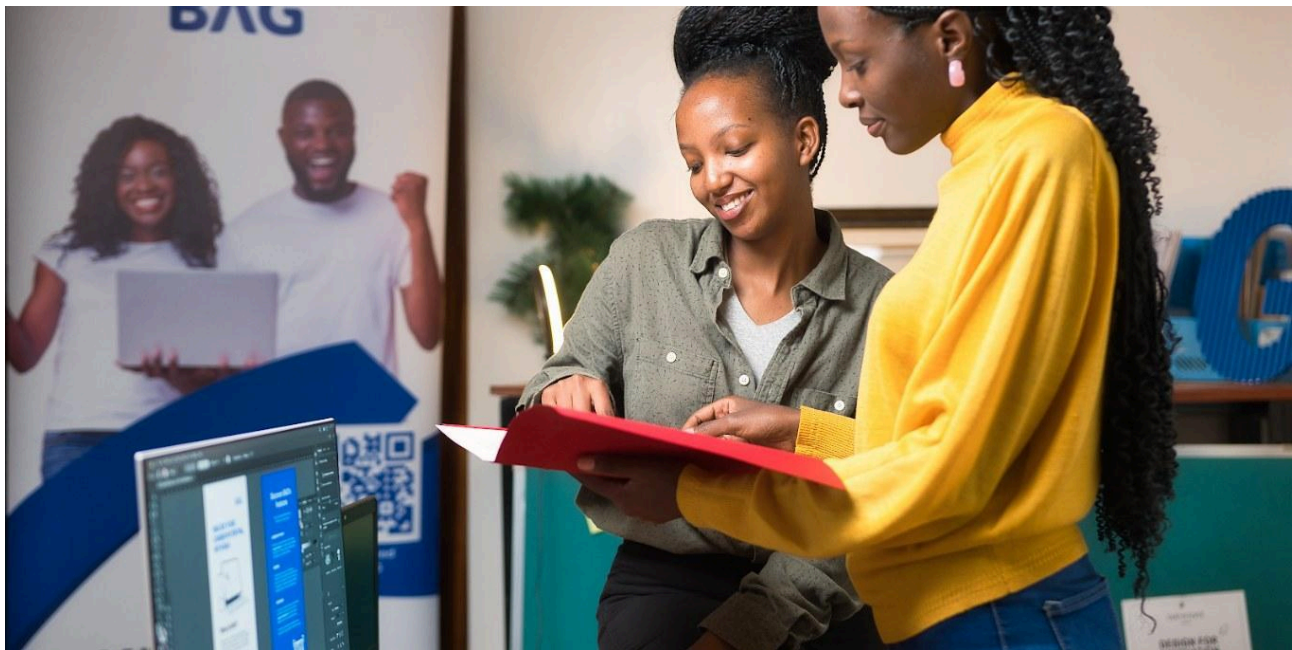
Each shift changed which competencies were billable.

Then	Then	Then	Then	Then	Now
Annotation for model training	Language and cultural nuance	Computer vision for autonomous vehicles	Domain experts in mathematics and coding	Data collection	Robotics and physical AI

Source: Fuzu Atlas, as shared with Jobtech Alliance, 2026.

Upskilling should be the operating system for platforms in this space, who must take into account just how volatile skills have become in today’s world.

Skills demand moves faster than most workers could track through their own initiative. While [AI is making platform-based skilling work](#) at a pace that was not available three years ago, the volatility in skill and competency demand might mean the conventional livelihood or career path in this sector might not be that durable. Worker attrition is a corollary of this.



Three things follow from this.

01

Breadth of pool beats depth in any single skill

A platform holding millions of profiles across many domains can follow demand more closely as it moves. However, this may undermine attempts to build up liquidity.

02

Reskilling has to be fast, cheap and largely self-directed

With AI, this has [become possible](#) in a way it was not three years ago. We invested in [BAG and Learn.ink](#) based on this thesis.

03

Upskilling has to be measured before it can be claimed

If moving a worker up the competency ladder is the answer to the wage question from [lesson 3](#), a platform needs to show it is happening. That is where [data portability](#) can become particularly useful.



Practical tips

- Assess talent for adaptability alongside the competency you need.
- Deepen the role that skill combinations, rather than rigid competencies only, can play in your value proposition.
- Keep the pool as broad as you can, but not at the expense of engagement, so that workers can remain engaged even when liquidity is thin.
- Create records of upskilling and, ideally, make those records portable for workers.

More reading

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