Building an Upskilling & Reskilling Culture with Stack Overflow for Teams

Introduction

There are a few paths to becoming a developer: finishing a computer science degree, or doing an intensive bootcamp, or self-teaching with the help of online programs and communities.

But once those developers are part of your team, how can you make sure that they are continuously learning?

That they're building on the foundational skills that qualified them for the job and keeping up with the knowledge they'll need to succeed?

Making sure your company has a healthy, supportive culture of **upskilling** and **reskilling** is a good place to start.

Upskilling is when people level up their skills, deepening core competencies and gaining enough expertise to start teaching others. It's not unlike leveling up a character in a video game, where after enough training, their stats increase and they're ready to take on the final boss. At work, junior developers who discover and apply information well are able to collect new skills, learn more complex code, and experience a progression in their responsibilities, gaining seniority in their role and even becoming a trainer of others. A work culture that supports upskilling is one that makes information easily accessible. Employees are encouraged to grow, and are enabled with the tools they need along the way.

Reskilling is different. It's when people acquire the knowledge and experience to switch roles. Let's say a company that builds physical servers and hardware decides to go through a digital transformation and start building software in the cloud. The company's engineers, who were already experts in one thing, need to transform their skillset into a broader, more forward-thinking set of skills. Engineers who become managers of people often need a similar kind of reskilling, to go from succeeding as an individual contributor to managing the whole employee lifecycle.

Upskilling and reskilling are both important because they allow your team to keep learning and evolving on the job. No one joins your team knowing absolutely everything they'll need for a successful, decades-long career—they couldn't. Technology evolves too fast. Upskilling and reskilling enable folks to make consistent progress in their jobs from any starting point.

And it pays off: creating a culture where developers can upskill and reskill at work gives them a fulfilling, growth-fueled path while also ensuring that your company is ready for whatever the future may hold.

The two things you need to build a learning-focused culture: humans and technology

Whether you're looking to help junior engineers scale the ladder or senior developers prepare for new roles, learning is best when it's dynamic. Everyone learns differently, but no one is a machine.

Good, supportive learning cultures provide two things: the right technology and experienced humans.

That's true for the learning methods we talked about earlier. College and bootcamps use technology (instructional videos and course management software, among others) and overlay it with a strong human element (professors, instructors, and plenty of office hours). Self-guided learners often rely heavily on technology and supplement it with some human help, via forums like Stack Overflow.

At work, whether developers are upskilling or reskilling, that double-pronged human-tech approach is what can help them get over the "I don't know what I'm doing" hump. Giving learners the tools, resources, and people necessary to get on the right path helps to clear up confusion.

Stack Overflow for Teams is designed to provide the exact right mix of both humans and technology.

The six steps of building a community of learning on Stack Overflow for Teams

Stack Overflow for Teams has helped reskillers and upskillers at places like <u>Intuit</u> and <u>Expensify</u> get up to speed quickly and expand their horizons. A healthy community is one where knowledge and learning are accessible to all. The Stack Overflow for Teams platform brings together the technology and the human expertise to make that possible.

We have a tried-and-true process for setting up successful learning-focused communities. (It's at the heart of Stack Overflow, which has gone from a niche site to one of the top websites in the world, with 100 million visits a month.

Here's how it works:

STEP 1

Buy-in

A successful community needs its champions, and there are a few key archetypes you'll want to look for, including subject matter experts (SMEs) and ambassadors. Here's how you can get them on board:

- **Show SMEs how valuable their knowledge and their time are.** Let's say everyone on your team goes to the same two senior engineers every time they have a question. They play a vital role in upskilling newer members, yes, but what if they could do that without being pulled out of their work all the time? Talk to them about <u>knowledge reuse</u>, a metric that measures how often team members are helped by their contributions, and about the compounding impact of writing down what they're most often asked.

- **Talk to ambassadors about the team-building potential of Stack Overflow for Teams.** Ambassadors are usually organized, extroverted, enthusiastic people who enjoy being associated with interesting projects.. Find yours and explain how Stack Overflow for Teams will help everyone in your group level up together.

- **Explain to project leads how Stack Overflow for Teams can help teams work better.** High-velocity, complicated projects are great test cases for a knowledge reuse platform, since lots of people will often have the same set of questions. Is your team working on any DevOps workflows, architecture discussions, cloud migrations, digital transformation initiatives, support processes, or data science deep dives? Talk to your project leads about how a reskilling platform could help everyone engage with new processes and responsibilities.

Planning

Just like with any other project, an effort to upskill requires knowing exactly what you're trying to achieve. Setting a goal to collect a certain amount of solid questions and answers is a good place to start. You can:

- **Assign SMEs to specific questions or tags.** Maybe a senior solutions architect will answer questions on customer pain points, and a seasoned backend developer will address Python questions. Task SMEs with answering a few seed questions in their area of expertise (more on those in a minute).

- **Come up with key company and project questions.** What are the core pieces of information that someone new to your team needs to know (upskilling)? Or that all employees will be required to know for a new set of competencies or projects (reskilling)?

Seeding

If you want your team to know how to get the most out of Stack Overflow for Teams, you've got to show them all it can do. Pre-seeding tags and questions allows employees to not just see an example of what they could ask, but see actual topics that they themselves are interested in and need to know to succeed at work. Give these a try:

- **Invest in a content base of 60-100 answered questions.** Have your SMEs create answers to key queries and make them easy to find by tagging them. As employees start to explore the platform and see that their questions are already answered, they'll be encouraged to ask their own questions.

- **Integrate into your other tools.** Talk to your ambassador about getting Stack Overflow for Teams to integrate with your ChatOps and messaging tools, which will reduce context switching and make it easier for users to upskill or reskill from within the context of their regular day-to-day habits.

Evangelizing

Once you've built a strong foundation of helpful content, it's time to really spread the news. You've basically created a library, and now you want everyone to know they've already been given library cards with no checkout limit. Showcase it with these ideas:

- **Include Stack Overflow for Teams updates in normal communication.** Do you do all-hands meetings? Monthly newsletters? Daily standups? Add an update on this newly available tool to those agendas. ie the platform into the business goals it supports, like running a new complicated project, helping new people managers, or teaching a new coding language.

- **Enjoy launch day.** Shipping new code is exciting, and maybe your team is already used to celebrating product launches or improvements. Even if they're not, give Stack Overflow for Teams the star treatment. Pick a day to officially launch your internal knowledge reuse platform and build hype for it with competitions (like who can answer the most questions or who has the highest reputation).

Embedding into your workflows

What are the key processes your teams run? New hire onboarding, internal support, training and development, project management? All of those can be made easier via Stack Overflow for Teams. And that's extra true for an all-remote team that needs to codify how they interact and how they document processes and common problems. You can:

- **Survey future ambassadors.** Who in HR is responsible for onboarding, and would they enjoy pointing new hires towards a codified and always-updated set of key answers on company history and strategy? What about all the PMs in your company—what kind of best practices would they like to make accessible to all? Finding other groups who will be well-served by a platform that supports upskilling and reskilling helps make them a real part of company culture, versus a side project of a specific engineering team.

- **Ask for feedback.** Part of the beauty of upskilling is a focus on always getting better. So make sure you're doing the same thing by asking your team what information they'd like to see more of. Consider this webinar on how Intuit scaled a culture of upskilling across their whole tech organization, and benefit from what they learned along the way, too.

Inviting your clients

If you're a company that works closely with clients—whether in consulting, customer success, or other areas—would it be helpful to enjoy an open, highly communicative culture with them? If so, consider asking them to:

- **Embed Stack Overflow for Teams into a customer workflow.**
  It can be as simple as having a contractor hub for teaching freelancers company-specific practices.. Or you can build out an entire repository of marketing know-how, developer integration best practices, or customer support shortcuts.

- **Use Stack Overflow for Team's built-in analytics dashboard as part of your reporting metrics.** Let's say you save a given customer an average of two hours per senior engineer per week on upskilling tasks because instead of having to shadow a senior engineer, more junior team members can self-serve onto a new client project via the platform. Show your clients how much more time you can spend building products for them or serving their needs as a result of the knowledge reuse and constant learning made possible by Stack Overflow for Teams.

The place for answers

Your engineers want to be big contributors to their team's success—they just don't always know how. And asking for help when you feel vulnerable can be hard. Stack Overflow for Teams is where important documents are kept, all questions are answered, and expert-checked answers are made accessible. Knowledge for all.

It's a self-serve library staffed by your very own experts featuring your company's unique bibliography. Whether you're looking to help developers upskill; help employees reskill themselves before changing roles, functions, or projects; or just looking to make onboarding or client communication smoother, Stack Overflow for Teams can help.

A team made up of confident learners is a team ready to build what's next. Let Stack Overflow for Teams help.

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