

Skills-First Framework for Action Media Information Kit

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Introduction to Skills-First Framework for Action

The **Skills-First Framework for Action (FfA)** sets out a roadmap to advance Skills-First practices in Singapore. Skills-First places greater emphasis on skills – alongside qualifications – in how individuals navigate their careers and how enterprises hire, develop and deploy talent, redesign jobs and transform their workforce.

The Framework is timely as technology, changing business needs and demographic shifts are reshaping jobs and the skills they require. While Singapore has made significant progress in lifelong learning and skills development, the next step is to ensure that skills are more consistently identified, developed, applied and recognised across careers and workplaces.

The Framework represents the culmination of two years of research and engagement, building on five earlier Skills-First Working Papers and corresponding roundtables that examined different aspects of Skills-First practices. More than 1,000 participants from across government, industry, labour, education and the workforce were consulted in developing the body of work that led to the Framework

Spearheaded by IAL's Centre for Skills-First Practices (CSFP), five national partners – the Skills and Workforce Development Agency (SWDA), National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), Singapore Business Federation (SBF), Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) and Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) – convened to co-author the Framework, which translates two years of research and stakeholder engagement into practical ideas for action.

Skills-First Framework for Action: Co-authors' Quotes



Dilys Boey
Chief Executive
Skills and Workforce Development Agency

“Over the years, Singapore has built strong foundations for workforce development through the SkillsFuture movement and the Career Health initiative. We have nurtured a culture of lifelong learning and skills development, enabling individuals to fulfil their career goals and businesses to grow with a skilled workforce. The Skills-First Framework for Action builds on this by shifting our focus from ‘enabling access’ to ‘embedding in practice’, making ‘skills-first’ an instinct in how individuals plan their careers and how businesses make workforce decisions. As AI and economic restructuring continue to reshape jobs and skills needs, this Framework provides a shared direction and provides practical pathways to help the workforce navigate transitions with greater confidence. SWDA is committed to working with our partners to turn these pilot ideas into scalable practices that strengthen career resilience for individuals and enable enterprise growth across Singapore.”



Professor Tan Tai Yong
President
Singapore University of Social Sciences

“As careers become longer and more dynamic, learning must extend well beyond a person’s first job and remain closely connected to the changing needs of work. The Skills-First Framework for Action highlights the importance to equip HR professionals, career coaches and adult educators to help individuals make informed learning and career decisions. It also enables enterprises to identify, develop and recognise capabilities through real workplace challenges. By connecting learning, work and career development more closely, we can help individuals build relevant skills while supporting enterprises through transformation.”



Caryn Lim

Assistant Secretary-General and Chief Job Security,
National Trades Union Congress

“AI and technology continue to reshape jobs. Workers will need to continually upskill and remain adaptable throughout their careers. The Skills-First Framework for Action is about ensuring that workers can access opportunities beyond their official qualifications. This includes enabling them to review their transferable skills and career plans, proactively identify new pathways, and take concrete steps before disruption occurs. NTUC welcomes the Framework as an important step to strengthen workers’ career resilience and empower them to take charge of their learning and career development. These efforts are complemented by NTUC’s AI-Ready SG initiative to equip workers with the capabilities, confidence and opportunities to thrive in an evolving job market.”



Mark Lee

Chairman
Singapore Business Federation

“Great companies don't spot talent by accident – they recognise and grow it systematically. Skills-First should be a routine part of how business works, not a special one-off initiative. Most employers already believe skills matter; our goal is to make acting on that belief the default. And when one company discovers what works, others should be able to build on it – we make faster progress when we share. SBF stands with businesses on this journey. Together, we can put Skills-First practices into action to build the workforce our enterprises need, unlock competitive advantage, and develop firms ready for the future.”



Tan Hwee Bin

Vice President
Singapore National Employers Federation

“As employers seek to attract, deploy and develop talent amid rapid technological change and evolving skills needs, the Skills-First Framework for Action provides practical ways to integrate skills into hiring, deployment and workforce development decisions. By making better use of skills and capabilities alongside qualifications and experience, employers can widen access to talent pool, strengthen internal mobility and build more competitive businesses and future-ready workforces.”

Skills-First Framework for Action: Pilot Ideas

Areas of Action ¹	Pilot Ideas	Government	IHLs & CET ² Providers	Labour Movement ³	TACs ⁴ , HR & Professional Bodies
Enabling Employers	1 Emphasise Skills Screening and Assessment in Hiring Support employers and recruitment intermediaries to adopt skills-based hiring by incorporating appropriate skills screening and assessment into recruitment processes. Complement this with practical tools, HR capability development and professional guidance, so that demonstrated capabilities are more visible and recognised in hiring decisions alongside qualifications, experience and other relevant considerations.	✧	✧	✧	◆
	2 Embed Skills-First Practices into Enterprise Transformation Embed Skills-First practices into enterprise transformation, workplace innovation, work redesign and relevant business grant initiatives, so that workforce capability development is integral to business transformation. Organisations should identify required capabilities, enable employees to build and demonstrate them through real-work projects, and recognise demonstrated skills through mechanisms such as the Careers & Skills Passport to support deployment, progression and mobility.	✧	✧	✧	◆

Areas of Action ¹	Pilot Ideas	Government	IHLs & CET ² Providers	Labour Movement ³	TACs ⁴ , HR & Professional Bodies
Enabling Employers (cont.)	3 Develop Skills-First Enterprise Transformation Pathway Provide firms, especially SMEs, with a structured Skills-First Enterprise Transformation Pathway that reduces pathfinding time. Support firms to diagnose workforce needs, map required capabilities, redesign jobs and hiring practices, enable internal mobility and skills-based progression, and measure skills utilisation, helping to embed Skills-First practices into everyday business operations.	✧	✧	✧	✦
	4 Build Skills-First Capability Where Workforce Decisions Are Made Equip line managers and SME owners, supported by business advisors, with the knowledge, tools and practical capability to apply Skills-First practices in everyday workforce decisions. This includes leading human-centric work redesign and workforce transformation, assessing skills, conducting skills conversations, and making skills-informed decisions that shape how employees' skills are developed, deployed and applied at work.	✧	✧	✧	✦

Areas of Action ¹	Pilot Ideas	Government	IHLs & CET ² Providers	Labour Movement ³	TACs ⁴ , HR & Professional Bodies
Supporting Individuals	5 Strengthen Skills-First Capability Across the Career-Learning Ecosystem Embed Skills-First knowledge, tools and practical methods into the professional development of HR practitioners, career coaches, adult educators and training providers. Strengthen IHLs and CET providers to provide career profiling and coaching before programme enrolment, help individuals identify transferable skills and make informed learning decisions, and provide post-training support to articulate demonstrated skills and connect with career opportunities. Practitioners should leverage common infrastructure, including the Careers & Skills Passport, to help individuals maintain trusted, portable skills records across learning, work and career transitions.	✧	✦	✧	✧
	6 Introduce Recurring Career and Skills Review Introduce scheduled career and skills reviews at key career and life stages for working adults, prompting concrete learning or career actions and tracking follow-through rather than waiting for disruption. Regular reviews can normalise continuous career planning, while employer recognition of demonstrated skills in recruitment, development and internal mobility can reinforce their value and encourage meaningful participation.	✧	✧	✦	✦

Areas of Action ¹	Pilot Ideas	Government	IHLs & CET ² Providers	Labour Movement ³	TACs ⁴ , HR & Professional Bodies
Supporting Individuals (cont.)	7 Default Skills Profile Refresh at Every Career-Learning Touchpoint Embed a default prompt for individuals to review and update their skills profile at key career and learning touchpoints, such as when accessing career advisory services or enrolling in funded programmes. This helps keep skills profiles current and useful, while enabling individuals to make learning, skilling and career decisions based on an up-to-date understanding of their capabilities.	✧	✦	✦	✧
	8 Build Skills Fluency Through Real Workplace Problems Support training providers to begin with diagnosed business challenges rather than a standard curriculum, identify the capabilities required to address them, and enable learners to develop and demonstrate these skills through real work. This strengthens skills fluency through application, while providing evidence of demonstrated capability that can be recognised in subsequent workforce decisions.	✧	✦	✧	✧

Areas of Action ¹	Pilot Ideas	Government	IHLs & CET ² Providers	Labour Movement ³	TACs ⁴ , HR & Professional Bodies
Supporting Individuals (cont.)	9 Mainstream Work-Integrated Learning Embed structured work-integrated learning, including work-study programmes, internships, apprenticeships and industry projects, as a core component of IHL programmes. IHLs and industry should provide meaningful opportunities built around authentic workplace tasks and capability needs, while cultivating students' mindsets to value these experiences for skills development, career exploration and lifelong learning. Learners should be able to develop, demonstrate and validate skills through real work, with demonstrated skills recognised, where appropriate, through the Careers & Skills Passport to support employment transitions and provide employers with richer evidence of capability.	✧	✦	✧	✧
Strengthening System-wide Infrastructure	10 Establish a Common Verified-versus-Certified Standard for Skills Establish shared definitions and validation methods that distinguish verified from certified skills and support consistent recognition of demonstrated capability. Verified skills can be recorded through common infrastructure such as the Careers & Skills Passport, providing individuals and employers with trusted and portable evidence of capabilities that can be recognised across learning, employment and career transitions.	✧	✦	✧	✧

Areas of Action ¹	Pilot Ideas	Government	IHLs & CET ² Providers	Labour Movement ³	TACs ⁴ , HR & Professional Bodies
Strengthening System-wide Infrastructure (cont.)	11 Strengthen Shared Skills Infrastructure for Foresight and Inclusion Strengthen the national skills infrastructure through a shared translation service that enables organisations to map the national jobs-tasks-skills taxonomy to their job architectures, supported by continuously updated skills and labour market intelligence, including Jobs Transformation Maps. Integrate insights on emerging and declining skills, job redesign trends and pay references linked to demonstrated skills to inform firm-level workforce planning and transformation. The infrastructure should also identify sectors, occupations and worker groups most exposed to transformation, enabling targeted interventions, inclusive workforce outcomes and more consistent signals on the value of demonstrated skills.	✦	✧	✧	✧
	12 Develop Skills-First Observatory Develop and publish a recurring monitoring approach to track the adoption of Skills-First practices and their relationship with individual, workforce and enterprise outcomes. Drawing on multiple sources of evidence, the Observatory can identify areas of progress and gaps, enable benchmarking and provide a stronger evidence base for understanding how Skills-First practices are taking root and evolving over time.	✧	✦ (Centre for Skills-First Practices)	✧	✧

¹ The areas reflect the primary focus of action: enabling employers, supporting individuals and strengthening system-wide infrastructure. They are not intended as discrete categories, as individual pilot ideas may contribute to outcomes across more than one area.

² Continuing Education and Training (CET) refers to structured learning and professional development programmes designed for adults to upskill, reskill, and stay career-resilient.

³ Labour Movement: Labour Movement refers to the National Trades Union Congress, Employment and Employability Institute (e2i), and its affiliated unions and associations.

⁴ Trade Associations and Chambers (TACs): Refers broadly to trade associations, chambers and apex employer organisations, including the Singapore Business Federation (SBF) and Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF), that represent and support enterprises across sectors

Individual Skills-First Journey

MAKE YOUR SKILLS WORK FOR YOU

Your job title tells only part of your story. Your skills show what you can do.



Skills-First means knowing, building and demonstrating what you can do, and having your capabilities recognised alongside qualifications and experience.

Your skills are attained in many ways:

Work | Learning | Life Experience | Projects | Volunteering

WHY DOES SKILLS-FIRST MATTER TO YOU?

The world of work is changing. Your skills open new possibilities.



Find new opportunities

Show employers what you can do and unlock jobs and career paths you may not have considered.



Make better learning choices

Focus on skills that help your work and career.



Achieve professional fulfilment

Use your strengths in meaningful work that matches your interests and aspirations.



Prepare for change

Build skills to stay resilient and to support job pivoting.

4 THINGS YOU CAN DO

Start small. Use these four steps whenever you are thinking about your career or learning.

1 Know your skills

What am I good at, and where can I add value?

Think about what you are good at and able to do, based on what you have learnt through work, projects, training and other experiences.

Try this:

Write down 5 skills you can confidently use and how they contribute at work.

2 Record your skills

How can I show what I can do?

Record your skills, experiences and achievements in one place.

Keep it current:

Update your Careers & Skills Passport as you learn, contribute and grow.

3 Build your skills

What do I need to learn next?

Identify the skills you need, then build them through upskilling courses, workplace learning and hands-on projects.

Plan your next step:

What course or learning opportunity will help me get there?

4 Use your skills

Where can I put this into practice?

Volunteer for a project. Take on a new task. Explore another role. Apply what you learn.

Seek out opportunities:

Discuss with your supervisor for opportunities to apply your skills.

READY TO START?

Use these resources to take your next step.



Careers & Skills Passport

Take stock of your skills to make informed decisions.



NTUC AI Career Coach

Explore career options and the skills you may need.



SWDA Jobs-Skills Portal

Explore labour market data and insights on jobs and skills trends.



Skills-First

Explore practical ways and ideas to make your skills work for you.

Know your skills ► Record your skills ► Build your skills ► Use your skills | Make your skills work for you

SUSS | IAL INSTITUTE FOR ADULT LEARNING RESEARCH

In partnership with

SBF

SNEF

ntuc

SWDA

Skills & Workforce Development Agency

Enterprise Skills-First Journey

MAKE SKILLS WORK FOR YOUR BUSINESS

Build the skills your business needs. Make better people decisions.



WHAT IS SKILLS-FIRST?

Skills-First means recognising what people can do, what they can learn and how they can contribute, alongside their qualifications and experience, in decisions on hiring, work design, development, and progression.

TURN WORKFORCE CAPABILITIES INTO BUSINESS VALUE

Business needs are changing quickly.

39%

core skills expected to change by 2030

Source: WEF 2025

22%

jobs expected to be transformed by 2030

Source: WEF 2025

6x

increase in talent pool when using skills-first hiring

Source: LinkedIn 2023

SKILLS-FIRST HELPS BUSINESSES TO



Find people with the skills you need

Widen your talent pool by looking at relevant and transferable skills.



Build the right skills

Focus development on real capability gaps and business needs.



Use talent you already have

Use your employees' strengths and skills where they can add the most value.



Adapt faster to change

Redesign work and build capabilities as technology and customer needs evolve.

START WITH THESE 5 ACTIONS

1 Hire for the skills you need

What must this person be able to do well?

- Identify the 3–5 skills that matter most to deliver the outcomes required of the role.
- Use work samples, interview questions or simple assessments to see the skills in action.
- Consider relevant transferable skills from other jobs or sectors to widen the talent pool.

2 Develop for real business needs

What do we need our employee to do better or differently?

- Identify the capability gap before choosing training.
- Identify learning that is linked to tangible improvements in business outcomes.
- Give employees opportunity to apply skill through real work.

3 Use skills where they add the most value

Are we making the best use of the skills across our team?

- Look beyond current job titles to understand employees' strengths and transferable skills.
- Match employees to projects and roles based on their skills and where they can contribute best.
- Have regular conversations about how their skills can be used and developed.

4 Redesign work as the business changes

How will the work change, and what skills will we need?

- Identify which tasks will change, grow, be automated or disappear.
- Involve employees in redesigning their roles and workflows to improve how work gets done.
- Build, redeploy or hire for the capabilities needed in the new way of working.

5 Recognise and reward skills

How do we recognise what our employees can do and the value they contribute?

- Make skills development and application part of career and performance conversations.
- Recognise employees when they demonstrate and apply new or stronger capabilities to create value.
- Link progression, opportunities and rewards to skills demonstrated and contribution made.

READY TO START?

Use these resources to take your next step.



Toolkits for Organisational Growth

Offers practical diagnostic tools to help organisations identify strengths, gaps and areas for improvement in innovation and workplace learning.



Workforce Development Grant (Job Redesign+)

Offers funding support for workforce consultancy, HR capability building, and workforce tech costs to redesign jobs.



NTUC Company Training Committee Grant

Offers funding support for enterprise and workforce transformation.



Skills-First

Offers practices and ideas to build workforce capabilities and support business growth.

Equip your people, boost your business

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SUSTAINABLE
LEARNING

In partnership with

SBF

SNEF

ntuc

SZDA Skills &
Workforce
Development
Agency

Media Profile:

Building from within: HSC Pipeline Engineering's Skills-First journey



[HSC Pipeline Engineering Pte. Ltd.](#) is a Singapore-based civil engineering company with over 30 years of experience in pipeline infrastructure and related engineering services for the gas, water, telecommunications and energy sectors. It employs about 344 people, of whom 313 are site-based and 31 office-based.

HSC's Skills-First journey grew out of its digitalisation and workflow transformation. The company began digitalising around 2018, using low-code and no-code tools such as Power Apps to replace paper-based reporting and documentation. Around 2021, it introduced utility mapping using technologies such as ground-penetrating radar.

These changes created skills needs for which there was no direct, ready-made qualification pathway. HSC responded by training existing staff and hiring from adjacent or non-traditional backgrounds, recognising their transferable skills, relevant experience, the ability to learn and attitude alongside formal qualifications.

For existing employees, HSC redesigned roles around emerging business needs, mapped competency gaps and supported staff to build the skills those roles required.

For the company, the returns have shown in two areas:

- Since 2024, 11 roles were filled through role or job redesign.
- HSC estimates that it has been able to avoid about 30% of the trial holes that would otherwise have needed to excavate and saved an estimated 400 hours of hours saved on reporting monthly. The time and manpower saved can then be redirected to productive, billable work.

Nelson Lai - from Project Coordinator to Assistant Project Manager

Nelson Lai Wei Chieh, 33, joined HSC in December 2019 as a Project Coordinator, coming from a business management background. The role was mostly site-based, coordinating underground pipe-laying works.

As HSC introduced utility mapping, ground-penetrating radar and more data-driven planning workflows, Nelson was consistently among the early adopters of new approaches. Managing Director Shane Shi said Nelson was often one of the first to take up a change and demonstrate that it could work in practice.

HSC subsequently promoted him to Assistant Project Manager, an uncommon progression from Project Coordinator within the company as he did not come from an engineering background. He now manages four to five engineers and oversees distribution projects involving more than 20 km of pipeline a year.

As his role evolved, Nelson built new skills in utility mapping and data-informed project planning. His work shifted from frequent site visits towards more desktop-based planning, using utility mapping data and trial-hole information to plan pipe routes and reduce unnecessary, loss-making trial holes. Trial holes are small excavations made to confirm the location and depth of underground utilities before construction begins.

Nelson has progressed in an engineering environment through construction-related training courses and by demonstrating initiative, adaptability and the ability to apply new workflows.

Ruby Lew - from Procurement Executive to Business Process Analyst

Ruby Lew Xin Jie, 29, joined HSC in June 2022 as a Procurement Executive, bringing earlier experience working with data and databases. While she was in procurement, HSC identified strengths in her systematic thinking and ability to work with data that could be applied beyond her original role.

Rather than hire externally, the company redesigned her role and moved her into a Business Process Analyst function. She is now developing a web-based internal platform intended to connect data across safety, procurement, inventory, HR timesheets, project data and quantity surveying, which currently sits across different spreadsheets or systems. The platform is designed to reduce repeated data entry and support automated report generation, while retaining checkpoints for relevant staff to review and adjust information. The system is currently in the testing phase.

Ruby uses AI tools including ChatGPT, Claude and Cursor to help conceptualise and build the platform.

Her move illustrates HSC's approach of identifying transferable strengths in an existing employee, building new capabilities around them and redeploying the employee into a role aligned with the company's digital transformation needs.

Quote by Shane Shi, Managing Director, HSC

“For us, Skills-First has two parts. One is hiring people for their relevant skills and experience instead of just their qualifications. The other is looking at what our existing staff have already been doing and putting more effort into the areas where they show strength, so we can help them grow into new roles. It helps us put our effort in the right places, matching people's strengths to what the company needs so we can stay competitive in this market.”

Media Profile:

Unlocking Potential Through Skills-Based Hiring and Development: DLM's Skills-First journey



[DLM Pte. Ltd.](#) is a Singapore-based mechanical and electrical (M&E) contractor delivering integrated ACMV (Air Conditioning and Mechanical Ventilation), electrical engineering and installation works, data centre solutions and support mission-critical facilities. The firm employs close to 300 employees.

Faced with manpower constraints and a limited pool of specialised talent in the Built Environment sector, DLM recognised that qualifications alone would not meet its growing workforce needs. This was particularly relevant in highly technical areas such as air-conditioning and heat transfer, where there is no dedicated formal academic pathway in Singapore, and building information modelling (BIM), where local talent is limited. As the company grew, DLM increasingly adopted a skills-first approach to attract, develop and redeploy people based on their competencies, potential and ability to learn.

For new hires, DLM trained its hiring managers to assess demonstrated competencies, transferable skills and relevant experience rather than academic credentials. It also redesigned roles including Project Engineer and Project Manager around the capabilities required for the work. Where the skilled worker is limited in supply, DLM tapped on career conversion support from WSG, now SWDA, to bring in mid-career entrants from other sectors or re-skill employees from within.

To meet changing business needs, DLM redesigned roles and identifies staff whose existing skills and potential could be developed for new or expanded responsibilities. The company also places a strong emphasis on continuous workplace learning. To encourage attendance, the company changed its learning and development workflow, where employees now take

ownership of their own training opportunities rather than having the management assign courses to them. This raised the attendance rate by roughly 15 to 20%.

For the company, the returns have shown up in four places:

- Skills-based assessment and career conversion widened the pool beyond candidates holding qualifications.
- The skills-first approach has also enhanced internal mobility by creating opportunities for employees to transition into new roles and career pathways based on their capabilities and interests.
- Job redesign and skills development have enabled employees to take on new capabilities, including the application of AI to improve work processes. AI-powered visual intelligence solution is already in use, while an in-house engineering chatbot and automated workflows is due to launch later this year. Project managers now spend 5 to 6.5 hours a week on project monitoring, down from 6 to 8 hours, while project engineers have cut daily site walks and manual updating of photographs and notes from 2 to 3 hours to 1.5 to 2 hours.
- The approach has helped DLM meet growing workforce needs as the business expanded, with revenue more than doubling over the past five years.

Xavier Lim - from Senior Project Manager to Head of Engineering

Lim Sian Wee, Xavier, 45, was a Senior Project Manager at DLM when the company's job redesign exercise identified him as having high potential to grow into a broader role.

He combined a strong technical base with a keen interest in AI and took ownership of developing his capabilities further. He attended AI training, using his own SkillsFuture Credit, with DLM supporting his learning journey. At work, he draws on DLM's senior engineering leaders, including a mechanical professional engineer, a Green Mark expert and supported by a senior engineering master trained at Tsinghua University. Managing Director Joseph Goh said Xavier was able to absorb knowledge from across that group and consolidate it well.

DLM subsequently promoted Xavier to Head of Engineering and empowered him to lead the company's adoption of AI applications. He now leads DLM's workflow automation work and is due to launch its in-house chatbot later this year. He is also passing on what he has learnt, training managers and engineers to use an AI-powered visual intelligence solution to monitor and manage worksites.

Javen Wong - from Senior Engineer to Assistant Project Manager

Wong Ven Jie, Jayven, 31, joined DLM as an engineer and was working as a Senior Engineer when he was identified for job redesign.

As DLM implemented new project management tools, including Microsoft Project, Javen picked up the management skills the tools supported rather than treating them as administration. He also built AI capability such as implementing the AI-powered visual intelligence solution in the project that he is in-charged by learning directly from Xavier, the Head of Engineering.

He was promoted to Assistant Project Manager at the middle of the job redesign process, since he demonstrated managerial capability and has attended the Career Aspiration Navigation Program in March and Front-line coaching training in April 2025.

Quote by Er. Joseph Goh, Managing Director, DLM

“While a skills-first approach is not a silver bullet, it has proven effective in expanding access to talent, reducing hiring effort and improving retention. This is particularly important in the built environment sector, where talent shortages require organisations to look beyond traditional qualifications and focus on the skills and potential that candidates bring.”

LIST OF CHINESE TRANSLATIONS

ENGLISH TERMS	CHINESE TRANSLATION
Associate Professor (Practice) Terence Ho Executive Director Institute for Adult Learning	何伟伦副教授 成人学习学院院长
Mr Edwin Tan Director Centre for Skills-First Practices	陈俊中 实践技能优先中心司长
Associate Professor (Practice) Gog Soon Joo Senior Director Centre for Skills-First Practices	吴纯瑜副教授 实践技能优先中心高级司长
Institute for Adult Learning	成人学习学院
Centre for Skills-First Practices	实践技能优先中心
Skills-First	技能优先
Framework for action	行动框架
Skills profile	技能履历
Work-integrated learning	在职学习