Workforce Learning Outlines Four-Layer AI Skills Framework

United Ceres Workforce Learning has introduced a structured approach to building workforce competence in artificial intelligence. The organisation describes a four-layer framework that spans from basic familiarity with AI tools to strategic oversight of AI systems. The announcement positions this framework as a response to the growing need for organisations to develop internal capability in AI across multiple levels of responsibility.

The framework, which United Ceres Workforce Learning calls an "AI learning pathway", is designed to address the gap between general awareness of AI and the specialised skills required to manage, build and govern AI systems. It breaks down the learning journey into four distinct layers: AI use, AI building, AI leadership and AI governance. Each layer targets a different group within an organisation, from frontline employees to senior executives.

Understanding the Four Layers

The first layer, AI use, focuses on the practical application of existing AI tools. This layer is intended for employees who need to work with AI-driven software and platforms in their daily tasks. It covers how to interpret the output of AI systems, how to interact with them effectively, and how to recognise their limitations. For many organisations, this is the entry point for the workforce, ensuring that staff can adopt AI tools without requiring deep technical knowledge.

The second layer, AI building, moves into the technical domain. This layer is aimed at professionals who develop, customise or integrate AI systems. It includes understanding machine learning models, data preparation, model training and deployment. The focus is on equipping teams with the practical skills needed to create and maintain AI solutions that meet business requirements. This layer acknowledges that many organisations will need to build internal development capability rather than relying solely on off-the-shelf products.

The third layer, AI leadership, addresses the management and strategic direction of AI initiatives. This layer targets managers, team leads and executives who oversee AI projects or departments. It covers how to align AI projects with business goals, how to evaluate the return on investment of AI initiatives, and how to build teams with the right mix of skills. Leadership in this context means understanding enough about the technology to make informed decisions without necessarily being able to build the systems themselves.

The fourth layer, AI governance, deals with the oversight and ethical management of AI systems. This layer is relevant to senior leaders, compliance officers and board members. It includes understanding regulatory requirements, risk management, bias detection and the

establishment of internal policies for responsible AI use. As AI systems become more prevalent, the ability to govern them effectively is becoming a critical organisational capability.

Why a Structured Approach Matters

Many organisations have found that simply introducing AI tools does not lead to widespread adoption or effective use. Employees may resist new technology if they do not understand it, while leaders may approve projects without the expertise to evaluate them. A structured learning pathway helps to build competence systematically, ensuring that each level of the organisation develops the skills appropriate to its role.

Another challenge is that AI skills are not static. The technology evolves rapidly, and what was cutting-edge a year ago may now be standard. A framework that organises learning into layers allows organisations to refresh and update content for each layer independently. It also helps individuals see a clear progression path, from basic user to governance specialist, which can support career development and retention.

Organisations that have invested in broad AI literacy programmes often find that they still lack the specialised skills needed for building and governing AI systems. A layered approach addresses this by defining distinct competencies for each role rather than treating AI learning as a single, uniform activity. It also makes it easier to measure progress, because each layer has its own set of objectives and outcomes.

The Role of AI Learning Pathways in Workforce Development

An "AI learning pathway" of this kind sits within the broader field of workforce development. As AI adoption accelerates across industries, the demand for skilled professionals has grown faster than the supply. Many organisations are responding by building their own training programmes rather than competing for a limited pool of external talent. A well-designed pathway provides a blueprint for that training, reducing the risk of gaps or overlaps in coverage.

Workforce development in AI also requires a shift in mindset. In the past, technology training often focused on a single tool or platform. Today, the emphasis is on understanding underlying principles that apply across different AI systems. This is especially important for the governance layer, where the ability to evaluate an AI system depends on understanding how it works, not just how to use it.

The four-layer model also reflects the fact that AI skills are not only for technical staff. Everyone in an organisation interacts with AI in some way, whether through automated workflows, recommendation engines or decision-support systems. A comprehensive learning pathway ensures that all employees have a baseline understanding of AI, while still providing depth for those who need it.

Implementation Considerations

Organisations looking to adopt a similar framework typically start by assessing their current level of AI maturity. This helps to determine which layer to focus on first. A company that has already deployed AI tools widely may need to invest more in governance and leadership, while one that is just beginning may start with AI use and building.

Another consideration is how to deliver the training. Some organisations prefer self-paced online modules, while others favour instructor-led workshops or blended approaches. The choice often depends on the size of the workforce, the urgency of the need and the existing training infrastructure. The framework itself is flexible enough to accommodate different delivery methods.

Assessment is also a key part of any learning pathway. Employees need to demonstrate their understanding before moving to the next layer. This can take the form of practical projects, tests or certifications. Clear assessment criteria help to maintain the credibility of the pathway and ensure that skills are genuinely acquired.

Looking Ahead

As AI continues to evolve, the skills required to work with it will also change. A layered framework provides a structure that can be updated over time, making it a sustainable approach to workforce development. Organisations that invest in such pathways today are likely to be better positioned to adapt to future technological shifts.

United Ceres Workforce Learning has positioned its four-layer model as a practical tool for organisations that want to build AI competence systematically. By covering the full spectrum from use to governance, the framework aims to ensure that no critical skill is overlooked and that every level of the organisation can contribute to AI adoption in a meaningful way.