Cloud Skills Training:
A Key Pillar of Your Employer Brand
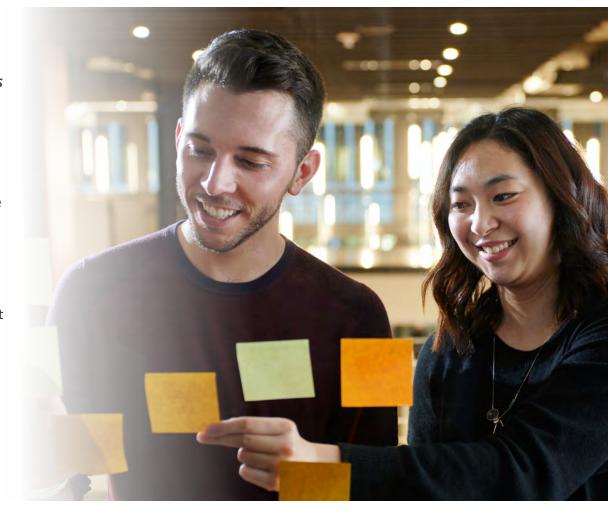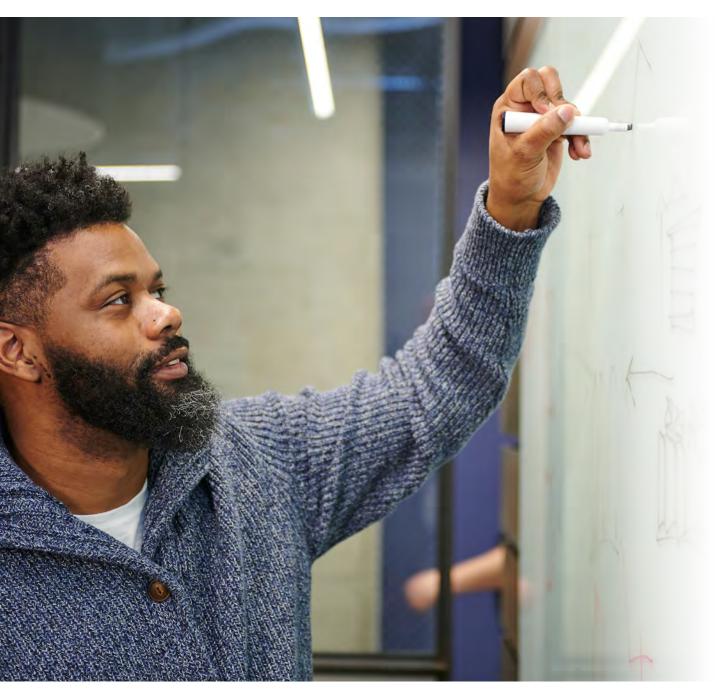
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Win the Cloud Talent War by Offering Cloud Skills Training

Across almost every industry, cloud adoption is transforming organizations. Motivated by the many benefits of the cloud, the change requires individuals with the right cloud skills and mindset to execute your digital transformation.

Organizations with experienced, in-house cloud teams have the ability to innovate and strengthen their competitive advantage. Yet, many organizations struggle to attract and retain the talent they need to execute cloud migration, especially during one of the tightest labor markets in recent history. According to an analysis of today's U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate for technology occupations fell to a 20-year low of 1.3% in May 2019, as hiring gains were recorded in both the tech sector and across the economy.[1]

Often, organizations already have talented individuals who lack new cloud skills and experience. Providing training opportunities and certification programs to an organization's existing workforce is a critical step to accelerate cloud transformation.

A robust cloud skills development program also demonstrates how an organization values and invests in people. This can enhance recruitment of new talent by establishing an organization's reputation as an ambitious, forward-looking enterprise. Companies that are considered as a "cloud employer of choice" are typically seen as more desirable places to work, and new tech talent tends to value companies that support their growth as professionals.

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The Value Proposition for Cloud Skills Training

Investing in internal continuous cloud skills training provides value to organizations, current employees, and prospective employees. Training supports qualities that are necessary for organizations to thrive in an increasingly competitive and disruptive business landscape:

- **Cultivating a culture of innovation**

- **Increasing staff effectiveness and efficiency**

- **Making modernization scalable**

- **Maximizing the benefits of available services and technologies**

Furthermore, half of IT decision makers agree that a lack of cloud expertise is holding their business back, while 84% of IT professionals said that deeper cloud expertise within their organization would significantly increase return on investment (ROI) in the cloud.[2]

> " A recent study found that 71% of IT decision makers believe their organizations have lost revenue due to a lack of cloud expertise—amounting to 5% of total global revenue, or $258,188,279 per organization.[2] "

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> " In a Mercer survey, 78% of employees said they would remain longer with an employer that provided a clear career path.[3] "

Ashish Gupta, former CIO of BT, observed that hiring and retaining talent is a problem endemic to the telecom industry. "We do face challenges when hiring and retaining talent, especially in areas that are growing very rapidly, such as cyber security, analytics, and big data. Colleagues and CIOs I speak to usually try to hire people with the right logical and technical aptitude, and then run a series of training programs to develop those skills further."[4]

Providing tech professionals with the opportunity to learn about the latest cloud tools and services not only prepares them for future technological change and trends, it also positions organizations as being invested in their employees' futures. This is key to enhancing employer brand, especially when it comes to recruiting the right talent and giving them a reason to stay and grow with the organization.[4]

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Strengthen Your Employer Brand with Cloud Skills Training

Employer branding is a crucial recruitment and retention strategy in a tight labor market. LinkedIn research found that a strong employer brand is twice as likely to be associated with job consideration as a strong company brand, especially among professionals under age 40.[5]

"Your employer brand is not a departure from your enterprise brand, but rather a way to dimensionalize your value for employees and recruits. It essentially defines how the people who work for you experience your culture," said Kerry Held, strategy director for employee engagement at Siegel + Gale. "Companies should create a brand their employees can be excited about—one that supports their ambitions, values, and goals. When employees feel a sense of pride in where they work, they create a positive ripple effect for your employer brand in the world, serving as your brand ambassadors."[6]

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Though related, employer branding differs from an organization's employer reputation in the talent pool.[7] Employer branding is a deliberate effort to shape its reputation by fostering greater awareness, positive perceptions, and active interest among desirable talent.

"Today, it's crucial for enterprises to invest in their employer branding strategy," said Held. "If you don't put a stake in the ground and clearly define your employer brand, it will end up being set for you."[6]

An organization's first step in crafting an employer brand is to realistically assess its existing employer reputation. External resources, such as Glassdoor and Indeed, can help gauge how an enterprise is viewed and ranked in the talent marketplace. Maintaining employer brand integrity is key: if that branding diverges significantly from an organization's current reputation, that disparity can alienate top talent.[8] Developing a strong cloud skills training program for employees—and promoting that program through employer branding efforts—can help demonstrate the integrity of that brand.

Establishing an employer value proposition (EVP) helps define an organization's employer brand. Training and professional development opportunities may be included in an EVP as a means of attracting and retaining top tech talent. LinkedIn recommends "providing learning opportunities that help careers take off" to accomplish that goal.[9]

When formulating an EVP, both leaders and their workforce may consider and discuss questions such as:

- **What makes us unique?**

- **What can we offer?**

- **How can we improve the candidate experience?**

- **Does the experience of working here differ from most applicants' perceptions?**

To clarify an EVP, leaders should reflect on why their organization is moving to the cloud and investing in training. Identifying clear goals— to innovate faster, reduce costs to support reinvestment, empower developers, move more quickly to market, or create better user experiences—can help.

An EVP also requires continuous updating to keep pace with an organization's evolving talent needs, as well as the evolving needs and wants of its target employee demographics. This applies to both attracting prospective new hires and maintaining current employees seeking to evolve their roles.

Messaging for employer branding should showcase an organization's unique differentiators: culture, diversity, flexibility, benefits, opportunity for advancement, and leadership in their field, for example. In developing this messaging, cloud skills training can be presented as a demonstration that the enterprise:

- **Maintains a culture of learning**
- **Invests in its employees by actively supporting their professional advancement**
- **Treats innovation and leadership in the cloud seriously**

Employer branding supports recruiting, hiring, and onboarding processes by providing a clear framework and language. Starting from the job posting, the recruiters can emphasize the culture of continuous learning and explain how their organization is investing in its employees' future and career development. This emphasis should continue through subsequent steps in the sourcing and recruiting process, and even throughout new-hire onboarding. For example, Kerry Held, strategy director for employee engagement at Siegel + Gale suggests: "If the core of what you do is innovation and discovery, show that by consistently using innovative language, starting with how you write your job postings and throughout the entire onboarding process."[6]

Similarly, recruiters can discuss training opportunities with candidates during phone screens or on-site interviews—and even share information about online courses that candidates may want to take to emphasize the organization's commitment to learning.

The Importance of Branding Your Cloud Skills Training Program

An effective way to build awareness, engagement, and support for cloud skills training across a workforce is to formally create a skills development program with a short, engaging title.

This provides a shorthand representation of the company's value proposition for the program. Additionally, it simplifies both internal and external communications about an organization's cloud transformation experience and priorities. Repeated mentions of the program's name reinforces the program's value to employees and the enterprise. For example, National Australia Bank (NAB) accomplished this by branding their cloud skills training program as the Cloud Guild.[10]

In 2018, the bank launched the NAB Cloud Guild to quickly grow its internal base of skilled cloud professionals. This structured program enabled technical and business staff to understand the cloud's capabilities and usage best practices. NAB partnered with Amazon Web Services (AWS) to deliver training and certification to the Cloud Guild.

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The bank trademarked the Cloud Guild brand with the goal of building organizational engagement and enthusiasm.[11] "The Cloud Guild got people talking organically about the cloud," said Paul Silver, managing engineer for NAB and a founder of the Cloud Guild. "We put people through one- and three-day Associate courses on AWS Cloud services. As a result, they started to become self-directed learners, using AWS digital content for follow-up learning."[10]

These branding initiatives led to several NAB employees becoming AWS Certified. Before NAB launched the Cloud Guild in 2018, only seven employees were AWS Certified. As of May 2019, NAB employees hold more than 500 AWS Certifications, with approximately 12 successful certifications per week. This comprises 7% of all AWS Certifications in Australia and New Zealand. So far, more than 4,000 NAB staff have completed the Cloud Guild program.[12]

NAB's branded training demonstrates how similar initiatives can successfully foster team spirit, creativity, and professional development—as well as how they can convey the value an enterprise places in its employees.

Promote a Culture of Learning and Commitment to Employees

Many organizations devote considerable effort toward communication and promotion strategies for their employer brand. This messaging often focuses on workplace culture, flexibility, diversity, and benefits. Actively explaining and emphasizing these offerings can differentiate your organization in the talent marketplace.

Organizations can leverage cloud skills training and certification opportunities as proof of its culture of learning. Also, PWC found that 22% of millennials consider training and development opportunities to be a more valuable employment benefit than flexible hours, cash bonuses, or free healthcare.[13]
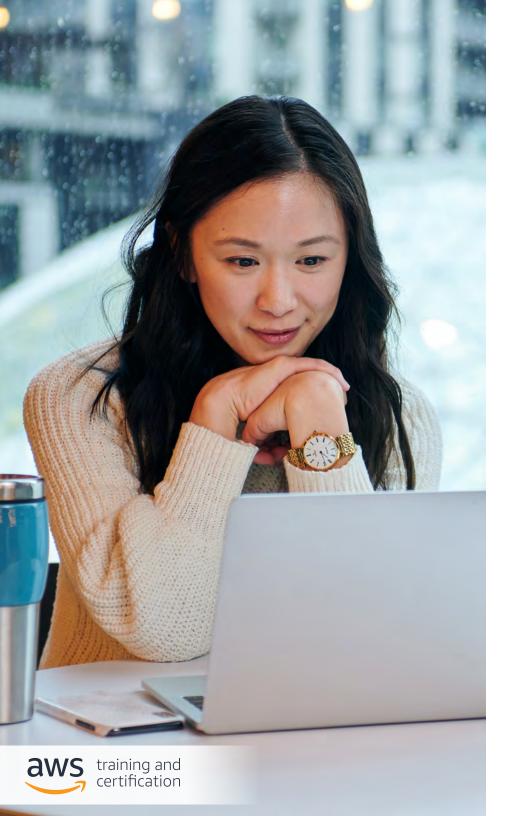
It's essential to clarify internal and external target audiences of employer branding, as well as how each may benefit from training or professional development. These audiences often fall into two categories:

1. **Existing workers.** Training helps current employees use their existing foundational IT skills and institutional knowledge as a springboard to transition to cloud roles. Among the workforce, it also can foster an enhanced sense of efficacy by empowering them to accomplish organizational objectives more efficiently, and to innovate faster. Promoting the branded training initiatives can bring the existing employees together, help them to establish their own communities of practice, and become engaged by understanding the value of employer's investment in people. Training also can overcome resistance to transformational change by increasing the sense of job security and showing the employer's commitment to supporting all employees throughout the transition.

2. **Prospective new hires.** Cloud skills are now widely perceived as a key to IT career advancement and IT staff productivity improvement, leading to greater job opportunities and satisfaction.[14] Consequently, touting training and development opportunities can help shorten average recruitment time. When an employer brand is strong and effective, top talent comes looking for you, and requires less persuasion to join the organization. The potential savings are significant: the recruitment process can take 6-12 months or longer, and it involves fierce competition. New employees are more likely to stick around when their new job proves to be a vehicle for professional development, as well as for interesting opportunities to put their newly acquired skills to good use.

Organizations may build internal awareness of cloud skills training offerings through emails, FAQs, workplace posters, internal publications, intranet sites, presentations, webinars or town halls with key leaders, or self-service employee portal resources. Special training for managers or communities of practice may also build internal awareness and enthusiasm for cloud skills training programs.

When offered to employees, cloud training and certification become part of an organization's broader learning culture. It demonstrates the organization's commitment to, and vision for, innovation and long-term success.

For example, NAB offers cloud education to all of its workers, including those outside technological domains. In May 2019, NAB's senior automation and DevOps consultant Lupco Trpeski said, "We haven't limited our cloud training to just IT. We've actually put it across the board. It doesn't matter if you're a mainframe developer or a graphic designer—we actually want everyone to be really competent with the AWS services."[12]

Clear branding and promotion of a training and certification program also helps spread positive word of that program's benefits beyond the organization itself. This may happen through organic communication, such as employees of one organization having conversations with personal or professional contacts employed at other organizations. Employers may find benefit in leveraging these types of communication by engaging enthusiastic employees and recruiting them as informal employer brand ambassadors. These employees may be asked to speak about an organization's cloud skills training initiatives on social media or at conferences and meetups, for example.

Promoting your training initiatives in the communities where employees reside can be an effective way to promote your employer brand.

Examples of promotional methods within these communities include:

- **Press releases and feature story pitches to local news outlets**

- **Submissions to contests for executive/company of the year or to local "best of" competitions**

- **Talking points for local, state, or country government officials who are promoting local economic development**

- **Sponsored content or advertising in local magazines or airline magazines serving your region**

- **Articles written for alumni magazines of the alma maters of key executives, or for local higher education institutions, especially if they are AWS Academy members**

Similarly, promotion throughout an organization's industry may include:

- **Offering to speak on a cloud skills training program as a topic for an executive session or panel at an industry trade show**

- **A keynote speech by a CEO or other top executive at an industry conference**

- **Inviting key training program participants to represent their company at industry events, from major conferences to local meetups**

Organizations should also use their external-facing career website to highlight training and development as part of their employer brand. For example, Booz Allen Hamilton's career website features this content:[15]

Be Empowered: *We recognize each employee's path is different, so we'll empower you to own your experience. Our employees are empowered to be self-initiated and self-driven, taking advantage of things that come their way to create new and interesting opportunities that are aligned with their career goals.*

Build Relevant Skills:

- **Industry Leading Technical Training**
- **Leadership Development & Apprenticeship**
- **Innovation & Accelerator Programs**

Similarly, the careers website of TechConnect promotes "individually tailored training," which includes:[16]

- **Close examination of one's personal skills**
- **Advice in choosing training**
- **Creation of a personal training concept**

Using social media outlets to promote an employer's brand and share training initiative information can get an organization's message directly to the prospects they desire.

NAB's Paul Silver shared this experience on how brand-related communications with local communities of tech professionals can produce results:

"I go to tech meetups quite often. As a bank, when you go to meetups and you say 'We're hiring!' It's almost like a laugh. 'I don't want work for a bank, that's ridiculous!' I heard that an awful lot—until we started the Cloud Guild. Now when I show up and say NAB is hiring, 15 [or] 16 people come over and want to have a conversation about the technology we're using. We may not hire them all, but they've got a real interest in what NAB's doing. It's been great. So from a talent and acquisition perspective, we've really lifted our game by having the [Cloud] Guild."[11]

Conclusion

To gain traction or build momentum for the training and development portion of its employer brand, an organization must:

- Assess both the immediate and long-term risks that the cloud talent shortage poses to your employer brand. What will it lose by not attracting and retaining enough top cloud talent?

- Gain support, from its C-suite to its department level, for winning the cloud talent war.

- Devise a strategy for winning the cloud talent war— featuring cloud skills training and certification as an essential part of its employer value proposition (EVP).

- Develop and actively promote a branded cloud training initiative.

- Highlight its cloud training initiative as part of its employer brand and include it in internal and external promotions.

Finally, organizations should continually discuss cloud innovation and skills training with professionals within and outside of its workforce. Because the cloud skills gap is challenging to bridge, ongoing communication and effort is required to keep an organization's strategy on track.

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Resources

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13. "Which Work Benefits do Millennials Value Most?," by Niall McCarthy, Forbes, Nov. 12, 2015. Based on research conducted by PWC.

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Links

- AWS Training and Certification for Enterprise

- AWS Executive Insights

- AWS Cloud Enterprise blog