

The step-by-step guide to bridging the IT skills gap from within:

Part 3

Empowering teams and setting your business apart



Mind the (skills) gap for good

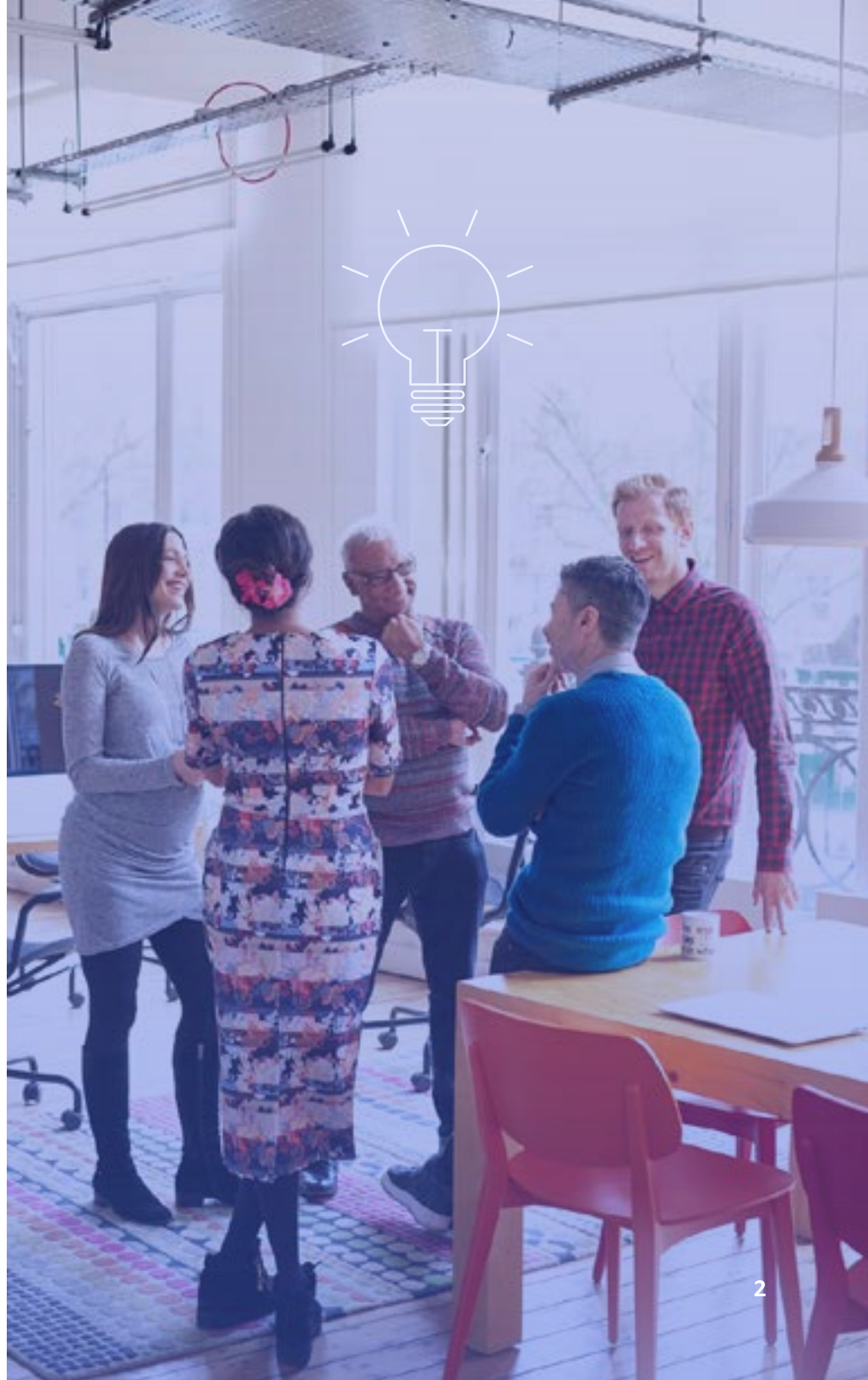
Despite the issues it creates for modern organizations, surprisingly few have fully acknowledged the severity of the **IT skills gap**. Many see it as an issue of technology department staffing, unaware that the gap affects not just IT groups but also entire organizations. Even leading enterprises are struggling to comprehend the full scope of the skills that must be added or developed to bridge the growing gap.

In Part 2 of this AWS eBook Series, we explored the importance of training your employees to bridge the skills gap. In the concluding volume, we focus on proven methods of empowering your people for success. As part of that guide, we've also included Jonathan Allen's "12 Steps to Get from Zero to Hundreds of AWS-Certified Engineers."

"Leaders should work hand-in-hand with HR to shift away from position-based development, develop a tactical skills gap analysis, and utilize tools and methods for improving I&O skills in-house."

—Gartner, Inc., 2018¹

¹<https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2018-03-27-gartner-says-lando-skills-gaps-will-cause-75-percent-of-organizations-to-experience-visible-business-disruptions-by-2020>



5

Empowering teams

Today's project teams must be cross-functional, possessing the authority to execute individual objectives and the freedom to organically cross-pollinate with other teams as demands dictate and opportunities arise. To make this kind of teamwork possible, management will need to let go of the strictly hierarchical and departmentally siloed organizational models of the past. Objectives must be reset, obstacles removed.

That change won't come easy. But, in a bit of an ironic twist, the source of the skills gap itself—emerging technologies—can accelerate transformation in ways that benefit everyone in the organization.

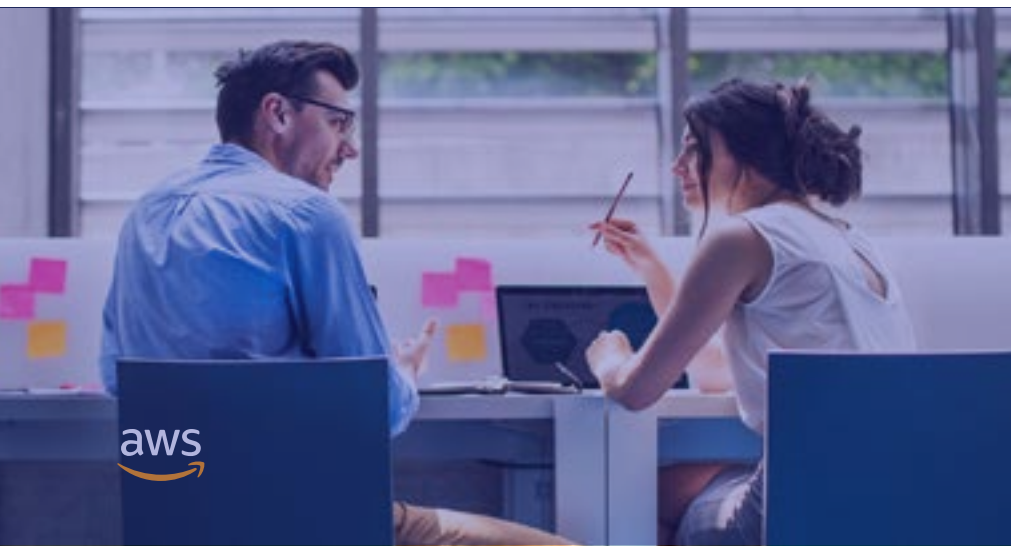
The business value of the cloud, DevOps, and today's best practices for IT delivery can empower nearly everyone in the enterprise. While this new paradigm is centered around autonomous, cross-functional teams, that doesn't mean management and senior executives will be left powerless—or with little or no power to make change.

The fact is, the new model makes managers *more essential*, not less. The shape and function of their authority may have changed, but it hasn't waned.

Rather than blunt instruments of enforcement, managers and executives have become enablers of team success, providing guidance to prevent siloed operations, maintaining focus on key objectives, identifying opportunities for cross-pollination, allocating resources, and resolving conflicts.

Driven by DevOps and the cloud, the cross-functional team model transforms managers and executives into champions of productivity—high-order idea trailblazers ready to redistribute goals, inspire creativity, develop new shared tools and architectures, and eliminate any obstacle standing between their teams and success. Freed from administrative tasks that amount to glorified babysitting, managers and executives can now amplify their teams' ideas, slicing through bureaucracy and guiding the business with sharper clarity and a more powerful vision.

Still, the traditional hierarchical management framework is firmly entrenched. How do we get from there to the teamwork-driven promised land?



Changing the guard

Traditional management models focus on productivity, moving work through an assembly line of employees and strict organizational processes before finally reaching the end customer. Today's most successful businesses are flipping that model on its head—starting with the customer and working backward.

Businesses that practice customer-focused management are having more success because they've recognized that the customer has changed—and that management must change in response.

Today's customers are more empowered than ever. They can voice their opinions on public forums to audiences of thousands, sometimes millions. Most of these comments and social media posts may go unnoticed, but all it takes is a viral tweet from a lone, dissatisfied customer to throw even the sturdiest global enterprise into a PR crisis.

Customers also have a multitude of options for nearly every product or service on the market—and with brand loyalty in a tailspin², customers won't hesitate to ditch a company that isn't meeting their needs.

Now that you understand why customer-focused management is critical to success, let's dig into what the model actually entails. Being customer-focused means making it easy for customers to connect and share feedback. It means providing user-friendly access to all products and services, acknowledging and rewarding loyalty, and, of course, giving customers what they want—as quickly as possible and at the best possible price.

Once customer satisfaction takes its rightful place at the forefront of management, executives can then work backward, tailoring processes and tasks not to arbitrary productivity quotas but instead to actual outcomes. This allows teams to better identify the metrics that really matter, focus on improving them, and ultimately get to see the results of their labor. For most employees, working this way leads to superior teamwork and greater job satisfaction.

In the customer-focused model, success flows upward. It starts with the customer, then ascends into autonomous, cross-functional teams that design new products and features the customer wants. Eventually, it works its way up into management, where it combines with other successes to form initiatives based on real customer value and designed to improve business outcomes.

The framework of authoritative, cross-functional teams we discussed in the last section fits hand in glove with this customer-focused model. A 2019 McKinsey report found that cross-functional teams can resolve 95% of customer requests during their first contact³.

True transformation—the kind needed to cost-effectively close the IT skills gap—will require that your teams commit to initiatives that result in *real* action. Everyone must be on board and focused on new models of teamwork and leadership. The best way to make sure that happens is to start small and let the change happen organically. All of which brings us back—back to your cloud foundation team and its first project.

²<https://www.businessinsider.com/most-us-consumers-not-brand-loyal-2019-3>

³<https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Business%20Functions/Operations/Our%20Insights/Customer%20first%20Personalizing%20the%20customer%20care%20journey/Customer-first-Personalizing-the-Customer-Care.ashx>

6

Now what?

While making the organizational changes we outlined in Sections 3–5 will be essential to successfully closing your IT skills gap, you don't need to wait until all the dust is fully settled before you build your Cloud Foundation Team. The efforts of your initial exploits into the cloud can run in parallel with the evolution of your business model—although the team's ability to spread its new learnings and capabilities throughout the enterprise will depend heavily on your commitment to creating a work environment that empowers and enables them. Now that you have a broader understanding of the larger scope of work required to close the skills gap, let's take a look at your first steps into the cloud from a wider lens.

In his blog, [“A 12 Step Program to Get from Zero to Hundreds of AWS-Certified Engineers,”](#) Jonathan Allen, current AWS enterprise strategist and evangelist and former Capital One UK CTO, illustrates a more extensive methodology for bridging the IT skills gap using mostly your existing personnel (with a single step dedicated to recruiting).

We encourage you to read the post in full. But for now, we'll identify and briefly describe his “12 steps” to give you a broader perspective—and, borrowing a phrase from another [blog post](#) by AWS Head of Enterprise Strategy Stephen Orban—to demonstrate why you already have the people you need to succeed with the cloud.



Jonathan Allen's "12 Steps to Get from Zero to Hundreds of AWS-Certified Engineers":

- 1) **Acceptance** – Technology leaders and engineers themselves must accept that your current engineers have the ability to become cloud experts.
- 2) **Training** – Take the [AWS Technical Essentials course](#), the ideal introduction to the capabilities of the cloud.
- 3) **Hands-On Time** – Give your engineers a safe space where they are encouraged to play, configure, experiment, and, yes, even *fail*.
- 4) **Assemble Your Two-Pizza Team** (Cloud Foundation Team) – Put together an engineering team with a core mix of network, database, Linux server, application, automation, storage, and security skills.
- 5) **Invite Some Experts** – Add some expert-level engineers who have the right attitude when it comes to sharing their learnings and best practices.
- 6) **Make It Real** – Have your team build something real and put it into production—if it succeeds, great, if not, discard and restart as many times as necessary.
- 7) **Scale the Learning Like Cellular Mitosis** – Once your first team achieves a level of cloud proficiency, split them into separate teams and add more engineers for your newfound cloud experts to train. Repeat until all your engineers have rotated onto at least one team.

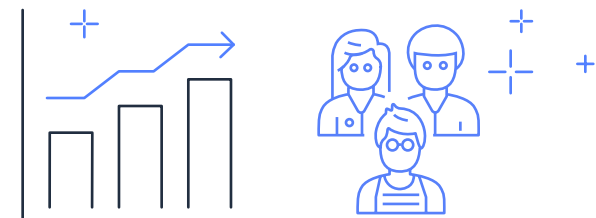
8) **Certification** – Work with [AWS Technical Training](#) or one of its [partners](#) to start down the [path to certification](#), ultimately working toward [professional-level certification](#).

9) **Scaling the Certification and Associated Leadership** – Reach a [critical mass of 10% of engineers](#) advocating the cloud, and let the [network effect](#) take hold. Build toward the [Halo Effect](#), and watch your transformation accelerate exponentially as you attract or convert more talent to become cloud literate.

10) **Recognize and Reward Expertise** – Celebrate successes by “shouting from the rooftops” and rewarding technical progress in any way you can—meals, vouchers, drinks, special team chairs, novelty awards, you name it.

11) **Take the Challenge Yourself** – Demonstrate your commitment by studying for and making a serious attempt to pass a technical certification exam.

12) **Create a Unifying Job Family Portfolio** – Offer a solid job-family track to your technical employees and ignore outdated glass ceilings—for example, be willing to promote engineers to senior levels without requiring them to serve as managers.



Set your business apart with the IT staff you already have

Closing the IT skills gap requires such significant process changes and philosophical evolution that it may feel like you need to completely reshape your company. In fact, the transformation from cloud zero to cloud expert starts with just a single spark.

One thing is fairly certain—your business can do it. Best of all, it can be done with the people you have today. All it takes is the courage to set your business apart and the tools to get started. It won't be long before your business is ready to emerge as the cloud-expert, data-driven, unstoppably competitive enterprise of tomorrow you've always known it could become.

Ready to get started? [Visit us](#) to see how AWS can help you fuel transformation and close the IT skills gap from within.



Make the transition to AWS
[Contact us today →](#)