

FREE RESOURCE

Skill Mismatch

A practical primer on underuse, under-skilling, changing work, and learning decisions.

Designed for adult professionals and curious learners. Original AdriaMont Institute material, adapted from expert teaching, research, and professional practice.

A concise but substantive primer for professionals who want to think more clearly about skills, jobs, career development, and labor-market change.

USE THIS WHEN	You are planning development, training, hiring, career change, or workforce strategy
DIFFICULTY	Introductory
FORMAT	Primer, diagnostic map, action questions, and reflection worksheet

Source and privacy note: Grounded in Milos's labor-market and skills research experience, including adult skills, skill use, skill development, and mismatch themes. The primer uses original synthesis and does not reproduce employer materials.

Mismatch is not one problem

Skill mismatch is often discussed as if it means only one thing: people do not have the skills that jobs require. In reality, mismatch can also mean that people have skills that their current roles do not use, that formal qualifications do not match actual tasks, or that the job itself is changing faster than learning routines.

Each pattern needs a different response. A training course is useful when the problem is a real skill gap. It is much less useful when the problem is poor job design, weak information, lack of opportunity, or underuse of existing capability.

Five mismatch patterns

PATTERN	MEANING	TYPICAL SIGNAL
Qualification mismatch	Formal education level or field does not align with job requirements.	Credentials are higher, lower, or different from the role profile.
Skill gap	The role requires capabilities the person has not yet developed.	Performance pressure, errors, slow task completion, or repeated support needs.
Skill underuse	Existing skills are not used in the role.	Boredom, low challenge, low autonomy, or frustration.
Skill obsolescence	Previously useful skills lose value as work changes.	New tools, standards, or workflows change the task.
Opportunity mismatch	The person could develop or use skills but lacks access, feedback, support, or role design.	Motivation exists, but the environment blocks practice and transfer.

A diagnostic sequence

- 01 Name the target task, not only the job title.
- 02 List the skills actually used in that task.
- 03 Separate knowledge, technical skills, social and emotional skills, and contextual judgment.
- 04 Gather evidence: work samples, performance data, supervisor input, self-reflection, labor-market information, or task analysis.
- 05 Decide whether the problem is skill shortage, skill underuse, changing demand, weak feedback, poor incentives, or unclear expectations.
- 06 Choose the response: learning, coaching, job redesign, mobility, assessment, mentoring, or better information.

Questions for different users

USER	BETTER QUESTION	USEFUL ACTION
Individual learner	Which skill would improve real opportunities or work quality?	Choose one priority skill and design repeated practice.
Manager or HR team	Are people missing skills or are we underusing them?	Combine training needs analysis with role and task review.
Education provider	Which tasks should learning prepare people to perform?	Build assessments and examples around authentic use.
Policy or NGO team	Which groups face skill gaps, underuse, or opportunity barriers?	Use evidence before recommending generic training.
Researcher or analyst	What evidence shows mismatch rather than only dissatisfaction?	Distinguish perception, qualification, task use, and measured skill.

Reflection worksheet

TARGET SITUATION	Which role, task, transition, or learning goal are you thinking about?
CURRENT EVIDENCE	What shows a gap, underuse, or changing demand?
PRIORITY SKILL	Which skill matters most for the next step?
LIKELY MISMATCH TYPE	Skill gap, underuse, obsolescence, unclear expectations, or opportunity barrier?
BEST RESPONSE	Learning, practice, feedback, job redesign, mentoring, assessment, or better information?
NEXT EXPERIMENT	What small action can test the diagnosis in the next two weeks?

Next step: complete the Skill Development Reflection Map.