# 5 Skills in IT That Will Be Non-Negotiable in 2026:

## Data, AI Literacy, Cybersecurity, Cloud, Stakeholder & Problem-Solving

As companies head into 2026 with tighter budgets but bigger transformation agendas, one thing is clear: headcount may be selective, but expectations of every hire are going up. The most sought-after professionals will blend strong technical capabilities with commercial awareness and human skills that drive real business outcomes.

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Here are five skills that will be non-negotiable for employers in 2026 – especially in technology, digital and data-driven roles.

## 1. Data Literacy: Turning Information into Action

Every function is becoming data-driven – not just data teams. Being comfortable working with data, interpreting dashboards and asking the right questions is now a baseline, not a "nice to have".

 • Professionals who can clean, interpret and visualize data, then translate insights into practical recommendations, will stand out in any role.

 • Hiring managers are increasingly assessing candidates on how they use data to make decisions, not just whether they can read a report.

You don't need to be a data scientist, but you do need to show that you can work with numbers, challenge assumptions and use evidence to support your ideas.

## 2. AI Literacy: Working alongside Intelligent Tools

AI will not replace most jobs in 2026 – but people who understand how to work with AI will increas -ingly replace those who do not.

 • Employers are looking for people who know how to use AI tools safely and effectively: refining pro -mpts, validating outputs, and integrating AI into workflows.

 • In many roles, the expectation is shifting from "Can you learn AI?" to "How are you already using AI to be more productive, creative or accurate?"



Candidates who can talk about concrete use cases – where AI saved time, reduced errors or improved results – will have a clear edge.

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## 3. Cybersecurity Awareness: Protecting the Organization by Default



Cyber risk is no longer just the security team's problem. With more cloud services, remote work and AI-driven tools, every employee plays a role in protecting data and systems.

• Basic cybersecurity awareness – from handling sensitive information to spotting phishing and understanding access controls – is becoming part of role expectations.

• In technology and data roles, security-by-design thinking is increasingly built into job des -criptions, not handled "later" by a separate team.

Professionals who show they understand both the risks and the business impact of cyber incidents will be trusted with more responsibility and more critical projects.

## 4. Cloud Fluency: Building on Modern Infrastructure

Cloud has become the default for new initiatives, and many organizations are now modernising legacy systems or optimising existing cloud environments.

• Even non-engineers benefit from a working understanding of cloud concepts: how services are delivered, what drives cost, and the basics of scalability and resilience.

• For technical roles, familiarity with at least one major cloud platform and with concepts like microservices, APIs and DevOps practices is quickly moving from advantage to minimum expectation.

Being able to talk about how cloud choices affect performance, risk, cost and time-to-market signals to employers that you think beyond pure technology.

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## 5. Stakeholder & Problem-Solving Skills: The Real Differentiator

Technical skills open doors; stakeholder and problem-solving skills keep them open. As automation handles more repeatable work, the premium shifts to people who can tackle ambiguous problems and bring others with them.

• Employers are prioritising candidates who can listen, clarify business needs, negotiate trade-offs and communicate clearly with non-technical stakeholders.

• The ability to frame problems, break them into manageable pieces, and lead people through change is now just as important as the tools you use.

In interviews, expect more scenario-based questions: "How did you handle…?", "How did you influence…?", "What did you do when things went wrong?". Your real stories are your biggest asset here.

# How to Position Yourself for 2026

To make these skills visible to employers:

• Refresh your CV and LinkedIn with concrete examples that show how you applied data, AI, security, cloud and stakeholder skills to deliver outcomes.

• Collect short, specific success stories (STAR format: situation, task, action, result) you can reuse in interviews and networking conversations.

• Prioritize learning that is close to your current role – one data tool, one AI use case, one cloud concept – and build visible, portfolio-style evidence over time.

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# Contact Us

If you're thinking about how to sharpen these five skills for 2026, or you want a market view on how employers are hiring around data, AI, cybersecurity and cloud, feel free to reach out.

Always happy to exchange views, share what I'm seeing on the ground, or simply answer questions about your next career move.

You can connect with me directly at bonnie.chan@kos-intl.com for further discussion or any questions you might have.