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Jobs for the Future

Skills-Based Practices: An Employer Journey Map

Maturity Diagnostic and Readiness Assessment

AT A GLANCE

This document is a one-stop guide to help employers build business agility, workforce diversity, and resilience through skills-based talent practices. It includes business cases for a skills-based approach and resources to assess a company's maturity and readiness to identify and adopt specific skills-based talent practices.

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Executive Summary

Yesterday's talent practices can't meet tomorrow's business needs.

Skills-based talent practices can help companies match employee capabilities to business needs with greater accuracy, cost effectiveness, and agility while building a more diverse, inclusive, and productive workforce.

In our work with more than 100 employers implementing skills-based talent practices, JFF commonly encountered two questions: "How am I doing?" and "What should I do next?"

To answer these questions, we have developed a resource called "Skills-Based Talent Practices: A Journey Map for Employers" that will help business leaders do the following:

- **Make the business case** for skills-based talent practices
- **Assess the maturity** of their current skills-based talent practices across seven criteria: job requirements, sourcing strategies, candidate assessment, hiring protocols, post-hire support, advancement opportunities, and organizational culture
- **Identify specific next steps** toward more sophisticated approaches based on their current level of maturity
- **Determine organizational readiness** for skill-based talent practices across four factors: vision, organizational buy-in, dedicated capacity, and implementation strategy

It also includes an extensive list of additional resources that can help them as they progress on their skills-based journeys.

One of the greatest challenges in any new endeavor can be determining where to take the next step. Our journey map will help you make the right choices.

Let's get started!

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01. Introduction

The U.S. talent ecosystem is rapidly transforming. Employers across industries are recognizing that yesterday's talent practices won't meet today's business needs, much less tomorrow's. To keep up with a changing landscape, they're increasingly looking to adopt skills-based talent practices.

Skills-based approaches to recruiting, hiring, and promoting employees offer numerous benefits over policies that all but require employers to base decisions on college degrees, job titles, years of experience, or other fixed requirements. Here are just a few of those benefits:

- Performance improvements driven by better matches between business needs and employee skills
- Improvements in business agility enabled by new approaches to training and development in which employees build skills more incrementally, and by employers redesigning jobs so that they solve emergent problems and take advantage of new opportunities, which are only increasing as artificial intelligence (AI) and other technologies change the nature of work
- Reductions in turnover, which lead to decreased spending on recruiting and hiring
- Access to a broader talent pool, because degree requirements exclude 60% of all U.S. workers (U.S. Census data)
- Higher levels of workforce diversity, because degree requirements exclude 76% of Black workers and 83% of Hispanic workers (U.S. Census data)

However, while the shift to skills-based talent practices is an imperative for companies to remain competitive, the change can be challenging. Human Resources technology systems that weren't built to track people based on skills must be redesigned. Policies need rewriting. Major culture change must happen to ensure that all managers hire and promote based on skills and not on traditional criteria like academic achievements.

With so many skills-based strategies to consider and changes to make, one of the greatest challenges can be determining where to take the next step.

That's where this journey map comes in.

At Jobs for the Future (JFF), we've set an ambitious North Star goal: In 10 years, 75 million people facing systemic barriers to advancement will work in quality jobs. We believe that widespread adoption of skills-based talent practices by employers in all sectors of the economy would play a significant role in achieving that goal. And we think it's particularly important for skills-based hiring to take hold among Impact Employers—the businesses whose people management practices emphasize job quality, employee well-being, and economic advancement opportunities for all workers. Skills-based approaches create more opportunities for more people while meeting immediate and future business demands. We've worked with more than 100 companies to advance skills-based practices, and we've seen where employers have been successful and where they've faced challenges. One common feature of successful companies: They started small and moved along their "skills-based journey" step by step, rather than trying to make sweeping changes all at once.

This journey map contains practical guidance based on our experience and research regarding skills-based talent practices. It will help you assess your organization's maturity with skills-based talent practices and its readiness to implement essential changes through an internal engagement process that helps build buy-in along the way. This document also provides guidance and specific implementation steps that will lead to quick wins and prepare you for sustained, long-term progress.

What Are Skills-Based Talent Practices?

By "skills-based talent practices," we mean organizing all talent acquisition and talent development activities around objectively defined skills. This is a departure from the widespread reliance on proxy signals of skills, such as four-year college degree requirements, specific numbers of years of experience, or a limited set of job titles in a candidate's career history.

Examples of skills-based talent practices include:

- Rewriting job descriptions to focus on required skills and eliminating unnecessary degree requirements
- Partnering with local community colleges or training programs to access new employees who have completed specific types of training
- Requiring managers to consider internal talent for new roles before posting jobs externally
- Providing managers and employees with information about possible career paths, the skills those paths require, and resources to develop those skills

Companies that focus on employee skills can reward individuals based on their abilities and then help them develop additional skills to transition into new roles that match the individuals' capabilities. This shift benefits both employees and employers: Employees gain access to new opportunities and career trajectories, while employers meet specific business requirements, develop essential skills for future demands, and boost retention rates.

Skills-based talent practices:

- Save businesses 70-92% per employee when used to build emerging skills rather than hiring new talent.
- Allow employers to access larger talent pools, both inside and outside of their companies.
- Enable employers to efficiently match business needs with required talent.
- Accelerate existing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives by enabling employers to access untapped talent that has faced bias and other barriers to economic advancement.
- Help employers make more precise staffing decisions.
- Reduce harmful biases in application and interview processes.
- Increase worker satisfaction.
- Honor workers' voice and choice in lifelong learning by allowing workers to build skills that drive career advancement.

Using This Guide

Charting your journey starts with assessing your company's maturity and its readiness to adopt new skills-based talent practices. We provide separate maturity and readiness diagnostics because a company's current-state maturity is often unrelated to its readiness to undertake systematic, long-term efforts to shift talent practices.

Our goal is to get you moving from conversation to action on skills-based talent practices as quickly and successfully as possible. Consequently, we have designed these assessments to take no longer than a week and conclude with practical and specific next steps.

While this guide should facilitate a holistic conversation about your organization, in some cases, different departments, locations, or divisions within the company may be in different stages of readiness for these conversations. In those instances, we recommend focusing on whatever unit has the authority to implement the changes laid out in this guide. Additionally, focusing on those parts of the organization where there is the greatest buy-in can create early wins, which can help generate data and case studies to encourage other parts of the organization to shift their behavior.

Who Is This Guide For?

This guide is meant to foster conversation among key stakeholders cross-organizationally. While often someone from human resources (HR) will play the convening role, we recommend that skills-based journey discussions include decision makers from the following teams:

- **Talent acquisition** teams looking to expand their talent pools and identify candidates with specific skills.
- **Talent management** and **talent development** teams committed to expanding opportunity through corporate development programs.
- **CEOs** and **C-suite** executives interested in creating corporate workforce planning processes that help the business maintain or increase market competitiveness.
- **DEI leaders** focused on utilizing talent practices to foster increased diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- **Hiring managers** and **business unit leaders** facing talent shortages for entry-level and middle-skill roles.

02. Assessing Your Organization's Skills-Based Maturity

To start, you will need baseline data on the current state of your organization's skills-based approach to talent. Which skills-based talent practices are already in place at your company? Undertaking this assessment will ensure that you accurately understand the scope of the work ahead and prioritize your efforts accordingly in collaboration with your colleagues.

The first diagnostic—the skills-based maturity assessment—provides a maturity rating level for your organization across the following seven criteria:

1. Job requirements
2. Sourcing strategies
3. Candidate assessment
4. Hiring protocols
5. Post-hire support
6. Advancement opportunities
7. Organizational culture

In each of these areas, you will give your organization a rating of Level 1, Level 2, or Level 3, with Level 1 representing the least evolved practices and Level 3 representing the most evolved practices. Your overall maturity rating can be calculated by taking the sum of your seven scores. The goal is not to get perfect scores but to candidly assess your company's progress in its skills-based journey. This candor will help your company be more effective in implementing next steps and provide an accurate baseline from which to chart growth.

Deploying the Maturity Assessment

While gathering the necessary information and insights to complete this maturity assessment is not particularly complex or time consuming, it will take planning and commitment from your senior leaders, particularly those in HR. In many organizations, some skills-based talent practices are already in place—although these practices are often undocumented, narrowly deployed, inconsistently followed, and poorly understood. This means you'll gain the best insight into current practices in your organization by gathering perspectives from a broad set of contributors.

We recommend HR professionals engage a team of five to 10 leaders to complete this assessment together. Start with relatively senior leaders who have responsibility for the following functions:

- Talent acquisition
- Talent development
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion

In addition, it will be helpful to gain the perspectives of business leaders who have responsibility for any high-volume entry-level or mid-level positions that are hard to fill. In Appendix 1, we recommend three different approaches for soliciting the views of your colleagues in the maturity assessment process.

Skills-Based Maturity Diagnostic

Skills-Based Talent Practices	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Job requirements	Documented job requirements, if they exist, are focused primarily on degrees, and fixed years of work experience. Job requirements do not articulate skills-based equivalencies for degrees and fixed years of work experience.	Documented job requirements mostly include skills-based equivalencies for degrees and work experience.	Documented job requirements are focused exclusively on necessary and desired candidate skills. Job requirements include similar skills that position candidates to quickly and efficiently acquire required skills through on-the-job training.
Sourcing strategies	Company sources candidates exclusively from postings on major job boards, the company website, or four-year colleges.	Company sources candidates from diverse talent pools through ad hoc or inconsistent arrangements with diversity sourcing specialists, community colleges, boot camps, company employee resource groups (ERG), existing employees with related skills, etc.	Company sources candidates from diverse talent pools through formalized, long-term partnerships with sourcing specialists, community colleges, historically Black colleges and universities, company ERGs, credential providers, community-based organizations, etc. Outcomes from these relationships are measured and analyzed over time to ensure desired results.
Candidate assessment	Candidates are primarily screened based on the prior acquisition of degrees, years of experience, or titles. Job skill assessment tools are informally defined, lack objective scoring criteria, and are minimally or inconsistently implemented across the enterprise. Managers have significant independence in candidate selection and focus primarily on intuition or informal selection criteria.	Candidates are assessed through a combination of subjective and objective measures, with some focus on degrees, credentials, and work experience and some focus on required job skills. Job skill assessment tools are formally defined with objective scoring criteria but are inconsistently used. Assessment tools include some of the following: • Behavioral-based interviews (with objectively defined criteria) • Diverse hiring panels • Written or online tests • Portfolio evaluations	Candidate fit is determined by using a formal and consistent set of objective skill assessments. Assessment tools include all or most of the following: • Behavioral-based interviews (with objectively defined criteria) • Diverse hiring panels • Written or online skills tests • Portfolio evaluations

Skills-Based Talent Practices	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Hiring protocols	Hiring staff members have received little or no unconscious bias training. If job skill assessment tools are in use, they have received little or no formal assessment tool training. There are no systems in place to ensure compliance with established hiring protocols.	Hiring staff members have received one but not both of the following: • Formal unconscious bias training • Training on the use of the company's job-skill assessment tools There are few if any systems in place for ensuring compliance with established protocols.	All hiring staff members receive ongoing unconscious bias training and training on the use of the company's job-skill assessment tools. Compliance systems are in place to ensure that hiring staff members follow established protocols.
Post-hire support	Recently hired employees without four-year degrees receive no differentiated post-hire coaching, mentoring, or training to support them and their unique needs.	Recently hired employees without four-year degrees receive access to coaching, mentoring, and training, but the support is either not differentiated or not consistently provided.	Recently hired employees without four-year degrees consistently receive dedicated and differentiated post-hire coaching, mentoring, and training.
Advancement opportunities	Few, if any, opportunities for professional development and career advancement exist for people without four-year degrees, and there is no system in place for tracking employee skills. Managers do not often support direct reports in reaching career goals, and internal candidates are not frequently considered for open positions.	Professional development opportunities that teach skills required for advancement are available for some roles, and employee skill development is tracked and factored into promotion decisions to some extent. Skills-based career pathways may be available but are inconsistently used by managers for career discussions.	All employees have access to professional development opportunities that teach skills required for advancement, and employee skill development is consistently tracked and factored into promotion decisions. Skills-based career pathways are available and consistently used by managers as part of career discussions.
Organizational culture	Organization has little to no awareness or acceptance of the benefits of skills-based talent practices. There is no formal organizational commitment to learning and development, racial equity, job quality, and equitable economic advancement for workers. Employees with four-year degrees are given preferential treatment. There may even be distrust of the capabilities of individuals without four-year degrees.	Employees in some areas of the organization (e.g., HR) have awareness and acceptance of the benefits of skills-based talent practices. There is some degree of organizational commitment to learning and development, racial equity, job quality, and equitable economic advancement opportunities for workers, but that commitment is expressed through separate, uncoordinated business unit initiatives.	Organization has broad-based awareness and acceptance of the benefits of skills-based talent practices. There is company-wide commitment to learning and development, racial equity, job quality, and equitable economic advancement for workers as expressed through C-suite-level support and company-wide initiatives and programs.

Using the Skills-Based Maturity Diagnostic

When you have successfully gathered the insights and perspectives of each contributor, calculate your total maturity score and determine your company's overall maturity level. In Appendix 1, we discuss the different ways to calculate your overall maturity level based on how you deployed the maturity assessment. The table below suggests potential next steps associated with each maturity score level.

Total Maturity Score	Overall Maturity Level	Recommended Next Steps
6-8	Beginner	Find a place to start your skills-based journey: • Choose one job description to rewrite. Either replace degree requirements with specific job-based skills or add skill-based equivalencies. • Develop a candidate-assessment protocol (e.g., objectively scored case studies, behavioral-based interviews, written pre-employment tests) that helps you identify individuals with the necessary job-related skills. • Use this experience to begin creating an approach to define and document the skills your company needs and align departments around language for describing and categorizing skills. • Pilot the changes and assess your outcomes after selecting and hiring a small number of candidates.
9-11	Advanced Beginner	Identify one or two skills-based talent practices that are inconsistently, narrowly, or ineffectively implemented in your organization. Try one of the following: • Conduct a listening tour across key departments, championing early wins, soliciting feedback, and cultivating the buy-in and coordination needed to scale. • Increase consistency by formalizing processes. • Extend these practices across a larger number of job roles or business units. • Improve the effectiveness of these practices through documentation, process improvement, and training. • Conduct an employee skills inventory to begin the process of tracking skills and integrating them into workforce planning.
12-14	Experienced	Move beyond your Level 1 practices! Roll out more effective skills-based practices in one or two business lines and get some experience in your least developed areas. Rely on business unit stakeholders to help carry the load.
14-16	Advanced Experienced	Identify one or two skills-based practices that are most successful and implement them across the entire enterprise. Cultivate stakeholders in each business unit, thoroughly explain the goals and objectives of the skills-based talent practices you'd like to scale, roll out new processes, and monitor both process adoption and effectiveness. Collect and share metrics and success stories that illustrate how your work has helped business units and employees succeed.
Over 16	Expert	Extend your success by institutionalizing any remaining skills-based talent practices across the entire enterprise. Consider engaging in efforts to help expand the skills-based talent ecosystem by presenting your findings at conferences and helping peers at other companies embark on a skills-based talent journey.

03. Assessing Your Organization's Readiness

Once you've assessed your organization's skills-based maturity level and have some ideas for next steps, it's time to assess your readiness to take those steps. In many ways, your skills-based maturity level is independent of your readiness to make ongoing skills-first progress. As we've previously discussed, embarking on a skills-based journey is an extensive, full-company endeavor that requires ongoing engagement, commitment, and support from your full executive team. This is as true for companies with relatively high levels of maturity as it is for companies with low levels of maturity. Your success in this endeavor is far less dependent upon your existing talent practices than it is on the following four factors:

- **VISION**
- **DEDICATED CAPACITY**
- **ORGANIZATIONAL BUY-IN**
- **IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY**

We can't emphasize this strongly enough: Don't mistake your current maturity level for your ability to successfully improve that maturity level. Make sure you consider your readiness assessment—even if you have a high total maturity score—before you begin the work.

Readiness Criteria Explained

The skills-based readiness assessment focuses on the four criteria that most contribute to a successful enterprise-wide project:

VISION

Before you start work, you must establish a clear and compelling vision for why you are shifting toward more skills-based talent practices. This vision should include your business objectives, desired outcomes, and the motivation behind your decision.

ORGANIZATIONAL BUY-IN

Because skills-based talent practices require the attention and focus of your entire management staff, it's critical to have the support and backing of all executive committee members. Make sure they understand what your project will aim to accomplish, what the likely risks are, and what you will need to be successful.

DEDICATED CAPACITY

It will be difficult, if not impossible, to make sustained progress without dedicated capacity (head count, earmarked funding, etc.). Consider that the shift to skills-based talent practices is less a time-bound initiative than it is a complete transformation of how your organization works. With dedicated capacity, you will be able to delegate this work to employees and/or an external consultant with the bandwidth and funds necessary for success. This should be part of their core job responsibilities and not something they do as an "extracurricular" activity.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Finally, you must determine how you intend to sustain and scale the skills-based practices across the enterprise. Failure to do so will likely result in inconsistent practices that are poorly adopted and have limited long-term impact for your company and its employees.

- **Depth first:** Start with a narrow implementation focused on transforming all the talent practices for one job, one business line, or one location, and then scale these practices to more jobs, business lines, or locations.
- **Breadth first:** Implement one skills-based practice at a time across the entire enterprise.

The approach you choose will be largely determined by how your stakeholders prefer to proceed. Given that you'll be relying on their support and effort throughout this endeavor, choosing an implementation strategy in line with their preferences is smart stakeholder management. As you think about scaling, it's also important to schedule frequent checkpoints. Analyzing outcomes can highlight early wins that will help cultivate the stakeholder buy-in needed for scaling, as well as generate strategies for continuous improvement and sustainability.

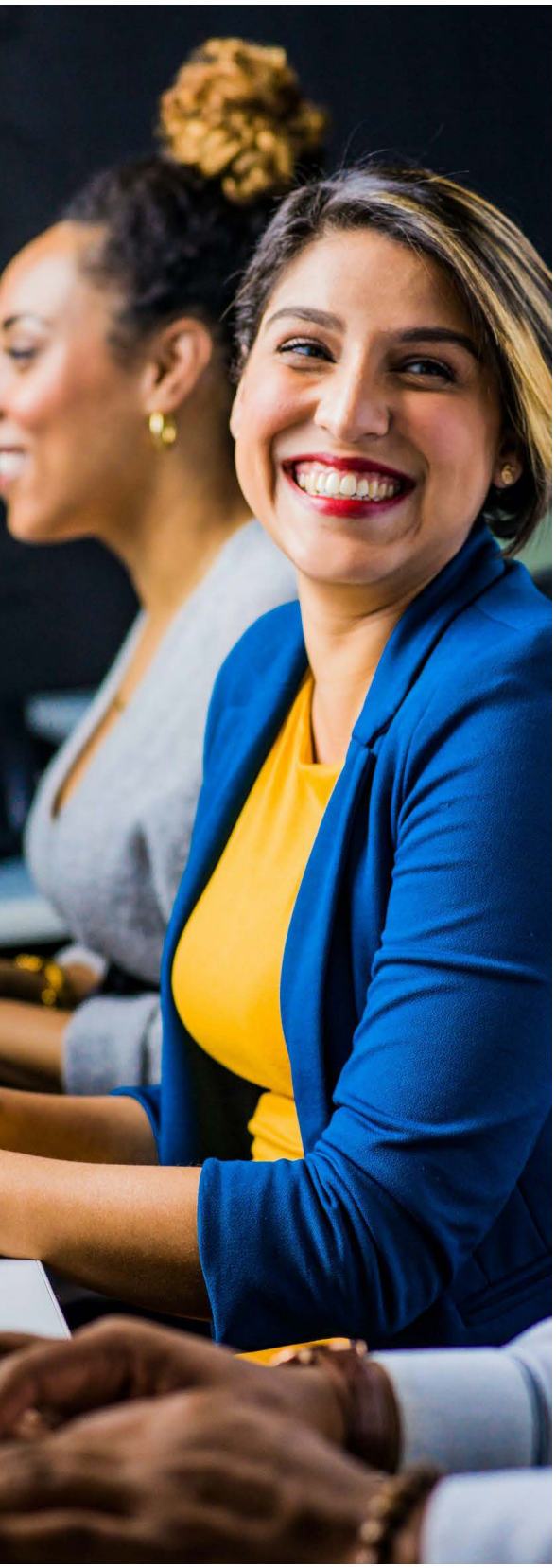
Deploying the Readiness Assessment

Given the critical nature of the criteria described above, we recommend that you refrain from moving forward with your next step until you meet the "Ready to Start!" requirements in each row of the readiness assessment, or at least have a plan in place to mitigate challenges associated with not being fully "Ready to Start!" in every category. We suggest that you spend some time with your most influential stakeholders to ensure that you've accurately understood your situation. To the extent that you haven't yet put in place everything you'll need to be successful, rely on your stakeholders to help shore up any potential gaps.

As previously discussed, holistically adopting a set of skills-based talent practices across a multifaceted organization is exceedingly challenging even under the best of circumstances. Try to avoid making your work more difficult than necessary by either prematurely launching your efforts or trying to adopt for expert-level practices when you have next steps you can take today.

Readiness Assessment

Readiness Criteria	Not Ready	On the Way to Being Ready	Ready to Start!
Project vision	Project owners and champions have yet to formally define a skills-based project vision. Initiative scope, outcomes, and objectives are not yet defined and documented.	Project owners and champions have defined a skills-based project vision, but the project scope, outcomes, and objectives are imprecise or undocumented.	Project owners and champions have defined a skills-based project vision. The scope, outcomes, and objectives are precisely defined and well documented.
Organizational buy-in	Stakeholders and decision makers (CEO, VP of HR, CTO, and key business leaders) have little awareness or understanding of the case for skills-based talent practices. While support for skills-based initiatives may exist to some extent, it is limited to one leader or one department.	Stakeholders and decision makers have some awareness and understanding of the case for skills-based talent practices but aren't fully convinced that a skills-based initiative can succeed or benefit the company. Multiple stakeholders across the enterprise are willing to consider the adoption of some skills-based talent practices but aren't willing to fund a comprehensive skills-based talent initiative.	Stakeholders and decision makers have a strong understanding of the case for skills-based talent practices. They are convinced that skills-based practices can succeed and benefit the organization. They are willing to fund a skills-based talent initiative provided the project is ready to be formally placed on the company's HR road map (if one exists). Incentives within the organization are aligned to drive successful completion of a defined skills-based talent initiative.
Funding	Project owners and champions have no sources of dedicated head count or funding for a skills-based talent initiative. Any work for a skills-based talent initiative is subordinated to work with dedicated head count and funding.	Project owners and champions have dedicated, though insufficient, head count and funding for a skills-based talent initiative. Success will require securing additional resources or diverting resources from other projects.	Project owners and champions have dedicated and sufficient head count and funding for a skills-based talent initiative.
Implementation Strategy	Project owners and champions have yet to articulate a clear and compelling implementation strategy that defines a data-centered depth-first or breadth-first approach to scaling adopted skills-based talent practices.	Project owners and champions have articulated an implementation strategy, but the strategy either isn't data-centered or isn't clear in how it will scale improved practices across the entire company and throughout the entire talent life cycle.	Project owners and champions have articulated a compelling, data-centered implementation strategy that clearly defines how the organization will scale improved practices across the entire company and throughout the entire talent life cycle.



Risks and Considerations

It's important to note that skills-based talent practices are not a panacea—for employers or employees. Specifically, skills-based practices:

- Don't eliminate bias in hiring and advancement. Companies need to implement comprehensive anti-bias training regardless of where they are in their skills-based talent journeys. Moreover, companies must invest in systems to assess, track, and cultivate objectively defined job-related skills. Without doing so, they could face significant legal and regulatory risk.
- Should include partnerships and strategies honoring both conventional postsecondary institutions and new training providers that award short-term credentials or certificates.
- Need to have job quality, longevity, and adaptability as their north stars, to avoid getting people in the door only to be stuck or left behind again.
- Cannot, by themselves, ensure racial equity, job quality, and equitable economic advancement opportunities for workers. Companies committed to these outcomes should continue investing in DEI and job quality initiatives that can work in concert with skills-based talent practices.

Adopting skills-based talent practices can have a transformative impact on individuals and businesses alike. By expanding the ways you recruit, assess, and hire candidates, you can open new pathways to quality jobs and high-wage careers for workers that past talent systems would have overlooked based on their level of educational attainment, job title, or other criteria and strengthen your business at the same time.

04. Conclusion

Skills-based talent practices are promising; many companies are already experiencing the benefits despite the associated change management challenges. Additionally, promising work is occurring throughout the ecosystem to help validate skills from a range of sources and past experiences and create definitions of skills that can be understood across organizations.

Despite the work that remains to be undertaken in many organizations and across the work and learning ecosystem, we hope employers are energized and motivated by determining where they are and what next steps they can take. For employees, skills-based talent practices unlock opportunities to get off the treadmill of low-wage work and onto career escalators. For companies, adopting skills-based practices promises expansive access to the talent that will set the stage for long-term business success. Research backs this up: Studies suggest that a diverse workforce contains a range of perspectives and lived experiences that bring increased innovation, more effective product development, and ultimately, more successful business outcomes. And by clearly defining the required job-related skills for each position, companies can more efficiently find and forecast better talent matches, ensuring that they have the right people in the right roles at the right time.

Further Reading

There is a growing body of literature on implementation of skills-first practices, published by institutions with notable expertise in organizational change. The assessment tools above are unique in their ability to engage a wide variety of stakeholders in conversation regarding readiness for next steps. While they offer suggestions for next steps and help cultivate buy-in for further action, most companies would benefit from additional implementation guidance. Once your company is ready to embark on its skills-based journey, we recommend exploring the following resources:

- SHRM Foundation's toolkit, "Ready for Success: Adopting a Skills Mindset in Employment Practices," provides employers with 12 actions they can engage in to further the adoption of skills-based practices in their organizations.
- Lightcast and Western Governors University both have skills libraries for employers hoping to create a skills taxonomy, conduct a skills inventory, or rewrite job descriptions to focus on skills.
- Opportunity@Work's research on employees who are "skilled through alternative routes" (STARs) can help companies build a business case for skills-based talent practices.
- LinkedIn Learning's course "Becoming a Skills-based Organization" supports companies in adopting skills-based talent practices at each phase of the talent life cycle.
- The Business Roundtable's Multiple Pathways Initiative has several resources, including a guide to Measuring the Impact of Skills-Based Talent Practices, a Skills-Based Internal Mobility Playbook, and a Guide to Improving Recruitment, Retention Advancement and Equity.
- Talent Rewire's "How Change Happens" resource can support employers who are trying to lead organization-wide culture change surrounding skills-based practices.
- The Rework America Alliance provides a free Employer Toolkit that includes online training courses about skills-based talent practices, a skills-based job posting generator, a guide to using HR software systems with skills-based talent practices, a skills-based sourcing and hiring playbook, and more!
- Grads of Life's Impact Measurement Framework provides employers with specific metrics they can use to evaluate the impact skills-based practices have on their employees and business.
- Grads of Life's Occupation Review tool can help employers leverage labor market data to prioritize roles for recredentialing and identify sourcing strategies for candidates with critical skills.

Appendix 1: How to Deploy JFF's Skills-Based Maturity Assessment

Of the many ways in which you can undertake this maturity assessment, we suggest the following three approaches, each of which will help you accurately gauge your organization's current skills-based maturity.

1 INDEPENDENT RESPONSES

Send each participant the diagnostic and request that they complete it individually and return their results to you. You can provide the necessary context and guidance separately, in person or via email or phone. While this approach is straightforward and fast, you might find that participants determine their ratings without carefully considering any informal or inconsistently followed practices that exist throughout your organization. Despite this drawback, it might be that the speed and efficiency of this approach outweighs some loss in diagnostic accuracy. (If that's the case, soliciting feedback from a larger team of contributors will likely reduce this risk.) When you've gathered ratings from each participant, average out the scores for each criterion, sum your totals, and determine your overall maturity rating.

2 STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Meet individually with the contributors you've identified and walk them through the diagnostic, explaining each descriptor and soliciting their ratings on each criterion. Using this approach, your role is to help the contributors understand the purpose of the exercise, each criterion, and each descriptor within each criterion. You can also use follow-up and clarifying questions to ensure that contributors are thinking as expansively as possible about the practices underway within your organization. As with the approach above, when you've gathered ratings from each participant, average out the scores for each criterion, sum your totals, and determine your overall maturity rating.

3 CONSENSUS RATINGS

Hold a one-hour meeting with all your diagnostic contributors. Walk the full team through the rating descriptors for each criterion and gather consensus ratings for all six maturity criteria. In this approach, your role as facilitator is to guide the conversation, make sure you've heard from all parties, and try to have the full team gain a holistic awareness of the current formal and informal practices underway at your organization. While you are trying to arrive at a consensus rating for each criterion, feel free to act as the arbiter and choose a single rating that most reflects the sentiments of the team.

While the first approach will undoubtedly be the most efficient—and therefore likely enable you to gather perspectives from the widest possible group of contributors—you'll miss an opportunity to build a sense of familiarity, understanding, and buy-in for the work you hope to undertake in the future. In many cases, the ability to establish greater stakeholder commitment toward skills-based talent practices warrants sacrificing some degree of process efficiency.

The method for calculating your overall maturity level score will differ based on the approach defined above. If you have solicited different scores from multiple contributors, average those scores and sum the separate total to get your total maturity score. If you've arrived at consensus ratings, simply sum each rating to get your total maturity score.

Appendix 2: Maturity Criteria Explained

The skills-based maturity diagnostic helps assess the types of talent practices that most contribute to the quality, diversity, and engagement level of your employee base. While many companies' talent practices vary by location, level, and business unit, companies with particularly uneven adoption of skills-based talent practices can either rate themselves a 2 in most categories or generate separate ratings by business unit. The maturity assessment is meant to provide maximum flexibility and should make it relatively easy to determine ratings for each criterion.

The diagnostic's maturity criteria are as follows:

JOB REQUIREMENTS

While many organizations look for candidates with specific degrees, credentials, and previous job experiences, organizations that focus on finding and promoting talent with critical job-related skills have access to often overlooked pools of talent. In fact, requirements for bachelor's degrees exclude more than 62% of U.S. workers ages 25 and up, including 76% of Black adults and 83% of Hispanic adults, according to Census Bureau data. By reevaluating job requirements, companies can access a much larger, more diverse pool of potential employees. Moreover, defining job requirements in terms of the critical job-related skills (as opposed to looking for experiences that might or might not have cultivated these critical skills) ensures the best possible fit between employee and job role. This lets employees ramp up in a minimal amount of time and establish an early track record of success—both critical factors in engagement, job performance, and long-term career potential.

SOURCING STRATEGIES

Many companies miss out on qualified candidates who are intimidated by the prospect of searching through hundreds of job postings on company websites and job boards. Companies that actively recruit workers with transferable skills, work collaboratively with their employee resource groups, and form long-term, formal partnerships with sourcing specialists and community colleges have consistent access to the talent that others have likely overlooked.

CANDIDATE ASSESSMENT

Assessing candidate proficiency levels for job-related skills is difficult for even the most sophisticated talent acquisition organizations. It requires expertise, practice, and commitment from not only your recruiters but also hiring managers and interviewers. The most successful companies in this regard have adopted a set of tools and processes that formalize the candidate assessment process and use objective data to identify those candidates with the most relevant job-related skills.

HIRING PROTOCOLS

Even the most sophisticated candidate assessment processes will fail to deliver if they are implemented by poorly trained hiring staff with little compliance oversight. For this reason, each participant of the hiring process—from recruiters and screeners to interviewers and hiring managers—must receive comprehensive, scenario-based training on using the relevant tools and templates. Moreover, it is essential that all members of the hiring staff receive anti-bias training focused on the effects of unconscious bias and the types of practices that can reduce bias as much as possible in the candidate selection process. Finally, rigorous compliance measures must be in place to ensure that hiring staff members follow all defined hiring protocols.

POST-HIRE SUPPORT

Companies that focus on finding and accessing new pools of talent may find themselves onboarding employees who have less experience navigating large, multifaceted organizations, such as a four-year college or multi-site company. These employees, especially those without four-year degrees and extensive job experience, may benefit from post-hire support. Companies that implement robust post-hire onboarding and development—from coaching and mentoring to training and long-term talent development—stand the best chance of reducing attrition, adapting to specific needs of employees, increasing the upward potential of their employees, and fully leveraging their investments in new sources of talent.

ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Employees with little experience navigating large organizations often feel at a loss when it comes to managing their careers. For this reason, companies with detailed career pathway documentation can help these employees focus their career development efforts and maximize their upward career potential. Although some employees' trajectories may not fit into a linear career pathway, organizations can still support these employees by offering training and development programs and transitional or rotational assignments, and by creating a culture where managers coach direct reports toward progress on individualized career goals. This helps increase employee engagement while ensuring that all employees have the resources to continue contributing to the success of the company throughout their entire careers.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Reengineering a company's talent practices with a skills-based mentality requires commitment, diligence, and staying power. For this reason, there must be an organizational culture that supports and fosters the necessary work, even when there are setbacks and disappointments. In practical terms, this means the organization must, as a whole, have a genuine belief in the power of skills-based talent practices, even when more conventional tried-and-true practices are easier and safer. In addition, leaders at all levels must value learning and development, racial equity, job quality, and equitable economic advancement for their workers and commit themselves to a culture that welcomes, values, and invests in the growth of employees from populations that are underrepresented in quality jobs.

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