

# Closing the Gap in Durable Skills Assessment and Development



## Executive Summary

Employers widely recognize that durable skills—also known as “soft skills,” such as communication, collaboration, and critical thinking—are essential to workforce success, yet many organizations still struggle to assess and develop them consistently.

SkillsRight set out to examine the gap between valuing durable skills and measuring, hiring for, and developing them in practice. Based on quantitative surveys and interviews with 500 hiring managers and HR L&D professionals at organizations with more than 500 employees, this research snapshot explores how organizations evaluate durable skills across hiring and employee development, and where current practices miss opportunities.

The findings reveal a clear disconnect. Durable skills are increasingly important, yet they are often assessed too late in the hiring process, and developed unevenly across the workforce. Degree status also continues to shape assumptions about durable skills capability, creating disparities in opportunity and advancement.

Closing this gap requires more consistent and structured organizational approaches that evaluate durable skills earlier, apply clear standards across all talent, and embed development throughout the employee lifecycle.

## Research Background and Objectives

Our 2025 report, [Insights from Hiring Managers: How Employers Can Turn a Skills First Mindset into Sustained Impact](#), identified the assessment of skills, both technical and durable, as the primary barrier to adopting skills-first hiring. This study builds on that finding by examining how organizations specifically assess, hire for, and develop durable skills, an increasingly critical component of skills-first hiring, talent strategy and workforce development.

### Key Findings

**Durable skills are in high demand by employers but inconsistently assessed.** [America Succeeds'](#) analysis of nearly 76 million job postings from 2023–2024 found that durable skills appeared in 76% of postings, with nearly half requiring three or more.

Despite this strong demand, our study found that organizations continue to assess these capabilities inconsistently.

Rather than integrating durable skills assessments into ongoing workforce development, many employers evaluate these skills primarily during major decision points such as hiring, promotion, or termination. This limits the opportunity to build a workforce whose durable skills are developed in alignment with the organization’s brand and strategic goals, ultimately strengthening its competitive position.

**Assessment happens too late in the hiring process.** Most durable skills evaluation takes place during in-person or final-round interviews, where it often functions as a gatekeeping tool rather than an early indicator of candidate potential.

This creates two challenges. Strong candidates may be screened out before they have an opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities, and late-stage, subjective assessment can introduce inconsistency and bias into hiring decisions.

Moving durable skills assessment earlier in the hiring process through scenario-based and structured evaluations, enables organizations to identify capability and role fit that resumes alone cannot reveal.

**Degree assumptions are leaving capable talent on the table.** Without objective assessment, hiring managers are three times more likely to assume degreed candidates arrive with durable skills already developed (33%) than candidates without degrees (11%).

These disparities continue after hiring, as employees without four-year degrees are 14% less likely to receive leadership development opportunities, limiting advancement regardless of actual capability. As a result, organizations overlook and underutilize capable, high-potential talent both externally and internally.

**The most effective development methods are often underused.** This study found a consistent pattern: the most effective durable skills development approaches are relationship-based, applied, and embedded in real work. Yet several remain underused:

- **One-on-one coaching or mentoring:** 88% effectiveness, used by 46% of respondents
- **Problem-solving workshops:** 82% effectiveness, used by 31%

- **Job rotation and stretch assignments:** 78% effectiveness, used by 35%
- **Formal training programs:** 74% effectiveness, widely used by 47%

In contrast, more passive formats such as internal lunch-and-learn sessions rank lowest in effectiveness (55%), suggesting that participation alone does not lead to meaningful skill development without structured application or feedback.

These findings point to a clear need for more consistent and structured approaches to assessing and developing durable skills across the employee lifecycle. The following actions reflect practices organizations can adopt to address these gaps.

## Recommendations

- **Assess durable skills earlier in recruitment.** Integrate structured, human-centered assessments early in the hiring process to reduce bias, manage high application volumes, and give candidates meaningful opportunities to demonstrate capability beyond their resumes.
- **Evaluate durable skills consistently, regardless of degree status.** Apply the same structured assessments across candidates and employees to ensure decisions are based on demonstrated capability, rather than educational assumptions and proxies.
- **Define role-specific durable skills clearly.** Identify and articulate the durable skills most critical to success in each role to improve evaluator consistency, hiring precision and development effectiveness.
- **Standardize skills assessment.** Replace informal, impression-based evaluations with structured methods applied consistently across candidates, regardless of educational background. This reduces subjectivity and helps surface talent that may otherwise be overlooked.
- **Invest in high-impact development methods.** Prioritize approaches that make durable skills visible through application, such as one-on-one coaching, problem-solving workshops, and stretch assignments. Reserve passive formats for awareness-building.
- **Open development pathways to non-degreed employees.** Review training and promotion criteria to identify degree-based barriers. Shift toward demonstrated skills and work-based evidence to support broader access to advancement.
- **Tie development to measurable outcomes.** Connect durable skills development to tangible business results to strengthen confidence in the impact of durable skills investment and sustain long term organizational commitment.

In an AI-driven labor market, durable skills are essential. Yet many organizations continue to assess them inconsistently and develop them unevenly. Closing this gap requires more structured, continuous, and measurable approaches that strengthen how these skills are evaluated and developed over time.

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