

The Skills Equation

Rethinking Talent Beyond Titles

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#ChangeLives



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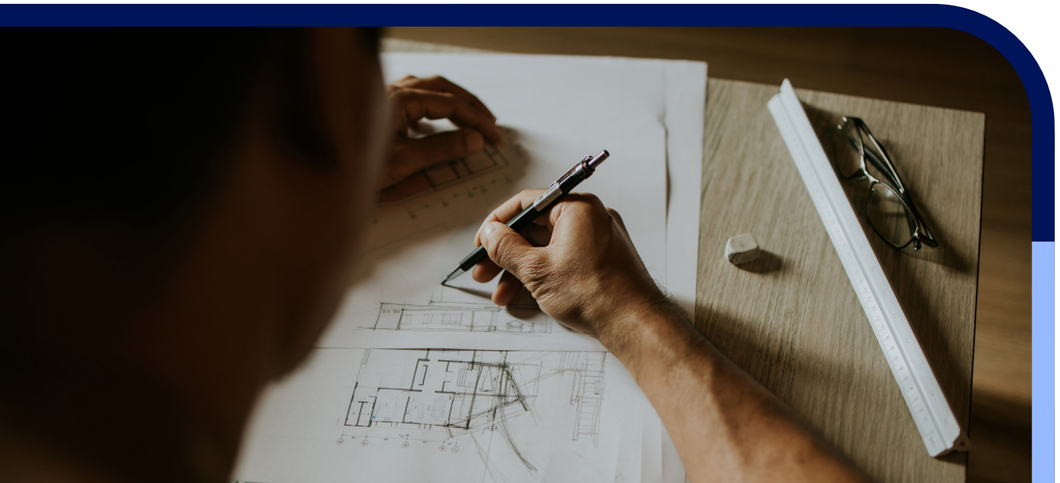
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Executive *Summary*

Skills-based hiring is no longer an emerging trend. It is becoming a **structural shift in the way organisations attract, evaluate, and develop talent.** Across markets, the labour market is moving away from stable trajectories, fixed role identities, and skills with a long shelf life, and towards a **more fluid environment** in which **capabilities evolve faster, career paths are less linear,** and **professional opportunities are less tied to a single stable role over time.** In this context, skills-based hiring has gained broad legitimacy, but its operational maturity remains uneven. The market is no longer debating whether this shift is necessary. **The challenge now is making it coherent, scalable, and credible in practice.**



5 Key Global *Insights*

1 The **broader labour market** is becoming **more fluid** and **more skill-driven.**

Companies increasingly require **different capabilities** than in the past, **career paths** are becoming **less linear,** and **skills** themselves are perceived as becoming **obsolete** more quickly.

2 **Skills-based hiring** is widely recognised as the **right direction,** but **still not fully implemented.**

Across both employees and HR decision makers, the model is already **regarded as the right direction** by a majority, with 58% of employees and 63% of HR decision makers supporting it. And yet, **structured execution remains limited:** only 23% of HR decision makers say the approach is already applied in a structured and cross-process way, while 49% place their organisations in a more exploratory phase.

3 The **main recruitment challenge** is no longer talent shortage, but **skill mismatch.**

Among HR decision makers, 40% identify the **scarcity of candidates** with the required skills as the main challenge, while 33% point to **difficulty in attracting qualified candidates.** The problem is therefore less about the absence of people in general, and more about the **absence of the right capabilities in the right places.**

4 **Skills** are becoming more critical, but also more **difficult to define and assess consistently.**

Organisations increasingly want to **make decisions based on what people can actually do,** yet the qualities that matter most are often among the hardest to evaluate reliably. This helps explain why traditional signals such as CVs, titles, and career history still retain so much weight.

5 **Internal mobility** is where skills matter most, yet **processes** remain **unclear and underdeveloped.**

Skills are seen as more important in internal mobility than in external selection by 68% of employees and 76% of HR decision makers, and yet **internal opportunities are still not visible, formalised, or accessible** enough to make that logic fully systematic.

! Alongside these insights, a further signal cuts across the entire picture: **AI is accelerating hiring processes,** but **trust and transparency remain key barriers.**

AI is already **entering recruitment systems** through the most scalable stages of the process, but **resistance remains significant,** with 22% of employees strongly agreeing and 35% somewhat agreeing that they would not participate in a selection process knowing that AI is being used to make decisions, bringing total resistance to 57%.

5 Main *Tensions*

If these are the most visible global insights, they also reveal a second layer of meaning: **the transition towards skills-based hiring is being shaped by a set of tensions that organisations have not yet fully resolved.**

1 Tension between **high strategic alignment** and **low operational execution.**

The model is no longer weak in legitimacy. It is recognised as the **right direction by a majority of both employees and HR decision makers,** and yet only 23% of HR decision makers say it is already applied in a structured and cross-process way, while 49% place their organisations in a more **exploratory phase.** The same gap is visible in relation to **skills mapping:** 42% of organisations have a structured and regularly updated skills mapping for company roles, but even among those that do, **only 44% use it systematically in decision-making.** This means that endorsement has moved ahead of infrastructure. Organisations are increasingly aligned on why skills-based hiring matters, but much **less aligned on how it should actually work across recruitment, internal mobility, development, and workforce planning.**

2 Tension between the **increasing role of skills** and the **limited ability to assess them.**

Skills are clearly becoming more central to decision-making, but the closer organisations move towards what really matters, the more they encounter the **limits of current evaluation systems.** In external selection, specific **technical skills, motivation** and **attitude,** and broader **personal fit** play a decisive role, yet many of these very dimensions are also among **the hardest to assess** reliably. For HR decision makers, alignment with team and workplace values is difficult to assess in 51% of cases, soft skills in 47%, motivation and attitude in 45% and specific technical skills in 43%. The paradox is evident: **the system** increasingly wants to privilege capabilities, but it still **relies heavily on signals that are easier to compare than skills themselves.** This is why **traditional proxies remain so persistent.** It is not simply a matter of conservatism; it is also the consequence of a system being asked to value what it still struggles to measure.

3 Relationship between **efficiency driven by AI** and **declining candidate trust.**

AI is entering hiring and mobility processes because it responds to a very real organisational need: faster screening, larger-scale matching, and more efficient management of complex talent flows. But the more technology expands, the more visible a parallel condition becomes: **people need to understand** how decisions are made and need to believe that those decisions remain fair. This is where the tension sharpens. **AI brings speed and scale, but it also raises concerns about opacity, dehumanisation, and procedural unfairness.** Among employees, 46% say that AI is a positive sign only if the process remains transparent and human, while 27% say it raises doubts about transparency and how decisions are actually made. Resistance becomes even more visible when automated decision-making enters the picture directly. Here, 57% of employees express at least some unwillingness to participate in a process if AI is being used to make decisions. Technology is therefore advancing faster than trust, and this makes **transparency and visible human oversight decisive conditions of legitimacy.**

4 Tension between **demand for flexibility** and **organisational rigidity.**

The **labour market** is moving towards more **dynamic, capability-based paths.** Career trajectories are becoming less linear, continuous upskilling is becoming more central, and both employees and organisations increasingly recognise that skills should travel more freely across contexts. Yet **many organisational systems** remain only partially formalised and still **depend heavily on role-based logic, legacy criteria, and rigid process structures.** This tension becomes especially **clear in internal mobility.** Skills are widely seen as more relevant there than in external hiring, but the internal architecture is still incomplete: only 26% of employees say internal opportunities are clearly visible and accessible to everyone, even though 55% say they are at least accessible or mostly accessible. The **system** is therefore being **pushed towards flexibility by the market,** while often **remaining too rigid internally** to convert that flexibility into real opportunity.

5 Tension between **global convergence of trends** and **local differences in maturity.**

Across markets, the broad direction of travel is shared: greater emphasis on skills, stronger relevance of internal mobility, more pressure on future capabilities, and increasing use of AI-supported decision-making. But **this common direction does not translate into uniform readiness.** Some countries are significantly more advanced in structured adoption, internal mobility openness, and process maturity, while others remain more cautious, more fragmented, or more constrained by cultural and organisational resistance. The result is **a market that converges in logic but diverges in execution.** The transition is global in narrative, but uneven in institutionalisation. This means that skills-based hiring **cannot be treated as a one-speed phenomenon.** It is moving through different markets with very different levels of operational maturity, trust, and organisational preparedness.

5 Business *Implications*

Taken together, these insights and tensions lead to a final level of interpretation: the implications are no longer only relevant for HR, but for business strategy more broadly.

1 **Skill mismatch** is becoming a core business risk.

If the main challenge is no longer generic talent shortage, but the inability to access the right capabilities, then **recruitment pressure** has to be reframed as a **structural skills challenge** rather than as a temporary sourcing difficulty. This also means that organisations cannot solve the problem through recruitment acceleration alone. They need a more **integrated response that combines targeted sourcing, stronger positioning in the market, and long-term capability-building.** In other words, the issue is no longer just how to fill roles more quickly, but how to **reduce the distance between evolving business needs and the capabilities actually available** inside and outside the organisation.

2 Organisations need to move from **role-based to skills-based workforce models.**

As long as workforce planning continues to revolve mainly around fixed roles and static job architectures, organisations will struggle to keep pace with a market in which capabilities evolve faster than titles. Moving towards a skills-based workforce model means **building stronger skills mapping, clearer capability frameworks,** and **a more explicit link between skills, mobility, development, and workforce planning.** It means using capabilities, not only titles, as the unit through which talent is interpreted and deployed. This is not simply a methodological refinement. It is a **structural shift** in how organisations organise visibility, allocation, and growth.

3 Internal mobility must become a strategic lever, not a side process.

Throughout the paper, **internal mobility** emerges as the area in which a **skills-based logic appears most credible and most actionable.** It is the place where people, organisations, and performance history already intersect, and where a more capability-based system could create immediate value. But that potential can only be unlocked if internal mobility is **made more visible, more formalised, and more legible.** If opportunities remain only partially accessible or dependent on weakly structured processes, then one of the strongest operational promises of skills-based hiring remains underused. Internal mobility cannot remain an informal by-product of talent systems. It needs to become a **central mechanism through which skills are recognised, redeployed, and developed.**

4 Transparency in hiring processes is now a competitive advantage.

Trust in how skills are assessed remains conditional, and opacity has concrete consequences, including requests for clarification and withdrawal from the process. This means that **transparency** is no longer a secondary feature of candidate experience, nor simply a matter of communication style. It has become **a differentiator of process credibility.** In markets where many systems still appear opaque, the organisations that make evaluation criteria clearer, decisions more understandable, and human oversight more visible are better positioned not only to generate trust, but also to **protect conversion and engagement** throughout the process. Transparency, in this sense, is not an accessory to performance. It is **part of performance.**

5 Employer branding must evolve from storytelling to credible positioning around skills and growth.

In a market shaped by non-linear careers, development needs, and skill scarcity, organisations can no longer rely on job-based messaging alone. They need to **communicate learning, mobility, and skill recognition** in a way that is **visible, believable, and operationally supported.** This is especially important because **attraction** now **depends** not only on whether organisations are visible,

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but **on whether they signal openness to relevant capabilities** that may not fit traditional role definitions perfectly. A strong and credible employer value proposition therefore becomes part of the answer to talent bottlenecks. It helps **expand the candidate pool, improve conversion,** and **strengthen the bridge between what organisations need and what candidates are willing to trust.**

Taken together, these implications show that the challenge is no longer whether organisations should move towards a skills-based logic. The challenge is how to turn that logic into a coherent operating model that is robust enough to be scalable, transparent enough to be trusted, and flexible enough to remain aligned with a labour market that is already changing faster than many systems are prepared to manage.



Global *Trends* (Cross-market View)

1.1 Diffusion, Perception and Adoption of Skills-Based Hiring
1.2 Key Gaps Between Candidates and Companies
1.3 Direction of the Market

Chapter Recap: Key Conclusions and Business Implications



1

1.1 *Diffusion, Perception* and *Adoption* of Skills-Based Hiring

Skills-based hiring is increasingly part of the language through which organisations interpret labour market change. It is **no longer a marginal concept,** nor a niche practice discussed only in innovation-oriented HR circles. Across markets, it has entered the **mainstream debate around recruitment, internal mobility and workforce development.** Yet its diffusion is not matched by the same depth of understanding everywhere. Awareness is widespread, but often remains uneven and, in many cases, still relatively superficial. Among **HR decision makers, 32% know the concept very well** and a further 49% know it quite well. Among **employees,** familiarity is weaker and more fragmented: **only 24% know it very well,** while 30% know it quite well and another 30% have only heard of it.

FIGURE 1.1 Awareness of skills-based hiring approach

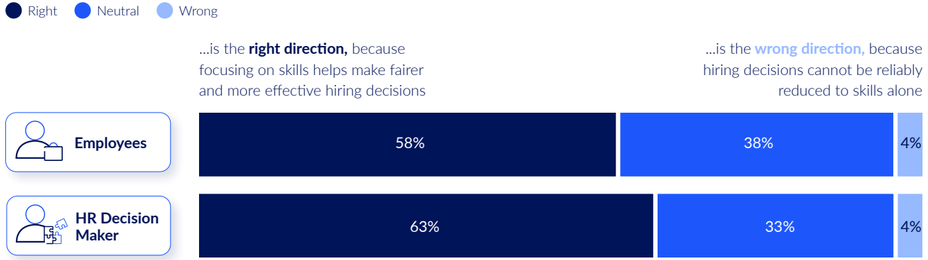


QUESTION EMP: Before answering this questionnaire, had you ever heard of skills-based hiring? HR DM: How familiar would you say you are with this concept?

This matters because the growing visibility of **skills-based hiring is not simply a matter of terminology.** It reflects a broader attempt to adapt talent decisions to a market in which static roles, linear careers and formal credentials are no longer sufficient to capture employability and potential. The concept has gained legitimacy because it appears increasingly aligned with the realities organisations are trying to manage. Across both employees and HR decision makers, skills-based hiring is already **recognised as the right direction** by a majority: **58% of employees and 63% of HR decision makers** see it as a fairer and more effective way to make hiring decisions. In other words, across markets, around 6 in 10 people on both sides of the employment relationship already regard a stronger focus on skills as the right direction for the future of recruiting.

QUESTION
Do you think that in a company like yours skills-based hiring...

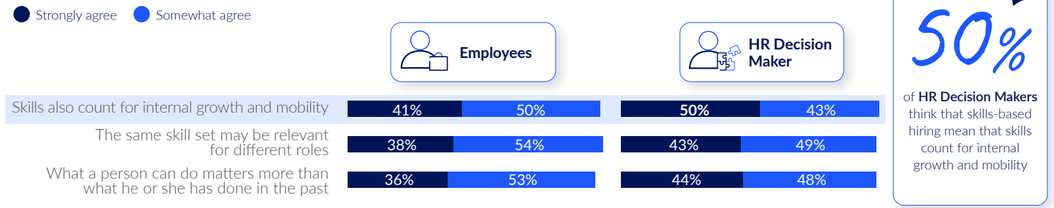
FIGURE 1.2 Is the skills-based approach the right or wrong direction for the future of recruiting?



At the level of perception, the model is not understood simply as a technical alternative to traditional recruiting. It is associated with **a wider transformation in how talent can be recognised** and valued. Skills-based hiring is linked to internal growth and mobility by 41% of employees and 50% of HR decision makers, while 36% of employees and 44% of HR decision makers strongly associate it with the principle that what a person can do should matter more than what he or she has done in the past. It is also understood as a way of seeing skills as transferable across roles, rather than locked into fixed job histories. This sends **a clear message to the market:** the appeal of skills-based hiring lies not only in more effective selection, but in a broader promise of flexibility, recognition and organisational adaptability.

QUESTION
In your opinion, does skills-based hiring mean that...

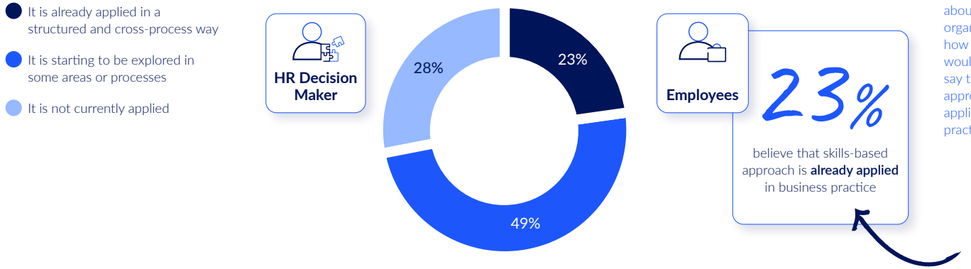
FIGURE 1.3 Perspectives on the meaning of skills-based recruitment



50%
of **HR Decision Makers** think that skills-based hiring mean that skills count for internal growth and mobility

Still, legitimacy should not be confused with maturity. **The spread of the concept is real, but structured adoption remains limited.** Only 23% of HR decision makers say that the skills-based approach is already applied in a structured and cross-process way in their organisation. By contrast, 49% place their organisation in an exploratory phase, where the model is being tested in selected areas or processes rather than embedded systematically. A further 28% say it is not currently applied at all. What emerges, therefore, is not resistance to the idea itself, but **a clear distance between strategic endorsement and operational implementation.** Skills-based hiring is increasingly seen as the right destination, but most organisations are still working out the route.

FIGURE 1.4 Application of the skills-based approach in business practice



QUESTION
Thinking about your organisation, how much would you say that this approach is applied in practice today?

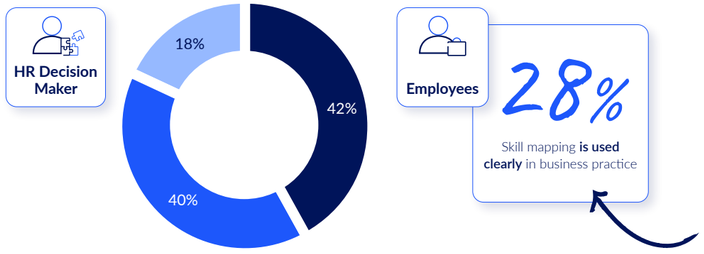
The same pattern appears when looking at the organisational tools that should support a more structured skills-based approach. Skills mapping, often treated as one of the clearest indicators of operational maturity, is far from universal. A structured and regularly updated skills mapping for company roles exists in 42% of organisations, while 40% are only beginning to explore it and 18% have no skills-mapping activities in place. Even among organisations that do have such a system, use remains partial. Only 44% use skills-mapping information systematically in decision-making, while half use it only in some cases and not in a structured way. This is an important cross-market signal. **The challenge is to build shared standards,** a common language, and the process discipline needed **to make skills truly actionable** across recruitment, mobility, development, and workforce planning.



QUESTION
Has your organisation launched structured and shared skills mapping for company roles?

FIGURE 1.5 Organisations with structured skills mapping for company roles

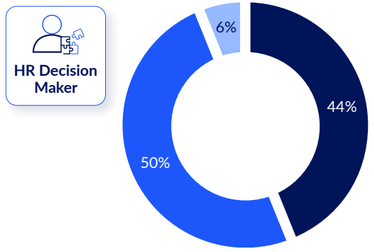
- There is a structured and regularly updated mapping
- Skills mapping is beginning to be explored
- There are currently no skills mapping activities



QUESTION
To what extent is the skills mapping information actually used in your organisation's decision-making processes (selection, internal mobility, project allocation, development)? / At what stages of the selection or internal mobility process is the skills mapping used as an explicit and structured criterion?

FIGURE 1.6 Usage of skills mapping in decision-making process

- They are used systematically and affect decisions
- They are used only in some cases, but not in a structured way
- They are available, but not actually used



Use of skills mapping across recruitment stages

36%	**First screening in profiles selection**
31%	**When writing the role and job description**
31%	**In the definition of evaluation tests**
29%	When structuring interviews
29%	In the definition of development plans
27%	In the choice of search channels and attraction of candidates
26%	In the definition of mobility possibilities
26%	In the definition of the offer to the candidate

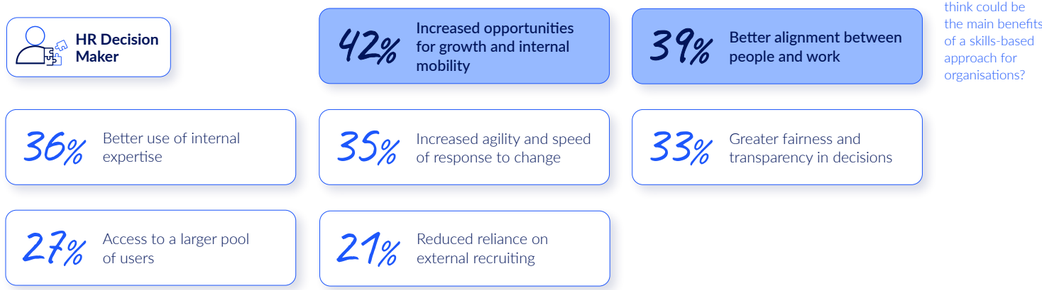
1.2 Key *Gaps* Between *Candidates* and *Companies*

One of the defining features of the current transition is that organisations and people do not always experience it in the same way. Companies increasingly present themselves as moving towards more evolved, skills-oriented models, but many candidates and employees continue to encounter processes that feel opaque, uneven and difficult to interpret. This **gap between institutional intent and lived experience** is one of the most important fault lines in the current labour market.

From an organisational perspective, **the rationale for skills-based hiring is relatively clear.** HR decision makers see in it **greater opportunities for growth and internal mobility (42%), better alignment between people and work (39%), better use of internal expertise (36%), and increased agility and speed of response to change (35%).** The model is therefore associated with organisational efficiency, better talent allocation, and stronger workforce adaptability. In strategic terms, it offers companies a way to **respond to labour market pressure with a more flexible and potentially more resilient** operating logic.

FIGURE 1.7 The main benefits of a skills-based approach for organisations

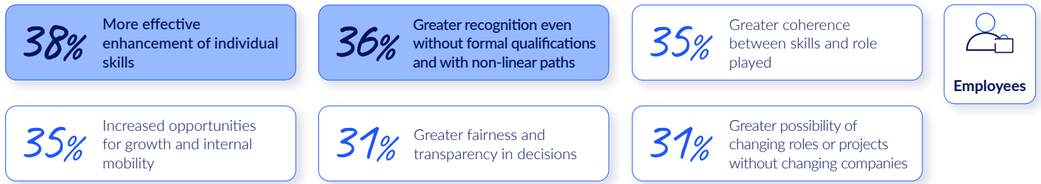
QUESTION
What do you think could be the main benefits of a skills-based approach for organisations?



From the point of view of people navigating these processes, however, the picture is more ambivalent. The benefits are visible, but so are the risks. **Employees do associate a more competence-based approach with more effective enhancement of individual skills** (38%), **greater recognition even without formal qualifications and with non-linear paths** (36%), **greater coherence between skills and role played** (35%), and **increased opportunities for growth and internal mobility** (35%). Yet these expectations coexist with concerns that are deeply process-related. The most frequently cited risks are **overly standardised evaluations that do not take people into account in their complexity** (35%), **lack of transparency** on how skills are assessed and decisions are made (35%), **over-reliance on automated tools or criteria** to the detriment of human judgement (34%), and the risk of **skills being measured in a biased or reductive way** (34%). What becomes visible here is a fundamental asymmetry: **organisations focus on alignment, efficiency and scalability, while people remain highly sensitive to standardisation, opacity and the loss of individuality.**

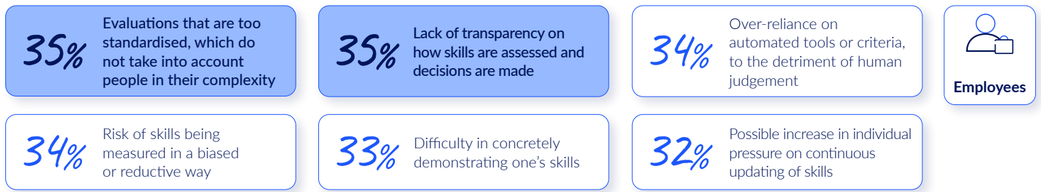
QUESTION
From your point of view, what benefits could a more competence-based approach bring to selection and internal mobility processes?

FIGURE 1.8 The potential benefits of a more competence-based approach for selection and internal mobility



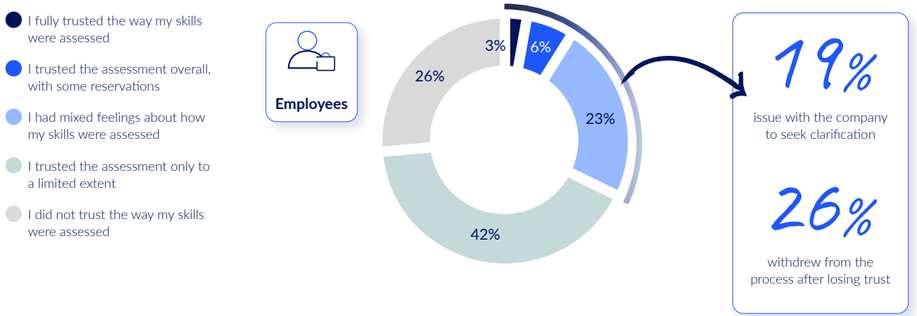
QUESTION
From your point of view, what benefits could a more competence-based approach bring to selection and internal mobility processes?

FIGURE 1.9 Main critical issues of a skills-based approach for organisations



This divergence is especially important because the credibility of a skills-based system depends not only on its internal logic, but also on whether it is perceived as fair by the people subject to it. **Trust remains fragile.** Only 26% of employees fully trust the way their skills are assessed, while 42% trust it overall but with some reservations. At the same time, 23% have mixed feelings about how the skills are assessed, 6% trust the assessment only to a limited extent and 3% do not trust it at all. Taken together, this means that roughly **1 in 3 people show weak or absent trust,** while a much broader share remains cautious rather than fully reassured. Once trust deteriorates, the practical consequences are immediate: 19% raise the issue with the company to seek clarification, while 26% withdraw from the process altogether. This is a clear message to the market: **trust is not an abstract cultural issue, but a measurable condition of process effectiveness.** A skills-based system that is not transparent enough to be understood is also less likely to be accepted, and therefore less likely to deliver on its promise.

FIGURE 1.10 Trust in how the company evaluates skills and behavior in case of lack of trust

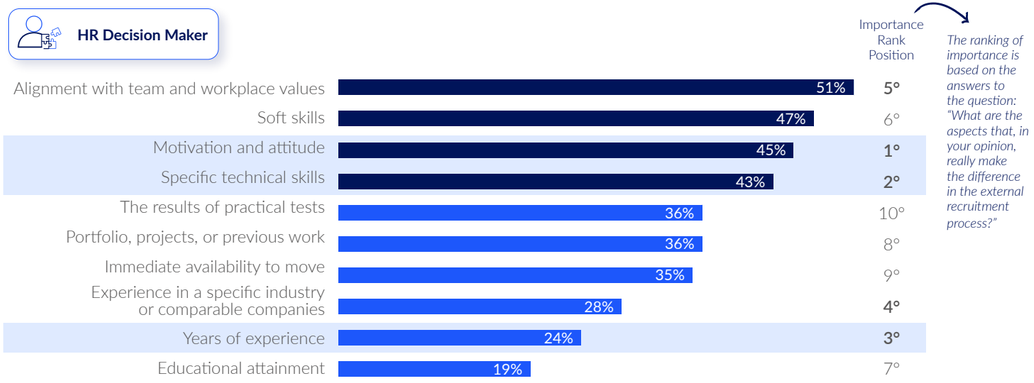


QUESTION
Thinking about the last selection process/ internal mobility process you underwent, to what extent did you trust that your skills were assessed fairly during these processes? / You stated that you did not trust the way your skills were assessed. What did you do next?

The same gap appears in the tools and practices used to assess people. In external selection, the aspects that make the greatest difference are specific technical skills, years of experience, and motivation and attitude. Yet **the elements that matter most are also among the hardest to assess.** For HR decision makers, **alignment with team and workplace values** is difficult to evaluate in 51% of cases, **soft skills** in 47%, **motivation and attitude** in 45% and **specific technical skills** in 43%. By contrast, years of experience and educational attainment remain far easier to read and compare. This helps explain why many organisations still rely heavily on traditional proxies such as CVs and career history, even while claiming to move towards more skills-based models. CV evaluation and career-path assessment remain the most commonly used assessment method, applied regularly as a company standard by 77% of HR decision makers. Here again, **the gap lies between what the market wants to value and what its current tools can assess with confidence.**

QUESTION
How easy do you think it is to evaluate these aspects during an external selection process?

FIGURE 1.11 Perceived difficulty of evaluating specific aspects during an external selection process (% complex to assess)



The ranking of importance is based on the answers to the question: "What are the aspects that, in your opinion, really make the difference in the external recruitment process?"

QUESTION
HR DM: How often within your organisation these techniques/practices are used in selection and/or internal mobility processes to assess skills?
/ EMP: In the course of your work experience, have you encountered some of these techniques/practices in the selection and/or internal mobility processes to assess skills?

FIGURE 1.12 Techniques used in selection and/or internal mobility processes to assess skills

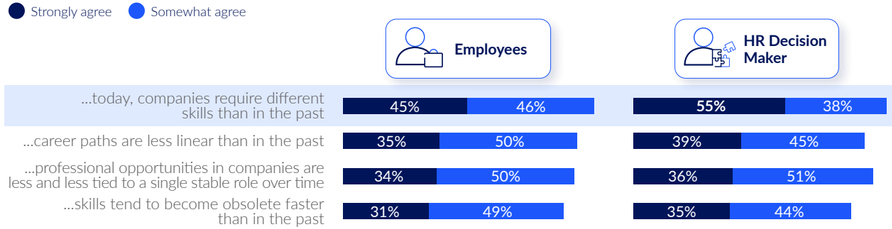


1.3 Direction of the *Market*

The broader direction of the market is increasingly clear. Employment is moving away from a model centred on linear progression, stable role identities and accumulated credentials, and towards a model that places more value on capabilities, adaptability and movement across contexts. This shift is already visible in how labour market change is perceived. Over the last two to three years, **45% of employees and 55% of HR decision makers strongly agree that companies now require different skills than in the past.** Career paths are also seen as less linear, while professional opportunities are increasingly understood as less tied to a single stable role over time. Skills, meanwhile, are perceived as becoming obsolete more quickly than before. What emerges is a structural transition towards more dynamic, skills-based paths.

QUESTION
Looking back over the past 2–3 years, how much do you agree with the following statements based on what you have observed in your organisation and professional role? Compared to 2–3 years ago...?

FIGURE 1.13 Developments in the labour market over the last 2–3 years

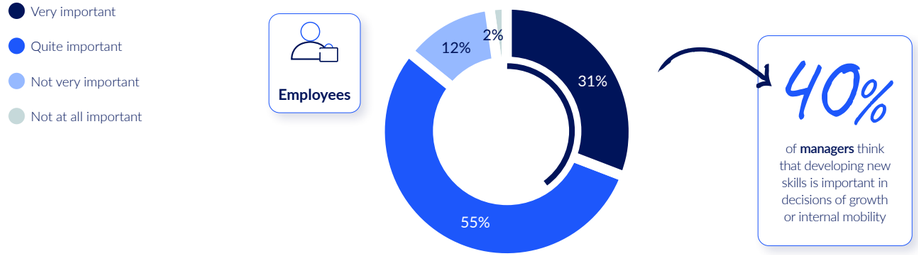


55%
of **HR Decision Makers** think that today, compared to 2-3 years ago, companies require different skills than in the past

As roles become less fixed, continuous upskilling becomes more central. The **development of new skills is already recognised as important in decisions of growth and internal mobility by 86% of employees.** The link between skill development and actual career opportunity is also widely acknowledged: 27% say that developing new skills has led to concrete career opportunities very much, and 48% say quite a lot. This means that **three quarters of employees already connect skills development to tangible opportunity.** At the level of behaviour, there is also a clear orientation towards active investment in learning. 41% say they actively invest time and effort in developing technical and hard skills on a regular basis, and 34% do so for soft skills, while a further 44% and 47% respectively work on them occasionally when needed. This sends a clear message to organisations: continuous upskilling is now **a core part of how people understand their future** in the labour market.

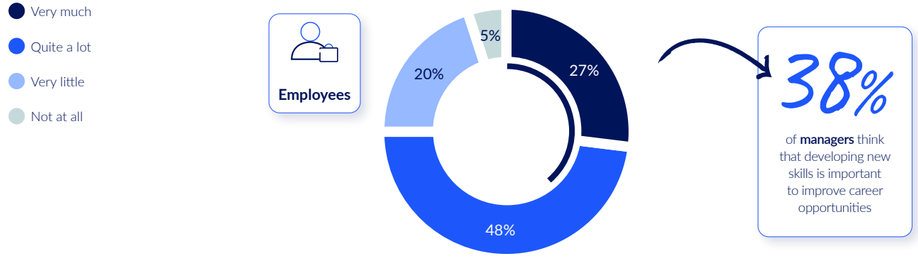
QUESTION
Thinking about your experience, how much do you think that developing new skills is actually recognised and valued in decisions of growth or internal mobility?

FIGURE 1.14 How much the development of new skills is actually important and valued in decisions of growth or internal mobility?



QUESTION
In your current work experience, to what extent do you believe that developing new skills has led to concrete career opportunities for you?

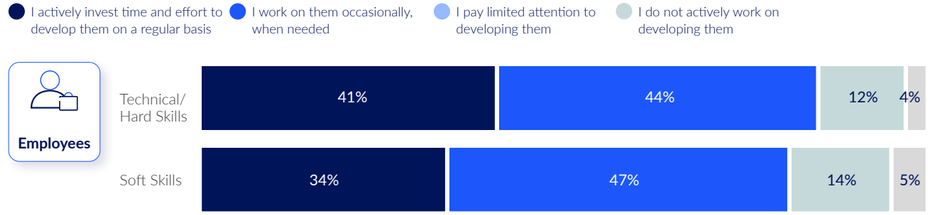
FIGURE 1.15 The role of new skills development in accessing career opportunities



The future skills agenda itself is becoming more defined. On the hard skills side, the strongest priorities converge around digital literacy, artificial intelligence literacy, data literacy, and the ability to design and improve workflows and processes. On the soft skills side, effective communication, analytical thinking and complex problem solving, and collaboration across functions stand out as the most relevant capabilities. These are not isolated trends. Taken together, they point to a labour market in which value is increasingly created at **the intersection of technical fluency, process intelligence, and the ability to operate effectively in complex and evolving environments.**

The same direction can be seen in the gradual move towards **AI-supported decision-making.** AI is entering recruitment and internal mobility processes primarily through the stages that are easiest to scale, such as initial CV screening and automatic profile matching. Its appeal is tied to speed, efficiency and improved matching between

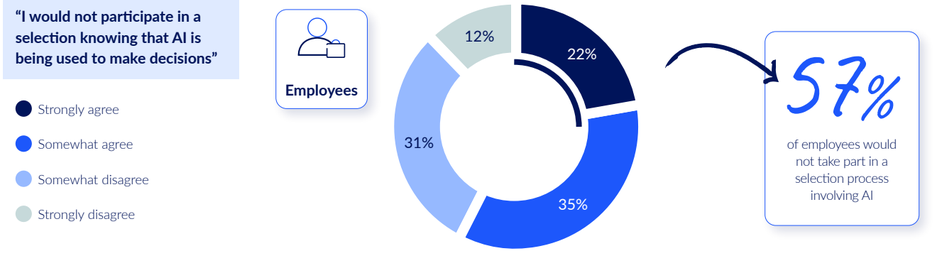
FIGURE 1.16 Focus on developing your soft skills and technical skills



QUESTION
Do you think that in a company like yours skills-based hiring...

supply and demand. At the same time, its adoption is being shaped by a strong demand for transparency. **More than half of both employees and HR decision makers strongly agree that candidates need to be informed when AI tools are being used.** Nearly one third in both groups strongly agree that the use of AI in selection raises important ethical issues. And 22% of employees strongly agree that they would not participate in a selection process knowing that AI is being used to make decisions. The market is therefore not moving towards automation without conditions. It is moving towards AI-supported decision-making under a growing expectation that technology must remain understandable, fair, and visibly governed.

FIGURE 1.17 Propension to participate in a selection process involving AI tools



QUESTION
How much do you agree with the following statements regarding the use of AI in selection and internal mobility processes?

1 Global *Trends* (Cross-market View)

Chapter Recap: *Key Conclusions* and *Business Implications*

Across markets, **skills-based hiring has gained legitimacy faster than maturity.** Awareness is widespread, but not always deep. Support is broad, but structured adoption remains limited. The strategic logic is increasingly shared, but the operational model is still incomplete. This means that the **current phase** is not one of conceptual uncertainty, but one of **organisational translation.** The market is clearly moving in a more skills-based direction. The real challenge is translating that direction into **credible, scalable, and trusted practices.**

A second conclusion is that the **distance between companies and people** remains **one of the main barriers to progress.** Organisations increasingly speak the language of alignment, agility and talent optimisation. People, by contrast, judge these systems through the lens of transparency, clarity and fair recognition. Any company that wants to position itself credibly within a skills-based market must therefore address not only process design, but also **process intelligibility.** Skills-based systems will not be trusted simply because they are modern, data-rich, or efficient. They will be **trusted only if people can understand how they work** and believe that individuality is not being lost inside them.

A third conclusion concerns the **direction of long-term labour market change.** The movement away from linear careers and towards more dynamic, capability-based paths is already underway. Continuous upskilling is becoming central to employability, **internal mobility** is emerging as the space **where skills matter most in practice** and **AI** is gradually **entering decision-making processes** under strong expectations of transparency and oversight. For organisations, the implication is clear: those that continue to rely mainly on role-based logics, static credentials and opaque evaluation processes risk falling behind the market they are trying to recruit from. The next competitive advantage is unlikely to come from adopting the language of skills alone. It will come from **building systems that can make skills visible, assessable, portable, and credible** across the full talent journey.



Key *Tensions*

2.1 Adoption vs Actual Implementation
2.2 Alignment vs Misalignment in Skill Expectations
2.3 Efficiency (Scale and AI) vs Trust and Transparency
2.4 Importance of Skills vs Difficulty in Assessing Them

Chapter Recap: Key Conclusions and Business Implications



2

If the first chapter outlined the broader direction of the market, the next step is to understand why the transition towards skills-based hiring remains so uneven in practice. The issue is not whether the model has gained legitimacy. It has. The issue is that **the shift towards a more skills-based logic is unfolding through a set of tensions that organisations have not yet fully resolved.** These tensions do not sit at the margins of the system. They are built into it. They affect how organisations adopt the model, how people and companies interpret skills, how technology is used in decision-making, and how difficult it remains to assess the very capabilities that are becoming most central. In this sense, skills-based hiring is not emerging in a frictionless environment. It is emerging as a response to contradictions that are becoming harder and harder to ignore.

2.1 Adoption vs Actual *Implementation*

The first tension is the distance between belief in the model and the ability to implement it consistently. Across markets, skills-based hiring has already acquired broad legitimacy. It is seen as a fairer and more effective direction for recruitment, and it is increasingly associated with broader organisational promises such as internal growth, stronger alignment between people and work, and greater recognition of capabilities beyond formal credentials. At the level of principle, the model is no longer marginal. Organisations are broadly aligned on why a stronger focus on skills matters.

And yet, that strategic alignment is not matched by equivalent maturity in execution. As we have already said (Figure 1.4), only 23% of HR decision makers say the skills-based approach is already applied in a structured and cross-process way, while 49% place their organisation in a more exploratory phase. This is the clearest expression of the execution gap: the model is widely recognised, but **only a minority of organisations have translated that recognition into a stable operating logic.** The same pattern appears in relation to skills mapping. A structured and regularly updated **skills mapping is used systematically by fewer than half of organisations** in decision-making processes. And in many cases, it is used only in selected situations rather than as a consistent company-wide infrastructure.

What this reveals is not a lack of conviction, but a lack of translation. **Organisations are aligned on why, but not yet on how.** Skills-based hiring requires more than adopting a new vocabulary. It requires clear standards, shared definitions, stronger governance, and better integration across recruitment, mobility, development, and rewards. This is where the strongest bottlenecks emerge. Among **HR decision makers, the most visible critical issues include the difficulty of connecting skills, performance and rewards (34%), the complexity of governance and coordination between HR, managers and functions (33%), and decision overload for managers and HR (30%).** The real divide, then, is between organisations that can operationalise the model and those that can only endorse it.

QUESTION
What do you think could be the main benefits of a skills-based approach for organisations?

FIGURE 2.1 The critical issues of a skills-based approach for organisations

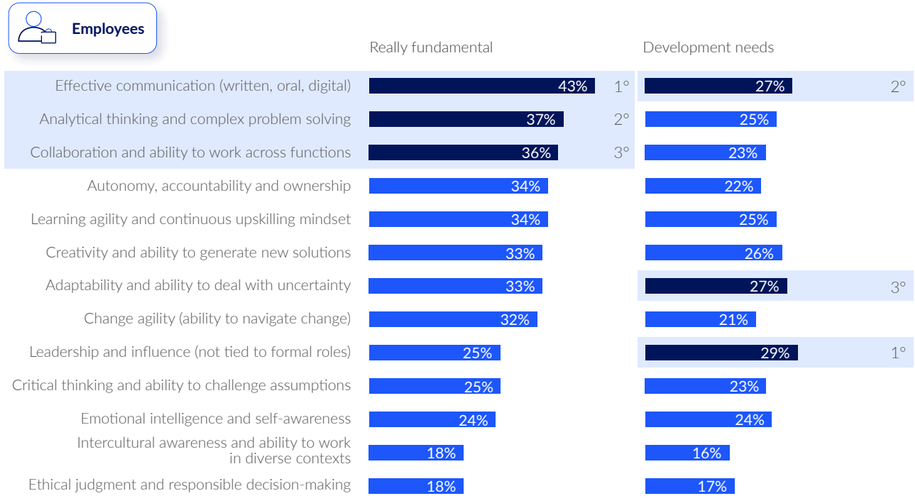


2.2 Alignment vs Misalignment in Skill *Expectations*

A second tension concerns the relationship between shared direction and partial misalignment. There is now broad convergence around the idea that the labour market is becoming more skill-driven, and both employees and HR decision makers increasingly recognise the importance of digital, analytical, process-related, and adaptive capabilities. In that sense, the direction is common. **But convergence at the level of general principle does not mean full alignment in expectations.** What counts as important, what counts as scarce, and what counts as worth developing are not always interpreted in the same way by both sides of the labour market.

This becomes especially visible when the focus shifts from broad skill categories to actual development gaps. On the soft skills side, employees are more likely to identify **leadership and influence as a key area for development, at 29%,** while organisations more often point to **analytical thinking and complex problem solving as the hardest soft skill to find, at 35%.** Adaptability offers an even clearer example of this partial misalignment: for employees, it is one of the most visible areas of self-development, while and for HR decision makers it is one of the clearest market shortages, cited by 32%. The same skill is recognised as important by both sides, but it is located differently within the system: **one side experiences it as a personal development need, the other as a structural sourcing problem.**

FIGURE 2.2 Which soft skills are really fundamental today and in which areas employees feel the most room for improvement

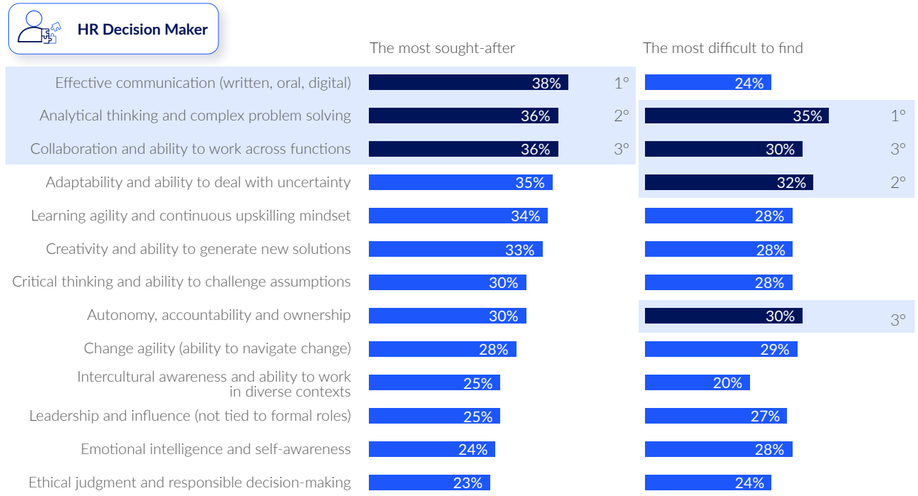


QUESTION
Which of the following soft skills are really fundamental today in your opinion when thinking about the job market in general? / In which areas of expertise in terms of soft skills do you feel you have the most room for improvement or development?



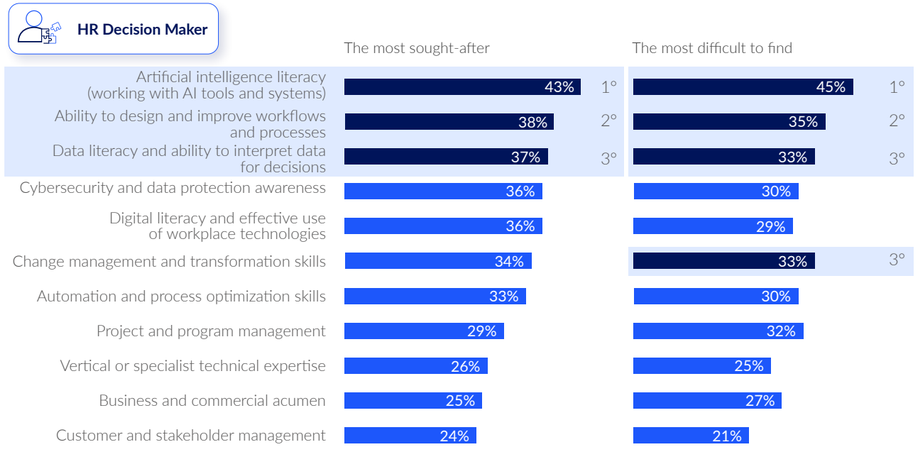
QUESTION
Which of the following soft skills are the most sought-after and important today when considering the job market in general? / Which of the following soft skills are the most difficult to find on the job market in general today?

FIGURE 2.3 Which soft skills are the most sought-after today and what are the most difficult to find in the job market today



A similar dynamic appears on the hard skills side. Employees emphasise what is becoming important to build, especially in relation to artificial intelligence literacy, workflow and process capabilities, digital literacy, and data literacy. Organisations, by contrast, are more focused on what is becoming difficult to source at scale. **Artificial intelligence literacy is the clearest case: it is both a development priority and the hardest-to-find hard skill in the market, at 43%.** What emerges, then, is not a complete disconnect, but a significant misalignment in emphasis. Employees tend to look at skills through the lens of growth and future opportunity. Organisations tend to interpret them through the lens of scarcity, business relevance, and decision-making utility. This tension highlights the need for **clearer frameworks and shared definitions of what skills truly matter.** Without them, the market risks speaking the language of skills without fully agreeing on how that language should be translated into priorities.

FIGURE 2.4 Which hard skills are the most sought-after today and what are the most difficult to find in the job market today



QUESTION
Which of the following technical/hard skills are really fundamental today in your opinion when thinking about the job market in general? / Which of the following technical/hard skills are the most difficult to find on the job market in general today?

2.3 *Efficiency* (Scale and AI) vs Trust and *Transparency*

A third tension defines the current transition with particular force: **the tension between efficiency and trust.** As organisations face pressure to recruit faster, improve matching, and manage larger talent pools, AI becomes an increasingly attractive lever. Its value proposition is obvious. It promises speed, scale, and more efficient matching between roles and profiles. This is why its use is expanding especially in the earliest and most scalable stages of hiring, such as initial CV screening and automatic profile matching. In that sense, AI clearly improves speed and matching.

But this is only one side of the picture. The more technology expands within selection and mobility processes, the more visible a second requirement becomes: people need to trust the process through which they are being evaluated. This is where AI runs into its most

important limit. It raises concerns about fairness, opacity, and dehumanisation. **Almost half of employees, 46%, consider the use of AI tools a positive sign only if the process remains transparent and human.** Another 27% say it raises doubts about transparency and how decisions are actually made, while 11% feel it makes the company seem distant and less respectful of candidates as individuals. The real issue, then, is the need for conditions that allow technology to remain legitimate.

QUESTION
Throughout your professional life, have you ever recognised the use of an artificial intelligence tool by the company during an internal selection/mobility process? What is your opinion of companies that use AI tools in recruitment and internal mobility processes?

FIGURE 2.5 Experience with AI tools in internal selection/mobility processes

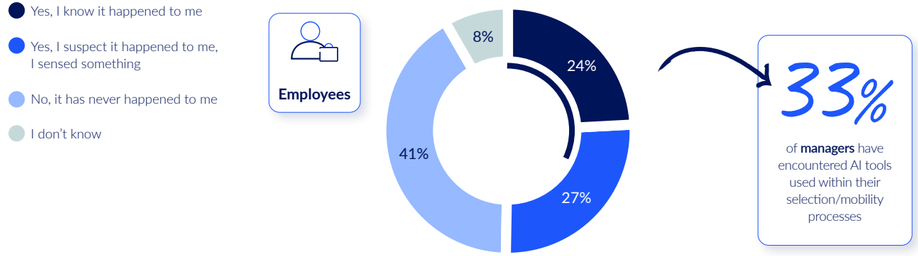
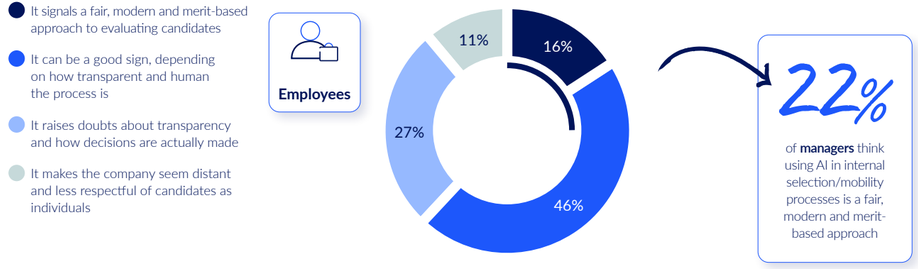


FIGURE 2.6 Opinion on use of AI tools in internal selection/mobility processes



This is why technology is scaling faster than trust. AI may improve efficiency, but efficiency alone does not create credibility. The adoption of AI in hiring requires a careful balance between efficiency and human oversight, ensuring transparency, fairness, and trust. This is visible not only in attitudes, but in behaviour. Beyond the stronger resistance already captured in earlier chapters (Figure 1.17), 35% of employees somewhat agree that they would not participate in a selection process knowing that AI is being used to make decisions. The broader message is clear: technology can accelerate hiring systems, but without visible human judgement and procedural clarity, it can also weaken confidence in the system itself.

2.4 *Importance* of Skills vs *Difficulty* in Assessing Them

Perhaps the deepest tension in the current market is that skills are becoming more important at exactly the moment they are proving hardest to evaluate reliably. **Organisations increasingly say they want to make decisions on the basis of what people can actually do.** And yet, much of the current system still depends on signals that are easier to read, compare, and standardise than skills themselves. This is not a secondary contradiction. It sits at the core of the transition towards a more skills-based model.

In external selection, specific technical skills, motivation and attitude, and years of experience are among the factors that make the greatest difference in decisions. **But the qualities that matter most are also among the hardest to assess.** As we already said (Figure 1.11) For HR decision makers, alignment with team and workplace values is difficult to evaluate in 51% of cases, soft skills in 47%, motivation and attitude in 45%, and specific technical skills in 43%. Even more concrete dimensions can still prove difficult to assess consistently: practical tests are considered difficult by 36%, portfolio, projects, or previous work by another 36%, and immediate availability to move by 35%. This means that the system is increasingly asked to value the very dimensions it finds hardest to measure.

That is why traditional proxies continue to dominate. The dependence on CVs, career history, titles, and prior track record is not simply a matter of old habits. It reflects the fact that these signals remain easier to interpret and defend within organisational processes. More advanced methods exist, but they remain far less embedded. **Assessment centres, for example, are used regularly as a company standard by 44% of organisations** (Figure 1.12), while case studies or simulations are used regularly by only 42%, despite being better suited to make skills visible in action. This is the core contradiction of the current model: skills are the most critical factor in decision-making, yet they are also the hardest to evaluate consistently and credibly. The system is increasingly built around what is hardest to measure.

2 Key *Tensions*

Chapter Recap: *Key Conclusions* and *Business Implications*

What defines the current phase of skills-based hiring is not a lack of strategic direction, but the coexistence of strong momentum and unresolved tension. Organisations believe in the model, but limited structured implementation reveals a critical execution gap. **Employees and HR decision makers increasingly speak the same language of skills, but they do not always prioritise the same gaps in the same way.** AI brings scale and efficiency, but also introduces concerns about fairness, opacity, and the loss of human judgement. And skills are becoming the most critical factor in decision-making at exactly the moment they remain the hardest to assess reliably.

The business implication is clear. The next stage of maturity will not depend on whether organisations support skills-based hiring in principle. That support is already present. It will depend on whether they can reduce the tensions that currently limit credibility and scale. This means turning endorsement into operating logic, turning broad skill discourse into clearer shared frameworks, integrating technology without sacrificing trust, and redesigning evaluation systems so that what matters most can also be assessed more credibly. In practical terms, the competitive divide will increasingly run between organisations that merely recognise the right direction and organisations that are able to make that direction real.



Where It *Breaks*

3.1 Attraction
3.2 Selection
3.3 Internal Mobility

Chapter Recap: Key Conclusions and Business Implications



3

If the first tension in the market lies between strategic endorsement and operational execution, the next question is more practical: **where does that gap become visible in real processes?** The answer is not abstract. It appears along the journey through which people encounter the labour market and organisations make talent decisions.

This is where the promise of skills-based hiring is most clearly tested. **Attraction, selection and internal mobility are not simply three stages of a process.** They are three points at which the current system reveals whether it is genuinely capable of identifying skills, or whether it still falls back on more familiar but less adequate signals.

3.1 Attraction

The first point of friction emerges before assessment even begins. The central issue in attraction is not merely that companies struggle to find people. It is that they struggle to find people whose capabilities match a market that is changing faster than many talent systems can absorb. The problem is the growing difficulty of aligning evolving demand with available skills. This tension is visible in the way recruitment pressure is described. The most immediate difficulty is **the lack of candidates with the required skills, identified by 40% of HR decision makers,** followed by difficulty in attracting qualified candidates, cited by 33%. Other constraints reinforce the same picture: salary expectations, inconsistent career paths, competitive pressure on the same profiles, and lack of availability in the territory all point to a market in which the issue is less about headcount than about fit. **Attraction breaks down when roles evolve faster than the pool of visible, reachable, and recognisable talent.**

FIGURE 3.1 The main challenges in external recruitment processes

HR Decision Maker

40% Scarcity of candidates with the required skills	33% Difficulty in attracting qualified candidates to the company
28% Salary levels required too high	25% High candidate churn or drop-out during the process
25% Candidates' career paths that are inconsistent with open roles	24% Competition with other companies on the same profiles
23% Lack of availability of candidates in the territory / geographical area	21% Difficulty in reliably assessing candidates' skills
15% Organisational or regulatory constraints in hiring processes	

QUESTION
What are the main challenges your organisation has faced in recent years in external recruitment processes?

This matters because skills-based hiring is often presented as a response to labour market fluidity, yet attraction still depends heavily on how organisations define need in the first place. If organisations continue to search using rigid role logics while the market is increasingly shaped by transferable capabilities and non-linear paths, then misalignment begins before candidates even enter the process. In that sense, attraction is the first place where the system shows its limits. Companies may want more agile talent decisions, but they are still recruiting into a market where skill relevance is moving faster than organisational categories.

This is also where **employer positioning becomes more important** than it may initially seem. In a skills-constrained market, attraction is no longer only about visibility. It is about whether organisations are capable of signalling openness to capabilities that may not fit a traditional profile perfectly, but are nonetheless relevant to evolving business needs. Where that signal is weak, attraction remains narrow. And where attraction remains narrow, skills-based hiring never fully begins.

3.2 Selection

If attraction is where the market reveals its scarcity, selection is where the system reveals its inconsistency. This is the point at which organisations claim to evaluate what people can do, yet often rely on tools that are better suited to reading what people have already done. The core problem is that **the methods used to assess them are not always aligned with the criteria that supposedly drive decisions.**

That contradiction appears clearly in the factors considered decisive in external selection. Specific technical skills, motivation and attitude, and years of experience all carry strong weight in final decisions. Yet, the qualities that organisations increasingly say they value are often those that current systems struggle to capture with confidence.

That is why traditional signals continue to dominate. CV evaluation and career-path assessment remain the most commonly used methods, applied regularly as a company standard by 77% of organisations. Technical tests, portfolio review, and structured interviews are present, but more situational methods remain much less embedded. The result is a familiar mismatch: decisions are expected to reflect skills, motivation and potential, but evaluation still relies heavily on proxies such as formal background, previous titles, and accumulated experience. Assessment methods are not always aligned with decision criteria.

People do not experience selection as a neutral process. They experience it through the clarity of the criteria, the transparency of the judgement and the extent to which they feel seen as individuals rather than reduced to a profile. Trust in how skills are assessed is therefore not a secondary perception issue: it is a structural part of process quality. As noted before (Figure 1.10), one in three people express a lack of confidence in the company's skills assessment process, leading employees to seek clarification from the organisation or to withdraw from it. When people no longer trust how their capabilities are being read, behaviour changes. This is one of the clearest points of rupture in the entire journey: once trust breaks down, the process loses both credibility and conversion power.

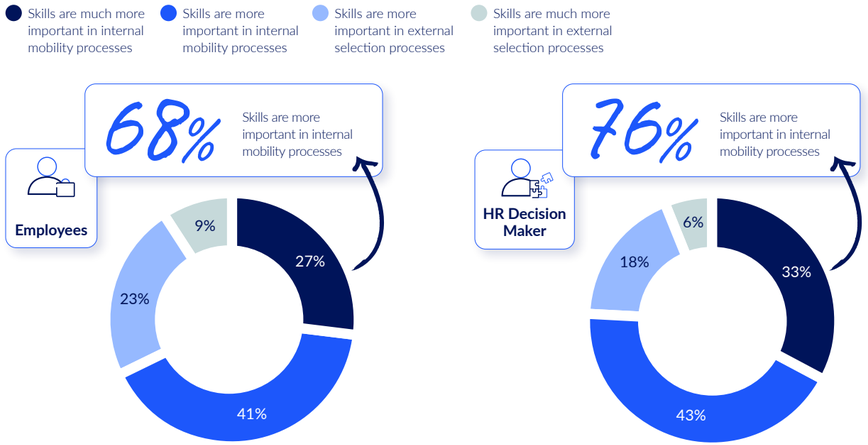
Selection, then, is where skills-based hiring most clearly confronts its own internal contradiction. Organisations want to evaluate skills, but they do so through systems still shaped by readability, comparability, and defensibility rather than by full capability recognition. That is why **this stage remains one of the most delicate in the entire transition.** It is where the distance between aspiration and method becomes most visible.

3.3 Internal Mobility

If selection is where the system shows its assessment limits, internal mobility is where the potential of skills-based hiring appears most tangible. This is the space in which capabilities are expected to matter most, because organisational context, performance history and internal visibility should in principle make skills easier to interpret. It is also the space in which **a more fluid and capability-based logic could most directly reshape how talent moves and grows.**

That potential is real. In internal mobility, the factors that make the greatest difference are performance and results in the current role, trust and internal reputation, specific technical skills, and motivation and willingness to change. Compared with external hiring, the internal environment offers richer context and more evidence. It is therefore the area where the skills-based logic appears most credible in practice. **Skills are already perceived as more important in internal mobility than in external selection by 68% of employees and 76% of HR decision makers.** This sends a clear message to the market: if organisations want to make skills-based hiring concrete, internal mobility is the most natural place to do it.

FIGURE 3.2 Skills are more important in internal mobility processes or in external selection processes



QUESTION
EMP: Based on your experience and what you observe, where do you think that skills count more in practice in decision-making: in internal mobility processes or in external selection? / HR DM: In general, would you say that skills, what a person can do, count more in internal mobility or in external selection?

And yet, this is also where another breakdown becomes visible. The logic is stronger than the infrastructure. Internal opportunities are not always visible, transparent, or formalised enough to allow that logic to unfold consistently. **Only 26% of employees say internal job or project opportunities are clearly visible and accessible to everyone.** 55% say they are accessible or mostly accessible, which means a meaningful share still experiences them as uneven, informal, or not fully transparent. The same applies to movement itself: 55% say it is easy to move internally to a different role, project, or area based on skills, while 72% say it is legitimate to apply even without all formal requirements. These numbers point to strong potential, but also to an incomplete system. The door is not closed, but it is not yet fully open either.

QUESTION
In your organisation, internal job or project opportunities are...

FIGURE 3.3 Visibility and accessibility of job or project opportunities within the company

"In your organisation, internal job or project opportunities are..."

- Clearly visible and accessible to everyone
- Mostly accessible, but not fully transparent
- Accessible mainly through informal networks
- Rarely communicated
- Not available
- I don't know

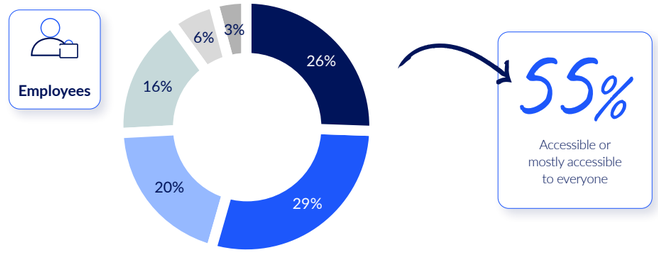
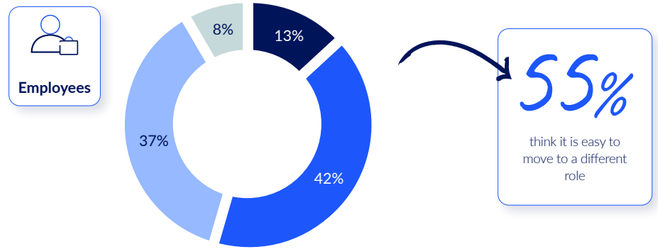




FIGURE 3.4 Move internally to a different role and formal requirements to apply internally

"Move to a different internal role"

- It is very easy
- It's quite easy
- It's quite complicated
- It's very complicated

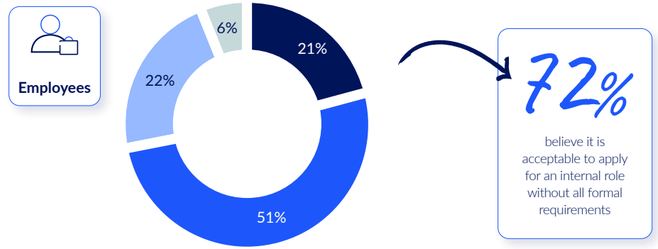


QUESTION
How easy is it for an employee in your company today to move internally to a different role, project or area based on their skills?

FIGURE 3.5 Move internally to a different role and formal requirements to apply internally

"Formal requirements for internal applications"

- A lot
- Quite
- Little
- Not at all



QUESTION
Thinking about your organisation, how legitimate would you feel to apply for an internal role or project even if you do not have all the formal requirements?

This is where internal mobility reveals both the promise and the limit of the current model. On the one hand, it is the space where organisations are closest to moving beyond rigid role-based logic. On the other hand, it still suffers from lack of visibility, partial formalisation and uneven process clarity. **Internal mobility should be the strongest practical expression of skills-based hiring.** Instead, it often remains a space of high potential but incomplete structure.

That matters strategically. If internal mobility remains unclear or underdeveloped, then one of the strongest advantages of a skills-based approach is weakened. The issue is not simply whether employees are allowed to move. It is whether they can clearly see how movement happens, on what basis it is decided and how skills are actually valued inside the organisation. Without that clarity, internal mobility remains more of a promise than a system.

3 Where It *Breaks*

Chapter Recap: *Key Conclusions* and *Business Implications*

What breaks across the talent journey is not the relevance of skills, but the ability of organisations to consistently translate that relevance into process. In attraction, the main problem is not generic talent shortage, but the difficulty of reaching profiles whose capabilities match evolving demand. In selection, the main contradiction lies in the gap between what organisations say matters and what their assessment methods can reliably capture. In internal mobility, the potential of a skills-based logic is strongest, but the supporting infrastructure is still too uneven to make that potential fully systematic.

The business implication is straightforward. Organisations cannot build a credible skills-based model by intervening only at the level of strategy or language. They have to **redesign the journey** itself. **Attraction** needs broader and more capability-sensitive ways of defining talent need. **Selection** needs methods better aligned with the criteria that actually drive decisions. **Internal mobility** needs greater visibility, stronger formalisation, and clearer rules for how skills are recognised and converted into opportunity. The issue, in other words, is not whether skills matter. The issue is where the current system still fails to make them visible, legible, and actionable.



Country Clusters

4.1 Advanced Markets
4.2 Transitional Markets
4.3 Lagging or More Cautious Markets
4.4 Key Local Differences

Chapter Recap: Key Conclusions and Business Implications



4

If skills-based hiring is becoming a global direction, it is not becoming one at the same speed, with the same degree of maturity, or through the same organisational pathway everywhere. **The broad movement is shared across markets, but the form it takes varies considerably.** Some countries appear further ahead in translating strategic endorsement into process infrastructure. Others show strong conceptual alignment but weaker operationalization. Others still remain more cautious, with lower maturity, stronger cultural resistance, or greater dependence on traditional signals. This means that **the geography of skills-based hiring cannot be read simply in terms of support versus resistance. It has to be read in terms of maturity patterns.**

The country picture that emerges is therefore not one of isolated national stories, but of clusters defined by how organisations combine awareness, operational structure, internal mobility, trust, and openness to innovation. What matters most is not whether a market has already embraced the idea of skills-based hiring in principle, but how far it has progressed in **making that idea workable** across recruitment, mobility, and talent development.

4.1 Advanced *Markets*

Some markets already display a more mature configuration. They combine relatively strong awareness with higher levels of structured adoption, a more developed use of supporting tools such as skills mapping, greater openness to AI and innovation, and a more credible internal talent market. These are not necessarily frictionless systems, but they are more advanced in translating the skills-based logic into recognisable processes.

India stands out most clearly in this regard. It combines high awareness, strong endorsement, and the highest reported level of structured adoption, at 36% among HR decision makers. Internal mobility also appears especially open: 71% of employees say it is easy to move internally, while 80% say it is legitimate to apply even without meeting all formal requirements. At the same time, India also shows that maturity creates new pressures. The main challenge is governing the model without creating excessive complexity, technological strain, or trust risk. In more advanced markets, the tension changes rather than disappears.

The United Kingdom also belongs in this more advanced cluster, though with a different profile. It appears less emphatic than India, but **more process-led in structure.** Practical maturity is above average, with 24% of HR decision makers saying the approach is already applied in a structured, cross-process way. Internal opportunities are also relatively visible by international standards, with 62% of employees saying they are visible or mostly accessible, and 60% saying it is easy to move internally. The challenge here is not basic adoption, but balance. Greater structure brings advantages, but it also raises questions about operational complexity, governance strain, and the risk of turning a flexible model into a more procedural one.

What defines this advanced cluster is therefore not perfection, but a stronger ability to move from strategic intent to process infrastructure. These are markets where skills-based hiring is no longer just a direction. It is becoming a more organised operating logic, even if its governance remains demanding.

India



India is one of the **most mature market in terms of skills-based hiring,** and is currently facing issues related to **operational complexity.**

In this specific sample, India appears as the market in which the skills-based approach is more accepted: high awareness, strong endorsement, stronger process infrastructure and a more open internal talent market. The main focus is on how to govern the model without creating excessive complexity, technological strain and trust risks.

The job market threats mostly have to do with **competition on same profiles** that bring to **too high salary requests.**

Within this sample, India stands out as the market with the **most widespread acceptance of skills-based hiring,** with **high awareness** among HR decision makers and **strong endorsement** from both employees (77% think it is the right direction) and HR (75%), and the highest reported level of structured adoption (36% according to HR DM).

This acceptance of SBH also shapes how the model is understood and applied internally. In India, 56% of employees and 64% of HR associate **skills-based hiring with internal growth and mobility,** while 54% of employees and 61% of HR say it means **what a person can do matters more than what they have done.**

Internal mobility seems easier in this Indian sample compared to other countries. 78% of employees and 80% of HR decision makers say **skills matter more in internal mobility than in external hiring;** 71% of employees say it is easy to move internally, and 80% say it is legitimate to apply even without meeting all formal requirements.

The model is not perceived as frictionless. Employees see **clear benefits in greater opportunities for growth and internal mobility** (47%) and more effective **enhancement of individual skills** (44%), but they also **fear overly standardised evaluations** (45%), **lack of transparency** (44%) and **pressure to keep updating skills** (41%). Even so, trust in skills assessment is comparatively high, at 81%.

For HR decision makers, the **main challenge in India is about how to run the model at scale.** The main constraints are especially **IT systems and technological limitations** (58%), then **governance and coordination complexity** (49%), but also connecting skills, performance and rewards.

The skills priorities are also very advanced. On the hard skills side, India cares most about **AI literacy (54%), digital literacy (46%), data literacy (43%),** and the **ability to design workflows and processes (41%);** employees also identify these same areas as major development priorities, especially **AI literacy (55%).** Desired soft skills are cognitive and adaptive: **creativity (47%), effective communication (44%),** and **analytical thinking (44%)** stand out most.

United Kingdom



The United Kingdom shows a **relatively mature, process-led approach** to skills-based hiring.

The United Kingdom appears as a relatively mature and process-led market: labour market frictions are strong, but skills-based hiring is better institutionalised than in many other countries in the sample. Skills matter clearly more in internal mobility than in external hiring, while the real challenge is balancing stronger structure with the risk of greater operational and technological complexity.

External recruitment is under pressure because of **scarcity of candidates with the required skills (52%),** then by competition on the same profiles (31%), difficulty attracting qualified candidates (22%), and salary levels too high (22%).

UK looks relatively mature on skills-based hiring, even if support is not especially enthusiastic. HR awareness is high at 85%, while 58% of employees and 64% of HR decision makers see skills-based hiring as the right direction. Practical maturity is also above average in this sample: 24% say the approach is already applied in a structured, cross-process way.

The UK links the model quite clearly to internal growth and broader role relevance. 40% of employees and **60% of HR** say skills-based hiring means that skills should count for internal growth and mobility. Internal mobility is where the model appears most legitimate in practice, with 70% of employees and 78% of HR decision makers say skills count more in internal mobility than in external selection; 62% of employees say internal opportunities are visible or mostly accessible, and 60% say it is easy to move internally.

Employees see clear benefits but remain attentive to process quality. The main perceived upsides are **increased opportunities for growth and internal mobility (39%), greater fairness and transparency in decisions (37%),** and **more effective enhancement of individual skills (37%).** The main concerns are **over-reliance on automated tools (40%), lack of transparency (34%), risk of reductive or biased measurement (34%),** and **overly standardised evaluations (33%).** Even so, trust in how skills are assessed is relatively high, at 74%.

For HR, the main issue is how to run the model without adding organisational strain. The hardest issues are **complexity of governance (38%), difficulty connecting skills, performance and rewards (30%),** and **difficulty defining and standardising skills (29%).** Resistance also appears split between culture and infrastructure, with **IT limitations (43%), organisational culture at leadership level (37%),** and **organisational culture within HR (38%)** all standing out.

The UK skills agenda is strongly digital, data- and execution-oriented. Employees place greatest weight on **digital literacy (53%), data literacy (53%), AI literacy (46%);** their biggest development priority is **AI literacy (48%).** On the soft skills side, the priorities are **effective communication (56%), analytical thinking (50%),** and **collaboration (42%),** while HR struggle to find **analytical thinking (41%), adaptability (38%), and effective communication (31%).**

4.2 Transitional *Markets*

A second cluster consists of markets where awareness and strategic alignment are relatively solid, but operationalization remains partial. These are not lagging markets in conceptual terms. In fact, they often show clear support for the model and a visible understanding of its relevance. What holds them back is not the absence of legitimacy, but **the unevenness of implementation.** Processes are still fragmented, the supporting infrastructure is incomplete, and the model remains more present in discourse than in consistently applied practice.

Brazil fits this transitional profile well. The model is strongly endorsed, with 71% of employees and 72% of HR decision makers seeing it as the right direction, but maturity remains uneven, with **only 24% reporting structured, cross-process adoption.** The internal talent market appears relatively open, and the broader direction is accepted. Yet the central challenge lies in translating support into clearer processes, stronger evaluation criteria, and more robust links between skills, performance, and rewards. What emerges is a market that is moving forward, but not yet evenly.

France belongs in the same broad category, but with a **more cautious profile.** Here, skills-based hiring has legitimacy, but not yet strong operational momentum. Only 22% of HR decision makers say it is already applied in a structured cross-process way, while the internal market remains relatively less fluid, with **only 49% of employees saying it is easy to move internally.** The market recognises the need for change, especially under conditions of recruitment pressure, yet the model remains more procedural than transformative. Cultural resistance, difficult assessment, and only moderate trust keep the transition relatively contained.

Italy can also be placed in this transitional space, though with its own nuance. The logic of skills-based hiring is broadly understood, but execution remains cautious. **Only 21% of HR decision makers report a structured approach,** and while 66% of employees say skills count more in internal mobility than in external selection, only 50% say it is easy to move internally. The real bottleneck here lies less in the relevance of the model than in governance, culture, and reward linkage. Italy is not outside the transition; it is in a more tentative phase of it.

Portugal also belongs in this transitional cluster, though closer to its lower-maturity edge. The direction is broadly accepted, but organisational maturity remains limited. Only 17% of HR decision makers say the approach is already applied in a structured, cross-process way, even though **67% of employees and 77% of HR decision makers say skills matter more in internal mobility than in external selection.** The model is present, but weakly institutionalised. The main challenge lies in turning support into clearer processes, stronger reward links, and a more scalable operating model.

What defines the transitional cluster is this combination: good awareness, a visible strategic logic, and a still incomplete translation into consistent practice. The model is present, but not yet stabilised.

Brazil



Brazil shows **strong endorsement** of skills-based hiring, but still **needs more structured execution.**

In this specific sample, in Brazil skills-based hiring is strongly endorsed and increasingly visible, especially as a driver of internal mobility. The internal talent market looks relatively open, but maturity is still uneven: the real challenge is translating support into structured processes, clear evaluation criteria, and strong links between skills, performance, and rewards.

Within this sample, **Brazil has a strong endorsement of skills-based hiring.** Awareness is already very high among HR decision makers (91%), and **both employees (71%) and HR (72%) see it as the right direction.** At the same time, maturity is partial: only 24% say the approach is already applied in a structured, cross-process way.

The model is perceived as an **effective way to enable internal growth**. 56% of employees and 59% of HR associate skills-based hiring with internal growth and mobility; 45% of employees and 53% of HR say the **same skill set may be relevant for different roles;** and 48% of employees and 53% of HR say that **what a person can do matters more than the past.**

The internal mobility market appears quite open. 69% of employees and 72% of HR say **skills count more in internal mobility** than in external selection; 51% of employees say it is **easy to move internally,** and 82% say it is **legitimate to apply for an internal role even without all the formal requirements.**

Employees see real upside in the model, especially in terms of stronger skills recognition and mobility, but they are not naïve about the risks: 41% mention greater opportunities for growth and internal mobility and 40% more effective enhancement of individual skills; at the same time, 40% the pressure to keep updating skills , 39% cite lack of transparency, 36% overly standardised evaluations. Trust in how companies assess skills is positive overall, at 69%.

For HR decision makers, the **main challenge in Brazil is also how to run the model at scale.** Brazil HR acknowledge a **better alignment between people and work** (52%), **better use of internal expertise** (48%), **and stronger growth and mobility opportunities** (47%), but the hardest issues are **connecting skills with performance and rewards** (42%), **decision overload for managers and HR** (37%), and **governance and coordination complexity** (34%). Resistance also remains organisational and technological, **with HR culture** (37%) and **IT limitations** (37%) **as the main barriers.**

Besides digital skills, Brazil focuses on skills such as **ability to design and improve workflows and processes** (47%), **change management** and **transformation skills** (42%), and **vertical or specialist technical expertise** (38%). On soft skills, employees **emphasise a broad mix:** creativity (40%), effective communication (39%), learning agility (39%), emotional intelligence (38%), and collaboration (37%).

France



France **shows interest** in skills-based hiring, but **remains cautious** also due to a strong recruitment pressure.

In France skills-based hiring has legitimacy, but not yet strong operational momentum. The need is real, especially because recruitment pressure is high, yet the model remains cautious: cultural resistance, difficult assessment, and only moderate trust keep it more procedural than transformative.

HR report issues in terms of **difficulty in attracting qualified candidates** (45%), general **scarcity of candidates** (39%) and **career paths inconsistent with openings** (30%).

The idea of skills-based hiring is present, but only partially mature. **HR awareness is solid** (74%), **endorsement is moderate rather than enthusiastic:** 56% of employees and 57% of HR say skills-based hiring is the right direction, only 22% say it is already applied in a structured cross-process way. The model is seen mostly in terms of **internal growth rather than external growth.**

Skills are in general seen as more important in internal mobility than in external selection, but **the internal market is not particularly fluid.** Only 49% of employees say it is easy to move internally, while 71% say it is legitimate to apply even without all formal requirements.

Employees do see the value of the model, but they are not fully reassured by how it works in practice. Alongside the upside on skills enhancement and recognition, **the main concerns are overly standardised evaluations** (38%), **over-reliance on automated tools** (36%), **and lack of transparency** on how skills are assessed and decisions are made (32%). Trust in how companies assess skills is mid-level.

Despite the recognised organisational benefits like better alignment between people and work (46%), increased agility and speed of response to change (36%), in France as well **the main bottleneck is execution.** The hardest issues are **connecting skills with performance and rewards** (33%), **defining and standardising skills in a shared way** (32%), and **managing the uncertainty** this creates for people (31%). Resistance in France sits more in HR culture (47%) than in technology (18%).

Skills priorities are **very pragmatic,** as employees point first to **data literacy** (42%), **digital literacy (40%),** and **AI literacy** (35%), also recognised by HR as the hard skills most difficult to find together with and change management and transformation skills. In terms of soft skills, **accountability and ownership stand out both for employees and HR DM,** and is also one of the main perceived gaps.

Italy



Italy shows **conceptual alignment** with skills-based hiring, but more **cautious execution.**

In Italy the logic of skills-based hiring is broadly understood, especially in relation to internal growth and mobility. Yet execution remains cautious: the internal market is only moderately open, trust in assessment is present but not strong, and the real bottleneck sits in culture, governance and reward linkage, more than technology.

External recruitment is under pressure above all because of **scarcity of candidates with the required skills** (42%), followed by **high drop-out during the process** (31%), **difficulty attracting qualified candidates** (30%), **difficulty reliably assessing candidates' skills** (24%). By contrast, salary pressure appears less dominant than in some other countries, at 13%.

Italy appears more aligned with the logic of skills-based hiring than fully convinced by its execution. Support for the model is present but not strong: **56% of employees** and **51% of HR decision makers** see it as the right direction. At the same time, the infrastructure behind the model still looks partial, with only **21%** of HR reporting a structured approach.

Internal mobility is clearly seen as the place where skills should matter more, but the internal market does not yet look especially open. **66% of employees** and **71% of HR decision makers** say skills count more in internal mobility than in external selection; still, only **50%** of employees say it is easy to move internally, and only **64%** say it is legitimate to apply for an internal role without meeting all formal requirements.

Employees see real value in the model, but their concerns remain highly process-related. The →

main perceived benefits are **the enhancement of individual skills** (35%), **the coherence between skills and role, the increased internal opportunity** (33%). At the same time, the strongest concerns are **too standardised evaluations** (31%) and **difficulty in showing skills** (30%). Trust in how skills are assessed is present, but not strong, at 64%.

For HR, the real challenge is organisational rather than technological. The main expected benefits are **increased internal mobility** (39%), **increased agility and speed** (35%), **better alignment between people and work** (33%) **and better use of internal expertise** (33%). The main bottlenecks are **difficulty alining skills/performance** (30%), **difficulty standardising skills in a shared way** (30%), and broader cultural resistance.

On the hard skills side, employees place most weight on **change management and transformation skills** (39%), **digital literacy** (37%), **and AI literacy** (37%). The hardest hard skills to find are **cybersecurity** (49%), **AI literacy** (45%), **and data literacy** (41%). On the soft-skills side, employees emphasise **analytical thinking** (38%), **effective communication** (37%), **and collaboration** (37%), while their biggest development gaps are **leadership** (38%) and **communication** (30%).

Portugal



Portugal shows **support** for skills-based hiring, but still **limited organisational maturity.**

In Portugal direction of skills-based hiring is broadly accepted, but organisational maturity remains limited. Internal mobility is seen as the natural place for skills to matter more, yet the real challenge is turning that principle into clearer processes, stronger reward links, and a more scalable operating model.

In terms of external recruitment HR point first to **scarcity of candidates** (38%), **salary levels that are too high** (34%), and **high dropout during selection processes** (28%).

Portugal appears supportive of skills-based hiring, but still weakly institutionalised. 58% of employees and 61% of HR decision makers see it as the right direction, yet **HR awareness is the lowest in the country comparison at 68%. Practical maturity is also limited:** only 17% say the approach is already applied in a structured, cross-process way.

Internal mobility is seen as the place where skills should **matter more,** but the system still looks **only partially fluid.** 67% of employees and 77% of HR decision makers say skills count more in internal mobility than in external selection. Still, **only 45% of employees say it is easy to move internally,** even if 74% say it is legitimate to apply for an internal role without meeting all formal requirements.

Employees see clear value in the model, but their **concerns are mostly about how it works in practice.** The main perceived benefits are greater coherence between skills and role played (38%), increased opportunities for growth and internal mobility (38%), and greater possibility of changing roles or projects without changing company (33%). At the same time, the strongest concerns are **difficulty concretely demonstrating one's skills** (36%), **lack of transparency** (36%), **over-reliance on automated tools** (35%), **and overly standardised evaluations** (30%). Trust in how skills are assessed is present, but only mid-level, at 62%.

For Portugal HR the main bottlenecks are **difficulty connecting skills, performance and rewards** (42%), **decision overload for managers and HR** (39%), and **governance and coordination complexity** (27%). Resistance is spread across the organisation, but sits mainly in culture rather than in technology.

On hard skills, employees prioritise **change management** (39%), **digital literacy** (38%), **automation and process optimisazion,** while the **main development gaps** are **AI literacy** (31%), **ability to design and improve workflows** (29%), and **customer and stakeholder management** (29%). On soft skills, the strongest priorities are **effective communication** (42%), **accountability** (36%) and **creativity** (34%). HR perspectives reinforce this picture, placing particular emphasis on communication (53%) and collaboration (38%), but also on data literacy and the vertical expertise.

4.3 Lagging or More Cautious *Markets*

A third cluster is made up of markets where **the move towards skills-based hiring is slower,** more cautious, or more constrained by organisational resistance. These are not necessarily markets without pressure or without awareness. In some cases, labour market frictions are strong. What distinguishes them is that endorsement remains more restrained, the use of structured tools is weaker, and traditional criteria continue to play a relatively stronger role.

Germany is the clearest example of this more cautious pattern. Labour market pressure is real, but endorsement remains more restrained than in other countries: **only 43% of employees see skills-based hiring as the right direction,** the lowest figure in the comparison, and just 19% of HR decision makers say the approach is already applied in a structured way. Skills are still seen as more credible in internal mobility than in external hiring, but the main bottleneck lies in building shared standards, linking skills to performance, and overcoming cultural resistance within HR rather than in solving a purely technological issue. Germany therefore appears less blocked by lack of relevance than by the difficulty of turning relevance into shared organisational norms.

Spain is more complex, because HR openness is relatively strong while employee confidence is more cautious. It is therefore not a lagging market in terms of organisational support, but it does reveal a visible credibility gap in execution. **63% of HR decision makers see skills-based hiring as the right direction, but employee support falls to 49%.** Structured adoption also remains partial, at 21%, and trust in how skills are assessed is the lowest in the comparison, at 57%. In that sense, Spain belongs at the more cautious end of the spectrum not because the direction is absent, but because legitimacy is not yet matched by enough process credibility. What defines this more cautious cluster is not simple resistance to innovation. It is the persistence of structural barriers: weaker adoption of structured tools, stronger cultural friction within HR or leadership, more limited process credibility, and a greater dependence on traditional criteria.



Germany



Germany approaches skills-based hiring **more cautiously than other countries.**

Germany is one of the most cautious markets: labour market frictions are strong, but endorsement of skills-based hiring remains relatively restrained. Skills are clearly seen as more credible in internal mobility than in external hiring, while the real bottleneck lies less in technology and more in building shared standards, linking skills to performance, and overcoming HR cultural resistance.

In terms of external recruitment HR point first to **difficulties attracting qualified candidates** (46%), **salary expectations that are too high** (46%), **and scarcity of candidates with the required skills** (44%).

Germany appears more cautious than convinced about skills-based hiring. Awareness among HR decision makers is still relatively solid at 76%, but **only 43% of employees and 61% of HR see skills-based hiring as the right direction.** Practical maturity is also limited: **just 19% say the approach is already applied in a structured way.**

Germany seems **less aligned than other countries with the broader implications of the model.** Only 30% of employees and 39% of HR associate skills-based hiring with internal growth and mobility. However **Germany sees skills as more relevant in internal mobility than in external recruitment.** Internal mobility also appears **more accessible** than in several other countries: 60% of employees say it is easy to move internally, 54% say internal opportunities are visible or mostly accessible, and 69% say it is legitimate to apply for an internal role even without all formal requirements.

Employees do see value in the model, but **mainly in terms of recognition rather than fluidity.** The main perceived benefits are more effective enhancement of individual skills (41%), greater recognition even without formal qualifications and non-linear paths (38%), and greater coherence between skills and role played (35%). Concerns remain fairly balanced: 33% mention **overly standardised evaluations,** 33% **over-reliance on automated tools,** and 31% **lack of transparency.** Trust in how skills are assessed is present but not especially strong.

For German HR as well the main challenge is cultural and organisational: difficulty connecting skills, performance and rewards (35%), difficulty standardising skills (32%), and organisational culture within the HR function (47%).

On the hard skills side, priorities center on **digital literacy** (50%), **workflow and process design** (38%), and **AI literacy** (35%). HR report the hardest capabilities to find as project and program management (43%), workflow and process design (39%), and AI literacy (38%). On the soft skills side, **the main priorities are analytical thinking and complex problem solving** (44%), **cross-functional collaboration** (44%) **and effective communicatio**n (42%). The toughest gaps for HR are collaboration (34%), emotional intelligence. and adaptability.

Spain



Spain shows a **gap between HR support and employee trust** in skills-based hiring.

In Spain labour market pressure is real, HR are relatively supportive of skills-based hiring, but employees remain more cautious because trust in assessment is weaker and internal mobility still feels difficult in practice. The model has legitimacy, but not yet enough credibility in execution.

In terms of external recruitment HR point first to **scarcity of candidates with the required skills** (34%), **difficulty attracting qualified candidates** (30%), and **salary levels that are too high** (30%).

Spain shows **HR openness to skills-based hiring,** but more **limited employee involvement.** Awareness among HR decision makers reaches 78%, and 63% of them see skills-based hiring as the right direction; **among employees, however, support falls to 49%.** Practical maturity also remains partial: only 21% say the approach is already applied in a structured, cross-process way, and 35% report structured and regularly updated skills mapping.

The Spanish market links the model to internal growth more than to a full rethink of how talent is valued. **Only 31% of employees say the model means that what a person can do matters more than the past,** and the employee experience is relatively weak. Only 43% of employees say it is easy to move internally, and only 64% say it is legitimate to apply for an internal role without meeting all formal requirements. The internal market is not particularly fluid in practice.

The main perceived benefits are **greater coherence between skills and role played,** increased opportunities for **growth and internal mobility,** and also **recognition beyond formal qualifications.** Concerns however are very process-related: 37% point to the risk of **skills being measured in a biased or reductive way,** 36% to **difficulty concretely demonstrating their skills,** 35% to **over-reliance on automated tools,** and 34% to **lack of transparency.** Trust in how skills are assessed is the lowest in the comparison, at 57%. From an HR perspective, the governance issues are predominant, and the HR organisational culture is one of the main barriers.

Spain's skills priorities are clear: on the hard skills side, employees identify **digital literacy (**45%), **AI literacy** (38%) and **data literacy** (35%) as the most fundamental capabilities, with the biggest development needs in AI literacy (36%) and data literacy (31%). On soft skills, demand is strongest for **autonomy and ownership** (40%), **learning agility** (36%), and **analytical thinking/problem solving and change agility** (both 35%). HR views are broadly aligned, especially on communication (53%) and adaptability (40%), while the hardest gaps to close remain analytical thinking, adaptability and ownership.

4.4 Key Local *Differences*

These clusters are useful because they reveal patterns, but the local differences within them remain important. One of the most visible concerns trust in AI. **Openness to technology is not distributed evenly across markets, and the legitimacy of AI-supported decision-making varies significantly depending on local expectations of fairness, transparency, and human contact.** In India, for example, 49% of employees strongly agree that AI makes selection faster and more efficient, while in Germany the same figure falls to 14%. This means that technological maturity and social legitimacy do not always move together.

QUESTION
How much do you agree with the following statements regarding the use of AI in selection and internal mobility processes:

FIGURE 4.1 Statements on the use of AI in selection and internal mobility processes (% strongly agree)

Employees

	Total	UK	Italy	Germany	France	Spain	Portugal	Brazil	India
AI tools make selection faster and more efficient	**24%**	25%	16%	14%	15%	20%	19%	38%	49%
AI tools improve matching supply and demand	**21%**	21%	13%	8%	12%	17%	16%	33%	48%
AI tools make selection fairer, more inclusive and respectful of diversity	**19%**	17%	13%	9%	13%	13%	12%	26%	47%
You need to be transparent with candidates when using AI tools	**54%**	64%	50%	50%	56%	49%	47%	61%	52%
The impression of direct contact can never be replaced by artificial intelligence tools	**47%**	56%	45%	50%	51%	49%	36%	44%	44%
AI tools use in selection processes raise important ethical issues	**32%**	36%	26%	26%	38%	29%	26%	35%	43%
I would not participate in a selection knowing that AI is being used to make decisions	**22%**	24%	18%	19%	26%	18%	15%	22%	36%

A second major point of variation concerns internal mobility. **Some markets present a more open internal talent environment,** where movement appears more legitimate and more accessible. Others recognise the importance of skills internally, yet still operate with weaker visibility, lower fluidity, or less formalised pathways. This difference matters because internal mobility is one of the clearest practical spaces in which a skills-based logic can either become real or remain rhetorical. The more visible and structured internal opportunities are, the more credible the overall model becomes.

A third difference concerns **the balance between soft and technical skills.** Across markets, the general direction is shared, but countries still prioritise different capabilities depending on business context, talent shortages, and organisational culture. In UK, cyber security and data protection awareness stands out strongly among HR priorities, at 54%, while in France autonomy, accountability and ownership reach 58% among employee soft skill priorities. These differences are not secondary. They suggest that while **the language of skills-based hiring is increasingly global, the content of the skills agenda remains locally shaped.** Markets do not simply differ in how much they support the model; they also differ in what they expect the model to solve.

QUESTION
Which of the following technical/hard skills are really fundamental today in your opinion when market in general?

FIGURE 4.2 Fundamental technical and hard skills today across job markets

HR Decision Maker

	Total	UK	Italy	Germany	France	Spain	Portugal	Brazil	India
Artificial intelligence literacy (working with AI tools and systems)	**43%**	50%	42%	46%	39%	43%	29%	45%	50%
Ability to design and improve workflows and processes	**38%**	32%	55%	34%	31%	27%	36%	45%	43%
Data literacy and ability to interpret data for decisions	**37%**	48%	23%	31%	37%	27%	42%	45%	44%
Cybersecurity and data protection awareness	**36%**	54%	34%	37%	36%	36%	16%	35%	42%
Digital literacy and effective use of workplace technologies	**36%**	50%	29%	30%	36%	33%	39%	29%	41%
Change management and transformation skills	**34%**	31%	49%	22%	39%	29%	33%	40%	28%
Automation and process optimisation skills	**33%**	40%	26%	33%	34%	22%	29%	38%	38%
Project and program management	**29%**	33%	29%	21%	35%	25%	36%	28%	29%
Vertical or specialist technical expertise	**26%**	20%	36%	16%	26%	14%	43%	30%	25%
Business and commercial acumen	**25%**	21%	17%	28%	17%	30%	30%	27%	28%
Customer and stakeholder management	**24%**	25%	16%	22%	18%	20%	29%	30%	35%

QUESTION
Which of the following soft skills are really fundamental today in your opinion when thinking about the job market in general?

FIGURE 4.2 Fundamental soft skills today across job markets

Employees

	Total	UK	Italy	Germany	France	Spain	Portugal	Brazil	India
Effective communication (written, oral, digital)	**43%**	56%	37%	42%	48%	30%	42%	39%	44%
Analytical thinking and complex problem solving	**37%**	50%	38%	44%	24%	35%	27%	34%	44%
Collaboration and ability to work across functions	**36%**	42%	37%	44%	35%	32%	31%	37%	30%
Autonomy, accountability and ownership	**34%**	22%	38%	34%	58%	40%	36%	27%	17%
Learning agility and continuous upskilling mindset	**34%**	31%	36%	29%	29%	36%	34%	39%	37%
Creativity and ability to generate new solutions	**33%**	32%	29%	32%	24%	30%	34%	40%	47%
Adaptability and ability to deal with uncertainty	**33%**	40%	32%	30%	36%	33%	29%	27%	34%
Change agility (ability to navigate change)	**32%**	25%	43%	33%	47%	35%	25%	29%	20%
Leadership and influence (not tied to formal roles)	**25%**	23%	22%	18%	18%	28%	24%	31%	37%
Critical thinking and ability to challenge assumptions	**25%**	36%	26%	23%	18%	19%	26%	19%	32%
Emotional intelligence and self-awareness	**24%**	28%	17%	21%	17%	20%	31%	38%	22%
Intercultural awareness and ability to work in diverse contexts	**18%**	17%	18%	14%	17%	18%	18%	19%	26%
Ethical judgement and responsible decision-making	**18%**	20%	11%	12%	11%	17%	17%	24%	30%

4 *Country* Clusters

Chapter Recap: *Key Conclusions* and *Business Implications*

What emerges from the country comparison is not a fragmented map, but a structured one. Skills-based hiring is moving across markets through recognisable maturity patterns. Some countries are more advanced in institutionalising the model and supporting it with internal mobility practices, skills mapping, and stronger process infrastructure. Others are strategically aligned but still operationally fragmented. Others remain more cautious, constrained by cultural resistance, lower adoption of structured tools, or weaker credibility in execution. The business implication is that maturity cannot be inferred from endorsement alone. Organisations operating across countries cannot assume that the same skills-based narrative will travel unchanged from one market to another. The same concept may require different forms of communication, different process design choices, and different degrees of formalisation depending on local trust levels, internal mobility structure, and cultural openness to innovation. In practical terms, this means that **a skills-based strategy needs both a global logic and a local operating model.** The competitive advantage will not lie only in discerning the direction of travel, but in knowing how to adapt that direction to markets that are moving at different speeds and through different institutional pathways.



Generational Lens

5.1 Differences in Perception, Trust, and Expectations
5.2 Implications for Talent Attraction and Engagement
Chapter Recap: Key Conclusions and Business Implications



5

If skills-based hiring is becoming a structural direction in the labour market, it is not being interpreted in exactly the same way by every generation. The broad shift is shared: careers are becoming less linear, growth is increasingly linked to capabilities, and the value of skills is extending beyond formal track record. But generations do not stand in the same position in relation to this transition. They do not look at flexibility, development, mobility, and evaluation with the same expectations. This is why the generational lens matters. It shows different ways of reading what a skills-based system promises, and what it risks.

5.1 Differences in *Perception, Trust,* and *Expectation*

A first difference concerns **how generations relate to non-linear careers and skills-based growth.** Younger generations are more naturally aligned with a labour market in which growth is less tied to stable role sequences and more connected to transferable capabilities, internal movement, and continuous development. **Gen Y appears the most supportive cohort overall, with 62% saying that skills-based hiring is the right direction,** while Gen Z also shows solid support at 58%. More importantly, Gen Y is the cohort most clearly aligned with the broader skills-based logic: 44% associate it with internal growth and mobility, 42% with the relevance of the same skill set across different roles, and 38% with the idea that what a person can do matters more than past experience. **Gen Z is especially future-oriented in one crucial respect: 40% link the model to the idea that capability matters more than track record.** What emerges here is a clear generational pattern. Younger generations are more open to non-linear careers and skills-based growth because they appear more ready to **interpret work as movement across opportunities** rather than progression through fixed role sequences.

Senior profiles, by contrast, remain more cautious. **Baby Boomers are less likely to read skills-based hiring as a system centred on internal mobility and transferable value:** only 36% link it to internal growth and mobility, and 35% say it means that what a person can do matters more than the past. This does not mean that senior profiles reject the model outright. It means that **they approach it through a more cautious experience of labour market change,** and they are less immediately inclined to read it as a break with traditional career logic.

Employees

- **62%** **Gen Y** saying that skills-based hiring is the right direction
- **57%** **Baby Boomers** saying that skills-based hiring is the right direction
- **58%** **Gen Z** saying that skills-based hiring is the right direction
- **55%** **Gen X** saying that skills-based hiring is the right direction

QUESTION
How much do you agree with the following statements regarding the use of AI in selection and internal mobility processes:

FIGURE 5.1 Perspectives on the meaning of skills-based recruitment (% strongly agree)

Employees

	Total	Baby Boomers	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z
Skills also count for internal growth and mobility	**41%**	36%	40%	44%	43%
The same skill set may be relevant for different roles	**38%**	32%	35%	42%	39%
What a person can do matters more than what he or she has done in the past	**36%**	35%	32%	38%	40%

That caution becomes especially visible when AI and automated decisions enter the picture. Here, the generational divide is not simply between those who support innovation and those who do not. It is between those who are **more ready to accept technology as part of a fluid and evolving labour market,** and those who require stronger reassurance that human judgement, recognisability, and procedural clarity will not be lost. **Gen Z is the cohort most open to a more fluid and tech-enabled labour market, while Baby Boomers remain more skeptical of automated decision logics** and more likely to expect a stronger human presence in evaluation. Gen X, meanwhile, appears as the generation in which skepticism towards the system is most pronounced, with trust in assessment falling to 61%, the lowest score across cohorts. This is a crucial point for the chapter: senior profiles show more skepticism towards AI and automated decisions not simply because they are less digital, but because they judge technological mediation through **a stronger demand for credibility and human oversight.**

At the same time, one condition cuts across all generations: transparency and fairness remain critical expectations for everyone. What changes is not whether these conditions matter, but the form that skepticism takes when they are missing. Baby Boomers are more concerned about overly standardised evaluations and lack of transparency. Gen X appears the most critical of the system's credibility. Gen Y is more open to the model, but still attentive to bias, standardisation, and the pressure to keep updating skills. Gen Z is the most receptive to a fluid and capability-based labour market, yet still expects clear criteria and visible fairness. **Across all generations, transparency and fairness are critical expectations.** Without them, support for the model becomes more fragile, regardless of age.

FIGURE 5.2

Generational Comparisons

Employees

	Baby Boomers	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z
Overall stance towards skills-based hiring	Moderate support: 57% say it is the right direction	Support is present but cautious: 55%	Most supportive cohort: 62%	Solid support, though not the highest: 58%
How they interpret the model	Less likely to read it as a mobility and capability-based system • 36% link it to internal mobility • 32% link it to transferable skills across roles • 35% say it means what a person can do matters more than past experience	Still fairly cautious in how they interpret the model • 40% link it to internal growth and mobility • 35% to transferable skills across roles • 32% to capability over track record	Most aligned with the skills-based logic overall. • 44% link it to internal growth and mobility • 42% to transferable skills across roles • 38% to capability over track record	Most future-oriented interpretation of the model • 43% link it to internal growth and mobility • 39% to transferable skills across roles • 40% to capability over track record
Relationship with internal mobility	Less enthusiastic with internal mobility • 51% say it is easy to move internally • 66% say it is legitimate to apply without meeting requirements	Coldest cohort on internal mobility • Only 49% say it is easy to move internally • 67% say it is legitimate to apply without all requirements	Strongly mobility-oriented • 75% say skills matter more in internal mobility than in external hiring • 58% say it is easy to move internally • 77% legitimize applying without all requirements	Most positive on internal fluidity • 63% say it is easy to move internally • 75% say it is legitimate to apply without all requirements
Trust in the assessment system	Trust is decent, but not high: 67%	Most skeptical cohort: 61%, the lowest score	Fairly high trust: 70%	Highest trust among generations: 71%
Main tensions / perceived risks	Most concerned about overly standardised evaluations and lack of transparency	The key issue is the credibility of the system more than the principle itself	Open to the model, but not naïve: concerns around standardisation, bias and pressure to keep updating skills	More open to tech-enabled readings of the model, but still ask for transparency and clear criteria
Distinctive trait	They recognise labour market change, but approach the model more cautiously	They demand more credibility and judge the system more critically	They are the cohort most naturally aligned with the skills-based and mobility logic	They are the most growth-oriented and the most ready to move in a more fluid labour market

5.2 Implications for *Talent Attraction* and *Engagement*

These differences matter because organisations cannot assume that a single skills-based narrative will resonate equally across all generations. If cohorts read growth, mobility, and evaluation differently, then value propositions also need to be tailored more carefully. **The need to tailor value propositions by generation is therefore not a branding detail. It is part of making the model believable.** Younger generations are more likely to respond to messages built around fluidity, internal growth, learning, and development opportunities. More senior cohorts are more likely to require signals of coherence, fairness, and clarity in how opportunity is allocated. The same model has to be made meaningful in different ways depending on the generation it is addressing.

A second implication concerns the increasing importance of learning, mobility, and development opportunities. **These features are becoming central to how people judge whether an organisation offers a credible future.** This is particularly visible among younger cohorts. As we already said (Figure 5.2), Gen Y appears the most mobility-oriented generation, with 75% saying that skills matter more in internal mobility than in external hiring, and 77% saying it is legitimate to apply even without meeting all formal requirements. Gen Z is even more positive about internal fluidity in practice, with 63% saying it is easy to move internally and 75% legitimizing applications without all requirements. This sends **a clear message to the market: for younger generations, mobility and development are no longer secondary benefits.** They are increasingly part of the definition of opportunity itself.

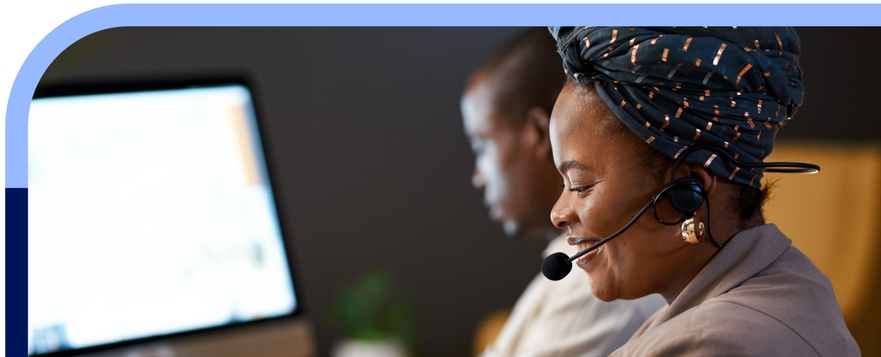
At the same time, these expectations are not limited to the youngest cohorts. **Even where generations are more cautious, the relevance of learning and development remains visible.** The difference lies in how those opportunities are judged. For younger people, they are often read as a sign of openness and future potential. For more senior profiles, they are more likely to be evaluated in relation to whether they are clearly structured, fair, and realistically accessible. This means that mobility and development opportunities need not only to exist. They need to be made legible. Organisations that want to attract and engage across generations must therefore show not only that growth is possible, but also how it happens.

This leads to the third implication: clear communication of evaluation criteria becomes essential. In a skills-based system, **people need to understand how skills are read, how decisions are made, and on what basis growth or movement becomes possible.** This is important for all generations, but it is especially important because each cohort reacts differently when opacity is perceived. Where communication is weak, younger generations may still be attracted by the promise of fluidity but become skeptical about fairness. More senior generations may see the system as unstable or insufficiently credible, especially when AI or automated decisions are involved. Clear communication of evaluation criteria is therefore not only a matter of candidate experience. It is a condition of cross-generational trust and engagement.

5 *Generational* Lens

Chapter Recap: *Key Conclusions* and *Business Implications*

The generational lens makes one thing clear: skills-based hiring is not interpreted through a single cultural filter. Younger generations are more open to non-linear careers and skills-based growth, while senior profiles remain more cautious, especially when AI and automated decisions enter the process. At the same time, transparency and fairness remain critical expectations across all generations. The difference is not whether these conditions matter, but how quickly trust weakens when they are not perceived to be present. Again, the business implication is straightforward. Organisations need to tailor value propositions by generation, while recognising that learning, mobility, and development opportunities are becoming increasingly central to attraction and engagement. At the same time, these opportunities will only be credible if the rules behind them are communicated clearly. In practical terms, this means that **a skills-based strategy cannot be only operational. It also has to be generationally intelligible.** The more organisations are able to connect growth opportunities with clear and fair evaluation criteria, the more likely they are to make the model resonate across different cohorts of the workforce.



Future Skills and Gaps

6.1 Most Relevant Skills for the Future
6.2 Perceived Development Gaps
Chapter Recap: Key Conclusions and Business Implications



6

If skills-based hiring is becoming a structural direction in the labour market, it is because the question of talent can no longer be separated from the question of skills. The issue is no longer simply how organisations select people, but how they identify, value, and develop the capabilities that will matter in a market shaped by technological change, process transformation, and less linear career paths. In this context, the future skills agenda is not an appendix to skills-based hiring. It is one of its core foundations. **A labour market that moves towards skills must also become clearer about which skills are becoming most relevant,** where the most visible gaps are opening up, and how development priorities should be translated into opportunity.

6.1 Most Relevant *Skills* for the *Future*

One of the clearest signals across markets is that the future skills agenda is becoming more recognisable. It is no longer fragmented into isolated capabilities. It is converging around a more defined technical and cognitive core. On the hard skills side, digital literacy, artificial intelligence literacy, data literacy, and the ability to design and improve workflows and processes increasingly sit at the centre of what the labour market considers most relevant. These are not marginal or specialist skills. They are becoming **the capabilities that allow people to work effectively in more digital, data-rich, and process-intensive environments.**

Among employees, **digital literacy stands out as the most fundamental hard skill today, at 42%,** followed by artificial intelligence literacy at 39% and data literacy at 36%. Organisations read the same landscape through a slightly different lens. **For HR decision makers, artificial intelligence literacy is the most sought-after hard skill, at 43%, and also the hardest to find, at 40%.** Workflow and process capabilities sit close behind, not only as a priority, but as a scarcity area. This sends a clear message: the future of work is increasingly tied to the ability to operate inside systems shaped by technology, data, and process redesign.

FIGURE 6.1 Which hard skills are the most sought-after today and what are the most difficult to find in the job market today

HR Decision Maker

Artificial intelligence literacy (working with AI tools and systems)

43% **think that it is the most sought-after**

40% **think that it is the most difficult to find**

Ability to design and improve workflows and processes

38% think that it is the most sought-after

35% think that it is the most difficult to find

Data literacy and ability to interpret data for decisions

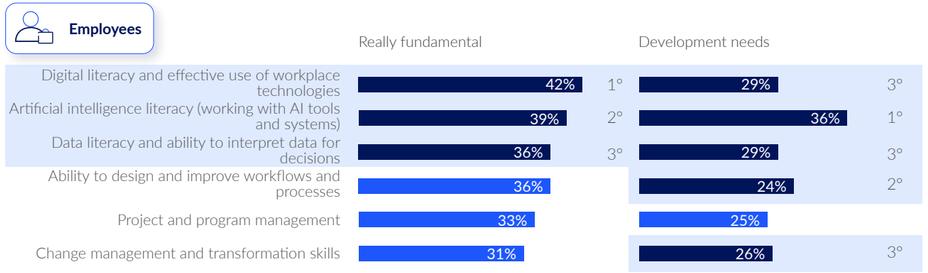
37% think that it is the most sought-after

33% think that it is the most difficult to find

QUESTION
Which of the following technical/hard skills are really fundamental today in your opinion when thinking about the job market in general? / Which of the following technical/hard skills are the most difficult to find on the job market in general today?

QUESTION
Which of the following technical/hard skills are really fundamental today in your opinion when thinking about the job market in general? / In which areas of expertise in terms of technical/hard skills do you feel you have the most room for improvement or development?

FIGURE 6.2 Which hard skills are really fundamental today and in which areas employees feel the most room for improvement



At the same time, the future skills agenda is not only technical. On the soft skills side, a second layer of relevance emerges with equal clarity. **Effective communication, analytical thinking and complex problem solving, and collaboration across functions stand out as the capabilities that make complexity usable in practice.** They are the skills that allow technical fluency to be translated into decisions, coordination, and adaptability. In that sense, the future skills agenda is not split between hard and soft skills. It is built around their integration. What matters is not only having technical capability, but being able to apply it in fluid, collaborative, and changing environments.

This is precisely why skills-based hiring carries a broader promise. It enables more inclusive and flexible career paths by recognising individual capabilities beyond traditional qualifications and linear trajectories. **A system that places more value on what people can actually do creates more room for skills to become portable, visible, and meaningful across roles.** But this promise only becomes credible if the skills that matter are clearly identified and consistently valued. The more central skills become, the less acceptable it is for them to remain vague.

6.2 Perceived *Development Gaps*

The second issue is not only what matters, but where the gaps are. And this is where the picture becomes more demanding. The labour market is not simply converging around a new set of relevant skills. It is also revealing a clear asymmetry between strategic importance and actual readiness. The same capabilities that are becoming more central are often the same ones people still need to strengthen and organisations still struggle to find.

This is particularly visible on the hard skills side (Figure 6.1). Among employees, artificial intelligence literacy stands out as the most visible development priority, at 39%, followed by the ability to design and improve workflows and processes at 29%, while digital literacy and data literacy both stand at 26%. On the organisational side, the same family of skills reappears as a market shortage: artificial intelligence literacy, workflow and process capabilities, data literacy, and change-related skills remain difficult to source. What emerges, then, is not a mismatch between what people think matters and what organisations need. **It is a mismatch between the speed at which these capabilities are becoming strategic and the speed at which they are becoming available at scale.**

A similar pattern can be seen on the soft skills side, although with more nuance. Employees are more likely to identify leadership and influence, communication, and adaptability as the areas where they feel the greatest room for improvement. Organisations, by contrast, are more likely to point to analytical thinking and complex problem solving, adaptability, and ownership as the hardest capabilities to find in the market. This means that **even where both sides recognise the importance of soft skills, they do not always locate the gap in the same place.** Employees tend to frame the issue as one of personal development and future progression. Organisations frame it more often as a question of business-critical scarcity. The two views are not contradictory, but they are not perfectly aligned either.

This is where the idea of perceived development gaps becomes especially important. **The future-skills debate cannot be reduced to a list of capabilities.** It also requires a shared interpretation of where the shortages really are, which gaps matter most, and how development priorities should be translated into talent strategy. Without that shared interpretation, skills-based hiring risks recognising the importance of skills without creating the conditions for their actual development. It can identify what matters, but still fail to reduce the distance between relevance and readiness.



6 *Future* Skills and Gaps

Chapter Recap: *Key Conclusions* and *Business Implications*

The future skills agenda is becoming clearer, and that clarity carries a strong business implication. The most relevant skills for the future are increasingly concentrated around digital literacy, artificial intelligence literacy, data interpretation, workflow and process design, and a soft skills layer that makes complexity usable: communication, analytical thinking, and collaboration. This is no longer a fragmented skills agenda. It is becoming a clear direction of travel for the labour market.

At the same time, the perceived development gaps show that **relevance does not automatically translate into availability.** The very skills that are becoming most strategic are often the same ones people still need to strengthen and organisations still struggle to find. This means that **talent shortages should increasingly be understood not as isolated recruitment difficulties, but as deeper capability gaps.** In practical terms, the implication is clear: organisations cannot rely only on selection to solve a future-skills problem. They need stronger development strategies, clearer skill frameworks, and more explicit links between growth opportunities and capability-building.

This is where skills-based hiring reveals one of its most important long-term functions. It enables more inclusive and flexible career paths by recognising individual capabilities beyond traditional qualifications and linear trajectories. But that only happens if the skills that matter are made visible, shareable, and actionable. The future of skills-based hiring therefore depends not only on better assessment, but on a more deliberate skills-development model capable of reducing the gap between what the market increasingly values and what people are actually equipped to offer.



Implications and Next *Steps*

7.1 Business
7.2 HR Strategy
7.3 Employer Branding
7.4 Candidate Experience
7.5 Final Perspective



7

If the previous chapters have shown anything clearly, it is that skills-based hiring can no longer be treated as a passing HR trend. It is becoming a structural response to a labour market in which roles are less stable, capabilities evolve faster, internal mobility matters more, and traditional signals are no longer sufficient on their own to guide talent decisions. But identifying this shift is only the first step. The more important question is what organisations should do next. At this stage, the issue is no longer whether the market is moving in a more skills-based direction. It clearly is. The issue is how organisations, recruitment partners, and talent functions can translate that direction into business choices, operating models, employer positioning, and candidate experience.

7.1 Business

The first implication is business-wide. Organisations need to treat skills as a core strategic asset, not simply as one dimension of hiring criteria. In a market where the most visible recruitment pressure comes from the scarcity of candidates with the required capabilities, **talent shortages should increasingly be understood as structural skills challenges rather than isolated recruiting difficulties.** This changes the frame of action. It means that the response cannot rely only on faster selection or broader reach. It requires a more integrated strategy that combines targeted sourcing, employer value proposition, and long-term skills development.

This is why workforce planning also needs to be aligned with evolving capabilities. If the labour market is increasingly shaped by digital literacy, artificial intelligence literacy, data literacy, workflow and process design, and adaptive soft skills, then organisations can no longer plan talent only around static roles or legacy job architectures. They need to **align workforce planning with evolving capabilities,** asking not only how many people are needed, but which skills are becoming strategic, where the gaps are deepening, and how those gaps can be addressed over time. A skills-based logic becomes valuable precisely because it allows organisations to connect current demand with future capability-building.

This also increases the value of **recruitment partners as facilitators of a more skill-based approach.** In a market shaped by evolving capability needs, structural skill shortages and growing process complexity, organisations often need external support not only to access talent, but also to interpret it more effectively. **Recruitment partners** can help **make this transition more actionable by clarifying what skills matter, broadening the understanding of relevant talent pools** and **supporting a more capability-based reading of the market.** Their role becomes especially valuable when organisations are trying to connect immediate hiring needs with a wider talent and workforce strategy. In this context, recruitment partners can help **make skill-based approaches more concrete, more legible and easier to operationalise.**

7.2 HR Strategy

The second implication concerns HR strategy more directly. If skills-based hiring is to become more than a directional concept, organisations need to move towards skills-based workforce models and skills mapping. As the earlier chapters have shown, support for the model is broader than the maturity of its implementation. That means the central issue is not legitimacy, but operationalisation. **HR strategy therefore has to take on the task of turning a recognised principle into a structured system.**

Moving towards skills-based workforce models means building a more explicit link between skills and the core architecture of talent decisions. It means treating capabilities as the unit through which organisations interpret mobility, development, deployment, and growth. **Skills mapping becomes essential** in this respect because it creates the shared language needed to make skills visible and actionable across roles. Without that language, skills remain important in theory but difficult to embed in consistent decisions. With it, organisations are better able to connect roles, people, and opportunities through a clearer capability logic.

At the same time, HR strategy cannot stop at mapping. It also needs to redesign processes to ensure consistency and scalability. One of the clearest lessons from the report is that current systems often recognise the importance of skills without yet having methods fully aligned with that recognition. Assessment still depends heavily on proxies, governance remains complex, and process quality varies across contexts. **Redesign is therefore needed not only to make systems more skills-based, but to make them more consistent and scalable.** This includes clearer definitions of what is being evaluated, stronger links between skills and internal mobility, more structured use of evaluation criteria, and better integration between recruitment, development, and workforce planning.

7.3 Employer Branding

A third implication concerns employer branding. In a labour market increasingly organised around capabilities rather than fixed paths, employer branding can no longer rely mainly on job-based messaging. Organisations need to **shift from job-based messaging to skills, growth, and impact narratives.** The issue is no longer only how to describe a role, but how to communicate what people can learn, how they can move, what kind of capabilities are valued, and how contribution is assessed beyond linear trajectories.

This is where employer positioning becomes more strategic. Organisations need to strengthen positioning around development and internal mobility, because those are becoming two of the clearest markers of credibility in a skills-based market. **Where the internal talent market is visible and opportunities are legible, the overall value proposition becomes stronger.** People are more likely to engage with organisations that appear able not only to hire them, but to develop and move them based on capabilities. That is especially important in a context where younger generations are more open to non-linear careers and where internal mobility is increasingly seen as the place where skills should matter most in practice.

A strong and credible employer value proposition plays a key role in unlocking talent bottlenecks by expanding the candidate pool and improving conversion. This is particularly important when the challenge is not generic shortage, but difficulty finding profiles aligned with evolving needs. In that kind of market, organisations that communicate development, growth, and skill recognition more credibly are better positioned to reach people who may not match a traditional role description perfectly, but whose capabilities remain highly relevant. Employer branding, in other words, becomes part of the solution to a structural skills challenge. It helps broaden reach, strengthen attraction, and create a more believable bridge between organisational needs and candidate expectations.

7.4 Candidate Experience

The fourth implication concerns candidate experience. If skills-based hiring is to become credible, organisations need to increase transparency in evaluation processes. This is not a secondary communication issue. It is one of the most consistent conditions of trust across the entire report. **People are more willing to accept a skills-oriented model when they can understand how their capabilities are being read, what criteria are being used, and how decisions are being made.** Where evaluation remains opaque, trust weakens and process quality deteriorates. Transparency, therefore, becomes a core part of the operating model, not just of the messaging around it.

This becomes even more important as AI use expands. Organisations need to balance AI usage with human interaction and clarity. The point is not to reject AI, but to ensure that its role remains understandable, fair, and visibly governed. AI can increase speed and matching efficiency, but it can also raise concerns about opacity, dehumanisation, and unfairness if introduced without sufficient explanation or human presence. That is why candidate experience now depends increasingly on whether technology is integrated in a way that preserves recognisability and trust. **Human interaction remains essential not because innovation is unwelcome, but because people still need evidence that judgement has not been reduced to automation alone.**

Ultimately, organisations need to build trust as a key differentiator. In a market where many processes still feel opaque, trust becomes a competitive advantage. It shapes not only how candidates perceive fairness, but also whether they remain engaged through the journey or disengage from it. Clear evaluation criteria, transparent communication, visible human oversight, and coherent process design all become part of a differentiated candidate experience. In this sense, **trust is a central outcome** that the system must be designed to produce.

7.5 Final Perspective

Taken together, these implications show that skills-based hiring is no longer only a question of recruitment technique. It has become a broader organisational agenda touching business strategy, HR design, employer branding, and candidate experience. **Treat skills as a core strategic asset. Move towards skills-based workforce models and skills mapping. Shift from job-based messaging to skills, growth, and impact narratives. Increase transparency in evaluation processes and balance AI usage with human interaction and clarity.** These are not parallel recommendations. They are part of the same transition.

The next step for organisations is not simply to adopt the language of skills more confidently. It is to make that language operational, credible, and visible across the full talent journey. That is where the real competitive divide will lie: not between organisations that know that the market is changing and those that do not, but between those that can translate that change into coherent systems and those that remain strategically aligned but operationally incomplete.

Methodology

The research was conducted through online CAWI interviews, administered to two target audiences involved in workplace dynamics across eight countries: Brazil, Germany, India, Italy, France, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. A total of 4,000 interviews were completed: 3,200 Employees and 800 HR Decision Makers at senior manager level or above. Both targets selected through a stratified random sampling approach based on gender and generational cohort: Baby Boomers (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1980), Generation Y (1981–1996), and Generation Z (1997–2008).



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