



How Strategic Competencies
and Skill Development
Can Drive Business Performance

Research Summary



2019

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Executive Summary

Employers struggle to establish, develop and measure competencies and skills for their employees. This leaves organizations without clear visibility on how capabilities of employees align with the current and future needs of the business and the type of training and development needed to improve individual and organizational performance.

For competencies and skills to impact organizational performance, they must be integrated across talent processes, including learning, performance management, and career and succession planning. Employers struggle in just about every aspect of managing competencies and skills.



SKILLS

Developed proficiencies in mental operations or physical processes that are often acquired through specialized training; the execution of these skills results in successful performance.



COMPETENCIES

The combination of observable and measurable knowledge, skills, abilities and personal attributes that contribute to enhanced employee performance and ultimately result in organizational success.

Failure to develop competencies and skills to meet current and future business needs has a vast impact on the organization, including:

- ⚙ Inadequate employee engagement
- ⚙ Talent retention challenges
- ⚙ Difficulty in reacting to market and business changes
- ⚙ A void of creativity and innovation
- ⚙ Slowed revenue and profitability growth

To turn competencies from a liability to an asset, employers need to address many critical issues, including stakeholder alignment, integration of competencies and skills across talent processes, communication of strategy across the enterprise, embedding competencies in all IDPs, improving culture and feedback, how technology can enable competency and skill development, and more.

Competencies should be the adhesive that links business objectives with individual and organizational performance goals, learning and development and career growth.

Instead, competencies are adrift.

The talent function and business leaders need to be joined at the hip, which has proven to be almost impossible. Progress requires behavior change at all levels of the organization. This report will provide several strategies to turn competency and skill development into the business driver it should — and must — be.



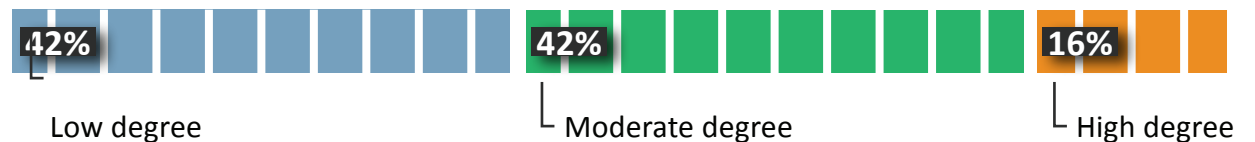
The Current State

Employers struggle to establish, measure and develop competencies and skills for their employees. In most organizations, needed competencies and skills are determined by HR and business stakeholders when creating Individual Development Plans. However, about half of organizations don't have IDPs for every employee.

More troubling, fewer than one in five organizations tie competencies and skills to performance goals and evaluations to a high degree, so progress in developing competencies and skills is not tracked regularly for many employees.

This leaves organizations without clear visibility on how the competencies and skills of employees align with the current and future needs of the business and the type of training and development needed to improve individual and organizational performance.

Linkage Between Competencies and Skills and Performance Goals, Evaluations



Source: 2019 Brandon Hall Group Competency Development and Management Study

Complexities

For competencies and skills to impact organizational performance, there must be integrated across talent processes, including learning, performance management, and career and succession planning. Employers struggle in just about every aspect of managing competencies and skills.

The biggest problem, expressed by 61% of organizations, is lack of consistent feedback and coaching of employees by their managers. But the impediments go much deeper and are systemic:

- Poor organizational alignment on competencies
- Lack of resources to develop a viable competencies program
- Inconsistent use of IDPs
- Lack of a long-range plan to develop competencies and skills for future business needs

In addition, the list of new-age digital competencies in need of development is exceedingly long, topped by:

- Emotional intelligence
- Critical thinking
- Innovation
- Analytics
- Collaboration
- Continuous learning



Importance of Workplace Competencies

1 They clearly communicate performance expectations.

2 They help employees identify the behavioral standards of an organization and improve transparency.

3 Managers can easily identify the need for development in the performance of their team members based on their fulfillment of competencies.

4 Competencies promote improved operational efficiency in the organization.

5 Having a clear list of workplace competencies helps you conduct targeted learning and development aligned with business goals.

6 They help improve talent planning strategies.

Source: Brandon Hall Group 2019



Consequences

Failure to develop competencies and skills to meet current and future business needs has a vast impact on the organization, including:

- ☀ Inadequate employee engagement
- ☀ Talent retention challenges
- ☀ Difficulty in reacting to market and business changes
- ☀ A void of creativity and innovation
- ☀ Slowed revenue and profitability growth

Critical Questions

To turn competencies from a liability to an asset, employers need to answer many critical questions:

- ? How can we get stakeholders from across the enterprise to align on competencies and skills needed to drive business results, both now in and in the future?
- ? How can we integrate competencies and skills across the talent processes so that competencies and skills are reflected in learning, performance management, coaching and mentoring, career development and succession planning?
- ? How can we communicate our strategy and approach around competencies across the organization?
- ? How can we ensure that employees at all levels of the organizations have Individual Development Plans that include competencies and skills that will benefit the employees and the business?
- ? How can we make coaching and feedback, in alignment with competencies and skills, part of the fabric of our organization?
- ? How can assessments — during the hiring process and post-hire — help us determine employees' strengths and development areas so we can provide relevant learning aligned with needed competencies and skills?
- ? How can we evaluate our technology to make sure we have systems that can help us improve the development of competencies and skills related to business needs?
- ? How can we do a better job of understanding employees' personal and professional aspirations, and how they align with business goals and the competencies and skills the business needs to succeed?



Brandon Hall Group POV

Competencies should be the adhesive that links business objectives with individual and organizational performance goals, learning and development and career growth.

Instead, competencies are adrift. Competencies are closely linked to employee performance goals in only 16% of companies. Almost half of organizations don't have Individual Employee Plans for all employees, and 60% of organizations

struggle to integrate competencies and skills into the IDPs that do exist.

Employee performance won't meet the ever-changing needs of the business until employers figure out how to unify and synchronize business goals with learning, performance development, career development, and competency and skills development.

Actions to Improve Effectiveness of Competency Skills Development

Create learning that is more aligned with development of competencies and skills

64%

More engagement with managers to ensure they are aligned with their employees' competency and skill development objectives and path

64%

Better coaching and mentoring for individuals as they develop competencies and skills

62%

Improve integration and skills into IDPs

60%

Enhancing the assessment of an individual's competency and skill development

60%

Better technology to assess and monitor competency and skill development

58%

Identifying a core set of competencies and skills for all leaders

57%

Better alignment of individual personal and professional goals with organizational goals

54%



The leading technology providers are starting to roll out solutions that help sync performance and business goals, but systems are only tools. Employers need to get all the pieces together, and that breakthrough is elusive.

For this to work, the talent function and business leaders need to be joined at the hip:

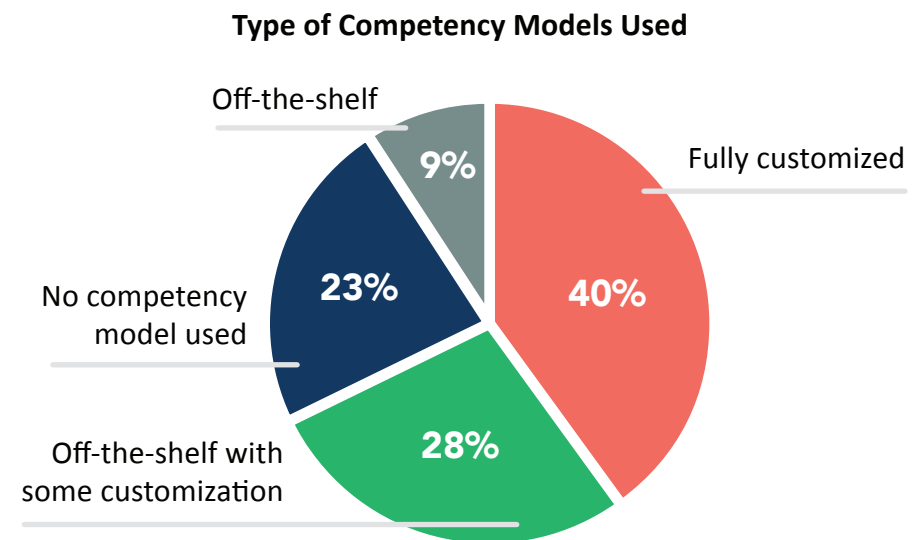
- Business objectives need to be communicated clearly and consistently across the enterprise
- The business and talent functions must align on the strategies to meet the goals.
- Then they must agree on the competencies and skills that must be developed to drive those performance outcomes.
- Learning must develop the behaviors that develop the outcomes.
- Career growth — both vertical and horizontal — must be tied to mastering the skills and competencies that drive the performance outcomes.

Here are several strategic approaches that will jump-start competency development and management:

• Start with the Greatest Area of Need

Managing competencies and skills development is a complex process. The larger and more matrix an organization is, the more difficult it becomes. The biggest mistake an organization can make is to attempt too much at once.

But that is what seven of 10 organizations do — cover all full-time employees with many different types of competencies. Making matters worse, organizations most often opt for fully customized competency models, which takes more time and resources, rather than off-the-shelf models or customizing only what is necessary from an off-the-shelf model.



Source: Brandon Hall Group Competency Management Study

Our research shows that organizations reporting the greatest success targeted one critical competency type — most often core or leadership competencies — and getting buy-in and results before moving on to other initiatives. They targeted a competency that they deemed most critical for success and put their time and resources there.

Once a culture of competency development is built around one critical competency set, replication is more manageable and organizations can learn from their successes and mistakes.



Case in Point

Large U.S. Healthcare Organization

A healthcare organization in the eastern U.S. with fewer than 10,000 employees took a bold approach to develop leadership competencies at all levels of the organization. Less than two years ago, there was no money, competencies or program for leadership development.

Now the organization, which asked to remain anonymous to speak candidly, has a fully functioning leadership academy involving more than 400

leaders from the CEO to frontline leaders. The program centers around a dynamic competency model focused on three domains:

Transformation **Execution** **People**

A team of stakeholders from across the enterprise built the competency model from scratch through an intense collaboration approach. Each year, the academy focuses on developing one competency under the domains of Transformation, Execution and People.



For each of those three domains, the focus is restricted to three behaviors and 16-week “competency sprints” are developed in each domain.

Three levels of leaders are trained on the competencies — frontline leaders, managers, and executive directors and above. Each group has different proficiency targets. In the year following the training, the leaders are measured on the behaviors on which they have been trained.

Before this effort, the organization endured many stalled initiatives to address multiple competencies. The effort and stakeholder coordination needed for success strained resources and nothing got done. So this time, they focused on a foundational need —better leadership at all levels — and made significant progress in a short amount of time.

The company is now replicating its successful process and will focus on core competencies for each department in the coming year.



Case in Point

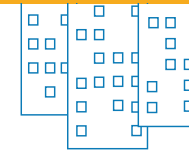
Regional Utility

At a major utility in the U.S. Pacific Northwest, the urgent need was an aging workforce and lack of qualified entry-level employees for field work and substation operations.

Only 45% of applicants meet basic prerequisites and only 13% of applicants have enough qualifications to be hired.

The utility, which requested anonymity to speak candidly, is a competency-driven organization. Job descriptions are competency-based, selection criteria are competency-based and the operational training unit uses competencies to advance employees from entry level to:

- Able to work on their own
- Competency in working on their own



- Teaching others to reach competency levels

In an urgent effort to improve time to competency, the organization focused most resources on building entry-level competency. It also quickly evolved from formal training to a contextualized learning approach that includes:

- Engaging learners through storytelling and change management.
- Structured on-the-job training.
- Simple technology solutions for delivery and on-the-job support.
- Real-world simulation solutions for situational awareness.

The speed to competency initiative is a work in progress, but the utility took all the right steps, including attacking the core of the skills problem.

**Case in Point**[click for the full case study](#)

Kellogg Responds to Urgent Need



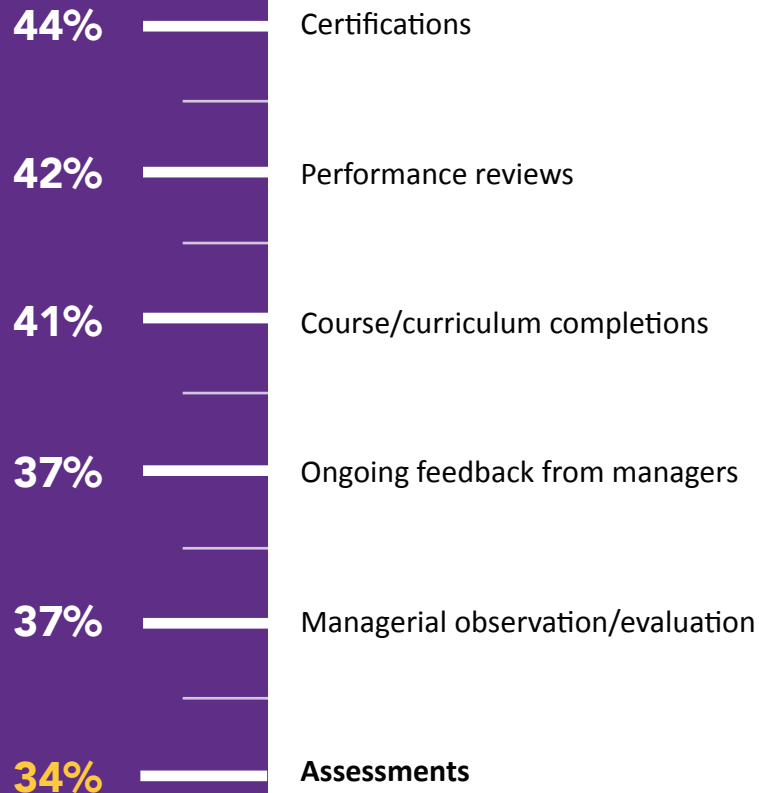
Focusing on specific business pain points can lead to rapid results.

Kellogg, the consumer packaged-goods giant with \$13 billion in revenue and 33,000 employees in 180 countries, learned through employee surveys that it had consistent gaps in basic leadership capabilities globally. This included problems in developing employees, coaching and feedback, and driving engagement.

With a sense of urgency and no budget, Kellogg's Global Learning Center of Excellence developed the Step Up virtual leadership development program. It linked directly to the company's leadership competencies and growth strategy.

From conception to launch took just four months and began in early 2019, using a flipped classroom concept with heavy social collaboration. Satisfaction with the training averaged 9 on a 10-point scale. Performance data is coming soon, but Kellogg has already succeeded in training 200 new leaders who would not have received any sort of formal training. Kellogg saw an urgent need, had a laser-focus tied to competencies and went to work to address the critical business need.

How Organizations Measure Competency and Skills Development



Source: Brandon Hall Group Competency and Skill Development Study

• Assess Skills and Identify Gaps

To prioritize how you target competency and skill development, it's important to understand your strengths and weaknesses. Assessments are important tools to identify skill gaps and prioritize how to address them based on the most critical performance needs.

But assessments remain a severely under-utilized and under-appreciated weapon in the talent development arsenal. While most employers use assessments in some manner, only about 20% have a formal strategy that leverages a range of assessments from pre-hire to departure, according to Brandon Hall Group's 2019 Assessment Practices Study.

Assessments enable employers to evaluate aptitude, personality, behaviors, cognitive abilities, skills and potential in ways that other methods — especially performance evaluations and candidate interviews that are plagued by human bias — cannot.



**Case in Point**[click for the full case study](#)

Accenture Network Services



At global consulting firm Accenture, the Network Services team has been a partner to a world-renowned telecommunications provider in the U.S. for a decade. As new Accenture team members come on board, it is critical that they have the competencies to keep up the level of service to the client.

The Accenture learning team deploys needs-based, end-to-end learning solutions and training interventions that help address the ever-changing demand and directions of Accenture's client. However, the Accenture team did not have a concrete assessment process to determine skill and competency levels of its staff.

So, the Assessing TelCo Competency Exercise was developed. It's a series of activities designed to measure baseline knowledge and skills, identify gaps and create corresponding training and non-training interventions. The assessment found low proficiency levels for 42% of team members. Once identified, Accenture was able to create highly targeted learning interventions to improve competency and skills that were directly linked to Accenture's ability to meet the client's business needs and keep its trust.



Case in Point



APTMetrics and Duke Energy

[click for the full case study](#)

APTMetrics developed a customized, high-fidelity, technology-driven “day in the life” simulation as part of the comprehensive assessment experience for Duke Energy, a major energy company with close to 30,000 employees.

Participants were placed in a scenario that takes place five years in the future within a simulated, fictitious organization, Viceroy Energy — a holding company with operations covering 10 states. In the simulation, the participants take on the role of the CEO, accountable for the overall success and sustainability of the organization.

The results of the simulation program were integrated with results from personality, motivational and behavioral-based assessments. This information provided specific feedback regarding the participants’ strengths and key opportunities for improvement relative to the desired core competencies and the organization’s strategy. In addition, the results illuminated targeted developmental priorities and aggregated insights into how to most effectively invest in the development of critical employees.



Case in Point

Alba's Skills Matrix and Training Program

[click for the full case study](#)

Aluminum Bahrain, known as Alba, is a global aluminum smelter with 2,700 employees. It needed to stop competitors from poaching its best talent and develop leaders from the local workforce rather than relying on expatriates.

Its previous programs were flawed: non-managerial employees were only promoted when a vacancy arose, even if they had higher skills; and managers were paid for years of service, rather than technical know-how. Two new programs, “Skills Matrix” and “Training Development Program,” solved this problem.

The Skills Matrix Assessment and training scheme streamlines the succession plan for non-managerial roles. It involved preparing an approved matrix of knowledge and skills for every non-supervisory job across the organization. This job profiling ensures multi-skilling at every level so that management in each department can rotate jobs and reassign employees to meet ever-evolving requirements — giving Alba a competitive edge.

Up to 600 employees each year enter the Skills Matrix Assessment for promotion. It ensures regular progression of non-management staff, their development and multi-skilling. Employees are assessed by two independent judges according to agreed criteria. During the assessment process, gaps in knowledge and skills are identified and training is arranged to fill these gaps. The employee must prove their competence within six months.

Successful candidates are promoted to the next level and unsuccessful candidates get further training and are re-assessed after a gap of six months.

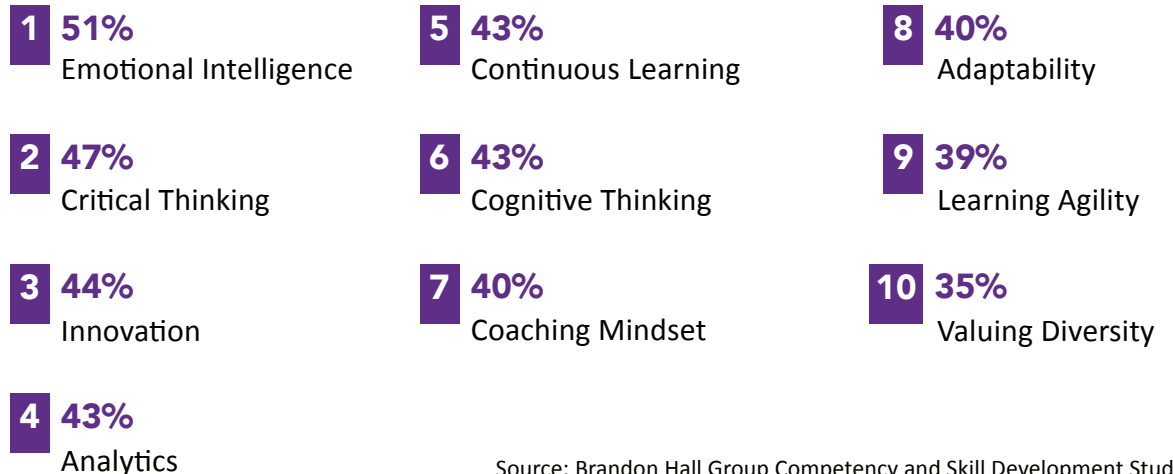


• Act Now to Develop Digital-Era Competencies

Many organizations have let themselves fall behind in developing critical workforce competencies. In playing catch-up, it is easy to fall even further behind by not developing competencies needed for future success as the digital era evolves in the 2020s.

Companies often focus on the here and now. That is certainly important, but employers must also focus on critical competencies that will be needed three, five and 10 years down the road. It is a difficult balancing act, but one companies must master if they want to remain competitive and thrive in the decade ahead.

Top 10 Digital Transformation Competencies Organizations are Targeting



Source: Brandon Hall Group Competency and Skill Development Study

Case in Point



Schneider Electric Applies Digital Disruption Principles to Transform Leadership

[click for the full case study](#)

In 2015, France-based Schneider Electric, a global leader in energy management and automation, unveiled a new strategy focused on becoming a digital company.

This shift required a change in leadership mindset, focus and behavior at all levels — not just to cope with market disruption — but to take a market-leading position and truly shape the industry. Schneider turned to European business school INSEAD for help with implementing their vision.

Within three years, the expectation is that nearly 2,000 managers and the whole population of 200 top executives will have been touched. Results so far include 30% cost-savings for customers, 27% business growth and a 20-point increase in customer satisfaction scores.

• Invest in Feedback, Coaching and Mentoring

Research respondents have a long laundry list of challenges to developing and managing competencies and skills. But lack of feedback and coaching from managers was far and away the biggest barrier.

Top Barriers that Impede Competency and Skill Development

Managers don't offer enough feedback and coaching to their employees



Executives are not aligned on how to develop competencies and skills



No long-range plan for identifying future talent needs and associated competencies skills



We don't have IDPs for every employee



We don't have the right technology to assess and track the development of our workforce



Source: Brandon Hall Group Competency and Skill Development Study

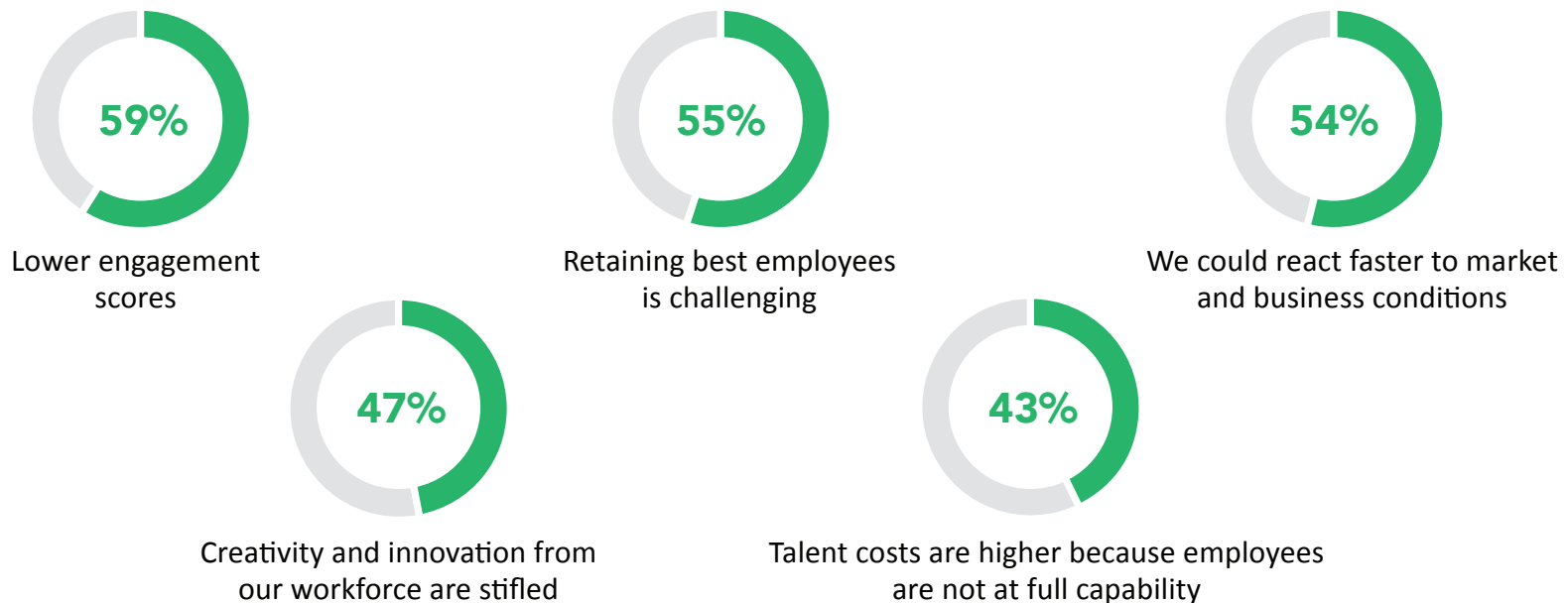
In almost every talent and learning research study Brandon Hall Group conducts, inadequate coaching is cited as a problem. But development of coaching skills sits low on the list of training priorities for most organizations. There is clearly a big disconnect here.

As important as addressing critical business needs and assessing skill gaps are, nothing improves without high-quality, ongoing feedback, coaching and mentoring. There

is only so much time for learning courses and training programs. The best way to drive continuous competency and skill development is through consistent feedback and coaching that are tied to Individual Development Plans, which in turn must be linked to critical business goals.

The best organizations invest in training both managers and individual contributors how to coach and provide feedback.

Top 5 Consequences of Inadequate Competency and Skill Development



Source: Brandon Hall Group Competency and Skill Development Study

**Case in Point**[click for the full case study](#)

CA Technologies' CA Spark



CA Technologies is an IT management software and solutions company operating in 43 countries with more than 11,000 employees. As a global business working within an IT landscape that is full of volatility, CA's talent strategy is founded on a "leaders at all levels" philosophy which empowers all employees regardless of role to demonstrate leadership skills.

The focal point of this philosophy is real-time, ongoing, future-focused discussions called pulse

conversations between managers and employees that align goals, accelerate performance, learning and growth, and adjust behaviors. To support this journey, the company provides a wide variety of development opportunities specifically focused on feedback, coaching and mentoring.

CA's most intense coaching development program is CA Spark, a five-week, blended learning, social, virtual experience that provides the foundation, framework, tools and practice to help build core coaching

skills. It enables both managers and individual contributors to embody CA's DNA principles and develop the skills to help others grow, drive change and adapt.

This led to increased retention rates and engagement scores for program participants compared to others in similar roles.

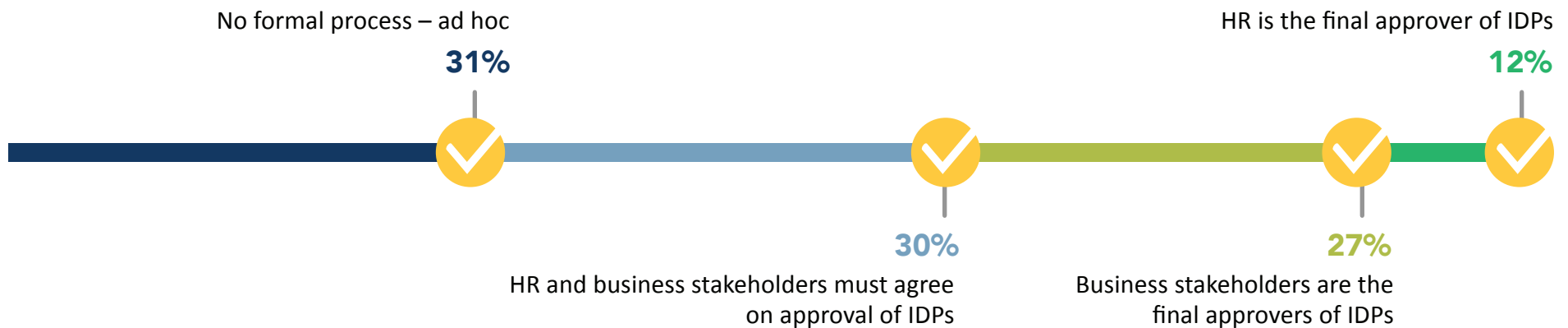
- Create Immersive Learning Experiences Around Critical Business Needs

Some areas of competency and skill development are so complex that they require long-term learning experiences and demonstration of proficiency before the employees can be fully functional.

The best organizations create blended experiences that combine formal and informal learning with rotations or apprenticeships, often culminating with certification or a high-stakes exam.

The most critical component here is again prioritizing business need. These programs require a big investment of time and money by the employer and the learners. It's important that organizations understand their near- and short-term business priorities and link their most immersive learning experiences to those critical needs.

How IDPs Are Approved



Source: Brandon Hall Group Competency and Skill Development Study

**Case in Point**[click for the full case study](#)

Dell's Data Science and Big Data Analytics Program



Dell Technologies Education Services' Data Science and Big Data Analytics v2 is a certification program for professionals seeking to build competency in data science, namely, applied statistics, programming, Machine Learning algorithms and Big Data Technologies. The course takes roughly 40 hours to finish in addition to lab exercises followed by a certification exam, which is the minimum requirement on the part of a student to be certified by the "Dell Technologies Proven Professional Certification Path."

The program isn't product-specific or specific to an industry. It is a general set of skills required by certain professionals who want to do more with the data available at their

disposal. This includes simple outcomes such as reporting, dashboarding and monitoring metrics and complex outcomes such as predictive analytics, as well as running queries on large databases and handling end-to-end model-building exercises that can be integrated into the decision-making process.

The Data Science and Big Data Analytics program is part of Dell Technologies Proven Professional path, which focuses on continuously improving skill sets based on application and work experience.

**Case in Point**[click for the full case study](#)

McKinsey's Operations Excellence Program

McKinsey & Company

McKinsey & Company's Operations Excellence Program accelerates development in early-tenure learners to fill hiring gaps for specialized skill sets. It is an immersive two-year fellowship that concentrates significant senior expert time toward reskilling and upskilling new joiners through apprenticeship and training.

During the intensive two-year period, participants primarily work on apprenticeship projects with clients. They spend Mondays through Thursdays in the field, working at

onsite apprenticeships in their focus area and receiving daily coaching from leadership. They also dedicate two Fridays a month to training sessions that are specific to their focus area and led by practice leaders in the field.

The program culminates with a technical evaluation that certifies the breadth of their knowledge and their depth of expertise. Passing the evaluation is required for promotion. Over time, McKinsey has scaled the program dramatically. In the first few years, five to 10 people graduated

from the program each year; in 2019, that number will be close to 100. The program has also expanded from its original location in Western Europe to Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

The program has become a peerless source of early-tenure operations talent, with nearly 600 current participants and graduates filling specialized roles at the firm and more than 300 alumni working in operations leadership positions across the globe.

Leverage Technology to Drive Success

Competency and skill development is a complex endeavor that touches every talent process. It begs to be empowered and enabled by technology.

Compared to other talent management processes, organizations do not utilize technology to fully enable competency management as much as they could. However, the 11% of organizations that have fully automated competency systems enjoyed significant increases in the effectiveness of their competency management plans, according to our research.

Our research found that 45% of respondents said they don't have the right technology to assess and track the development of their workforce. Technology was cited as one of the top five impediments to competency and skill development.

More than half of organizations use performance management or learning management systems to store and access competencies. This is not necessarily a problem — if those systems have the right functionalities to enable agile management of competencies and skills. In total,

organizations use 20 different types of systems to manage competencies.

While the other strategies we've discussed are fundamental to success in competency and skill development, technology is the great enabler. Everything you do in this area can be made more effective by leveraging the right technology. So, organizations should take stock of the technology they are using and give serious consideration to upgrading or buying new technology.

Conclusion

Competency and skill development is perhaps the most complex piece of the talent management puzzle. It should be — but often is not — linked to every talent process: learning, performance management, career development and succession management. They are all inexorably linked, but competency and skill development often gets short-changed because it's difficult.

Meaningful progress requires behavior change at all levels of the organization:

- Business leaders and the talent function must do a better job of engaging with managers so they understand the competencies and skills they need to develop in their employees.
- Managers need to coach employees effectively and consistently as they work on building the competencies and skills.
- Those competencies and skills need to be included in IDPs for every employee so they are enabled and motivated to improve their performance to enhance their careers and help the business. They must go hand in hand.
- Accordingly, career growth must be directly aligned to competency and skills.
- And organizations must assess competencies and skills regularly to prioritize learning and help monitor progress.



Demographics: Competencies and Skills Study

255 Respondents
(from organizations with
more than 100 employees)



8% Small (100 - 499 employees)



34% Medium (500 - 4,999 employees)



58% Large (5,000+ employees)



Geographic Distribution

38%

Organizations with multiple locations
across the globe

38%

Organizations located in one country with
multiple locations

14%

Organizations located in one country with
some global distribution

10%

Organizations located in one country in
one location

Authors and Contributors



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About Brandon Hall Group

Brandon Hall Group is an HCM research and advisory services firm that provides insights around key performance areas, including Learning and Development, Talent Management, Leadership Development, Talent Acquisition, and HR/Workforce Management.

With more than 10,000 clients globally and 25 years of delivering world-class research and advisory services, Brandon Hall Group is focused on developing research that drives performance in emerging and large organizations, and provides strategic insights for executives and practitioners responsible for growth and business results.

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Our Services

GET HELP TO DRIVE RESULTS FOR YOUR TALENT

In today's volatile and global business climate, managing talent for high-performance plays an increasingly crucial role in an organization's growth and future success. Effective talent management is a top priority in organizations everywhere because, while organizations recognize the need to obtain and retain people with the very best skills, they continue to struggle to implement effective strategies to do so. HR and Learning professionals need to be able to successfully define organizational talents needs and skills, identify talent strengths and career goals, and align organizational needs to individual needs. Rethink your strategy, validate your assumptions, transform your business, and optimize your time with the use of reliable data, tools, and guidance.



PLAN



ATTRACT



DEVELOP



PERFORM



RETAIN



OPTIMIZE

GET HELP WITH YOUR HR SERVICES MANAGEMENT & DELIVERY

As described in the employee lifecycle, processes are linked to employee transactional processes (e.g., compensation, benefits, compliance, contingent workforce management, etc.) via workforce planning and analytics.

- Policies/Process/Procedure
- Payroll
- Expense Management
- Benefits & Compensation
- Contingent Workforce Management
- Compliance
- Time & Labor Management

Our Services (Continued)

GET CONSULTING HELP WITH...

- Strategy and Planning
- Governance & Business Alignment
- Executive Management
- Team Development
- Measurement & Analytics
- Program Design & Deployment
- Technology Selection, Management & Integration
- Organizational Structure
- Measurement & Analytics
- Change Management
- Budgeting & Forecasting

Membership Offers Tailored Support

At the core of our offerings is a Membership Program that combines research, benchmarking and unlimited access to data and analysts. The Membership Program offers insights and best practices to enable executives and practitioners to make the right decisions about people, processes, and systems, coalesced with analyst advisory services which aim to put the research into action in a way that is practical and efficient. Membership also provides you direct access to our seasoned team of thought leaders dedicated to your success, backed by a rich member community, and proactive support from our client services team.

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- Case Studies, Frameworks & Tools
- DataNow® & TotalTech®
- Webinars and Research Spotlights
- Annual HCM Conference

ADVISORY SUPPORT

- Ask the Expert
- 1 on 1 Consultations
- Research Briefings
- Benchmarking

CLIENT SUCCESS PLAN

- Your Priorities
- Executive Sponsor
- Client Associate
- Monthly Meetings

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