



HOW TO BUILD AN EFFECTIVE **SKILLS** ↗ **ASSESSMENT** **FRAMEWORK**

EBOOK





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INTRODUCTION

Skills development is a top CHRO priority for the next two years, [Korn Ferry's 2025 CHRO survey](#) reveals.

Yet, while 66% of HR leaders are confident in identifying the skills needed for growth, only 48% know how to acquire them for their organization through hiring or development.

That's where a skills assessment framework comes in.

Rather than just cataloging skills, an effective framework serves as a strategic tool that provides insight to guide your decisions about the talent you have and the talent you need.

It can help you answer crucial questions, such as:

- ▶ What skills does my organization need now and in the future?
- ▶ What skills do our people already have?
- ▶ Where are the critical gaps?
- ▶ How can we close them efficiently?

This step-by-step guide walks you through building a skills assessment framework, so you can make smarter decisions about hiring, upskilling, and reskilling today.



01

WHY YOU NEED A SKILLS ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

Remember when job descriptions stayed the same for years? Those days are gone.

Skill requirements now evolve at a dizzying pace, with technical capabilities becoming outdated almost as quickly as the latest smartphone model.

“Twenty years ago, we wouldn’t have to look at skills in the workplace very often. You’d talk to a hiring manager, and it’s the same skills required as the last time,” explains [Scott Erker](#) at Korn Ferry.

“Now the cycle time is changing. Some jobs need to be re-evaluated annually, others every six months, and the pace is only accelerating.”

The skills needed for the average job have changed by 25% since 2015, and that number is expected to double by 2027.

What your organization needed six months ago might not be what it needs today and almost certainly won’t be what it needs tomorrow.

A skills assessment framework isn’t just a nice-to-have—it’s a competitive necessity. Without one, organizations are flying blind, making talent decisions based on outdated assumptions rather than real workforce needs.



By providing clarity on the talent you have versus the talent you need, your skills assessment framework becomes the compass that guides your organization through constant change.

Scott Erker, Korn Ferry

02

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS FOR BUILDING A SKILLS ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

STEP 1: CREATE AN ACCURATE SKILLS FRAMEWORK

A skills framework defines and categorizes the specific skills and competencies your organization needs to succeed. Think of it as the foundation that supports all your talent decisions.

Without clearly defining what “data analysis” or “strategic thinking” means in your business, you’ll end up with inconsistent assessments where each manager applies their own interpretation.

A well-designed skills framework should:

- ▶ Identify and organize the specific skills your organization needs
- ▶ Establish a common language around skills across your organization
- ▶ Provide clear skill definitions that everyone understands
- ▶ Remain agile and quick to adapt as requirements change



WHAT MAKES A SKILLS FRAMEWORK “AGILE”?

Key characteristics include:



FORWARD-LOOKING

Identifying skills needed for future growth, not just current requirements



FLEXIBLE

Accommodating new roles and responsibilities without a complete redesign



RESPONSIVE

Updating quickly when new technologies or business models emerge



DATA-DRIVEN

Using assessment data to continuously refine and improve



BUSINESS-ALIGNED

Directly connecting to your strategic objectives and market trends

To create a skills framework, start by identifying your business strategy and the capabilities needed to execute it.

Ask key questions, such as:

- ▶ What are the potential growth areas?
- ▶ What technologies are we adopting?
- ▶ Where is the company experiencing performance challenges?
- ▶ What might we learn from our competitors?
- ▶ What skill sets are they building that we are not?

These questions will help you prioritize the **critical skills** your organization needs to deliver on its objectives.



In the energy sector, for example, companies pivoting to carbon neutrality have had to completely redefine their skills frameworks to incorporate capabilities in wind and solar technologies—requiring entirely new skill sets,” notes Erker.

An effective skills framework needs to include both technical skills (such as data analysis, cloud computing, or digital marketing) and broader leadership competencies (such as strategic thinking, influencing others, or driving innovation).

It’s important to structure these work-related skills and competencies at the right level of detail—neither so broad that they can’t be measured nor so granular that assessment becomes unmanageable.

STEP 2: DEFINE “WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE”

With your skills framework in place, it's time to apply it to specific roles. This step is about creating **success profiles**—blueprints that show exactly what successful performance looks like for each position.

Success profiles translate abstract skills at work into concrete job requirements by defining:

- ▶ Which essential skills are needed for each role
- ▶ What level of proficiency is required
- ▶ How skills fit within broader job responsibilities
- ▶ The behaviors and mindsets that drive success

These success profiles provide context and targets for skills assessments.

While your skills framework defines what “data analysis” means across your organization, a success profile shows what level of data analysis is needed for a specific role, how it connects to job responsibilities, and what successful application looks like.

Success profiles help you determine the difference between the talent you have and the talent you need to deliver on your business strategy. They establish clear standards for assessment and provide a consistent reference point for hiring, development, and succession decisions.

Start with your most critical roles and involve both HR and operational leaders in developing these profiles. This collaboration ensures profiles reflect both strategic priorities and day-to-day realities.

Remember that success profiles should evolve as job requirements change, particularly for roles affected by technological advances or market shifts.

STEP 3: SECURE STAKEHOLDER BUY-IN

Even the most brilliantly designed skills assessment framework will fail without proper organizational support.

Without this step, your carefully crafted skills definitions and success profiles will never translate into actual assessment and development.

Department heads need to commit resources, managers need to incorporate them into their processes, and employees need to engage with the assessment activities.

Here's how to make it happen:

▶ **Highlight the pain points:** Use specific examples where skill gaps have affected business results—lost deals, delayed projects, or customer complaints. Connect these directly to the framework you've designed.

▶ **Speak their language:** For your CFO, quantify the cost of bad hires and turnover. For your CTO, demonstrate how it will help navigate technology transitions and develop new skills. For line managers, show how it will make their teams more effective.

▶ **Start small and prove value:** Start with one high-impact area. Document quick wins and use these successes to build momentum for broader adoption.

▶ **Make it practical:** Don't present the framework as an abstract concept. Show exactly how it will integrate into existing processes like performance reviews or project staffing.

The most successful skills assessment frameworks have visible support from senior leadership, as well as employees. When executives reference the framework in town halls or strategic discussions, it signals to the entire organization that it's a business priority.

HOW TO ENGAGE EMPLOYEES WITH THE PROCESS

Skills assessments can raise concerns for employees, with fears about being judged harshly for skills they haven't had the chance to develop or the potential impact of a poor assessment on their job security.

Addressing these concerns with transparency and clear communication can help employees feel more confident and engaged in the process.

Here's a few ways you can do this:



Clearly stating how results will be used for development, not evaluation



Letting people try sample assessments before the real thing



Sharing examples of how others have used assessment feedback to grow



Creating psychological safety through clear communication

When employees see an assessment as a growth opportunity rather than a judgment, you'll get more accurate results and greater engagement with the process.

STEP 4: SELECT THE RIGHT ASSESSMENT METHODS

Now that you have stakeholder and employee support, it's time to determine how you'll actually measure skills across your organization. The assessment methods you choose will directly impact the accuracy and usefulness of your skills data.

01 **SELF-ASSESSMENT**

Employees rate their own proficiency in specific skills. It is quick and scalable but prone to bias. Works best when validated by other methods.

02 **MANAGER ASSESSMENT**

Supervisors evaluate their team members' skills based on observed performance. Provides practical context but may be influenced by relationship quality as much as actual skill level.

03 **PEER ASSESSMENT**

Colleagues evaluate each other's capabilities. Particularly valuable for collaborative skills and can reveal strengths not visible to managers.



04

STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Targeted questions that probe for specific skills and application experience. Effective for assessing both technical capabilities and contextual application

05

TECHNICAL SKILLS TESTS

Knowledge-based assessments that verify specific technical proficiencies. Good for establishing baseline capabilities but doesn't show application ability.

06

WORK SIMULATIONS

Controlled environments where candidates perform actual job tasks. Most predictive of real performance but requires more resources to implement.

Assessing Your Workforce at Scale

Scaling assessments across your workforce doesn't have to be complex. An integrated platform like **Korn Ferry Assess** makes it easier, helping you evaluate both technical skills and leadership competencies with consistency.

Even more importantly, it connects the results directly to development opportunities, turning assessment data into actionable next steps.

FIND OUT MORE

When designing your assessment strategy, it's important to consider:



Skill criticality: Invest more in assessing the skills that matter most to performance



Verification level: Determine which roles require formal validation or certification



Combined approaches: Use multiple methods for the most reliable results

The ultimate goal of these assessments is to identify meaningful gaps between your required skills and your current capabilities—insights that will directly inform your talent decisions.



STEP 5: ESTABLISH SUPPORTING PROCESSES

For your skills assessment framework to deliver lasting value, it needs proper infrastructure behind it. The right supporting processes transform a theoretical framework into a practical tool that managers actually use.

Focus on these key elements:



REGULAR MAINTENANCE

Determine who updates your framework and when. Assign clear ownership to a small team that reviews skills definitions and success profiles quarterly, with more comprehensive updates annually.



FEEDBACK LOOPS

Create specific channels for users to report when skills definitions seem outdated or when success profiles no longer match role requirements. Quick corrections maintain credibility.



TRAINING FOR MANAGERS

Create simple reference guides and short training sessions that help managers apply skills data to everyday decisions. Show them exactly how to use assessment insights for hiring and development.



IMPACT MEASUREMENT

Track specific metrics that show framework effectiveness—like reduced time-to-hire, improved performance ratings, or decreased skill-based turnover. Use these metrics to demonstrate value to stakeholders.



CONNECTION TO TALENT SYSTEMS

Ensure your Human Capital Management (HCM) system, learning platforms, and performance tools can easily import and use skills data. This might require Application Programming Interface (API) connections, shared taxonomies, or regular data synchronization.

The best indicator of success isn't how elegant your framework looks on paper. It's whether managers automatically reference it when making talent decisions.

When hiring discussions naturally center around skills gaps or when development plans clearly target specific skill needs, you know your framework has become truly embedded in your organization.

WHEN TO UPDATE YOUR SKILLS ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

Shifts like new leadership or changes in your business model often signal the need to reassess your skills assessment framework. This may involve updating the framework itself, refining success profiles, and revising assessment methods to maintain alignment with current needs.

Watch out for these signals that indicate your framework may need refreshing:

- ▶ New leadership with shifting priorities
- ▶ Significant changes in business model or strategy
- ▶ Emerging industry trends impacting core capabilities
- ▶ Consistent feedback that profiles no longer match roles
- ▶ Assessment results that fail to predict actual performance
- ▶ Changes in regulatory requirements affecting skill needs
- ▶ Difficulty finding candidates with the defined skill set

Don't wait for the annual review—frameworks that adapt quickly provide the most value.



WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOUR SKILLS STRATEGY?

Building a skills assessment framework isn't the end goal—it's the first step toward making better talent decisions.

With this foundation in place, you can make smarter decisions about who to hire and who to develop. No more guesswork and no more reactive scrambling when critical skills suddenly become scarce.

Ready to take the next step? Download our [**Introductory Guide to Talent Assessment**](#) to learn how to develop a future-ready talent pipeline that responds to your specific business needs.



Korn Ferry is a global organizational consulting firm. We work with our clients to design optimal organization structures, roles, and responsibilities. We help them hire the right people and advise them on how to reward and motivate their workforce while developing professionals as they navigate and advance their careers.

Business advisors.

Career makers.