



A NEW CONVERSATION ON:

# SKILLS



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past five years, skills-based hiring has been at the center of TA transformation. Companies are doubling down on everything related to skills and the rapid advancements in AI has accelerated the need for skills-based hiring.

### According to Aptitude Research:

62%

of companies eliminating roles

69%

creating new roles

65%

identifying skill gaps

Skills-based hiring has never had more urgency. Yet, the discussions around skills have not progressed much over the past few years. We found that 1 in 2 companies are facing fatigue or frustration with the skills conversation today. For many companies, it has been misaligned and misguided. And the result is that companies are stuck on skills—unsure where to start, whether to build a skills inventory, invest in technology, or redefine their hiring models.

One reason for the frustration with skills is that the primary focus has been on inferred skills rather than validated skills.

Inferred skills—extracted from resumes, job titles, and experience—provide context but do not always confirm competency. Validated skills, however, are directly assessed through structured evaluations, simulations, and AI-driven assessments.

To ensure better hiring outcomes, greater trust, reduced bias, and a future-ready workforce, organizations must consider both inferred and validated skills.



1-in-2

companies are facing fatigue or frustration with the skills conversation today.

This report is an introduction to new research from Aptitude on validated skills and the impact on TA transformation. It includes the following:

- 1 | **The Shift to Validated Skills**
- 2 | **Current State of Skills-Based Hiring**
- 3 | **Challenges in Validating Skills**
- 4 | **The Role of AI**
- 5 | **Measuring Success in Skills-Based Hiring**

## Top 8 Findings



### Validated Skills and Inferred Skills

Companies are moving away from assumptions based on resumes and job titles toward structured, directly validated skill assessments. 50% of companies stated their top frustration in the skills conversation is the difficulty in validating skills.



### Skills Fatigue Is Real

Nearly 1 in 2 organizations report frustration or fatigue with the current skills conversation—driven by confusion, lack of trust, and ineffective tools.



### Resumes Are Still Overused

Despite the rise of new tools, 72% of companies still rely on resumes or self-reported skills to identify talent.



### Measurement Is the Missing Link

Few companies track validated skills' impact on outcomes like retention, performance, or bias reduction—creating blind spots in hiring ROI.



### Maturity Levels Vary Widely

Only 26% of companies feel confident in their current skills approach, and most fall into early or developing stages of adoption.



### Technology Investment Is Lagging

Over a third of companies have only lightly adopted tech to support skills-based hiring, and 6% have made no investment at all.



### Structured Doesn't Mean Stale

Effective validation blends structured assessments with human interpretation—balancing data with context.



### Skills Strategy Requires Cross-Org Alignment

Success demands collaboration across TA, HR, and business leadership to embed skills deeply in hiring, mobility, and workforce planning.



# INTRODUCTION: THE SHIFT TO VALIDATED SKILLS



The workforce is changing and the way companies hire must change too. The demand for skills-based hiring has never been more critical. Forty-three companies stated that skills is more of a priority this year than last year. Companies are experiencing a tremendous amount of change in how they recruit and engage talent. In many instances, the skills that were required to help companies grow have either become obsolete or shifted in this new digital era.

Despite the demand for a skills-based approach to hiring, many companies remain uncertain about how to operationalize skills-based hiring, leading to:

- Confusion about the right approach (skills taxonomy vs. direct validation).
- Lack of urgency, delaying meaningful action.
- Over-reliance on resumes, missing true capability assessment.

Additionally, many companies still rely on resumes, drawing assumptions from job experience, education, or past roles. However, these do not validate a candidate's actual abilities and can lead to:

- ❌ **Bias in hiring decisions**
- ❌ **Mismatched job placements**
- ❌ **Poor performance predictions**

Companies are not always seeing any outcomes in a skills-based approach. According to this study, the top challenge that companies face with skills-based hiring is the difficulty in validating skills effectively (see Figure 1).





**Figure 1:** Challenges with Skills-Based Hiring

**59%**  
stated that they  
somewhat trust it but  
prefer validation.

AI inference is the primary way that companies use skills in TA. AI infers skills or learnability or potential based on a resume or job application. This use case is valuable because it helps employers see candidates in a more holistic way and it gives candidates an equitable experience. The challenge with AI inference is that many companies have questioned how these skills are actually validated, and some providers are not transparent with how they are using AI. When asked if companies trust AI inference in the hiring process, 59% stated that they somewhat trust it but prefer validation. The right conversation is not about what skills candidates claim to have—but how and when those skills are measured and validated.

# THE CURRENT STATE OF SKILLS-BASED HIRING



Skills-based hiring has dominated many of the discussions in HR Tech over the past few years. Despite **95% of companies valuing skills over job titles**, only:



feel effective at skill validation.



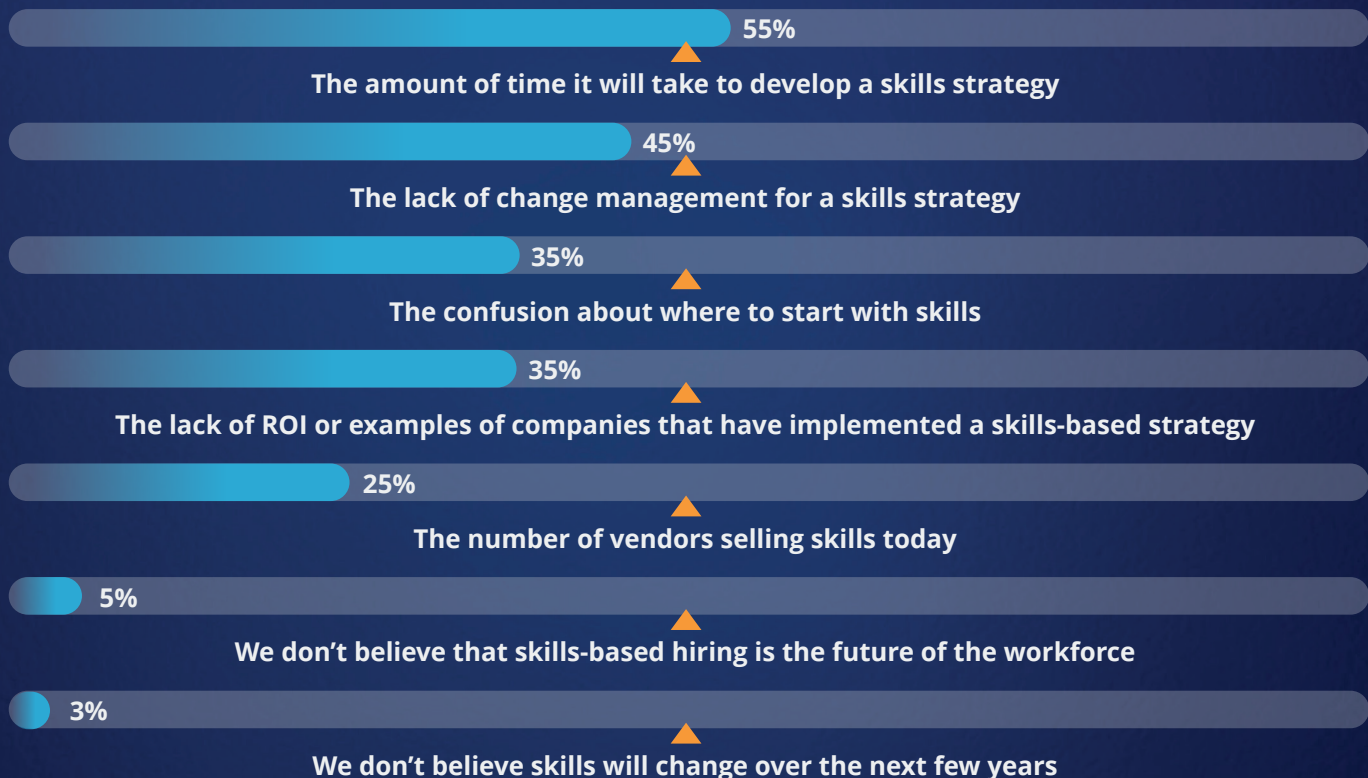
Only 1 in 3 understand their  
technology options.



report frustration with skills-  
based hiring efforts.

Aptitude Research found that 55% of companies stated the amount of time it will take to develop a skills-based strategy is their biggest frustration. Most companies do not know where to start with a skills-based approach (see Figure 2).

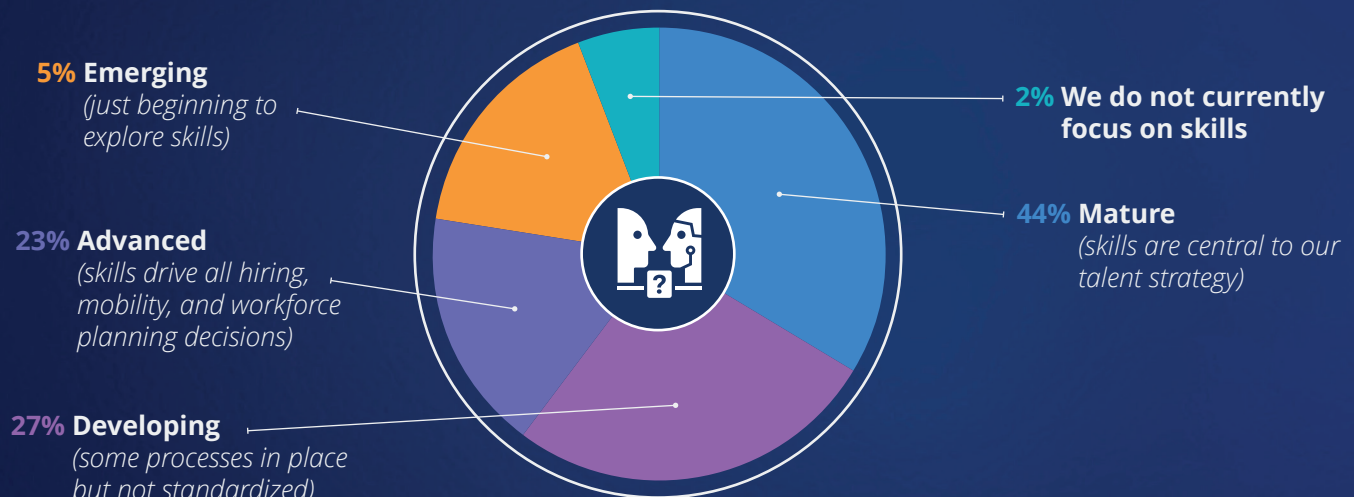
Figure 2: Top Frustrations with Skills



Given these frustrations, we found that companies are at various stages of maturity with understanding their skills journey. With 44% citing that they are maturity and 23% stating that they are advanced in their move to skills. Many of these companies have not rolled-out a full skills-based strategy or investing in solutions beyond matching candidates to jobs.

As a result, only 26% are confident with their skills approach.

**Figure 3: Maturity in Skills-Based Hiring**



### The Maturity Gap in Skill Validation



#### Beginner

Relies on resumes & job descriptions. Limited AI adoption.



#### Intermediate

Uses some AI but still infers skills from experience.



#### Advanced

Uses AI-powered skill validation tools, structured hiring models



# THE CHALLENGES OF VALIDATING SKILLS

Many companies are unsure if they should:

- ✓ **Build a skills inventory.**
- ✓ **Invest in AI-driven hiring platforms.**
- ✓ **Redesign their entire TA approach.**

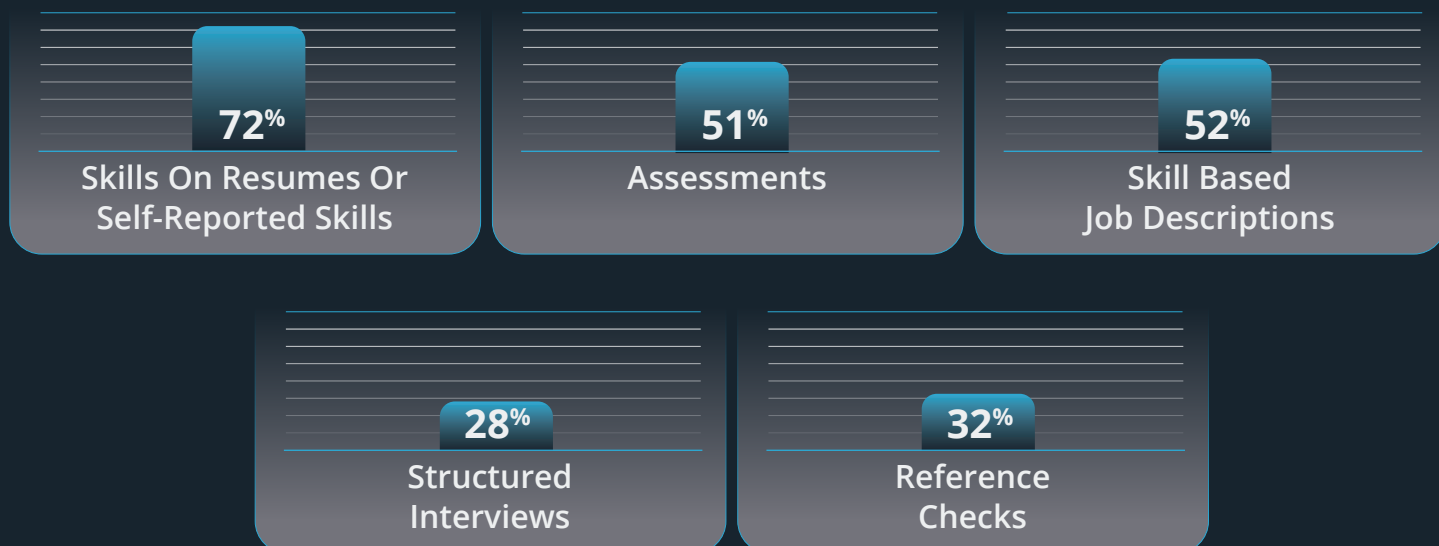
When asked how companies are identifying skills today:  
72% still rely on resumes or self-reported skills from candidates.  
Companies need a more scientific way to validate skills



# 72%

still rely on resumes  
or self-reported skills  
from candidates.

**Figure 4:** How Skills Are Being Identified



Trust is another major concern with the current approach to skills-based hiring. Although AI is transforming hiring, trust remains a challenge:

- ✓ **Only 53% of HR leaders trust AI recommendations.**
- ✓ **58% trust validated skills over inferred.**
- ✓ **51% worry AI incorrectly infers skills.**
- ✓ **Workers fear AI bias and automation risks.**

Transparency is key to increasing AI adoption in hiring. When asked what would make companies trust AI more, 31% stated better integration and 29% stated a combination of AI and direct skills validation (see Figure 5)



#### Insights from the Field:

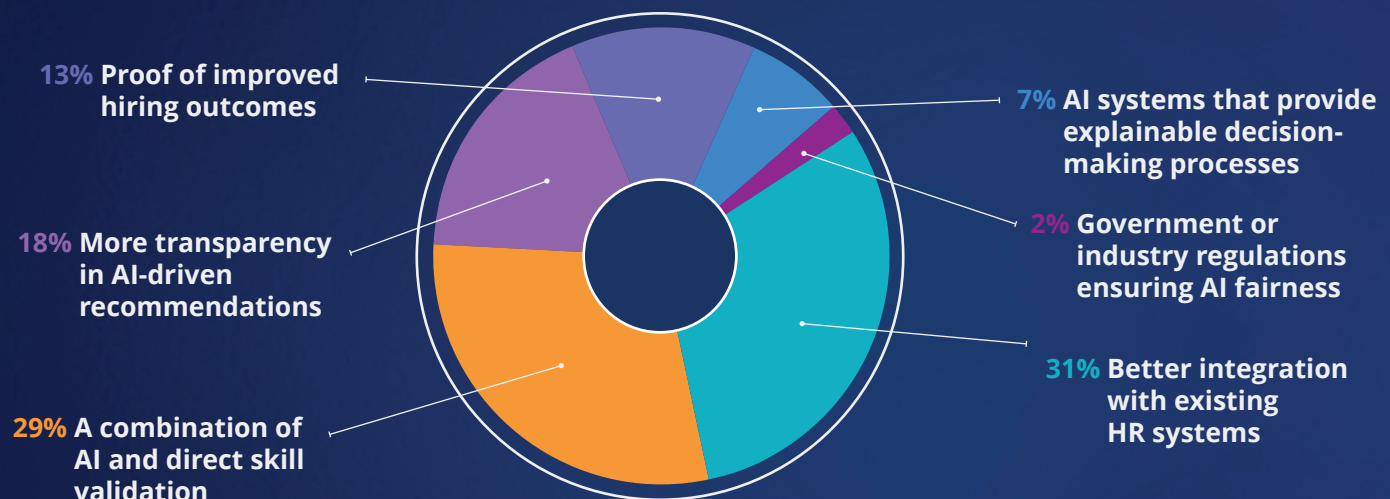
*"Trust but verify applies to hiring. You can trust that what's in a resume is accurate, but you need to verify it. Properly constructed assessments or structured interviews are the tools you need to verify that a person can perform your expectation."*



**- Laura Fields,**

Senior Director TA Operations, Selection and Assessment, Spectrum

**Figure 5:** Improving Trust in AI

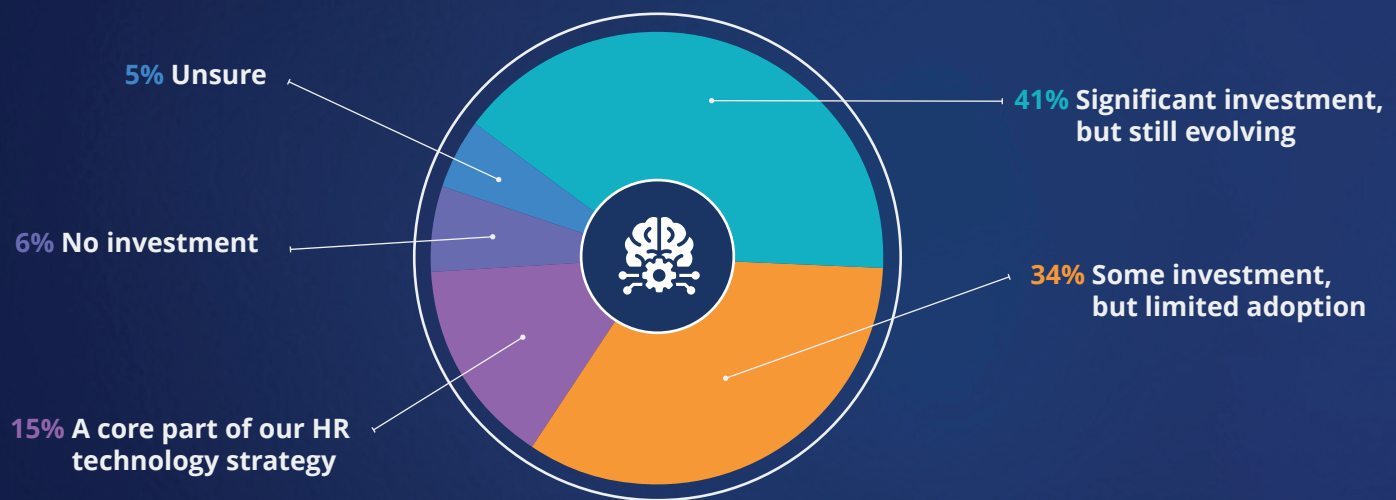


# THE ROLE OF AI IN VALIDATING SKILLS



AI is no longer experimental—it is fundamentally changing hiring. AI plays a critical role in helping companies both infer and validate skills in hiring. When asked how companies are investing in AI to support their skills-based approach, 41% are still evolving and only 15% stated that AI is a core part of their HR Tech strategy (see Figure 6). Many companies are still relying on manual ways to validate skills or stuck on their strategy without leveraging a true technology partner.

**Figure 6:** AI in Skills-Based Approach



## How AI Validates Skills

**Instead of inferring skills, AI-powered assessments:**

- ✓ Conduct video-based skill evaluations.
- ✓ Analyze real-world simulations.
- ✓ Use AI-driven structured interviews to test competencies.

### Inferred Skills

Assumed from resumes and experience

Can lead to hiring bias

Unreliable predictor of performance

### Validated Skills

Measured through assessments and AI-driven evaluations

Ensures objective, data-driven hiring

Stronger predictor of job success



# THE IMPACT OF ASSESSMENTS IN **VALIDATING SKILLS**



In today's competitive hiring environment, the ability to **accurately validate skills** — not just infer them — has become a strategic imperative. Assessments are the cornerstone of this shift, providing scalable, structured, and increasingly sophisticated ways to understand candidate capabilities.

## Insights from the Field:

*"Over and over again, research has demonstrated that past experience has zero power when it comes to predicting job performance. Over and over again research has demonstrated that structured interviews, assessments, and job samples have strong predictive power. Yet, everyone still looks at resumes. Technology has made validating skills scalable; it's time to lean in and give up the resume."*

**- Laura Fields,**  
Senior Director TA Operations, Selection and Assessment, Spectrum

## Why Assessments Matter

Effective assessments do more than measure what candidates know — they measure how candidates apply that knowledge in practice. This distinction is crucial in evaluating job-readiness and performance potential. When thoughtfully constructed, assessments help organizations:

- ✓ **Ensure fairness** by standardizing the evaluation process.
- ✓ **Reduce bias** by focusing on demonstrated ability over pedigree.
- ✓ **Predict performance** with greater accuracy than resumes or references.
- ✓ **Improve hiring outcomes** through deeper data and insight.

Aptitude Research found that companies using assessments were able to see the following impact to DEI, quality of hire, and hiring manager satisfaction.

Figure 7: The Impact of Assessments

	Using Assessments	Not Using Assessments
Improving Quality of Hire	68%	32%
Reducing Bias	62%	28%
Improving Hiring Manager Satisfaction	74%	44%

## Types of Assessments That Drive Value

- ✓ **Job Simulations:** Put candidates in realistic workplace scenarios to evaluate their problem-solving, collaboration, and decision-making.
- ✓ **Structured Assessments:** Objective, role-specific exercises that benchmark skill proficiency.
- ✓ **AI-Enhanced Interviews:** Tools that evaluate soft skills, communication, and behavioral traits using structured prompts and analysis.

But **not all assessments are created equal.**

Many organizations still fall back on pre-packaged, one-size-fits-all solutions, or outsource validation to vague certifications or AI tools. As one experienced practitioner aptly stated:

## The Ideal Assessment Approach

The most effective **strategies blend structure with context**, automation with human judgment. They combine broad skill testing with role-specific insight. A mature assessment approach includes:

- ✓ **Custom content** designed by practitioners who understand both the role and the talent market.
- ✓ **Multiple modalities**, including live tasks, asynchronous challenges, and collaborative working sessions.
- ✓ **Feedback loops** that help refine tools and train interviewers to fairly and consistently interpret results.
- ✓ **Integrity measures** to protect content and maintain a level playing field.

Validated assessments, done right, don't just improve hiring. They redefine it.

# Functional Variations in Skill Validation:

## Moving Beyond Tech Roles

While the conversation around skill validation has often centered on technical roles—such as software engineers, data scientists, and architects—the shift toward validated skills is now expanding across all functions within the organization. Aptitude Research found that validated skills are no longer exclusive to high-skill, high-tech roles, but are becoming increasingly important for roles in operations, customer support, sales, HR, and beyond.

While structured assessments and technical simulations are well established in engineering and IT hiring, companies are now adapting these methods to evaluate skills in non-technical domains—especially as role requirements evolve with automation, AI, and hybrid work.

### Functional Trends in Skill Validation

According to Aptitude's recent study:

- ✓ **Technical roles** (engineering, data, product): Still lead in use of coding tests, simulations, and structured assessments. 85% of companies with validated skills initiatives apply them here.
- ✓ **Customer-facing roles** (sales, support): Increasing use of scenario-based simulations and behavioral assessments to evaluate communication, empathy, and decision-making.
- ✓ **People-centered roles** (HR, learning & development): Growing use of structured interviews and case studies to assess strategic thinking, coaching skills, and adaptability.
- ✓ **Operations and administration:** Incorporating basic tech aptitude tests and process simulations to evaluate workflow efficiency and digital literacy..

### Why This Matters

- ✓ **Validated skills help reduce bias**—especially in non-traditional or internal mobility candidates.
- ✓ **They improve hiring accuracy** by measuring how someone performs in context—not just what's on their resume.
- ✓ **They increase hiring manager satisfaction** by providing concrete evidence of ability.

For HR and TA leaders, the key takeaway is that skill validation should not stop at the edge of the IT department. Whether you're hiring a recruiter, a project manager, or a customer success specialist, the same principles apply: structure the evaluation, define success, and validate what matters.



# MEASURING SUCCESS IN SKILLS-BASED HIRING

To ensure skill validation delivers measurable impact, companies should track:

- ✓ **Bias reduction** – Are hiring decisions becoming more inclusive?
- ✓ **Hiring efficiency** – Are candidates moving through the process faster?
- ✓ **Job performance** – Are new hires performing better?
- ✓ **Candidate experience** – Are applicants confident in the fairness of assessments?

Figure 8 Shows the different ways that companies are measuring the success of their skills-based approach including employee retention and job performance and productivity. These measurements extend beyond just efficiency.

Figure 8:



## Conclusion

Skills-based hiring is no longer a future state—it's a present-day necessity. But simply talking about skills isn't enough. Organizations must evolve beyond resume reviews, buzzwords, and surface-level signals into a model that actively tests, proves, and trusts in real capability.

Validated skills represent a turning point in how we identify talent. They demand better tools, more thoughtful design, and a willingness to invest in both people and process. This includes leveraging technology responsibly, designing rigorous assessments, and embedding human judgment where nuance matters most.

True progress comes from aligning talent acquisition, HR, and business leaders around a shared understanding of what great looks like. The organizations that commit to this level of clarity and rigor will not only hire better—they'll build teams with the resilience and readiness to thrive in an unpredictable world.

The conversation on skills is evolving. Whether through AI, assessments, or collaborative working sessions, the goal is clear: shift from guessing to knowing. Skills-first isn't a toolset; it's a mindset.



## ABOUT US



Aptitude Research is a leading human capital management (HCM) research and advisory firm. Our in-depth research and vendor assessments help HR leaders develop a deep understanding of the HCM technology landscape, including talent acquisition and engagement, to ultimately make better purchase decisions.

Our flagship research, delivers a comprehensive look at talent acquisition trends and technology. This knowledge, combined with our consulting and advisory services, enables companies to save time, money and improve the recruiting, hiring and workforce management experience.

Founded by leading analyst Madeline Laurano and based in the Boston area, Aptitude Research provides a wealth of HCM expertise to companies, vendors and investors. View our recent and upcoming research at [www.AptitudeResearch.com](http://www.AptitudeResearch.com) or connect with us on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

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**To learn more, visit [HireVue.com](http://HireVue.com)**