



Insights for Accelerating a Ready Workforce

Tap into skills, enable culture, and support mobility.

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Executive summary.

Few things are more important in business than having a workforce equipped with the skills and capabilities to perform the work that needs to be done, when and where it's needed most.

This is workforce readiness at its core. And given the pace of change in the world today, having an agile, ready workforce is of paramount importance.

Sadly, the current state of workforce readiness worldwide is . . . not ready.

That's based on findings from a survey conducted by the Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp), a research organization focused on discovering people practices that drive high performance. Several areas need significant attention, from understanding the skills of current employees and the future needs of the organization, to developing those critical skills through more robust learning and talent mobility initiatives, to taking an expansive view of workforce readiness that includes employee well-being, inclusion and belonging, organizational culture, and more.

Responses from more than 1,300 HR and business executives across 80 countries revealed that only 30% believe their organization's workforce currently has the skills necessary to advance strategy over the next 1 to 3 years.

At a high level, there are two ways to remedy this: buy or build, hire or develop. Focusing on the build/develop side of the equation, some alarming results surfaced among respondents who represented organizations with 1,000 or more employees:

- 27% believe LinkedIn knows more about their organization's workforce than the actual organization does
- Only 12% consider skills training efforts within their organization to be effective
- 39% say it's easier for their employees to find jobs externally than internally

This paper shares additional findings and provides recommendations and best practices for three ways organizations can improve their capability to build or develop for workforce readiness.

Develop a ready workforce through a learning culture of continuous skilling.

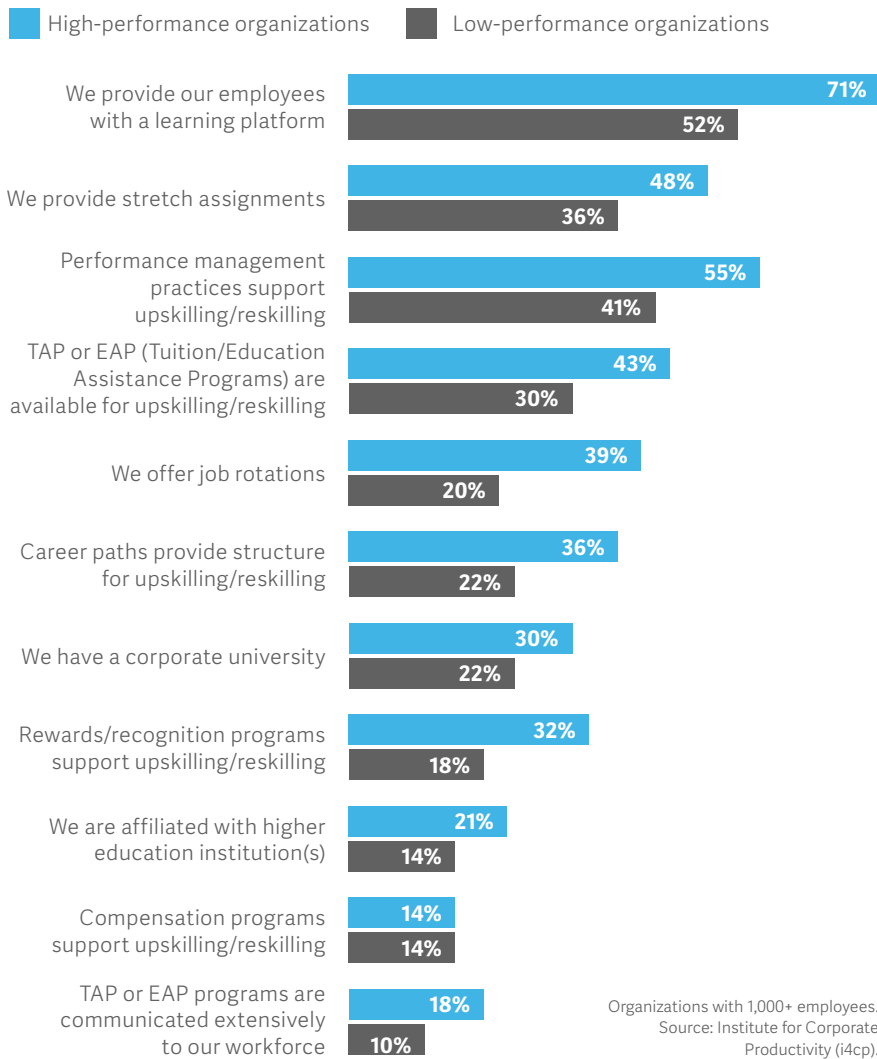
Organizations cannot entirely—or even mostly—hire their way to optimal workforce readiness. This means that upskilling (i.e., developing new skills to improve one's performance in their current role) and reskilling (i.e., developing new skills to take on a new job) must play a key role in any workforce readiness strategy. Unfortunately, only 12% of survey participants said that their organization's current upskilling/reskilling efforts are effective to a high or very high extent, though high-performance organizations are doing much better (20%) than low performers (6%).

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High-performance organizations more often support the continuous skilling of their employees via a host of practices, starting with basics such as providing employees with a robust learning platform and evolving their performance management practices to better emphasize upskilling/reskilling. Although they are few, high-performance organizations offer job rotations, career pathways to provide structure for upskilling/reskilling, or rewards/recognition programs to support continuous learning.

How to support continuous skilling of employees.

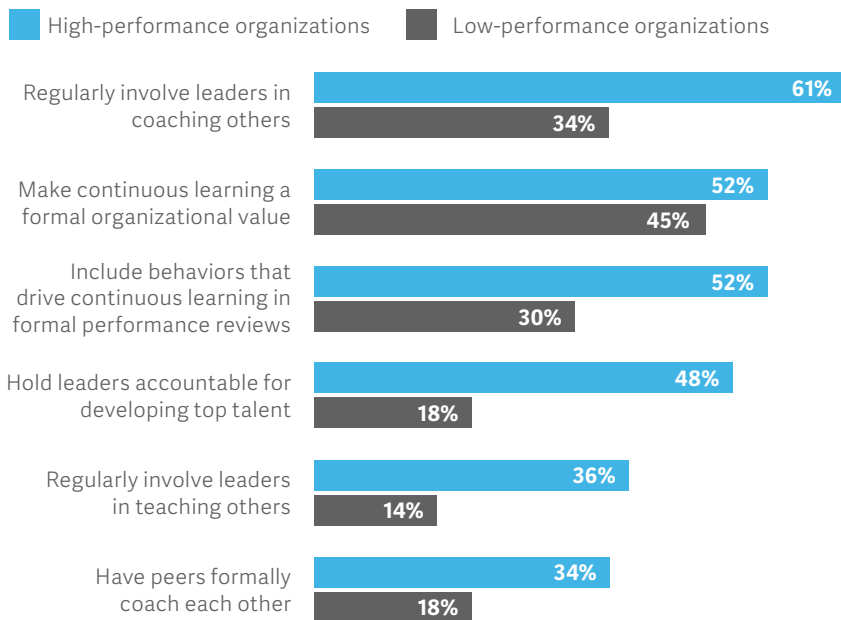


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In addition to these many specific practices and more, establishing and maintaining a learning culture is the tide that lifts all boats when it comes to increasing upskilling/reskilling within an organization. High-performance organizations significantly lead low performers in these practices: regularly involving leaders in coaching others, driving continuous learning in formal performance reviews, holding leaders accountable for developing top talent, and regularly involving leaders in teaching others. Of course, this last practice needs to be weighed against the many other responsibilities that leaders have. But looking at leaders as teachers has proven time and again to benefit both learners and leaders. Learners benefit through the added stories and experiences; the leaders themselves benefit as they become better aware

of the diverse skills of the people within their organization and sharpen their understanding of the program material.

How to establish and maintain a learning culture.



Only 30% of respondents said their organization is effective at facilitating the internal movement of employees.

Organizations with 1,000+ employees. | Source: Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp).

Enhance workforce readiness by enabling greater talent mobility.

In the August 2021 *Harvard Business Review* article “[Let Your Top Performers Move Around the Company](#),” i4cp’s CEO Kevin Oakes stated that one of the telltale indicators of a low-agility and low-performance organization is allowing managers to keep their top performers from moving anywhere else in the company—also called talent hoarding.

Among the challenges of talent hoarding is its persistence: 43% of survey participants said their organizations have managers who often hoard talent rather than encourage internal movement. This highlights a major area of opportunity for cultural growth and development that will reap benefits for most organizations: unlocking all the trapped value that resides in workers who are unable to leverage, further refine, or develop new capabilities to the benefit of their employer and themselves. This deeply ingrained behavior of talent hoarding is a serious challenge—one that requires concerted effort to address and for leadership to model in order to drive change.

Consider these findings:

- 39% of respondents said it’s easier for their employees to find a job externally than internally
- Only 30% of respondents said their organization is effective at facilitating the internal movement of employees
- 27% of respondents said it is easier to hire from outside the organization than from within

- Only 12% of survey participants said their organization recognizes or rewards managers for talent movement

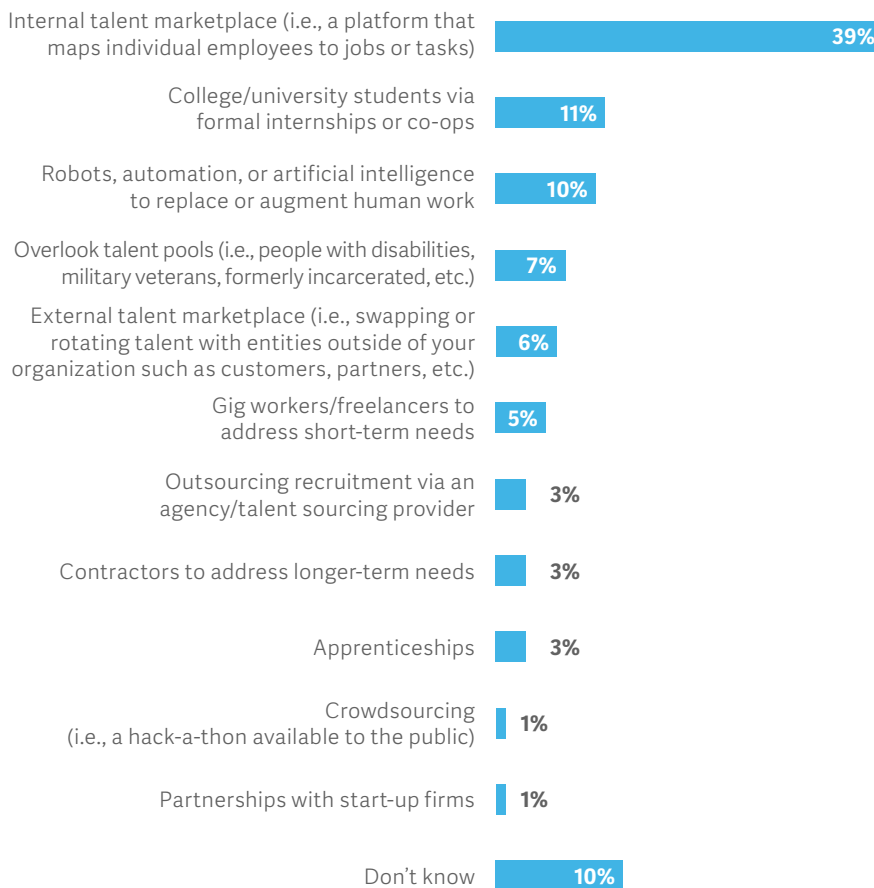
Fortunately, a solution to these perceptions and issues is readily available: the creation of internal talent marketplaces, sometimes also referred to as internal opportunity marketplaces. This is a proven practice that is a powerful lever for increasing mobility, opportunities for development, retention, and ultimately, productivity and market performance.

Case studies from i4cp on companies such as Disney, Tiffany & Co., Unilever, and others demonstrate the power of internal talent marketplaces. While only 19% of survey participants indicated their organization currently leverages these platforms to access needed skills or capabilities, high-performance organizations were twice as likely to do so than low performers.

Not only that, but survey participants indicated that internal talent marketplaces were by far the most promising source of opportunity for skills and capabilities for the next 1 to 3 years. When given the chance to choose only 1 from a list of 11 talent sources (outside of traditional full-time and part-time employees), 39% chose internal talent marketplaces—far outpacing college and university students via formal internships and co-ops (11%) and robots, automation, or artificial intelligence (AI) to replace or augment human work (10%).

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Source of skills and capability that presents the greatest opportunity in the next 1 to 3 years.



Organizations including very high/high extent with 1,000+ employees. | Source: Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp).

High-performance organizations implement several practices that support an internal talent marketplace, such as training managers on the platform's goals and objectives and identifying potential organizational roadblocks (i.e., policies and procedures) that could inhibit managers from using the platform.

Three other valuable practices are incentives, rewards, and recognition. High-performance organizations are 4x more likely than low performers to reward or recognize employees who use the internal talent marketplace, and 3x more likely to reward or recognize managers for encouraging employees to do so.

Going further than rewards and recognition, some organizations have reconfigured their pay systems in order to incentivize employees for success with project-based work—a common type of work opportunity available via internal talent marketplaces. High-performance organizations (38%) are 7.5x more likely than low performers (5%) to follow this important next practice.

Support role shifts for greater individual and business success.

Well before the extraordinary events of 2020, about 30% to 40% of an organization's workforce was likely experiencing some type of a job shift in any given year. This could be those joining the company for the first time, or those taking on a new role, a promotion, or a new project. Amplified by the pandemic and now the Great Resignation, the number of job shifts is skyrocketing.

While these shifts offer exciting career advancement and important opportunities to grow critical skills, job shifts can also result in peril over promise. Even at the most senior level where the greatest attention is applied to success, McKinsey reports that 27% to 46% of executives who transition are regarded as failures or disappointments 2 years later.

The consequences to their network are also considerable and costly. McKinsey research finds when leaders struggle through a transition, the performance of their direct reports is 15% lower than it would be with high-performing leaders. Further, direct reports are also 20% more likely to be disengaged or to leave the organization.

Unfortunately, this rise in job shifts is happening as remote and hybrid work make it challenging for job shifters to build new networks. In fact, Microsoft's analysis of 122 billion emails and 2.3 billion meetings confirmed the growing issue of network atrophy during the pandemic. Specifically, the atrophy of bridging ties makes it harder for job shifters to be pulled into the high-value work that is critical to success and satisfaction during the first year.

What to learn from the fast movers.

While no one could have anticipated today's job shift explosion, several years ago there were ample signs of increasing role transitions, growing collaborative intensity, and the significant cost of ineffective transitions. So Connected Commons, a research consortium co-managed by thought leader Rob Cross and i4cp, launched a research program designed to [help people accelerate transitions](#).

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An analysis of network data from 300 organizations and more than 160 in-depth interviews revealed that 10% to 15% of people (later referred to as “fast movers”) were becoming well connected in one-quarter to one-third of the time of their peers. These people became not just well connected, but they specifically replicated the networks of high performers and reaped the benefits of rapid productivity, innovation, higher engagement, and lower risk of attrition. To help all job shifters realize fast-mover benefits, Connected Commons researchers captured the secrets of the fast movers in a set of principles and practices.

Five Next Practices to accelerate success and satisfaction.

Appreciating that role shifts are often a challenge for workforce readiness, the i4cp Workforce Readiness study examined the degree to which organizations encourage employees in new roles to apply the fast-mover practices. The results were striking, with all of the practices correlating with i4cp’s Market Performance Index (which considers revenue, profitability, market share, and customer satisfaction over five years). From this, five practices were identified as Next Practices—ones that correlate to high performance but aren’t yet being used by many organizations:

- 1 Identify and engage people who are opinion leaders or network influencers to create legitimacy, reputation, and organizational know-how.** A connection with one or more network influencer leads to more successful outcomes for projects and goals, as well as opportunities for new hires and newcomers to be drawn into future work. Potential influencers fall into four categories:
 - **Central Connectors** have many informal connections and are influential within a group—typically within a function, location, or capability.
 - **Boundary Spanners, or Brokers**, have ties across groups or geographies and can help integrate networks and perspectives.
 - **Energizers** create passion and enthusiasm in their interactions.
 - **Resisters** are negative influencers; they may be vocal about their opinions, passively resist, or simply pursue different goals.
- 2 Position expertise to align with others’ goals and objectives.** Rather than pushing their knowledge or experience out of context, successful new hires and job shifters ask questions, listen closely, and tailor how they present their expertise to address colleagues’ problems or help with challenges. They consider whether their behavior in meetings and casual interactions creates enthusiasm or disinterest. More effective people show genuine interest, are positive, give respect and status to others, and co-create mutual benefits of working together. They follow up and stay connected without expectation, recognizing that some of these early interactions are likely to benefit them and, eventually, their work.
- 3 Engage others by pursuing mutual benefit.** Pursuing a mutual win with stakeholders and teams will produce better, more substantive results and more effective network ties. When new hires and newcomers help people see solutions to their problems and ways to attain their goals in the work they are proposing, they generate more interest and greater ownership.

A connection with one or more network influencer leads to more successful outcomes for projects and goals, as well as opportunities for new hires and newcomers to be drawn into future work.

Colleagues are more creative and willing to help when they see a benefit to themselves or their group. They are likely to contribute time and support later as the work evolves or is implemented. Pursuing mutual wins also helps the new person establish a reputation as someone others appreciate and want to work with.

4 Shift patterns of interaction to proactively manage collaborative overload. In transitions, a surge of work to build a diverse network is necessary to grasp a new role and context. But the patterns and habits of involvement and communication that are helpful early on can become inefficient and overwhelming. After six to nine months, new hires and job shifters should evaluate their priorities and impose structure to streamline collaborative demands, alter their mindset on when and how to collaborate, and adapt behaviors for more efficient interactions. When people don't do this well, they get over-utilized, create reliance on themselves that cannot be sustained, and are at risk of derailment because they are unable to meet expectations or adjust to new demands. In contrast, more effective people gain back 18% to 24% of their time by making just three or four small changes.

5 Assess and refresh networks to ensure diverse, enterprise-wide connections and relevant external ties. Research shows that within 9 to 12 months of a new role—and periodically, as demands, goals, and circumstances change—more effective people evaluate their networks to ensure they are investing in relationships needed for long-term performance and growth. Four kinds of relationships are critical and should be assessed in the context of key projects or priorities slated for the coming 6 months. These relationships include connections for:

- Emergent ideas, creativity, and innovation
- Expertise, depth, and best practices
- Professional growth and career development
- Political support and influence

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Thriving in an era of change.

While organizations strive to mitigate the effects of the Great Resignation, the long game must be about improving workforce readiness, which requires high-performance strategies to support being agile organizations that thrive in this new world of work we're all experiencing. As you devote your energy and resources to these goals, an abundance of research indicates that organizations that support continuous skilling, talent mobility, and successful transitions can help accelerate both success and satisfaction for the business and the workforce.



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