



WHITE PAPER

The Skillsoft® Learning and Talent Maturity Framework™:

A path to accelerate HR's adaptability and your workforce's agility



By Kieran King

Vice President, Global Customer Insight, Skillsoft

Key Contributors:

[Brent Colescott](#), Director of Business Strategy and Transformation for SumTotal, A Skillsoft Company

[Laura Overton](#), Founder and CEO, Towards Maturity

[Dr. Shreya Sarkar-Barney](#), President and Founder, Human Capital Growth Inc.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Warnings have been issued, yet only a few are ready	4
What really good looks like ... the self-developing organization	6
The indicators of maturity	7
The nine success indicators	8
Thought-leader insight: Laura Overton, Managing Director, Towards Maturity	12
Why learning maturity matters	12
High aspirations of today's people professionals	12
What is holding organizations back?	13
Who is achieving the best results?	13
What are the top-performing learning organizations doing differently?	14
Maturity Matters	15
Learning and Talent Management Maturity Framework Matrix	16
Thought-leader insight: Shreya Sarkar-Barney, Ph.D., President and Founder, Human Capital Growth	23
A roadmap to business impact	23

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONTINUED)

Why change?	23
Significance of the model	23
How to change?	24
Conclusion: take a step forward	25
About the author: Kieran King	26
About the key contributor: Brent Colescott	26
About the key contributor: Laura Overton	27
About the key contributor: Dr. Shreya Sarkar-Barney	27

WARNINGS HAVE BEEN ISSUED, YET ONLY A FEW ARE READY

In 1997, a groundbreaking McKinsey study exposed workforce vulnerabilities for human resource teams in their book, "The War for Talent," yet almost 20 years later as the human capital field is desperate for a revolution, most organizations are not prepared for battle.

The dynamics of talent's low supply and high demand are playing out across the globe, affecting every industry sector and continent. A recent study from PwC called "Redefining Business Success in a Changing World" found that 72% of CEOs are concerned about the availability of key skills and 48% are planning to increase headcount¹. However, the majority of human resource teams are still employing decades-old traditional practices which don't come close to addressing the priorities. In fact, a recent Deloitte University study² reports that the percentage of companies rating learning and development as a "very high" priority tripled in a year, yet organizational readiness is declining at a rapid rate. Only 40% of organizations indicated they were ready to face these challenges, which was 35 points less than the year before. This inverse dynamic is more than intellectually disturbing.

Amid the readiness concerns for the overall workforce, retention and succession gaps are leading to anemic levels of qualified leaders. The same PwC CEO study reported that the top talent concern among executives is fortifying the future leadership pipeline³. Leadership capability is seen by CEOs as a key ingredient in an enterprise's ability to remain competitive and relevant. Given that high-performing leaders relate to a more engaged workforce, better productivity and nearly 50% higher profitability, leadership remains a top challenge for organizations⁴.

In sum, the soft approach many HR teams have taken in the past won't cut it as organizations strive to meet hard business vulnerabilities.

No doubt, it's difficult to change. The war for talent will involve far more than novel recruiting tactics. It will take wholesale HR adaptation. To some enterprises, this might be quite disruptive. However, the need for organizations to morph how they manage and grow talent is about as fundamental as Darwin's principles for evolutionary theory itself. Conditions have changed remarkably. The demographic shifts, revamped business models, digitization of products, rise in big data analytics and new forms of competition require organizations to fuel perpetual skill upgrades. HR must evolve to apply new paradigms toward talent attraction, mine for unrealized capability, build rapid development tactics, implement highly effective engagement strategies and unveil succession

"According to Darwin's 'Origin of Species,' it is not the most intellectual of the species that survives; it is not the strongest that survives; but the species that survives is the one that is able best to adapt and adjust to the changing environment in which it finds itself."

Leon C. Megginson

1 19th Annual Global CEO Survey by PwC. 2016.

2 Global Human Capital Trends 2015, Leading in the New World of Work by Deloitte University Press. 2015.

3 19th Annual Global CEO Survey by PwC. 2016.

4 State of the American Manager by Gallup. April 2015.

pathways with far more innovation than they have demonstrated to date. Old assumptions and stale practices need to be abandoned. Organizations who successfully compete for talent will exploit technology to achieve a smarter way, build a healthier culture and develop a more resilient workforce.

A key part of accomplishing better outcomes involves breaking down the artificial walls between talent management and learning. Talent management teams possess a wealth of insights into how the workforce needs to be shaped, while inordinate numbers of L&D departments are operating independent of this vital information. As Figure 1 depicts, many organizations unintentionally silo the talent management processes away from learning. This “bolted-on” approach results in a clunky experience for employees and causes HR to apply focus toward fixing integration issues instead of building capabilities for the organization.

When talent and learning are interwoven, the ability for employees and the organization to achieve its strategic results can be systemically actualized instead of coincidental. It is vital that HR analyze the business aims and align talent and learning to directly support each other. According to the Towards Maturity benchmarking research, the best-in-class organizations routinely align their efforts with the business strategy. In less mature organizations, only 36% of organizations repeatably look to align to the business agenda⁵. How can executives be expected to tolerate such lack of alignment?

Organizations are recognizing that they must shift from “training” employees with an event-centric approach to designing environments where employee development flourishes as a growth enabler. Developing talent is far more than setting up a catalog within an LMS and ensuring annual performance reviews take effect. As the interplay between the talent management and learning pieces gradually becomes more cohesive, and as the alignment to the strategic agenda improves, workforce performance levels increase. Learning becomes a lever that is truly embraced and encouraged as a synergistic part of the workflow and an intrinsic component of each talent facet.

Achieving this type of symbiotic relationship between talent and learning not only dissolves silos, it also creates competitive differentiation. Organizations that apply this modern approach build superior employer brands, entice a higher level of talent to join their ranks and optimize the existing workforce in new ways.

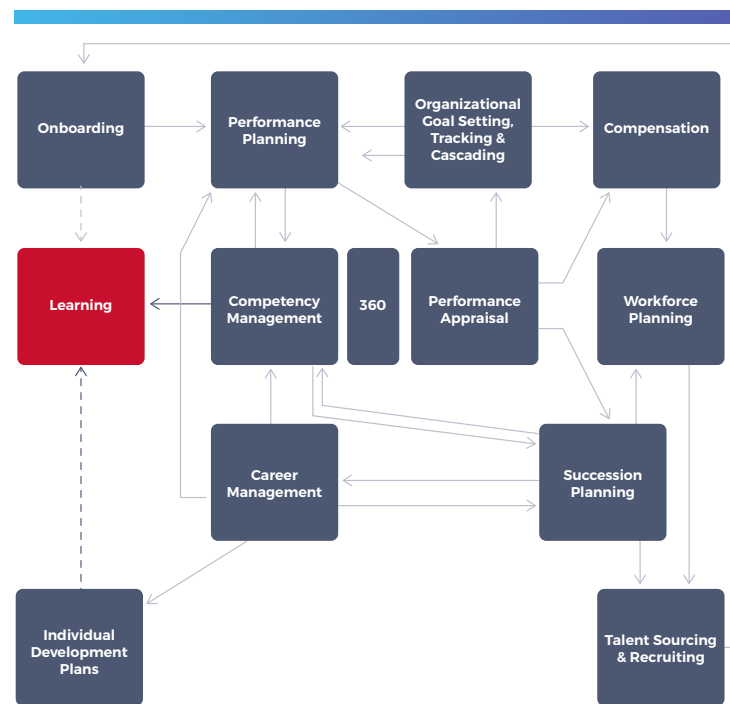


Figure 1: Illustrative schematic of talent and learning process dysfunction

WHAT REALLY GOOD LOOKS LIKE ... THE SELF-DEVELOPING ORGANIZATION

Since Skillsoft has such a vast opportunity to spot best practices we are often asked, “What does good look like?” What the inquirer really wants to know is what really good looks like. Really good is the self-developing organization.

The self-developing organization empowers individuals to take control of their own development and career trajectories.

The self-developing organization provides employees with meaningful context regarding their current capabilities as well as a road map of what they need to accomplish, putting each employee in the driver's seat. It is unified so that employees don't need to search a multitude of disparate systems to pull together what they need. Self-developing organizations make information actionable so employees not only see what they need to do and what they have done. These organizations seamlessly connect staff to the tools that will arm them for the future. Leaders of self-developing organizations gain insights to keep teams engaged, productive and collaborative – all key goals in an increasingly competitive global environment. For the organization itself, the self-developing philosophy enables companies to better attract, retain and reward talent.

The self-developing organization is only possible by leveraging the horsepower of a smarter technology solution, with hyper-personalized development experiences for leaders and individual contributors. It also possesses big data predictive capabilities that come to know each employee's preferences and future needs. Armed with that intelligence, the system delivers unique recommendations before they are sought out and it signifies ways to repurpose employees to enhance talent mobility.

The credo of a self-developing organization embodies the following:

- Learning and talent management efforts and technologies should be coupled together.
- High-quality, curated content delivered in the context of job performance is essential.
- Fluid talent mobility is key to keeping employees engaged and it is a competitive lever.
- Ubiquitous access to learning – delivery at the time and place of need – is critical to knowledge acceleration.

- The user experience must be frictionless and compelling, bringing inherent value to the way work gets done.
- Technology provides the ability to manage talent and deliver learning in innovative ways.
- The power of analytics provides insights that can predict demand and serve-up hyper-personalized experiences.

THE INDICATORS OF MATURITY

Skillsoft has the privilege of studying over 6,700 organizations and 45 million employees in 160 countries across a diverse industry spectrum. By collaborating with HR teams around the world, Skillsoft has witnessed a series of highly predictable milestones that organizations go through as they shift from perpetuating old ways to adopt pace-setting practices. For more than 10 years, Skillsoft used its Learning Growth Model® to help organizations evaluate their learning strategies against a series of maturity stages. That work provided a firm foundation for us to evolve the model, expanding it to encompass the talent dimension in 2016.

This new talent and learning framework is structured into five stages, just as the prior model was. However, the maturity indicators have gone through quite a transformation. The new framework has nine indicators because its canvas extends to a larger scope. Each indicator is described at a high level within this section, and the detailed characterization by stage can be found in the Learning and Talent Maturity Matrix. As your organization examines the indicators and diagnoses its current stage, it is important to keep in mind that most will not see indicators neatly line up all to one stage. It is far more common to see the majority of indicators under one stage while a few lie in a different stage.

By utilizing this framework an organization can identify its current stage for each indicator and understand what milestones demonstrate progress to the next stage. Skillsoft also invites organizations to participate in the complimentary online diagnostic, a survey-based tool that diagnoses the present stage by indicator and provides a playbook-style set of recommendations to ascend to the next stage.



Click here to launch the complimentary diagnostic.

THE NINE SUCCESS INDICATORS

1. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: The people edge

Work culture plays an important role in encouraging employees to put forth their best efforts and it has a significant effect on employee tenure. This culture determines the way employees interact with one another and how well the organization functions collectively. Enterprises that intentionally foster a healthy culture often do so because it correlates to increased employee engagement, satisfaction and productivity. Today, employees often seek out employers due to their culture. With social media services such as Glassdoor, prospective employees can easily review comments from a company's current and past workers regarding the leadership, work environment and salary. Annually, Glassdoor ranks companies to devise its Employees' Choice Awards. Clearly, information about culture has never been more available and this trend is likely to continue to evolve. Organizations with acclaimed cultures have highly supportive leaders focused on people prosperity instead of viewing staff as a scaffold of workers simply hired to perform static jobs.

2. HR'S ROLE AND STRATEGY: The importance of understanding

According to Towards Maturity benchmarking research, 70% of learning and development teams are not proactive in understanding how the individuals in their organizations learn⁶. While it is not for lack of desire, many struggle to fully connect with the employee base, feeling as though they are pushing boulders up an incline to encourage participation in HR programs. At the root, many HR teams fundamentally do not understand the employees they strive to support. In fact, a recent study found that only one-third of learning teams have a solid understanding of their audiences' business priorities, skills, work environments, career interests, digital capabilities or preferences⁷. The most mature organizations address each member of their workforce as a unique individual. Progressive HR teams also focus on flexible alignment of their team members to remain in close proximity to the business strategy. HR teams operating at the higher levels ensure that the talent and learning structure, roles and supportive processes are tightly integrated. They also have a strong understanding of the business objectives and their employees. Under these conditions, HR teams know precisely what problems they are trying to solve and as a result, their well-articulated strategy tends to be far more nimble and ultimately more successful.

"If the CLO can understand what those key performance indicators are and then cascade them out as key performance indicators for the learning team, then we inherit the very same principles, the very same objectives, of those we're trying to serve. We shouldn't have separate and independent key performance indicators for just the learning function. It should be extremely business relevant."

**Kieran King, Vice President,
Global Customer Insight, Skillsoft⁷**

⁶ "Embracing Change: Improving Performance for Business, Individuals and the L&D Team" by Towards Maturity. November 2015.

⁷ "Key Findings: Becoming a High-Impact Learning Organization" by Bersin by Deloitte. 2012.

⁷ "Is Your Organization Ready For the Fast Lane?" by Chief Learning Officer magazine. <http://www.clomedia.com/2016/03/28/is-your-company-agile/>

3. LEARNING AND TALENT OWNERSHIP: Who's in charge of people development?

The industry is starting to experience a shift beyond internal programs aimed at training people to innovative environments that fuel employees to develop themselves. Traditionalists at the lower end of the maturity spectrum tend to view their workforces as passive sets of audiences. For the more autocratic organizations, the burden for development lies squarely on HR to operationalize programs and tell employees when and where they should develop their skills and explore career options. Career mobility is limited and jobs do not morph frequently. On the other side of the maturity spectrum, the more modern firms catalyze employees to take active roles as part of a thriving development environment. These companies foster the responsibility for shaping capabilities and career opportunities by equipping their employees to steer themselves. Managers operate more as coaches, encouraging employees to take on greater levels of accountability. They also tend to not see employees or their current roles as fixed. Positions can adapt as dynamics change.

4. END-USER EXPERIENCE: Going beyond the three-click rule

Today's end-users expect more. Contemporary principles and state-of-the-art designs deliver simple, effective and enjoyable experiences. A great user experience (UX) enables a user to perform a task successfully, while also providing a compelling experience. Less mature organizations underappreciate the importance of the UX, so they concentrate on satisfying a checklist of features oriented around HR's needs (not the employees'). Less mature companies also frequently keep HR's talent and learning systems distinct from one another, making the use of them cumbersome for employees. Employees in these organizations will often complain that the systems are dated and slow. While hard to believe, in today's technology-rich landscape some HR teams still rely on paper and pencil processes for development plans and performance appraisals. In the ideal state, function and effortless experience seamlessly merge, creating a sticky effect that compels employees to explore more of a system's capabilities. This is something more mature organizations appreciate. This class of companies has a tremendous focus on the end-user experience, and they are vigilant about reducing any friction within the UX. They watch the top consumer end-user experiences closely as their bar to strive toward, since they know employees will bring that level of expectation to the systems they use at work. More mature organizations also ensure that their workforce doesn't see distinct lines between using talent and learning systems.

5. TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE: What's under the hood will determine the speed

Captivating content and delivery platform combinations provide new possibilities for reaching employees and impacting the business. When an organization melds rich employee profiles with intelligent talent and learning software, the full power of what is possible

“In the coming years, self-developing organizations are going to out-perform and out-deliver their peers.”

Josh Bersin, Principal and
Founder, Bersin by Deloitte ⁸

⁸ "The 'Self-Developing Organization'" by Josh Bersin, joshbersin.com, March 2, 2015. <http://joshbersin.com/2015/03/emergence-of-the-self-developing-organization/>

for the self-developing vision can be realized. Companies at the lower end of the maturity spectrum often lack comprehensive staff profiles or job descriptions that can inform talent and learning software. They frequently scramble to devise contemporary job profiles and they typically have elementary levels of employee data and legacy human resource information systems (HRIS). More mature organizations maintain an enterprise competency dictionary and robust job descriptions as well as extensive employee profiles. These higher-stage organizations view their platforms as a way to maximize the return on human capital so they exploit the advantage big data algorithms provide, building out “smart systems” that get more intuitive over time.

6. ELECTIVE PARTICIPATION RATE: If we build it, will they come? It depends on what you’ve built

The level of endorsement for an organization's talent and learning strategy can be judged by the degree of elective participation it receives from the “connected population.” The connected population includes employees that have routine access to a personal computer or device with access to HR’s learning and talent offerings. Beyond compulsory performance reviews and compliance training, how much discretionary use of HR’s talent and learning offerings do employees consume? The more mature organizations have end-user advocates who turn toward the HR experience to continue to grow capabilities and cultivate their careers. There is more employee “pull.” More mature organizations also leverage engagement tactics fueled by big data to encourage more voluntary participation. Less mature organizations have very low elective participation rates and rely on very self-motivated individuals to go beyond the obligatory asks. The less mature organizations also tend to employ traditional marketing techniques to spur elective participation so the uptake is directly influenced by the effectiveness of their “push” campaigns.

7. GOVERNANCE: Moving from nomadic efforts to natural controls

HR’s ability to instill governance is a clear sign of its maturity level. For the less mature organizations, the structure for talent and learning is highly decentralized. It lacks guardrails where efforts are not monitored so there is little coordination between HR’s own efforts and its interface with other enterprise functional groups. As organizations evolve toward higher maturity phases, they gradually see that they must implement more controls in order to get a stronger handle on decision-making, forward-looking plans, resources and cost. At the middle stage of maturity it is common for organizations to establish steering committees that eventually transition into formal governance. In fully mature organizations, the governance for both learning and talent jurisdiction is intuitive. These organizations also operate from a fact base of data to optimize efficiency and continually enhance their effectiveness.

8. FUNDING: Do you need a GPS to determine where the money is going?

While a distributed or federated model of funding may seem liberated, in the end, organizations typically find that they must rein in expenses to maximize their effect. Less modern organizations focus on constant reduction of expenses; there is no predefined

talent investment and spend levels tend to be underwater compared to industry benchmarks. Cloud-based learning is frequently implemented in order to increase scale and offset more expensive training delivery options. Funding processes are not uniform and HR is often subject to disproportionate reductions when economic times are tight. As an organization's strategy matures, rationalization efforts emerge which are often taken up along with procurement counterparts. In more evolved companies, talent is viewed as key investment that directly influences the organization's strategic success. Therefore at the higher levels, budget in human capital often exceeds industry benchmarks. Funding strategies are also artfully coordinated through advanced governance.

9. MEASUREMENT: Without data, it's just an opinion

In literally every function, data-driven decisions are becoming more prevalent and HR is no exception. In the early stages of maturity, organizations tend to focus on garnering participation measures to provide a proxy for success. They use participation rates as the principle means of articulating value. Reporting efforts are often ad-hoc and reactionary. As enterprises move up the maturity framework, their efforts become more proactive and the combinations of data inputs stem outside of what falls within the boundaries of the HR function. As an organization moves beyond traditional practices and transforms, business impact becomes a key measurement pursuit. Productivity metrics become more regular and the organization defines a philosophy regarding learning and talent measurement. As an organization progresses up the maturity model, it steadily increases its own self-discipline toward evidence-based decisions. Eventually, a dedicated practice for measurement is created, including sophisticated data visualizations, statistically oriented software and predictive data modeling.

If organizations choose to stand still, immobilized from evolving due to the enormity of it all, they will invariably fall behind. It's not a matter of if such paralysis would compromise organizational outcomes, but rather, by how much.

Thought-leader insight

Laura Overton, Managing Director, Towards Maturity



WHY LEARNING MATURITY MATTERS

If there is one element that we've seen add real value back to the business, its learning maturity! Towards Maturity's research with over 4,500 L&D and HR leads around the globe shows that mature learning and development (L&D) teams are not only achieving their full potential but they are unleashing the capability of the businesses and individuals they serve. They have moved beyond the role of pure course provider and deliverer of "more for less." They embrace the application of innovative learning strategies to actively support business success. What's more, business leaders around the globe are sitting up and valuing that contribution.

HIGH ASPIRATIONS OF TODAY'S PEOPLE PROFESSIONALS

Maturity matters to all of us regardless of sector, regardless of location. In our last study with 600 L&D leaders, we found that the majority of L&D leaders are hungry to add value back to the business. They recognize that this demands a shift in focus from purely delivering programs to adding real organizational value and placing an active role in creating a culture of learning. Inspired by a wide range of technologies to support learning and talent we found that at least nine out of 10 are looking to:

- Increase efficiency of learning delivery (e.g. 98% are looking to improve flexibility/access to learning and 88% want to prove compliance more effectively)
- Improve individual process (e.g. 95% are looking to improve the onboarding process)
- Add to overall productivity and employee engagement (e.g. 94% are looking to adapt programs to individual need/context)
- Improve overall business responsiveness and agility (e.g. 94% looking to provide a faster response to changing business conditions)
- Play a leading role in building an active learning culture (e.g. 96% are looking to improve the sharing of good practice)

However, whilst 75% of L&D leaders are making progress in improving compliance, fewer than half of them are achieving their aspirations. In fact, we have seen that each of these stages of maturity are increasingly difficult to achieve. The proportion of organizations that are achieving their goals is depicted in Figure 2.

WHAT IS HOLDING ORGANIZATIONS BACK?

There are a number of barriers holding us back including:

- **Lack of skill to embrace technology:** L&D leaders are applying more technologies to their learning solutions yet 56% of them do not feel their teams have the skills to embrace new technologies
- **Perception of learner reluctance:** 63% of L&D leaders believe their staff members lack the skill to manage their own learning
- **Lack of management backing:** 48% claim that learning is not seen as a management priority
- **Technology barriers:** 33% report lack of support from IT

WHO IS ACHIEVING THE BEST RESULTS?

Over the years, Towards Maturity has found that organizations that are executing their efforts within a framework of six workstreams are more successful. These workstreams within the Towards Maturity Framework™ are listed below. Organizations measure their maturity against the framework using the Towards Maturity Index™:

1. Defining need
2. Understanding learner context
3. Understanding work context
4. Building capability
5. Ensuring engagement
6. Demonstrating value

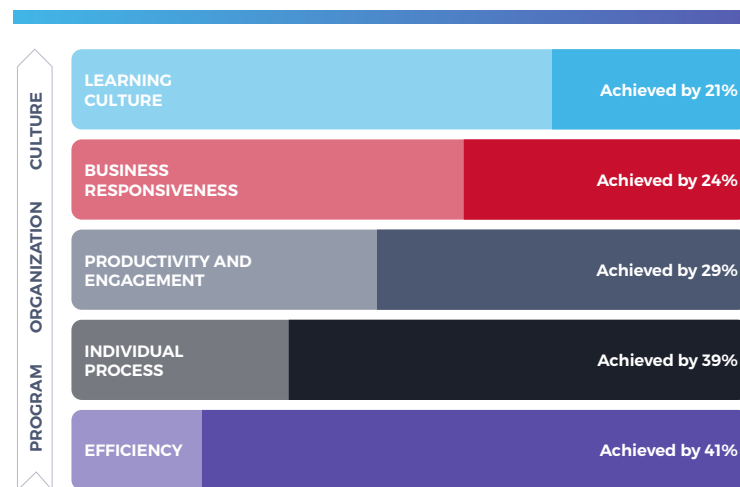


Figure 2: To what extent are goals being achieved? n=600. Used and adapted with permission.

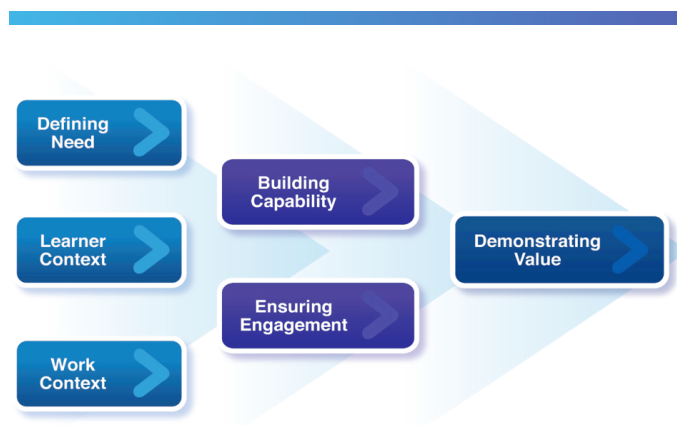


Figure 3: the Towards Maturity Framework™ - Six workstreams of success

So at a high level, success is not linked to a specific mode of technology, budget size or headcount. Rather, it's about applying business sense to learning strategy.

Importantly, Top Deck organizations, those who reside at the upper 10% of the Towards Maturity Index™, consistently report better results:

- 3 times more likely to report benefits relating to **efficiency and business improvement**
- 5 times more likely to report benefits relating to **productivity and business agility**
- 8 times more likely to report benefits relating to **learning culture**

As one might also expect, the top performers also see fewer issues in adopting new technologies as well as fewer issues garnering management and IT support.

WHAT ARE THE TOP-PERFORMING LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS DOING DIFFERENTLY?

Top-performing organizations provide us with a glimpse of the future of workplace learning. Some examples of how they apply business thinking to their learning strategy:

- **Defining need:** They prioritize outputs, not inputs
 - 84% analyze the problem before recommending a solution (55% is average)
 - 86% agree that everyone on the L&D team understands the strategy plans and priorities of the business (59% is average)
- **Learner context:** They focus on the “customer”
 - 86% are proactive in understanding how staff currently learns what is needed for their job (30% is average)
- **Work context:** They build strong stakeholder relationships and break down silos between learning and HR
 - 88% involve managers in the design of the most appropriate solutions
 - They are three times as likely to agree that learning supports the recruitment and onboarding process

- **Building capability:** They address the critical skills gaps within the L&D function to deliver against goals
 - 90% agree that the L&D role is shifting from learning delivery to consultancy (54% is average)
 - 73% of their L&D staff are confident in incorporating use of new media in learning design (28% is average)
- **Ensuring engagement:** They know how to manage change
 - 88% ensure that a communications plan is in place for all stakeholders (39% is average)
- **Demonstrating value:** Evidence-based decision making is vital
 - Almost 4 times as likely to use learning analytics to improve the service they deliver
 - 3 times as likely to measure specific business metrics when evaluating the effectiveness of a learning program

MATURITY MATTERS

The impact of a mature learning strategy matters not only to L&D and HR but to business leaders and to individuals as they seek out to continually grow, perform and adapt. However, achieving the results of a mature learning strategy is a journey, a journey where we can all help each other. Benchmarking, both formally and informally, helps identify the tactics that have the potential to make a difference. It is only when we take action on those tactics that we will be one step closer to achieving our goals.

LEARNING AND TALENT MANAGEMENT MATURITY FRAMEWORK MATRIX

INDICATOR	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5
	SILOED	TARGETED	TRANSFORMING	CONTINUOUS	OPTIMIZED
Organizational Culture	<p>Learning and talent are often separate processes. Both are regarded as necessary for HR operations but they are distinct from how business is done. Most employees do not regard the culture as engaging. Culture is frequently hierarchical. HR may conduct an engagement survey periodically but the inertia behind addressing some of the engagement challenges is low.</p>	<p>Executive support for learning and talent is more evident but the culture is still principally characterized as a top/down command and control philosophy. The organizational structure is fairly hierarchical but employees see opportunity for career advancement and mobility. Senior leaders are not purposefully driving efforts to enhance the culture or the level of engagement among employees.</p>	<p>Learning and talent begin to converge based on an awakening of how they can be exploited to achieve better business outcomes. Employees recognize a shift toward more people-centric strategies as executives support more initiatives that strengthen the culture. Key to success in this phase is the degree of middle management support. Information flow becomes more organic.</p>	<p>An inspired, growth-minded enterprise is recognized as a true learning culture with a people-first philosophy. The organization is outputting perpetual innovations and responds quickly to market changes, often seizing first-mover advantage and outstanding talent. Engagement studies are regularly conducted to measure the tempo of the employee culture and there is wide-spread support for adjusting tactics when signs of engagement begin to drop.</p>	<p>A self-developing ecosystem drives change at individual and organizational levels. Collaboration and transparency in career and development abound. Employee ideas are valued and encouraged regardless of level. The organization is agile and consistently at the front of its field. The people culture is at the heart of the organizational philosophy. As such, multiple measures of employee engagement are used and there may be a dedicated function aligned to the employee experience. Highly sought after employer.</p>

INDICATOR	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5
	SILOED	TARGETED	TRANSFORMING	CONTINUOUS	OPTIMIZED
HR's Role & Strategy	<p>Process Resource Minimal overarching learning and talent strategy directs the HR team's efforts. The HR team is largely reactive to the business stakeholders with respect to independent processes (acquisition, training, succession, compliance, etc.) The scope of HR's roles and structure hold the function back from understanding the business and the employees. Several HR systems may be manual.</p>	<p>Program Manager Strategies regarding critical talent and learning functions (talent acquisition, development and performance management) are project managed and process-driven, but they are not integrated. There may also be differing degrees of maturity within talent and learning. HR & L&D begin to engage more proactively with the business to ensure alignment, but efforts are not consistent and change tends to happen slowly.</p>	<p>Catalyst Practices among key learning and talent processes start to become integrated as the organization recognizes the need for greater adaptability. Performance consulting is applied to ensure better alignment between the HR strategies and the business strategies. The cascading of organizational goals as a way to guide individual and team objectives and development begins to become pervasive.</p>	<p>Workforce Architect All aspects (talent attraction, development, promotion, mobility, engagement and rewards) are connected to one another in order to heighten the output of the enterprise. Internal talent mining becomes more adept. The business strategies are routinely translated into talent strategies so the HR team remains in-step with the enterprise.</p>	<p>Competitive Enabler Highly sophisticated and integrated near and long-term HR strategies exist. Strategic objectives, which are typically cross-organizational, require HR leaders to collaborate cross functionally, creating shared goals and actions. Collectively these behaviors drive outcomes. The strategy is continually reviewed to ensure it is on track with the business and averting risk. When necessary, the strategy is rapidly altered based on data-driven inputs to stay at the fore.</p>
Learning & Talent Ownership	<p>HR perceives employees as passive about progressing their development and careers. Many of the training needs are compulsory; L&D typically mandates direction. Value of learning and talent is largely from the organization's point of view, not the employee's point of view.</p>	<p>Greater appreciation for employee ownership of development and career starts to emerge. HR recognizes that staff members are initiating their own development, with or without L&D. Select managers are proponents of learning within their teams and they take a more active role in career counseling.</p>	<p>Employees are more visibly accountable for steering their development and careers, and HR begins to design an enabling environment for that to flourish. Developing talent from within is well recognized so clear development paths exist for most roles. Reward systems start to be tied to talent and learning.</p>	<p>Employees demonstrate strong accountability to take advantage of what the organization provides and HR is focused on clearing their paths. Top talent is actively nurtured. Sophisticated systems and social rewards celebrate employee knowledge and skills (badging, micro-credentials, etc.).</p>	<p>Employees are drawn to this organization due to its strong people brand and reputation for a thriving, diverse culture. Employees are provided real-time performance feedback so they can take immediate steps to adapt. Employees actively encourage one another to engage in learning. Managers are people-developers.</p>

INDICATOR	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5
	SILOED	TARGETED	TRANSFORMING	CONTINUOUS	OPTIMIZED
End-User Experience	<p>Learning and talent processes are in parallel but not yet integrated. The employee's interface between the HR processes is disjointed and the user experience varies from one HR process to the next. The learning resources available are from a catalog of offerings (sometimes one or many catalogs) and the resources offered are agnostic to role. A significant portion of learning is delivered through the classroom. Training tends to be event-centric and highly formal. Little to no blended learning exists and no curation efforts are in place yet. Mobile experiences are rarely offered to employees.</p>	<p>Employees are still channeled to learning and talent processes independently but gateways between the two start to emerge. There may be some connection between competencies and learning assets for specific programs or job functions. Learning discovery improves. Multiple modalities are offered with a better balance between formal and informal learning. The L&D team creates simple blended learning designs and social learning is introduced. Curation starts with the organization's content partner aiding the effort. Mobile is available for select talent processes, but not widely adopted. Mobile learning is often immature, and could be restricted to one modality and bound in one app.</p>	<p>HR begins to remove system barriers and to integrate learning into a few core talent processes in order to enhance the employee and leader experience. As the user-experience becomes a more conscious concern, it garners more investment and resources. The learning modality mix continues to increase in variety. Blended learning efforts are more formalized and achieve greater scale. There is an active curation responsibility embraced within L&D, which is done in partnership with business SMEs and content partners. Mobile capabilities are extended and the organization is very accepting of multiple apps in order to ensure optimal end-user functionality.</p>	<p>There is a solid commitment to a compelling and intuitive user-experience. Employees are constantly tapping into a font of relevant resources because they are woven into the workflow and integrated with performance management and succession planning. Individualized development paths are updated routinely with the latest assets. Curation is a vital part of contextualizing the recommendations and keeping pace with new skill requirements. Blended programs are the norm for each function and role. Learning regularly involves connections with others in the form of cohorts or communities. Mobile use is quite high.</p>	<p>HR and learning applications offer a world-class and entirely integrated user experience. The experience embodies a "consumerized" approach that mirrors the applications employees use outside of work and is just one part of the organization's holistic dedication across all functions. As a result, the talent and learning prescriptions are hyper-personalized and multi-modal. Employees are given a dynamically adaptive dashboard that helps guide their competency development in a more intelligent, data-informed way. Gamification techniques for rewarding performance are present. There is a high level of social connection among employees. Mobile access is ubiquitous.</p>

INDICATOR	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5
	SILOED	TARGETED	TRANSFORMING	CONTINUOUS	OPTIMIZED
Technology Infrastructure	Frequently there is no LMS or there may be a legacy system that supports administrative cataloging and tracking of training. Platforms are viewed as back office systems.	Often there is an LMS or multiple learning management systems that involve a heavy administrative and operational burden. Platform elements, whole or in part, are frequently behind the firewall.	Adoption of a consolidated and more sophisticated LMS and TM platform is brought in as a talent accelerant. The organization aspires to adopt a “better agenda” when it comes to its infrastructure.	Platform is viewed as a way to maximize the organization’s human capital so it is continually pacing with the latest platform version and it is typically full SaaS.	The use patterns of employees feed the platform with big data intelligence and the longer these algorithms are in place, the more value they bring to the employees and the organization.
Elective Participation Rate	20%+ of the “connected enterprise” Traditional marketing awareness tactics are used to drive participation in talent and learning programs. Adoption is influenced by the effectiveness and frequency of the “push” efforts.	30%+ of the “connected enterprise” The marketing strategy includes a multi-faceted set of media and engagement techniques to drive uptake. Momentum is dependent on end user experience and direct manager support.	50%+ of the “connected enterprise” Deep linking of talent and learning begins where it is folded into the workflow so adoption builds. Traditional marketing approaches are less necessary.	80%+ of the “connected enterprise” The majority of managers are evangelists for talent development and career planning so employee participation is high. There is more “pull” from the employees versus “push” from HR.	90%+ of the “connected enterprise” Big data insights provide highly personal career path and learning recommendations so participation is extremely high.

INDICATOR	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5
	SILOED	TARGETED	TRANSFORMING	CONTINUOUS	OPTIMIZED
Governance	<p>The talent and learning structure is decentralized, lacking consistent standards and controls. This often results in little to no coordination between corporate and departmental efforts, so operations are highly inefficient. The lack of coordination may hit a pain point or a clash between teams where conflict can arise. Such conflicts often remain unresolved. Since there is a lack of governance-based controls, there is duplication resulting in higher overall expenses.</p>	<p>Coordination between learning, talent and IT starts to become more organized, beginning with the formation of some common standards and partnerships with suppliers, often facilitated by procurement. Typically this stems from an imperative to resolve skill gaps among targeted employee groups (sales, customer service, leadership, new employee orientation, IT, etc.). Organizations may have a learning council but participation tends to be ad-hoc. Agendas for the council meetings are often not directly connected to the business – they are more topically based or simply provide a forum for voluntary sharing.</p>	<p>A steering committee is established to provide oversight to the change management processes. The cross-functional team includes senior executives, business stakeholders, key representatives from talent and learning as well as senior sponsors from IT. Some turf-protections rise up in the early stages. The organization assembles a talent transformation plan to earmark its milestones. Accountability to the plan and adherence to the emerging controls is reported regularly to senior executives. The support of the executive team will greatly influence how difficult it is as better governance is rooted.</p>	<p>Governance is well-established with strong business and procurement stakeholders. Centralized decision making is the norm for the strategic and operational aspects of talent and learning. The infrastructure and processes are standardized across the enterprise. There are often specialized centers of excellence that stay on top of what is trending. Formal meetings (typically quarterly) include senior HR, IT and business stakeholders and executive-level updates are issued after each meeting. Academy or university leads are typically in place to liaise with each business unit, geography or in support of a global portfolio.</p>	<p>The governance processes are fully mature and decisions for all aspects of talent and learning are made from a fact-base of data-driven inputs. The organization runs efficiently because the vision is well understood and controls are not difficult to maintain. There is a high degree of team consensus, often underpinned by a less hierarchical structure where all ideas for improvement are respected. Annually, a detailed plan is written by the governance team to articulate any changes in budget, staffing, program plans, and business alignment practices. The plan also highlights HR's key performance indicators (KPIs) to illustrate how the current plan is tracking to expectations and what adjustments in measures are proposed for the new year.</p>

INDICATOR	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5
	SILOED	TARGETED	TRANSFORMING	CONTINUOUS	OPTIMIZED
Funding	<p>Focus is on continually reducing expenses versus ensuring performance. HR is frequently among the first to suffer in a cost-containment initiative. There is no pre-determined commitment to talent at a certain percentage of payroll or revenues. Cloud-based learning is used to increase scale and bring greater cost-efficiency. Talent acquisition and performance management are typically not automated processes due to lack of desire to invest in modernizing them. Budget for learning and talent is far below industry benchmarks.</p>	<p>Funding processes are not uniform and when times are tight, learning investments are often among the first sacrificed. Not all training spend is visible to the corporate HR organization because considerable “shadow training” investments are made at the departmental levels. Procurement may get engaged to resolve duplicative investments across certain cost categories. Outside of those key investment consolidation projects, funding decisions are commonly federated and often not connected. Budget planning occasionally takes industry benchmarks into account.</p>	<p>The larger rationalization effort is typically coordinated with the expertise of procurement and finance. The cohesion really begins when the first significant centralized funding and platform decisions are made through the consensus of the committee. While the cross-functional steering committee is formed, several opportunities for alignment to the business or elimination of duplication may be missed because this new group is early in its establishment. Budget targets begin to take industry benchmarks into account.</p>	<p>People are regarded as investments that directly influence the organization’s agility so funding is reliably in place and investments are aggressive to retain and attract top talent. With the lion’s share of rationalization opportunities achieved, the focus now is on capitalizing on nascent opportunities to enhance enterprise performance. Budget targets are parallel with industry benchmark best-in-class companies.</p>	<p>People development is an integral part of the enterprise brand, so funding per capita is the highest. Any capital investments for new systems or considerable increases in staff are expressed in payoff to the business. Organizations at this level are often envied, their methods may be shared with the extended enterprise or to others on a consulting basis. Budget is typically significantly above industry benchmarks because it is based on the organization’s KPIs and ROI goals.</p>

INDICATOR	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5
	SILOED	TARGETED	TRANSFORMING	CONTINUOUS	OPTIMIZED
Measurement	<p>Evaluation methods focus on consumption and participation in learning and talent systems or programs. Strides are made to increase the efficiency metrics in order to provide validity for the talent and learning as functions. Reporting is typically ad-hoc upon request and the data is pulled from within each specific application. Learning impact and talent success stories are conveyed through anecdotal testimonials.</p>	<p>Measurement is more disciplined and reports are provided proactively. Report inputs are still not related to one another due to challenges of marrying multiple HR data sources. The effectiveness of learning is examined routinely. The HR team begins to appreciate the need for a more formal measurement strategy and expertise so they benchmark other organizations to learn how to advance. Basic data visualization approaches emerge.</p>	<p>As part of the learning and talent transformation, business impact studies begin. The organization realizes it should be more data-driven in its decision making, especially in the area of talent acquisition and development. Correlations are gleaned from disparate data sources, within and outside HR. Improvements in individual productivity and team capacity can be quantified. A formal practice for measurement is formed and the philosophy is defined.</p>	<p>The hallmark in this stage is that decisions are made on data-based intelligence. HR can conduct causal analyses with experimental design, which is a higher level skill set. These organizations can isolate the impact of other variables from talent and learning interventions. Business impact and ROI studies are regularly conducted. Statistical capabilities are resident in HR and members often possess industry-regarded credentials. Data visualization techniques are sophisticated.</p>	<p>Organizations at this level have a culture of evidence-based decision making and a continuous improvement mindset. A dedicated analytics practice is in place that defines workforce risk and mitigation strategies as well as predictive scenario planning. Complex data visualizations are regularly created and the team is well-versed at telling the “data story.” These organizations have a perennial commitment to advance their measurement aptitude through bleeding-edge best practices and tools.</p>

Thought-leader insight

Shreya Sarkar-Barney, Ph.D., President and Founder, Human Capital Growth



A ROADMAP TO BUSINESS IMPACT

There has never been a better time in the history of the global economy than now to be a professional working in learning or talent management. Every CEO survey lists talent and human capital among the top priorities for driving business success. This emphasis on people parallels annual increases in HR budgets since the great recession. When we look at the results of these investments, the picture is not as rosy as one might expect. Increased funding levels have not resulted in commensurate improvements in workforce capability or retention. As rational humans, we would want to know why.

WHY CHANGE?

Traditional approaches marked by priorities disconnected from business needs and non-integrated solutions have dominated learning and talent practices. As the chorus of disappointment has gotten louder organizations have resorted to activities that are akin to putting bandages (e.g. more event-driven offerings) or increased investments in doing more of the same (e.g. increasing the catalog of training offerings). In times of urgency, business as usual or doing nothing are no longer options. Doing so will come with a fair amount of risk, threatening the continuity of the learning and talent function.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MODEL

The Skillsoft Learning and Talent Maturity Framework™ offers a practical methodology for anyone looking to make tangible improvements. The framework offers a blueprint to help the learning and talent management function pivot in the direction it needs to for the purpose of driving business impact. Many look for silver bullet strategies to excellence, which rarely exist. The Skillsoft framework puts a spotlight on the key elements that must be optimized to drive results. Driving impact requires careful orchestration among culture, people and resources, in a way that delivers valued outcomes. The model elaborates on these elements. Most change is an evolutionary process. The maturity framework has the added benefit of providing stepping stones to reach higher levels of excellence.

HOW TO CHANGE?

Initiating change can seem daunting at first. This may be particularly true if your function has primarily been in a service role rather than a proactive advisory or consulting role. For those in Stages 1 or 2 of the model, the first step will require clarifying expectations with your clients. It will also require establishing boundaries for the work your function will and will not take on. Progressing to Stage 3 requires aligning with the priorities of the business and helping line managers drive outcomes through talent. This step requires a focus on outcomes and adopting an evidence-based mindset to innovate and solve problems. In today's world, we are bombarded with many great ideas and best practices. The plethora of options have added to the confusion and led to paralysis of action. Much worse, it has put at stake the credibility of the learning and talent function. If time and resources are constrained and gaining the confidence of your stakeholders is important, using practices that have prior evidence increases the chances of success. Similar to medical science, there are 150 years of scientific studies, investigating the efficacy of a variety of practices related to human performance. Using these prior estimates for guidance can tremendously increase the likelihood of success. As an added benefit, evidence-based methodologies lend themselves well to measurement and analytics (key elements of Stages 4 and 5). Adopting this approach lays the groundwork for Stages 4 and 5, which focus on data-based decision making and intelligence-driven solutions. Ultimately, evidence-based methodologies provide greater control in future outcomes and create a culture of self-propelled improvements.

Using the Skillsoft Learning and Talent Maturity Framework organizations can write a new chapter that makes the learning and talent function a strategic partner in business success.

Steps to business impact

1. Become clear on what value learning & talent management will help drive
2. Start with the outcomes most critical for business success
3. Use evidence-based approaches to identify practices to drive outcomes
4. Measure, analyze and adjust to fine-tune results
5. Celebrate success!

CONCLUSION: TAKE A STEP FORWARD

For most, change is not an option. The majority of companies must take a step forward, one stage at a time, toward a bolder destination. The human capital challenges HR faces today obliges us to tackle new talent imperatives that are both exciting and urgent. We cannot afford to be complacent: the employees entrusted to us and the enterprise agendas we are asked to support deserve no less.

What's the payoff? Organizations that apply higher levels of talent and learning maturity will be better able to respond to business change and will be better positioned to innovate. They will possess engaged workforces that unbridle potential and navigate change gracefully. Their HR direction is highly purpose-driven, with clear objectives and multi-faceted strategy. They will be undoubtedly more successful in handling dynamics that will affect adaptation and ultimately, organizational competitiveness.

The Skillsoft Learning and Talent Maturity Framework™ is designed to help organizations chart a path to actualize a self-developing organization reality. The framework is based on observations of more than 6,700 organizations with 45 million employees. By taking the complimentary diagnostic, organizations can gauge their current maturity level across nine indicators. At the end of the diagnostic, respondents will receive a report with their current maturity results, as well as prescriptions for advancing to the next stage.

As more HR teams resolve to leverage the insights of forward-looking practices and initiate action toward progress, the field itself will become a more indispensable partner to the business. It's an exhilarating opportunity that simply must be seized.



Click here to launch the complimentary diagnostic.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kieran began her career in the talent field more than 20 years ago. In 1999, Kieran joined CBT Systems (which was acquired by Skillsoft in 2002) and participated in the evolution of the learning industry by consulting with organizations across a wide variety of sectors and geographies. She has consulted with companies to design enterprise learning programs, implement learning and talent platforms, lead strategy engagements, and advise on measuring learning's impact on business outcomes. Kieran has authored several methodologies and white papers, she blogs regularly and she's been featured in magazines such as *Chief Learning Officer*, *Elearning!*, *Talent Management* and *Forbes*. Kieran was also featured on Sirius Radio's *In the Workplace* hosted by Wharton Business School. Today, Kieran studies the composition of successful learning and talent partnerships throughout the world.




Kieran King

Vice President, Global
Customer Insight, Skillsoft

 [linkedin.com/in/kieran-king-2868986](https://www.linkedin.com/in/kieran-king-2868986)

 @kieranmking

 [skillsoft.com](https://www.skillsoft.com)

ABOUT THE KEY CONTRIBUTORS:


Brent has more than 16 years of experience in the learning and talent fields. Since 1999 he has successfully initiated and optimized online learning platforms and programs during his career in the HR, Utilities and Energy industries. Notable accomplishments include being recognized by WebEx as the "Innovator of the Year" in 2005 and by Skillsoft as the "2007 Learning Leader of the Year." Brent holds a Master of Education in Administration and Technology and is the current Chairman of the Humble ISD Education Foundation. He lives in Houston Texas with his wife Tara and their three children.



Brent Colescott

Director of Business Strategy and
Transformation, SumTotal, A Skillsoft Company

 [linkedin.com/in/brentcolescott](https://www.linkedin.com/in/brentcolescott)

 [sumtotalsystems.com](https://www.sumtotalsystems.com)

Laura is the founder and CEO of Towards Maturity, a not-for-profit benchmark practice that provides independent research to help organizations deliver improved performance through learning innovation. Her work is based on 30 years of practical experience in implementing technology enabled learning strategies for business advantage. Laura was also one of the first to research directly with learners in the workplace and runs the **Towards Maturity Learning Landscape**. Laura is an Academic Fellow of the CIPD and a fellow of the Learning and Performance Institute. She is on the steering board of Online Educa Berlin, and the L&D advisory board of the CIPD. In 2016 she was voted number 1 in the **Top Ten' most influential people in the corporate e-learning in the UK** (a position held since 2014) and was also voted 2nd most influential in Europe and 3rd in the globe.



Laura Overton

Founder and CEO,
Towards Maturity

[in](https://www.linkedin.com/in/lauraoverton) [linkedin.com/in/lauraoverton](https://www.linkedin.com/in/lauraoverton)

[Twitter](https://twitter.com/lauraoverton) @lauraoverton

[towardsmaturity.org](https://www.towardsmaturity.org)

Shreya is the president and founder of Human Capital Growth Inc. (HCG), a talent management firm that helps organizations achieve better outcomes using science, analytics, and empathy. HCG offers services that promote leadership excellence and talent management excellence. Prior to starting Human Capital Growth, Shreya led global leadership development at Levi Strauss & CO., and organizational effectiveness and training at Dendrite International. Her work at Dendrite earned the Human Capital award of the year, making her the only employee in HR to be recognized with stock options. Shreya also holds a lecturer appointment at University of California, Berkeley. She is the former chair of the SHRM effort on developing an ANSI standard on employee turnover. Shreya is the author of the book *The Role of National Culture in Transfer of Training* based on a 49 country study of learning impact. She serves on the board of Leaderamp, a science-backed technology platform that amplifies leader development. She is a frequent invited speaker, and has authored several book chapters and peer-reviewed research papers.



Dr. Shreya Sarkar-Barney

President and Founder,
Human Capital Growth Inc.

[in](https://www.linkedin.com/in/sarkarbarney) [linkedin.com/in/sarkarbarney](https://www.linkedin.com/in/sarkarbarney)

[Twitter](https://twitter.com/sarkarbarney) @sarkarbarney

[humancapitalgrowth.com](https://www.humancapitalgrowth.com)



[in](#) [linkedin.com/company/skillsoft](https://www.linkedin.com/company/skillsoft)

[f](#) [facebook.com/skillsoft](https://www.facebook.com/skillsoft)

[Twitter](#) twitter.com/skillsoft

[Computer](#) [skillsoft.com](https://www.skillsoft.com)

[Phone](#) 866-757-3177

ABOUT SKILLSOFT

Skillsoft is the global leader in eLearning with a long history of innovation. We train more professionals than any other company in the world and are trusted by the world's leading organizations, including over 50% of the Fortune 500.

We currently serve over 6,700 customers and more than 45,000,000 learners worldwide and provide continuing, hands-on support to assist them in maximizing their ongoing success.

Skillsoft has grown rapidly, with 2,500 employees across multiple locations in North America, EMEA and APAC. For more information, visit www.skillsoft.com.