

Beyond Degrees: A Conceptual Study on the Shift to Skills-Based Hiring and Its Implications for Human Resource Management

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Abstract

Due to the dynamic technological changes in work and general industry requirements organizational hiring has transitioned to a skills-based system as opposed to the traditional methods of hiring based on degrees. This paper will look into the driving forces behind this shift and they will be digital transformation, evolving job descriptions, skills gaps, and the growth of the gig economy. Using a conceptual research design, the study summarizes available literature in the academic sources and industry reports to study the consequences of skills-based hiring on human resource management. The review points out that the use of degrees as an approximation to the capabilities can be very inefficient in the recruitment process and it can also lock out talent. Conversely, skills-based recruiting allows companies to expand their talent bases, increase job-role fit, and increase workforce flexibility. The research also incorporates the theoretical viewpoints including Human Capital Theory, Resource-Based View, Competency-Based Theory, and Signaling Theory to give a detailed explanation of the shift. The results show that skills-based hiring is a drastic change in the HR core functions. Skill tests and artificial intelligence applications make the process of talent acquisition more empirical, whereas learning and development are concerned with lifelong upskilling and tailored progression. Performance management systems are becoming more output based and workforce planning is becoming more flexible, facilitating internal mobility. Moreover, this method is more diverse and inclusive as it will decrease the dependence on formal credentials and increase the range of opportunities of non-traditional candidates. The transition does not come without challenges even though its effectiveness will benefit the organization and lack of standardized skill evaluation frameworks, as well as resistance to change by the organization. To summarize, it is possible to state that the research shows that skills-based hiring, as one of the approaches, is both strategic and has a future orientation and improves the effectiveness and inclusivity of the organization, which can serve as a solid basis of current talent management activities.

Keywords: Skills-Based Hiring, Degree-Based Hiring, Human Resource Management, Talent Acquisition, Workforce Transformation, Competency Frameworks, Diversity and Inclusion

1 Introduction

Recruitment is changing tremendously as companies are abandoning the degree-based recruitment system to a more skills-based one. Academic qualifications have been used over a decades as the major criteria by which the suitability of candidates is assessed. But this practice is becoming doubtful in the current dynamic and technology-related workplace. Jobs are changing fast, and they need to be practical, flexible

and constantly updated, which formal degrees might not necessarily represent well. Consequently, employers are now starting to place more emphasis on tangible talents and abilities rather than on education.

This change outlines a burning issue in the current hiring systems. There is an increasing lack of connection between what is offered in the educational institutions, and what is needed in the industries. There are too many candidates who have degrees that do not have job-prepared skills, and good people without any formal qualifications often experience difficulties in finding jobs (Blair, Debroy, and Heck, 2025). This imbalance does not only impact the personal career chances but also brings inefficiency in talent acquisition within organizations (Fuller, Langer, and Sigelman, 2022). Also, inflexible dependence on degrees can narrow the diversity and leave a large amount of talented expertise at home, limiting innovation and labor adaptability (Bankert et al., 2024).

This study is necessitated by the growing applicability of skills based recruitment in mitigating these issues. Organizations are increasingly appreciating the significance of competency-based practices with the help of technological aspects like artificial intelligence or digital evaluation tools (Gupta and Sharma, 2025). In addition, workforce transformation, internal mobility, and lifelong learning have some consequences related to the shift towards skills-based hiring (Sahu, Datta, and Bhattacharya, 2026; Dongre and Kanchan, 2025). It is thus necessary to have a conceptual study of this change so as to know how it affects human resource management, especially in recruitment, training, and workforce planning in order to facilitate organizations to have more inclusive, efficient, and future-proof talent systems.

1.1 Research Methodology

The research design of this study is conceptual research design, which is based on systematic review and synthesis of secondary data. The collection of the relevant literature was done in the form of peer-reviewed journals, industry reports, and scholarly literature on skills-based hiring and human resource management. The choice of the sources was based on the relevance, recency, and the contribution to the topic. Thematic analysis methodology was adopted to find the main patterns, concepts, and relationships in the literature. Also, the analysis was supported by such established theoretical frameworks as the Human Capital Theory, Resource-Based View, Competency-Based Theory, and Signaling Theory. It is a conceptual study and does not entail the data collection as primary data.

1.2 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are-

- To study the modern job recruitment to incorporate skills-based hiring as opposed to degree-based hiring.
- To examine the HR implications of skill based hiring
- To determine challenges in the adoption of skills-based hiring practices in the organizations.

2 Literature review

2.1 Review Method of literature

The proposed study will take the conceptual literature review approach that relies on secondary data of scholarly journals, industry releases and theoretical work. The relevant literature was chosen on the basis of recency, relevance and contribution to knowledge of skills-based hiring and its HR implications. Both conceptual and empirical literature were brought in to provide a balanced point of view (Rohitkumar, 2026; Sahu et al., 2026). Reports were used to provide information about the industry in terms of organizational practices (Goel et al., 2023; Bankert et al., 2024). Human Capital Theory, Resource-Based

View, Competency-Based Theory, and Signaling Theory were also included as the foundational theories to assist the conceptual analysis (Wuttaphan, 2017; Lubis, 2022; Makulova et al., 2015; Connelly et al., 2025).

2.2 Literature Analysis

The literature on skills-based hiring that has been published so far can be divided into a few themes that are directly related to each other and explain the current changes in the recruitment practices.

Hiring methods have traditionally been based on the use of academic credentials to determine a level of competence, though more recent research indicates that it has several limitations in determining job suitability. Organizations are also starting to acknowledge that degrees do not offer a reliable representation of practical abilities and have started to lay more importance on skills as a better indicator of talent (Fuller et al., 2022). With the industry reporting, employers can further develop competency-based talent pools and enhance hiring results by focusing on competencies over credentials (Goel et al., 2023).

The second theme is on workforce change and organizational performance. There are better internal mobility, organizational agility, and improved workforce productivity that are linked to skills based hiring. With skills, organizations are able to align employees to roles better, assist in career advancement, and aid the ongoing learning (Sahu et al., 2026). Moreover, the replacement of job names by the skill profiles will allow the firms to react more appropriately to the dynamic demands of the market and the evolving technologies (Prabowo et al., 2025). Workforce flexibility is also reinforced by the focus on lifelong education and professional growth (Dongre & Kanchan, 2025).

The third theme is technology based hiring and skill evaluation. The recruitment processes have been seriously altered by the incorporation of artificial intelligence and digital platforms. AI-driven applications help identify and assess candidate talents more accurately, which minimizes the use of the traditional credentials (Gupta and Sharma, 2025). Other emerging studies also suggest the relevance of alternative certification routes and training in the industry as important in improving employability and reducing skill gaps (Kovalev et al., 2025). Such changes point to a transition to more competency and data-driven hiring systems.

The other urgent theme is inclusiveness and minimization of inequality in the labor market. Competency-based recruitment can also help to shatter the degree requirements also known as the paper ceiling. Organizations can also give opportunities to people of different backgrounds by prioritizing skills over formal qualifications, thus encouraging equity and inclusion (Bankert et al., 2024; MP et al., 2025). Moreover, research indicates that degree dependency is a potential cause of inequality, and skills-based strategies can help to establish a more balanced labor market (Blair et al., 2025).

The fifth theme is associated with competency frameworks and theoretical basis. Competency-based methods give systematic ways of identification, evaluation, and creation of skills in organizations (Krishna, 2019). These theories have wider theoretical underpinnings. The Human Capital Theory puts its value on skills and knowledge to increase productivity (Wuttaphan, 2017), whereas Resource-Based View refers to skills as strategic resources that can bring a competitive advantage (Lubis, 2022). The Competency-Based Theory also helps align the skills with the job requirements (Makulova et al., 2015). Moreover, Signaling Theory discusses why the degrees are no longer used as the indicator of the ability, but are being substituted or accompanied by the reliable assessment of the skills (Connelly et al., 2025). Lastly, the extent of the skills-based hiring in the workforce transformation and talent management are also recognized in the research. The shift demands companies to re-design recruitment systems, invest in

skill development and more flexible human resource practices. On the whole, the literature indicates the shift of the paradigm to competency-based hiring in reaction to the changing economic and technological conditions (Rohitkumar, 2026).

2.3 Research Gap

Although there is a large amount of literature related to skills based hiring, gaps still exist. The majority of the research is dedicated to the practical tendencies and empirical findings, and less integration of the theoretical approach is done to describe the shift in its entirety. Although studies mention positive outcomes like inclusiveness, labor mobility, and enhanced effectiveness of hiring processes, there is a lack of conceptual connection between skills-based recruitment and core HR processes. There has also been little focus on issues like standardization of assessment of skills and organizational preparedness to transition. Moreover, the current literature tends to focus on individual elements, but not on giving a comprehensive plan. Hence, a conceptual research is necessary to fill these gaps and provide a systematic knowledge of the HR implications.

3 Theoretical Framework

The move towards skills-based recruiting within a degree-based framework can be conceptualized in a variety of theoretical models that clarify how a company manages to study talent and generate value to meet the transformative labor market conditions. The paper will rely on the Human Capital Theory, Resource-Based View (RBV), Competency-Based Theory, and Signaling Theory, to present a detailed conceptualization.

The Human Capital Theory focuses on the fact that knowledge, skills and abilities of people are key determinants of productivity and economic value. Human capital has traditionally been used as a proxy in regards to the educational qualifications. Nevertheless, within the framework of changing work needs, this theory serves to justify the concept that the actual skills and competencies give a better indication of the productive potential of a particular person (Wuttaphan, 2017). The trend toward skills-based recruiting is consistent with this view because it focuses more on practical skills rather than academic qualifications. The Resource-Based View (RBV) also provides more reinforcement to this point by viewing human resources as a strategic resource which helps in maintaining the competitive advantage. In the view of the RBV, organizations can attain high levels of performance through the attainment and development of value, rare, and inimitable resources (Lubis, 2022). However, skills based hiring allows firms to find and exploit special talent pools that would otherwise be missed in a degree based system and increases organizational capacity and competitiveness.

Competency-Based Theory offers a systematic approach to the comprehension of the ways in which skills could be identified, measured, and matched to job needs. This practice puts emphasis on the identification of particular competencies that would result in positive performance and building recruitment and development mechanisms on that basis (Makulova et al., 2015). It contributes to the shift to skills-based recruitment, which underlines quantifiable skills and workplace-related behaviors as opposed to official academic achievement.

On the contrary, Signoring Theory describes the conventional use of academic degrees as cues of candidate ability, effort, and intelligence. Degrees have long been a convenient way employers to evaluate potential in cases of information asymmetry. Nonetheless, with the increased use of more direct skills assessment methods within organizations, the use of degrees as indicators is weakening (Connelly et al., 2025). Skills-based hiring is a change towards more transparent and effective signaling processes that feasible and vali-

dated competencies.

All these theories come together to give a complete picture of the shift in hire based on degree, to skills based hiring. Although the Human Capital Theory and the RBV put emphasis on the importance of the skills, Competency-Based Theory can provide practical structures on how to implement, whereas Signaling Theory can be used to describe the shifting role of credentials in the hiring process. This combined theoretical basis gives backing to the purpose of the study of analyzing the consequences of skills-based hiring in relation to human resource management.

4 Discussion: Transition to Skills-Based Hiring.

4.1 Definition and Meaning

Skills-based hiring is a method of recruitment where the focus is placed on the capabilities, skills, and practical knowledge of a candidate based on the skills and abilities rather than his/her educational background or the degree. In contrast to the old-fashioned methods of hiring that heavily depend on the academic qualifications as the proxy of the capability, skills based hiring gives preference to the illustrable skills, work experience and the competencies related to the job. This method focuses on what the candidates are capable of as opposed to the study location thus helping organizations to gauge talent more effectively. It represents a more general trend of competency based human resource practice, in which measurable performance measures and practical abilities determine recruitment and selection.

4.2 Motives of Skills-Based Hiring

1. Digital Transformation

The rapid socio-technological progress has also transformed the nature of work to a great extent. Job requirement has been transformed by automation, artificial intelligence, and digital platforms as technical and digital skills have become more significant than traditional ones. The trend is also that an increasing number of organizations are employing data-created recruitment resources, as well as online skills tests to evaluate applicants, thus minimizing the use of degrees as a screening tool.

2. Changing Job Roles

Contemporary job descriptions are not static and continuously changing and they may demand more interdisciplinary and flexible skills. Most of the emerging positions particularly in the area of IT, data analytics, and digital marketing lack standard education paths. Consequently, employers are moving towards skills-based recruitment so that candidates are able to be equipped with particular competencies in these positions.

3. Skill Shortages

There is a big disparity in the skills that job seekers have against the skills being required by the employers. The degree-based hiring usually excludes the opportunities of the qualified candidate who might not have the degree qualifications but have the relevant skills. Skills-based employment assist organizations to overcome talent shortages by increasing the talent pool and emphasizing on ability other than qualification.

4. Gig Economy

The emergence of the gig and freelance economy has also increased the move towards skills-based recruitment. Formal education is not important in gig-based work environments, with performance and output getting more appreciation. The employers are keen and focused on particular skills and project-based knowledge, which adds to the relevance of hiring methods that are competency-related.

4.3 Comparison between Degree-Based Hiring and Skills-Based Hiring

Table 1 - Comparison between Degree-Based Hiring and Skills-Based Hiring

Basis of Comparison	Degree-Based Hiring	Skills-Based Hiring
Primary Focus	Academic qualifications and credentials	Skills, competencies, and abilities
Assessment Criteria	Degrees, grades, and institutional reputation	Skill tests, portfolios, certifications, experience
Talent Pool	Limited to degree holders	Broader and more inclusive talent pool
Job Readiness	Assumed based on education	Evaluated based on actual capability
Flexibility	Rigid and standardized	Flexible and role-specific
Inclusivity	May exclude non-degree candidates	Promotes diversity and inclusion
Adaptability to Change	Slower to respond to evolving roles	Highly adaptable to dynamic job requirements
Hiring Efficiency	May lead to mismatches	Improves job-role alignment
Cost and Time	Potentially higher due to longer screening	More efficient with targeted assessments

The move towards a skill-based approach to hiring as opposed to qualified degrees is a complete revolution in the field of talent as perceived and assessed within organisations. Organizations can maximize efficiency when confronting the hiring process, making it more efficient and competency-concentrated, increase the quality of working force, and enhance inclusiveness. The shift in the concepts also reinvents the role of the human resource management and calls to more dynamic, data-driven, and competency-based methods of talent acquisition and development.

5 HR Implications of Skills-based Recruiting

The tendency toward the skills-based hiring process has great consequences to the human resource management as it prescribes the reorganization of the conventional HR functions. The companies need to redefine their operations to match competency-based strategies, making them more efficient, inclusive, and adaptable.

5.1 Talent acquisition and recruitment

Talent acquisition and recruitment refers to the skill and knowledge that employees utilize to achieve business success (Klein, 2009). Skills based hiring essentially changes the recruitment methods as it does not depend on academic credentials but shows real abilities. Degree filters are also being replaced by skill tests, which determine the practical skills, problem solving skills, and job preparedness of the candidates. This helps organizations to recognize talent more precisely and minimize the lack of fit between job needs and the skills of employees.

Also, artificial intelligence and online skills testing platforms have been used to make the recruitment process more efficient. AI-based applications can filter candidates using a set of targeted competencies, process high volumes of candidates and offer decision-making evidence-based information. Not only is this process more efficient in terms of hiring but it also reduces the human factor to recruitment which yields more objective and inclusive results.

5.2 Learning & Development

The implementation of skills-based recruitment requires a heavy focus on lifelong learning and growth.

Companies need to invest in upskilling and reskilling programs to make sure that the employees are relevant in the fast changing working environments. This strategy facilitates flexibility and assists organisations in filling the changing skills gaps.

Moreover, the individual learning trajectories start to gain significance in the contemporary HR practices. Organizations can promote employee engagement and performance because they can match training programs to the individual skill profiles and career goals. Learning platforms that are technology-enabled can provide tailored learning experiences, whereby the employees gain competencies that benefit the organization directly.

5.3 Performance Management

The performance management systems are also changed through skills-based hiring because it brings on board competency-based measures of evaluation. Organizations are no longer basing their appraisal techniques on the conventional appraisal techniques but are increasingly basing it on the skill use, output quality and contribution to the organizational objectives.

Output-based performance systems are based on actual outcomes as opposed to input like qualification and tenure. The change enhances responsibility, promotes ongoing change and makes employee performance coincide with company performance. It also encourages a more transparent and merit based assessment.

5.4 Workforce Planning

A skills-based framework of workforce planning is more dynamic. Mapping available skills within the workforce will enable the organization to develop a flexible set of models of workforce that are responsive to changing business demands. This makes it possible to allocate talent in a better way and also to utilize the human resource effectively.

Another important implication is the internal mobility since employees can be transferred through job roles depending on their competencies instead of the official job titles and qualifications. This advances the career development prospects, employee retention and optimal utilization of skills within the organization.

5.5 Diversity & Inclusion

Skills-based recruitment is a very important aspect in diversity and inclusion as it helps cut down on the use of formal education which is one of the barriers to entry. Through skills, the organization can disregard four prejudices related to degrees, prestige of an institution, or socio-economic status.

This strategy also increases the exposure to non conventional sources of talent such as self trained professionals, occupational learners and underrepresented populations. This leads to organizations enjoying a variety of the point of view, increased innovation, and a more balanced work environment.

Figure 1 – HR implication of skill based hiring



In general, the shift to skills-based recruiting necessitates that HR functions will be more strategic, technologically oriented, competency-oriented. It helps organizations to create a more flexible, inclusive, and high-performing workforce in accordance with the requirements of the new economy.

The infographic demonstrates the shift in the hiring based on the degree to the hiring based on the skills and shows its main implications on the human resources management. Conventionally, the recruitment depended on academic qualification as one of the main indicators of the capability of the candidates. Nevertheless, the movement to skills-based recruitment focuses on practical abilities, which allows companies to understand a candidate with what she or he can offer instead of her or his qualifications. The resulting transition has great HR implications in a variety of functions. Organizations use skills tests and artificial intelligence-based recruitment solutions to increase the accuracy of hiring in the talent acquisition process. Continuous upskilling and individual training tracks are of greater importance in the context of learning and development. The performance management systems move towards skill-based and output-driven performance appraisals, which is in tandem with the organizational objectives. The process of workforce planning advances to be more nimble, and internal mobility encouraged on competency basis instead of job title. Also, it would be more diverse and inclusive as degree barriers are eliminated and this allows access to the non-traditional talent pools. In general, the infographic can help to understand that this change is turning HR into a more flexible, competency-based, and inclusive department.

6 Challenges of Skills-Based Hiring

Although it has its benefits, skills-based hiring has some challenges to the organizations. The absence of uniform systems to evaluate and certify skills is one of the challenges since it is hard to guarantee uniformity and equitability in hiring. The process of the assessment of soft skills, namely communication, creativity and adaptability is especially complicated. Moreover, the resistance to change might occur in the organizations, because the general course of hiring, which relies on degrees, is well rooted in the HR practices, as well as in the organizational culture. The inclusion of biases by over-reliance on technology and AI-driven tools can also occur when the algorithms are not well created or monitored. Moreover, there is a huge investment of training, tools and process redesigning involved to change to a skills-based approach. These issues call for orderly mechanisms and effective evaluation systems to establish skills based hiring successfully.

7 Conclusion

Skills-based recruitment as opposed to degree-based hiring is a drastic change in the modern human resource management paradigm. Due to the growing dynamism and technology-oriented nature of organizations that operate in them, restrictions of the traditional credential-centered hiring needs have become more apparent. Degrees are still worthwhile but they are not adequate signals of job preparation or practicability. Compared with this, skills-based hiring focuses on provable talent, allowing companies to better discover talent and match talent to the changing needs of the job.

This paper points out that the trend towards skills-based recruitment is informed by various issues such as digital transformation, job roles redefinition, skills shortage, and the emergence of the gig economy. These drivers have forced organizations to revisit the traditional recruitment models and explore more flexible and competency-based models of recruitment. The HR implications are far reaching. The processes of talent acquisition are becoming more inclusive and data-driven, the systems of learning and development are oriented toward the idea of ongoing upskilling, and the performance management is shifting towards

the output-based assessment. Moreover, workforce planning is gaining agility, and the trends of diversity and inclusion are reinforced by eliminating the degree barriers.

The theoretical bases of such a change, which are backed by the Human Capital Theory, Resource-Based View, Competency-Based Theory, and Signaling Theory, also attest the significance of skills as vital resources in the success of the organization. Nonetheless, it is not an easy move, as problems of measuring skills, standardization, and organizational preparedness are present.

All in all, the ability-based recruitment is more fair, effective, and progressive in terms of talent management. It allows companies to access untapped sources of talent, increase the flexibility of the workforce and gain sustainable competitive advantage. The skills-based approach to hiring has not only become an alternative, but also a strategic requirement of the organizations that want to be relevant and sustainable in the updated economy as the nature of work continues to evolve.

7.1 Possible Future Research

The implication of the study on the effects of skills-based hiring on the performance of organization, employee productivity, and retention in various industries can be empirically validated as part of future studies. Specialized literature, especially on IT and new fields of digital, would shed more light on its practical application. It is also possible that further studies will investigate how artificial intelligence can be used to improve the accuracy of the skill assessment and decrease bias. Also, building a standardized system of measurement of technical and soft skills is another significant field to be explored. Comparative research on the results of degree and skills-based hiring can also help to have a more in-depth insight into this developing recruitment paradigm.

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