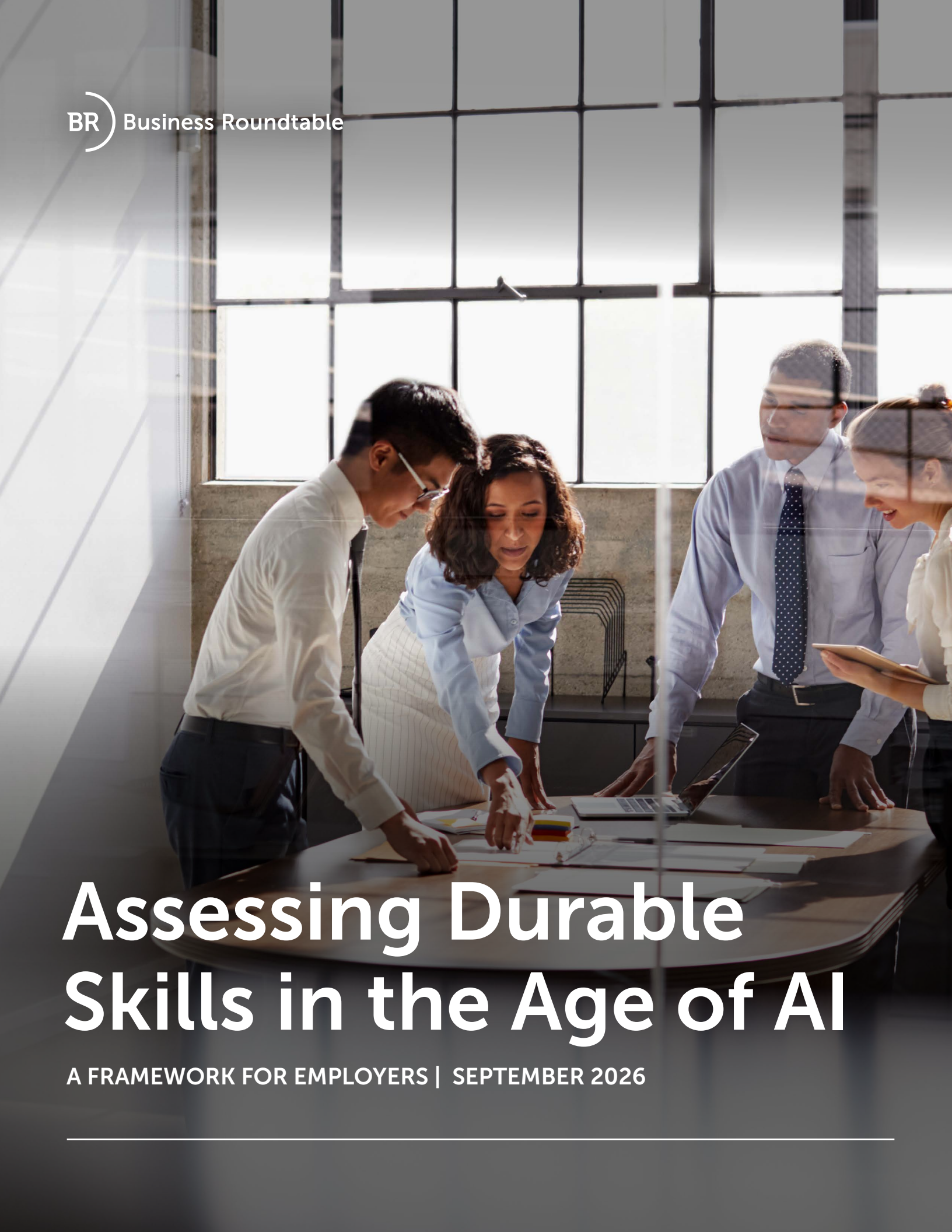




Assessing Durable Skills in the Age of AI

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Executive Summary

Workforce readiness depends not only on what someone knows on day one, but also on whether they can apply durable skills — including judgment, communication and collaboration — to new and unexpected challenges. These skills are among the most in demand in the workforce, yet they are inherently difficult to assess because they are context-dependent and often revealed through behavior over time. Increased use of artificial intelligence (AI) adds another layer of complexity as it impacts the reliability of traditional assessment methods.

This resource helps employers address challenges in assessing durable skills. It identifies four characteristics of a strong skill signal and offers a practical framework companies can use to evaluate their existing assessment methods. The most reliable evidence comes from observing an individual apply a skill and achieve an outcome. For talent leaders, the task is to bring hiring, promotion and development decisions closer to that standard.

Introduction

As AI automates a growing share of technical work, the skills that most distinguish a strong employee are increasingly the durable ones. Durable skills include a combination of how we use what we know (e.g., critical thinking, communication and collaboration) and how we show up in the world (e.g., leadership, resilience and self-awareness). Business Roundtable member companies have long recognized the value of these skills, with over 70% of their job postings requiring at least one durable skill. In fact, the share of postings requiring durable skills has risen 5% since 2022, and, on average, these companies require 16% more durable skills per vacancy than they did three years ago.²

America Succeeds and Lightcast's July 2025 analysis¹ of nearly 76 million job postings from 2023 and 2024 found that:

- + **76%** of U.S. job postings request at least one durable skill, up from 64% four years earlier
- + **47%** request three or more
- + **8 of the 10** most requested skills in the U.S. labor market are durable skills

Employer demand for these skills has risen steadily for years. Durable skills now appear in a majority of job postings nationwide,³ and these skills are expected to increase in importance over time.⁴ Three key features of AI's impact on the workforce have recently converged to make durable skills matter more than ever, both for individual career success and business results.

1. AI can automate technical tasks and improve efficiency, but it cannot consistently reproduce the durable skills that drive business success such as managing talent, building partnerships and leading people.
2. Using AI effectively requires durable skills: someone must decide how to engage a model, catch what it gets wrong and take responsibility for the results.
3. The evidence employers have traditionally used to identify durable skills — such as entries in a resume, a well-written cover letter or a polished answer to an interview question — can now be produced or refined with AI. These materials can still provide useful context, but on their own may reveal less about how an individual applies a skill or reasons through a problem.

As a result, the central challenge for employers is to supplement conventional proxies with more direct evidence of skills in use. This resource explains why durable skills are difficult to assess, describes the properties of a strong skill signal and offers a practical way to evaluate the tools companies use today.

Assessment: a systematic process for evaluating skills, mindsets and attributes, using tools or protocols that produce a skill signal.

Signal: a data point or collection of data points that reduces uncertainty about future performance.

Why Durable Skills Are Difficult to Assess

The methods employers use to assess durable skills are generally the right ones and align with those that assessment research ranks among the strongest predictors of job performance.⁵ For example:

- + One talent leader described using situational interviews that include layered problems drawn from real business challenges. These interviews prompt a candidate to draw from examples across roles to construct a nuanced answer.
- + Another pointed to case studies that require a candidate to reason through a problem under pressure: *"We used case studies as real-time evidence of how you communicate effectively, how you take a complex problem and break it into right-sized components, and how you develop a relationship at the same time."*

If talent leaders are using proven assessment methods, why do they describe the skill signal as incomplete? However, even when talent leaders use proven assessment methods, they often describe the skill signal as incomplete. A key reason is that durable skills are context-dependent, and their assessment structure is easier to design than to sustain. In practice, assessment tends to break down in two predictable places.

Interview questions may standardize what is asked, but the answers are not rated against a fixed standard.

Without clear criteria for what different levels of performance look like, evaluators may interpret the same answer differently. As one talent leader put it, *"What I define as good leadership could be very different from what [a colleague] defines as good leadership. One of the things we are trying to do internally is find some way to quantify these areas, and that's far more difficult than it sounds."* The research points to the same conclusion: structured interviews outperform unstructured ones in part because they limit interviewer discretion. However, without a standard scoring criterion, candidate comparison can become more subjective and less consistent.

Interview guides become outdated as the nature of work changes. Built around a competency model with 15 to 20 elements and tailored to individual roles, interview guides can become lengthy and overly specific. They may also struggle to keep pace as the work itself evolves. As one talent leader said, *"They are too complicated. They are not dynamic, and as the pace of change is faster than we can move, they become very obsolete."* Another explained why: *"The unit of change is not a job. The unit of change is a task."*

When tasks are automated or reassigned during a hiring cycle, a guide based on a static job description assesses a role that has already changed.

AI Is Changing What Traditional Evidence Shows

These assessment challenges predate the rise of generative AI. What AI has changed is the range of support available to candidates as they prepare application materials, complete exercises and respond to interview questions. When AI can help shape an answer, even a well-designed behavioral question may provide less visibility into an individual's reasoning unless the process also includes direct observation or follow-up.

Employers are also navigating a separate but related challenge: confirming candidates' identities and the authenticity of application materials in digital hiring processes. Gartner predicts that by 2028, one in four candidate profiles worldwide will be fake.⁶ This concern reinforces the value of assessment practices that give candidates a clear opportunity to demonstrate their skills directly.

One talent leader described the limits of relying too heavily on resumes and other application-stage signals. Despite having a defined competency model, role-specific assessment guides and an experienced talent team, the company found that their process did not always predict performance after hiring. The company added an in-person whiteboard exercise, without a computer, so candidates could work through a problem and provide what the talent leader called an "exhibited example" of the skill. The change was not based on the view that traditional hiring methods are broadly ineffective. Rather, it reflected a desire to give candidates another way to demonstrate their abilities and evaluators a fuller picture.

Employers Converge on the Value of Direct Evidence

Asked how they assess durable skills, companies with different competency models, industries and histories reached a similar conclusion: self-reported experience establishes context, but a stronger signal is one that incorporates evidence of the skill in use.

One talent leader came to this conclusion after taking his company's microscope assessment for production roles. He expected it to be easy: *"On paper I'm overqualified, but in front of a microscope, I'm a beginner compared to our staff who may not have a credential. We can't assess just what is on paper. We have to assess for the physical ability to do the job."*

Although this example involves a job-specific ability, the same principle applies to durable skills: the strongest signal comes from observing a skill in practice. Because AI can help candidates prepare increasingly polished materials, employers may need more assessment methods that complement resumes, interview replies and other self-reported evidence.

The Properties of a Strong Skill Signal

Employers reached the same conclusion long established by assessment research: no single method is sufficient. As one talent leader explained, rigor comes from using multiple methods to produce "an evidence-based, holistic picture" rather than relying on the impression that "they seem like a good fit."

As outlined in the table below, a strong skill signal has four properties. The signal is most useful when all four are present because each addresses a limitation the others cannot. Together, they indicate how closely an assessment approaches the most direct evidence: observation of a skill in use.

Property	Example of Weak Skill Signal	Example of Strong Skill Signal	Why It Matters
Behavior-anchored: focuses on how a person applied or demonstrated the skill.	A self-assessment or resume entry considered on its own.	An observed exercise where the candidate works through a problem similar to those faced in the workplace.	The score reflects observed behavior, not only a person's ability to describe the skill.
Standardized: applies the same method and scoring rubric for every candidate.	Interviewer chooses which questions to ask and determines how to score the answers.	A fixed set of interview questions paired with a defined scoring criteria and trained interviewers.	Score differences are more likely to reflect differences in candidate performance or skill, instead of differences in methodology or scoring protocol.
Multi-source: draws on more than one task, interviewer or moment.	A single strong interview.	A work sample, an interview and a manager who has worked with the candidate for some time.	The decision is less influenced by any one interaction, moment or rating.
AI-resilient: clarifies the individual's contribution and skill apart from the use of AI.	A take-home writing assignment.	An interactive case study with real-time follow-up questions.	The assessment provides visibility into the person's skills without being augmented by AI.

These properties compound to create more reliable signals. A self-assessment or resume entry can provide useful context but is rarely sufficient on its own. A realistic problem solved or task completed in real time with trained evaluators can provide evidence across all four properties. As a rule, the closer an assessment comes to observing the work itself, the stronger the signal it produces.

Finally, a skill signal can only be as predictive as the outcome to which it is calibrated. That is why any assessment process must start with a clear understanding of the skills that predict success in a role. One company found that when it asked business units which skills to assess, the resulting lists included more than 30. When it asked instead which skills were most closely tied to an employee's ability to perform in a role, the list narrowed to 10.

Putting the Properties to Work

The four properties of a strong skill signal are most useful when framed as questions about an assessment tool, whether it is already in use, being developed by an internal talent team or offered by a vendor. Few assessments meet all four standards. This framework helps identify where a tool is strong and where another method may be needed to fill a gap.

- + **Behavior-anchored:** Can a score be traced to something the individual did? Self-assessments, personality inventories and resume entries can provide helpful context, but they do not capture how someone applies a skill in practice.
- + **Standardized:** Are candidates being evaluated using consistent criteria? Review the assessment rubric and rater training, not just the question bank. A fixed set of questions is most valuable when interviewers also have clear descriptions of different levels of performance.
- + **Multi-source:** Does the tool claim to measure the entire skill on its own? Be cautious of any assessment presented as a complete evaluation of a candidate. The strongest tools are designed to provide one input among several and clearly identify what they do not measure.
- + **AI-resilient:** Can the candidate produce the output using an AI tool without possessing the skill that is the subject of the assessment? A take-home output considered on its own may provide limited evidence. Live demonstrations and unscripted follow-up questions can provide a more reliable picture.

Used this way, the four properties do not grade a tool. Rather, they show which standards the tool meets and where gaps remain, allowing a company to address those gaps deliberately rather than relying on a single assessment. As one talent leader cautioned, companies risk *“putting too much weight on an assessment to drive all their decision-making.”*

Beyond the Offer Letter

The four properties apply well beyond hiring, but the purpose of a skill signal changes later in the talent lifecycle. In hiring, an employer is predicting a skill it has not yet observed. In promotion and development, it is evaluating a skill demonstrated over months or years. That may sound easier, but it often is not.

Internal decisions carry an advantage no interview can match — evidence from work performed under real conditions over time, rather than a sample produced during an assessment. One company noted that as it shifted toward focusing on demonstrated skill and potential, internal mobility tripled, with three times as many roles now filled by internal candidates as three years ago.

Employers making internal mobility decisions commonly face three challenges:

- + **Subjectivity of assessment:** Managers bring valuable context and professional judgment to decisions about performance and potential. The challenge is that their observations are not always captured in a way that allows meaningful comparisons across employees. For example, a manager’s assessment

of how well someone handles a difficult client may be measured against a standard that is not visible to others. Shared criteria can make that evidence more objective and comparable. This is an especially important consideration in promotion decisions that determine who assumes greater responsibility and helps shape the direction of the business.

- + **Limited opportunities to develop durable skills:** Companies often have sophisticated systems for technical skill development, including skills engines, required training and defined career pathways. Comparable durable-skills development is sometimes concentrated in leadership programs available to a select group. However, employees at every level can achieve higher levels of performance in their roles when provided opportunities to practice problem-solving, communication and other durable skills.
- + **Lack of regular diagnostic assessment:** Development also requires a different type of skill signal. Hiring and promotion rely on evidence that predicts future performance. Development requires evidence that identifies a specific gap and measures progress toward closing it through repeated assessment against a consistent standard. Relatively few companies have built systems that assess durable skills with this level of intentionality.

As one talent leader explained, the goal is not to assess durable skills in isolation but to understand how they are demonstrated throughout the employee lifecycle and build a talent system that puts those insights to use. Without such a system, valuable skills data often remain underused.

Conclusion

Companies can lead the development of scalable strategies for assessing durable skills, but no single employer can make durable-skills development a standard across education and training systems. By working together, companies can accelerate this shift. They can evaluate their assessment methods using a common set of questions — a shared standard applied to each company's own tools rather than a single tool adopted by all. They can help education and training providers understand what demonstrated ability looks like. And they can jointly invest in programs that develop and surface durable skills before individuals enter the workforce.

Durable skills assessment deserves the same rigor employers already apply to technical and physical skills. Companies that help establish this standard can improve their own talent decisions while shaping more useful evidence of durable skills across the broader labor market.

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Contributing Companies

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Endnotes

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