



2022 Power Skills Survey

Asia Pacific

CREATING AN IMPACTFUL AND
FUTURE-ORIENTED SKILLING CULTURE



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Foreword

More than one billion jobs – that’s more than one third of all global jobs – will be transformed by technology by 2030⁽¹⁾.

In Asia Pacific, technology will displace 28 million workers by 2028⁽²⁾. As labour markets evolve, the same disruptive forces that will make some roles redundant will also create a strong demand for new jobs and new industries.

To ensure the available workforce is able to meet that demand, workers will need to understand the skills they need to be relevant and successful in the future of work. They will need to develop into a dynamic pool of talent that works in harmony with technological change, fit for the rapidly shifting world of work.

Today though, it’s hard for leaders in business and government to predict and prepare for future needs. Businesses everywhere are asking the question: how do we maintain and enhance the value of our most vital asset – our people? Employees and learners are asking themselves: how do I chart the best course through my working life and boost my career success? There is little robust data to use to make these important decisions, all leading to uncertainty about which skills are the most impactful and how best to develop them.

At Pearson we believe success is a world where it’s no longer about what you have done, but what you can do. We are

committed to helping organisations realise the untapped potential in their people, bridging skills gaps for businesses and boosting job and career opportunities for individuals. We can help businesses predict and prepare for their future by modelling how technological change will disrupt jobs and accurately map the skills needed to futureproof workforces at scale, building customised learning pathways and measurement tools.

For this reason, delving into the skills gaps in Asia Pacific is both timely and significant. Asia Pacific is the fastest growing region in the world today and investment in talent here will be a driving force for global economic growth in the long term.

Yet at the same time, the Covid-19 pandemic continues to exert an influence over all our lives. From a learning and upskilling perspective, the survey results suggest that the abrupt move to remote working and online learning has exacerbated existing skills gaps in some markets. The good news is that businesses are now more focused than ever on tackling these gaps.

As we look ahead to the future, it is clear that we need to radically rethink our approach to reskilling and workforce learning. This report shines a light on some of the key areas and themes and we look forward to working with businesses across Asia Pacific as part of the solution.

1. World Economic Forum, “We need a global reskilling revolution – here’s why”

2. Oxford Economics, “Technology and the future of ASEAN jobs”



MICHAEL HOWELLS
President, Workforce Skills
Pearson



ESTER MARTINEZ
CEO & Editor-in-Chief
People Matters

If reskilling is one of the biggest opportunities for businesses to ready their workforce for the future, it is also one of the biggest challenges. Without accelerating our progress on the skills agenda, we won't have the talent to take advantage of the new jobs we are creating. This is both a business and an HR challenge, and it demands organisation-wide interventions to deliver results. Companies that unlock reskilling at speed and scale will transform at a pace that will leave their competitors behind.

As more sophisticated technologies and market forces dramatically change the nature of work, employees must fine-tune the social and emotional abilities that machines cannot master. To encourage this behaviour, employers must adjust the way they assess, educate, train and reward their workforce on soft skills such as collaboration, communication and critical thinking.

In our survey, we found that organisations have affirmed how, with the limited availability of soft skills, their quality standards and/or customer experience is impacted (69%). Further, they aren't able to innovate effectively (66%), and the cost of managing their people is increasing above estimates (42%).


Hence, a key differentiator among performing and non-performing organisations in this constantly changing world would depend on how much they invest in assessing, developing, and measuring these soft skills, which are also known as 'power skills'. However, as our survey results revealed, organisations are struggling to build soft skills due to key challenges.

- **Lack of a clear vision for developing soft skills that align with overall business goals**
- **Lack of credible metrics for measuring the business impact of developing soft skills**
- **Difficulty among employees to allot time for participating in Learning & Development programmes**
- **Lack of budget and/or resources to support continuous skill-building**

Effective reskilling requires blended learning journeys that mix traditional learning, including training, digital courses and job aids, with non-traditional methods, such as coaching. Organisations participating in our study suggest that In-Person/Virtual Workshops (53%), Digital Learning (48%), and Expert Coaching (42%) are the most effective formats that they have been using for developing soft skills.

This study from People Matters and Pearson reflects the importance of providing soft skills training and how it creates a positive impact on the workforce by yielding higher productivity and better business outcomes.

Through this study, I invite all of you to reflect upon the changing dynamics of business and how these power skills can help you build the enterprise of tomorrow. As today's skill shift accelerates, it is essential that organisations enhance and expand development initiatives for business longevity.



Introduction to the 2022 Power Skills Survey

It has become increasingly clear that, for most working people, a proportion of tasks they currently perform will be either completely replaced by machines (AI if the tasks are cognitive, robots if they are manual) or augmented by a human-machine interface.

While there is less clarity about the types of tasks that will remain within the human domain, we can make some predictions. We know that right now and for the foreseeable future, machines are generally less equipped when it comes to understanding a person's mood, sensing the situation around them, and developing trusting relationships. Therefore it is no surprise that any discussion on future skills tends to focus on competencies that are uniquely human. In fact, according to the World Economic Forum⁽³⁾, 8 out of the 10 future skills that will grow in prominence over the next 5 years are human “soft skills” — such as critical thinking, problem solving, empathy, context sensing, and collaboration.

That means that millions of people across the world will have to make the transition towards becoming more adept at soft skills.

It's an interesting contrast with the technical or “hard skills” that dominated discussions around skills gaps until a few years ago. According to Josh Bersin⁽⁴⁾, hard skills are in fact *soft* (they change all the time, are constantly rendered obsolete, and are relatively easy to learn) and, conversely, soft skills are *hard* (they are behavioural in nature, difficult to teach, and take considerable effort to master).

3. The future of jobs report, World Economic Forum, 2020.

4. Bersin, "Let's stop talking about soft skills: They're power skills."

The impact of COVID-19 on the world of work has significantly accelerated the relevance of these soft skills: creativity, ingenuity, communication, collaboration, synthesis, and the ability to work across multiple disciplines. These are the *power* skills that high performers exhibit and that employers are looking for in the future workforce. Organisations that can harness these power skills in their people are the ones that are most likely to realise individual, team and business potential over the long term.

These are some of the key findings from our **2022 Power Skills Survey**. We asked business leaders, HR professionals, and Learning and Development (L&D) experts from across Asia Pacific about their skilling goals and challenges, and what the future of talent development and the learning culture looks like in their organisations.

We've broken down the report into 4 key areas

- **The impact of COVID-19 on skilling**
- **2022 power skills**
- **The role of English proficiency in a modern workforce**
- **Creating a better learning path: Assess, Develop, Measure**

You'll also hear from regional experts in the field about their experiences and challenges in creating an impactful and future-oriented skilling culture.

Demographics

**The 2022 Power Skills Survey:
Asia-Pacific by People Matters
and Pearson saw the participation
of 180 unique organisations
across the APAC region.**

Following is a quick snapshot of the type and size
of the organisations that participated in the study.

TOP THREE INDUSTRIES:



IT
& ITES:

16%



Professional
Services:

14%

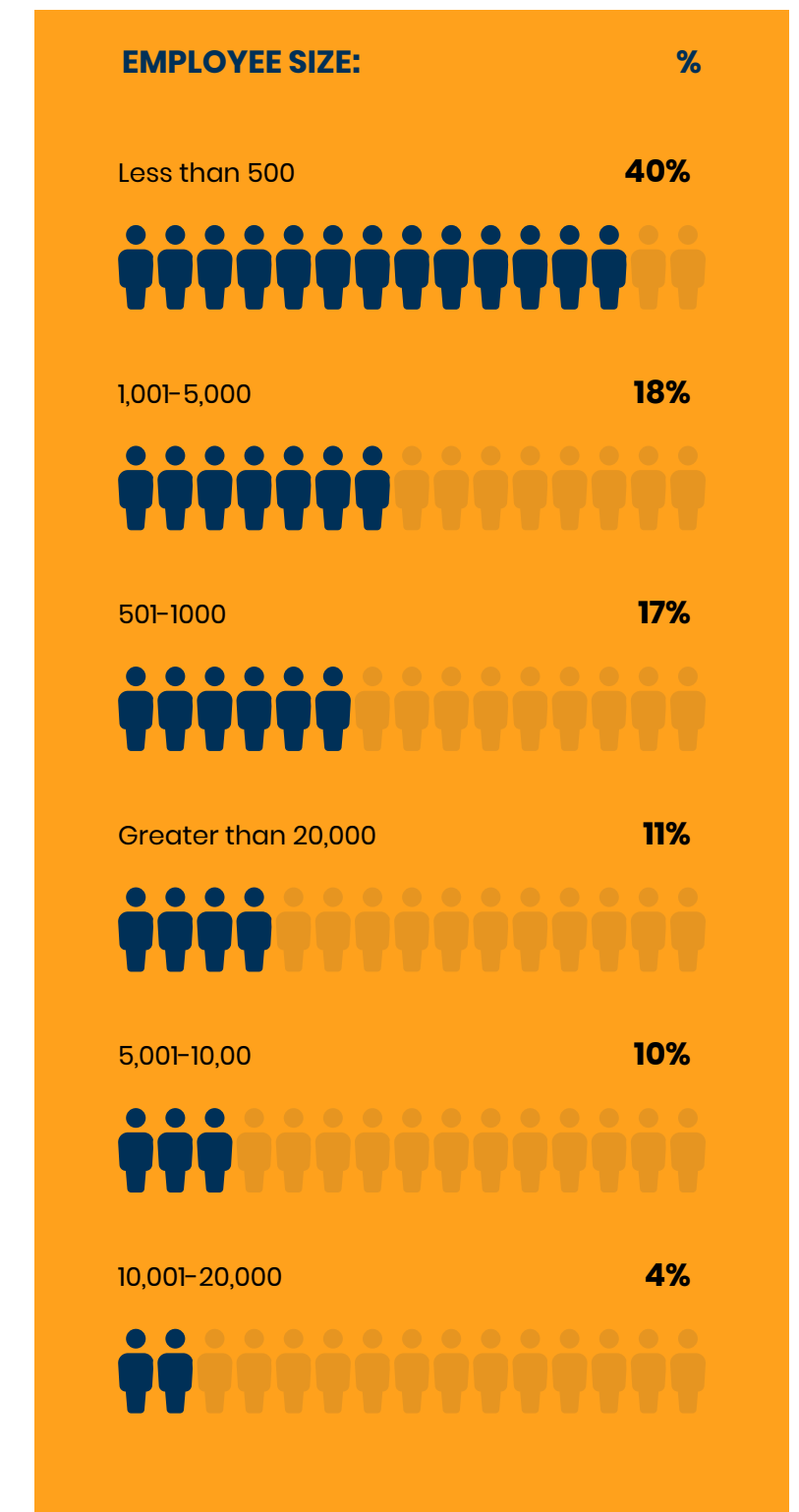
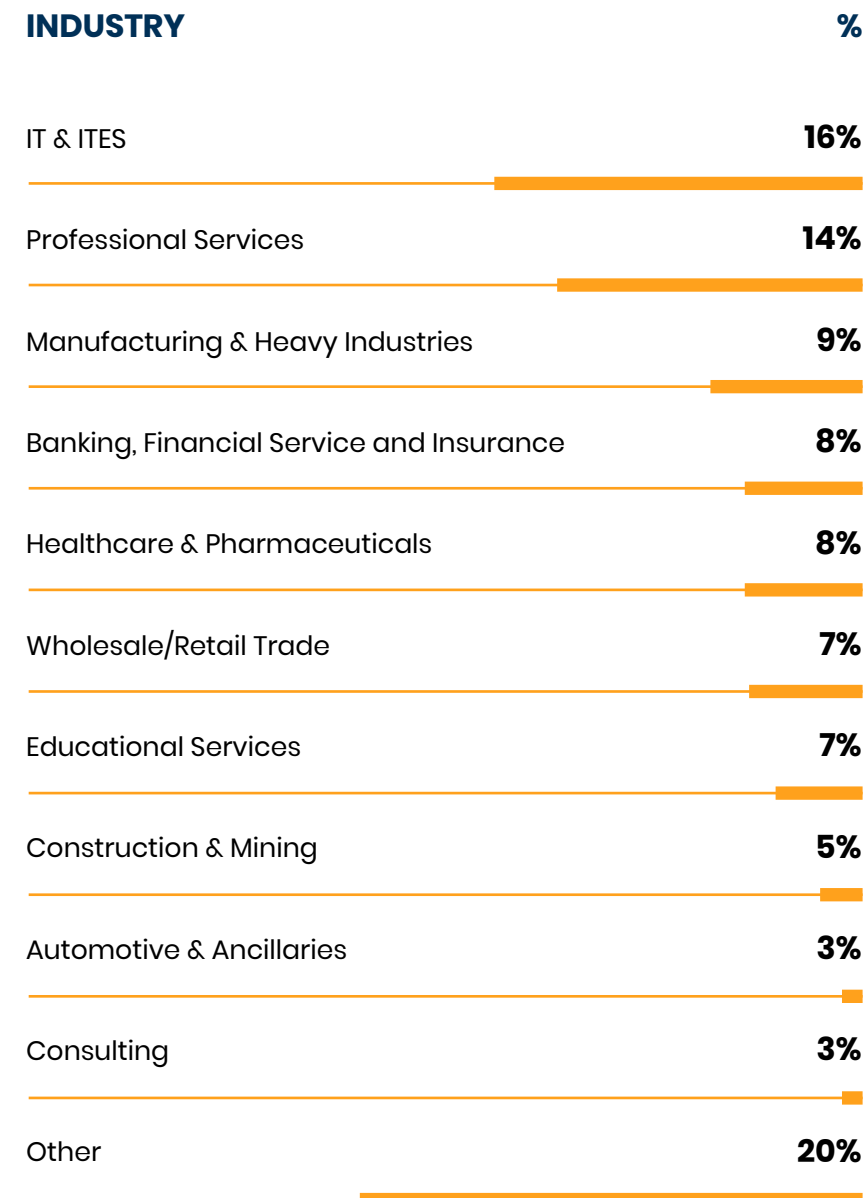


Manufacturing and
Heavy Industries:

9%

PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES:

- **Australia** • **Hong Kong** • **India** • **Indonesia**
- **Japan** • **Malaysia** • **New Zealand** • **Philippines**
- **Singapore** • **Thailand**





Section A:

The impact of COVID-19 on skilling

Investment and time spent in skilling programmes increased by almost 30%



If building critical skills was a business priority for leaders before, then the pandemic’s hard shove on digital transformation has made talent development a business survival necessity.

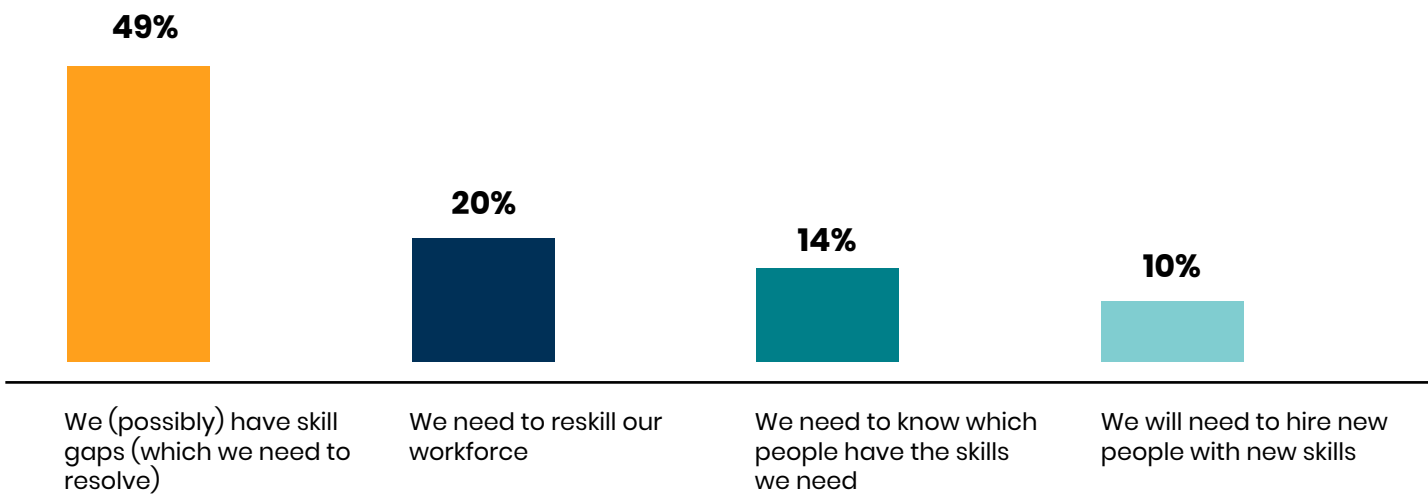
According to our survey, only 34% of leaders believe skill-building was "extremely important" to their business prior to the pandemic. Today, 66% say the current crisis has made skill-building "extremely important" to their survival, while 80% believe it will continue to be "extremely important" in the next five years.

How would you rate the importance of skill-building to an organisation’s long-term growth?

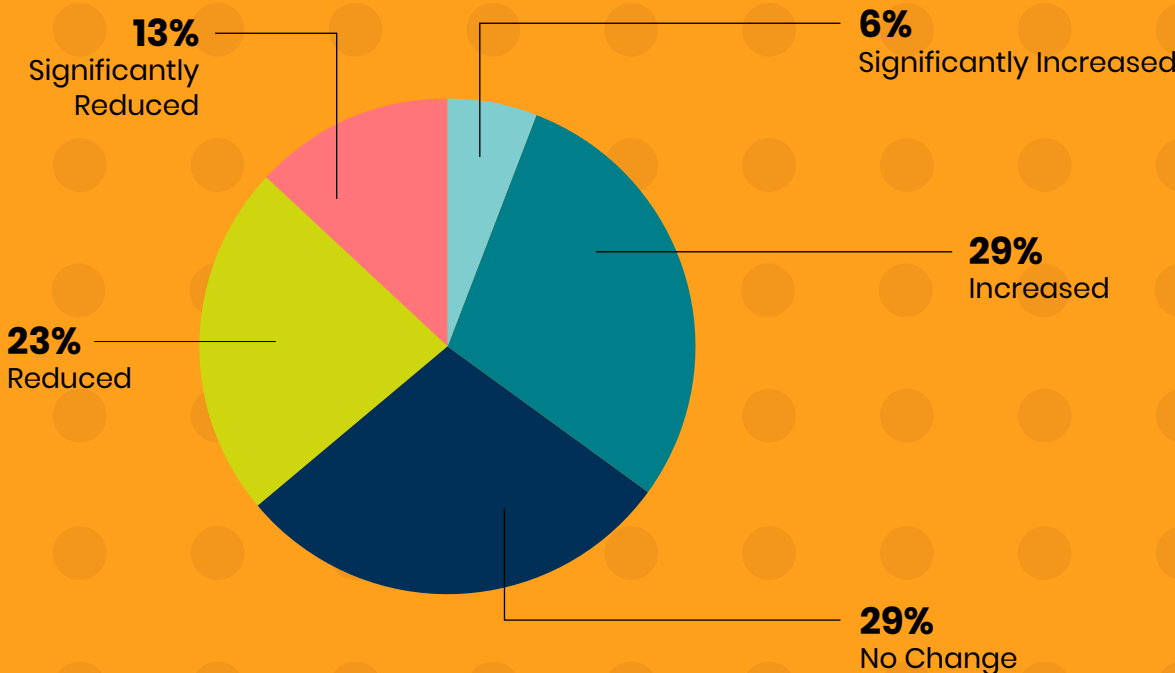
	Extremely Important	Important	Moderately Important	Slightly Important
Before COVID-19	<div>●</div> <div>34%</div>	<div>●</div> <div>49%</div>	<div>●</div> <div>13%</div>	<div>●</div> <div>4%</div>
Currently	<div>●</div> <div>66%</div>	<div>●</div> <div>28%</div>	<div>●</div> <div>5%</div>	<div>●</div> <div>1%</div>
Next five years	<div>●</div> <div>80%</div>	<div>●</div> <div>18%</div>	<div>●</div> <div>1%</div>	<div>●</div> <div>1%</div>

The pandemic had a profound impact on the way businesses responded to evolving consumer demands. Organisations found it difficult to thrive amid the crisis, in part because of the skills gap: 49% of organisations said the crisis created a demand for new skills and helped them to realise the extent of their skills gap.

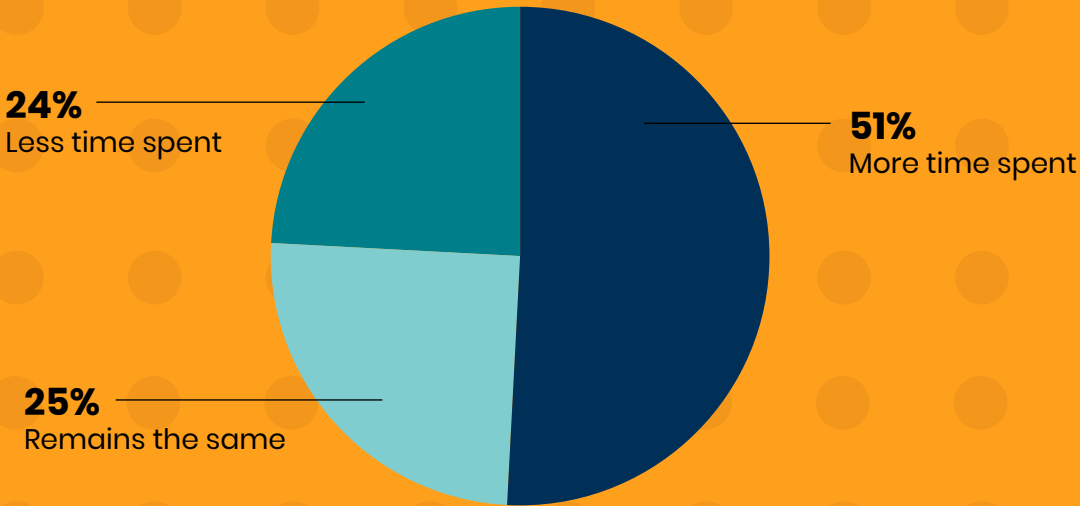
To what extent has COVID-19 had an impact on skills gaps in your workforce?



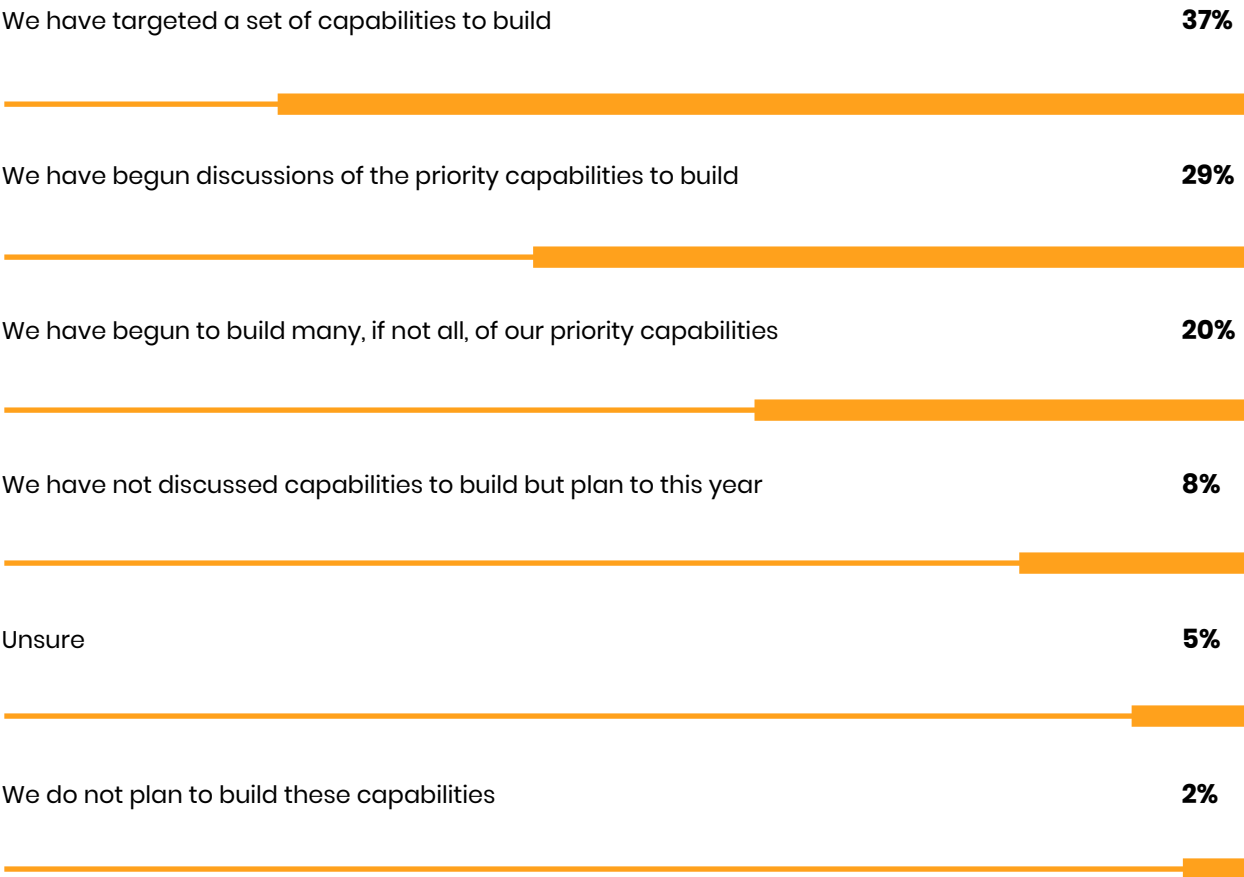
How would you rate change in budgets in skill-building since the COVID-19 crisis began?



What is the change in time spent on skill-building since the COVID-19 crisis began?



Does your organisation have a clear plan for building soft skills?

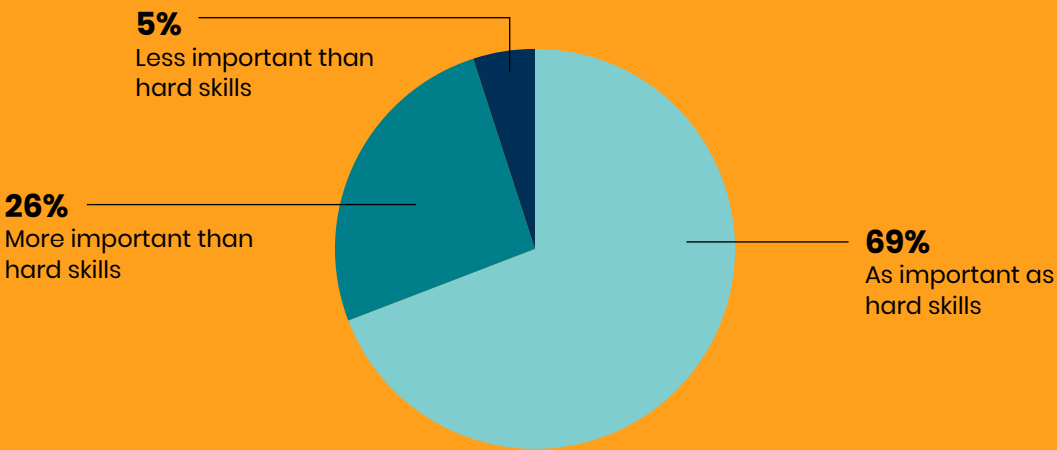


Organisations participating in this survey affirm that with the limited availability of soft skills, their quality standards and/or customer experience is impacted (69%), they aren't able to innovate effectively (66%), and the cost of managing people is increasing above estimates (42%).

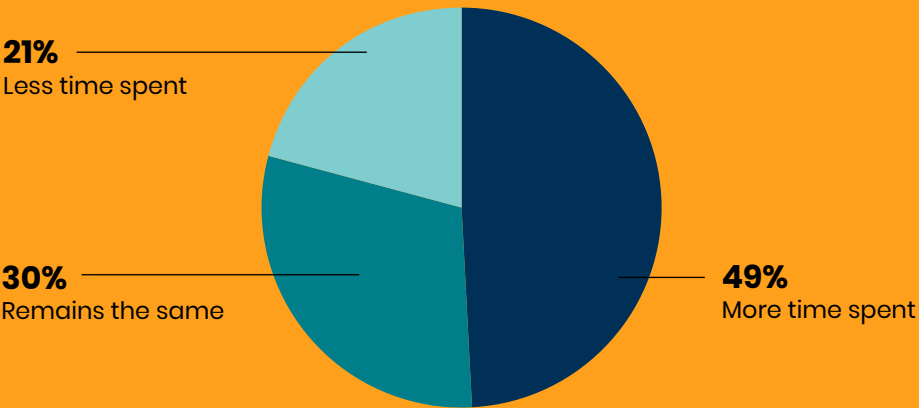
What impact is the 'availability of soft skills' having on your organisation's growth prospects?



How important are soft skills to your organisation's success?

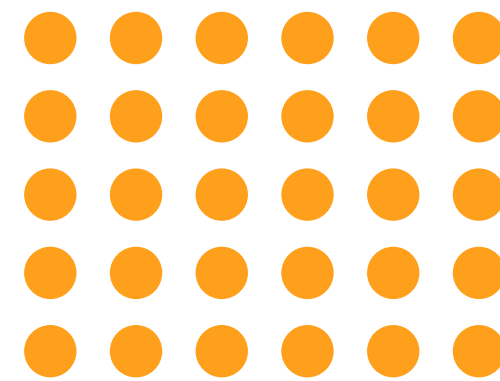


What is the change in time spent on soft skill-building in your organisation since the COVID-19 crisis began?





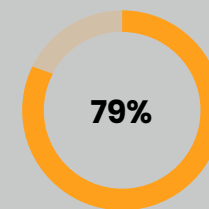
Section B: 2022 power skills



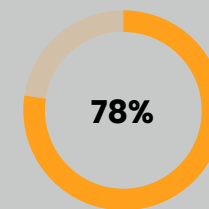


The top 5 power skills to look out for in 2022

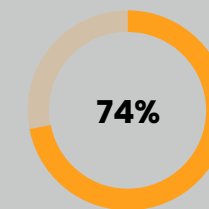
When measuring the impact of COVID-19 on the demand for skills, these 5 power skills showed the highest increase in demand.



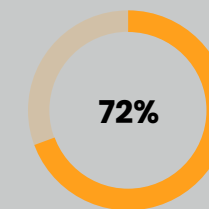
Leadership & Managing Others



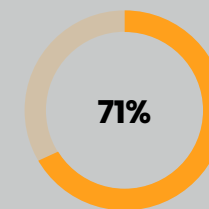
Collaboration



Adaptability & Continuous Learning

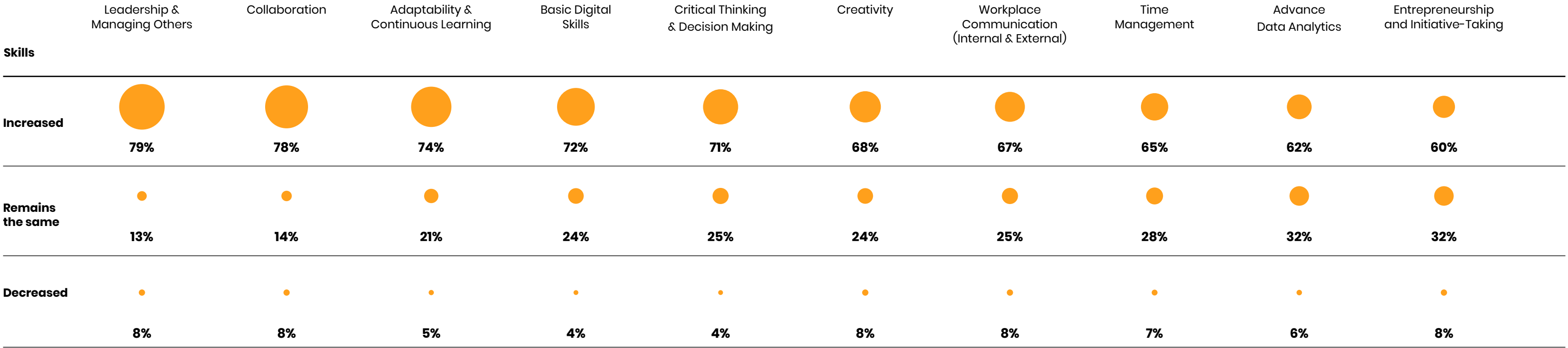


Basic Digital Skills

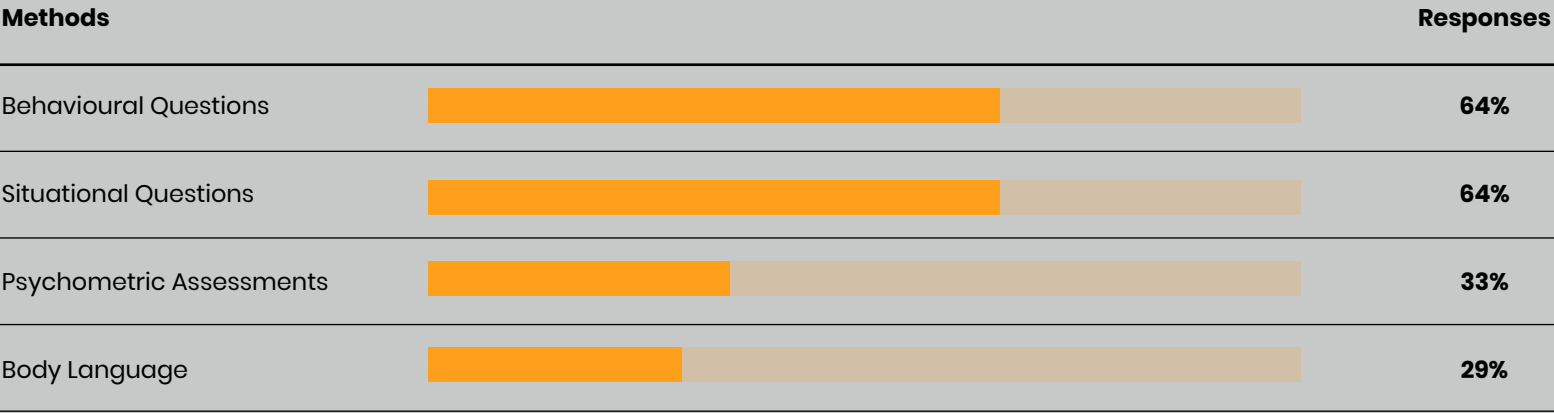


Critical Thinking & Decision Making

How has COVID-19 impacted demand for the following skills in your organisation?



How are you currently assessing soft skills in new or existing employees?



“

Whilst COVID-19 has certainly accelerated the need to reskill our human capital, it is a necessity and priority we had already identified prior to the pandemic. This is because the way of working has shifted, and there is a real need to apply different workforce skills in a more digital and agile world. Soft skills are definitely critical elements that have been given more focus now due to the adaptations required by organisations during the pandemic.”

ZAHIRA SUGHRA ZAINUDDIN

Head, Group Strategic Business
Alliance/Special Projects,
Petronas





The role of English proficiency in a modern workforce

Consider these statistics for a moment: In Indonesia, Southeast Asia's largest economy in terms of GDP, the service sector employs nearly half of the country's local workforce. In Thailand, nearly 60% of the country's GDP is generated by tourism and export-oriented production. Vietnam, one of APAC's fastest growing markets and a rising manufacturing powerhouse, counts the US among its top trading partners. The Philippines' business process outsourcing (BPO) sector, a key pillar of the country's economy, employs 1.3 million people⁽⁵⁾.

While these numbers attest to the potential of these countries, they also point to another common theme: globalisation and the increasing use of English as a common language.

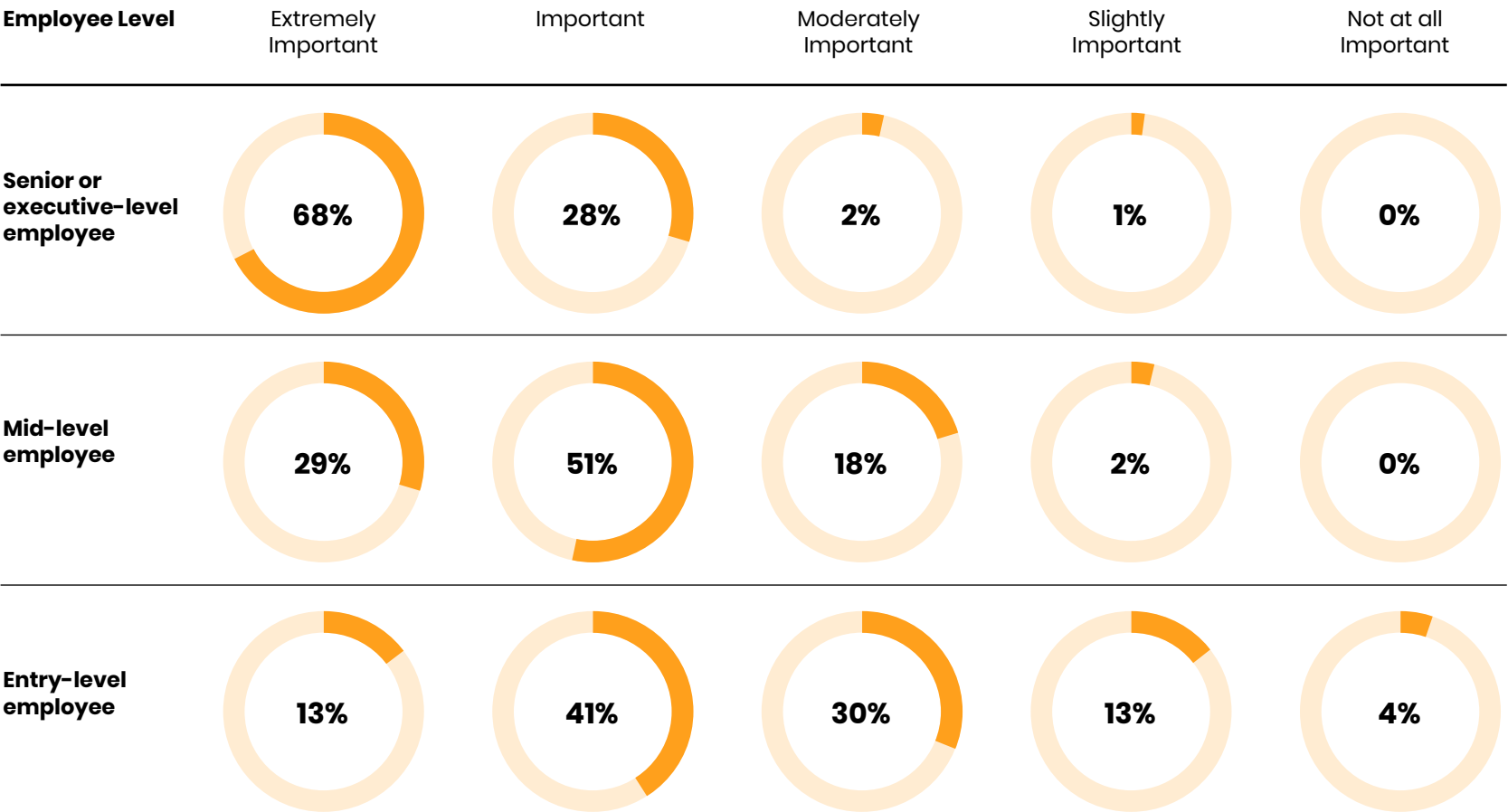
Effective communication in any workplace is essential. COVID-19 has in many industries removed geographic barriers for jobs and accelerated the trend towards remote working. Adopting common language and ensuring that the entire workforce can access it has become more important than ever before. Many of the 2022 power skills that employers are looking for are underpinned by proficiency in language – collaboration, critical thinking, leading teams – however the survey responses suggest a mixed approach to addressing this skilling area.

54% of companies interviewed say that high levels of English proficiency amongst their entry level staff is important or extremely important. This rises to 80% for mid-level staff, and 97% for senior staff. Interviews are found to be the most popular method (58%) to test English skills among employees and job candidates. However, the study also found that 37% of organisations are not measuring English language skills at all. Further, 61% of organisations do not have any strategies in place to support or upskill teams with English language training.

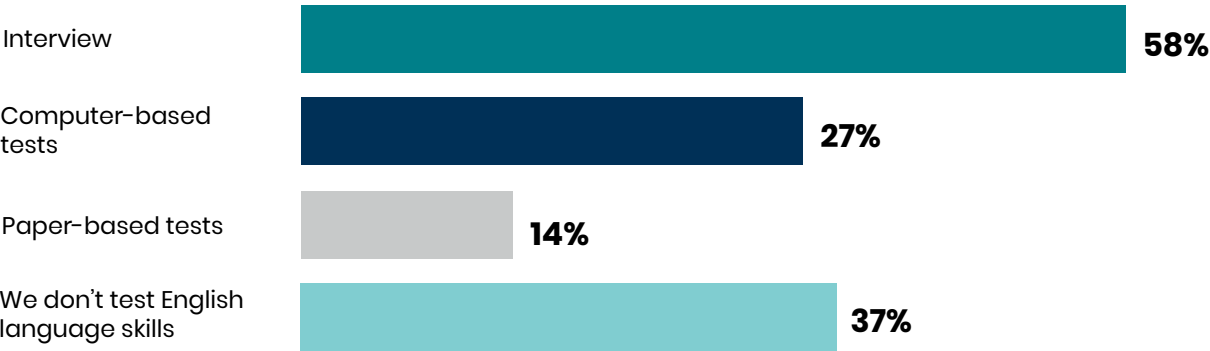
5. Asia Link Business, "Indonesia's Economy." ; International Labour Organisation, "ILO Brief: COVID-19 employment and labour market impact in Thailand."; Oxford Economics, "Vietnam | Role as a global manufacturing hub will fuel growth." ; Oxford Business Group, "How is the Philippines BPO sector faring amid global business disruption?" ; London School of Economics, "COVID-19 & the Philippines' outsourcing industry."



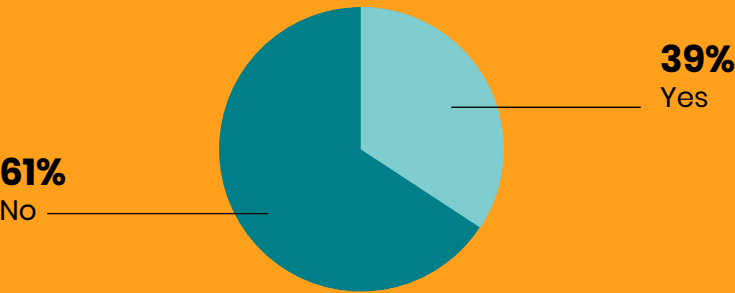
How important is it for your organisation to have teams with a high level of English language skills?



How do you test English language skills in your organisation?



Do you have, or plan to have, an English language training programme in your organisation to upskill your team?



“At Axiata, communication is a critical skill that sets the foundation for not only leadership competencies, such as people management and coalition building but also for wider and effective stakeholder management in the ecosystem – communicating with our shareholders, customers and the communities that we operate in. A holistic communicator is someone who has the capability of building trust and connection with their stakeholders, skilled in both verbal and non-verbal methods of communication.”

NORLIDA AZMI
Group Chief People Officer,
Axiata



“

There has been a definitive shift in thinking from accent neutralisation to understandability or intelligibility. The main focus of assessing communication skills is now firmly on the ability to effectively communicate and be understood between both parties. Strong communication skills are a critical underlying factor for first-call resolution, protecting the brand image, and driving Net Promoter Scores or customer satisfaction."

JON KAPLAN

CEO, TDS Global Solutions,
Philippines





Creating a better learning path: Assess, Develop, Measure

In the age of "The Great Resignation" – a term coined by US academic Anthony Klotz to refer to the increasing number of employees quitting amid the pandemic – organisations need a fundamental shift in the way they attract and develop their talent. As employers compete for top candidates, they expend large sums of money, time, and other resources in advertising and recruiting. The careful use of talent assessments and learning platforms can yield benefits for organisations by increasing productivity, cost savings, and the development and retention of top employees.

Our findings showed organisations are struggling to build soft skills due to four key challenges:



How can we ensure that our strategies for building soft skills remain effective?

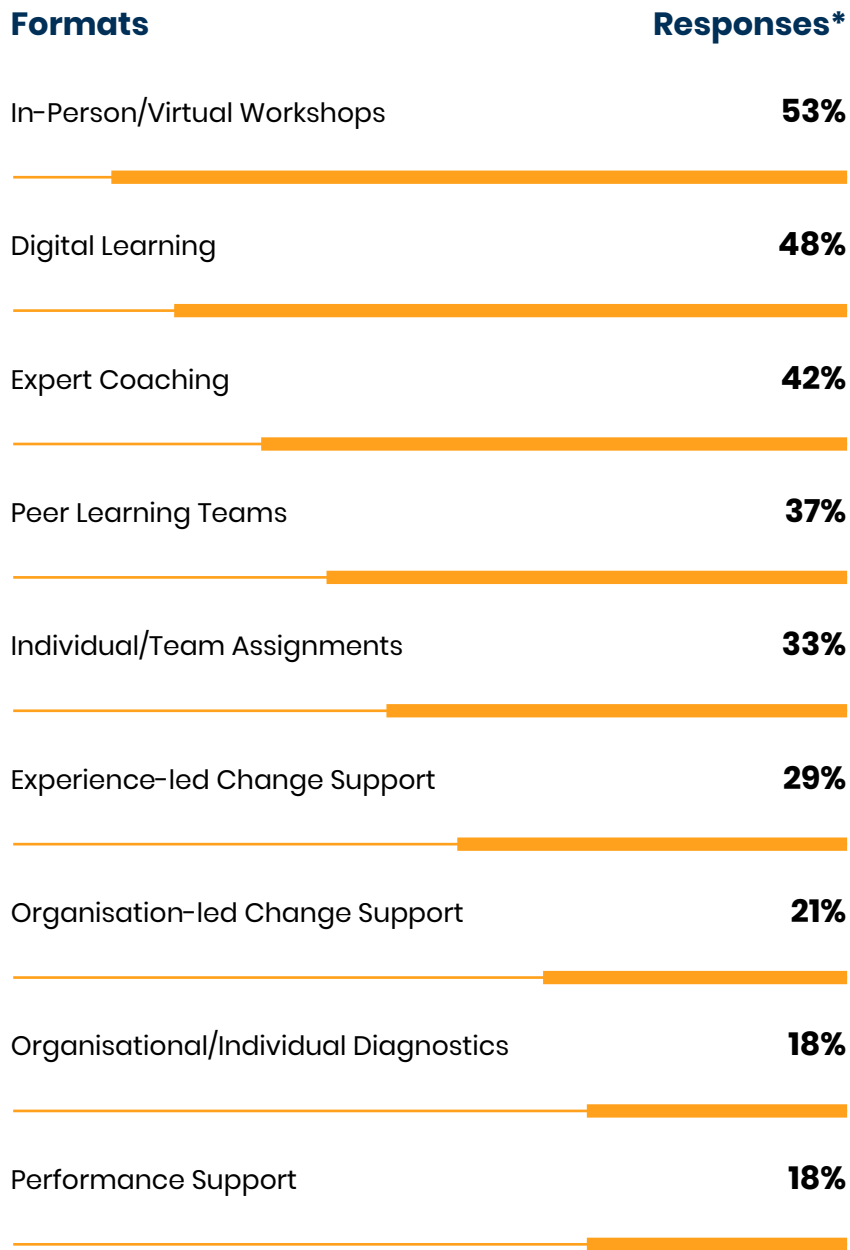
Among all their options, respondents suggest that In-Person/Virtual Workshops (53%), Digital Learning (48%), and Expert Coaching (42%) are the most effective formats for developing soft skills. With blended learning and digital learning ranking high, one cannot deny the importance of technology in accelerating the effectiveness of skill-building.

“Identifying the areas that we need to focus on capability building always starts with our strategy. We work closely with our business leaders and managers to identify, prioritise and use different development options to bridge the gap. We are constantly educating everyone in AIA Singapore that learning happens beyond the classroom setting. While we still provide virtual learning opportunities, we have actively provided electronic learning assets and continued to hold our annual mentoring program for the sixth year in a row. We organised short learning sessions or talks and introduced platforms or channels for social learning to take place. The focus is often placed on equipping both hard and soft skills like digital analytics and agile ways of working.”

AILEEN TAN
Chief Human Resources Officer,
AIA Singapore



What is the most effective format for developing soft skills?



*Respondents selected their top 3 choices.

“The importance of having the right technology to back your talent decisions cannot be overstated. Using the right predictive technologies can provide companies with the clarity and support they require to make talent management practices more robust. It also enables them to provide their employees with access to growth opportunities. Further, it also helps business leaders to prioritise what skills they require and the nature of change incoming in the ecosystem. Such practices are scalable and provide companies with valuable resources to spur growth.”

GRACE YIP
Managing Director
at Accenture



How important are the following features when you are looking to invest in a learning tool?

	Extremely important	Important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not at all important
Employees can demonstrate and apply skills learned to their job	53%	36%	7%	3%	1%
Content that is proven to help develop desired skills	48%	39%	7%	4%	2%
Program is scalable	41%	41%	12%	5%	2%
Integration of assessment, learning content, and tracking of outputs all in one system	38%	48%	9%	4%	1%
Ability to align employee skills to available jobs/roles in the company	38%	48%	8%	4%	1%
Ability to understand employees' preference for learning materials through program data and tailor accordingly	34%	44%	14%	6%	1%
Offers learning experiences that closely simulate actual work projects	34%	53%	8%	3%	2%
The program utilizes input from managers or mentors to guide employee learning path	32%	49%	14%	3%	2%
Delivered online (anytime/anywhere)	32%	46%	17%	4%	1%
Content & instruction are company-specific or focused	29%	43%	21%	4%	2%

A woman with long, wavy brown hair and black-rimmed glasses is sitting at a desk, looking down at a laptop. She is wearing a black leather jacket over a mustard-colored turtleneck. Her hands are on the laptop keyboard. The background is a blurred office setting. On the right side of the image, there is a large orange rectangle with a grid of smaller orange circles. The word "Conclusion" is written in a blue, sans-serif font across the middle of this orange rectangle.

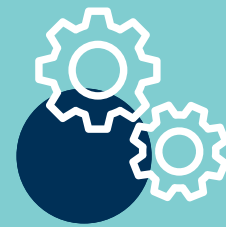
Conclusion

For hiring managers, an age-old dilemma persists. Two qualified candidates interview for the same position, but only one can be hired. This may seem like an ideal situation for a hiring manager. However, it's still a dilemma, and dilemmas demand solutions.

When choosing between two seemingly equal candidates, organisations are now prioritising soft skills or “power skills” as key differentiators that will have outsized business impacts over the coming years.

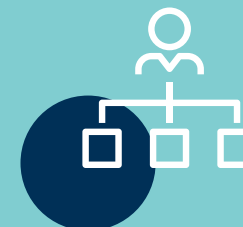
The 2022 Power Skills Survey: Asia-Pacific helps shed light on some of the challenges and aspirations businesses in the region have with regards to skilling, and highlights important shifts that organisations will need to make in order to access, develop and retain the best talent.

The study highlights skill-set shifts within organisations and flags the increasing importance of soft skills to ensure teams are well equipped to innovate, build better relationships with customers, and create business impact.



The impact of soft skills today, after going through the pandemic, increased.

For **69%** of organisations, soft skills are now as important as hard skills.



The most in demand soft skills in a post pandemic workforce are:

- **Leadership & Managing Others**
- **Collaboration**
- **Adaptability & Continuous Learning**
- **Digital Fluency**
- **Critical Thinking & Decision Making**



A well-defined strategy for investing in technology-based learning solutions that accelerate effective skill-building is critical. Key features to look out for include:

- **Content and contexts that are relevant to the target skills and job roles**
- **Learning and assessments that are integrated, scalable and measurable**
- **The ability to clearly link target skills and learning to real job tasks or projects in the organisation**



“Many organisations today are facing increasing workforce disruption, as skills gaps grow and as past workforce planning tactics prove less effective in an increasingly digitalised workplace. HR and L&D leaders need clear, comprehensive data to confidently predict future skills needed so that they can make the right recruitment and reskilling decisions.”

GREG MILLER

Executive Director,
Faethm, Australia





Expert Views

Aileen Tan

Chief Human Resources Officer,
AIA Singapore

Norlida (Oli) Azmi

Group Chief People Officer,
Axiata

Zahira Sughra Zainuddin

Head, Group Strategic Business
Alliance/Special Projects, Petronas

James Lee

Managing Director of Group
Human Capital, Great Eastern

Ranjani Kumaraveloo

Vice President - Human Resources,
Everise Asia

Suttaphong Eamphanich

Head of Talent, Jebsen & Jessen Group



**AILEEN
TAN**

Chief Human Resources
Officer, AIA Singapore

Using different
methodologies to
ensure growth

Capabilities-building has been a long-term focus here at AIA Singapore. But with COVID-19, we found ourselves in a working condition that accelerated the need to reskill and upskill, catapulting capabilities to the very top of our agenda. We focus on building cognitive flexibility and a growth mindset, both of which proved crucial in helping employees embrace challenges and build resilience. We supported these programs to develop emotional intelligence and our employees' ability to work collaboratively.

At AIA Singapore, there is constant effort to balance the need for hard, technical skills such as digital literacy and data analytics with other soft skills that are just as crucial today. Our learning programmes are embedded with leadership essentials – clarity, courage and humanity – which build crucial skills and create a growth mindset within our employees. These trainings help tackle mindsets that hinder a sustainable soft skills uptake.

Employees need to understand that soft skills can be learned and developed by investing time and effort into their craft. In addition to being more tangible, developing soft skills remains a long-term process that requires dedication and hard work, which often becomes a roadblock, since many don't end up putting emphasis on their development. But here at AIA, we focus on developing a growth mindset and support it with constant coaching, practices and feedback that enables employees to master and reinforce these skills.

A growth mindset is key

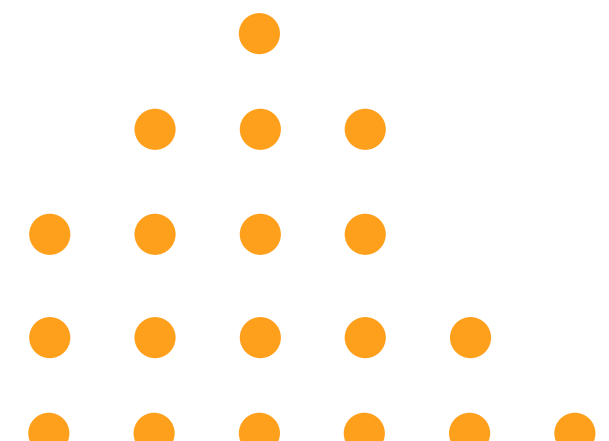
I believe that, with the right mindset, half the battle is already won. To make learning successful, we require those with an attitude that embraces change and growth. For me, this process begins at the very start of an employee's journey. I look for people who show signs of being introspective enough to accept that we are all a work-in-progress and thus believe in continuous learning. Additionally, their ability to handle ambiguity is of key concern to us. The changing nature of work has meant that leaders often don't have all the answers. Therefore, we require our employees to be comfortable with ambiguity and with a growth mindset, such that they are willing to experiment, fail and learn fast.

Critical thinking, collaboration and high emotional intelligence are other soft skills that are necessary today. They enable employees to adapt and excel in the uncertain times we experience today. The ability to think beyond established parameters, make new connections and work with diverse teams is associated with successful organisations. In addition, the right communication skills play a critical role in enabling employees to be impactful. Its scope, however, is more than just proficiency of a language but rather its proper use.

Identify and support

It is important to know what skills are in demand within an organisation before creating learning programmes. At AIA Singapore, this is done through annual engagement and a wide variety of pulse surveys, helping understand the gaps in soft skills. Through these practices, we have identified core skills like communication, influencing and collaboration, data fluency, and customer-centricity among others as a major part of our focus.

To address these gaps, we actively provide e-learning opportunities that are supplemented by our annual mentoring programs. The key factor in choosing whether physical or virtual classrooms are effective depends upon the types of skills or knowledge and what methodology of learning works best for the employee. While managers and employees still prefer learning to be in a classroom environment, we make sure to educate our employees that learning new skills remains continuous, extending even beyond the parameters of a classroom.





**NORLIDA (OLI)
AZMI**

Group Chief People Officer,
Axiata

Focusing on inclusive skilling

The unprecedented levels of disruption brought on by the pandemic have led to the future of work pivoting strongly towards digitalisation. It has impacted the way we work, and shuffled skilling priorities across the board. It is no surprise that we are seeing the rise of digital skills as one of the top skills that companies require today. As remote work becomes the norm rather than the exception, we see a growing demand for virtual modes of engagement and collaboration.

Communication remains a critical skill especially in a company as wide and diverse as Axiata for it helps our leaders to effectively manage our workforce, and forms new networks, along with key stakeholder management. With our wide range of operations that span over 11 countries, we require good linguistic proficiency. And this goes beyond building familiarity with a language like English. For us, a holistic communicator is someone who has the capability of building trust and connection with their stakeholders, skilled in both verbal and non-verbal methods of communication.

Being comfortable with uncomfortable changes

COVID-19 has reshaped much of how we operate. It has transformed workspaces and work timings, and spurred remote working away from the physical office. For many who work in isolation, this can result in possible stress and health and safety concerns. This is when companies need to step up and instill in their leadership and people a growth mindset that enables them to be comfortable with different and uncomfortable changes. Fostering this

attitude can help them to overcome roadblocks and build sharper problem solving and critical thinking skills.

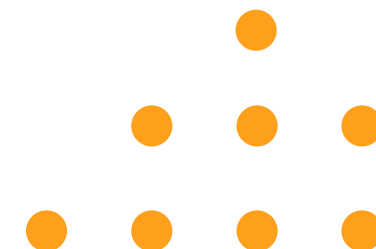
Additionally, agility and resilience have become increasingly important skills for the future of work. While we see parts of the world attempting to get to a new normal, companies can only do so with the people who have the right skills. What I look for in a candidate is one who has the right attitude and character, high emotional intelligence, one who sees challenges as opportunities, perseveres to get the job done and is collaborative in getting the right results. These soft skills are growing in importance in a future filled with disruptions.

Using technology in an inclusive manner

The demand for soft skills is now greater than ever. With communication becoming vital in virtual or hybrid work arrangements, companies are paying closer attention to how they bridge these skills. For senior leaders too, this period signals the adoption of more empathetic and inclusive leadership styles. At Axiata, our focus was to maintain the desired standards of the required professional capabilities and skills while keeping people's motivation and aspirations strong. Equal attention was given to both hard and soft skills. Keeping pace with the impact that Industrial Revolution 4.0 had on organisations across the globe, Axiata had begun pivoting towards helping our employee's uptake these 'new' skills during the pandemic. Today, our learning programmes deliver a two-pronged approach; hard

skills like data analytics and digital skills are built alongside soft skills like empathy and resilience.

The digital divide across abilities and generations continues to make it challenging for us to deploy effective virtual upskilling and reskilling programmes to uplift our people. Aspects such as screen fatigue and lack of engagement are just some disadvantages that come with online learning. While online learning modalities provide multiple benefits, companies need to ensure digital tools are used in a manner that includes all cohorts of employees. As such, we are continuously finding a suitable balance in how we leverage learning technologies. Through perseverance, a strong growth mindset and winning culture, we are seeing and making progress every day.

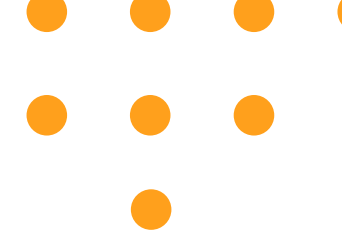




**ZAHIRA SUGHRA
ZAINUDDIN**

Head, Group Strategic Business
Alliance/Special Projects,
Petronas

Soft skills are
a critical part of
talent management



While COVID-19 has certainly accelerated the need to reskill our human capital, it was a necessity and priority that had already been identified prior to the pandemic. This is because the way of working has shifted, and there is a real need to apply different workforce skills in a more digital, agile world. Soft skills are critical elements which have been given greater focus at present due to the changes the organisation has had to adopt as a result of the pandemic. However, soft skills have always been an important part of the talent assessment, conducted throughout career stages as part of the development and growth of talent.

The biggest challenge moving forward would be in terms of mindset. In the past, emphasis was placed on hard skills as they were predominant in the workplace. However, with jobs evolving and disappearing, the need to learn, unlearn and relearn is becoming constant, with soft skills also becoming critical life skills.

Empowering your talent by integrating changes in mindset, technology and policies

It is fundamental knowledge that interpersonal skills are considered timeless and, therefore, will always be needed. In today's world when witnessing the trends and the evolution of work, key skills that can be considered crucial are empathy, adaptability and resilience. These

skills are essential with the rise in mental health concerns and associated issues such as burnout, digital fatigue and the like. One way of empowering our people to do better is by driving the agenda for this set of skills.

Communication is another critical skill for it is tied with the ability to resolve conflict and other associated challenges in the workplace. The value of English as a medium of exchange is also on the rise. No doubt that the English language has always been globally accepted as the main language of business and trade, but the need to learn and speak other languages should not be underestimated.

In driving this development of personal skills at an organisational level, we have developed a continuous feedback culture at Petronas, whereby we are encouraging our people to have more open and transparent communication to enhance the development of soft skills in the organisation. This is in line with our people planning approach and performance evaluation strategies. Psychometric assessments on our talents are also conducted periodically.

Technology is indeed an important enabler but it needs to be combined with other equally important elements to be able to move the needle on the success rate of

skilling programme outcomes. At Petronas, when we embarked on our talent transformation programme to redefine the employee experience and strengthen the foundation, we took the elements of People – in terms of mindset and behaviour; Platform – in essence technology; and Practices – processes and policies in an integrated manner to achieve our objectives.

Navigating the road ahead by continuously evolving

As an organisation, we have to continuously embark on various transformation programmes throughout the years to align with the needs of that particular time and business requirements. At Petronas, our philosophy is to invest in our people and we do that through continuous learning, assessment and training of the workforce. Thus, we have always been investing in soft skills as part of our talent management philosophy. In planning our programmes for the future, especially in light of soft skills, it is imperative that leaders are mindful of putting the current context at any point in time, thereby enhancing, customising, or even developing new programmes to suit the needs of the time and business we are in, including our future organisational requirements.



JAMES LEE

Managing Director
of Group Human Capital,
Great Eastern

Creating your learning technology mix

COVID-19 has accelerated our digital transformation journey, changing the way we work and interact with customers, and also how we work with each other across the company. Working digitally or through virtual platforms comes with its own set of skill demands. Soft skills form an important part of such demand as physical connection is suddenly replaced by a virtual one.

For Great Eastern, the aim was to improve soft skills such as communication, teamwork and leadership as these were important areas to focus on. In addition to technical skills, our focus has been to enable our employees to perform better in a digital world. This means building soft skills that will enable them to achieve business goals. To do this, we developed our #FutureReady Framework with seven skill pillars – Digital Business Model & Ecosystems, Technology & Data, Risk & Governance, Customer Centricity, Domain Expertise, The Way We Work, and Leadership in the Digital World – to enable digital transformation and support our business growth pillars.

Leveraging different methodologies

Soft skills such as communication, teamwork, customer orientation and leadership are all important skills to have today. Communication chiefly becomes imperative to be successful in any market, with English being the standard business language in all our offices across markets. In our industry, communication is key to engaging our customers, on a face-to-face basis as well as digital channels. By communicating effectively, and

using appropriate channels, then we can support our customers' needs and serve them better.

To build a future-ready workforce that is equipped with the right skills, we have sought to create an environment complemented by systems and platforms that allow employees to constantly learn. Skills acquisition cannot be limited to the conventional way of learning. We have put in place a blended learning approach that incorporates experiences, networks, and information to create an impactful learning programme. Soft skills require new-age learning methodologies to ensure that they are sustainable and effective.

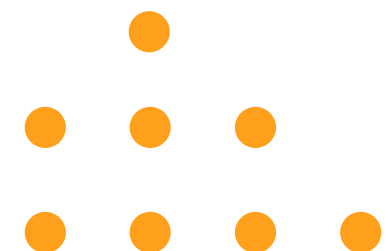
Enable employees to take ownership

Learning and development is a key area for us at Great Eastern. In this digital age, ease of access to learning tools is also key to promoting self-directed learning. By promoting autonomy and enabling self-directed learning, companies put employees at the centre of their learning journeys. This can be with great effect by utilising online learning platforms and resources. E-learning programmes, for example, are being rolled out by Great Eastern to employees in a manner that facilitate self-paced learning.

However, technology as an enabler can only do so much to aid in the skilling outcome of individuals. To be truly effective requires employees to take ownership and embrace the new ways of learning, and their managers must consistently encourage them to own

their learning or nudge them towards skilling up. When organisations fall short in achieving real impact, it may well be due to several factors. Above all, it takes time for mindsets and learning cultures to shift.

At Great Eastern, we continue to encourage empowerment and autonomy in learning and applying a blended learning approach that provides different learning experiences. This will continue to be our mandate in shifting employee mindsets and building a learning organisation.





**RANJANI
KUMARAVELOO**

Vice President – Human Resources,
Everise Asia

Soft skills have
to be organisational
priorities

There has been little doubt that with COVID-19, all effort was directed towards upskilling employees quickly. Companies have invested greatly in improving their capabilities in handling the disruption caused by the pandemic. But investments alone can do little. There's a need to focus on evolving company culture to reflect external realities. This means to ensure that people within the organisation have to grow in tandem with the changes outside. For Everise Asia, this meant working with our employees to build soft skills that help reduce the gap between people and the business world. Communication, collaboration, problem solving – these are just a few areas that Everise focused on developing.

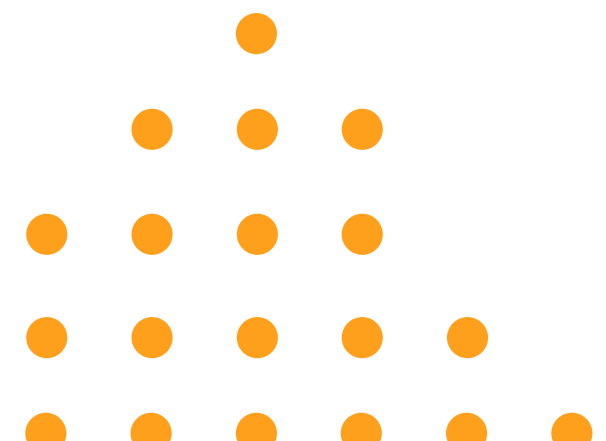
We built soft skills by focusing on extensive learning and development programmes, promoting innovation by encouraging employees, predicting future changes in the ecosystem and using a robust rewards system. These programmes are designed with the intent to enable employees to upskill while allowing them to expand their soft skills and boost their confidence.

Focus on soft skills development

Research shows that companies often end up with higher levels of production if they have focused their hiring strategy on soft skills rather than hard skills. While that is true, we also see that today's workforce is growing increasingly weak in terms of soft skills as, often, they are

trickier to hone as opposed to hard skills that require specialised knowledge of a trade or specific role. Since most jobs are team-oriented, it is crucial to be able to communicate and collaborate in the workplace. This is why at Everise we focus on building communication and English skills. Communication is described as the conveyance of information to gain a better understanding. Having said that, there may now be a critical mass of English speakers around the world, making the language's growth impossible to halt or even slow.

The in-demand soft skills of 2022 are considered to be emotional intelligence (EQ), creativity, collaboration, and adaptability. These are in addition to other basic skills like communication, teamwork, work ethic, and active listening. For us, it was both a combination of training and hiring the best talent. Companies today are often willing to spend the extra time and money to teach a hard skill if their soft skills are right for the job. The capacity to recognise and solve problems, communicate effectively, and strike a balance between being an individual contributor and working as part of a collaborative is crucial.





**SUTTAPHONG
EAMPHANICH**

Head of Talent,
Jebsen & Jessen Group

Soft skills
are power skills

At Jebsen and Jessen imparting the right digital skills became our topmost priority. With work fast shifting to virtual platforms during the pandemic, we aimed to enable our workers to be successful in this new environment. To do this we focused on building soft skills like adaptability, flexibility, empathy, tenacity and resilience. We worked on enhancing communication to ensure smooth functioning over digital media.

The pandemic meant we had to postpone some of our skill development programmes which required face-to-face interaction. While our response towards addressing such roadblocks was to adopt a digital approach, some skills required a more traditional learning format to be impactful. We realised we had to focus on building our soft skills like communication to ensure employees could connect and form networks that help them learn efficiently.

Align business goals with learning objectives

It is important for individual development plans to reflect the reality of the organisation. When we carry out skill gap analysis, we adopt a top-down approach. We start from the direction the business wants to adopt. Once that is identified, we bring organisational goals down to the level of an individual to build their development plans. This is in line with their capabilities and based on the inputs of our rigorous performance management system. These individual development plans are further supported by a talent development programme that looks at overarching skills and competencies.

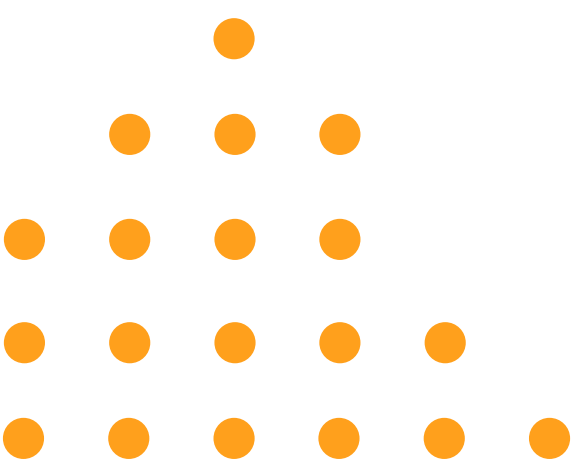
One way we ensure that talent development and learning programmes are a success is by involving the senior management to both provide feedback and act as a mentor. While soft skills remain a tough task, senior leaders across the company are actively involved and witness the progress of the employees. Project evaluations and employee engagement surveys are used to assess success and make the necessary changes to our learning programmes to improve their impact. Other additional metrics are brought into play to gauge whether learning translates into its correct application.

Learning is a journey

While improvement is often required in the present, it's important to remember that learning is a process and not a one-off event. We have found that while tech skills remain a priority, it remains relatively easier to acquire. For us, addressing the gap in how fast our employees can learn, and translate what they've learned into action, has been a major challenge. Another shift we hope to bring about is in the mindset of individuals to be more adaptive. All this takes time to develop.

The tumultuous nature of the future of work has meant that employees today have to be innovative, embrace change, have analytical skills, show a willingness to learn and can apply what they learn in their work successfully. At Jebsen and Jessen, we focus on building these very skills, the intent marked by our attitude not to refer to such skill sets as merely soft skills, but rather

power skills. Our hiring too is reflective of this change as we hire those who possess a growth mindset and strong emotional and social intelligence.





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