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HR.com's Future of Career Development and Mobility 2025-26

Drive employee growth and organizational capability through career development and mobility

DECEMBER 2025

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Executive Summary

The state of career development is stagnant, posing a major risk to talent retention and workforce agility. This study reveals systemic inertia, with 96% of organizations failing to reach the “Innovative” stage on the HR Research Institute’s Maturity Model.

Despite the known link between employee developmental growth and loyalty to employers, most organizations continue to rely on immature, ad-hoc development systems. Effectiveness ratings for career development and internal mobility remain minimally changed from 2024, highlighting a persistent gap where intent rarely leads to action.

Furthermore, 40% of organizations say they do not offer career development programs to all employees, and nearly 80% of organizations admit they cannot meet employee demand for developmental opportunities.

The good news is that success is achievable for a high-performing cohort that we deem Career Development Leaders. These organizations are nearly five times more likely to have effective career management processes. They are much more likely to commit resources, ensure managerial accountability, actively use technology, and prioritize non-managerial career paths, tracking metrics that demonstrate tangible progress.

This report details the differences between these leaders and the laggards, indicating potential best practices for achieving a strategic advantage. Today’s shortfalls in employee development will not be addressed without wide-scale advances in processes, engaged managers, and dedicated resources.

About the Survey

The HR Research Institute, or HRRI, fielded the “Future of Career Development and Mobility 2025” survey between September and November 2025. We gathered responses from 210 HR professionals in virtually every industry.

Respondents are located around the world but predominantly from North America. Participants span diverse industries, with 74% coming from midsized or large organizations.

Defining career development and internal mobility

For the purpose of this study and the survey on which it is based, we defined career development and internal mobility as follows:

- **Career development** refers to the improvement of an employee's capabilities through training, education, and work experience, usually with the attainment of a specific occupational or professional goal in mind.
- **Internal mobility** refers to the movement of employees to new jobs, roles and opportunities within the same organization, often for the purpose of career growth. These movements may represent either permanent or short-term assignments.

Our Major Research Findings

Major Finding 1

Only a fraction of organizations has progressed to higher maturity levels of the career development function.

- Over eight in 10 organizations are at the Defined stage of career development maturity or worse. This means that most organizations say career development in their organizations is ad-hoc or informal (Beginning), lightly supported by managers but lacking structure (Advancing), or only standardized in connection with performance reviews without being a true priority (Defined).
- Just 17% of organizations identify themselves at the Innovative (4%) or Strategic (13%) stages of career development. These more advanced stages reflect organizations where career development is formally reinforced, goal-aligned, and integrated with succession and talent management (Strategic) or forward-looking, agile, embedded in workforce planning, and continuously improved (Innovative).
- This general lack of strategic focus results in inefficient processes, with less than two-fifths of organizations (39%) rating their processes for managing career development and internal mobility as effective.

Major Finding 2

Organizations struggle with meeting employee demand for career development opportunities and closing skills gaps.

- Just 22% of organizations agree they offer enough career development opportunities to keep up with employee demand, while almost half disagree.
- Most organizations (64%) have kept the number of career opportunities offered the same over the last two years, while only 22% indicate an increase.
- Correspondingly, a clear majority say time (55%) devoted to career development has stayed the same over the last year.
- Most organizations effectively identify and address employee skills gaps only to a moderate degree (45%), while 41% report low or very low efforts.

Major Finding 3

Internal mobility is limited by a lack of clear pathways and formal processes.

- Just over half of HR professionals (55%) report prioritizing internal candidates for open roles.
- Only 18% of organizations have a formal process for internal mobility, and only 13% regularly measure internal mobility metrics.
- The top obstacles to internal mobility are a lack of career paths for non-managerial roles (45%) and insufficient available positions (41%).
- Commonly used tools and technologies for internal mobility are digitally accessible information on open positions (73%) and internal job boards (68%).

Major Finding 4

Manager accountability for employee development remains low, while the burden falls on the employees.

- Half of HR professionals indicate that managers are encouraged to help employees develop their careers.
- Only 16% of organizations require managers to actively help employees develop, while the majority (61%) indicate employees are primarily responsible for their own careers.
- Just a quarter of organizations say career planning is personalized to each employee.

Major Finding 5

Organizations primarily rely on foundational career development processes, often limiting access.

- The most commonly used development-friendly process includes the goal-setting and performance review loop (57%).
- Career development primarily focuses on employees' interests and motivations (58%), followed by prior experience (43%) and discussion of future career options (43%).
- Two-fifths of organizations do not offer career development to all employees. Among those that limit access, programs primarily target leadership (50%) and professional/technical roles (47%).

Major Finding 6

Career development technologies are mostly foundational, with limited adoption of advanced tools such as artificial intelligence (AI).

- Learning Management Systems (54%) and collaborative communication tools (50%) are the most widely used technologies.
- Only 26% rate their development technologies as “good” or “excellent,” with the majority (52%) rating them as “okay.”
- Over half of organizations (53%) do not use AI in any listed career development applications. Among those that do, the most common response is expecting employees to acquire AI-related skills (25%).

Major Finding 7

Compared to organizations with less mature career development functions (aka, Career Development Laggards), those with more mature functions (aka, Career Development Leaders) are:

- 7X more likely to identify and address employee skills gaps to a high degree
- almost 5X more likely to have effective processes for managing career development
- 4X more likely to have a formal internal mobility process
- 3X more likely to say their career development approach is equitable and inclusive
- over 3X more likely to personalize development to each employee
- 2X more likely to have increased both time and financial resources devoted to career development over the last year

Please note that the findings and recommendations contained in this report are informational only. Nothing in this report should be construed as constituting legal opinions or advice. Please consult an attorney if you have questions about the legal requirements, rules, or regulations associated with any content discussed in this report.

Career Development Maturity and Effectiveness

Finding: Most organizations remain in the early stages of career development maturity

Defining large, midsized and small organizations

For the purpose of this report, large organizations have 1,000 or more employees, midsized organizations have 100 to 999 employees, and small organizations have 99 or fewer employees.

Respondents were asked, "How would you describe career development in your organization?" We found that career development programs in most organizations remain underdeveloped or only partially structured.

Responses to the question, which is based on HRRI's Career Development Maturity Model, shows that 30% describe their organizations as being at the Beginning stage, where programs are ad-hoc or nonexistent. Another 34% say they are at the Advancing level, meaning managers provide some development support but without a consistent or structured approach.

Only one in five organizations have a Defined program linked to performance reviews, though even these lack prioritization. Just 13% describe their approach as Strategic, meaning formally integrated with succession and talent management. And, only 4% are at the Innovative stage, where career development is adaptive, forward-looking, and tied to workforce planning.

Few organizations have embedded career development deeply into their culture or talent strategies. The low percentage at the Strategic or Innovative stages suggests that while career growth is widely recognized as important, it has not yet been operationalized as a core capability in most organizations.

These proportions have not undergone much change from last year's research on this topic, indicating the function remains stagnant and organizations are facing significant challenges in developing the function.

Differences based on organization size

Perhaps contrary to intuition, smaller organizations have an advantage in this area. Nearly a quarter (23%) of small organizations report they are at the Strategic or Innovative stages of the Career Development Maturity Model, compared with just 14% of midsized and 18% of large organizations.

Editor's note: The actual question in the survey was phrased, "How would you describe career development in your organization?"

A mere 4% say their organizations have attained the Innovative level of the maturity model

Career development-based cohorts

What differentiates organizations at higher levels of career development maturity from others? To examine this question, we divided our data set into two cohorts based on how respondents rated themselves on the career development maturity model presented in the previous finding. They are:

- **Career development leaders -** those who responded “Strategic,” or “Innovative” to the question, “How would you describe career development in your organization?”
- **Career development laggards -** those who responded "Beginning" or "Advancing" to the same question.

Correlation does not necessarily indicate causation, of course, but these relationships may provide clues about possible best practices in the career development space.

Finding: Little progress made in improving the effectiveness of career development and mobility processes

Organizations show minimal improvement in managing career development and internal mobility compared with last year's results. About 39% of HR professionals now say their organizations have effective career development processes, up slightly from 37%, while 39% report effectiveness in managing internal mobility, a small decline from 42% previously.

These marginal shifts suggest that despite growing awareness of the importance of employee development, few organizations have made meaningful structural or cultural advances in this area.

Roughly two-fifths of respondents continue to view their systems as ineffective, echoing last year's findings. This stagnation highlights a persistent implementation gap. Organizations may recognize the strategic value of development and mobility but still lack the frameworks, accountability, and integration needed to turn intent into measurable results.

Differences based on organization size

Fully 47% of respondents from large organizations agree or strongly agree that they have effective career development processes, compared to 34% of midsized and 35% of small organizations. We typically see a stronger correlation between our maturity model and effectiveness questions by size of organization.

What might help explain the differences this year is that those from large organizations are only half as likely as those from small and mid-sized organizations to "strongly agree" they have an effective process for managing career development. This suggests that HR professionals in many large organizations believe their processes could become considerably more effective.

Note - By "effective," we mean a process that is clearly structured, accessible to employees, and produces measurable outcomes (e.g., career progression, skill development, or improved retention).

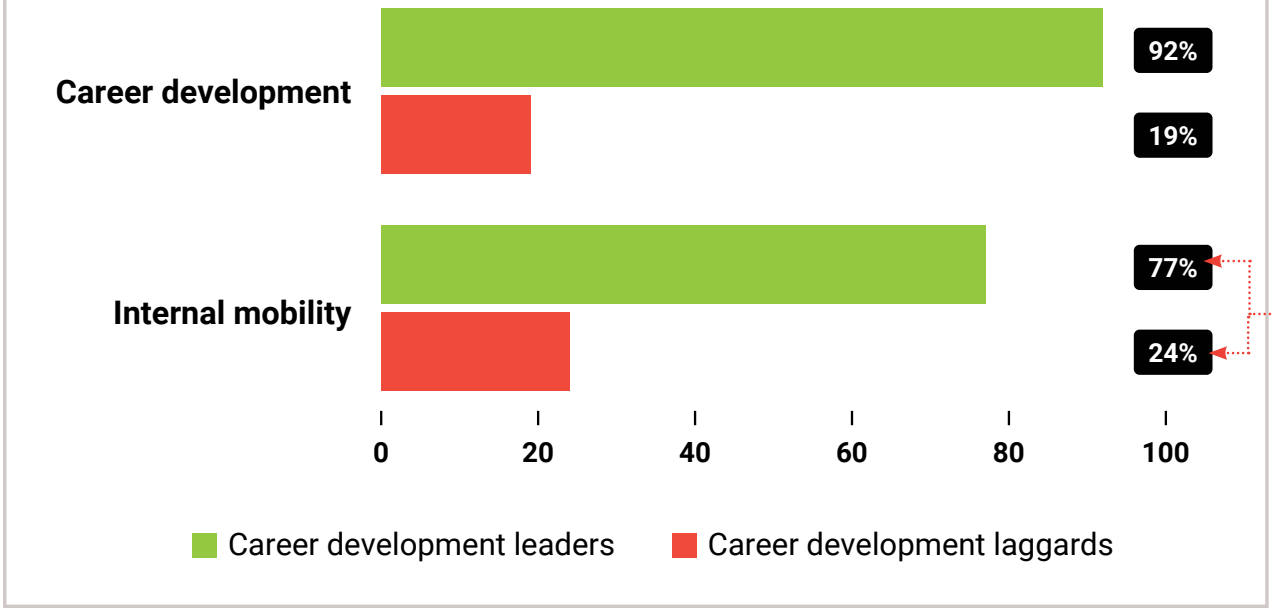
Finding: Career development leaders are nearly five times more likely than career development laggards to actively agree that their organization has an effective process for managing career development

Nearly all career development leaders agree or strongly agree that their organization has an effective process for managing career development, and 77% say the same about internal mobility. By comparison, laggards are far less likely to actively agree.

Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that career development leaders are significantly more likely than the laggards to report effective career development and internal mobility processes.

Career development leaders are three times more likely to actively agree that they have effective processes for managing internal mobility



HRRI Strategic Recommendations

Based on our research, below are some suggestions:

- **Build a formal career development framework with defined steps.** Create a tiered model (e.g., explore → develop → advance) and provide templates for development plans so every employee follows a consistent process.
- **Embed structured career conversations into existing manager check-ins.** Require quarterly growth discussions, provide managers with question guides, and track completion in your HRIS.
- **Create a visible internal mobility hub that shows roles, skills, and pathways.** Publish role profiles with required skills, list upcoming mobility opportunities, and add searchable learning recommendations aligned to each path.
- **Train managers on delivering career guidance using microlearning and toolkits.** Offer short training modules on coaching skills, give managers a "career conversation" script, and supply a checklist for identifying employee skill gaps.
- **Measure career development maturity annually and set improvement targets.** Conduct an internal maturity assessment each year, identify two to three capability gaps, and assign owners to drive progress with quarterly updates.

Career Development Opportunities and Skills Gap

Finding: Just over one-fifth agree they have enough career development opportunities to keep up with employee demand

Almost half of HR professionals disagree or strongly disagree that their organization's career development opportunities meet employee demand, while only 22% agree or strongly agree, and 29% remain neutral.

This gap between employee expectations and organizational offerings can reduce engagement and increase turnover. Deloitte's 2025 research highlights this gap, reporting that many employees feel underprepared and underserved by traditional learning and career programs, underlining the importance of creating structured and accessible development pathways.

About half of organizations do not have career development opportunities to meet employee demand

Editor's Note: In the original data, 3% of respondents stated that they "don't know." We removed those responses and recalculated the numbers, so this only shows percentages for those who answered the question.

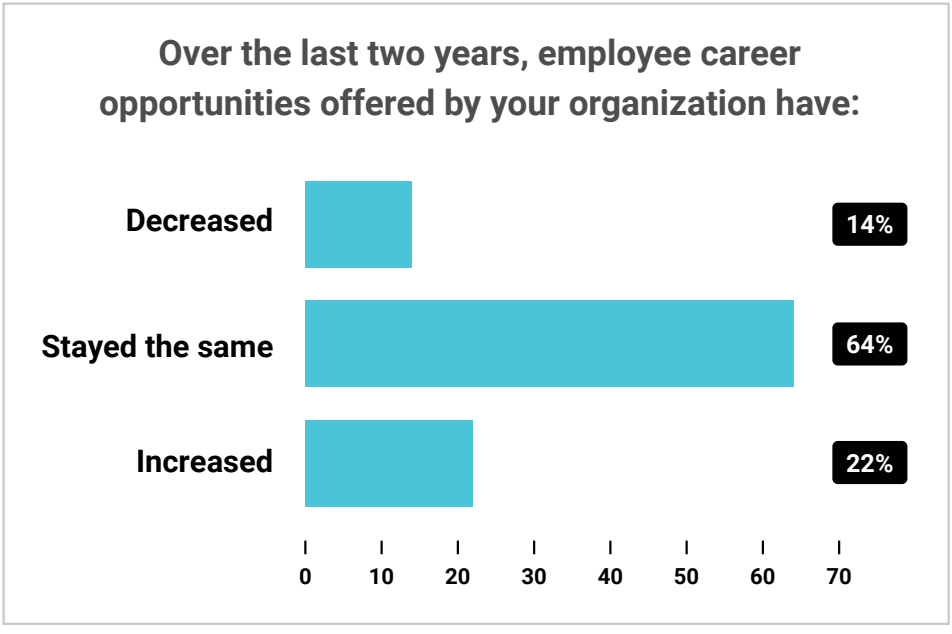
Finding: Nearly eight in 10 organizations have failed to increase the number of career development opportunities offered over the last two years

A combined 78% of organizations have either frozen (64%) or reduced (14%) their career development offerings over the last two years. This aligns closely with last year's findings, where over half of organizations reported no change and only a third had expanded development opportunities. This persistence of static offerings, even amid rising employee demand, highlights a gap between organizational intent and workforce expectations.

These kinds of gaps can have serious negative implications for workforce management. One Deloitte study reports that structured growth opportunities are key drivers of retention and engagement. Our findings also support research by Gartner showing that under half of employees feel supported in their career growth.

Differences based on organization size

Small organizations are much more likely to have increased the career opportunities over the last two years (31%) compared to midsized (23%) and large organizations (15%).



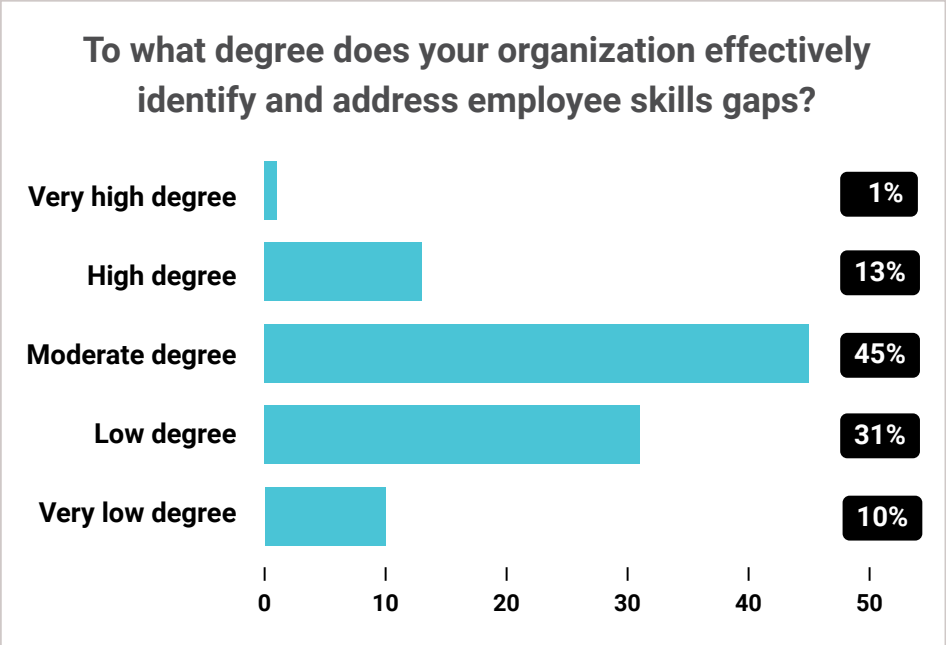
Finding: Most organizations address employee skills gaps only to a moderate degree

Over two-fifths of HR professionals (45%) report that their organizations identify and address employee skills gaps to a moderate degree. Another two-fifths perceive their efforts as low or very low (31% and 10%, respectively), while only 14% believe they do so to a high or very high degree.

This aligns with previous findings showing that career development opportunities have largely remained static and often fail to meet employee demand.

Differences based on organizational size

Small and midsized organizations fare better at identifying and addressing skills gaps to a high/very high degree (15%) compared to large organizations (10%).



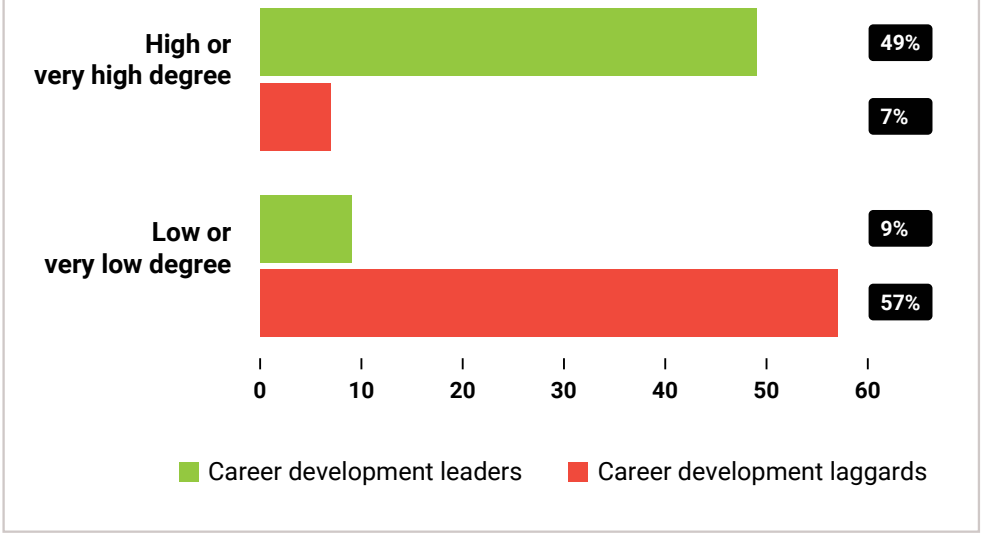
Note: Effective means the career development process is achieving desired goals.

Finding: Leaders are seven times more likely than laggards to identify and address employee skills gaps

Identifying and addressing employee skills gaps to a high or very high degree is something that career development leaders do much more successfully than laggards (49% vs. 7%).

Results of Chi-square Test

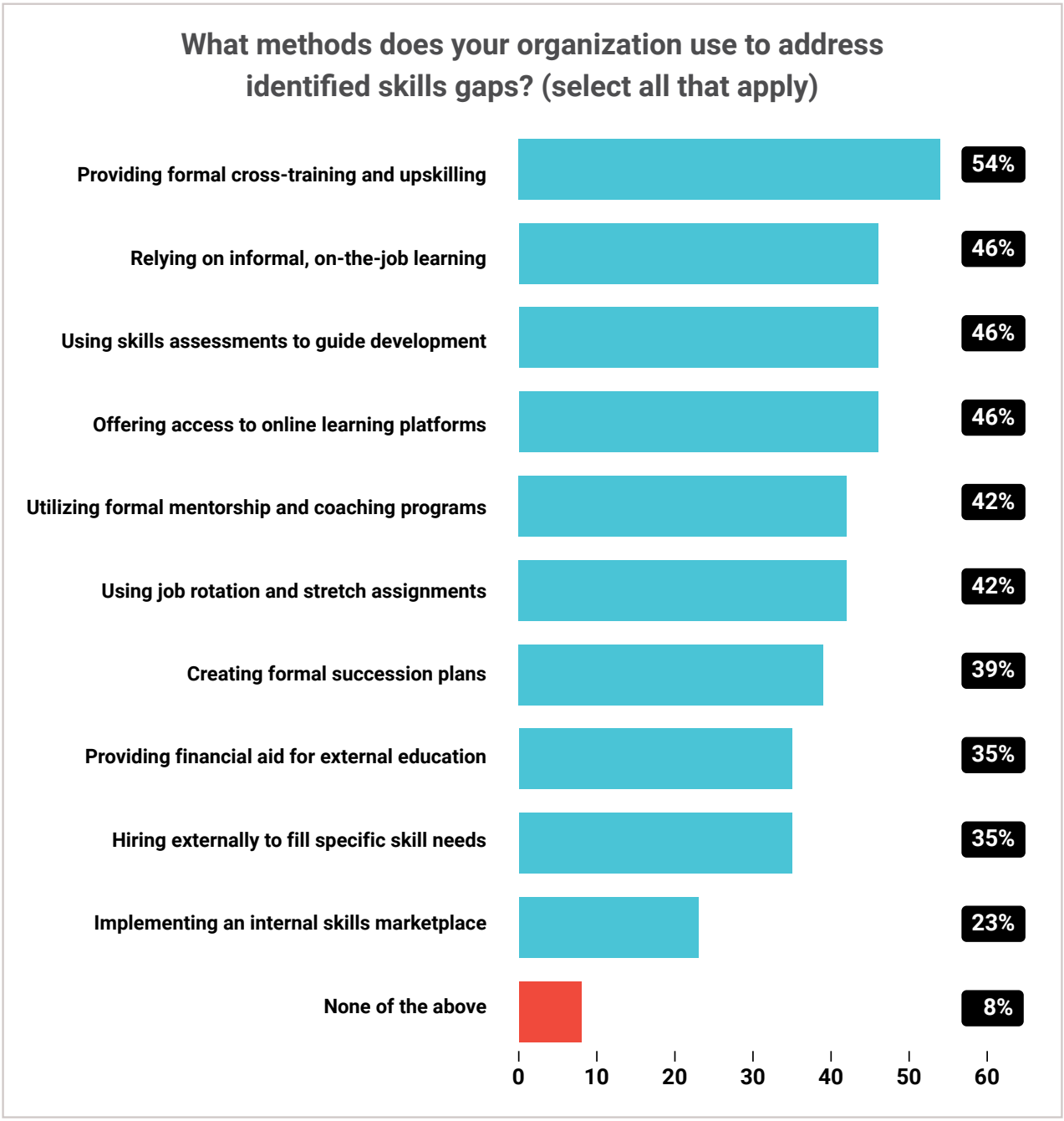
A chi-square test of independence shows that career development leaders are significantly more likely than the laggards to say their organization effectively identifies and addresses employee skills gaps.



Finding: Formal cross-training and upskilling is the most widely used method to close skills gaps

Organizations most commonly address skills gaps through formal cross-training and upskilling (54%). Three methods follow closely at 46%: skills assessments, access to online learning platforms, and informal on-the-job learning, reflecting a continued mix of structured and informal development.

Job rotation and stretch assignments (42%) and formal mentorship and coaching (42%) remain widely used, aligning with earlier findings that organizations still lean on relationship-based and experiential learning. However, succession planning (39%) is less common, suggesting a tendency to focus on near-term skill needs rather than long-term planning.


What methods does your organization use to address identified skills gaps? (select all that apply)
Providing formal cross-training and upskilling
54%
Relying on informal, on-the-job learning
46%
Using skills assessments to guide development
46%
Offering access to online learning platforms
46%
Utilizing formal mentorship and coaching programs
42%
Using job rotation and stretch assignments
42%
Creating formal succession plans
39%
Providing financial aid for external education
35%
Hiring externally to fill specific skill needs
35%
Implementing an internal skills marketplace
23%
None of the above
8%
0
10
20
30
40
50
60

Finding: Most organizations report no change in the time allocated to career development

A clear majority (55%) have kept time allocations flat, and financial investment is similarly paralyzed. Nearly half (49%) of organizations have made zero change to their development budgets. Still, about one in four report slight increases in time (25%) and nearly the same show slight increases in financial resources (18%), suggesting modest but emerging momentum behind development efforts.

Only small proportions report dramatic increases (4% for time, 6% for finances), which aligns with earlier findings showing limited investment in advanced tools, technologies, and manager capability.

Decreases remain far from negligible: 26% report reduced financial resources and 17% report reduced time, highlighting pressures in some organizations to scale back. This mixed pattern reinforces a broader theme across the survey: career development is valued, but substantial increases in resourcing are still far from widespread.

Differences based on organization size

Large and midsized organizations are more likely to have increased the time devoted to career development (28%) compared to small organizations (20%). However, small organizations are more likely to have increased the financial resources devoted to these programs (30%) compared to midsized (22%) and large organizations (20%).

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Editor's Note: In the original data, 6% - 7% of respondents stated that they "don't know." We removed those responses and recalculated the numbers, so this only shows percentages for those who answered the question.

Finding: Career development leaders are more likely to prioritize development through increases in time and budget

Career development leaders continue to prioritize career development through increased time and resources. In fact, they are twice as likely as laggards to have increased both time (50% vs. 25%) and resources (44% vs. 22%) to career development over the last year.

Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that career development leaders are significantly more likely than laggards to have increased the time and financial resources devoted to career development over the last year.

Over the last year, have the time and/or financial resources devoted solely to career development increased or decreased in your organization? (Percent responding increased a little or a lot)

HRRI Strategic Recommendations

Based on our research, below are some suggestions:

- **Expand career development opportunities.** Launch new role-specific learning paths, introduce microlearning modules, and set targets such as opening at least one new development program each quarter.
- **Conduct quarterly skills gap assessments.** Collect input from managers and employees, analyze performance data, and prioritize the top three skill gaps to address with targeted training.
- **Implement structured cross-training, rotations, and stretch assignments.** Assign employees to at least one rotation or stretch project annually and track skill acquisition.
- **Increase dedicated time and budget for career development.** Allocate a minimum number of hours per employee each quarter for learning, and earmark funds for mentorship programs, certifications, or digital learning subscriptions.
- **Integrate multiple learning channels into a unified development plan.** Combine formal training, online courses, coaching, and on-the-job learning, and require managers to review progress regularly with each team member.

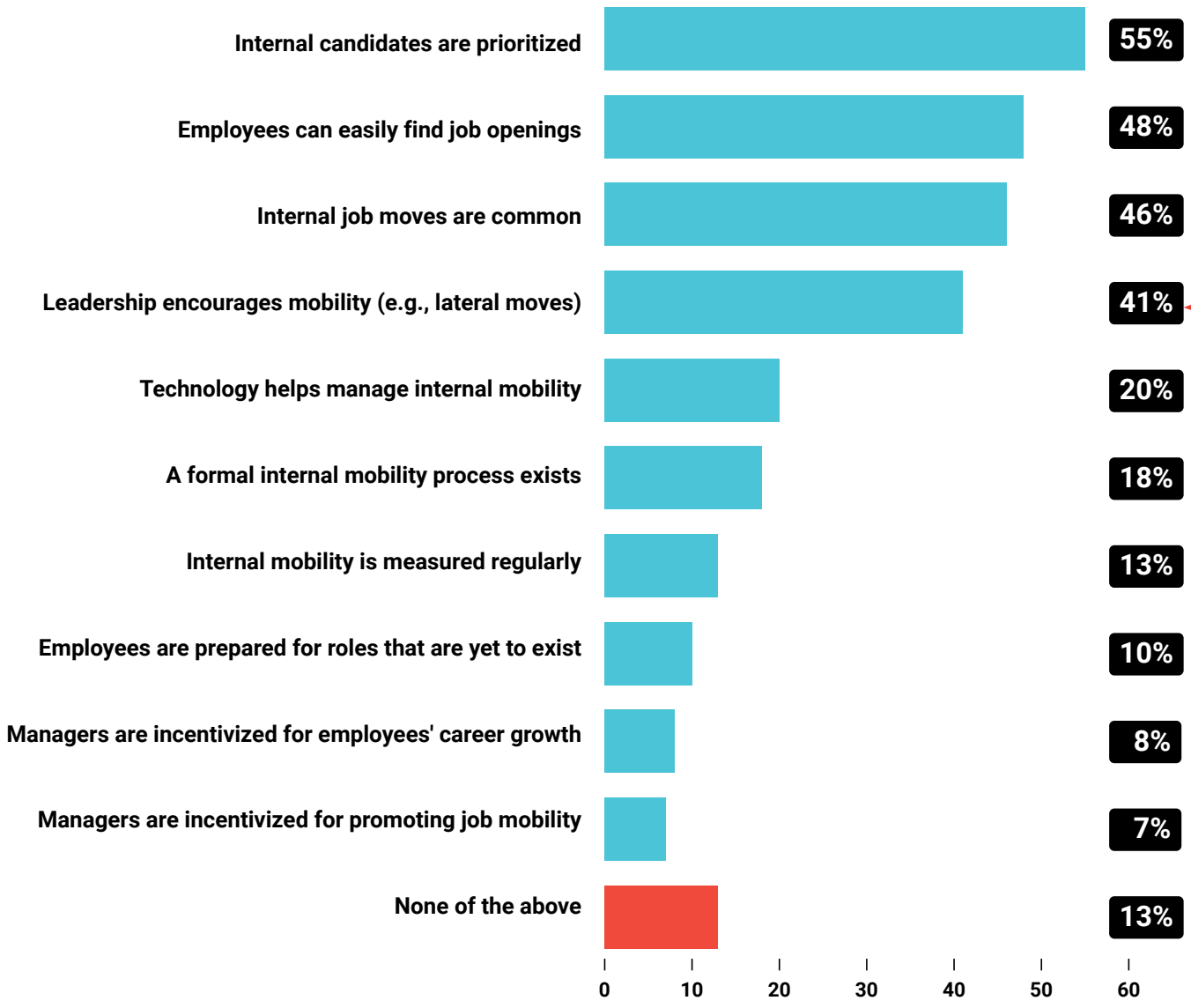
Internal Mobility Enablers and Obstacles

Finding: Just over half of organizations prioritize internal candidates for roles, but formal mobility remains limited

Internal mobility continues to be recognized as a key driver of employee growth, engagement, and retention, yet most organizations rely on basic or informal practices. Just over half of HR professionals (55%) report prioritizing internal candidates, with fewer noting that employees can easily find job openings (48%) or that internal moves are common (46%). Leadership support for lateral mobility exists in 41% of organizations, while formal processes (18%), technology support (20%), and regular measurement (13%) remain limited.

These findings largely mirror last year's data, which showed organizations focusing on making openings visible (58%) and selecting internal candidates first (56%), but we see less support for lateral moves and minimal incentives for managers to advance employee careers. Without structured processes, measurement, and technology enablement, internal mobility efforts remain fragmented, limiting both employee development and organizational agility.

Which of the following statements are true in your organization? (select all that apply)



Only 41% say leadership encourages mobility

Finding: Career development leaders are almost four times more likely to have a formal internal mobility process

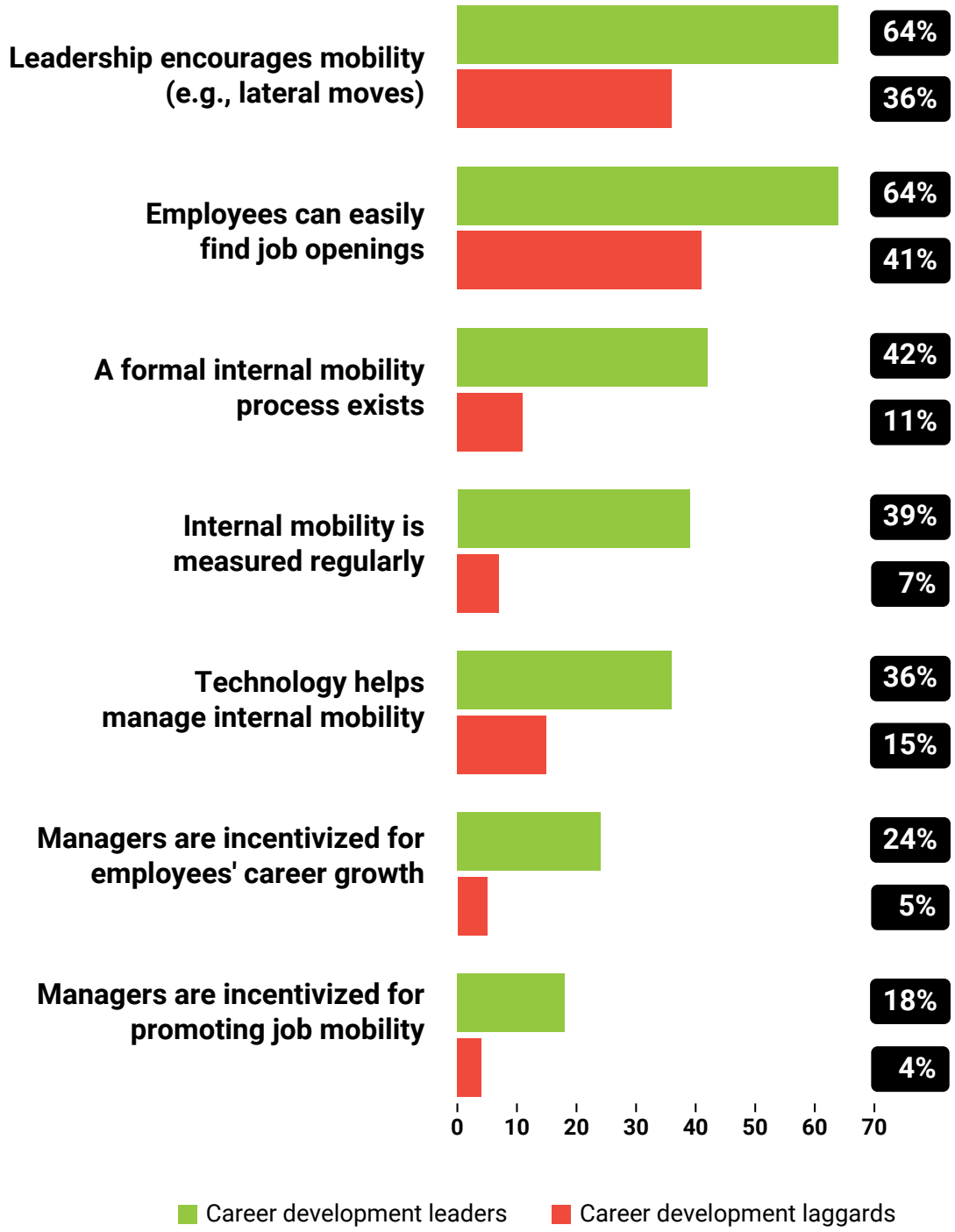
Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that career development leaders are significantly more likely than the laggards to say the listed statements are true in their organizations.

Career development leaders may be more successful with internal mobility because they are almost four times more likely than laggards to have a formal internal mobility process (42% vs. 11%). Further, leaders are more likely than laggards to regularly measure internal mobility (39% vs. 7%).

Management and leadership in career development leader organizations are also encouraged in several aspects of mobility. Specifically, they are more likely than laggards to say that leadership encourages mobility (64% vs. 36%) and that managers are incentivized for both employees' career growth (24% vs. 5%) and for promoting job mobility (18% vs. 4%).

Which of the following statements are true in your organization?



Two-fifths of leaders regularly measure internal mobility while just 7% of laggards say the same

Finding: Digitally accessible job information remains the dominant technology for internal mobility

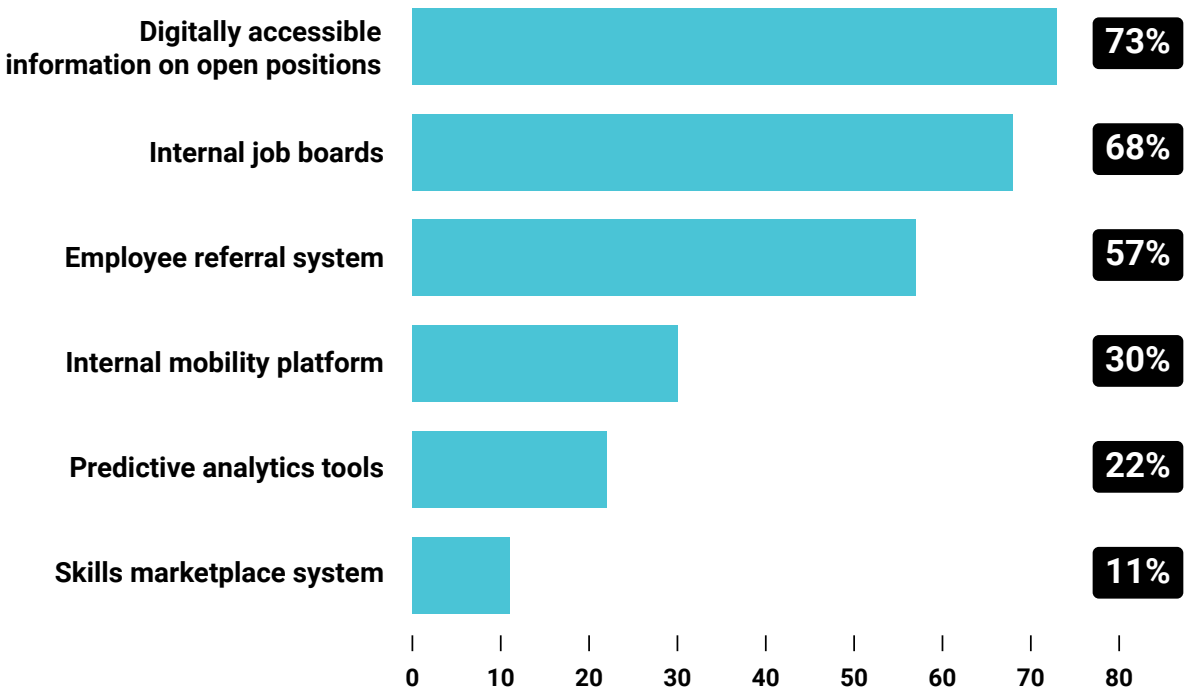
Among the minority of organizations that use some type of technology to help manage internal mobility (only 20% of all respondents), most organizations continue to rely on basic digital tools to support internal mobility. In this year's data, 73% of HR professionals report providing digitally accessible information on open positions, 68% use internal job boards, and 57% use employee referral systems. More advanced tools—such as internal mobility platforms (30%), predictive analytics (22%), and skills marketplaces (11%)—are far less common.

Compared with last year, foundational tools such as job boards and accessible job information continue to dominate, highlighting that most organizations still prioritize visibility and accessibility over advanced matching or workforce planning capabilities.

Differences based on organization size

Digitally accessible information on open positions is the most used technology in large and small organizations while internal job boards are more popular in midsized organizations.

What tools and technologies does your organization use to help manage internal mobility? (select all that apply)



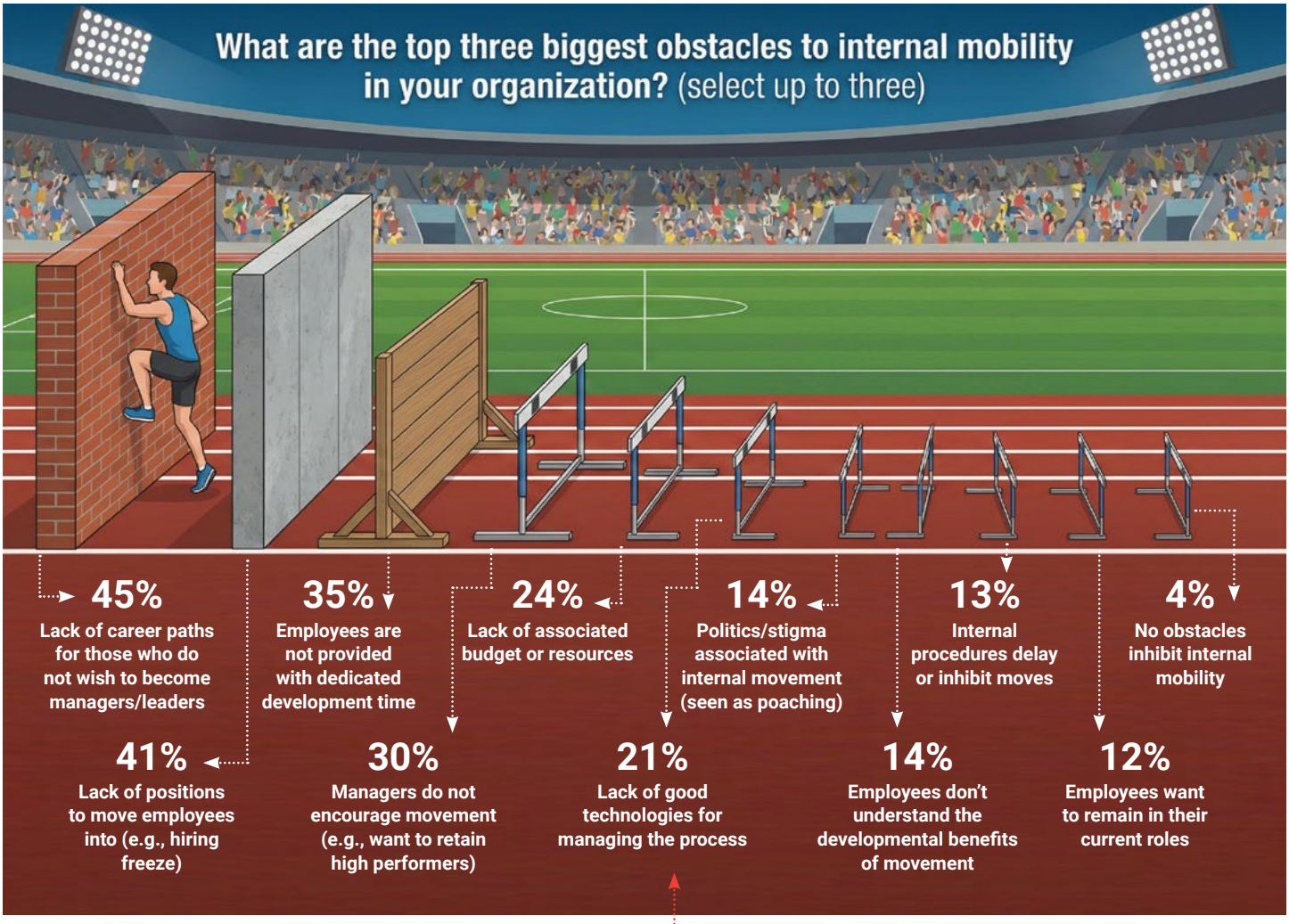
Finding: Lack of career paths and available positions are the top obstacles to internal mobility

HR professionals identify structural limitations as the primary barriers to internal mobility. Nearly half (45%) report a lack of career paths for employees who do not wish to become managers or leaders, while 41% cite insufficient positions for movement, such as during hiring freezes. These have remained the top barriers from last year. Other notable obstacles include employees not being provided dedicated development time (35%) and managers discouraging movement to retain high performers (30%).

These findings build on previous insights showing that internal mobility programs are often informal and under-resourced. Without clear career pathways, available roles, and dedicated support, employees are less likely to pursue internal moves, limiting skill development, engagement, and retention.

Differences based on organization size

Lack of career paths for those who do not wish to become managers/ leaders is the top challenge in midsized and large organizations while small organizations are most likely to grapple with lack of positions to move employees into.



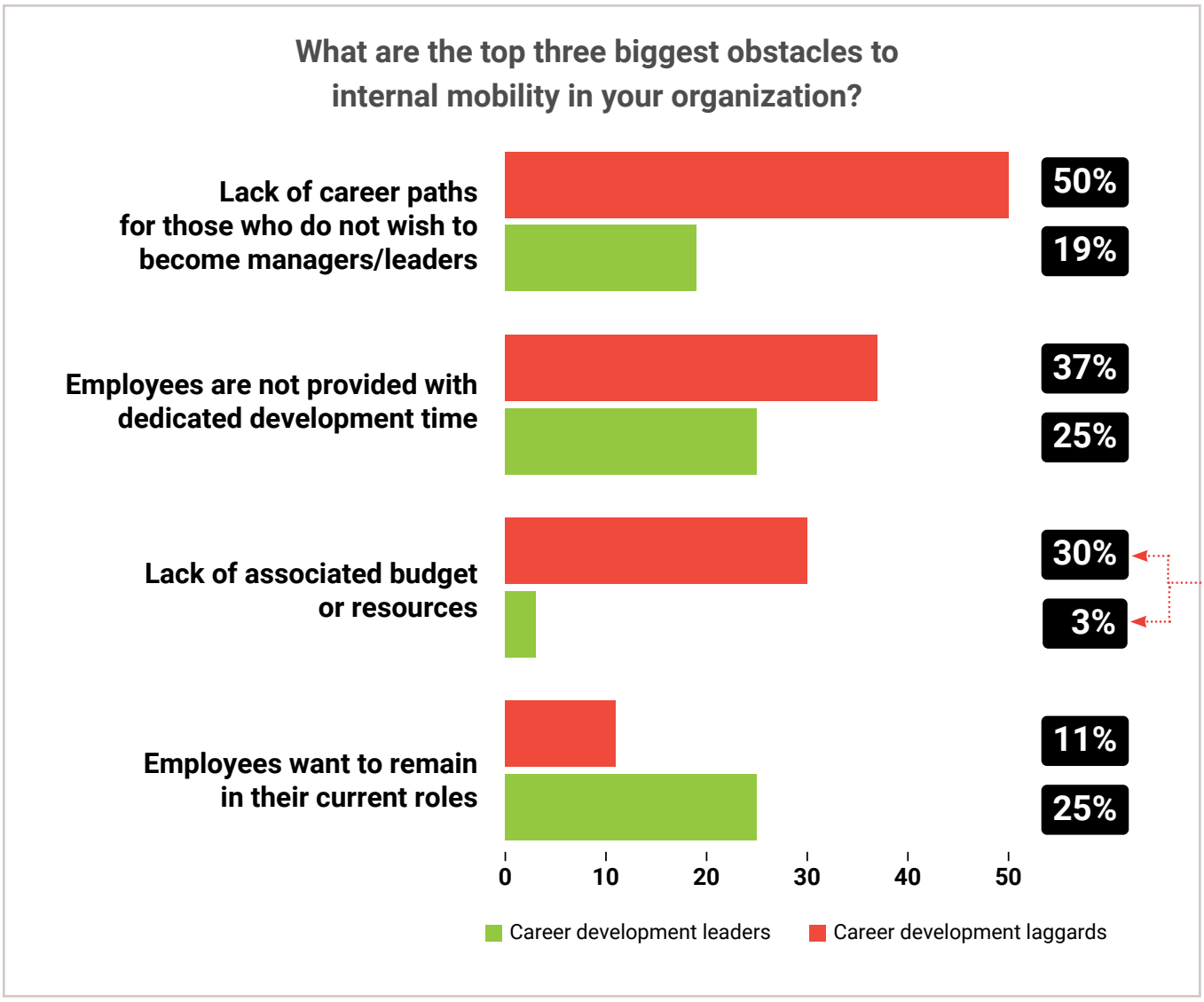
About a fifth cite lack of technologies to manage the process as a key challenge

Finding: Nearly a third of laggards cite a lack of budget or resources as an obstacle to internal mobility, while only 3% of leaders say the same

Not every employee wants to be a manager or lead others, and career development leader organization are more likely to accommodate this. They are less likely than laggards to say that a lack of career paths for those who don't want to become managers/leaders is an obstacle to internal mobility (19% vs. 50%). In fact, leaders are more likely than laggards to say that employees want to remain in their current roles.

Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that career development laggards are significantly more likely than leaders to say lack of career paths, development time, budget and resources are obstacles to internal mobility.



Laggards are ten times more likely than leaders to say a lack of budget/ resources is an obstacle to mobility

HRRI Strategic Recommendations

Based on our research, below are some suggestions:

- **Establish formal internal mobility processes.** Define policies for lateral moves, promotions, and role rotations. Incentivize managers to approve appropriate internal moves requested by employees, and review adherence quarterly. Organizations should avoid the dynamic of managers trying to "hoard their talent."
- **Make internal roles easily discoverable.** Maintain an up-to-date internal job board, post all openings digitally within 24 hours, and notify eligible employees automatically when roles match their skills.
- **Introduce dedicated career paths for non-managerial roles.** Map at least two alternative growth tracks per function, define skill and performance milestones, and communicate pathways in team meetings and development plans.
- **Encourage managers to support employee movement.** Tie a portion of manager performance evaluations to internal mobility metrics, provide recognition for facilitating lateral or stretch assignments, and require one mobility discussion per direct report each quarter.
- **Adopt technology to streamline internal mobility.** Deploy an internal mobility platform or skills marketplace, track employee applications and moves, and use predictive analytics to forecast open roles and match skills quarterly.

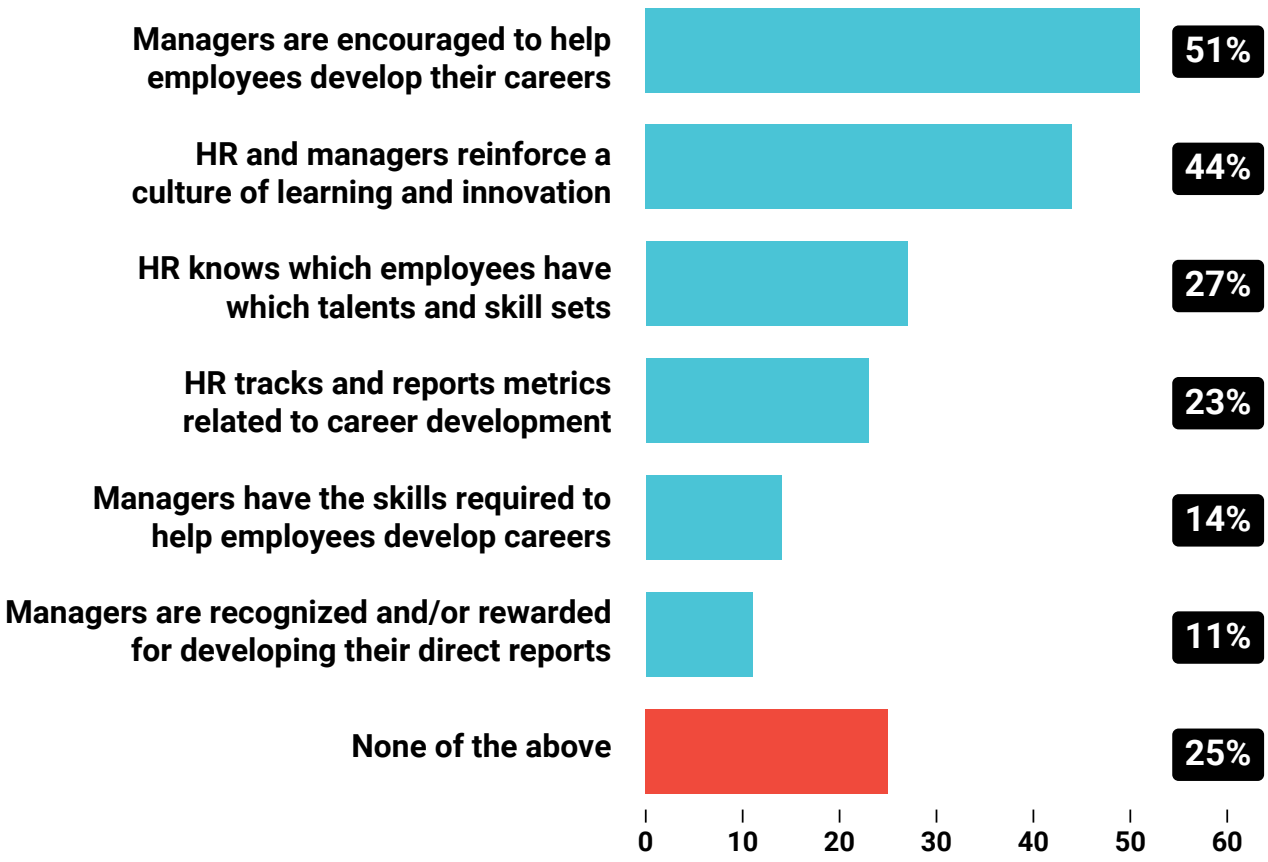
Career Development Culture

Finding: Only half of organizations encourage managers to support employee career development

While organizations verbally champion career development, they often fail to operationalize it. Half of HR professionals report that managers are encouraged to support employee growth, yet this expectation is rarely backed by systemic reinforcement. In reality, only 11% of organizations reward managers for developing their direct reports.

HR departments are also effectively managing talent in the dark. Despite the focus on learning cultures (44%), only 27% of organizations have a clear understanding of their employees' existing skills. And, just 23% track career development metrics. While organizations often promote career development in their messaging, they frequently lack the practical systems, measurable outcomes, and accountability needed to truly support it.

Which of the following statements are true about HR and managers in your organization? (select all that apply)



Just 23% believe HR tracks and reports metrics related to career development

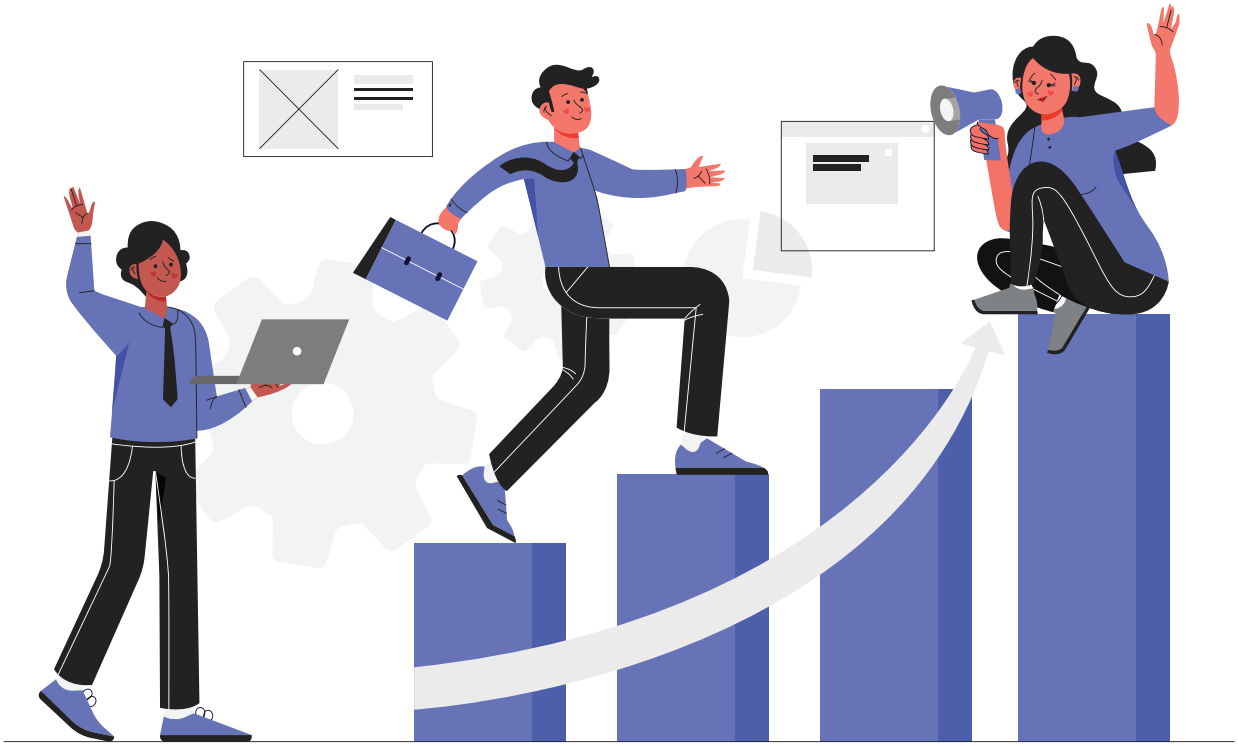
Finding: HR and managers are more likely to reinforce a culture of learning and innovation in career development leader organizations

Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that career development leaders are significantly more likely than laggards to say the listed statements about HR and managers and a culture of development is true in their organization.

Career development leaders are far more likely to have development embedded in their culture through multiple practices. Specifically they are more likely than laggards to empower and encourage managers to champion their direct reports. In fact, they are more likely than laggards to say that managers:

- encourage employees to develop their careers
- have the skills required to help employees develop their careers
- are recognized and/or rewarded for developing their direct reports



Which of the following statements are true about HR and managers in your organization? (select all that apply)

Career-development leaders track metrics at twice the rate of laggards (40% vs. 19%)

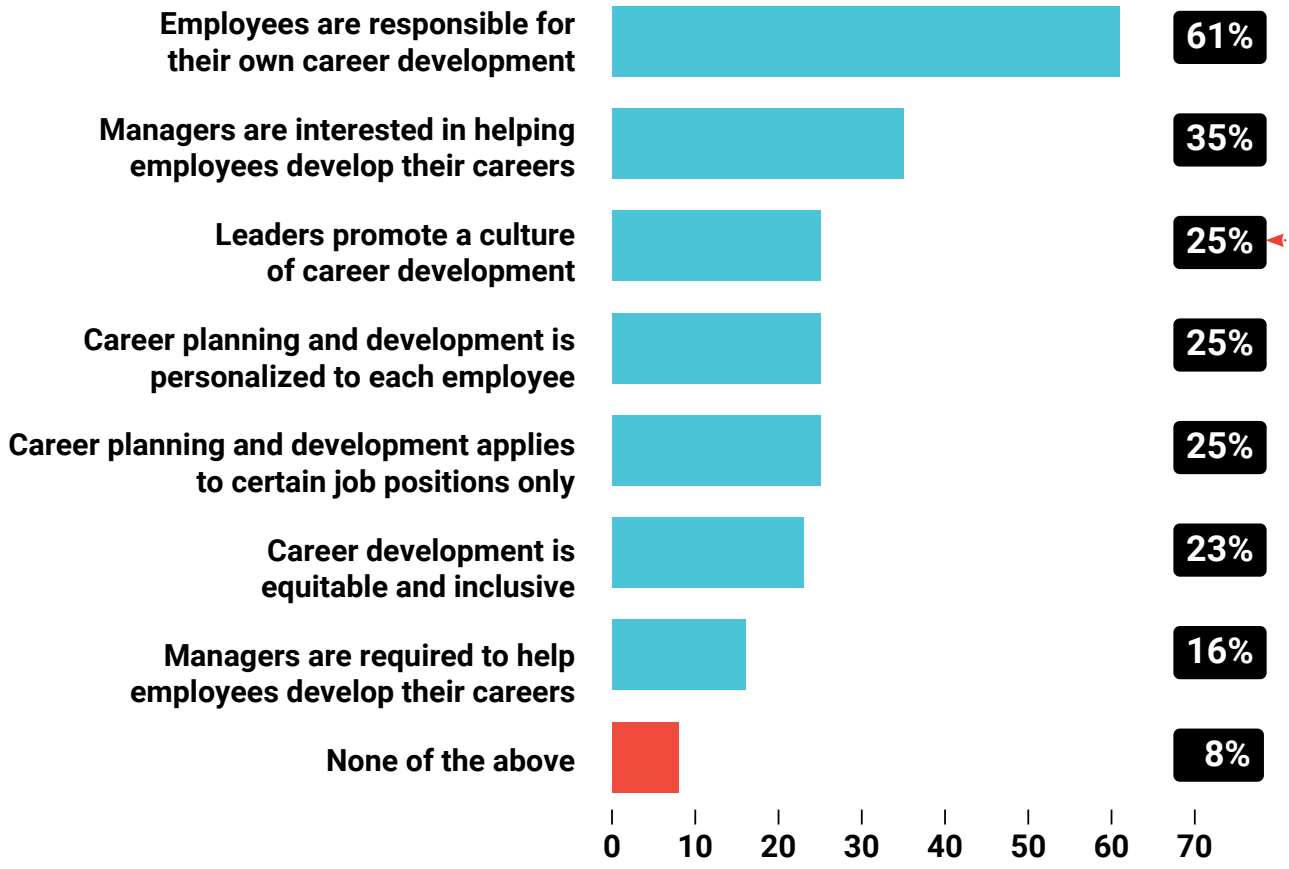
Finding: Most employees are expected to drive their own career development

A majority of HR professionals (61%) indicate that employees are primarily responsible for managing their own careers. While employee ownership is important, and often necessary, for effective development, it can become a limitation when organizations fail to provide the structure, guidance, and opportunities employees need to succeed. In other words, employees may "own" their careers, but they still rely on organizations to offer clear pathways, accessible tools, supportive managers, and equitable opportunities for growth.

Fewer report that managers are interested in supporting career growth (35%), and even smaller proportions say that career planning is personalized (25%), equitable and inclusive (23%), or supported by leadership culture (25%). Only 16% of organizations require managers to actively help employees develop.

These findings highlight a strong reliance on individual initiative over structured organizational support. Without more formal guidance, personalization, and accountability, employees may struggle to navigate career paths, limiting engagement, skill development, and internal mobility.

Which of the following applies to your organization with respect to career development (select all that apply)



One quarter say leaders in their organizations promote a culture of career development

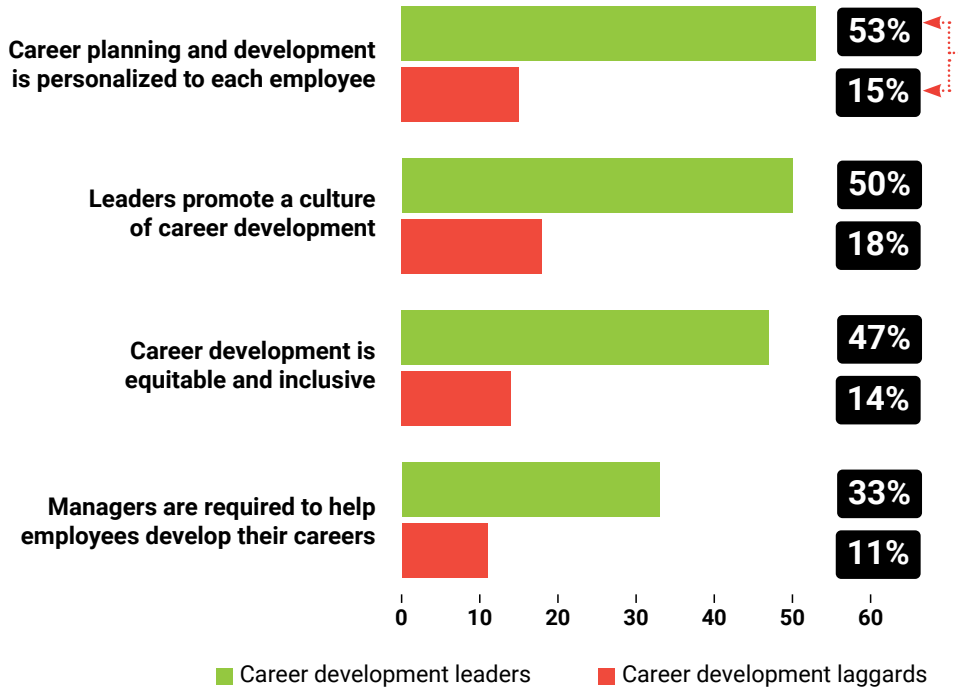
Finding: Managers in leader organizations are three times more likely to be required to help employees develop their careers

In an era where DEI is being scaled down, career development leaders are still much more likely than laggards to say that their career development is equitable and inclusive (47% vs. 14%). Leadership in these organizations is also expected to take responsibility for their employees. For example, managers are required to help employees develop their careers, and leaders promote a culture of career development.

Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that career development leaders are significantly more likely than laggards to say listed statements about creating a culture of development are true in their organizations.

Which of the following applies to your organization with respect to career development?



Career development leaders are three times more likely than laggards to personalize development to each employee

HRRI Strategic Recommendations

Based on our research, we have the following suggestions:

- **Require managers to actively support employee development.** Integrate career coaching responsibilities into manager job descriptions and hold quarterly check-ins with each direct report to review progress.
- **Track and report career development metrics.** Measure employee progress, internal mobility, and skill acquisition quarterly, and share results with leadership to drive accountability.
- **Create personalized development plans for all employees who want them.** Assign managers to co-develop growth plans based on skills, role aspirations, and performance data, and review them biannually.
- **Recognize and reward managers for supporting career growth.** Tie incentives, bonuses, or recognition programs to managers' success in facilitating development and internal moves.
- **Promote a culture of learning and leadership support.** Launch campaigns highlighting manager-led development successes, provide microlearning on coaching skills, and require leaders to model career support behaviors publicly.

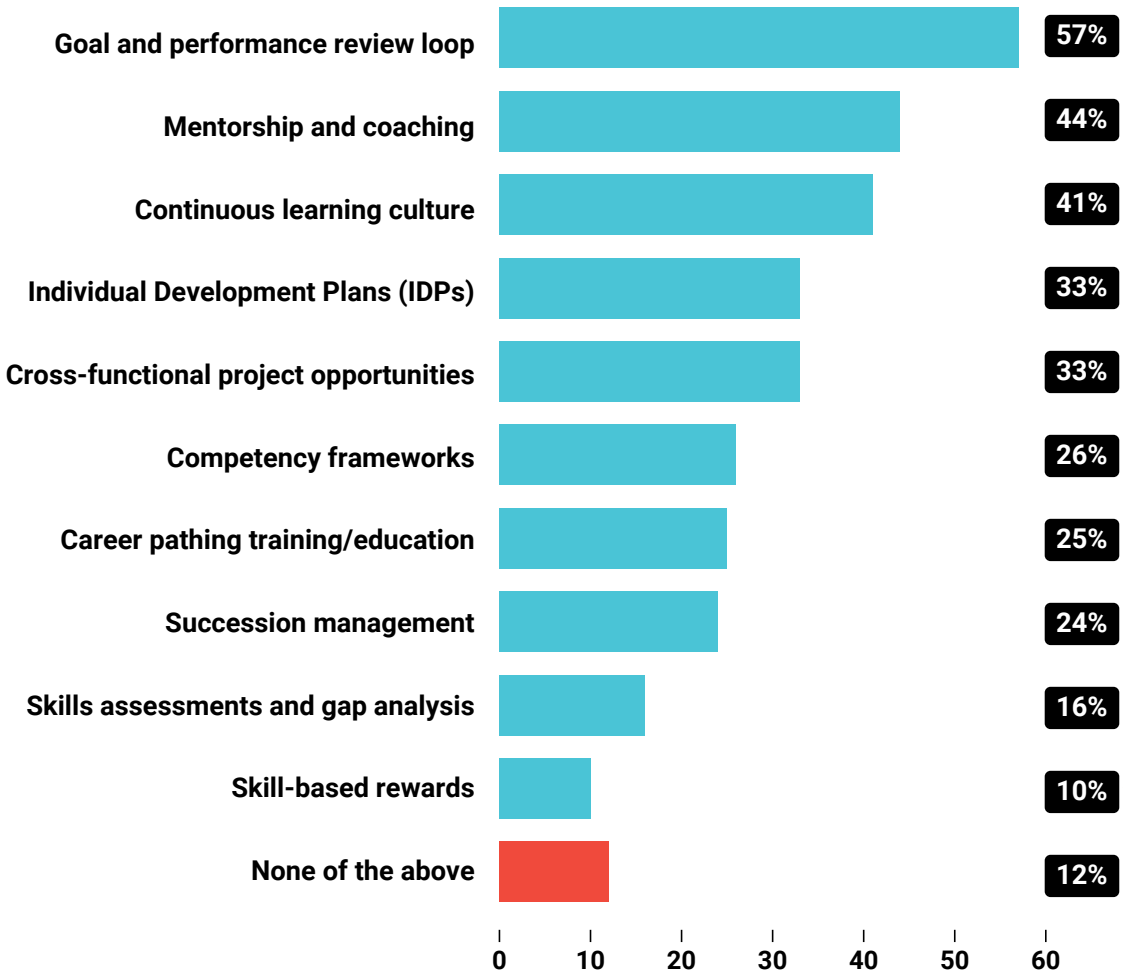
Career Development Processes

Finding: Goal and performance reviews are the most common development-friendly processes

A majority of HR professionals (57%) report that their organizations use goal-setting and performance review loops to support employee development. Other widely adopted processes include mentorship and coaching (44%), Individual Development Plans (33%), continuous learning culture (41%), and cross-functional project opportunities (33%).

These findings reinforce earlier observations that organizations rely heavily on foundational and informal development practices, with more structured or measurable programs less prevalent. When combined with previous data showing static career opportunities and limited managerial accountability, it highlights that many employees must navigate development largely on their own, even when programs exist.

Which of the following development-friendly processes does your organization use? (select all that apply)



Just one-tenth of organizations use skill-based rewards

Finding: More than three-quarters of leaders use mentorship and coaching in their organization, while just a third of laggards say the same

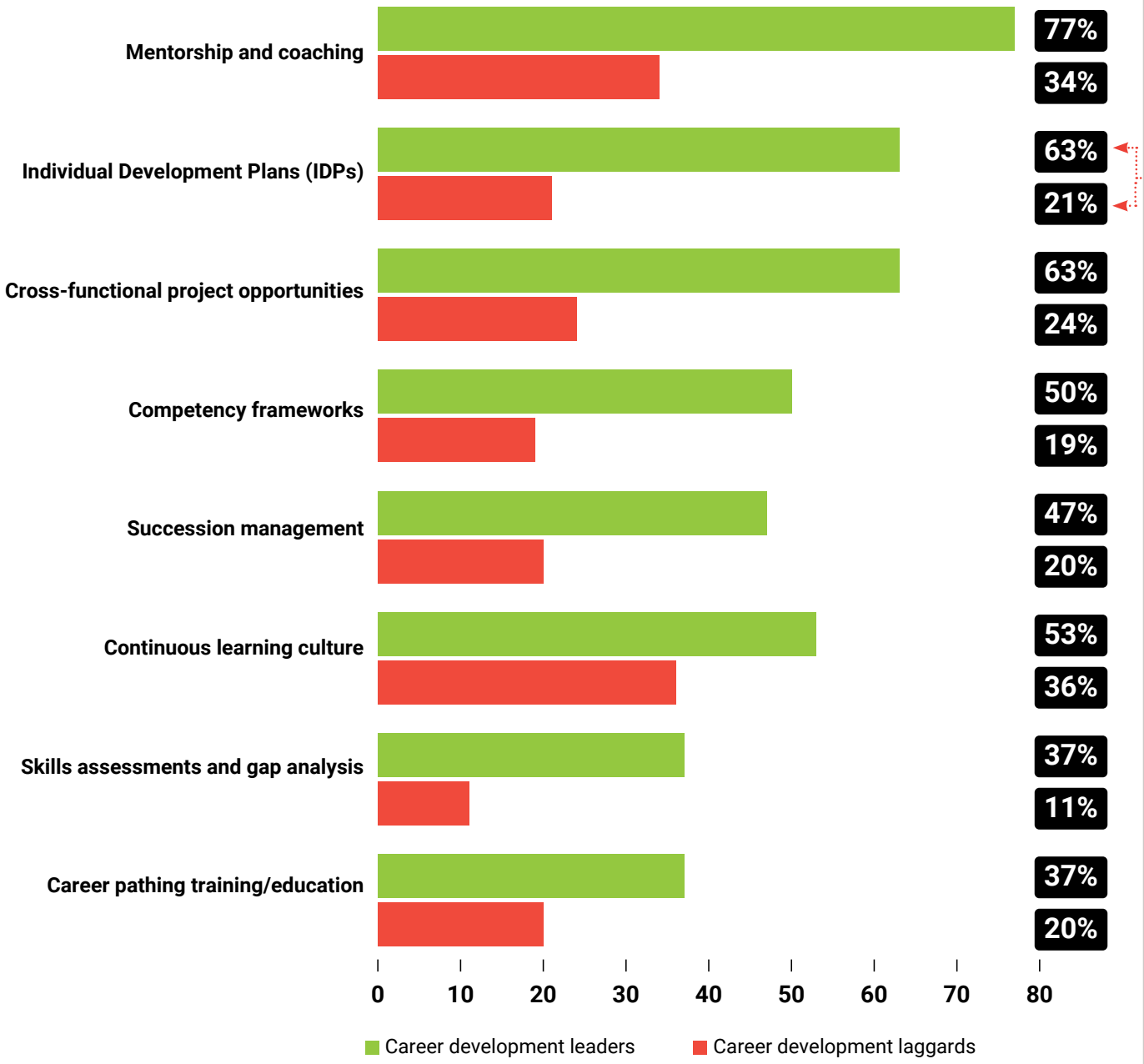
Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that career development leaders are more likely than laggards to say they use all listed development-friendly processes.

Career development leaders are more likely to use growth-related practices within the organization. For example, they are more likely than laggards to use mentorship and coaching (77% vs. 34%), succession management (47% vs. 20%), and a continuous learning culture (53% vs. 36%).

Further, they are more likely than laggards to use analyses-related processes such as skills assessments and gap analyses (37% vs. 11%) and competency frameworks (50% vs. 19%).

Which of the following development-friendly processes does your organization use?



Career development leaders are three times more likely than laggards to use Individual Development Plans

Finding: Employees' interests and motivations are the primary focus in career development

Almost three-fifths of HR professionals (58%) report that career development in their organizations considers employees' interests and motivations, making it the most emphasized element. Other common components include prior experience within the organization (43%), discussion of possible future career options (43%), prior experience before joining (38%), and project-based assignments (34%).

Which of the following elements are part of career development in your organization? (select all that apply)

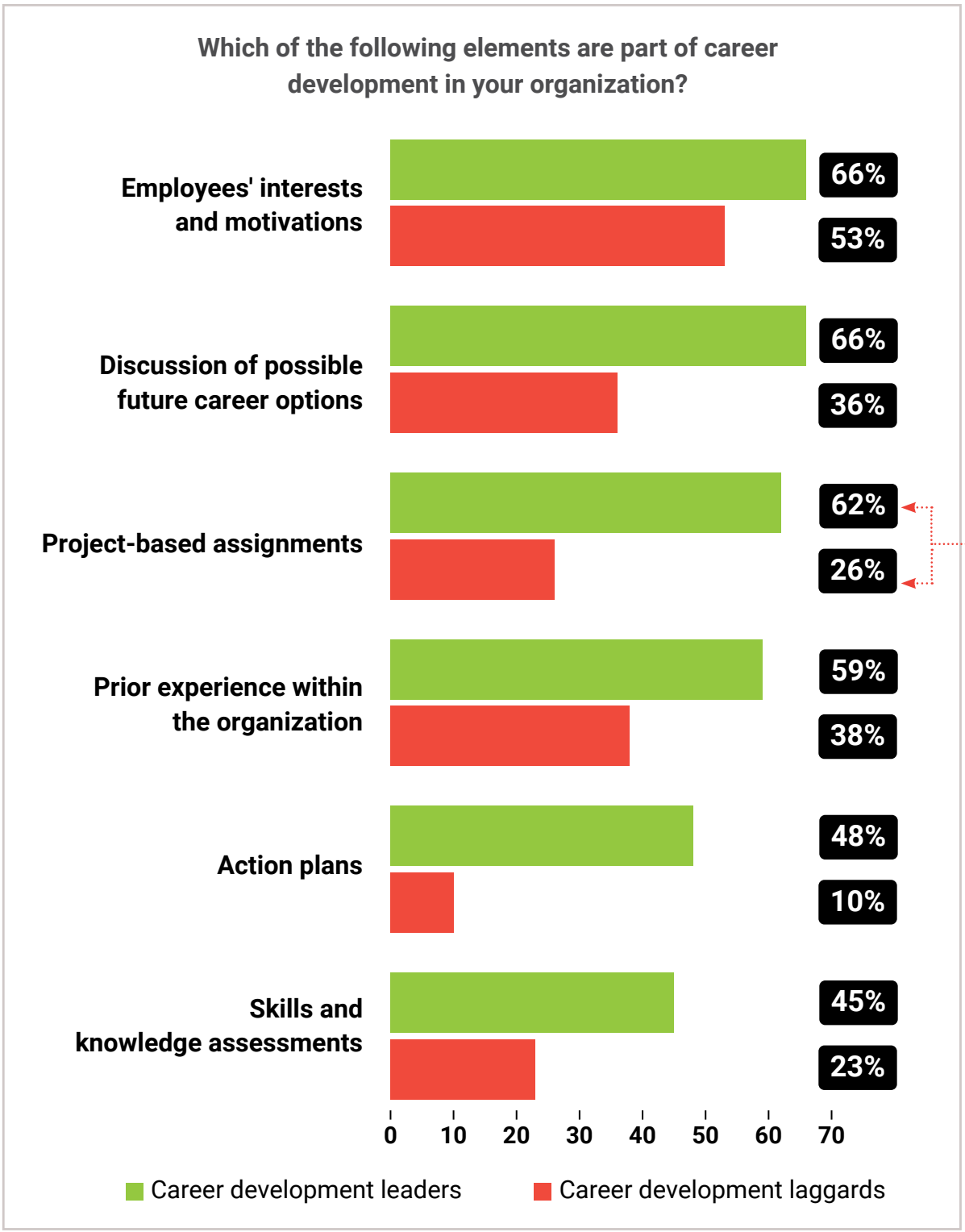
Only a fifth have action plans as part of a career development program

Finding: Nearly half of career development leaders use action plans as part of their career development process, while just 10% of laggards say the same

Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that career development leaders are more likely than laggards to say they use all listed elements in their organization's career development process.

Career development leaders have a more robust set of elements within their organization's career development. They are more likely to take the individual employee's interests into consideration through practices like discussions of future career options as well as trying out new skills and interests through project-based assignments. In fact, 48% of career development leaders take it one step further and include action plans for employees, while just 10% of laggards say the same.



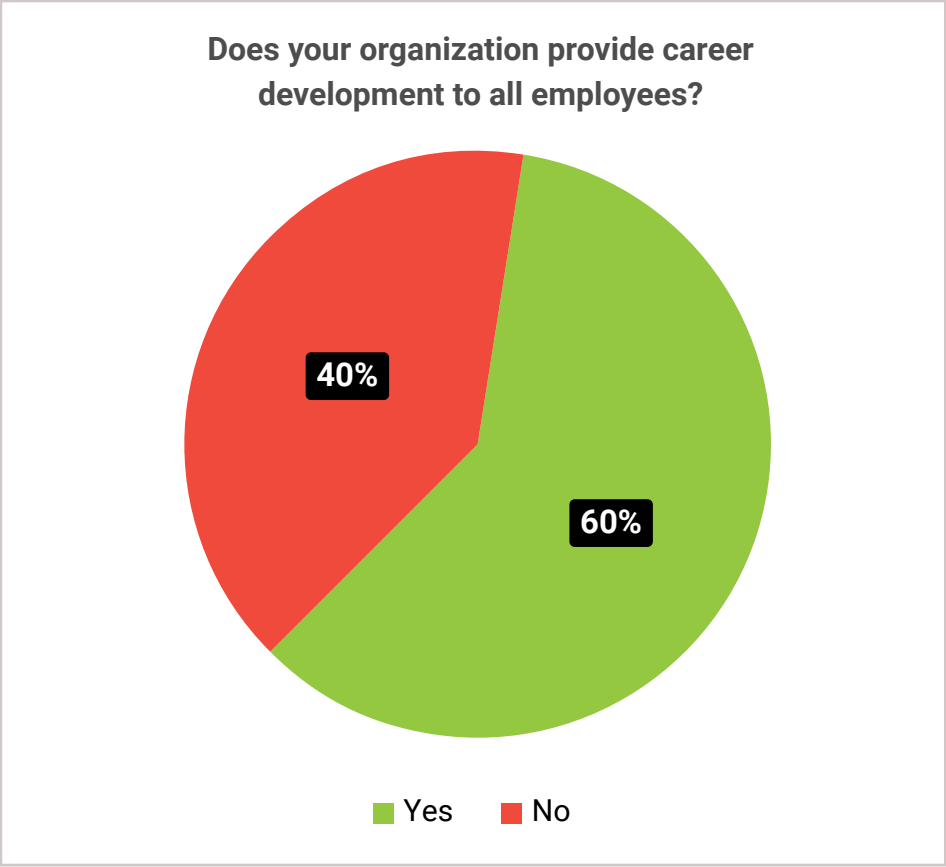
Career development leaders are more than twice as likely as laggards to include project-based assignments

Finding: Four in 10 organizations do not offer career development to all employees

Sixty percent offer career development to everyone, while 40% limit access. These organizations are effectively creating a two-tiered workforce: a “chosen” group that receives investment and a stagnant majority left to depreciate. This split reinforces a core theme throughout the data: career development remains unevenly distributed, and many organizations have not yet embedded development as a universal, equitable practice.

Differences based on organization size

Small organizations are most likely to offer career development to all employees (64%) compared to midsized (54%) and large organizations (44%).



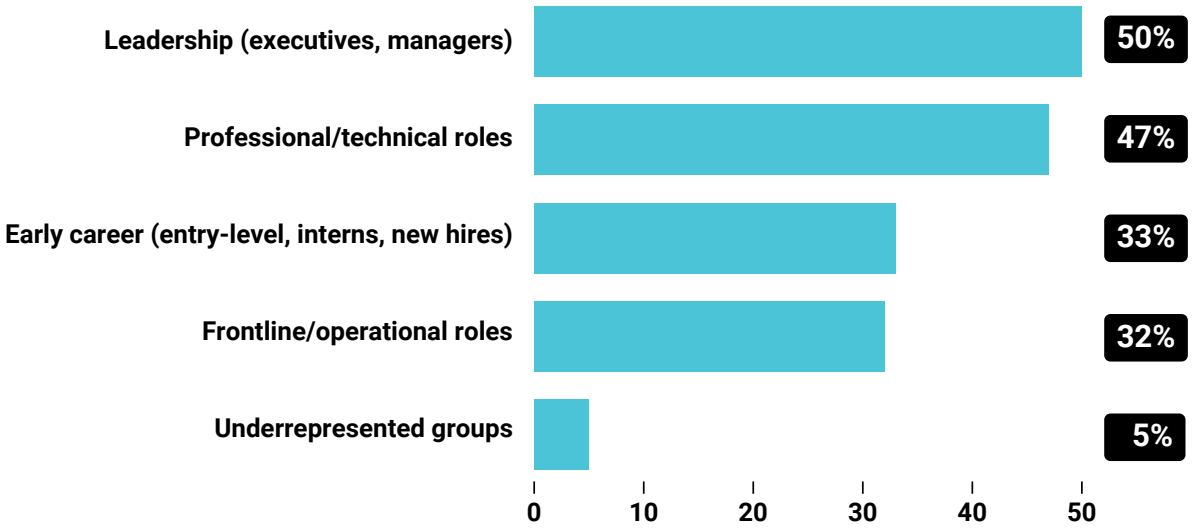
Editor’s Note: In the original data, 6% - 7% of respondents stated that they “don’t know.” We removed those responses and recalculated the numbers, so this only shows percentages for those who answered the question.

Finding: Career development programs primarily target leadership and professional roles

Of the organizations that limit access to career development processes/programs, half of HR professionals report that career development processes or programs are offered to leadership (executives and managers), with 47% covering professional or technical roles. Early career employees (33%) and frontline or operational staff (32%) are less frequently included. Programs for underrepresented groups are rare (5%), and some responses indicate ad-hoc or discretionary access such as "those who ask" or "persons who they like."

These findings reinforce earlier insights that career development tends to favor higher-profile roles, leaving many employees, particularly frontline staff and underrepresented groups, without structured support. This uneven investment not only limits equity and mobility but also weakens the organization's future leadership pipeline, reducing its ability to fill critical roles with internal talent.

To which groups of employees does your organization provide career development processes/programs? (select all that apply)



HRRI Strategic Recommendations

Based on our research, here are a few suggestions:

- **Conduct a development inclusion audit if current programs do not cover everyone.** Identify employees currently excluded from programs to determine what characteristics they share. Consider expanding programs to these employees.
- **Design career development programs with measurable outcomes.** Require each program to include concrete milestones such as skill completion, project participation, or promotion readiness, and track progress quarterly.
- **Link employee interests to structured development pathways.** Collect data on employee motivations through surveys or interviews, then assign tailored learning modules, mentorship, or project rotations aligned to those interests.
- **Expand action plan usage across all roles.** Ensure every employee has a written Individual Development Plan with specific tasks, deadlines, and manager checkpoints, reviewed at least twice per year.
- **Pilot skill-based rewards for non-leadership roles.** Offer certifications, digital badges, or small financial incentives for frontline and early career employees who complete targeted learning or internal projects, and evaluate participation and impact after six months.

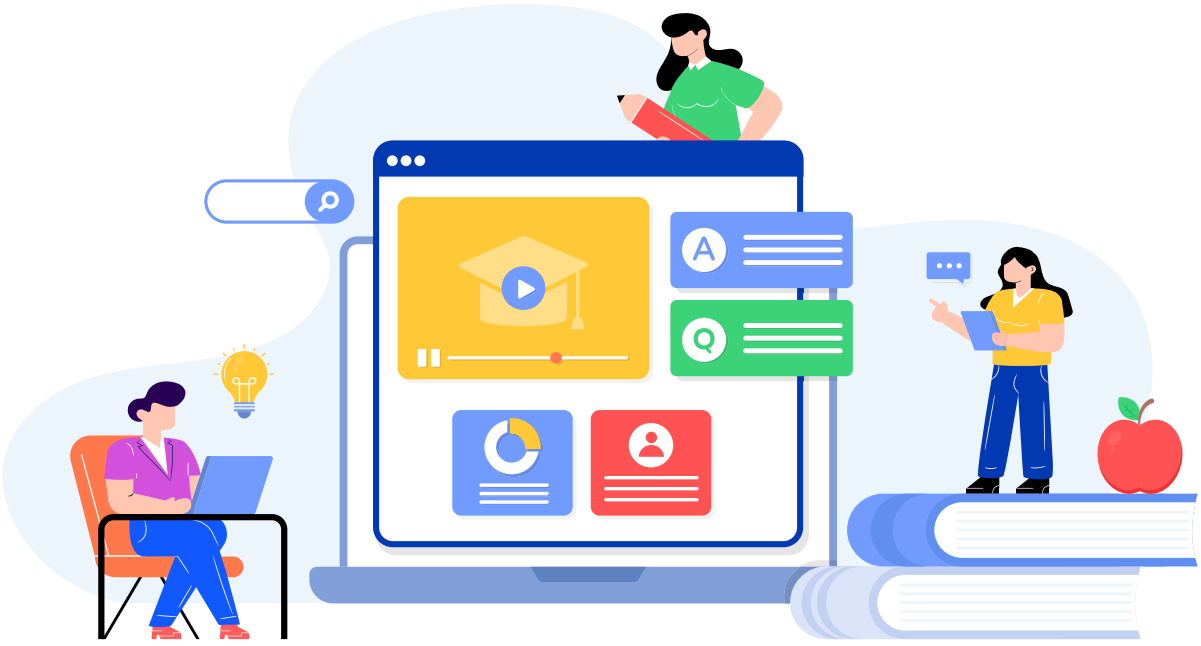
Career Development Technologies

Finding: Learning Management Systems are the most widely used development technology

Over half of HR professionals (54%) report using Learning Management Systems (LMS) to support employee development. Collaborative communication tools such as video conferencing or shared drives follow closely (50%), with performance management systems used by 42%. Online learning platforms and communities are used by 33% of organizations.

These findings show that while foundational digital tools are widely used, more advanced or specialized technologies for skills assessment, career management, and mobility remain underutilized.

Despite the fact that many of today's AI foundation models have functionalities specifically geared toward student-oriented guided learning, only 12% say they leverage AI-powered technology as a development technology.



Which of the following development-friendly technologies does your organization use? (select all that apply)

Almost a fifth have no development-related technologies of any type

Finding: Career development leaders are almost three times more likely to use skill assessment tools

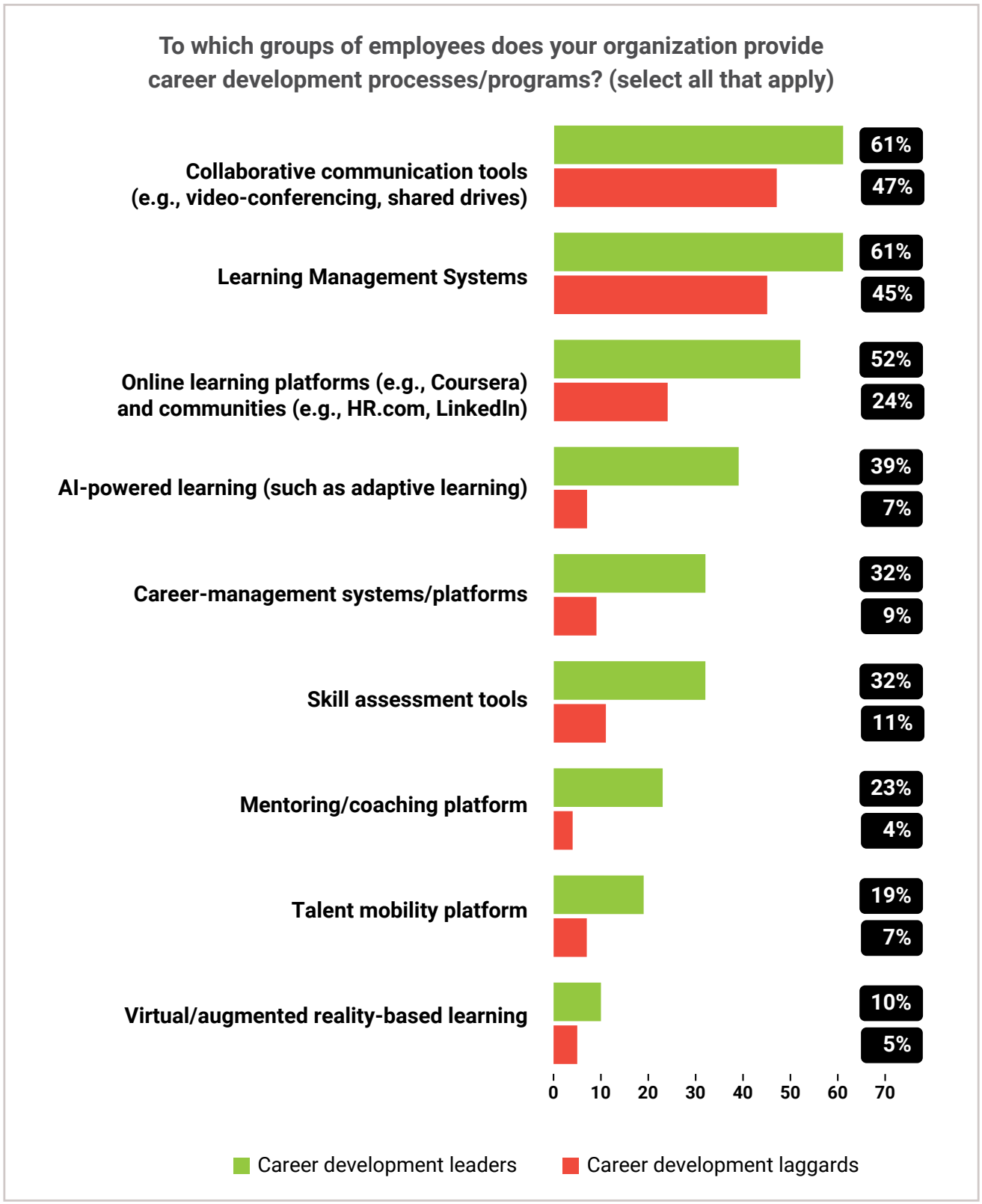
As previously mentioned, leaders are more likely than laggards to partake in mentoring and coaching. Further, they are also more likely to have a dedicated mentoring/coaching platform (23% vs. 4%).

In fact, career development leaders are far more likely than laggards to use technologies in a number of development areas, such as:

- online learning platforms and communities (52% vs. 24%)
- AI-powered learning (39% vs. 7%)
- career-management systems/platforms (32% vs. 9%)

Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that career development leaders are significantly more likely than laggards to use the listed development-friendly technologies.


To which groups of employees does your organization provide career development processes/programs? (select all that apply)
Collaborative communication tools (e.g., video-conferencing, shared drives)
61%
47%
Learning Management Systems
61%
45%
Online learning platforms (e.g., Coursera) and communities (e.g., HR.com, LinkedIn)
52%
24%
AI-powered learning (such as adaptive learning)
39%
7%
Career-management systems/platforms
32%
9%
Skill assessment tools
32%
11%
Mentoring/coaching platform
23%
4%
Talent mobility platform
19%
7%
Virtual/augmented reality-based learning
10%
5%
0
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
Career development leaders
Career development laggards

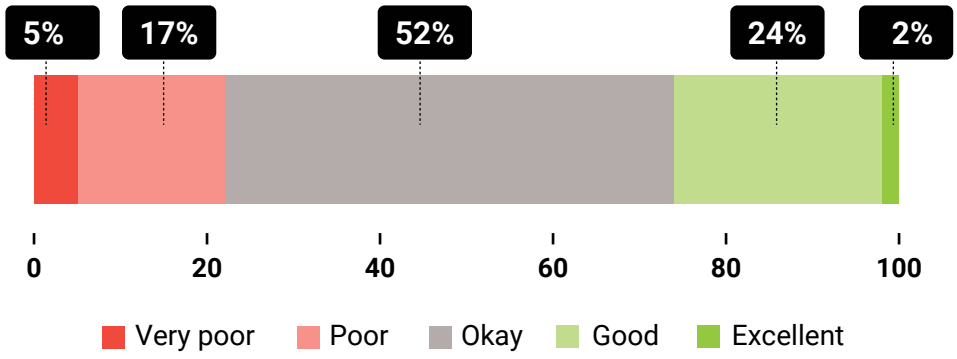
Finding: Career development technologies are largely rated as adequate but not advanced

Of the organizations that use some technology for career development, a majority of HR professionals (52%) describe the technologies their organizations use for career development as "okay." About a quarter rate them as "good" (24%), while fewer see them as "poor" (17%) or "very poor" (5%). Only 2% consider their development technologies "excellent."

Differences based on organization size

Respondents in small organizations are more likely to rate the technologies used for career development as good or excellent (39%) compared to midsized (22%) and large organizations (24%).

Overall, how would you rate the technologies that your organization uses to help with career development?



Note: Examples may include external online learning platforms as well as specific HR-driven development technologies

Finding: Over half of organizations do not use AI in career development

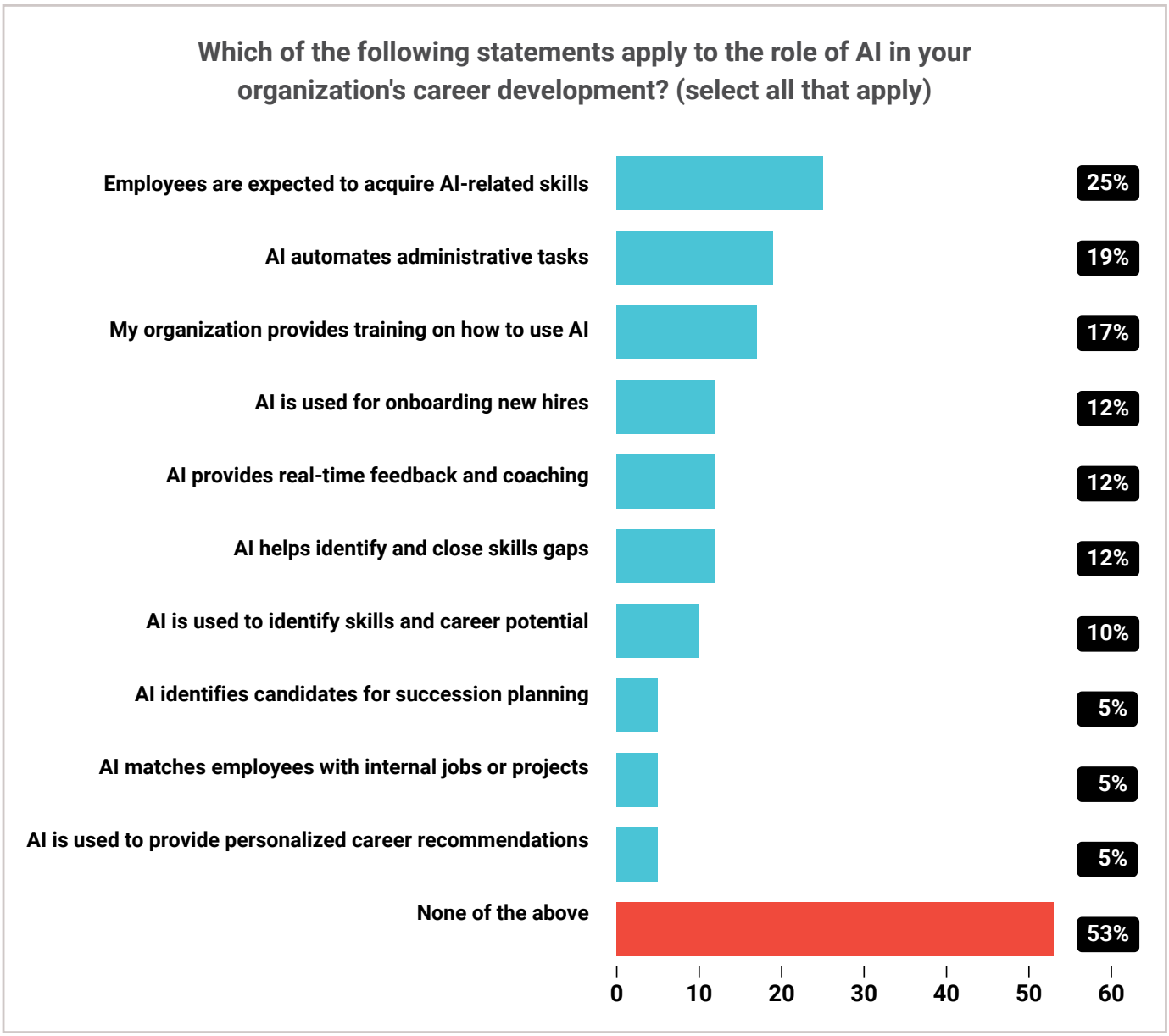
A majority of HR professionals (53%) report that none of the listed AI applications are used in their organization's career development processes. A quarter, however, at least encourage employees to acquire AI-related skills, though only 17% provide training on how to use AI. Nearly a fifth (19%) indicate that AI is used in automating administrative tasks.

Even fewer use AI for more strategic developmental tasks such as skills gap identification, onboarding, real-time feedback, succession planning, personalized recommendations, or matching employees to internal roles.

Generally speaking, AI adoption in career development remains very limited at most organizations. Many organizations apparently rely on manual processes that are potentially inefficient and create a heavy administrative burden for HR and managers.

Differences based on organization size

Respondents in midsized organizations are most likely to say they don't use AI for any of the listed career development activities (59%) compared to small (40%) and large organizations (40%).


Which of the following statements apply to the role of AI in your organization's career development? (select all that apply)
Employees are expected to acquire AI-related skills
25%
AI automates administrative tasks
19%
My organization provides training on how to use AI
17%
AI is used for onboarding new hires
12%
AI provides real-time feedback and coaching
12%
AI helps identify and close skills gaps
12%
AI is used to identify skills and career potential
10%
AI identifies candidates for succession planning
5%
AI matches employees with internal jobs or projects
5%
AI is used to provide personalized career recommendations
5%
None of the above
53%
0
10
20
30
40
50
60

Finding: Career development leaders are much more likely to embrace AI for career development uses

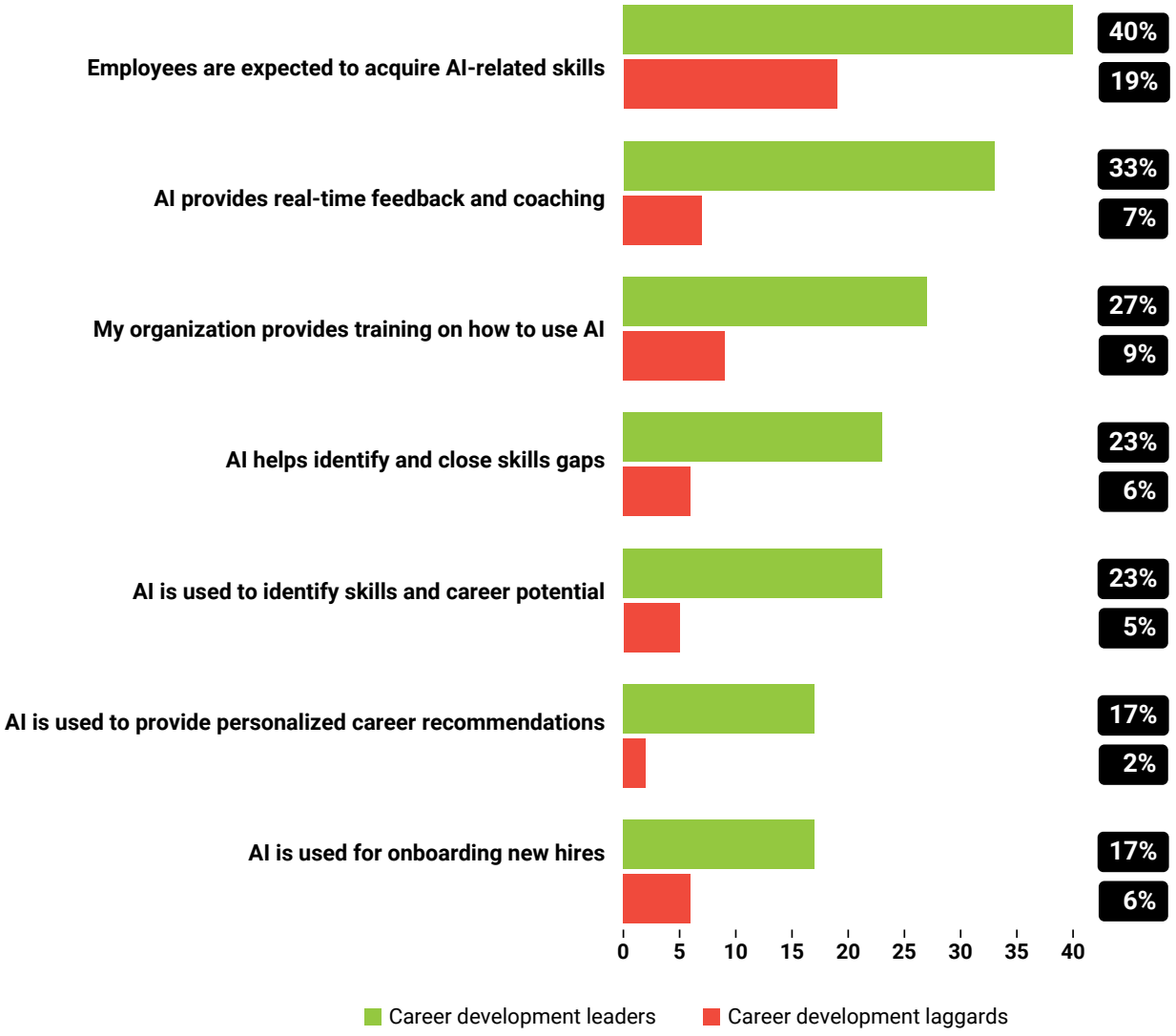
Results of Chi-square Test

A chi-square test of independence shows that career development leaders are significantly more likely than laggards to use AI for the listed career development-related applications in their organizations.

Career development leaders are consistently more likely to apply AI to career development. They are two times more likely to expect employees to develop AI-related skills and three times more likely to actually provide such training.

Leaders are also more likely to use AI for strategic purposes. Specifically, they are more likely than laggards to say AI helps identify and close skills gaps (23% vs. 6%), AI is used to provide personalized career recommendations (17% vs. 2%), and that AI is used to identify skills and career potential (23% vs. 5%).

Which of the following statements apply to the role of AI in your organization's career development?



Leaders are three times more likely than laggards to say their organization provides training on how to use AI

HRRI Strategic Recommendations

Based on our research, here are a few suggestions:

- **Implement real-time feedback and progress tracking tools.** Deploy digital dashboards where employees can monitor completed courses, skill growth, and career milestones, with manager visibility to support coaching.
- **Leverage collaborative technologies for peer learning and mentorship.** Use video conferencing, chat platforms, or internal communities to facilitate cross-team knowledge sharing, mentoring circles, and project-based learning initiatives.
- **Establish an annual technology audit for career development.** Review all development tools for effectiveness, adoption rates, and user satisfaction, then upgrade or replace outdated systems and measure improvements against employee development outcomes.
- Where needed, upgrade or integrate learning management and development platforms. Evaluate current LMS capabilities, integrate them with performance and skills tracking systems, and ensure all employees can access learning resources centrally.
- **Pilot AI-driven skills assessments and recommendations.** Use AI tools to identify skills gaps, suggest targeted learning modules, and match employees to internal roles, starting with one department before scaling organization wide. But, be careful of the weaknesses related to some forms of AI, such as AI "hallucinations."

Key Takeaways

Key Takeaway **1**

Where it makes sense, expand access to career development opportunities for all employees. Findings show that 40% of organizations limit development programs, which tend to favor leadership and professional roles. Consider including entry-level, frontline, and underrepresented employees in structured learning initiatives, mentorship, and stretch assignments to ensure equitable growth opportunities.

Key Takeaway **2**

Develop structured career pathways and Individual Development Plans (IDPs). With most organizations in early stages of career development maturity and only a fifth having action plans, create tiered career pathways across roles, link IDPs to performance reviews, and ensure employees have documented development milestones reviewed biannually.

Key Takeaway **3**

Increase manager accountability for employee growth. Only half of organizations encourage managers to support career development, and just 16% require active manager involvement. Embed career coaching into manager responsibilities, require quarterly coaching sessions, and track follow-through in HR systems.

Key Takeaway **4**

Implement metrics and reporting to track development effectiveness. Less than a quarter of organizations track career development metrics. Measure completion of learning programs, skill growth, internal mobility, and participation rates, and share results with leadership quarterly to drive accountability and informed decisions.

Key Takeaway **5**

Prioritize internal mobility and make opportunities visible. While 55% of organizations prioritize internal candidates, formal processes, technology, and lateral moves remain limited. Maintain up-to-date internal job boards, notify employees of role openings automatically, and establish metrics to track lateral moves, promotions, and succession outcomes.

Key Takeaway 6

Invest in cross-training, stretch assignments, and project-based learning. Over two-fifths of organizations only moderately address skills gaps. Implement structured rotations, cross-functional projects, and stretch assignments annually, and track progress to ensure skill development aligns with organizational needs.

Key Takeaway 7

Link development to measurable outcomes and rewards. Only 10% of organizations use skill-based rewards. To reinforce engagement and retention, consider introducing tangible incentives such as badges, micro-bonuses, certifications, or career progression tied to learning completion, skill acquisition, or successful internal mobility.

Key Takeaway 8

Leverage technology to support learning, mobility, and skills development. While 54% use LMS and over half do not use AI at all in this area, organizations can adopt advanced platforms for personalized learning, AI-based skills gap analysis, career path recommendations, and matching employees to internal roles. Pilot AI tools in specific departments, integrate with HRIS dashboards, and scale adoption based on outcomes.

Key Takeaway 9

Establish a culture of continuous learning and career growth. Only 44% of organizations report reinforcing a culture of learning. Promote visible leadership support, communicate development successes organization-wide, provide microlearning modules, and encourage managers to model career support behaviors consistently.

Key Takeaway 10

Regularly assess and enhance career development maturity. With only 13% of organizations at a strategic stage and 4% at an innovative stage, conduct annual audits of programs, resources, manager capabilities, technology adoption, and employee participation. Set measurable improvement targets and assign accountability for executing enhancement plans.

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