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Common Terms Needed to Match Talent with Jobs

New skills development network aims to create first universal language of work skills

Organizations are struggling to fill jobs, according to a Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) survey report released at the SHRM 2016 Annual Conference & Exposition in June in Washington, D.C. A dearth of technical skills and a shortage of qualified candidates in local markets were among the reasons HR professionals cited for their struggle to find good candidates.

The problem has been growing for some time. In a report IBM issued in 2010 that was based on conversations with 707 chief human resource officers around the world, the authors noted that “the agility to match critical talent with strategic opportunities is critical to outperforming [other companies] in today’s dynamic and hyper-competitive global marketplace.”

To more quickly find and place new employees, the IBM report recommended the creation of a common expertise taxonomy “that serves as a ‘currency’ of enterprise competencies.” The taxonomy could be used to evaluate talent shortages and surpluses across the organization and “drive more information-based human capital decisions.”

Matching Talent with Opportunities

This goal of creating a common language for skills is the idea behind TalentSky, a skills development network based in Redwood City, Calif., that launched in February.

“Technology has changed work demands faster than ever before. New roles are constantly emerging, and the inconsistent, subjective language of job descriptions and resumes means the employment system can’t keep up,” said Rick Devine, CEO and founder of TalentSky, in a news release.

He describes TalentSky as a “next-generation professional skills network” for white- and blue-collar jobs. Individuals can create a free account. Corporate users pay a per-employee annual fee to access the network.

Employees create social profiles that showcase their skills connected to specific projects or work accomplishments. Skills may be sorted alphabetically or by frequency of use, skill rating, or one of the four skill types—core competencies, expertise, markets (customers) and tools.

Employers that are members of the TalentSky network can verify their employees’ profiles. Colleagues and others who collaborated on the person’s projects or accomplishments can rate his or her skills. Scores are weighted using proprietary algorithms, according to the company.

The profile of Lucia Steinhilber, chief financial officer and senior vice president of operations at TalentSky, for example, lists 59 skills. A visual timeline highlights major points of her education and career: her involvement in the sale of Charms candy company to Nestle included skills such as merger/consolidation analysis and merger and acquisitions advising.

Standardizing Skills

William Tincup, CEO of Dallas-based Tincup & Co., thinks TalentSky’s attempt at standardizing skill definitions is “a great idea” that could especially resonate with HR and recruiting. Another benefit is that company leaders would know the skills that exist among their employees.

“[Employers] don’t do internal mobility very well and people leave,” he said. “If we knew their skills and knew where [employees] wanted to go, we could help them” with their career paths, Tincup said. “That’s where TalentSky is going to add a lot of value.”

Ben Eubanks, SHRM-SCP, principal analyst at Lighthouse Research based in Huntsville, Ala., thinks the value of TalentSky’s efforts is in providing a way for organizations to get a better grasp of people’s skills.

SOURCE:

<https://www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/hr-topics/organizational-and-employee-development/Pages/Common-Terms-Needed-to-Match-Talent-with-Jobs.aspx>



“A validated skills portfolio could be a valuable tool for evaluating the contingent workforce,” he said. “That’s where the value is with what TalentSky has to offer, if it’s all based on some kind of validated assessment rather than [a] subjective [one].”

However, Tincup thinks it would be better if a trade association or other independent body—“something other than a corporate entity”—pursued a standardization of skills definitions.

“Ultimately, a corporation is only going to get so far within the four walls of the corporation and they’re going to find natural competition,” he told *SHRM Online*.

Skills Library

TalentSky has partnered with IBM to create the foundation of its skills library, which launched June 7. The curated library—with more than 10,000 skills—has been in development for two years.

It utilizes elements of IBM Smarter Workforce Kenexa Talent Frameworks, billed as “a library of independently researched, industry-specific, skill-based job profiles.” TalentSky also collaborated with 20 major employers, including Foot Locker and eBay, to distill job descriptions into various skills, according to Devine.

The library includes core competencies, areas of expertise, markets and tools across a spectrum of jobs. For example, a core competency in technology might be software programming; expertise might be in developing business software, he explained.

Elaine Orlor, chairwoman and co-founder of The Talent Board in San Diego, noted that organizations are still trying to figure out what skills are critical to their businesses. Those that can pinpoint with accuracy what they need are ahead of the curve.

For the others that lag behind, “we’re left with a hypothetical job description that outlines skills that may or may not be needed for the jobs and duties that may or may not be performed,” she said. Often, the internal job description makes sense to

the organization but not to the public. A recruiter then has to use the job description and any information the manager provides.

TalentSky has some work to do in normalizing or defining job skills, Orlor noted.

“The opportunity is there for tools to really enable the job seeker to present themselves in the best possible way to corporations. The questions of how [competitors] will impact LinkedIn has created space for others to build out newer profile models for candidates, and how that is accomplished will depend heavily on what value there is to the job seeker to create that profile,” she elaborated in a follow-up e-mail to *SHRM Online*.

“If it takes hours to build (cut and paste) and repeat data just to create a ‘good-looking page’ but with no additional call to action or value, [TalentSky’s efforts] will be perceived as a waste of time. If it is set up to pull additional information from public files, engage in the collection of meaningful work examples, build on connections and bring stronger candidates to the top of the funnel—then there is a strong likelihood of success.”

Other vendors are attacking this problem, Orlor said. It’s been tried before; she pointed to attempts in the late ‘80s by the now-defunct Resumix to normalize recruiting terms by building algorithms and producing a skills inventory.

“The beauty of what TalentSky is doing is it’s on a worldwide platform; Resumix was doing this company by company. It wasn’t an open system for any candidate,” she said. “[TalentSky’s] goal is to inventory the world.”

While she likes the concept of a universal skills language, she said “the greatest concern is about the source data.” There is the potential, she noted, “to create an amazing taxonomy on junk data. It comes back to how that language normalization is going to take into account the quality and accuracy” of terms in the skills library.