

# TD Skills and Capabilities

2023





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## **Survey Overview**

### **Target Survey Population**

The target population for this research was talent development professionals across different organizations and industries. Surveys were completed by 497 talent development professionals.

### **Survey Instrument**

This report is based on a sub-section of the salary, skills, and benefits survey. The entire survey was composed of 65 questions, including those related to the demographics of the respondents. For this report, we focused on eight questions from the survey.

### **Procedure**

ATD Research distributed a link to an online survey to the target population in May and June 2023. The survey closed in June 2023.



# Introduction

In 2021, ATD published an article outlining the top 10 skills organizations were targeting for learning and development professionals. The top three were project management, change management, and leadership skills.<sup>1</sup> As a profession, it's important to determine the skills needed to be successful in talent development. It can help organizations with recruiting and building a strong talent development team. It can also aid professionals to know the right skills to develop and highlight on their resume.

To help talent development professionals and organizations be successful, ATD created the Talent Development Capability Model. It is “a framework to guide the TD profession in what practitioners need to know and do to develop themselves, others, and their organizations.”<sup>2</sup> The model outlines 23 capabilities needed for success, which are divided into three domains: Building Personal Capability, Developing Professional Capability, and Impacting Organizational Capability. ATD members are able to take the self-assessment to understand areas where they may need additional training. In this study, participants were shown a description of the 23 capabilities and asked to rate themselves—they did not take the full assessment.

ATD determined that “successful talent development professionals need knowledge and skills from all three of these areas to be most effective.”<sup>3</sup>

## About the Participants

When conducting research about talent development skills and capabilities, it is important to understand who was included in the study. ATD Research surveyed 497 talent development professionals. All survey participants lived in the United States. Two-thirds of survey participants were members of ATD.

To get a full understanding of professionals in the talent development field, ATD Research invited participants to share details about all their jobs. This means that respondents could select more than one job type.

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1 L. Spinelli, “Top 10 Skills to Get You Ahead in L&D,” ATD, March 2, 2021, [td.org/insights/top-10-skills-to-get-you-ahead-in-l-d](https://td.org/insights/top-10-skills-to-get-you-ahead-in-l-d).

2 ATD, “Talent Development Capability Model,” [td.org/capability-model/about](https://td.org/capability-model/about).

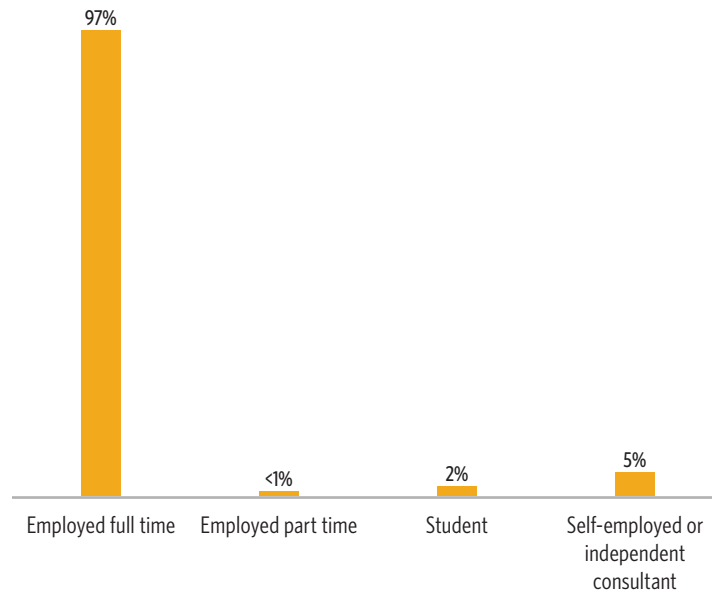
3 ATD, “Definitions of the Domains and Capabilities,” [td.org/capability-model/accompanying-resources](https://td.org/capability-model/accompanying-resources).

Ninety-seven percent of participants were employed full time, 5 percent were self-employed or an independent consultant, 2 percent were students, and less than 1 percent worked part time (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1**

### 97% of Respondents Worked Full Time

*What is your current employment status? (Select all that apply.)*

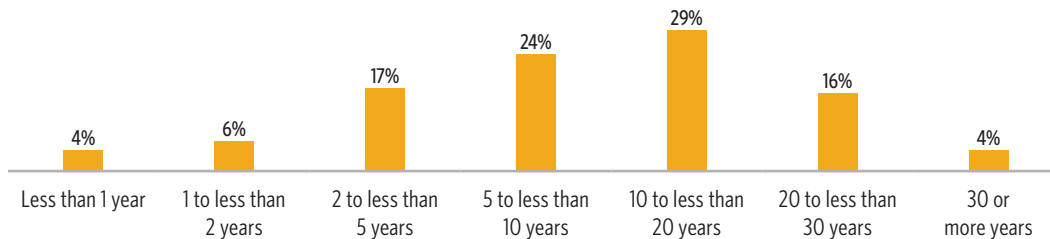


The survey also asked respondents how long they had been in the talent development field, including time they spent in full-time, part-time, and independent consultant roles. The most common response (29 percent) was between 10 and less than 20 years (Figure 2). However, participants across the survey had anywhere from less than one year of experience to more than 30 years in talent development.

**FIGURE 2**

### 29% of Respondents Had Between 10 and 19 Years of TD Experience

*How many years of experience do you have in the talent development or training profession?*



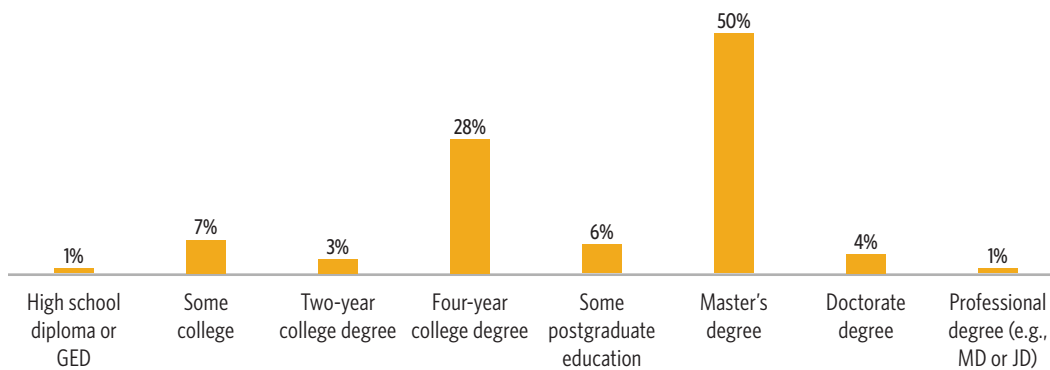


Talent development professionals tend to be a highly educated group. Most respondents had at least a two-year college degree, with more than half obtaining a master’s degree or higher (Figure 3). Five percent of respondents had a doctorate or professional degree. One percent had only a high school diploma or GED. To provide some perspective, when we look at the US Census Bureau’s latest research on educational attainment in the United States, 9 percent of Americans had less than a high school diploma; 28 percent had a high school diploma; 15 percent had completed some college; 10 percent had a two-year degree; 23 percent had a bachelor’s degree; and 14 percent had a master’s degree, professional degree, or doctoral degree.<sup>4</sup>

**FIGURE 3**

### More Than 50% of Respondents Had at Least a Master’s Degree

*What is the highest level of education that you have attained?*



Talent development professionals also tend to earn professional credentials. In this study, *credentials* refers to both certificates (evidence of completing an educational program) and certifications (evidence of passing a test that assesses professional skills with a recertification component). Nearly half of the survey respondents had at least one certificate or certification. Given that the survey was sent to ATD members and professionals associated with ATD, it is unsurprising that the Certified Professional in Talent Development and the Associate Professional in Talent Development were among the most common certifications (6 percent and 4 percent, respectively).

Other common designations included the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and Six Sigma Green Belt (5 and 4 percent, respectively). In 2022, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 24 percent of the full-time, employed civilian labor force has a certification or license.<sup>5</sup>

4 US Census Bureau, “Census Bureau Releases New Educational Attainment Data,” February 16, 2023, [census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2023/educational-attainment-data.html](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2023/educational-attainment-data.html).

5 US Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Statistics From the Current Population Survey,” January 25, 2023, [bls.gov/cps/cpsaat49.htm](https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat49.htm).

# Skills and Capabilities

In this study, ATD Research asked participants to rate themselves on a description of each capability within the Talent Development Capability Model using the following scale:

- **Exploring:** I have had no exposure to this concept, or I have little knowledge or skill in this area.
- **Informed:** I only have general, conceptual knowledge or awareness of this concept, or I have a limited ability to perform this skill. I need reference materials to complete tasks related to this concept.
- **Capable:** I am able to apply my knowledge of this concept in my work, or I can consistently perform this skill with minimal guidance.
- **Advanced:** I am able to apply in-depth knowledge of this concept, or I use my experience in this skill to lead or coach others in performing it.
- **Expert:** I provide expert advice and make sound judgments using my knowledge of this concept, or I provide consultation and leadership to others using this skill. I can foster greater understanding of this concept among colleagues and stakeholders.

The full definitions for each capability can be found at [td.org/capability-model](https://td.org/capability-model).

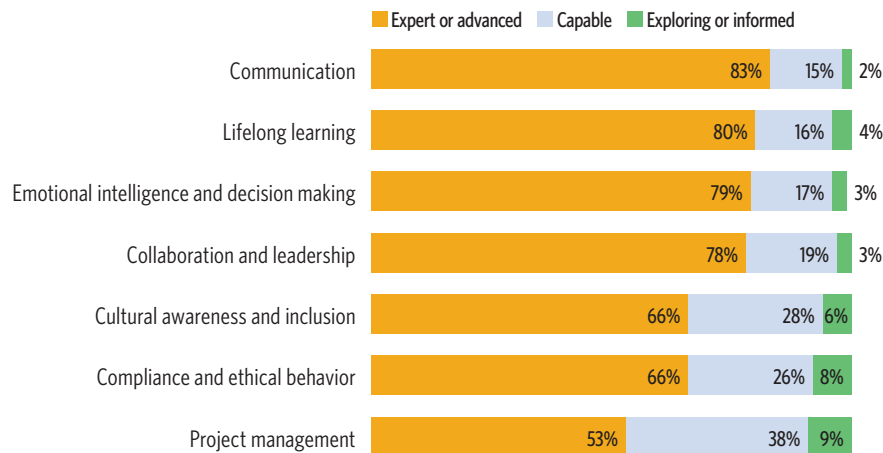
## Building Personal Capabilities

The Building Personal Capability domain includes foundational skills that professionals in the business world need to have. The seven capabilities in this domain are typically considered soft skills that are needed in the workplace (Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4**

## More Than 80% of TD Professionals Said They Were an Expert or Advanced in Communication Skills

*How would you rate yourself on the following personal capabilities?*



### Communication

Communication is about connecting with others. Skills included in this area are active listening, facilitating dialogue, and expressing ideas clearly. Eighty-three percent of respondents indicated that they were advanced or an expert in this area and only 2 percent indicated that they were exploring or informed.

According to Ryan Avery, author of “The Value of Communication Training,” when organizations prioritize communication skills training, they will see the benefits, including increased collaboration, ideas being clearly articulated, active listening, and constructive discussions. This can lead to better teamwork, increased productivity, improved problem solving, reduced workplace conflicts, and more innovation and creativity.<sup>6</sup>

### Lifelong Learning

Having the motivation to continue learning is another personal capability. Four in five respondents indicated that they were advanced or an expert in this area and 4 percent indicated that they were exploring or informed. Organizations benefit when they nurture lifelong learners. These benefits include “improvements in employee engagement, organizational performance, employee retention, and the ability to meet changing business needs.”<sup>7</sup>

6 R. Avery, “The Value of Communication Training,” ATD, June 7, 2023, [td.org/newsletters/the-buzz/the-value-of-communication-training](https://td.org/newsletters/the-buzz/the-value-of-communication-training).

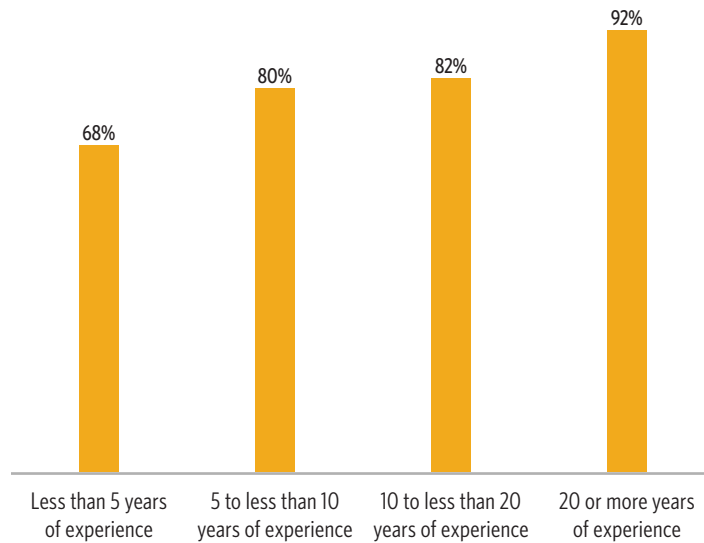
7 P. Ketter, “Lifelong Learning Is a Vital Capability for TD Professionals,” ATD, September 23, 2020, [td.org/insights/lifelong-learning-is-a-critical-capability-for-td-professionals](https://td.org/insights/lifelong-learning-is-a-critical-capability-for-td-professionals).

Professionals who had been in the field for 20 or more years were more likely to indicate that they were an expert or advanced at lifelong learning as compared with professionals with less experience (Figure 5).

**FIGURE 5**

## Lifelong Learning

*How would you rate yourself on lifelong learning?*



*Percentage of respondents selecting advanced or expert.*

## Emotional Intelligence and Decision Making

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is “the ability to understand, assess, and regulate your own emotions, correctly interpret the verbal and nonverbal behaviors of others, and adjust your behavior in relation to others.”<sup>8</sup> The ability to make good decisions is also important. Eighty percent of respondents indicated that they were advanced or an expert in this area and only 3 percent indicated that they were exploring or informed.

According to LinkedIn, “Employees with higher EQ are often better able to handle stress, work effectively in teams, and communicate more effectively with others. They also tend to be more resilient and adaptable in the face of change.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> ATD, “Accompanying Resources: Talent Development Capability Model,” [td.org/capability-model/accompanying-resources](https://td.org/capability-model/accompanying-resources).

<sup>9</sup> ABC Corp, “The Importance of Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace,” LinkedIn, May 1, 2023, [linkedin.com/pulse/importance-emotional-intelligence-workplace-abc-corp-nepal](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/importance-emotional-intelligence-workplace-abc-corp-nepal).

## Collaboration and Leadership

When TD professionals encourage teamwork and effectively align people and tasks, it shows they have strong collaboration and leadership skills. More than three-quarters of respondents indicated that they were advanced or an expert in this area and only 3 percent said they were exploring or informed. According to Indeed, when employees collaborate, they experience job satisfaction, conflict resolution, learning new skills, inclusivity, networking opportunities, and self-awareness.<sup>10</sup>

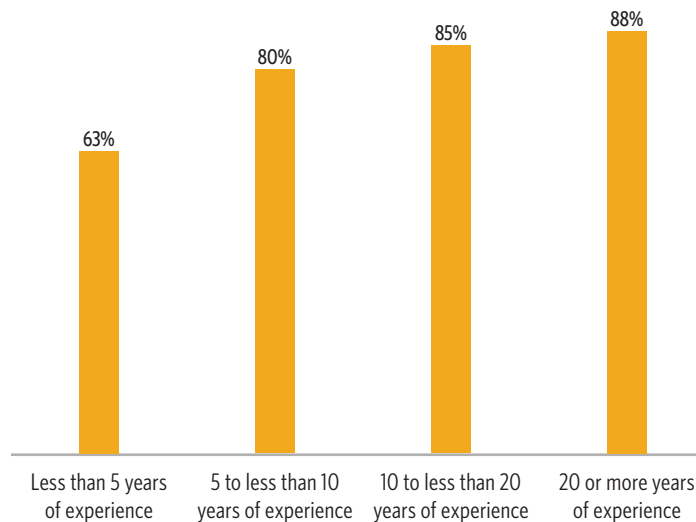
Eighty-five percent of respondents who held a credential said that they were an expert or advanced with collaboration and leadership, which was more than the 71 percent of TD professionals without a credential who rated themselves as an expert or advanced.

There were also significant differences depending on how long professionals had been in the talent development field. TD professionals with a tenure longer than five years were more likely to say they were an expert or advanced at collaboration and leadership (Figure 6).

**FIGURE 6**

### Collaboration and Leadership

*How would you rate yourself on collaboration and leadership?*



*Percentage of respondents selecting advanced or expert.*

<sup>10</sup> Indeed Editorial Team, "10 Reasons Why Collaboration Is Important in the Workplace," Indeed, February 28, 2023, [indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/why-is-collaboration-important](https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/why-is-collaboration-important).

## Cultural Awareness and Inclusion

TD professionals need to be able to foster an inclusive environment by showing respect for different perspectives, backgrounds, and abilities, along with ensuring employees are respected. Two-thirds of respondents said that they were advanced or an expert in this area and 6 percent said that they were exploring or informed. Cultural awareness in the workplace can lead to increased job satisfaction, engagement, and open communication.<sup>11</sup>

## Compliance and Ethical Behavior

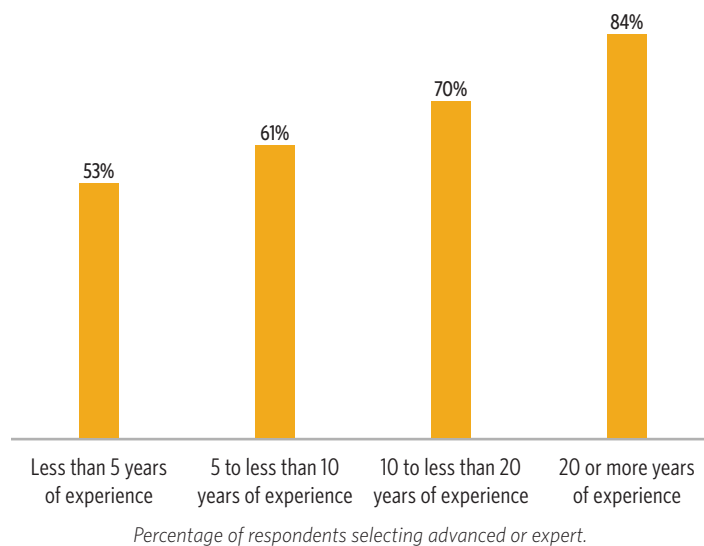
TD professionals need to know about the regulations and laws in their area, and be able to act with integrity. Two-thirds of respondents indicated that they were advanced or an expert in these skills and 8 percent indicated they were exploring or informed.

Professionals who were in the field for 20 or more years were significantly more likely to rate themselves as an expert or advanced at compliance and ethical behavior (Figure 7).

**FIGURE 7**

### Compliance and Ethical Behavior

*How would you rate yourself on compliance and ethical behavior?*



<sup>11</sup> Indeed Editorial Team, "Why Does Cultural Awareness Matter in the Workplace?" Indeed, July 9, 2022, [au.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/cultural-awareness-in-the-workplace](https://au.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/cultural-awareness-in-the-workplace).

## Project Management

Being able to plan, organize, and direct tasks to complete specific goals are necessary skills for proficient project management. A little more than half of respondents indicated they were advanced or an expert in this area and 9 percent indicated they were exploring or informed.

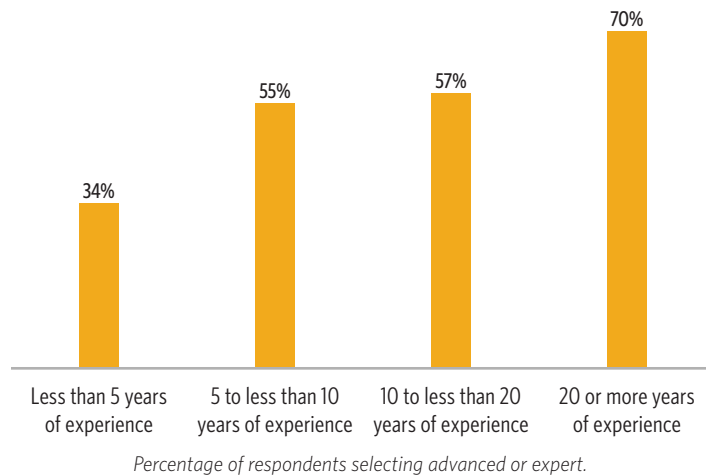
Professionals with a credential were more likely to say they were an expert or advanced at project management, as compared with professionals without a credential (59 and 46 percent, respectively).

There were also significant differences by how long professionals had been in the TD field. Talent development professionals with a tenure longer than five years were more likely to say they were an expert or advanced at project management (Figure 8).

**FIGURE 8**

### Project Management

*How would you rate yourself on project management?*



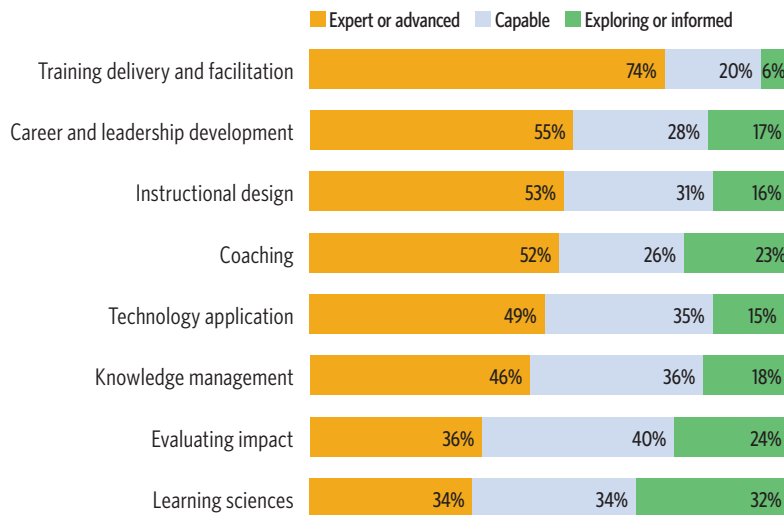
## Developing Professional Capability

The Developing Professional Capability domain includes the skills TD professionals need to have to create processes, systems, and frameworks that foster and develop the potential of employees. There are eight professional capabilities in this section (Figure 9).

**FIGURE 9**

## 74% of Respondents Said They Were an Expert or Advanced at Training Delivery and Facilitation

*How would you rate yourself on the following professional capabilities?*



### Training Delivery and Facilitation

By understanding the right learning environment, building rapport with learners, and using appropriate delivery options, talent development professionals can be successful with training delivery and facilitation. Nearly three-quarters of respondents indicated that they were an expert or advanced at this skill and 6 percent indicated they were exploring or informed about training delivery and facilitation.

Professionals who had a credential were significantly more likely to rate themselves as an expert or advanced at training delivery and facilitation compared with professionals without a credential (79 and 68 percent, respectively).

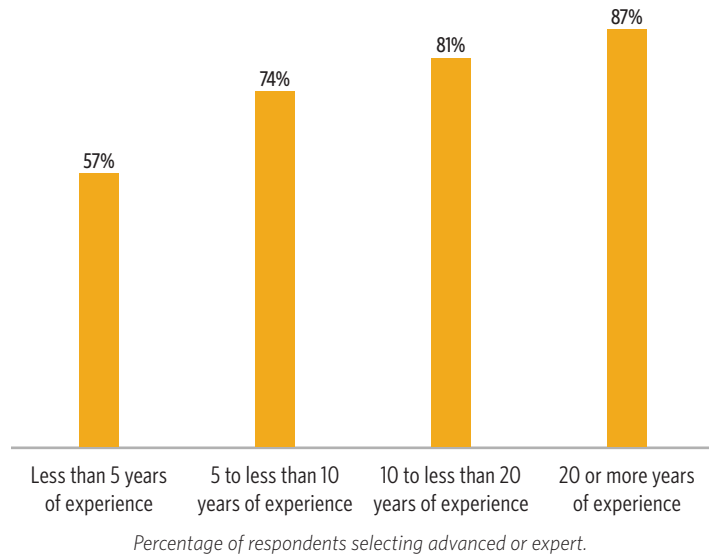
There were also significant differences by how long professionals had been in the field of talent development. TD professionals with a tenure longer than five years were more likely to say they were an expert or advanced at training delivery and facilitation (Figure 10).



**FIGURE 10**

## Training Delivery and Facilitation

*How would you rate yourself on training delivery and facilitation?*



### Career and Leadership Development

Talent development professionals need to think about the current and future needs of the organization and then develop programs that create pathways for employees to advance within the organization. Fifty-five percent of respondents said they were an expert or advanced in career and leadership development and 17 percent said that they were exploring or informed about this topic.

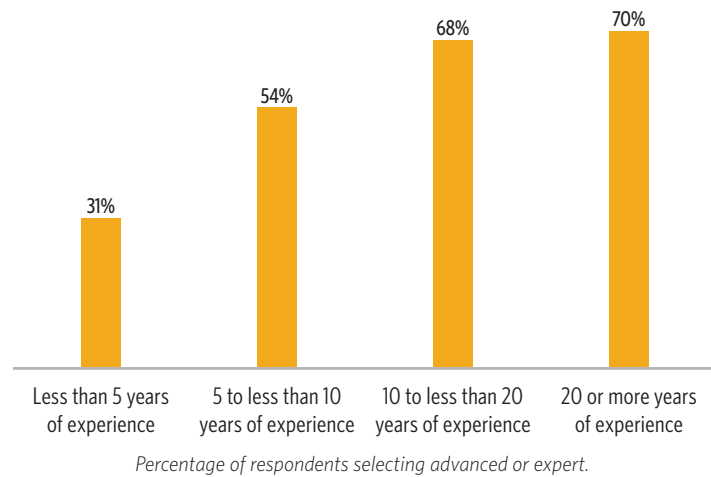
Professionals who had a credential were significantly more likely to rate themselves as an expert or advanced at career and leadership development compared with professionals without a credential (67 and 42 percent, respectively).

There were also significant differences by how long professionals had been in the field. Talent development professionals with a tenure longer than five years were more likely to say they were an expert or advanced at career and leadership development (Figure 11).

**FIGURE 11**

## Career and Leadership Development

*How would you rate yourself on career and leadership development?*



### Instructional Design

Talent development professionals need the skills to select the appropriate learning strategy, methodologies, and technologies to maximize the learning experience. More than half of respondents said they were an expert or advanced with instructional design; 16 percent said they were exploring or informed about this topic. Good instructional design can help reduce employee turnover, increase the return on investment, and promote productivity among workers.<sup>12</sup>

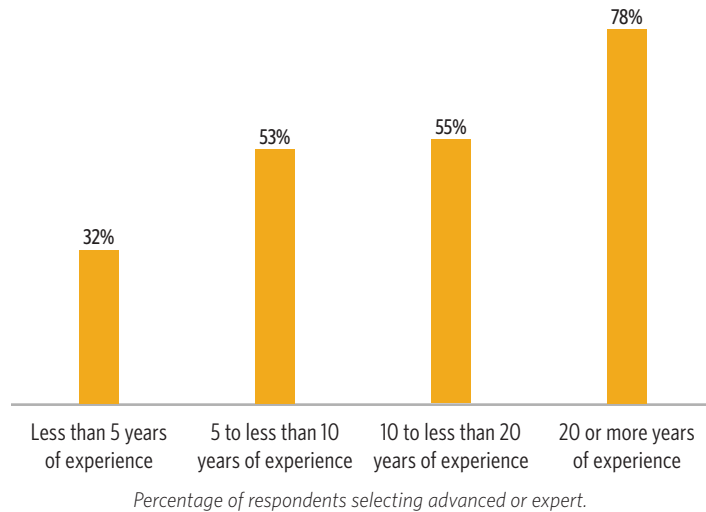
There were also significant differences by how long professionals had been in the field. Talent development professionals with a tenure longer than five years were more likely to say that they were an expert or advanced at instructional design (Figure 12).

<sup>12</sup> H. Tieger, "Why Must Organizations Take Instructional Design Seriously?" ATD, April 12, 2023, [td.org/atd-blog/why-must-organizations-take-instructional-design-seriously](https://td.org/atd-blog/why-must-organizations-take-instructional-design-seriously).

**FIGURE 12**

## Instructional Design

*How would you rate yourself on instructional design?*



## Coaching

To be strong coaches, talent development professionals need good listening skills, the ability to ask the right questions, and the ability to take action. More than half of participants said they had expert or advanced coaching skills and 23 percent said they were exploring or informed about coaching. Coaching has the ability to improve leader performance, strengthen well-being, and improve retention.<sup>13</sup>

Professionals who had a credential were significantly more likely to rate themselves as an expert or advanced at coaching compared with professionals without a credential (59 and 45 percent, respectively).

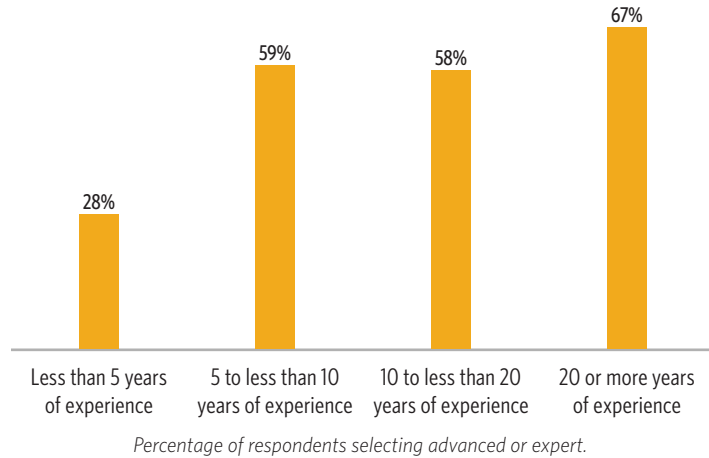
There were also significant differences by how long professionals had been in the field. Talent development professionals with a tenure longer than five years were more likely to say they were an expert or advanced at coaching (Figure 13).

<sup>13</sup> S. Dio, "A Data-Driven Case for Leadership Coaching," ATD, March 2, 2023, [td.org/atd-blog/a-data-driven-case-for-leadership-coaching](https://td.org/atd-blog/a-data-driven-case-for-leadership-coaching).

**FIGURE 13**

## Coaching

*How would you rate yourself on coaching?*



### Technology Application

Talent development professionals need to be able to identify, select, and implement the best technologies for the organization. Half of respondents said they were an expert or advanced at understanding technology application and 15 percent said they were exploring or informed.

### Knowledge Management

Institutional knowledge needs to be preserved. As such, talent development professionals must have the necessary skills to create, gather, manage, disseminate, and use the information. When institutional knowledge is lost, it can cost the organization time in training, turnover, and recruitment.<sup>14</sup> Less than half of respondents indicated that they were an expert or advanced in knowledge management and 18 percent said they were exploring or informed about this topic.

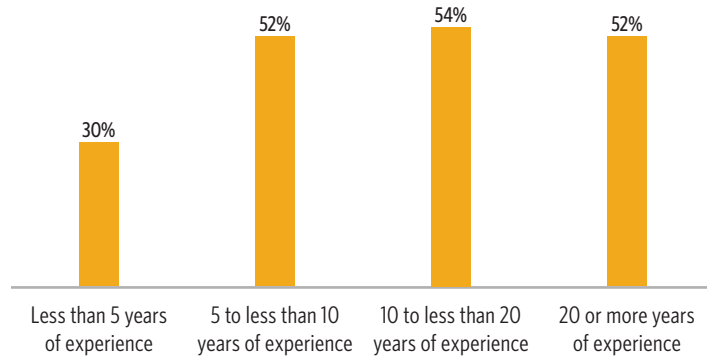
There are also significant differences by how long professionals had been in the field. Talent development professionals with a tenure longer than five years were more likely to say they were an expert or advanced at knowledge management (Figure 14).

<sup>14</sup> P. Harris, "Knowledge Management Is a Vital TD Capability," ATD, May 6, 2020, [td.org/insights/knowledge-management-is-a-vital-td-capability](https://td.org/insights/knowledge-management-is-a-vital-td-capability).

**FIGURE 14**

## Knowledge Management

*How would you rate yourself on knowledge management?*



*Percentage of respondents selecting advanced or expert.*

### Evaluating Impact

It's important for talent development professionals to understand how to gather, analyze, and report on information about the effectiveness of their learning programs. Thirty-six percent of respondents said they were an expert or advanced at evaluating impact and 24 percent said they were exploring or informed about this topic. Being able to collect, analyze, and communicate results can increase talent development's value with executives.<sup>15</sup>

Professionals who had a credential were significantly more likely to rate themselves as an expert or advanced at evaluating impact compared with professionals without a credential (42 and 30 percent, respectively).

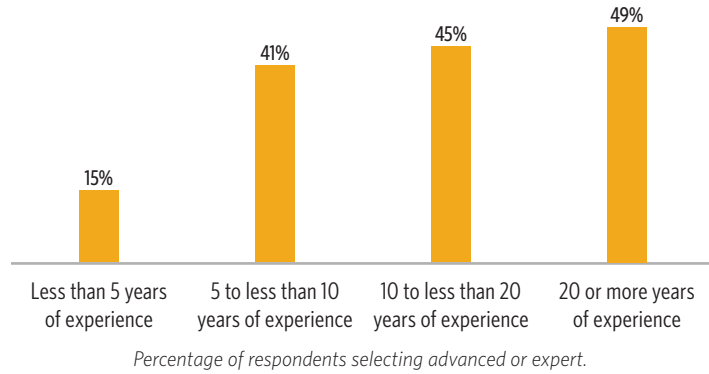
There were also significant differences by how long professionals had been in the field. Talent development professionals with a tenure longer than five years were more likely to say they were an expert or advanced at evaluating impact (Figure 15).

<sup>15</sup> P. Ketter, "Evaluating Impact Is a Vital Capability for Talent Development Professionals," ATD, October 7, 2020, [td.org/insights/evaluating-impact-is-a-critical-capability-for-talent-development-professionals](https://td.org/insights/evaluating-impact-is-a-critical-capability-for-talent-development-professionals).

**FIGURE 15**

## Evaluating Impact

*How would you rate yourself on evaluating impact?*



### Learning Sciences

Talent development professionals need to understand learning innovation and instructional methodologies. Thirty-four percent of respondents indicated that they were an expert or advanced at learning science, and 32 percent indicated they were either exploring or informed about this topic. When talent development professionals don't have a good understanding of learning sciences, "the result is ineffective training that wastes time and money."<sup>16</sup>

### Impacting Organizational Capability

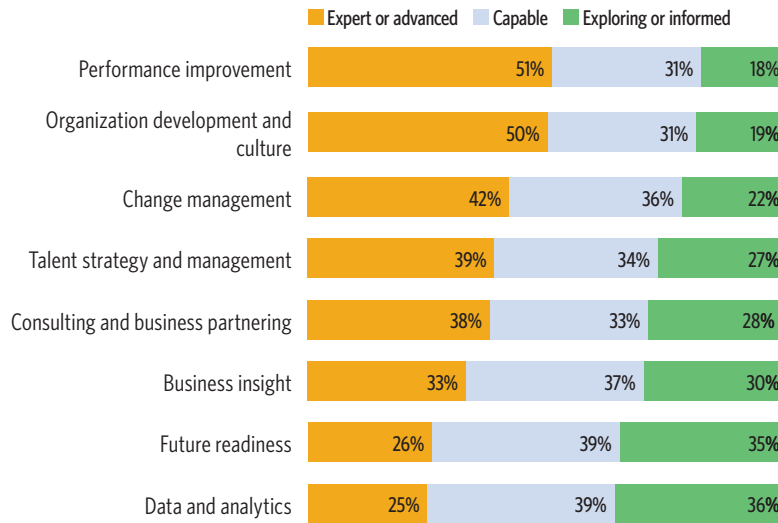
The Impacting Organizational Capability domain includes the skills TD professionals need to drive organizational performance, productivity, and operational results. There are eight organizational capabilities in this model (Figure 16).

<sup>16</sup> S. Castellano, "Learning Sciences Is a Vital Capability for TD Professionals," ATD, March 17, 2020, [td.org/insights/learning-sciences-is-a-vital-capability-for-td-professionals](https://td.org/insights/learning-sciences-is-a-vital-capability-for-td-professionals).

**FIGURE 16**

## 51% of Respondents Said They Were an Expert or Advanced at Performance Improvement

*How would you rate yourself on each of the following organizational capabilities?*



### Performance Improvement

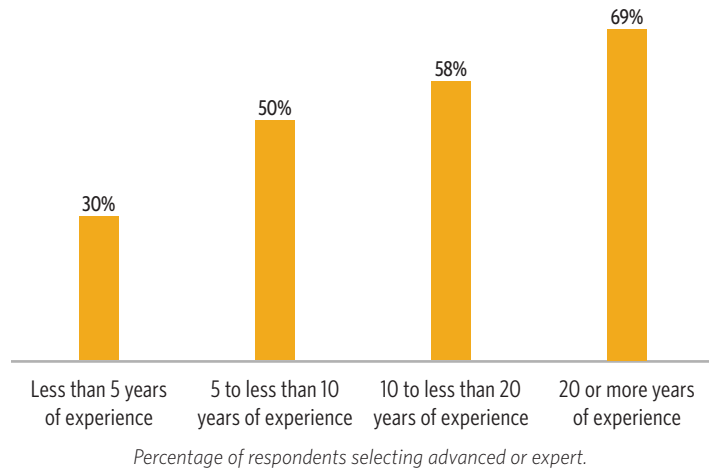
Talent development can assist organizations in meeting goals by identifying and closing human performance gaps. More than half of respondents indicated they were an expert or advanced at performance improvement, and 18 percent indicated they were exploring or informed in this area.

There were significant differences by how long professionals had been in the field. Talent development professionals with a tenure longer than five years were more likely to say they were an expert or advanced at performance improvement (Figure 17).

**FIGURE 17**

## Performance Improvement

*How would you rate yourself on performance improvement?*



### Organization Development and Culture

Organization development and culture are important areas for TD professionals to understand and work on. Training, onboarding programs, and coaching and mentoring programs have all been found to have a positive impact on organizational culture.<sup>17</sup> Half of respondents said they were an expert or advanced in this area, and 19 percent said that they were exploring or informed.

Professionals who had a credential were significantly more likely to rate themselves as an expert or advanced at organization development and culture compared with professionals without a credential (60 and 39 percent, respectively).

### Change Management

By connecting people, processes, and work, talent development professionals can assist organizations with change management. Forty-two percent of respondents said they were an expert or advanced at change management, and 22 percent said they were exploring or informed about this topic.

Professionals who had a credential were significantly more likely to rate themselves as an expert or advanced at change management compared with professionals without a credential (49 and 35 percent, respectively).

<sup>17</sup> ATD, *Building a Strong Organizational Culture: The Role of the TD Function* (Alexandria, VA: ATD Press, 2023).

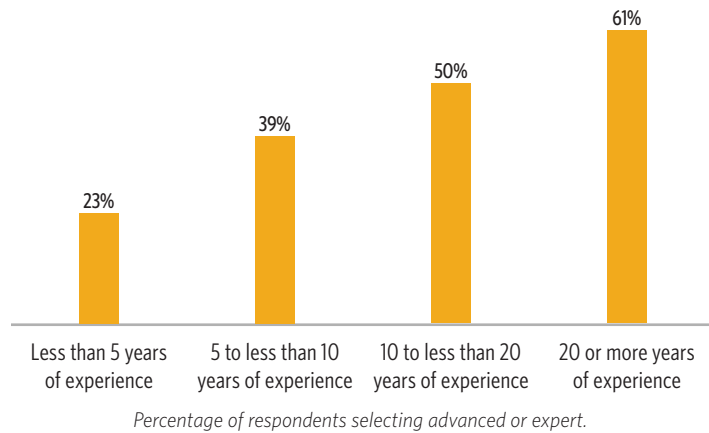


There were significant differences by how long professionals had been in the field. Talent development professionals with a tenure longer than five years were more likely to say they were an expert or advanced at change management (Figure 18).

**FIGURE 18**

## Change Management

*How would you rate yourself on change management?*



## Talent Strategy and Management

Talent development needs to be integrated into talent strategy and management. Thirty-nine percent of respondents indicated that they were an expert or advanced at talent strategy and management, and 27 percent indicated they were exploring or informed about this topic.

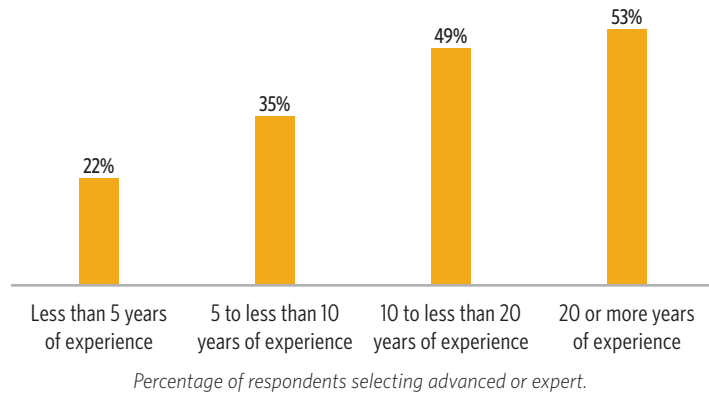
Professionals who had a credential were significantly more likely to rate themselves as an expert or advanced at talent strategy and management compared with professionals without a credential (49 and 29 percent, respectively).

There were also significant differences by how long professionals had been in the field. Talent development professionals with a tenure longer than five years were more likely to say they were an expert or advanced at talent strategy and management (Figure 19).

**FIGURE 19**

## Talent Strategy and Management

*How would you rate yourself on talent strategy and management?*



### Consulting and Business Partnering

Talent development professionals should use their expertise and personal skills to build relationships that improve the business. Thirty-eight percent of respondents said they were an expert or advanced at consulting and business partnering, and 28 percent of respondents said they were exploring or informed about this area.

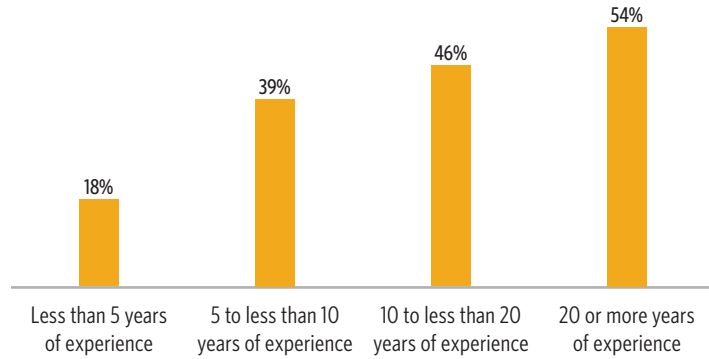
Professionals who had a credential were significantly more likely to rate themselves as an expert or advanced at consulting and business partnering compared with professionals without a credential (47 and 30 percent, respectively).

There were significant differences by how long professionals had been in the field. Talent development professionals with a tenure longer than five years were more likely to say they were an expert or advanced at consulting and business partnering (Figure 20).

**FIGURE 20**

## Consulting and Business Partnering

*How would you rate yourself on consulting and business partnering?*



*Percentage of respondents selecting advanced or expert.*

### Business Insight

Understanding business principles along with the business ecosystem allows talent development professionals to align their strategies with the overall business strategy. Thirty-three percent of respondents indicated they were an expert or advanced in this area, and 30 percent indicated they were exploring or informed about business insights.

### Future Readiness

Talent development professionals need to be constantly thinking about upskilling and reskilling employees. Twenty-six percent of respondents said they were an expert or advanced in this area, and 35 percent said they were exploring or informed about future readiness.

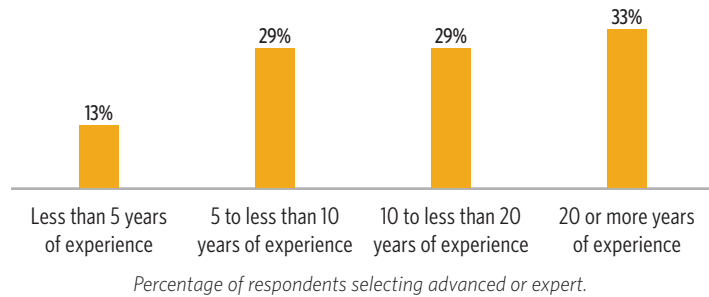
Professionals who had a credential were significantly more likely to rate themselves as an expert or advanced at future readiness compared with professionals without a credential (32 and 19 percent, respectively).

There were significant differences by how long professionals had been in the field. Talent development professionals with a tenure longer than five years were more likely to say they were an expert or advanced at future readiness (Figure 21).

**FIGURE 21**

## Future Readiness

*How would you rate yourself on future readiness?*



## Data and Analytics

Talent development professionals need to be able to collect, analyze, and use data to make an impact on learning, performance, and business. A quarter of respondents said they were advanced or an expert in data and analytics, and 36 percent said they were exploring or informed about this topic.

Professionals who had a credential were significantly more likely to rate themselves as an expert or advanced at data and analytics compared with professionals without a credential (31 and 19 percent, respectively).

# Conclusion

It is evident that as talent development professionals spend more time in the field and receive additional credentials, their skills and capabilities improve. Young professionals who are just beginning their career and professionals who are transitioning into a TD career should consider becoming certified in an area that is relevant to their work.

Overall, talent development professionals have strong skills and capabilities. The areas in which respondents rated themselves highest were communication skills, lifelong learning, and emotional intelligence and decision making. The areas respondents said they were still learning about included data and analytics, future readiness, and learning sciences. These are areas of opportunity for the talent development profession to work on and become better at.

# About the Author and Contributors

**atd** The Association for Talent Development (ATD) champions the importance of learning and training by setting standards for the talent development profession. ATD is the largest, most-trusted organization for the professional development of practitioners in training and talent development, serving a worldwide community with members in more than 100 countries. Since ATD was founded in 1943, the talent development field has expanded significantly to meet the needs of global businesses and emerging industries. ATD's mission is to empower professionals to develop talent in the workplace. Learn more at [TD.org](http://TD.org).

The resources we provide to help talent development professionals increase their impact and effectiveness include our research. ATD's researchers track trends, inform decisions, and connect research to practice and performance. By providing comprehensive data and insightful analyses, ATD's research products, which include research reports, briefs, infographics, and webinars, help business leaders and talent development professionals understand and more effectively respond to today's fast-paced industry.



**Rocki Basel, PhD**, is the associate director of ATD research services and served as the author of this report. She

provides oversight and direction for all of ATD's internal and external, industry-specific, and market research services.



**Caroline Cope** is a senior researcher for ATD and served as an editor for this report.



**Melissa Jones** is the manager of ATD Press and served as an editor for this report. She edits and manages the production

process for ATD research reports and books.



**Katy Wiley Stewts** is a production editor for ATD and served as an editor of this report.



**Shirley E.M. Raybuck** is a senior graphic designer for ATD and served as the designer for this report.





Association for  
Talent Development  
1640 King Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
td.org