

## **The Four C's Critical for Today's Workforce**

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As the U.S. economy begins to show signs of improvement, executives say they need a workforce fully equipped with skills beyond just the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic (the three R's) in order to grow their businesses. Skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation (the four C's) will become even more important to organizations in the future, according to a new survey conducted by American Management Association (AMA).

Proficiency in reading, writing and arithmetic has traditionally been the entry-level threshold to the job market, but the new workplace requires more from its employees. Employees need to think critically, solve problems, innovate, collaborate and communicate more effectively — and at every level within an organization. According to the “AMA 2010 Critical Skills Survey,” many executives admit there is room for improvement among their employees in these skills and competencies.

“AMA's survey shows that an overwhelming number of respondents believe that these 21st-century skills are important to their organizations today and will become even more important in the future,” said Edward T. Reilly, AMA president and CEO. “Many executives feel that their current workforce is not as well developed in these areas as they need to be. As such, management will need to address these skill gaps in order to compete in a global market,” he said.

As the current administration is proposing sweeping education reform, executives are shedding light on a set of skills — the four C's — that has been identified as being crucial to workforce preparedness and business success.

“As we move toward reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and common state standards, it is clear education reform must focus on fusing the three R's and four C's if every student is to succeed in today's and tomorrow's world,” said Ken Kay, president of P21, a national organization that advocates for 21st-century readiness for every student.

In an effort to assess how top of mind these skills and competencies are, AMA — in conjunction with P21 — surveyed 2,115 managers and other executives in AMA member and customer companies about the importance of the four C's to their organizations today and in the future.

According to the survey results, executives said these skills and competencies have been articulated within their organizations as priorities for employee development, talent management and succession planning. In fact, the majority agreed that their employees are measured in communication skills (80.4

percent), critical thinking (72.4 percent), collaboration (71.2 percent) and creativity (57.3 percent) during annual performance appraisals. In addition, job applicants are assessed in these areas during the hiring process.

About 3 out of 4 executives (75.7 percent) who responded to the AMA survey said that they believe these skills and competencies will become more important to their organizations in the next three to five years, particularly as the economy improves and organizations look to grow.

When asked why they believe these skills and competencies are taking on critical importance in the business environment, 91 percent rated the pace of change in business today as the leading cause, followed by global competitiveness (86.5 percent), the nature of how work is accomplished today (77.5 percent) and the way organizations are structured (66.3 percent).

Are employees equipped to handle these challenges? According to the AMA survey, more than half of executives (51.4 percent) said their employees were only average in effective communication skills versus 38.1 percent who rated them above average, and 46.9 percent of respondents said their employees were only average in creativity and innovation, compared to 37.4 percent who rated them above average.

However, executives rated their employees higher in other areas. More than half of executives (51.9 percent) said their employees were above average in critical thinking, compared to 41.9 percent who said they were average, and 46.7 percent of respondents rated their employees above average in collaboration and team building versus 42 percent who rated them average.

In order to improve their employees' skill levels in these areas, respondents identified one-on-one coaching and mentoring as the most effective methods, followed by professional development and training, in-house job training and job rotation.

The AMA survey also shows that managers and executives believe it is easier to develop these skills in students (58.6 percent) than it is to develop them in experienced workers (28.8 percent), suggesting that students and recent graduates may be more open to new ideas versus experienced workers with established work patterns and habits.

According to the AMA survey results, 80 percent of executives believe that fusing the three R's and four C's would ensure that students are better prepared to enter the workforce. Proficiency in reading, writing and arithmetic is not sufficient if workers are unable to think critically, solve problems, collaborate or communicate effectively.

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