

Techniques to Improve Talent Data Quality in HR

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The burden of clean data sits squarely on talent analytics teams' shoulders at many organizations. This often results in a lose-lose situation. The business loses when 70% of organizations are increasing investments in talent analytics but only 12% feel like they are getting results.¹ Talent analytics teams lose when they spend large amounts of time cleaning data and less time generating insights that drive business outcomes.

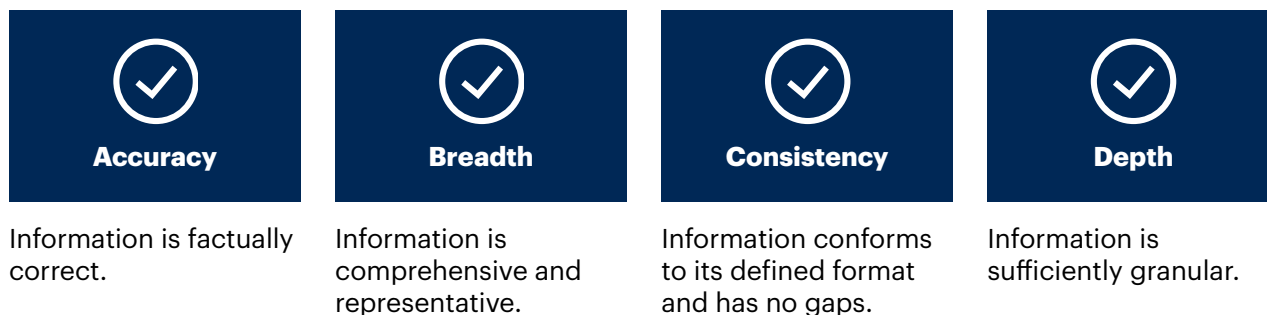
This situation happens because data management is a complex process that involves many stakeholders and, at many organizations, the stakeholders — and their technology — don't talk to one another. Talent analytics teams often access data after other stakeholders have collected it, and many stakeholders do not collect or input data in a standardized manner. Talent analytics leaders must use techniques to improve talent data quality so they can adequately support strategic business decisions with analytics.

To improve data quality at scale, talent analytics leaders should leverage our ABCD Data Quality Framework. First, talent analytics leaders should convene a data quality improvement committee with a collective responsibility for auditing and improving talent data quality. Second, they should use the framework to identify and prioritize high- and low-effort data quality improvement approaches.

Our ABCD Framework for Data Quality

Talent analytics leaders should use this framework to identify where data is weak and improve data quality with sustainable solutions. The framework allows talent analytics leaders to take a systematic approach to improving talent data's four most critical traits: accuracy, breadth, consistency and depth (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The ABCD Data Quality Framework



Source: Gartner

Accuracy measures how factually correct information is. To assess the accuracy of talent data, talent analytics leaders should ask:

- Do we trust the accuracy of our talent data? Why or why not?
- How do we identify and correct errors?
- How do we identify and archive stale data that is no longer trustworthy?

Breadth measures how comprehensive and representative information is. To assess the breadth of talent data, talent analytics leaders should ask:

- Does our data comprehensively represent employees at our organization, their interactions with HR processes and their interests?
- What interaction and communication channels are missing from our purview? How important is this data for our organization's objectives?

Consistency measures how much information conforms to its defined format and how much of the information has no gaps. To assess the consistency of talent data, talent analytics leaders should ask:

- Are there gaps in time where no data was collected?
- Are there anomalies in the data's format that prevent its usability?
- Has our collection methodology remained consistent over time for each data point?

Depth measures the extent to which information is sufficiently granular. To assess the depth of talent data, talent analytics leaders should ask:

- How granular is each data point compared to how we want to use it?
- Do we need more granular data to measure, target or analyze at the business-unit or individual levels?

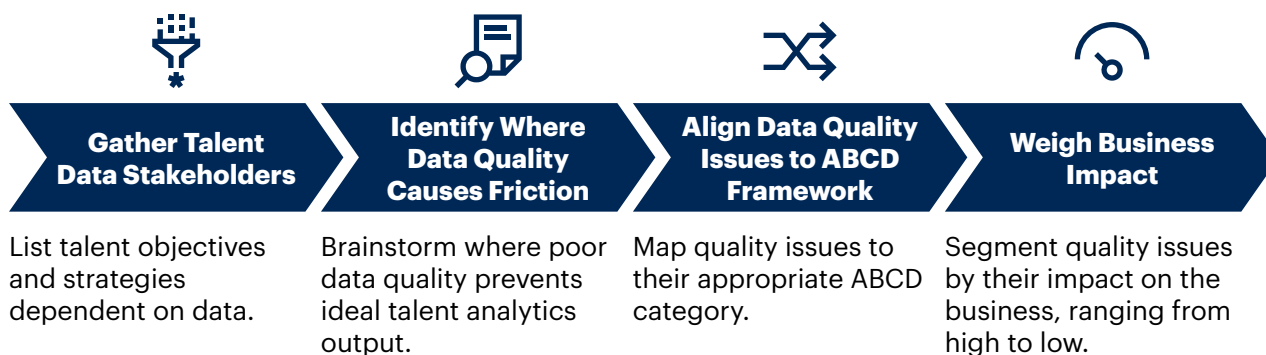
Create a Data Quality Improvement Committee

The first step to shifting the burden of clean data from talent analytics teams to all stakeholders working with HR systems and data is forming — or joining — an organizationwide committee. When forming or joining a data quality improvement committees, talent analytics leaders should reference the ABCD framework to establish the scope of the committee, demonstrate data quality is an always-on initiative and unify cross-functional efforts. The framework helps talent analytics leaders align data stakeholders around a common vision of collective responsibility for data quality.

To start, talent analytics leaders should identify stakeholders throughout their organizations involved in the upstream data collection process. For example, talent management leaders, directors of talent acquisition, recruiters, HR shared services team members and compensation specialists are stakeholders who use and, in many cases, input data into HR systems.

Next, the committee should audit talent data according to the ABCD framework to prioritize where to act (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: How to Audit Your Talent Data Quality



Source: Gartner

1. First, list data-dependent HR objectives and strategies.
2. Second, brainstorm where poor data quality prevents ideal talent analytics output.
3. Third, map quality issues to their appropriate ABCD category. For instance, an example of an accuracy issue is when prospective candidates apply for the same role more than once and multiple candidate identification numbers are created.
4. Fourth, weigh the business impact of data quality issues by segmenting them into categories of impact, ranging from: “mission-critical” to “value-adding” to “currently insignificant.”

The final step is critical: Categorizing data quality issues by their business impact allows the committee to prioritize where to begin improvements. For instance, removing duplicate applicants may be a value-adding data accuracy issue for organizations looking to benchmark different business units’ recruiting results. In another case, pulling quantitative data from external job boards may be a mission-critical data depth issue for organizations competing to attract critical talent in specific geographic areas. Given capacity and capability, teams might not be able to solve all issues at once, so discussing prioritization will ensure all stakeholders are involved in next steps.

Balance Effort and Priority to Improve Data Quality

After the audit, the committee should assess approaches to solve prioritized data quality

issues based on resource intensiveness. The committee should choose the approach that best balances resource availability and the need for business impact (see Figure 3).

Here are a few examples of potential approaches based on the ABCD Framework.

A: Improving data accuracy requires maintaining data integrity at the source of input.

- For a low-effort approach, assign stewards to functional areas, such as recruiting or a business unit.
- For a high-effort approach, verify data at capture. This involves a validation step where users review their data for potential errors before submission. It functions as a two-factor security authentication and requires users to put forth more time and diligence when entering data.

B: Improving data breadth requires gathering data from a larger pool of sources.

- For a low-effort approach, encourage employees to provide additional data points in employee profiles, such as commuting times and involvement in organizations’ cultural activities (e.g., affinity groups, community service).
- For a high-effort approach, build models that serve as proxies for missing data. For example, if an organization did not have reliable psychographic data on employees, a recruiting data steward and performance management data steward could work with a talent analytics leader to develop predictive models for candidates most likely to succeed in their roles based on assumptions developed from performance management data.

Figure 3: Examples of Ways to Improve Talent Data Quality

	Low Effort	High Effort
A Accuracy	Assign Data Stewards	Verify Data at Capture
B Breadth	Engage Employees to Provide Additional Data	Build Models to Proxy Missing Data
C Consistency	Standardize Data Formats	Unify Data Through Machine Learning
D Depth	Ask Targeted Engagement Survey Questions	Use Sentiment Analysis of Employees’ Emails

Source: Gartner

C: Improving data consistency requires standard data definitions across business units and HR functions.

- For a low-effort approach, standardize data formats. For example, enter dates into HR systems in a common format.
- For a high-effort approach, leverage machine-learning platforms to unify data throughout the business.

D: Improving data depth requires collecting granular data to fill analytical gaps.

- For a low-effort approach, ask more targeted questions in an engagement survey.
- For a high-effort approach, leverage sentiment analysis of employees' emails.

Whatever the approach, mobilizing to improve talent data quality as a cross-functional committee, rather than as a talent analytics function, sustainably shifts the burden for clean data. This frees talent analytics teams to spend more time generating insights with high-quality data. Talent analytics leaders can foster collective responsibility for talent data quality by using our framework to organize a committee that audits and improves talent data quality.

Recommended by the Authors

“Data Quality Toolkit”

This toolkit is designed to help talent analytics teams at various stages of maturity improve their data quality.

“TE Connectivity’s Data Quality Score”

See how the talent analytics team at TE Connectivity established a data governance framework focused on standardizing data definitions and processes as well as assessing and reporting data quality with a data quality score (Q score).

“Citizens Bank’s “Show, Don’t Tell” Data Quality Cleanup”

Learn from Citizens Bank’s data quality improvement approach. Instead of overinvesting in cleaning data before sharing it, Citizens Bank strategically reports imperfect data to build momentum for data quality improvement and talent analytics overall.

“Ignition Guide to Building Influence to Improve Data Quality”

This guide will help you identify data sources and owners based on business and talent analytics priorities, build partnerships with data owners and get their buy-in to actively maintain data quality, and drive accountability for data quality within and outside of your team.

¹ 2017 Gartner Talent Analytics Agenda Poll