



How One Healthcare Organization Uses Objective Metrics to Improve Project Management

In 2003, Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield, one of the nation's leading health care benefits companies, set out to identify, quantify, and improve the skills of its associates who manage vital projects. The need for Project Managers at Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield extends across multiple departments, from Information Technology to Finance, and from Marketing to Operations.

Recently, the company completed a 3-year systems consolidation initiative involving multiple functions across multiple states. In this, as in other major undertakings, project management skill is a key driver of success.

“To maintain our position as a leader in the health care industry, we needed a way to find out exactly how proficient we are as an organization when it comes to project management,” says Anthem Program Consultant Haley Sofiane. As part of Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield's East Region (which includes Connecticut, Maine, and New Hampshire), Haley is one of approximately 300 associates with project management responsibilities. By taking stock of its project management skills, Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield's East Region group hoped to pinpoint opportunities for improvement and ultimately boost its ability to complete critical projects on time and within budget.

To achieve these goals, they implemented a solution to enable associates to take an assessment online and receive immediate detailed feedback on their skills. Developed by leading online skills assessment provider Brainbench, the solution is now giving Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield's East Region a solid foundation of objective data for identifying and improving critical project management skills.

Gaining Buy-in: Phased Approach Wins Support of Associates and Managers

For Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield's East Region Project Managers, the idea of measuring skills seemed daunting. Before implementing its online solution, Project Managers typically depended on self-evaluation to identify their skill levels. While this process is important, it is also subjective and difficult to assess on an organizational level. The online test complements the company's self-assessment capability, providing detailed and objective scoring and feedback to Project Managers.

“The score gives us the objectivity we need,” says Sofiane. “To make the program succeed, however, we needed to ensure that associates supported the test. That's why we implemented the solution in a phased approach. We conducted a pilot in which managers of our business units each selected two or three of their top performing Project Managers,” Sofiane explains. “The Project Managers took the

Solution at a Glance: Assessing Project Management Skills

Challenge:

Major organization needs to capture and improve project management skills across multiple departments and multiple states.

Solution:

Objective assessments delivered through online system with challenging questions, detailed results and immediate reporting.

Benefits:

- Wins user support with challenging assessment
- Provides objective metrics to support training decisions.
- Establishes a process for continuous skills improvement



assessment, and the results validated our original belief that there are pockets of high-proficiency and other areas that need improvement. We then moved forward with the program, and the participation and response has been enthusiastic. People want to improve and they want to know how they can improve. We've given them a tool to do that."

Pinpointing Skills Improvement Opportunities: Challenging Assessments and Objective Results Identify Training Needs

According to Sofiane, the detailed results from the online assessment tool provided a significant focus for ongoing training and education efforts. "The online assessment is open book," Sofiane explains. "It is created by subject matter experts with experience in the field, and it measures real-world skills. As associates began taking the test and receiving their scores, they were highly motivated to take immediate action to improve. The role of managers is to make sure that their associates can take action while the motivation to learn is still high."

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Objective metrics and online reporting give Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield the ability to act quickly to address skills improvement needs with training or other educational resources. Assessments rate performance on a scale of 1.00 to 5.00, with a detailed breakdown of areas of strengths and weaknesses within the subject. Results are delivered online immediately after completion. The speed and detail of the results enable users to take specific actions, quickly, to improve their skills.

Organizational Skills Solution Supports a Process for Continuous Improvement

As a growing number of Project Managers assess their skills online, the company is quickly gaining a solid foundation for improvement across the organization. Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield's experience reveals valuable lessons for companies embarking on any skills improvement initiative, from gaining executive and associate buy-in, to identifying problem areas and creating a continuous improvement process.

The group even uncovered new opportunities for improved training and mentoring—identifying top performers and pairing them with those needing improvement in a certain area. The result is a system that maximizes the company's in-house skills and uses those skills to raise the bar on performance for its project management capabilities.

"We're still relatively early in the process," Sofiane points out. "But even at this stage, we've begun to see the result that we sought with the online skills assessment solution. It's a winning situation for Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield as a whole and for the associates whose career success is driven by their project management skills."