



Maintaining Talent for Market Leadership—How Wells Fargo Keeps Top IT Performers On Board and Moving Ahead

In today's financial services industry, IT skills are crucial to a company's ability to sustain market leadership. Even with the widespread availability of outsourced service providers, in-house expertise is fundamental to a company's success in a competitive technology-dominated marketplace. For Wells Fargo, technology and innovation is nothing new. This 150-year-old financial services giant is ranked #1 in multiple categories, from small business and agricultural lending to online financial services, insurance sales, and home equity lending.

"We don't take our industry leadership for granted," says Kevin Travis, manager for Wells Fargo's IT Learning Center and Technical Systems. "It's our people who make us what we are. We need to make sure that top IT performers remain on board and continue to evolve their skills. We have to give them a clear path for career growth, even after they've reached advanced milestones. We're doing something about it, and skills measurement is a big part of our solution."

"Tech Masters" Program Creates Framework for Developing Top IT Performers Across the Enterprise

Like many of today's leading enterprises, Wells Fargo grew to its current size and status through multiple mergers and acquisitions. Over the past year, Travis and his colleagues began looking at new ways of supporting and sustaining its technology leadership across the decentralized organization. What the business units needed was a common development program for advanced technology professionals across the multiple organizations within the company.

Like many large organizations, Wells Fargo develops top performers through one of two career development paths. An employee may be targeted and trained for a management career track, or that person may be targeted for an advanced IT track. But while the path for a manager is clear, high level IT training proved to be more challenging. "If I'm a top performer," says Travis, "I might be asking myself, 'what do I do next?' We needed a way to identify top IT employees, identify the skills they need to develop, and provide the tools to help top performers develop their skills and careers within the company."

Wells Fargo's solution is an innovative skills management and training strategy called the "Tech Masters program." Developed for top IT performers, Tech Masters is designed to help Wells Fargo keep them in-house to spread their knowledge, and continue on what Travis refers to as a "trend of technology innovation in the financial services industry."

Skills Measurement and Training Provide Key Ingredients for IT Development

The Wells Fargo Tech Masters program provides participants with a unique combination of customized training and assessment resources. In the current program, for example, Web Developers are being targeted to focus on a key skill known as J2EE. Employees undergo a rigorous application process, answering essay questions, obtaining recommendations, and completing an online pre-assessment to validate their skills.

Once enrolled in the program, employees take a pre-assessment, participate in two training modules over two months, and then complete a post assessment to measure learning progress. This process is then repeated for two more pairs of modules, each with pre- and post-assessments. Tests are custom developed by online skills measurement provider Brainbench, and training is provided by IT skills experts at Intertech.

While it is not uncommon for companies to embark on advanced skills development initiatives, Wells Fargo's program provides a uniquely integrated assessment and training system. "We wanted to do more than provide a training template," says Travis. "We also needed to accommodate knowledge that's unique to Wells Fargo. The assessments and the training are customized for our organization. Not every company may need to do that, but for us, it is important to have everyone on the same page, being trained to meet our unique technology needs."

"We wanted to do more than provide a training template," says Travis. "We also needed to accommodate knowledge that's unique to Wells Fargo."



Online Skills Measurement System Provides Performance Metrics

Wells Fargo's online assessments play a significant role in the Tech Masters program. At the application stage, employees are required to meet rigorous standards. "Average won't do," says Travis, "we're looking for exceptional. We challenge them to explain why they should participate, and ask them how they have shared their knowledge." In addition to essays, recommendations and verifications, employees take an online screening assessment.

The online screening component provides a much-needed objective dimension to an otherwise subjective process. "You can set minimum requirements such as years of service, job classification or grade," says Travis, "but the assessment gives us quantifiable data directly related to each skill being taught."

"The assessment gives us a common foundation for measuring skills improvement across all of our many IT organizations," says Travis. "We even found some surprises right up front. The first assessment revealed a skills gap we didn't think we had, and now we have the data to address it."

No Incentive Needed—Skills Development Path Serves as its Own Reward

For many decision-makers, one of the most significant perceived obstacles to skills measurement is the willingness of employees to participate. Wells Fargo's experience is proving the opposite. "We uncovered a real competitive nature because of the program's exclusivity," says Travis. "Employees realized that we were fulfilling a critical career development need. When they've exhausted their learning opportunities, they'll jump on a new opportunity to learn."

For Wells Fargo, the program has proven highly successful in creating an atmosphere for participation. "We had managers calling for daily updates on who in their departments have applied," said Travis. "We told them, 'we're not giving away your budget by promising automatic pay increases for participants, but you can use the results when you make decisions involving your team members. They wanted to prove themselves, and we were giving them training and the metrics to do it. Between the enthusiasm of the managers and the employees, we didn't need a carrot to put in front of the program to get the participation we wanted."

Wells Fargo Moves Ahead with Repeatable Skills Development Process

For decision-makers at Wells Fargo, creating the Tech Masters program meant gaining support for the concept among key executives. According to Travis, the support was there from the outset, and it now continues as the company plans a Tech Masters program for a new IT skill.

"For our Tech Masters program, new curriculum development is easier and faster now," says Travis. "We have a repeatable process in place. We have an advanced training program that is customized and focused. We have the tools to capture and measure the impact. We're a company that differentiates itself from the competition through skills leadership and innovation. This program gives us the tools to maintain that leadership position through the skills of employees across the company."

"The first assessment revealed a skills gap we didn't think we had, and now we have the data to address it."