

Five Challenges That Businesses and Agencies Can Address With Objective Skills Data

For companies and government agencies, skills measurement solutions are gaining recognition as effective tools for developing objective skills data to address specific business needs. These needs may include such issues as performance improvement, recruiting enhancement, or simply the documentation of a skills inventory in response to an executive mandate.

While a skills measurement strategy may deliver a positive impact on multiple facets of human capital management, the initiative usually begins in response to a single specific need. Below are five common reasons decision-makers initiate skills measurement strategies for their organizations, along with unique capabilities of online solutions that make them particularly adept at meeting those needs.

#1: Responding to Executive Mandates

In the federal arena, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is using its power as a controller of funding to drive agencies toward adoption of private sector best practices and solutions. Part of the emphasis of this push, outlined in the OMB publication of The President's Management Agenda, includes e-government initiatives as well as a focus on strategic management of human capital. An online skills measurement system directly addresses both needs. It leverages e-government capabilities, and it provides objective data to identify and manage skills across the organization.

The same push that drives federal agencies toward online skills measurement also applies to the private sector, particularly as companies implement initiatives to optimize their ability to perform better with fewer resources. (To learn more about The President's Management Agenda, see our article in Skills Measurement Report, Vol. 2, Issue 1 January 23, 2003.)

#2: Addressing Specific Performance Issues

Skills drive performance across all aspects of business, from operations to management, sales and customer service. IT skills are particularly influential, as businesses seek ways to ensure that they're maximizing returns on new technologies and the processes that go with them. An online skills measurement system enables decision-makers to quickly develop a snapshot of skill levels across an organization.

Unlike pass-fail tests, online assessments provide a level of detail that reveals skills levels, rather than the mere presence of skills. As a result, administrators can immediately pinpoint where skills levels fall short within an organization and then implement the training and education effort needed to correct those skills gaps.

One of the biggest advantages an online solution offers for correcting a skills gap is repeatability. The user can take a repeat assessment in the same subject and still experience the level of challenge needed to test his or her skill level. As a result, an organization can give employees a self-service ability to measure a skill, improve in a skill, and track that improvement with detailed results. Ultimately, the repeatability feature is crucial in both identifying and correcting skills gaps—a key driver of organizational performance.

#3: Documenting Organizational Transformation

When missions are redefined, the demand for employee skills is redefined as well. Realizing the full benefit of mergers, acquisitions and organizational restructuring efforts is impossible without a detailed knowledge of skills assets across the enterprise. How can a decision-maker ensure that decisions about organizational change are made at the optimum time and are based on objective data rather than educated guesswork? A skills measurement system provides an answer.

The objective skills metrics delivered by an online measurement system provide an effective tool for assessing available skills against a consistent standard that is not limited by organizational boundaries. As a result, decision-makers can make apples-to-apples comparisons of skill levels across groups and teams, and document employee capabilities throughout the transformation process. For more about skills metrics and organizational transformation, click here to download a pdf report on the subject: Skills-Based Change Management.

#4: Improving Recruiting Success

In the recruiting cycle, the time from pre-screening to final hire is driven largely by the need to identify the right candidates from a large pool of applicants. An online skills measurement system provides a powerful tool for accelerating that process, particularly at the front-end, where the need to pre-screen candidates and validate skills is greatest. By identifying people with the right skills at the beginning of the process, an online skills measurement system can deliver a dramatic reduction in time-to-hire.

Recently, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) utilized an online skills measurement system to validate applicant skills at a multi-agency online job fair. In cases where the recruiting process was aligned with the online format, the hiring cycle was reduced from several months to as little as three weeks. It is important to note that an online system also provides the benefit of clarifying the skills requirements for job openings. As a result, initial evidence from the OPM job fair indicated a better-than-expected proportion of qualified candidates applying through the process.

#5: Do More with Less (Identify Skills Across the Organization)

In today's tight economy, managers are frequently asked to look inside the ranks of their employee populace to find the skills to address an internal need or to complete a particular engagement. A common complaint from managers is that "we don't know what we know." In other words, companies may already have the skills they need to achieve their business objectives, but they have no objective means of finding out where they exist within the organization.

An online skills measurement solution addresses this problem, enabling employees to measure their skills without the need for extensive scheduling or training. Detailed skills data indicates where skills exist across the organization and at what level those skills are available.

In addition to consistent data, an online system also delivers the benefit of easy assessment across a wide range of skills. Rather than limit employees to taking "assigned" assessments, companies are giving employees the option of taking "elective" assessments, available in nearly every critical professional skill, ranging from IT, computer software, and office skills to management, language and communications, and industry knowledge. The skills data revealed through a broad assessment solution can prove crucial in identifying employee capabilities that might otherwise remain hidden to the organization.

Skills Metrics Deliver Benefits Beyond Single-Issue Goals

Whether an organization wants to measure skills for performance improvement, to pre-screen recruiting candidates, or meet any of major human capital management goal, gaining executive buy-in for implementation is crucial. Often, the best way to ensure successful buy-in is to build a case on a single objective, and expand that case with the additional benefits that online skills measurement provides. Once a program is implemented, organizations can scale the program as needed to meet a variety of key performance objectives.