



Tracking Your Changing Skills Inventory: Why It's Now Possible, and What It Means for Your Organization

Employee skills and change management—how can companies keep ahead? According to a recent survey by CIO magazine, 56% of IT professionals reported having difficulty keeping up with their companies' IT skills needs.* As a result, leading companies like Cable and Wireless and IBM, as well as government agencies such as the USDA continue to explore solutions that focus skills development toward meeting evolving strategic needs.

What's at stake? In today's changing IT marketplace, the ability to dynamically gauge and manage a changing skills inventory can yield a significant competitive advantage. By knowing where their skills are, how fast they are developing, and exactly where their skills need to be, companies are achieving measurable improvement in productivity and profitability.

In order to succeed, skills management strategies must address one basic tenet of business value creation—you can't manage what you can't measure. So how do you measure skills that are constantly changing? The answer lies in a system capable of delivering repeatable and accurate skills assessments over time. What makes such a system succeed where old methods fell short? The answer is simple: online skills measurement systems can now fulfill three goals. They can deliver relevant, repeatable results. They capture actionable information, and they require little if any administration on the part of the enterprise. For today's enterprise, the implications are significant.

56% of IT professionals reported having difficulty keeping up with their companies' IT skills needs.*

Goal #1: Deliver Relevant, Repeatable Results

For many companies, skills assessments are frequently implemented on paper in a proctored environment, usually in coordination with a particular learning event or employee development milestone. While such tests provide a static snapshot, they are of little use in managing the dynamics of skills development in a constantly changing environment. What if you want to re-test employee proficiency in a particular skill at some specified time after the initial assessment? Would you give the employee the same questions? Would the test-taker's previous experience with the test distort the results? In order to achieve relevant results, the skills assessment must challenge the test-taker every time.

One particular advance in online skills measurement provides a solution to these issues: Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT) technology. CAT technology delivers online assessments that draw from a pool of questions of varying difficulty as the test is taken. As a result, the user never takes the same test twice. In addition, the assessment chooses the difficulty of each question based on the test-taker's performance on previous questions, ensuring that even over repeat assessments of the same skill, users receive challenging questions.

Dynamic question selection engines such as CAT enable significant advantages at the enterprise skills management level. Formerly, to reassess skills or measure learning progress, companies had to create new tests, develop multiple versions of a test, or simply re-administer the same tests to the same test-takers (potentially compromising the validity of the results).

Dynamic question selection frees the enterprise from the burden of "creating" an assessment, and it ensures a realistic score over multiple testings. From a technical standpoint, it is the adaptive nature of this online technology that has freed the skills assessment from its single-event limitations.



Goal #2: Capture Actionable Information

One of the major challenges companies find with traditional assessment methodology is the bluntness of the results. When a training participant receives a simple pass/fail grade based on a post-training exam, the result provides little if any insight into the test-taker's strengths or weaknesses. The finality of a pass/fail grade suggests that learning for that skill ends with that assessment, thus inhibiting self-improvement. Similarly, employees are often simply asked to provide subjective self-assessments of their skills. The result is usually too inaccurate or lacking in detail to enable a relevant comparison to future assessments. Companies are now addressing the challenge of capturing value by leveraging detailed scores through flexible reporting enabled by online assessment systems.

Web- or Intranet-delivered skills assessments facilitate detailed scoring. When an individual takes an assessment, even a minute skill improvement will be captured by the system. For decision-makers ranging from the line-level manager to the executive, such results can provide telling details needed to validate training, identify operational skills gaps, and most importantly, capture and record improvement over time.

Goal #3: Automate the Assessment Administration Process

When the burden of creating and delivering challenging skills assessments over time becomes too great, an organizational skills inventory management strategy may lose momentum. Given that employee skills can represent up to 85% of a company's assets in today's economy, the operational detail of skills assessment administration can have major strategic implications.

Many companies have taken advantage of skills measurement technology to arrive at a simple solution to the administration problem: employee self-service. By providing access to assessments through the employee Intranet, companies are eliminating the scheduling and implementation burden. With continuous access, the employee views the assessment less as an intrusion and more as a tool for capturing skills improvement. Meanwhile, online access facilitates multiple assessments, delivering valuable skills data that helps the company track skills inventory and rate of improvement.

Many companies have taken advantage of skills measurement technology to arrive at a simple solution to the administration problem: employee self-service.

Eliminating the Guesswork—Skills Measurement Sheds Light Across the Enterprise

Thanks to advances that are enabling repeat online assessment, skills measurement now benefits all facets of business, from recruiting and training, to management, marketing and channel relations. Until recently, managers frequently had to rely on disparate skills data to assemble teams, make hiring and outsourcing decisions, and assess their skills assets. Now, they are eliminating much of the guesswork involved in these vital decisions by relying on accurate skills data. Repeatable skills measurement provides a key source of improvement benchmarking data and ROI metrics that is delivering bottom-line results enterprise-wide for today's smartest companies.

*From CIO.com
Mid 2002 IT Staffing Update