

## How Skills Measurement Pays Off

For today's enterprise, employee skills are now recognized as a key source of potential competitive advantage, and tracking those skills is fast becoming a priority for decision-makers across all departments. With all its new advances, however, skills measurement is not being adopted as a strategy for its own sake—companies are relying on skills measurement as a foundation for skills improvement. In one recent example, e-learning provider Element K used its online skills measurement system to track an average 16% skills improvement among 27,000 professionals. In other examples, telecommunications leader Cable and Wireless improved employee core skills by an average of 30%, and content infrastructure software company Interwoven improved skills and boosted training enrollment and revenue by 50%.

So what's different about skills measurement today compared to the past? The answer is a matter of purpose. In the past, skills measurement was used merely to track employee ability. Today, skills measurement not only provides a gauge for tracking past skills improvement, it now serves as a foundation for future improvement, providing a repeatable skills improvement process for employees across the organization. Here's how online skills measurement systems are now providing unique advantages that help companies translate skills measurement into skills improvement.

### **Automatic Improvement (Help people know what they know.)**

Unlike one-time paper and pencil tests, online skills assessments now give users the ability to access results, track their performance, and access learning materials. This "self-service" feature delivers results that facilitate a continuous learning experience for the test-taker.

While automatic improvement from the test-taking experience cannot substitute for active learning on the part of the employee/test-taker, the results provide a valuable perspective. Whether assessment results serve to show the employee how much (or how little) he or she knows about a skill, that knowledge alone can translate into valuable learning action and skills improvement.

### **Self-Education (Refer employees automatically to learning resources.)**

In addition to facilitating automatic skills improvement, online skills measurement systems also streamline the self-education process for the employee/test-taker. Employees receive assessment results broken down into areas of strength and weakness, with dynamically generated links to relevant books or other educational materials online. For the large organization and employees with widely spaced career or learning milestones, the automatic reference to self-education materials can dramatically enhance learning potential.

### **Mentoring (Identify strong performers as mentors for low scorers.)**

By providing a consistent set of metrics across test-takers throughout the organization, today's skills measurement systems can automate the process of objectively identifying top performers. Online reporting and filtering functions enable companies to pinpoint those performers and automatically refer them to others with weak scores in the same skill areas. Companies are currently exploring the mentoring functionality, and finding that, instead of isolating test-takers within an organization, online measurement systems are providing a common strategic platform that brings them together.

Many business leaders would point out a higher-level benefit derived from online assessment—that is, the ability to identify and reward top performers. For many companies, such as IBM and Cable and Wireless, (see Best Practices at [www.brainbench.com/business](http://www.brainbench.com/business)) skills measurement translates directly into a skills improvement culture. Even in tough times, it is the top performer that has the ability to help a company turn around. Whether the company wishes to recognize achievement, or facilitate mentoring, the net result is the same: online skills assessment and reporting facilitates more efficient utilization of company knowledge resources.



### **Training (Identify training candidates and track progress.)**

One of the most persistent problems facing both the managers who send employees to training, and trainers who are expected to deliver results, is the lack of a common and objective skills baseline. Online assessment addresses this problem, by helping managers attach their training efforts to a specific skills goal. The process dramatically simplifies the selection of training candidates and tracks training ROI.

- A skills baseline is established. This is usually set as a minimum score by the assessment provider based on a large pool of test data.
- A skills assessment is taken across a group or department.
- Those who don't meet the baseline are assigned to training.
- After training, the assessment is taken again (Computer Adaptive Testing technology ensures that every repeat assessment remains challenging.)
- Results from second assessments are used to evaluate training performance and employee assignment.

### **Establishing Assignments (Improve ability to match employee skills to job needs.)**

With nimble delivery and reporting functionality, online skills measurement can be a key enabler for decision-makers faced with change-management issues. From creating new teams to focusing the abilities of existing groups and departments, online skills measurement provides a vital level of objectivity for tracking and improving performance across the organization.

Organizations can instantly locate employees to fulfill specific skills needs related to a particular engagement through their database of online assessment scores. The net result of this strategy is that the company consistently puts its best foot forward when building teams, managing change, or engaging in new business activity. The result: skills measurement enables more effective skills inventory management, enhancing performance across the organization.

### **Moving Ahead: Where to Begin**

Whether your organization seeks to tighten up operational performance or begin building a skills improvement culture, a skills measurement program provides an effective starting point for action. Successful companies are establishing specific skills goals, often at the departmental or project team level, and they are implementing programs that include employees as part of regular skills measurement program. Identify top performers. Address skills gaps. Facilitate self-improvement. Smart companies are taking these crucial steps to performance improvement, and they are using skills measurement to help put these steps into action.