



### **3 Ways to Establish Employee Skills Ownership and Accountability**

Anyone who has ever bought a house knows it firsthand—homeowners have more reasons to maintain and improve their dwellings than do renters. For a homeowner, there is no landlord to call when something goes wrong, and the homeowner is compelled to make improvements to maintain and boost property value. Can the benefits and responsibilities of ownership also apply to an individual's skills? The answer is "yes." Many companies are now proving that individual skills ownership has its advantages.

It is widely held among business decision-makers that the skills of employees account for 85% of a company's assets. Employee skills determine the speed and success with which projects are completed, objectives are met, and services are delivered. But as any manager or executive knows, it is the individual employee, not the company, who has ultimate control over how well skills are maintained and developed. So how can managers motivate employees to improve critical skills and take greater "ownership" of their career development? The answer is relatively simple: give employees the means to objectively measure their skills and identify areas of improvement, and provide access to learning resources to close skill gaps.

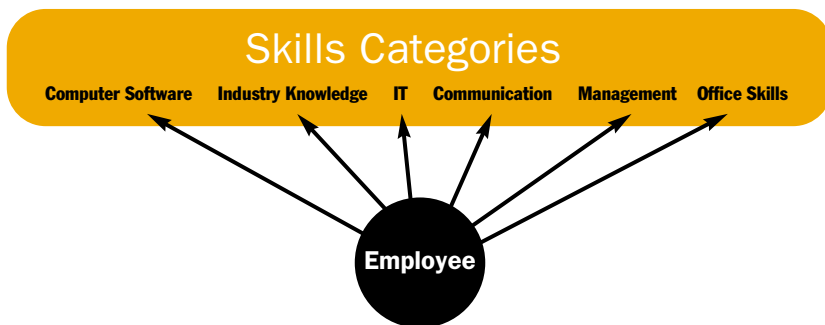
Progressive companies are implementing skills measurement systems that dramatically reduce the burden on managers to develop individual career development plans. Instead, they are making employees more accountable for their own learning and development based on objective feedback from skills assessments. There are three strategic components to the approach: provide objective metrics for measuring skills, establish accountability, and foster continuous improvement.

### Give Employees Objective Measurement Tools to Demonstrate Skills Ownership

How can companies convey skills ownership in terms that make that ownership “real” to the individual employee? Simply telling the individual that he or she is responsible for critical skills provides little in the way of actionable information. Give the same employee a resource for assessing particular skill sets from an extended selection of subjects, however, and the equation changes. The employee can take stock of a particular skill, assess the value of that skill, and identify how and where that skill can be improved.

To make skills ownership possible, objective metrics and the ability to apply them to a range of critical skills is important. An effective measurement system delivers assessments to employees on demand. The employee can access the system online, select a skills assessment, and complete the test for immediate results. The system calculates scores based on the employee’s answers to test questions—questions that are selected dynamically to test the user at his or her skill level. Employees achieve a detailed view of their critical skills, with the ability to repeat assessments and track growth and improvement.

Traditionally, skills measurement has been correlated with corporate training or some other focused initiative dictated by the company, taking skill measurement control and “ownership” away from the individual. An effective measurement system gives control back to the employee, providing objective metrics as well as a choice of skills to track. Even as companies assign employees with particular skill sets to measure and improve, they are also giving the same individuals the choice to measure skills outside of their assigned skills “track.” Employees can acquire new skills, measure them through an established system of skills metrics, and in the process, reinforce the value of skills ownership and improvement.



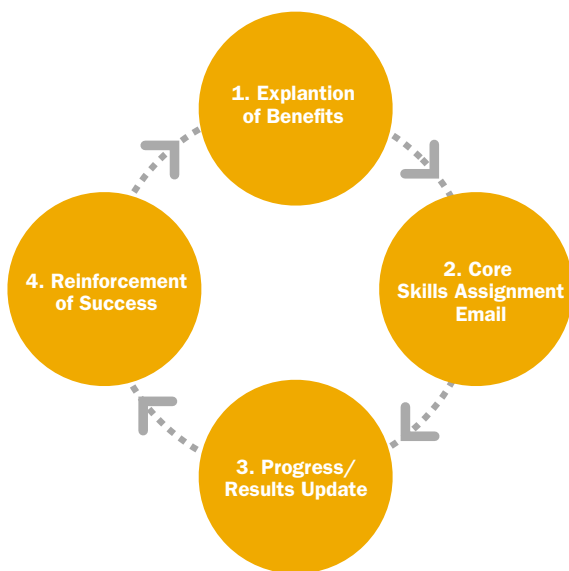
While individuals may be required to assess specific job role skills, effective measurement systems also provide access to a larger landscape of subjects.

### **Establish Accountability through Communication—Set Expectations and Reinforce Success**

While providing employees with the tools to measure skills is beneficial, smart companies are communicating expectations to translate “nice-to-have” measurement tools into “must-have” skills improvement objectives. How can employee skills ownership be translated to skills accountability? There are two answers: set skills requirements, and establish a clear communications process.

Underlying the establishment of skills accountability is the need to set requirements and establish a baseline. An individual employee, for example, may receive a selection of skills to track, based on that employee’s job role function, with assessment due dates and assessment score objectives. With an objective measurement system in place, the employee has the ability to take assessments, access learning resources as needed, and take repeat assessments over time to track improvement until baseline objectives are met. The result? The measurement system gives the employee the ability to prove skills ownership, as well as the responsibility for skills upkeep.

In addition to a skills baseline, accountability also requires a documented, repeatable communications process. Without a formal communications plan, skills initiatives run the risk of falling into disuse. The solution—don’t deliver communications on an as-needed basis. Instead, smart companies are boosting employee participation in the skills measurement and improvement initiatives by actively reaching out through a continuous communications process. From program introduction, to the assignment of skills assessments, delivery of organization-wide results, and promise of employee incentives, communications play an essential role in an ongoing process for establishing and reinforcing skills accountability.



A repeatable communications process like the one shown here dramatically improves the quality of employee participation in skills measurement initiatives.



**Provide Flexible Tools for Skills Improvement**

When it comes to fostering skills development, companies have traditionally relied on a prescriptive approach. Frequently, management decided what training was needed and then delivered that training on a schedule dictated by the company, not the individual employee. Today, however, companies are recognizing that a “one strategy fits all” approach can compromise skills development for the individual, mainly because the timing of learning and assessments rarely coincides directly with pressing employee needs or availability.

Unlike traditional top-down skills development approaches, online skills measurement systems can be designed to direct employees to learning resources as needed based on detailed feedback from individual assessment results. Whether an employee is referred to specific print reference material, training modules, or high score mentors within the organization, an online measurement system can provide an automated start to the learning process immediately after a test is taken. As a result, the employee has control over the learning process, and with it, the ability to learn continuously based on individual and company goals and needs.

**Leading Companies Facilitate Employee Skills Ownership and Continuous Improvement through Objective Skills Measurement**

Who is putting objective skills measurement into practice? The answer includes leading knowledge companies such as IBM, Cable & Wireless, and Wells Fargo. In addition, federal agencies are increasing their focus on skills measurement, giving employees the metrics to take control of their skills, and giving job candidates accountability for meeting specific and clear job requirements.

By helping employees document ownership of their critical skills, smart companies are now able to establish skills accountability and foster continuous learning—a key strength in today’s marketplace of constantly-evolving demands.