

## Three Ways to Promote Skills Development with Employees

Continuous participation is the key to success for any employee skills improvement initiative. The challenges of keeping employees involved can prove daunting. Employees move. Roles change. New employees need to be introduced to company skills measurement resources. In addition, there is the challenge of working in an enterprise environment—to take stock of employee skills across an enterprise, a company needs to facilitate employee participation in a skills measurement effort across multiple departments or project teams. Any one of these factors may prevent an employee from measuring his or her skills.

Taken together, the obstacles will almost certainly push a skills measurement initiative permanently on the “back burner,” if it is left without an active strategy for ensuring continued employee participation. Successful skills measurement initiatives cannot be implemented on a “build it and they will come” basis. Fortunately, there are clear solutions to the participation issues. Consider the following measures when planning your skills inventory initiative, and the result will be a clear strategy for continuous participation that will prove instrumental to program success.

### **Establish and Communicate Clear Skills Requirements**

When setting out the agenda for creating a skills inventory, clear goals are essential. Managers may establish benchmark levels for a variety of skills within their organizations. Alternatively, they may begin by focusing on one particular skill, as financial services leader Wells Fargo recently did with its advanced IT professionals—all with an eye toward expanding their skills inventory program.

Whether you implement a skills inventory program one skill at a time or comprehensively (as in job role-defined skill sets), it is important to communicate skills requirements to participating employees. Employees may be assigned a core “track” of skills to measure based on their job roles, and then have access to additional assessments to pursue for their personal development goals.

While assigning skills assessments to employees can ensure a basic level of participation, it is important to convey that skills measurement is a means toward achieving skills improvement. Scheduled periodic communication to each employee—email or otherwise—ultimately makes the difference between a skills measurement system that goes unused and a skills improvement program that yields continuous results.

### **Create Milestones for Continuous Development**

Once an employee is involved in a skills initiative, the most important issue is to ensure that there is a direction for improvement. Whether that means achieving a certain assessment score in one skill, or developing and validating a new skill, a clear milestone for improvement will ensure continued participation.

A skills milestone can be as simple as a due date for completing an assessment. While giving an employee an assigned due date for an assessment does not guarantee ongoing skills improvement, it does encourage participation.

In the case of IBM, managers have used skills measurement milestones to serve as valuable points of feedback between widely spaced traditional employee milestones such as performance reviews and training events. (*See IBM's story in the July, 2003 issue of Skills Measurement Report at [www.brainbench.com/business](http://www.brainbench.com/business)*)

**Recognize Achievement and Enhance Morale**

This is one of the most important aspects of an effective skills inventory program. Recognition of achievement ensures that employees view skills measurement as a means for skills improvement, not as a source of anxiety. When it comes to maintaining participation, recognition can prove critical. But what constitutes valid recognition?

Perhaps the most compelling recognition comes from the objective skills assessment score. A test-taker can be recognized for achieving a percentile ranking against a complete global database of test-takers in a given subject area—a powerful reinforcement for employees that excel. Other forms of recognition may be earned through above-average scores, certification of skills, personal high scores, or significant levels of improvement. In addition, managers can compare an online database of employee skills to a larger database of assessment results across an industry. While the employee cannot directly access the data to make this comparison, the skills measurement administrator can share results as with employees as needed.

How are companies rewarding their employees? Often, recognition is reward enough. In the case of Wells Fargo's advanced IT employees, little incentive was needed to promote participation. In other cases, rewards, certificates, or other forms of "honorable mention" serve as effective recognition tools.