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The What, Why, When and How of Skills Assessments



When hiring, developing, or promoting employees for new positions in your company, resumes and interviews only tell you so much. A person's education, experience, and references all provide indicators about what a person knows and what they have done. But, the best way to understand one's abilities and level of proficiency is to conduct a skills assessment.

What is a Skills Assessment?

Very simply, a skills assessment is an evaluation of an individual's ability to perform a specific skill or set of skills. Usually, it's an evaluation of skills specific to a job or role. Ideally, the assessment captures the level of proficiency for each skill, so you know which participants are new to a skill and which have mastered it.

Skills assessments may be conducted in person, online, or a combination of both. They may take the form of a simulation, test, questionnaire, or observation. For example, the skill of "Manages project risks," could be assessed with this stated requirement:

"Able to identify and document risks and assumptions associated with projects. Considers impact on the whole system when identifying risks. Collaborates with others to develop strategies for managing risks and ensures inclusion of input from all key stakeholder groups. Develops and documents contingency plans to reduce or mitigate risk factors."



Skill level could be assessed with proficiency markers of:

- Limited
- Basic
- Intermediate
- Advanced
- Expert

Regardless, you'll want to conduct standardized, objective reviews, so results of all the assessments can be

reliably compared. Many companies use a skills management system like Avilar's [WebMentor Skills™](#), to create and deliver custom online skills assessments based on job roles across the company. Results are centralized, always current, and readily available.

When to Use a Skills Assessment Test

Some people are strong on education; others are rich in experience. Skills assessment tests give no weight to *how* employees learned what they know; they measure *what* employees can do. They are routinely used for a range of hiring and employee development initiatives:

- **Recruiting:** A skills assessment test for employment can help hiring managers narrow down the list of candidates to interview or to decide between finalist candidates for an open position.
- **Career Development:** A jobs skills assessment test can be used to evaluate the performance of current employees, to help confirm that they are strengthening essential skills as they build experience.
- **Learning and Development:** As employees progress along a learning path, a skills assessment test is a simple, objective checkpoint to ensure that the training is effective.
- **Rapid Adoption of New Skills:** Skills are constantly evolving. From effectively participating in video meetings to adopting new protocols or manufacturing procedures, a skills assessment can quickly test whether employees have mastered new, essential skills before they are cleared for the work.
- **Reskilling and Upskilling:** Many employers are encouraging current employees to learn adjacent or entirely new skill sets to help address a talent gap.

Inside the Employee Skill Matrix

Skill assessment reports help managers understand the skills of individuals and teams, as well as identify areas where training is needed. One kind of report, an employee skill matrix, is a grid that maps required job skills to the proficiencies of current employees who need them.



Armed with this “map,” it is immediately clear which people have (and which have not) mastered the targeted skills. If one or two people are lagging behind the rest, you may want to work with them individually to get the training and support they need to get up to speed. If a whole team needs to advance, group classes and projects may be a better next step. By keeping the results in your skills management system, an employee skill matrix report will provide the visibility you need to ensure your teams are making the progress you need.

Benefits of a Skills Assessment

Because skills assessments are designed to objectively assess the skills of individuals, there are many benefits to using them. Here are just a few:

- **Reduce Bias:** Especially in the hiring process, intrinsic biases can affect our hiring decisions. The more weight given to skills assessments, the less is given to things like age, gender, previous employer, education, address, and other factors that can inadvertently sway a hiring manager.
- **Consistency:** Without an assessment, hiring managers are left with human reports of proficiency – with no objective agreement on the “scale.” One job candidate may report that her skills are mostly “3” on a 3-point scale and another mostly “2” – even if their skill levels are exactly the same. A skills assessment does a much better job assigning objective meaning to that 1-2-3 scale.
- **Personalized Development Plans:** Just because someone isn’t fully skilled doesn’t mean they shouldn’t get the job or promotion. A skills assessment is extremely helpful in pinpointing exactly the areas where someone needs to develop skills, making it easier to develop a relevant, personalized learning and development plan.
- **Measure Progress:** Whether monitoring the development of individuals or teams, regular skills assessments can confirm progress – or identify areas where the training and support isn’t enough.
- **Employee Engagement.** Employees want to keep learning. “Cultivating your employees’ growth is a win-win situation — it keeps them engaged and allows them to develop new skill sets that will make them stronger employees.” Skills assessments are precisely all about employee growth; supporting and recognizing their progress keeps employees engaged.

For skills old and new, a skills assessment can help keep your employees and teams current, productive, and engaged.

Are you ready to get started?

If you are looking to build a strong and resilient workforce, [contact us](#) to learn how Avilar’s [WebMentor Skills™](#) can help support your skills assessment initiatives.

About Avilar

Avilar – The Competency Company™ is a leader in web-based competency management and learning solutions for corporations, government, and non-profit organizations. Formed in 1997, Avilar was a pioneer with its award-winning WebMentor™ product line and has built itself on the basis of superior customer service and highly adaptable product design.

Avilar consultants are recognized as industry thought leaders and have decades of experience in implementation and analysis. Let Avilar help you transform your organization from ordinary to extraordinary. [Visit our website](#) to schedule a demo of our competency management system or our LMS. You can be confident that we will listen to your organization’s specific needs and help you find the best solutions to the talent management challenges you’re facing.

