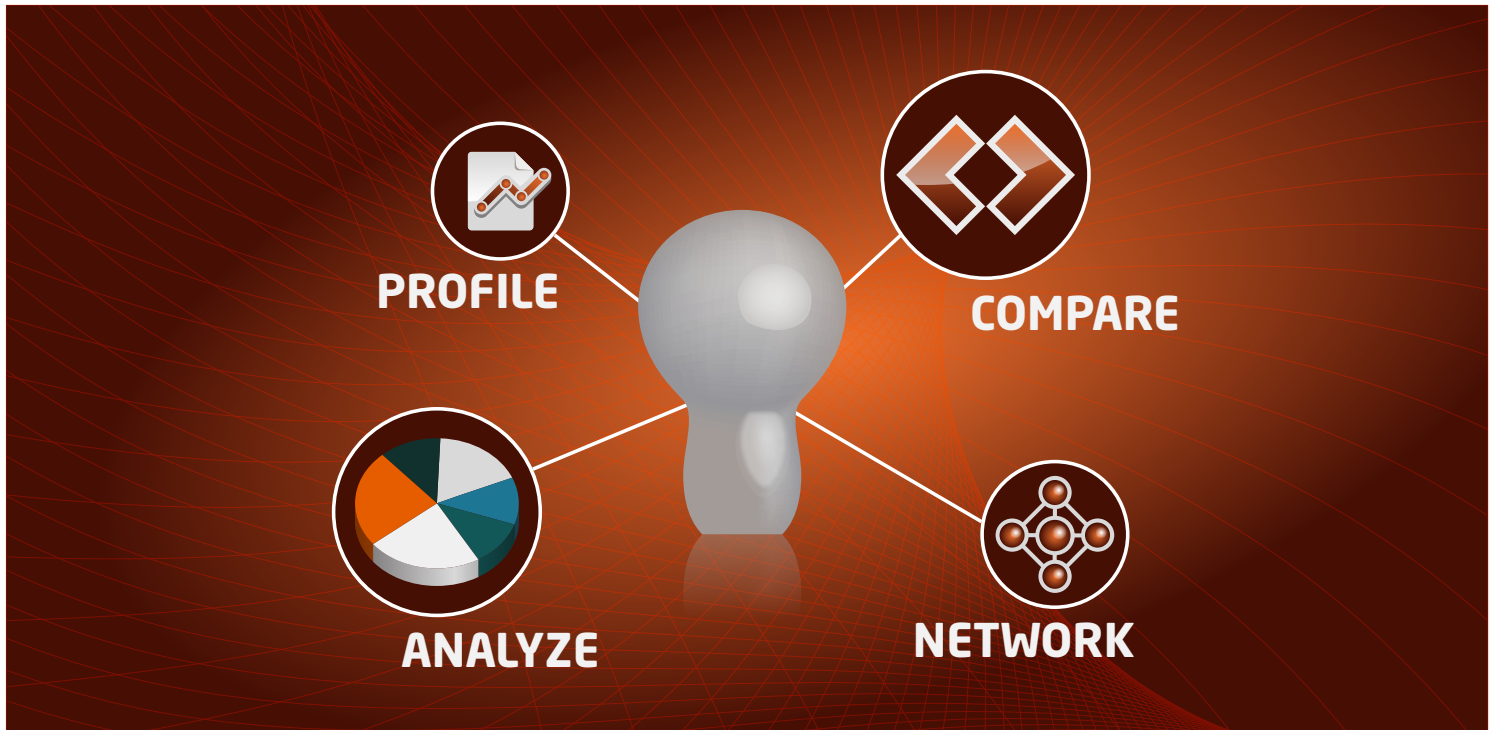


Tapping Into the Collective Knowledge of Your Workforce



White Paper

Tapping Into the Collective Knowledge of Your Workforce



Even in reasonably small organizations, managers might be surprised to find what skills someone they have worked with for years has—or doesn't have. In larger organizations, it's rare for HR or anyone else to have any kind of systematic grasp of the skills that exist across the organization—that information has typically not been captured.

Why is it important for managers to know about their team's skills? An accurate overview of skills enables managers to understand the depth of talent for succession. It informs them of gaps in talent for training, and provides a view into existing resources they have to deploy on projects.

Employees also benefit when skills are visible. There's less chance they'll be overlooked for opportunities because no one knew about their capabilities. They also know what skills they need to move along various career paths and can see how their skills compare to others in the organization.

Given the benefits, how would most organizations go about creating an organization-wide database of skills? The traditional approach would be to staff up a large group in HR to define skills, assess employees, manage a database, produce reports and keep everything up to date. Shrinking HR budgets and capturing and maintaining an up-to-date skills inventory makes this clearly impractical.

Yet new technologies and attitudes towards work and online information bring some fresh possibilities for capturing and managing organizational skills. Some of these important ideas are user content creation, empowerment, and transparency. These trends can provide an affordable, straight-forward way to leverage skills mapping for the benefit of employees and the company.

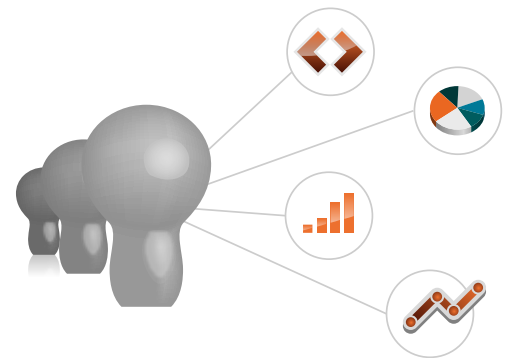
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A New Approach

Getting a handle on skills requires creating some sort of taxonomy, gathering skills data, verifying the accuracy of the data, using the data and keeping the whole system up to date. Here's how a company might tackle each with a fresh approach.

Creating a Taxonomy

Describing employee skills could conceivably require a great amount of detail. However, there is no need to over-engineer the project. The skills taxonomy should be simple or it won't be maintained. The idea of a skills map is not to capture every possible skill in great detail. Management, led by HR, should create a taxonomy that allows the organization to easily capture and manage what it most needs to know. This practical mindset believes "everything is beta" -- a techie's way of saying that a system is never finished, it's always changing and adapting, but is delivering value right now.

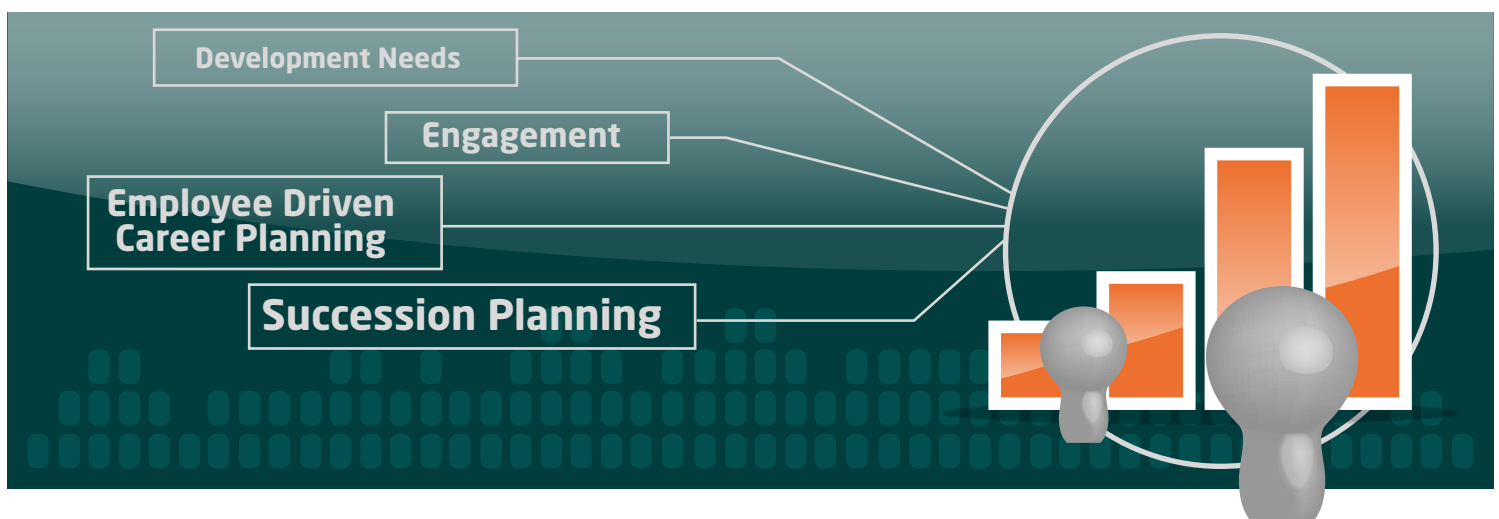


Getting the data

There is little chance HR can assess everyone's skills and keep the information up to date. Nor do managers have enough spare time to take on this sort of task. However, the Internet has demonstrated the power of user content creation. Why not require each employee to create their own online profile highlighting their skills? This approach is practical and empowering. It puts the ownership of skills where it belongs, with the individual.

Verifying the data

How does company management know if employees are being accurate when they enter their skills? The key is transparency: make the information accessible to everyone so that managers, peers and HR can all see what skills a person says they have. If someone claims they have skills that they don't, then they'll soon be found out. Transparency enables social forces that ensure the information is reasonably accurate; HR isn't put in the position of having to police the system.



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Using the data

There are a number of ways managers and employees can use a system that captures what skills employees have and which ones the organization requires.

- **Succession planning**

Leaders see which and how many people are positioned to move up to more senior roles. Insight into skills also shows what needs to be done to build deeper bench strength. In particular, it ensures that there are successors for critical roles.

- **Employee-driven career planning**

Employees can see how their skills map against the skills required for other positions and take charge of their own career development. They can recognize the paths that suit their strengths and what they need to do to position themselves for the future.

- **Identifying development needs**

Managers can look at skill gaps in their teams and then ensure development plans are in place to close them. HR can detect systemic skill gaps and address those through training or recruitment.

- **Accelerating informal development**

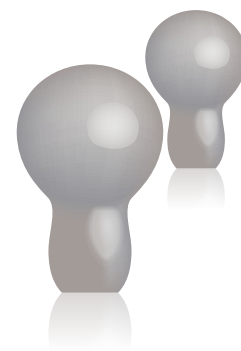
Creating a system for tracking skills is an effective way to motivate employees to develop skills. Research supports the idea that most skills are not learned in classrooms but on the job. Being able to update a skills profile based on projects they have worked on or tasks they have accomplished accelerates informal development.

Keeping the data up to date

The key to keeping the data up to date has already been given: it's up to the employees to do so and increases employee engagement. Keeping information updated is not a once-a-year process. A modern skills database is not something like a balance sheet printed in an annual report; it's more like Facebook with employees updating their skills profile with any new information that is relevant. In this model, updating isn't a chore. It is a rewarding way for employees to celebrate progress in developing their skills—and creating the conditions for achieving their career goals.

It CAN be Built

Given this scenario, managers and employees will readily agree that more visibility into the skills people have and the skills that jobs require is a huge benefit. What has stood in the way is an old-school approach to engineering this sort of system that isn't practical in an age of tight budgets and rapid change. However, the new ways of thinking and communication that now permeate the Web 2.0 era—employee content creation and empowerment—demonstrate that affordably creating and maintaining a skills database is entirely doable.



About Us

Founded in March 2006, Zapoint has developed career and learning technology that lets companies build more effective partnerships between HR and employees. Headquartered in Cambridge, MA, Zapoint helps organizations engage, retain and develop their workforces, to sustain their competitive advantage.

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