

Utility Company Maximizes Training Impact with Employee Assessments

Training Solutions for a Diverse Workforce

As a major energy provider for their state, this company supports coal, natural gas, and nuclear power plants and is committed to investing in expanding solar power for their state.

“We’re going to spend close to five billion dollars in the next five years upgrading our renewables.”

Training Support Specialist

This means the company must provide a wide range of training to their employees. And with investments in renewable energy, they are also focused on cross-training employees as the demands of the energy sector shift.



The Challenge

Like many organizations, this utility company has seen training needs shift over time. Historically, they have provided training on and off, with efforts all being focused at the plant level. But a new Vice President joined the company and stressed the importance of shifting to a corporate training department model for their L&D programs.

This led to a huge shift in the training strategy. As part of that transition, the company identified that there were gaps in their knowledge of what training employees needed and where their skills gaps were.

“We decided that we need to do assessments to understand where our folks are, so we can focus on training efforts and build skills that really need to be focused on.”

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There were **four main factors** that led to the company realizing they needed to assess competencies.

1

An Outdated Philosophy

The first challenge was there was an existing philosophy in their large, union workforce that ‘once you’re qualified, you’re always qualified.’ But they recognized that with shifts in technology and training over time, that simply was not the case. This led to a gap in knowledge where they did not know where employees’ competencies and skill levels really were.

“We really didn’t have a focus for our training program. It was based on what I thought employees needed to know, not what they actually needed to know. An assessment program could help us level-set where our skills were and determine what skills were needed.”

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An Influx of New Talent

The next challenge was the need to hire new talent, quickly. The energy industry’s workforce has been aging, and this company was experiencing their older workforce nearing retirement, creating a need to hire more people.

It became increasingly important to get an understanding of the skill level and where specific knowledge gaps were for new workers to keep them safe and get them trained quickly.

Succession Planning

With so many employees nearing retirement age, the company did not want to lose all their existing expertise and knowledge. Succession planning and being able to transfer knowledge before employees retired was a top priority.

“We had to look at what jobs they did, what tasks they need to do, and be able to transfer that knowledge before they retired. So, having some kind of assessment program was important for that.”

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4

Career Development

Last, they were struggling to provide clear paths for advancement for their employees. These employees wanted career growth opportunities, but it wasn’t clear how to get them there and what training was required.

The Training Support Specialist explained, “We actually saw people who advanced and weren’t successful in their role because they weren’t prepared for it. They were just put in those roles because they were the next person in line.”

But implementing assessments could help solve this challenge by helping identify gaps between an employee’s current skills compared to the requirements of a new role, and then create customized training plans to get an employee ready for a promotion.

The Choice: Competency Assessments

“I think assessments are so critical to the whole organization. We need to know where our workers are and how to fill knowledge gaps.”

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Once it became clear that assessing employees was an important tool for solving their training challenges, they had to get a foundation for what employees needed to know to build their assessments.

They went into the field to shadow various roles, they looked at best practices from plants that were already hyper-focused on training, and they looked at job descriptions. This helped them create role-specific task lists and the knowledge needed for each job.

Once they had a master task list, they mapped them into a Difficulty, Importance, and Frequency (DIF) Matrix. This helped them understand how difficult each task is, how important it is to the role, and how often a task would be performed to effectively weigh the overall value of a task to being successful in a role.

With this big-picture view of what matters to each role, the company can focus on what an assessment for that role needs to include. It also helps them see where they can cross-train employees based on competencies and job requirements for streamlined training efforts.



Vector Solutions has a great assessment tool. We're excited to use it because we have quite a bit of turnover and a lot of retirements. And with our coal plants about to shut down, we need to know where their skills are to be able to provide them with other opportunities at [our company] and demonstrate to leadership or the different plants that they do have the skills needed to put them in a job at a different plant.

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The Impact

Within Vector's Learning Management System (LMS), companies can build customizable assessments for a variety of roles. At this company, they are focused on training and assessing:

- Production Trainees
- Mechanics
- Welders
- Machinists
- Auxiliary and Control Operators
- Electrical and Instrumentation Apprentices and Journeymen

By using this technology in their training program, they have unlocked a tremendous amount of data to make more data-driven decisions.

The team is now using pre-assessments for new hires to get a baseline of their abilities and create customized training plans for each employee. And then they use assessments after training is complete, comparing it to their initial scores. This helps ensure they are providing a high-quality training program or to identify where they can modify their training approach.

"We've taken the data and really refined our training programs. We're shifting now to identify subject experts and having them come in and look at our training programs, or even be in the classroom providing extra materials and oversight to our programs."

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