

Nokia Finds New Ways to Deliver Assessment-Based Coaching and Career Development

A Case Study of Nokia



In late 2003 Nokia, a global leader in mobile telecommunications, established a new Enterprise Solutions business to serve mobile business users with wireless terminals and to offer improved Internet security to many of its customers. As a brand-new business unit, Enterprise Solutions needed a way to support the development needs of both managers and non-management employees. Since wireless computing and Internet access are on the cutting edge for innovative Nokia, and since the business unit's global workforce was widely dispersed—even by Nokia's standards—the company sought a cutting-edge approach to performance development for the new business unit.

George Winston had been providing coaching and career development within Nokia for four years when he was tapped to serve as HR Performance Development Manager for the new business unit. Winston wanted formal assessments as the foundation of the center's program, and online delivery turned out to be a crucial factor in terms of both acceptance and efficiency. The challenge he faced was to find a way to serve a dispersed workforce without sacrificing quality. The solution was a novel Personal Assessment Center that blended the flexibility and convenience of online access with the quality of personal coaching at key points.

"We identify performance and skill gaps, but our more important focus is on performance improvement and job satisfaction," says Winston. "We help people create developmental action plans and then help them follow through. We start with an orientation session, so that our people will know what to expect and what is expected of them. In most cases, my people or I am able to conduct this session in person—either individually or with a group. We then help each individual define needs, preferences, and values using time-tested assessments, including the *Strong Interest Inventory*®, *FIRO-B*® (*Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation-Behavior*™), *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument* (TKI), and *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® (MBTI®) Step I™ and Step II™ instruments, along with other specific assessments."

INCREASED EFFICIENCY

"The assessment phase is where we go virtual. Employees can complete them online, when and where it is convenient. Confidentiality is essential; our employees are

assured that their information is stored outside Nokia. And, in my observation, results are more consistent and reliable when the assessments are completed online. The availability of several leading assessments on the SkillsOne® Web site makes my job much easier."

The results of the assessments along with some explanation can be delivered by e-mail. But full explanation and coaching requires dialogue—face-to-face or by phone. "I travel a great deal," says Winston. "We couldn't provide the support we do without online assessments and telephone coaching.

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—George Winston,
HR Performance Development Manager

The Personal Assessment Center has had one absolutely counterintuitive effect: it has reduced the need for training. Winston reports, "Our people enter the process wanting training and thinking they need it. Now, in many cases, that is exactly what they get—training tailored to meet their job requirements and gaps. But in a surprising number of cases, we are finding that behavior change or job realignment is the answer. We're not just looking for gaps in skills and knowledge. We also make use of values sorts and consider how well the employee aligns to the climate and how well his or her values fit the job. Basically, we've evolved from training toward diagnostics."

For managers the Enterprise Solutions business provides one-on-one coaching, relying heavily on online assess-

ments complemented by an internally developed 360-degree instrument. “In our leadership development coaching, just as in our Personal Assessment Center, assessments enable our people to understand themselves better and to take ownership of their careers. In contrast, debriefing and coaching are best performed face to face; even so, we are experimenting to see whether telephone debriefing can help us meet the needs of our widely dispersed managers.”

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