

WILD About Testing



Volume 1, Issue 3
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A newsletter aimed at certification professionals interested in continuously improving the certification experience for their certificants and other stakeholders (employers or government agencies that might use the certificate).

From the Editor

Welcome to the third issue of **WILD about Testing**. We launched the e-zine at the Association of Test Publishers (ATP) meeting in Palm Springs – thank you to all the readers who went to my web site to sign up. As with the inaugural issue, content of the newsletter has been shaped by reader feedback.

Anyone who would like to provide additional feedback may go to www.wildandassociates.com to help with the design of future issues.

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One of the top requests for continuous improvement tips from our readers was setting priorities for continuous improvement. The first step in setting priorities is identifying the potential areas for continuous improvement. Conducting internal audits (featured in February 2009 issue) is one way to identify

potential areas for improvement. Another way to identify potential areas for continuous improvement is to identify costs of poor quality. Last month's tip talked about identifying the cost of poor quality, a second tool to identify potential areas of improvement. A third way to identify areas for improvement is to collect customer feedback.

Once you have a complete collection of information about potential areas for continuous improvement, what do you do with it? The quality tips section of future issues will explain how to set priorities. You need to keep reading **WILD about Testing** to get the complete picture.

Enjoy the newsletter and share it with your colleagues. Please use the "Forward to a Friend" link in and help me reach out and find everyone who can benefit from years of great experience, which I am delighted to share.



Dr. Cheryl Wild, President
Wild & Associates, Inc.

Continuous Improvement Tips:

Obtaining Customer Feedback

Why is customer feedback important?

Customer feedback is necessary in the design, marketing and continuous improvement of a certification program.

What are the most common mistakes in considering customer feedback?

1. Assuming that you know the customers' needs and skipping the collection of customer feedback entirely.
2. Focusing on one customer group (like first time test takers) and ignoring all the other customer groups.

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Continuous Improvement Tips *(Continued from Page 1)*

- Assuming that reactive measures of customer feedback (e.g. letters of complaint or phone calls) are sufficient to understanding customer needs.

Who are the customers of a certification program?

The most important point to recognize when considering customer feedback is that certification programs have **MULTIPLE** customers. Customers may include the applicants for certification, certificants who are renewing their certifications, employers, government regulators, and accreditation organizations, the public and sometimes insurance providers. Who are your customers?

Use a customer feedback matrix to identify your customers and the types of feedback that they might provide.

A customer feedback matrix is helpful to plan data gathering. The matrix includes the list of customers, the type of feedback needed from each customer, and for each type of feedback the method you would use to obtain that feedback. (A sample matrix is provided below.)

In looking at this feedback matrix there are several important points to notice.

First, multiple customers are considered in the feedback. For example, employers may be asked to provide feedback on whether the information provided about the certification meets their needs, including information about recertification of their employees. Certificants maybe asked whether their employers are informed about their recertification and whether the recertification process was effective.

Second, feedback may be from both proactive and reactive sources. Examinee complaints provided at the test center are a reactive source of feedback.

Focus groups to discuss the registration process are proactive methods of obtaining feedback. Both sources of information are necessary.

Who should be involved in the data collection?

Your customers have less time and patience for providing information than they have in the past. We all receive lots of Internet surveys and telephone call requests for information. The reality is that people obtain better information when they are experienced at designing and conducting surveys and focus groups. If this information is important to designing your services, it is wise to invest in the data collection.

CUSTOMER	FEEDBACK NEEDED	HOW TO COLLECT IT
First time test taker	Information on the clarity of the application process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Analysis of complaints ■ Identification of most frequent mistakes made on application forms ■ Focus group of new applicants after they take their test ■ Feedback form at the test center
Job incumbents	Identify knowledge and skills to include in the certification process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Participate in job analysis panel ■ Complete a survey to identify the importance of various knowledge/skill areas
Employers	Identify whether information about certification program is useful, easily available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Focus group to discuss needs ■ Pilot of web site using employers
Certificants	Evaluate whether recertification process is effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Focus group certificants who have just recertified to evaluate process ■ Collect data to evaluate the effectiveness of the recertification process

Benchmarking: Selecting Benchmarking Partners

Benchmarking columns in previous issues of this e-zine have covered identifying the goals of your benchmarking study, identifying your benchmarking team, and conducting secondary benchmarking. Now you would like to actually compare your process to the process with one or more other companies.

How do you select benchmarking partners? There are certain decisions you need to make prior to selecting your benchmarking partners:

What information do you need the most from a benchmarking partner?

Perhaps you are interested in improving the quality management system in your certification organization. Are you interested in learning about quality management systems that meet ISO 9001 standards?

Are you interested in learning how ISO 9001 certified organizations do internal audits? Or are you interested in learning the policies most relevant for management system in ISO 9001 certified certification organization?

There are many organizations with ISO 9001 quality management systems and internal audits that would be potential benchmarking partners. There are very few certification bodies with ISO 9001 certification.

Identifying the most critical information you need from a benchmarking partner helps to define the universe of potential partners.

What information are you willing and able to share with your benchmarking partners?

You should be willing to provide answers to any questions you ask your benchmarking partner. If you aren't willing to share the information, why should they?

This often means that competitors are not likely benchmarking partners – either because you will not want to share information with your competitors or your competitors will not want to share with you.



Is the information you are seeking something that others would be interested in learning?

Consortia have become a popular mechanism for collecting benchmarking information. In these consortia, multiple organizations work together with an experienced benchmarking facilitator to collect information that will be of interest to multiple parties. Multiple organizations pool resources to conduct the study.

The advantage of such an arrangement is that greater resources may be made available for the study and you will be able to compare your process with multiple organizations.

Best in class organizations maybe more willing to participate in such collaborative efforts than in benchmarking with an individual organization.

The down side of such consortia may be that some information will not be shared with a larger group that might be shared confidentially in a small benchmarking study.

Is the information you are interested in learning most likely to be available from other certification organizations or should you go outside of the certification industry?

Certification bodies often want to benchmark against other certification bodies. In some cases that is appropriate. However, in many cases you are more apt to get a “breakthrough” idea if you go outside your industry.

Toyota benchmarked against supermarkets in the United States to come up with their pull system of manufacturing.

Benchmarking: Selecting Benchmarking Partners

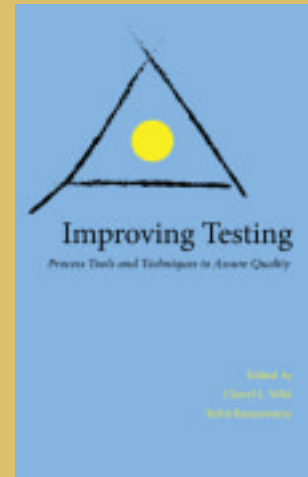
Once you have answered these basic questions, you are ready to proceed with identifying your primary benchmarking partners.

Remember, identifying who you would like to benchmark is only the first half of finding a benchmarking partner. Your benchmarking partner must be willing to be a partner.

How can you improve your success at identifying benchmarking partners?

Being well prepared to explain the purpose of the study, what you are willing to share, the information you need, and to answer any questions is critical. Knowing about the code of conduct of conducting benchmarking and abiding by that code of conduct is critical.

Benchmarking is something we all do informally, but not everyone has expertise – working with someone with experience in conducting benchmarking studies can increase your chances of success.



This best selling book was recently reviewed in *CLEAR Exam Review* and cited as “a **valuable addition to the reference bookshelf which covers a number of topics not well represented elsewhere in the testing literature.**”

For more details go to: www.wildandassociates.com/books.html

More about benchmarking in the May issue: **Benchmarking Code of Conduct.**

In The News

Check out this blog <http://advancingthenonprofit.blogspot.com> and join the discussion. It is aimed at executive directors of nonprofit organizations – which include many certification bodies.

In March, Oracle sent out a salary survey (<http://certnews.wordpress.com/2009/03/25/oracle-certification-salary-survey/>) and has promised to provide the results of the survey on their blog in April. You may want to look at this survey as a sample of a salary survey.

Do you know how your certificants fare in terms of salaries as compared to their non-certified colleagues? Collecting and publishing salary information is one way to validate whether your certificate provides value.

In *The Value of Accreditation (Chapter 5 of Improving Testing)*, Roger Brauer, the Executive Director of the Board of Certified Safety Professionals, reports on a number of ways that a certification program can provide evidence of the value of certification. Dr. Brauer presents salary differentials across time and shows that the pay differential for certified versus non-certified individuals has grown. Dr. Brauer believes that a certification also improves lateral mobility of certificants.

The Board of Certified Safety Professionals has tracked job advertisements in a professional journal in its field for over 20 years. The data show that requirements for education and experience typically appear in about 90 percent of these ads. The rate for these two characteristics has been fairly constant. However, the ads that require or prefer the Certified Safety Professional credential has increased from about 20 percent in 1980 to over 50 percent in the last five years – **a great value for certificants.**