

WILD About Testing



Volume 2, Issue 1
February 2010

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 second year of WILD About Testing. I am delighted to report that during the first year of producing this e-zine I've learned that certification professionals like and want information on improving quality in testing. Colleagues are generously contributing ideas and content (see the article about ISO 17024 assessor training) through interviews and on-line (right on my web site at www.wildandassociates.com). Please let me know what is on your mind and what you want me to write about next. Finally, I've learned that many more people would like to receive this information than are currently receiving it.

When I attend meetings or workshops, participants are excited to learn about my e-zine and wish they had heard about it sooner. You can help about this – with the new campaign – **Share the Wealth of Information**.

Why do I spend the time writing and distributing this newsletter?

I truly believe that certification and educational testing are critical parts of everyone's lives. In school, tests are used for grades, for placement, and for helping you understand what you know (and what you don't know). As consumers, we depend on certifications and licenses as a way of indicating that the doctors, lawyers, accountants and many others we employ have the basic knowledge and training needed to provide those services. And we use certifications as ways of bolstering our credentials and improving our work prospects.

Because testing is so much a part of our lives, **everyone** believes they can develop a test – after all, we have all taken tests for years in school and anyone can ask a question!

In the certification field, many certifications are begun by zealots in the field – people who know the subject matter of the certification and believe strongly in the need for certification, but may have no psychometric or process management expertise. That is fine, if the founders understand what they don't know and obtain the expertise elsewhere. **Although tests can do good, they can also do harm.** Not everyone in the certification field understands the need for sound psychometric development of tests and the application process management to assure fair, valid and reliable test results.

I write WILD About Testing because I want every certification professional to have the opportunity to learn techniques for producing certification programs that provide excellent benefits to their certificants and other stakeholders and to help avoid risks inherent in developing and delivering tests. Please help me share

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Dr. Cheryl Wild
President
Wild & Associates, Inc.

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the wealth of information with others in the certification field.

How can you help Share the Wealth of Information?

I am working hard to make this e-zine relevant and useful. But this information is only useful if others receive and read it. You can help in two ways. Please click the "Forward to a Friend" button on the bottom of the e-mail that brings each issue to you, or just spread the word and ask them to go to my web site and subscribe. Second, please continue to help shape the e-zine 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.)

What is in this month's issue?

This issue announces a change in dates for the *Improving the Quality of Your Certification Program: A Learning and Planning Retreat* I will be holding at the Jersey shore in September and October, and in Longboat Key, Florida in January, February, and March of 2011. This is a quick way to learn about quality tools and plan how to apply them to your organization.

Validity and Quality – A Marriage Made in Heaven discusses how psychometrics and quality management tools both emphasize the importance of customer involvement in designing a new certification program. The Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI) is doing an outstanding job of creating *validity* using customer involvement – you may wish to see what they have done so far.

If you are interested in becoming accredited to ISO/IEC 17024, you may be interested in learning how ANSI assures that their assessors are calibrated in the article *Training ANSI Assessors for Accrediting Certification Bodies*.

If you are one of my readers who have asked how to learn more about quality tools – you may want to read the article on page 5 about the Baldrige Award.

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

Rescheduling "Improving the Quality of Your Certification" Workshops, and Thank You

Thank you all for your interest in *Improving the Quality of Your Certification Program: A Learning and Planning Retreat*. These workshops (originally scheduled for Florida in January, February, and March) have been postponed due to my husband Ed's illness.

I want to also thank all of you who wrote and called after you learned of Ed's illness. Your wishes and prayers are appreciated and we both are thankful for your support!

Just to keep you posted, Ed's lung cancer is being treated with radiation and chemotherapy. Through treatment and drugs the doctor's have been able to reduce Ed's pain, which is a real blessing. We are praying that it is also reducing the size of the tumor. My priority continues to be with family for the next six months or so.

The good news is that September and October at the Jersey shore are gorgeous and we can have the workshop in the winter of 2011 in Longboat Key, Florida (my favorite winter spot in the whole world!).

Please keep the following dates in mind and let me know if you are interested!

September 16 – 17, 2010
September 23 – 24, 2010
October 14 – 15, 2010
October 21 – 22, 2010

Those of you who asked if we could conduct such a workshop for your management team – the answer is yes! Customizing the workshop would indeed provide a real bonus to your organization. Please feel free to contact me at 732-774-5188 or cheryl@wildandassociates.com to discuss participating in the workshop.

Validity and Quality – A Marriage Made in Heaven

What do the design of valid certification examinations and the design of quality products have in common? Customers! The first step in designing a high-quality process is to obtain customer requirements and prioritize them (see chapter 9 in *Improving Testing: Applying Process Tools and Techniques to Assure Quality* by Wild & Ramaswamy).

The first step in developing a new certification test is to conduct a job/task analysis – a technique of identifying the body of knowledge of the field (part of the customer requirements) and translating them into the test design (or the priorities for assessment).

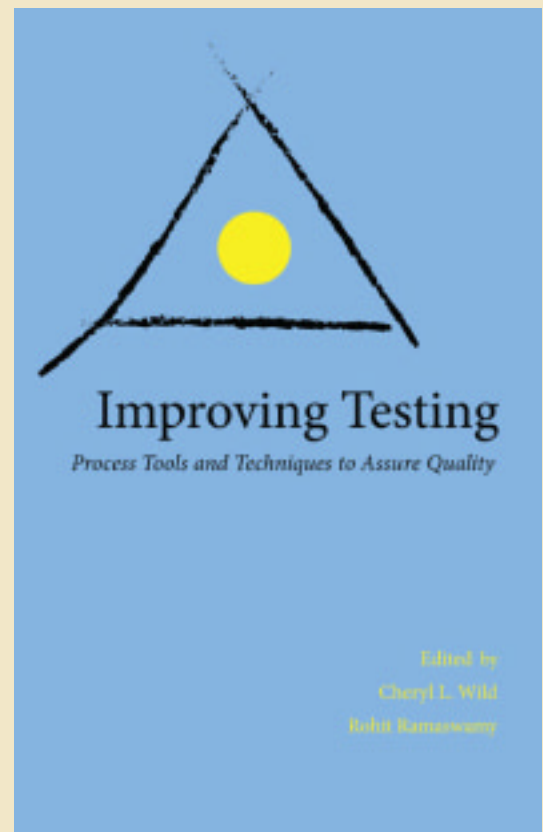
The first step in a marriage is the wedding ceremony – but a wedding ceremony doesn't guarantee a **marriage made in heaven**. Similarly, conducting a job task analysis doesn't guarantee a quality test design. To ensure validity, a certification body needs to ensure that the development of a certification program involves a wide range of the certification stakeholders, and that certification stakeholders contribute to the development of the examinations and the decisions about their use.

Unfortunately, I have often spoken to new certification organizations that have believed they have developed a quality certification test but really haven't. Have you ever talked to a new certification organization and found out that their board (of four or five people) constituted their job/task analysis panel? And then, because it is a new field and they didn't have a mailing list to send out a survey, each of the board members discussed the job/task analysis with two or three colleagues and then the board developed the test specifications. **This process nominally uses a job/task analysis, but it doesn't involve stakeholders and would not meet NCCA or ISO 17024 standards – at least in my opinion.**

Although involvement of a broad range of stakeholders is hard when first developing a certification, it is extremely important.

First, any field has many perspectives, and without involving all these perspectives in the design you risk designing a certification test that does not measure all the appropriate content.

Second, if you cannot identify and involve experts early in the process – how are you going to identify potential certificants or their employers (who will encourage certification)?



Fortunately, some new certification organizations take involvement of stakeholders in the design of their examination quite seriously. The Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI) is doing an outstanding job of creating **validity**. They are actively involving stakeholders – medical interpreters, their supervisors, the hospitals and doctors who employ them, and even accrediting agencies.

In order to have this active involvement, CCHI designed a communication plan to inform those in the profession about the job analysis and the need for their involvement. As a result of this active planning (in a field where a formal list was not originally available) **close to 2,500 professionals will have contributed to defining the content of the healthcare interpreters certification test!**

If you are interested in learning more about the CCHI experience, you can read my article **Report from the Front Lines** on the CCHI web site at: http://www.healthcareinterpretercertification.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=123&Itemid=37.

Training ANSI Assessors for Accrediting Certification Bodies

Did you ever wonder how ANSI assures that its assessors for ISO 17024 are making consistent decisions about programs that are applying for accreditation? As an ANSI assessor, I've been very impressed with the steps that ANSI takes to assure that its assessors are calibrated.

Before anyone becomes an assessor, they are required to take a week-long course on the standards and the role of the assessor, and to pass an assessment at the end of the course. Two assessors work together with each organization that is seeking accreditation. New assessors work with experienced assessors on their first assignment. Periodically (about once a month), conference calls with assessors are used for training and information sharing. And periodically, each assessor is "observed" and given feedback by an ANSI staff member.

In my opinion, though, one of the most productive ways of continual improvement of assessors is the required annual training. The latest meeting was in Las Vegas January 19-22. Twenty-four of the current ANSI assessors attended the annual training for Personnel Certification Accreditation Standards.

The sessions were led by Dr. Roy Swift and Dr. Vijay Krishna. I asked Dr. Krishna how the training for the annual meeting was designed. He said,

"One of the purposes of the annual meeting is to assure that assessors are consistently interpreting the standards. In order to facilitate discussions, we developed a number of case scenarios based on actual situations and arrived at consensus relating to interpreting the requirements. We also had sessions on lessons learned from the previous year assessment and sharing of exemplary practices relating to implementation of the Standard."

Some of the important issues covered at the 2010 meeting included the following:

- **Discussion of the impact of non-conformities on the certifying bodies** – both practically and personally. What do these mean to an organization and its employees?
- **The study of case studies** – illustrating the variety of circumstances assessors face while evaluating applicants for accreditation.
- **What is the acceptable level of implementation of the standards for meeting accreditation?** Particular

focus was given to areas in the management system, recertification, surveillance and internal audit.

- **Sharing best practices in implementing ANSI/ISO/IEC 17024** – presentations on quality systems demonstrated by ANSI accredited organizations – how the standards work to enhance efficiency in the organization.
- **In-depth discussion of the area of security and the life-span of the exam** – how is this implemented in 17024? What are concepts and activities to watch for to indicate vigilance in this regard?
- **Continued work to assure the consistency of application of the standards by assessors.**
- **Discussion of the importance of the on-site audit** – how this differentiates the quality accreditation program offered by ANSI, and how useful it is to applicants.
- **The role of the assessor** – how far can assessors go to recommend continuous improvements to a program without serving as a consultant?
- **An update on the program** – its continued growth and recognition by the Federal Government, particularly by DOD (Department of Defense) and OPM (Office of Personnel Management).

Many of the assessors have over 20 years experience in certification and licensure, so the training session included self-study, presentations, and group evaluation leading to in-depth review of the elements of the standard.

According to Dr. Swift, *"This annual training is one-of-a-kind. No other personnel certification accrediting agency has this quality assurance mechanism in place to ensure consistent quality accreditation in personnel certification."*

You can learn more about the ANSI accreditation for ISO 17024 on the ANSI web site at: <https://www.ansica.org/wwwversion2/outside/PERgeneral.asp?menuID=2>.

Thank you to Anne Browning of Browning Consulting, LLC for her contributions to this article.

Learn About Best Practice Management Procedures From Outside Your Industry

WILD About Testing is about improving the quality of your products and services for your clients. Many of my readers have asked how they can learn more about quality. Of course, ***Improving Testing: Applying Process Tools and Techniques to Assure Quality*** is one way to start. Another is to attend my workshop – but that is six months away.

Another way to start to learn more about quality would be to learn from best practice organizations. One way of identifying best practice organizations is to identify organizations that have won national awards.

The 2009 recipients of the Malcolm Baldrige Award have recently been announced and they are:

- Honeywell Federal Manufacturing & Technology (Manufacturing)
- MidwayUSA (Small Business)
- AtlantiCare (Health Care)
- Heartland Health (Health Care)
- VA Cooperative Studies Program Clinical Research Pharmacy Coordinating Center (Nonprofit)

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award is an award given by the President of the United States in the areas of manufacturing, service, small business, education, health care, and nonprofits. The applications are judged by a panel of volunteer judges who have been trained to apply the Baldrige criteria.

The criteria are divided into seven areas: leadership; strategic planning; customer and market focus; measurement, analysis, and knowledge management; workforce focus; process management; and results.

The Baldrige criteria are generic – they don't focus on the buzz words for quality like using six sigma, balanced score cards, or lean. They focus on the principles that are consistent among the methodologies.

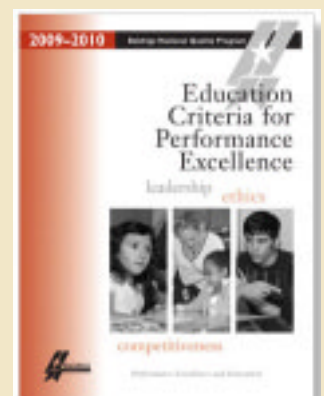
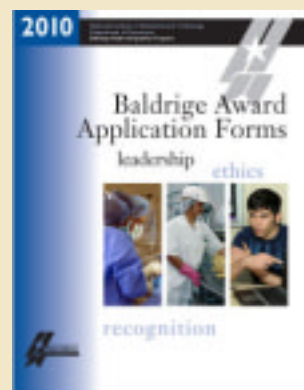
They also apply to any organization – they are not specific to an industry. The standards would apply to certification organizations and associations, although

they do not have standards specific to certification testing – you would have to look toward NCCA standards or ISO/IEC 17024 standards for specifics to certification.

There are at least three ways you can learn more about quality and apply it to your organization through the Malcolm Baldrige Award process.

1. **Attend the Quest for Excellence XXII in Washington, DC, on April 12 – 14, 2010.** The new winners of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award are going to share their experiences at this conference. (www.baldrige.nist.gov/Quest_for_Excellence.htm)
2. **Review the Baldrige Criteria that are available on the web site at:** www.baldrige.nist.gov/Education_Criteria.htm. An optional self-assessment worksheet is also available on the web site if you would like to apply the criteria to your organization.
3. **Volunteer to serve as a judge for the annual assessment.** Check first to see if your state has a state award – often it is easier to be accepted in the state award process and requires less travel! I participated as a judge in the New Jersey award process, while the state had one, and learned a lot from fellow judges and from the organizations I worked with.

Please let me know if you attend the Quest for Excellence conference or if you used the Baldrige criteria in any way.



In The News



The **Quest for Excellence XXII** will be held in Washington, DC on April 12-14, 2010.

For more information you can go to:
http://www.baldrige.nist.gov/Quest_for_Excellence.htm

An Invitation

Are you proud of the work you are doing internationally in certification?
 Would you like to contribute ideas to a future article in WILD About Testing on this topic?

If so, please contact me at
cheryl@wildandassociates.com

Certification: The ICE Handbook (2nd Edition),

Edited by Joan Knapp, Lynn Anderson, and Cheryl Wild, the Handbook is available from the Institute for Credentialing Excellence.

More than three years in the making, this is a must-have for any organization interested in a quality certification program.



ATP 2010

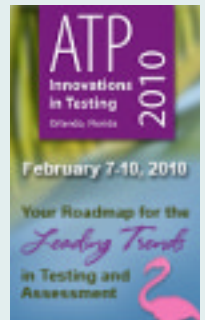
This e-zine is being published in the snow in New Jersey while many of the lucky readers are in the Florida Sun at ATP.

If you were unable to attend our break-out session, **Fast Track Best Practice Assessment Through Task Force Review** at the 11th Annual ATP Innovations in Testing Conference, in Orlando, you can review the PowerPoint presentation at www.wildandassociates.com. This presentation is about the use of a Certification Task Force and was prepared by three of the task force participants.

Steven Barkley, Director of Examinations for the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards, discusses how a Certification Task Force contributed to CFP Board organizational planning.

Casey Marks, Chief Operating Officer of the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, and Colleen Anderson, Head of Exam Administration and Security for the CFA Institute) discuss their experiences as task force members.

This presentation discusses the use of a task force to provide external program review, build buy-in for change, and educate volunteers (including council members). Panel members also discuss the benefits to task force members' organizations and procedures for planning and conducting an effective task force meeting.



Congratulations to Dr. Nancy Peterson from ACT, who received the ATP Career Achievement Award at the Florida ATP meeting.