

WILD About Testing



Volume 1, Issue 8
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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 eighth issue of **WILD About Testing**. I am delighted to report that during the seven months of producing this e-zine I've learned three things. First, people really like and want information on improving quality in testing. Second, my colleagues are generously contributing ideas and content (see especially the article about benchmarking in this issue) 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. The third thing I've learned is 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 with 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 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 of 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 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.

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

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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?

Summer is over (sigh) and many organizations are coming back full swing, determined to deliver high-quality services. Sometimes, this means identifying new services and sometimes it means identifying better ways of delivering existing services. Brainstorming, described in this month's **TIPS**, can help you generate ideas and creative thinking for designing or improving services.

The series on benchmarking ends this month with a focus on consortia benchmarking – using some examples from certification programs on how they are using the NOCA report ***Practices and Requirements of Renewal Programs in Professional Licensure and Certification*** by James Henderson for benchmarking.

In the News this month calls your attention to two important events. First, the E-ATP Workshop "Decreasing Assessment Costs by Increasing Quality Assessment", and the NOCA conference where ***Certification: A NOCA Handbook***, edited by Joan Knapp, Lynn Anderson, and Cheryl Wild, will be available for the first time.

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.

Continuous Improvement Tips:

Maximize New Ideas and Create Positive Thinking Using Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a group technique to generate ideas and creative thinking. It is especially useful to identify new products or services, to formulate theories (e.g., why are certification candidates not receiving registration information in a timely manner?), to generate possible solutions to performance problems (how can we prevent registration information from being lost in the e-mail?), and to identify areas of resistance to proposed solutions (why might staff resist the new way of sending registration information?).

Who should be involved in the brainstorming?

Involve participants from multiple areas so multiple perspectives are included in the brainstorming. Involve participants from multiple levels and people who actually do the work. Do you have some people on your staff who are very logical thinkers and some who are creative thinkers? Involve both types of thinkers.

Brainstorming thrives in an environment where different perspectives can be raised.

Establish and enforce rules to encourage creativity

At the beginning of the brainstorming session, state the following rules. Ask the facilitator and other participants to enforce the rules and call time-out when the rules aren't being followed.

These important rules are:

1. Suspend judgment of each others' ideas, either positive or negative. Suspend self-judgment as well.
2. Feel free to be unconventional in your thinking.
3. Hitch-hike on the ideas of others – feel free to expand on ideas, modify them, or create new ones by association.
4. Aim for a large number of ideas in a short period of time – don't discuss ideas until the brainstorming is complete.

Continuous Improvement Tips *(Continued from Page 2)*

Make sure everyone participates

Brainstorming sessions are most effective when there is a free flow of ideas and when everyone is appreciated for all ideas. Allowing one or two people to dominate in the presenting of ideas will stifle the free flow of ideas.

The following procedures help to ensure everyone participates:

1. Participants contribute during their turn.
2. Allow only one idea per turn.
3. If a participant doesn't have an idea to contribute, he or she may pass.
4. Do not provide explanations for an idea.

Assign someone to facilitate the meeting

A facilitator can greatly enhance the quality of a brainstorming session. They establish the rules for the session, monitor the discussion, document the brainstormed ideas, and help rephrase the question or suggest new avenues if the brainstorming falters.

After the brainstorming

Brainstorming will result in many ideas, but will not in and of itself point in a direction for moving forward. The ideas need to be processed and alternatives evaluated. Typically, the first step is to combine ideas and group similar ideas. These groups of ideas need to be clarified and titled, or the unifying concept explained. Next, the criteria for evaluating ideas are identified by the group.

Often it is helpful to identify the obstacles for each set of ideas and possible strategies for overcoming the obstacles.

The Killer Question About International Certification

International certification seems to be on everyone's mind these days. **WILD About Testing** is reporting on revising international standards for certification and the first meeting of the European Association of Test Publishers. A Certification Networking Group meeting was held in Chicago in August and international certification was discussed. Reports from participants tell me that Judith Hale did a fabulous presentation!

After I heard the rave reviews about the meeting, I e-mailed Dr. Hale and asked her what she believed to be the *killer* question about international certification – the question everyone should be asking but most organizations aren't addressing.

Dr. Hale said, ***"What are we really testing for? What do we really want our certification to measure? Are we measuring knowledge, skills and the ability to do work to standard or the ability to do work to standard anywhere in the world? To really be international the certification should focus on the last part – the ability to do work to standard anywhere in the world."***

Dr. Hale has identified a very critical distinction. Many times certification programs in the United States claim to be international. They are testing internationally, but they are testing against the United States standard. Obtaining the certification may be useful to finding a job in the

United States, but may have little meaning in other parts of the world.

The growing international perspective of certification was discussed at the Chicago Networking Group meeting and will be the subject of the September 16th Certification Network Group. Of course, the demand for ISO/IEC 17024 and the enthusiasm of the working group participants attests to the importance of international certification.

Paul Sharman expanded on Dr. Hales comments in the discussion and indicated, that as a certification body you can't just say, ***"We like it so everyone will like it."*** You have to ask ***"What is it about our profession that is important to society and how is this important to people around the world? For which people/countries is this important?"***

If you are considering these questions and investigating the answers with partners in the other countries, then you are considering international certification.

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.

Benchmarking: Certification Renewal Programs to Inform Change

According to a survey completed by members of the Certification Network Group in December of 2008 (Wild, 2008) more than 50 percent of those respondents indicated that benchmarking is a tool they use for implementing change. As an instructor of benchmarking for a graduate management program, I was curious about exactly how certification programs were using benchmarking.

At about the same time as this survey, the excellent report by James Henderson, *Practices and Requirements of Renewal Programs in Professional Licensure and Certification*, (NOCA, 2008) was published.

In the benchmarking lingo, *Practices and Requirements of Renewal Programs in Professional Licensure and Certification* is an excellent example of a consortium benchmarking study. It includes a literature review of 39 articles, reports, papers, Web pages, book chapters, and two books (often called secondary benchmarking) and the results of a survey of 331 organizations (often called primary benchmarking).

Now, about nine months after the publishing of this benchmarking information, five certification executives have provided insight into how benchmarking information is used in certification. These executives have answered the following three questions concerning their use of the NOCA study *Practices and Requirements of Renewal Programs in Professional Licensure and Certification*:

1. What part of the NOCA report did you find most helpful?
2. How are you using the Report?
3. Will this Report result in changes in how work is done?

Although the results of each organization's review of their renewal process may ultimately differ, the process of using the report is similar.

What part of the NOCA report did you find most helpful?

By far the most popular content in the report is the section on the definition of continuing competence, different approaches to assessing continuing competence, and the purpose of continuing professional development. Cyndi Miller Murphy, Executive Director



of the Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation, indicated that the *“definitions are a very interesting and valuable part of the report. It provides a good concise piece to provide to boards, which saves the executive directors the work of having to develop a similar piece.”*

How are you using the Report?

In general, typical uses of benchmarking studies are to provide information about what other organizations are doing, to build consensus, to provide breakthrough ideas, to help in designing work processes, and to design marketing. Certification executives were asked to comment about each of these uses.

Most of the organizations interviewed have used the study to provide information about what other organizations are doing, and to build consensus among their councils or boards. Darlene Leuschke, Administrator at the American Optometric Association, indicated that commissioners for the Paraoptometric Certification program have reviewed the report and have it on their September agenda for discussion.

Karen Plaus, Executive Director of the National Board on Certification and Recertification of Nurse Anesthetists, indicated that the Council on Recertification reviewed the benchmarking study in detail. They also conducted a recertification practice analysis. The Council combined the results of the practice analysis and the NOCA report and came up with recommendations. Now the Nurse Anesthetists are reviewing the recommendations and providing feedback.

Benchmarking: Certification Renewal Programs to Inform Change

None of the certification executives felt that the NOCA report provided any breakthrough ideas, but the findings did sometimes expand thinking. For example, the President and CEO of the Financial Planners Standard Council of Canada indicated that thinking around portfolios had expanded after looking at the study.

All of the executives agreed that it was premature to be using the results for designing processes or for marketing. Changing the requirements for recertification takes time – including research, consensus building, notification of stakeholders, and phasing in the change – and the NOCA report has only been out for less than a year.

Jim Henderson, author of the Report commented, ***“One of the things I learned in doing the study is that the pace of change is slow. Even the groups that are using the document to guide policy formation are looking to future change, since changing the contract for the already certified professional is a major undertaking.”***

Paul Grace, President and CEO, indicated that the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy used benchmarking for marketing purposes in their 2001 redesign of their continuing competency program. They targeted their benchmarking to certification programs in the same work environment with occupational therapists and used the results to educate the consumer on how the new continuing competency requirements compared to those in other programs, both in terms of cost and content.

Cyndi Miller Murphy also believes the certificants will be interested in hearing about how other organizations look at continuing competency. She states, ***“Our constituency often looks to other professions to compare requirements. For years physicians didn’t have any requirements for recertification and nurses complained that they had to recertify and doctors did not have to. Now board certified physicians have rigorous requirements for recertification and nurses no longer complain about their requirements.”***

Will this Report result in changes in how work is done?

Probably, but all agreed that it is too soon to know. As indicated above, changing recertification requirements is a long process, requiring design and education of

certificants. As certification executives mentioned, many of these changes may take years to phase in. The changes may increase costs for certificants, how certificants prepare for recertification, and the work that certification staff perform during the renewal process.

In discussing his plan for using the Report, Cary List cautions readers to remember the following: ***“This is a benchmarking survey, not a study of best practices over time. It is a first step. It can provide good input but should not be used as a final assessment of best practices. It should be used in conjunction with the certification body’s own research and analysis of what is appropriate for their own industry. Don’t just take this as the gospel and assume it is appropriate for your own organization. You need to do your own due diligence and use this Report to help inform your decisions.”***

Cyndi Miller Murphy agrees on the need for a rigorous method of identifying best practices. She indicated that the American Board of Nursing Specialties will be meeting in the fall and one of their agenda items is to develop a research agenda for nursing certification. It is hoped that this research will provide some evidence-based decisions for selecting criteria for renewal.

In some industries, benchmarking surveys identify best-practice organizations by defining the criteria for measuring a best practice. Industries often measure best practices in terms of cost, cycle time, or quality. In the certification industry, defining the criteria for best-practice in renewal is still problematic. If the criterion for success is the lowest cost per candidate, counting continuing education units may continue to be the “best practice.”

However, if best practice for renewal of certification is defined as assuring that certificants maintain “quality” knowledge/skills in their field, and if this quality can be measured, then best-practice organizations may lead to expanded practices in measuring continuing competence.

If you have suggestions for measuring the effectiveness of your renewal criteria, please send them to Dr. Cheryl Wild at cheryl@wildandassociates.com.

Working Group 30 is Revising ISO/IEC 17024

Working Group 30 met in Geneva, Switzerland in July to continue work on revising the standard for bodies who certify people. Revisions in the works are based on six years of experience using the Standard.

About 19 people, including staff and including two conference call participants, contributed to the meeting. (See the pictures from the meeting!)

It was exciting to participate in the discussions and learn about the differences in how certification is implemented in different countries, yet to realize we can come to consensus on the standards.

What might you expect to see in the new Standard?

Although still in the review stage and changes are continuing, you can expect more attention and detail about the test development process, more detail and specifics about a management system, and a rethinking of surveillance requirements.

Hopefully, some of the redundancy of different sections of the Standard will be eliminated as well.

Once the Standard is revised, based on the comments of the working group members, the revision will be sent to all ISO members for review and comment.

The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) is the ISO member from the United States. ANSI will send out an announcement when the draft is available for review so interested parties may contribute comments.

Of course **WILD About Testing** will also report how to obtain a review copy.

The next meeting of the working group is in Geneva in late September.



Casey Marks (US), Thomas Votsmeir (Germany), Giancarlo Colfera (Italy), Roy Swift (US), Cynthia Woodley (US), Stefan Marinkovic (ISO/CASO), Sean MacCurtain (ISO/CASCO), Peter Jonas (Germany), Cheryl Wild (US), Johann Dietrich (Germany)



Roy Swift, Sean MacCurtain, Cynthia Woodley, Stefan Marinkovic



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In The News



Certification: A NOCA Handbook (2nd Edition), edited by Joan Knapp, Lynn Anderson, and Cheryl Wild will be available at the NOCA meeting, November 18 – 21, 2009 in Phoenix, Arizona. **More than three years in the making, this is a must have for any organization interested in a quality certification program.**

The book contains 15 chapters divided into five sections covering the National Commission for Certification Agencies:

- (1) Standards for the accreditation of certification programs;
- (2) Governance and administration of certification programs;
- (3) Assessment of professional knowledge, skills, and abilities and continuing competency;
- (4) Administration and scoring of certification assessments; and
- (5) The future of certification.



A new blog:

<http://advancingthenonprofit.blogspot.com> is available and may be of interest to some readers.

It is aimed at Executive Directors of nonprofit organizations – which includes many certification bodies.

Please join us in discussions.

Please join me in Brussels September 30th to October 2nd at the **E-ATP Conference on Growing Talent in Europe: Gaining Advantage through Assessment**. When I attend NOCA and ATP, many organizations speak about expanding their test internationally as using tests developed in the United States internationally. However, the test publishing industry in Europe is growing and their perspective is also on expanding their markets internationally – into the United States! Testing advocates in Europe have been leaders in developing international standards (such as SO/IEC 17024) and requiring accreditation to these standards and certification to quality standards (such as ISO 9001).

In order to compete internationally, organizations will benefit from attending **E-ATP** and learning how testing is discussed and implemented in the European Union. Rohit Ramaswamy and I will be presenting a workshop titled **“Decreasing Assessment Costs by Increasing Quality Assessment”** and we expect that this popular workshop will be even more popular in Europe where quality management standards have had greater use than in the states.

You can find out more about this organization and the conference at the following web sites:

<http://www.testpublishers.org/europe.htm>
<http://www.testpublishers.org/europe.htm>
<http://eutestpublishers.wikispaces.com>

