

WILD About Testing



Volume 1, Issue 7
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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 seventh issue (already) 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 generous in their willingness to contribute ideas and content through interviews. People love the idea of the constant input area (right on my web site at www.wildandassociates.com) 24/7 to let me know what is on their mind and what they 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 or 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 really 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 with reader feedback. (Anyone who would like to provide additional

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

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feedback may go to www.wildandassociates.com to help with the design of future issues.)

What is in this month's issue?

This issue is chocked full of tools for continually improving your certification programs. In the tips section, we have been focusing on tools to make teams more effective. We've talked about developing effective agendas and tracking team decisions through action minutes in earlier issues. This month's column presents **Plusses and Deltas** – a tool for obtaining feedback from your team.

Have you ever noticed how leadership quantifies decision making and planning in dollars? The article on the language of leadership provides an example of

how quantifying the cost of a change may influence decision making. The cost of poor quality tool helps leaders determine whether quality tools are needed and are important. **(Note that I will be giving a workshop on this tool at the European Association of Test Publishers meeting.)**

The final article describes how a task force can be used identify best practice improvements for your organization and generate enthusiasm and support for implementing change.

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.

Continuous Improvement Tips:

Plusses and Deltas – Improving Team Meetings by Collecting Feedback

What is a Plusses and Deltas Review?

Plusses and deltas is a structured method of collecting information about what worked during the meeting (plusses) and what might be improved (deltas). Using the methodology is a way of showing team members that their input is important. It allows differences in opinions to be brought to light and discussed in a constructive environment – a session focused on improving the meeting for everyone.

When is feedback collected?

The plusses and deltas session is held at the end of a meeting. You will want to hold a feedback session at every meeting when a team first convenes. Once the issues are worked out, then you may only want to hold one periodically.

How is it done?

The facilitator draws a T on a flip chart and labels one column **Plus** and the other column **Delta**. (See sample chart.) Each person in the room is given the opportunity to say one thing that went well about the meeting and one thing that might be improved.

Typically you choose one person to start with and just go around the table. You keep going around the table until there are no more comments.

Why limit each person to just one plus and one delta each time around? If you don't, it could happen that the early speaker puts lots of things on the board and later speakers don't have the opportunity to add something new. By limiting it to one per person, you are allowing everyone to have an opportunity to contribute.

It is important to require everyone to give a positive comment. Often, people will want to focus on the deltas. At the very least, if a meeting is a terrible failure, one positive is at least that you are asking for feedback to improve the next meeting.

PLUS	DELTA
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

Continuous Improvement Tips *(Continued from Page 2)*

Why is it important to have some plusses?

People often don't want to waste the time on positives because they seem so obvious. What surprises everyone is that one person's positives may be another person's deltas. These differences of opinion may be critical to the team functioning and are important to discuss.

For example, I was just part of a plusses and delta session where I take physical therapy. I mentioned how grateful I was that the bicycle faced out the window so I could look outside while I rode the bike. This shocked the lady beside me because her delta was that the bicycle faced the window and she would rather face inside to watch the people.

Reserve discussion to the end.

Once some comments are on the board, participants will want to start discussing the opinions. Ask everyone to hold the discussion until all the plusses and deltas are on the board. Otherwise, you might miss important points that come out at the end.

Take action on the comments.

Include the plusses and delta results in the action minutes. Include the actions resulting from the plusses and deltas in the action minutes. At the next meeting, report to the team what has been done about the plusses and deltas.

The Language of Leadership

Have you ever had an "ah ha moment" – a learning insight that has lasted your career? I had such an experience listening to a program called *Dealing with Difficult People* while commuting back and forth to work. I don't remember the author, but I will never forget the insight. To convince other people of your ideas you have to speak to their values. And the speaker pointed out that money is an important value for leadership of any organization.

Have you ever had an experience when leadership was making a decision for change that was negatively impacting you or your employees? My organization was growing and there wasn't enough office space on site. My department of about 200 test developers was chosen for that honor of moving to a new off-site location. Arguments about our need for face-to-face collaboration with the publishing area, and lost time in travel back and forth were to no avail. **How could this argument be translated into the language of money?** I quantified the added costs of being off-site, identified the added security risks, and finally the potential costs if a security break occurred. Using hard data on the number of times a month a test went between test development and publishing, and a conservative estimate of the salary dollars added by travel between sites, we obtained a dollar cost for the added expenses. For any one test, the added cost seemed small, but the cost for a year were phenomenal. And the scariest part of the analysis was that NONE of this added cost added any value to the tests.

If this move had gone forward, a phenomenal amount of waste would have been added to the cost of developing our tests. At the time of my epiphany, I knew of no formal

method of measuring waste nor was I aware of risk assessment techniques. Now, I have experience using the cost of poor quality methodology to measure waste in a systematic way and to use that information to improve services.

What is cost of poor quality? Typically the cost of poor quality consists of all the costs incurred as a result of not doing the work correctly the first time. Typically cost of poor quality is the sum of failure costs, appraisal costs, and prevention costs.

Failure costs include costs that occur before delivery (called internal failure) and costs that occur after delivery to the customer (external failure). Internal failure costs include all the cost of rework, quality control, and internal review. It includes costs, such as those in the example above, that don't add value to the product. Checking that the test questions appear on the computer screen as intended would be an example of inspection, and fixing the questions that are not appearing properly on the screen would be an example of rework. I'm sure you can think of other examples of internal failure.

Examples of external failures would include handling examinee assertions that questions are flawed or having to reschedule a test administration because of a problem at the site. Customer complaints can occur if re-certification applications are not handled promptly.

Increasing prevention costs typically decreases the cost of poor quality overall. Prevention can include employee training and providing work tools and documented procedures for work. How many times

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have you heard horror stories, especially in small organizations, about experienced employees leaving the organizations and their replacements unable to do the work because there are no work instructions? This happened to one of my clients, and it is a really uncomfortable situation not to know how to check credentials for certification applicants or how to register someone for a test.

Placing answer sheets in a humidity controlled room before scanning is an example of a prevention mechanism to assure that the answer sheets can be scored properly by the scanner.

There is much more to cost of poor quality than estimating the costs and reducing them. By estimating

cost of poor quality, an organization can determine ways of improving services to their customers or identifying areas where customers' needs aren't being met.

Costs of poor quality also include reputational costs. If reputation is lost, employers may no longer value your certification. Certificants may choose not to re-certify or may choose to obtain a competitors certification.

If you are interested in learning more about this methodology, join us in Brussels at E-ATP for our workshop **Decreasing Assessment Costs by Increasing Quality Assessment**. See *In The News* (page 5) for more information.

Certification Task Force Creates the Impetus for Improvement

As a certification leader, are you committed to providing your potential certificants and your stakeholders (the certificants' employers, government groups, etc.) with the best certification program possible? Are you unsure whether your vendor's technical recommendations are truly best practice? Have you moved to a new organization and wonder how to implement improved practices without offending the volunteers and experienced staff in your organization? Do you want to compare your organizations procedures with those of other best practice certification organizations?

If you have questions like these, you are obviously interested in improving your organization and understand that change is difficult. You understand that implementing change requires both good ideas and willingness of your employees to support and implement the change.

One extremely effective way to identify best practices, and at the same time to convince your colleagues of the importance of these best practices, is to conduct a certification task force meeting. A certification task force is composed of experts in the technical areas of interest. The technical expertise is often in accreditation standards, quality management of a certification program, use of volunteers, reporting test scores, writing and reviewing certification examinations, delivery of tests, and/or records management. Typically the task force meets for a day and a half or two days and develops recommendations for the convening body.

I recently helped the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards, Inc. (CFP Board) conduct a Certification Task Force meeting. The result was so successful that we are

proposing a presentation for the February ATP meeting — I hope you will join us in Florida to learn more about the process.

In a nut shell, holding an effective meeting requires detailed up-front planning, effective facilitation during the meeting to both identify recommendations and to prioritize those recommendations, and creating a report that reflects the task force recommendations. The recommendations must then be turned into an action plan for the organization.

"Cheryl was an excellent facilitator," said Steven Barkley of the CFP Board. ***"She took the time to understand our issues and what we were trying to accomplish. Her detailed planning allowed us to complete a tremendous amount in a day and a half. Her facilitation skills are excellent – she is flexible while maintaining boundaries. The final report, which she prepared for the task force review, captured the essence of the group – it was both fair and accurate."***

The magic of the process is the enthusiasm that is generated around the ideas at the meeting. This builds buy-in by leadership and volunteers and sets the stage for effective change.

If you would you like to learn more about conducting a certification task force meeting, write to me at cheryl@wildandassociates.com and I would be happy to schedule a time to talk.

In The News

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Action Minutes

MEETING OBJECTIVES: _____ MEETING DATE: _____

TEAM OR MEETING NAME:

Meeting Location:	Meeting Date:	Meeting Time:
Participants:	Indices/Participant name:	Participants:
High Level:	Topic:	Topic:
Facilitator:	Facilitator:	Facilitator:
Minutes:	Minutes:	Minutes:

MEETING AGENDA & NOTES ABOUT EACH ITEM

Item:	Notes:	Responsibility:	Notes:

Action Items from State Meetings:

Item:	Assigned to:	Due Date:	Status:

Action Items from Non-State Meetings:

Item:	Assigned to:	Due Date:	Status:

For all of you who loved the Action Minutes form on page 3 of the July issue of Wild About Testing and wanted me to make it available in a downloadable form, we have great news. Just send me an e-mail requesting the form and I'll send it to you.



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>



The ISO working group to redefine the International Standard ISO/IEC 17024 – Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies operation certification of persons will be meeting July 23-25th in Geneva, Switzerland.

After the meeting, my sister and I will be taking scenic train rides and sampling chocolates. Read next month's e-zine to learn more about the process and to see some fantastic pictures!