WILD About Testing

Volume 1, Issue 6
July 2009

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

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

Welcome to the sixth issue (already) of **WILD About Testing**. I am delighted to report that during the five 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. (This month I'm asking you to specifically provide me with some feedback on your use of benchmarking – see the benchmarking article for more details.) 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 me 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 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 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

(Continued on Page 2)

In This Issue

From the Editor *(Continued from Page 1)*

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?

Teams working on quality improvement often tell me that using a meeting agenda and monitoring team assignments are two of the most important tools in the process improvement tool kit. Last month's tip was on maximizing meeting effectiveness with great agendas.

Once you have held an effective meeting, how do you assure that the decisions made during the meeting are truly decisions and not reworked every time you meet? How do you assure that team members follow through on commitments made at the meeting? Preparing an ***action summary*** of the meeting and using it to monitor progress on commitment is the key to follow through and will be discussed below.

This month's benchmarking article focuses on consortia benchmarking – it is a two-part article, focusing on theory this month and implementation in August.

In the News this month is really interesting with reports on an article on retesting by Mark R. Raymond (National Board of Medical Examiners), Sandra Neustel (National Board of examiners in Optometry), and Dan Anderson (American Registry of Radiologic Technologists, and a report on the new Supreme Court decision on Ricci vs. DeStefano.

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 Meeting Effectiveness With Action Minutes

When we conducted a pilot of quality improvement tools, years ago at ETS, we did a debriefing of all the teams to identify what we learned. What were the most important tools according to the team members? The first most important tool was the meeting agenda described last month) and the second most important tool was meeting minutes – which I call action minutes. Do you ever have meetings where people agree to do the work, but nothing ever happens after the meeting? The beauty of action minutes, when used in combination with a well designed agenda, is that everyone is held accountable for their commitments. How is this done?

What are action minutes?

Action minutes document the decisions that were made at a meeting and the reasons why these decisions were made. They are NOT a word-for-word discussion of who said what. Action minutes also document assignments – who agreed to do what by when. In addition, action minutes include a method to document the status of action items.

Who creates the action minutes?

Before the meeting, someone is assigned to be responsible for the action minutes. Often, for ongoing meetings, the same person who creates the agenda also creates the minutes.

When are action minutes sent to meeting participants?

Ideally, right after the meeting, since they may include assignments to be completed for the next meeting.

What do you do with the action minutes?

An effective way to use the action minutes is to

Continuous Improvement Tips *(Continued from Page 2)*

review them as the first item on your next agenda. For open items, meeting attendees give an update of the status – this update will be included in the action minutes for the next agenda.

What might action minutes look like?

A sample of action minutes is given below. It helps to have a preset format. In this sample, the meeting participants and meeting date are provided. Next to each agenda item, notes about the discussion are presented.

The first agenda item is to review the action minutes from the last meeting. The last agenda item is to summarize new assignments and suggestions for the next agenda.

One section of the meeting notes is the action items for today's meeting. Each item is described, the person responsible for the action, the due date for the action, and any notes about the action.

The final section of the action notes is the Agenda Topics from Prior Meetings. This will include all action topics that were still open as of the prior meeting. During the meeting (agenda item 1) these open items can be discussed and the status updated. If the item is completed, it will be so noted in the action minutes of Today's meeting.

Once actions have been completed, they can be archived and dropped off the action minutes.

Sample Action Minutes

MEETING OBJECTIVE: ____________________ **MEETING DATE:** __________

TEAM OR MEETING NAME			
Meeting Location:	**Meeting Date:**		**Meeting Time:**
Participants:	**Indicate Participation (Yes/No)**	**Participants:**	**Indicate Participation (Yes/No)**
Project Owner:		Team Members:	
Project Sponsor:			
Team Leader:			
Guests:		Facilitator:	

MEETING AGENDA & NOTES ABOUT EACH ITEM			
Agenda Item	**Time**	**Responsibility**	**Notes**
Review agenda for today's meeting, action items and meeting notes			Sample note: All meeting, pending action items were complete!
(Last) Review assignments and topics for next meeting		All	

Agenda Topics for Future Meeting:

Action Items from (date) Meeting:			
Item:	Assigned to:	Due Date:	Notes:

Action Items from Prior Meetings:			
Item:	Assigned to:	Due Date:	Status:

Benchmarking: Using Benchmarking Information

In November and December of 2008, more than 120 members of the Washington Area Certification Network responded to a survey about quality tools and marketing. More than 50% said they use benchmarking.

Since there is so much interest in benchmarking in the certification community, **WILD About Testing** has run a series of articles on benchmarking. The last two installments, in July and August, and will cover how to use benchmarking information. If you have implemented a benchmarking study in your organization, and are willing to share your insights with readers, please e-mail me at: **cheryl@wildandassociates.com**.

I started to write this article by going through my lecture notes on implementing a benchmarking study – but when I teach benchmarking the students have to conduct a benchmarking project and apply it to their improvement project. The lecture is much more interesting when you are going to apply the information. How can you have the same benefits even though you aren't necessarily implementing a benchmarking study? I'm asking you to answer some questions based on an excellent benchmarking study published by NOCA.

The best example of a consortia benchmarking study in testing is ***Practices and Requirements of Renewal Programs in Professional Licensure and Certification***, written by James Henderson and published by the National Organization for Competency Assurance in 2008. The full report is available from **www.noca.org** (go to the publications and resources tab at the top of the page and then choose "publications").

The publication includes extensive secondary research (discussed as a tool in the second issue of **WILD About Testing**) – a review that included both published papers, online research, and suggestions from an advisory committee of members who represented a variety of fields and expertise.

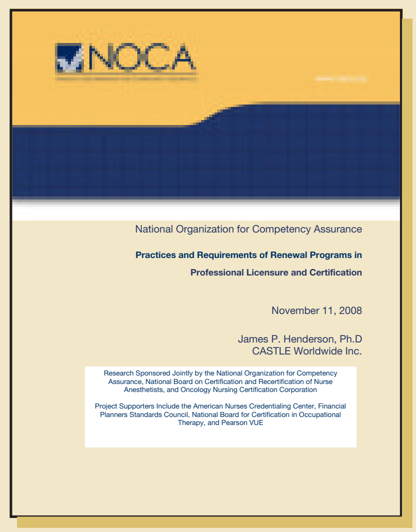
The paper also reports on primary benchmarking – in this case, the results of a survey to collect information on current practices and trends as they affect the renewal of professional licenses and certifications. Of the 2,120 organizations invited to participate in the survey, 331 actually provided responses.

Now, your homework. Go to **www.noca.org** for a copy of the benchmarking report, then answer the following questions:

1. How does my organization compare to those responding to the benchmarking survey?

2. Do the results of the comparison (answers to question 1) suggest that my organization should consider changes to our renewal process?

3. Hypothetically, if my organization were to try to implement a change to the renewal process, what additional information would I need and how would I get it?


NOCA

National Organization for Competency Assurance

Practices and Requirements of Renewal Programs in Professional Licensure and Certification

November 11, 2008

James P. Henderson, Ph.D
CASTLE Worldwide Inc.

Research Sponsored Jointly by the National Organization for Competency Assurance, National Board on Certification and Recertification of Nurse Anesthetists, and Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation

Project Supporters Include the American Nurses Credentialing Center, Financial Planners Standards Council, National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy, and Pearson VUE

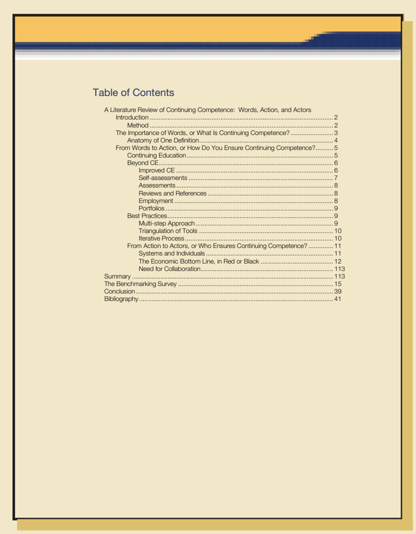


Table of Contents

Read next month's issue to learn how some other organizations are using this benchmarking report.

Interview with Dr. Rohit Ramaswamy:

Process Management in the Testing Industry

Dr. Rohit Ramaswamy

In June, I had the opportunity to interview Dr. Rohit Ramaswamy about how quality management and quality improvement applies to the testing industry. Dr. Ramaswamy has collaborated with me on several assignments in the testing industry, and is co-editor with me on ***Improving Testing: Applying Process Tools and Techniques to Assure Quality***.

He is the author of ***Design and Management of Service Processes***. An excerpt of the interview is provided below. For a full transcript of the interview, you can go to: **http://www.wildandassociates.com/interview.pdf**

Cheryl: How does the testing industry differ from other industries you've worked with?

Rohit: The quality issues are exactly the same. All work gets done through processes. And so whether you are talking about health care processes, telecommunication processes, or testing processes, there are always opportunities to improve. There may be different ways of controlling errors in different industries.

The testing industry, for example, uses a large amount of inspection, while other industries like healthcare might use automation as a way of reducing error. But errors in processes are always an issue. Quality of the output, in terms of how the quality is viewed by the customer, is always an issue. The notion of continuous improvement of processes to create a competitive advantage is something that is relevant to testing as well.

Cheryl: In the certification field, many organizations are quite small – fewer than 100 employees and often only 5 or 10. The quality issues may be the same, but is a formal quality process needed in this size organization?

Rohit: I think even more so than in large organizations, and the reason for this is that large organizations have a lot of slack. If I have a 1,000 person organization and have inefficiencies, it doesn't necessarily show up in increased errors or workforce stress because there are extra people to carry the workload. If I have a small operation and a limited budget and I want to be lean, it is really important to have formal processes and quality checks. So, absolutely the smaller organizations often need these formal tools more because it helps them to do a lot with few resources.

Cheryl: What kind or approach to quality would you recommend for a small organization?

Rohit: It is important to understand that there is no "one size fits all" solution. Some organizations start with a specific problem that they want to fix. Other organizations may not have a specific problem to address, but they want to be seen as the best in their industry. They may start by identifying and measuring their processes, comparing the results to customer needs improving their processes. Either the problem focused, or the continuous improvement approach, ultimately lead in the same direction. They help the company to do things better.

Cheryl: I noticed you didn't suggest starting with Lean or Six Sigma or any of the common buzzwords that we hear. Why is that?

Rohit: Over the last 10 or 15 years in the industry, tools have been emphasized before the kind of approach and so Lean and Six Sigma have been pushed as "magic tools to solve quality problems." The way that I think about quality is that there are multiple ways to success – ultimately what I need to do is examine my processes and look for opportunities to improve. It is important to stay away from a one-size-fits-all approach. Quality is bigger and more complex than that, and we want to take advantage of all the tools available.

Cheryl: Thank you Rohit. And reader, if you would like to learn more about our quality philosophy you may want to read ***Improving Testing: Applying Process Tools and Techniques to Assure Quality.***

In The News

Please join me in Brussels September 30th to October 2nd at the **E-ATP Conference on Growing Talent in Europe: Gaining Advantage through Assessment.**

Rohit Ramaswamy and I will be presenting a workshop titled **"Decreasing Assessment Costs by Increasing Quality Assessment."**

For more information or to register for the Conference, go to: **http://eatp.designingeventsonline.com/**

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.

Mark R. Raymond (National Board of Medical Examiners), Sandra Neustel (National Board of Examiners in Optometry), and Dan Anderson (American Registry of Radiologic Technologists) have written an excellent article ***"Same-form Retest Effects on Credentialing Exams"*** in the summer 2009 issue of ***Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice***.

Besides the results of their research, the article contains an excellent review of the literature about the impact on test scores when examinees take the same test form a second time. The article is written so that nontechnical readers will benefit from reading the review and the results. What did they find? "Mean score gains for repeat examinees who received the same test form were not different from score gains for examinees who received a parallel form and there appears to be no relationship between score gains and time delay between test administrations." (p. 25). The authors point out an important implication of this research for small certification programs. Some low volume testing programs have difficulty obtaining large enough volumes of test takers to equate test forms. In these cases it might be better to repeat the use of the same test form, or increase the number of equating items in a test form, than to develop new forms.

Please take the time to read this article – it has important implications for certification tests.

On June 29th the Supreme Court issued their ruling on **Ricci et al. v. DeStefano et al.**, a case involving test results used for promotion of firefighters working in New Haven, Conneticut. The plaintiffs in the case complained when the city invalidated the test results for promotion because no African Americans qualified under the examination. The city feared it would be sued on the basis of the results. The court ruled that the fear of litigation by Black officers was not a good enough reason to permit invalidating the test results.

The following link will take you to the full 93 pages of documentation on the ruling: **http://documents.nytimes.com/supreme-court-opinion-ricci-v-destefano**