

ASSESSMENT, TRAINING & CERTIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

The following is a generic introduction to the process required for a certification program. This framework can also be used as a construct for the development of any training program that requires validation.

The goal of the certification process is to validate the mastery and competency of a given body of knowledge.

Certification requires assessment by an independent professional organization. The role of this organization is to verify the five characteristics that the Department of Labor (1) says distinguish a profession from other occupations, namely:

1. National Organization – a unified group that can speak with one voice for its membership and foster development of the profession.
2. Code of Ethics – established standards of behavior relating to fairness, justice, truthfulness and social responsibility.
3. Research – Applied research to advance the profession.
4. Body of Knowledge – Through a codification process defines the body of knowledge for the discipline.

5. Credentialing – An independent credentialing organization that sets the professional standards for the discipline and defines eligibility requirements for the certification examination.

Certification sets the professional standards in the field and establishes the basis for higher order functioning of the discipline.

This paper will expound on the total elements of this process; namely, Assessment, Training and Certification.

ASSESSMENT

The assessment phase establishes the body of knowledge that will be used to test relative competency in a discipline. Using the discipline of Human Resources as an example, the Human Resources Certification Institute (HRCI) identified seven functional areas for competency examination. The weighting of each area is based on the relative importance to the knowledge requirements of the profession. There are two certification designations; namely, the Professional in Human Resources (PHR) and the Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR) designations. The designations are divided by years of direct experience. Eligibility for the examination for the PHR requires a 2-4 years experience and 6-8 years for the SPHR. The HRCI has established the

following examination weights for each examination:

PHR	SPHR
Management Practices	
15%	21%
General Employment Practices	
19%	17%
Staffing	
19%	15%
Human Resource Development	
11%	12%
Compensation and Benefits	
15%	19%
Employee and Labor Relations	
11%	14%
Health, Safety, and Security	
6%	6%
Total	
100%	100%

Table 1 – PHR / SPHR Components

These functional areas are then divided into specific components. For the PHR/SPHR examination there are 45 academic dimensions covered. Each of these dimensions is furthermore divided

into the topics required for competency. For example, one of the 45 dimensions is the topic: Legal and regulatory factors. Contained within this dimension are 18 subordinate topics such as:

1. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act
2. Age Discrimination in Employment Act
3. Health, medical and rehabilitation statutes
4. Vietnam-era Veterans Readjustment Act
5. Immigration Reform and Control Act
6. Employee Polygraph Protection Act
7. Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures
8. Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act
9. North American Free Trade Act
10. Common law tort theories
11. Copyright statutes
12. Compensation laws and regulations
13. Consumer Credit Protection Act
14. Social Security/retirement legislation
15. COBRA (Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act)
16. Workers' compensation and unemployment compensation laws and regulations
17. Legal and regulatory factors affecting employee and labor relations
18. Federal health, safety and security legislation(1)

As is evident by the example above, the assessment phase is critical to the certification process because it defines the scope and breadth of what constitutes competency in the discipline. This is validated by the oversight organization (HRCI) to determine that such topics do

indeed reflect the current body of knowledge. As regulations and practices change, environmental scans must be periodically conducted by HRCI to assure that knowledge requirements remain current in the assessment phase. After the assessment phase has been completed it must be published and disseminated to certification aspirants for their respective examination preparation.

TRAINING

After the body of knowledge has been defined and published, certification aspirants can gauge their relative competency and assess their preparedness. Areas needing improvement can be discerned and available training programs/tools can be sought. In the example above, the national organization providing training and tools is the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). The SHRM organization offers a Certification Preparation Course that can be taken either as self-study or in-class instruction. There are also other venues for preparation such as College and University courses and private training organizations.

Self-assessment of resident knowledge and competency is very important to examination preparation. The examination is timed with 225 questions covering the aforementioned body of knowledge. If there are examination samples they should be taken so that an honest assessment of current knowledge level can be gained. Important to this training aspect is also physical conditioning. If it is possible, it is strongly encouraged that candidates take

sample examinations under exam conditions and condition the body and mind to the related stress and time constraints required by the examination.

Once the self-assessment is completed aspirants should map out a preparation strategy. As in this case there are 7 major categories, it is suggested that at least one week be afforded to each category for preparation.

CERTIFICATION

To the recipient the certification designation is certainly an achievement of competency that has been established by a national standard. The question is how this designation is regarded in the public domain. As the adage goes: "Proof of this pudding is in the eating". Many companies and corporations are now specifying the PHR/SPHR designation for employment eligibility in the Human Resources discipline. This validates the emerging acknowledgement of competency demonstrated by this designation. However, even if companies do not incorporate this requirement of competency for employment, attainment of the designation equips the recipient with such an extensive body of knowledge that it will translate into a higher level of professional ability. This is a measure that translates directly to the bottom line.

APPLICABILITY TO TRANSIT AND OTHER TRAINING PROGRAMS

The foregoing discussion can be applied to the development and validation of training programs. The Transit Industry has now introduced a certification

process under the auspices of the APTREX Institute(2). Five designation levels are available. Is it right for Transit? Yes! Because APTREX designations have been validated by a process similar to the Human Resources example above. Attainment of a designation demonstrates competency measured by a national standard. Whether the Transit Industry uses this for promotional opportunities or not, the groundwork for a higher order functioning is established by this credential. Expanded knowledge serves to improve an individual's capability that benefits the organization and the Industry as a whole. Finally, this credential establishes a genuine professional status for all Transit professionals.

ENDNOTES

1. Certification Guide, Human Resources Certification Institute, 2001
2. Transit Certification Information Package, American Public Transit Exams Institute, 2001