



CEdMA Blog

Do You Need A Certification Program?

Posted by Joe Cannata on 11/24/2020

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Many institutions and companies constantly need to assess various skills. According to a recent survey, 40% of employers stated that specific, non-evergreen type skills are good for only four years. No matter the skill, there are many ways to measure if someone has mastery of it. Common methods include assessment tests, formal exams, oral presentations, hands-on demonstrations or the production of something that shows how the skill was applied.

Organizations need to decide how they will assess job skills. There are two basic routes to achieve this.

Option One

The less complicated route is to use a Learning Management System (LMS) to deliver assessments and record progress. With an LMS in place, you can leverage it to perform and record a candidate's learning and skill mastery. Well-written assessments that attempt to measure skill mastery are a very viable option. This option requires you to have a collection of subject matter experts that convene and determine the skills to be measured, and then craft quality questions to measure the skills. The exams can vary in length, depending upon how deeply you need to assess the skills. Progress of skill mastery is recorded in the LMS, and some sort of certificate or badge is awarded to the candidate.

The upside? There are no additional vendors involved, exam development and delivery is “free”, since the LMS is the item banking and delivery vehicle. You need to think about scalability, and back-end reporting. Metrics are a key measure of success, and the LMS must have adequate reporting to be able to do this. Again, this option is viable, depending upon the overall goals of your skill assessment program. It is not uncommon to enlist industry expertise to get your program started. You can hire an industry expert, or work with an experienced consulting organization to build your program.

Option Two

In the IT space, for institutions willing to invest, a certification program is a common way to build a rubric of hierarchical skills you can measure by having candidates pass an exam. The exams can be computer based, or hands-on performance based, depending upon your program goals. Building a program requires a lot of forethought, planning, and buy-in from executives that have to sign-off on the investment.

There are many great reasons to have a certification program, exemplified by the various studies and surveys performed in the industry. From a Global Knowledge August 2019 report, IT decision-makers insist that certified personnel are better at:

- Meeting client requirements
- Closing organizational skills gaps
- Troubleshooting issues
- Providing an edge over the competition
- Completing projects quickly
- Saving the business money

A TechValidate 2018 survey of 281 users at Commvault discovered that trained and certified users generate 10 times fewer support calls than their non-certified counterparts. In the Pearson VUE 2018 Value of Certification Survey, they found:

- 67% had greater self-confidence in their abilities
- 55% felt knowledge obtained has been transferrable to real work situations
- 44% had a higher quality of work output
- 41% had increased job satisfaction
- 35% had a salary or wage increase
- 28% earned increased responsibilities (task quality and importance)

If you decide to go with a formal certification program, you need to answer a few key questions:

- What is the goal of this program?
- What does success look like and how will it be measured?
- Is there an executive that will sponsor the program?
- What are the expectations of management for the program?
- Who is the intended audience?

- What are the resources, tools and systems that are required?
- How much are you prepared to invest in the program, and how much ongoing budget will be allocated?
- Who are the key stakeholders in this program?
- Once the program is up and running, what is the plan for growth and maintenance?
- Will your program be high-stakes, low-stakes or a mix?
- What will your marketing strategy be?

Once you have the answers to these questions, and they all point to a “go for certification”, then you start formulating a project plan, reasonable timelines, and doing research on how a program should be built. This is where you can turn to professional organizations like the Customer Education Management Association (CEdMA) and the Technology Services Industry Association (TSIA) for information.

If you need help to get started, you can bring in knowledgeable industry experts, like LearnExperts, to help architect your program. A solid, sustainable program cannot be built just by guesswork or learning as you go. Industry expertise is required to build a project plan and then execute on the various stages to be on time and within budget.

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