Continuing Competency:
A Critical Component of a Certification Program

Roy Swift, Ph.D., Executive Director, Workcred

May 15, 2017
Certification is the *Hot* “Credential” of the Year!
WHY?
Employers Value Certification

• Competencies are generally more valid and transparent because of employer engagement.

• Quality certifications are time limited and require "re-certification"
  – Mandatory updating

• Certification can be taken away from an individual for being unethical or incompetent.
In a Climate of Life-Long Learning Where Technology and Knowledge is Changing at a Rapid Rate. . .

- Re-certification becomes as important as the initial certification process
- Most research has been via survey asking individuals to self-report what has contributed to their learning
- As important as re-certification is, we know very little about what contributes to individuals remaining “competent in their profession”
- Recently, Oklahoma physicians convinced their legislature that they should not have to maintain specialty certifications from the Board of Medical Specialties
  - **Why did this happen?**
    - Requirements became too demanding
    - Physician did not see the relevance of the requirements
    - Physicians felt it had little to do with “competence” in their practice
    - We are throwing the “kitchen sink” at “competence” without having the research to back it up
What Methods Do Certification Bodies Use to Document “Continued Competency”?

• Continuing professional education
  – Often not specifically related to current practice of the individual
  – Individuals couldn’t apply the knowledge in their work environment
  – Often not specifically related to job analysis “competencies”

• Examination – often inappropriately giving the same initial examination

• Portfolios
  – Always a question of “who did it?” and “who can verify the work?”

• Continuing practice in the field
  – Many certification bodies don’t require that the individual actively practices in the profession
  – If you take professional development courses, you can be “re-certified”

• No felonies

• Continued good health to physically perform the job
Informal Learning in the Workplace

• Many professionals find that the workplace is where most continual learning occurs

• This is supported by survey research projects

• Learning experiences at work:
  – On-the-job problem-solving requires new knowledge and skills
  – Colleague interaction
  – Reading resources that are immediately available
What Do We Know About a Work Environment that Facilitates Informal Learning?

It is complex with many factors affecting informal learning:

• **Psychological**
  – Learning is enjoyable and non-threatening
  – One must “learn” to be a self-directed learner
  – Success breeds success – competence is key to intrinsic motivation

• **Social**
  – The more interactive the person is with others, the more opportunities for learning exist
  – It takes good communication skills and observation skills
  – Role models are important – Social Learning Theory
  – “Caring relationships”

• **Cognitive**
  – Ability to “question” and “problem solve”
  – Ability to “search” and “access” information

• **Physical-Environment**
  – Introducing “novelty” into the environment
  – Resources are quick, close, and easily accessible
  – Resources are written more in a “problem focus” format
Examining the Issue

• If the work environment is a major contributor to “continued competency,” how should it be used in the re-certification process of certification bodies?
  – Tomorrow, Workcred will bring together a task group to study this issue
  – The focus will be on creating sociological and anthropological research models to begin developing a deeper understanding of “continued learning” in the workplace
  – If you are interested in joining this research effort, please let me know
Roy Swift, PhD
Executive Director
Workcred
rswift@workcred.org
202.331.3617
www.workcred.org

Workcred Headquarters
1899 L Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
www.workcred.org