Practice Analysis

Make It Strategic!

What makes a practice analysis truly strategic? The answer lies in the **goals** we set, the **data** we collect, and how we use the **results** of that data collection.

Approached **strategically,** practice analysis offers a credentialing organization opportunities to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of practice and practitioners, to establish defensible rationales for all aspects of a credentialing program (not just the assessment), and to create lasting value for employers of credentialed practitioners.

It All Starts with Goals

Practice analysis studies are routinely conducted with a primary (if not singular) goal in mind: To validate a delineation of the tasks performed and the knowledge and skills required for practice in a given job, role, or profession, which in turn will serve as the basis for developing legally defensible test specifications for a credential. Important stuff – no doubt about it! But that's only the tip of the iceberg in terms of what can be accomplished through a practice analysis study.

During the planning stage of a practice analysis study, it's important to take a step back and ask some strategic questions, such as:

- How does the credential fit within your overall credentialing program or strategy?

- To what extent is your credential valued by employers?

- Do potential candidates seek out your credential?

- How can the practice analysis contribute to your understanding of trends in practice (i.e., where the profession is going)?

- To what extent are educational/training programs "engaged" with the credential?

- If there is an existing delineation, is it representative of the entire practitioner population in terms of geographic and demographic diversity, as well as the range of practice settings?

- What is the competitive landscape for the credential?

- In what ways can your organization apply the results? (Hint: It is more than just test specifications.)

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Data Collection – Why Limit Your Study to a Survey of Practitioners?

Every credential has a constellation of stakeholders, including but not limited to practitioners, supervisors, employers, regulators, educators, and thought leaders; a practice analysis study affords the ideal opportunity to engage these stakeholders and push the envelope in terms of understanding the job role/ profession and practitioners.

Beyond the survey of practitioners, which sits at the heart of most practice analysis studies, a variety of complementary data collection techniques can be leveraged to enhance the study and help the sponsor to answer the strategic questions posed during the planning stage of the study. Each of the following techniques can be employed with a new or extant credential.

Data Collection Technique	How It Can Enhance a Practice Analysis Study	Situation(s) in Which It Might Be Employed
Thought Leader Interviews Interviews with recognized experts and thought leaders within the profession	Illuminate trends and broad changes in a job role or profession that should be considered during the conduct of the practice analysis	Where the job role or profession is changing as a result of expanding/narrowing of focus or shifting due to scope of practice or regulatory changes
Review of Employment Analytics Evaluation of data maintained by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, O*Net, and proprietary systems	Obtain job descriptions, statistics on job, overlap with related titles	It's always useful to have an understanding of the employment outlook and how the job role or profession is defined by others or appears in job postings
Focus Panels Facilitated discussion with targeted SMEs to surface trends in practice	Represent the perspectives of key stakeholder groups (e.g., employers, educators, practitioners)	In a rapidly changing field or a field in which the scope of practice has changed
Independent Reviews Electronic review of a draft delineation by sets of SMEs representing unique stakeholder perspectives	Ensure that the delineation reflects practice across a variety of professional and practice settings	When practitioners come from a broad range of work settings or industries
Critical Incidents Interviews Interviews with employers focused on identifying the *critical incidents* that distinguish competent practice from incompetent practice	Identify employer perspectives about key knowledge and skills to target in the credentialing program	When employers express concern that practitioners have weaknesses relative to job requirements

Data Collection Technique	How It Can Enhance a Practice Analysis Study	Situation(s) in Which It Might Be Employed
Literature Reviews Review of literature related to a job role or profession	Identify evidence supporting inclusion of tasks, knowledge, and skills in a delineation, as well as trends in the scope of the profession	It's always a good idea to keep abreast of the literature related to the job role or profession
Curriculum Reviews Review of curricula from well-respected training and educational programs	Identify aspects of a job role or profession that are the focus of training/educational programs and the extent to which training/education aligns with a credential	When criteria for the credential include completion of formal training or education

You've Collected the Data – Don't be Afraid to Use It!

Depending on the data collected, a practice analysis study can inform far more than the test specifications/blueprint for a credential. A rich and comprehensive data set, drawn from a range of stakeholders, will position your organization to achieve some important and highly strategic ends, including:

- Creating a dynamic **profile of practitioners** in various roles, industries, levels of experience, settings, geographical locations, and specialty or generalist practice, etc. This gives the credentialing organization a much richer understanding of practitioners.

- Providing **guidance for items writers** related to depth and breadth of content coverage and questions associated with each task and KSA.

- Developing/validating a rationale for **eligibility criteria** (education and experience) for the credential.

- Developing/validating a rationale for **re-credentialing requirements**—is there new content that all practitioners need (e.g., new tools and technology, expansion of scope of practice) to demonstrate competence? How should you structure continuing competence requirements? Is there a purpose to retesting as part of re-credentialing?

- Providing **guidance to employers** regarding the development of employment interview protocols and/or supervisory rating scales/feedback for practitioners at all levels.

- Planning or updating **professional development initiatives/offerings** in support of the credential.

- Providing **feedback to educational/training programs** such as benchmarks for evaluating curricula.

- Developing **career ladders** that define entry, specialty, and advanced practice.

- Communicating the **value of the credential** by creating a public statement regarding your mission, vision, and credentialing focus.

- Validating that a credential is consistent with regulatory **scopes of practice.**

- **Advocating** for the profession and credential holders.

Key Takeaway

Depending on the *goals* set, the *data* collected, and how the *results* of that data collection will be used, any practice analysis study has the potential to be truly strategic. So why settle for anything less?

ACT® ProExam

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