

INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Presented by the Adult Resources Service
World Scout Bureau
Box 241, CH-1211 Geneva 4, Switzerland



CONSIDERATIONS FOR ASSESSING COMPETENCE

Submitted by Kirsty M. Brown OAM (Australia),
Chairman, World Adult Resources Committee

Note

There are many ideological positions with respect to competency-based approaches. With some trainers for and some against the concepts in their Associations. I merely use the word competent in two of its ordinary meaning namely: a) someone being properly qualified or capable and b) someone being fit, suitable, sufficient, adequate for a purpose.

Developing a comprehensive assessment strategy

Firstly, it is important that assessment cannot be expected to solve the problems of poorly conceived courses nor should it be held responsible for setting standards of performance. This means that the planning for assessment must go hand-in-hand with course development. For the most part, competence is not achieved until after around 3 year's on the job experience in medium or complex levels of your role. Yet, when many trainers and educators talk about competence, it is often competence on a given task or a range of skills. Real competence takes time to develop and is difficult to achieve. It may be easier to assess competence than to create it.

What is the purpose of the assessment?

One reason is to assist learners during the course of instruction in order to gauge the extent of learning and their responses. The second and by far the most popular reason that we conduct assessment is to certify performance of learners in order to state that they have achieved a particular standard.

Which aspects of learning are being assessed?

Once you decide to assess, then you may wish to think about the types of assessment tasks you might use. There are five fundamental forms of assessment namely: observation,

simulation, skills testing, questioning and using prior evidence, but under each of these there are a large variety of testing methods and procedures. The advantages and disadvantages of a particular form and method of testing will depend on your circumstances, resources and assessment skills but a useful starting point is to consider which aspects of learning are being assessed. Recently there is a trend towards what are called authentic assessments in which the assessment task starts to match the reality of the situation that will be encountered. Together with this there is also an emphasis on performance based assessments in which people are being asked to do something. This way they can demonstrate their skills, their knowledge and their attitudes simultaneously. Some of the performance and authentic assessments are useful because they provide a holistic view of competence on a range of tasks or an entire position.

At what stage in the development of the skill is learning to be assessed?

Performance at various stages of skill learning varies greatly. We know from statistical trials that your ability to pass a subsequent assessment increases dramatically especially if you are close to the cut-off point. Secondly, the chance to repeat an assessment task means that the task is not the same task for that person on a second or later occasion. Maybe, assessment certificates of competence should at least indicate the tasks at which a person is competent and the number of attempts that were required to achieve such competence.

How will the results of different assessments be combined?

In competency based assessments that are task oriented your concern will be whether the person has satisfied the criteria or standards for achievement. Assessors need to establish judgement rules for combining such results on individual tasks.

What emphasis will be given to content areas and learning outcomes?

The emphasis on content areas and learning outcomes can be mapped out in a table of specifications. The assessment emphasis could be based on the amount of training time devoted in the course to the various tasks as well as the importance on the job.

Results are maximised when they have real meaning, that is, when they can be related to actual behaviours (such as can develop a Group Plan meeting all the strategies of the Association). The emphasis is not on distinguishing the performance of one person from another but on discriminating whether someone can perform one task from another.

How many assessments are required to prove competence?

The real question here is to decide how many failures are acceptable to you on the job. In some areas where performance is not critical for safety and health you may be prepared to put up with a number of errors and/or failures. Traditionally, in Australia we have set a standards of around 50% for passing most educational courses but this approach is inappropriate for Scouting settings.

By and large, mastery is not established unless someone can perform with 85%+ accuracy on repeated trials. Setting standards in the order of 95% means that many existing Adults in Scouting may not be judged competent even after considerable training and this can create human resource management problems for trainers. My own experience is that it is very difficult to be competent 95 times out of 100 even on tasks that we consider ourselves to have mastered!

How will the results be used or reported?

The process of assessment is covered by a code of ethics. There are principles of fairness, equity, privacy, confidentiality and privileged access that have been established in many Associations. Some Adults in Scouting and trainers may feel that privacy

(continue overleaf)

because the Association is paying for the training. The overriding principle, is that the assessment results are the property of the person and that they can only be used in ways which do not infringe the rights of the person.

The confidential communication of results is also important for the self-esteem and self-respect of Adults in Scouting. In competency based assessments the reporting can be in terms of the learning outcomes, knowledge, skills and tasks that have been mastered, together with the overall judgment of competent or not yet competent.

How high will you set the standards for performance?

The advantage of competency based assessment is that the standards for performance can be agreed upon at the outset. A process of negotiation can be undertaken with interested stakeholders and the standards for competent performance are then explicit. The main advantage of competency based assessment is that it can be introduced irrespective of the methods of instruction or learning. It suits both mastery learning as well as other forms of instruction and with its practical emphasis is more likely to be acceptable to Adults in Scouting. Learners can be assured that the focus is on specific learning outcomes. It provides an assurance to the National Board that training has produced outcomes and desired achievements. It avoids the problems of training and development programs that at their worst are nothing more than a placebo or nebulous experience with fuzzy outcomes of little importance to the Association.

Recommendations for competency based assessment

Your assessments must be part and parcel of your training. They reflect its quality and its philosophy. If your training is performance oriented then your assessments will need to be competency based. I doubt that you can ever have valid training without some formal or informal assessment, moreover unequivocal recognition of learning is non-existent until it is independently and externally assessed in an objective and standardised fashion.

The highest standards for any summative competency based assessment that is intended to certify performance at a point in time is to have:

- An externally set of assessment to establish standards
- That is externally assessed in order to establish credibility

- The specific content of which is unknown in order to avoid practice effects and ensure generalisation of learning
- The learning outcomes of which are known at the outset and related directly to the instruction criterion
- That is competency based according to a set of agreed standards and assessed beyond the unit level
- Which is relatively objective in its marking
- That is repeatable in order to ensure validity and reliability of the results.

UNITED NATIONS COMPETENCY MODEL

The United Nations Secretariat has developed a new competency model designed to build the organisation's human resources capacity for the future. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said that the quality of our people is our greatest strength and the key to our success as an organisation Kofi Annan went on to say that *competencies could provide the glue to link human resources systems together in an integrated way. Clearly, the value of a competency model will come from its application and integration into other aspects of HR management.*

<p>CORE COMPETENCIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication - Teamwork - Planning and organising - Accountability - Creativity - Client orientation - Commitment to continuous learning - Technological awareness <p>CORE VALUES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrity - Professionalism - Respect for diversity <p>MANAGERIAL COMPETENCIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leadership - Vision - Empowering others - Building trust - Managing performance - Judgment/decision-making

What is different to our World Adult Resources Policy?

MEETING OF THE WORLD ADULT RESOURCES COMMITTEE (WARC), GENEVA, 23-25 JUNE 2000

Under the chairmanship of Kirsty M. Brown, the committee appointed after the Durban Conference met for the first time. All members were present and the Committee followed the agenda, as published in the previous issue of Information Exchange. One

item was added under 6, "Strategy", on the question of the gender issue, following the policy statement adopted in Durban.

The Committee set as its main objective until the 36th World Scout Conference to be held in Thessaloniki, Greece in 2002 "to achieve the implementation of the Adult Resources Policy in 80% of WOSM's member organizations.

In order to achieve its objective, the Committee agreed on a number of strategies such as:

- Obtaining information from each region through annual reports submitted by National Scout Organization, reports on regional and sub regional seminars or workshops
- Reports of Regional Conferences (2001)
- Maintaining close relationship with World Scout Bureau Executives in charge of Adults in Scouting in Regional offices through another formal meeting to be held in 2001 and through informal contacts between Committee members and those Executives in each region.
- Promoting existing materials such as:
 - Adults in Scouting booklets
 - Essential Characteristics of Scouting
 - Chief Commissioner's kit
 - Management Handbook
- Completing and circulating new material:
 - New issues of Information Exchange
 - Adult Resources Handbook
 - Training modules
- Maintaining close relationship with the World Youth Programme Committee. It should be noted at this stage that Item 7 on the agenda "Youth involvement in the decision making process" was discussed both separately by the WARC itself and jointly with the World Youth Programme Committee.

The joint session was rated as "very useful" by the two committees and it is hoped that new opportunities for joint discussions will arise in the future. As a result of their joint meeting, the two committees agreed on a practical proposal to be made to the Educational Methods Group to ensure a wider representation of young members on WOSM's world bodies without having to go through a quota system which in fact was not seen as an acceptable solution by the two Committees. The Educational Methods Group which subsequently met during the afternoon of 25 June endorsed the proposal which will be put to the World Scout Committee in October.