Behind The Scenes: The CCPDT Knowledge Exam Development Process

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Just as a strong foundation is critical when building a home, a certification program needs a strong and rigorous development process for its examinations. The Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CCPDT) partners with a third-party testing organization, Professional Testing Corporation (PTC), for the development and maintenance of its certification exams. With the help of volunteer subject matter experts, the two organizations are constantly working hard to ensure the foundation of our exams adhere to best-in-class psychometric principles and meet the expectations of the profession.

The CCPDT recently undertook an extensive updating of its CPDT-KA® and CBCC-KA® written exams. From start to finish, the process took about 18 months and required a great deal of time and effort from CCPDT staff, vendors, and volunteers. To help our certificants, candidates, and the public understand the importance of certification exams, we are sharing an overview of the steps involved. The process is applied to each certification individually, and the work on the CPDT-KA and CBCC-KA exams was done concurrently.

SUBJECT MATTER EXPERT (SME) RECRUITMENT

CCPDT recruits subject matter expert (SME) volunteers with varied backgrounds, locations, specialties, and experiences to participate in the exam development process. Having a diverse group of SMEs brought differences in thoughts and perspectives, and helps control for bias during each task and across the entire project. In addition, different SME volunteers are used for each task panel (i.e. item review, exam review, etc.). This limits the influence of any individual or group, and better ensures the process is representative of the larger profession. Kate Anders, CCPDT Director of Exam Development, said, "More diversity produces better exams. Having SMEs from various backgrounds and demographic characteristics provides multiple viewpoints and helps spot and address bias proactively."

JOB TASK ANALYSIS (JTA)

A valued and legally defensible certification exam is built upon a well-designed, current job task analysis (JTA). A JTA helps establish content validity for the certification exam program and ensures that the program stays up-to-date and is reflective of current best practices.

The JTA begins with a comprehensive review of the profession. This resulted in the identification of the major areas of responsibility (domains of practice) for the profession, specific work-related tasks that are associated with those domains, and the knowledge needed to perform those tasks. The domains, tasks, and knowledge areas are validated by surveying the professional community.

The results of the JTA survey are used to develop an updated content outline for the exam. The content outline serves as the real-world "blueprint" from which test questions are written and exams are constructed.

The JTA process is undertaken approximately every 5 years so that the exam accurately reflects the current scope of practice as the profession evolves over time.

EXAM QUESTION WRITING AND REVIEW

Item writing SMEs undergo extensive training on the best practices for writing exam questions (items) that target the knowledge specified in the content outline. The exam questions go through several stages of review including psychometric review by PTC staff trained in exam development procedures, and content review by a separate panel of SMEs representative of the likely candidate population. Item review panels check and edit each question to confirm that the knowledge being tested is:

- Accurate.
- Reflective of current best practice as indicated in the content outline.
- Relevant and important to the practice of the profession.
- Free from bias and stereotyping.

Approved questions are entered into CCPDT's item bank, a secure repository for the exam questions.

EXAM CONSTRUCTION

Exam form drafts are constructed by PTC's psychometrician (measurement specialist), using the pool of approved exam questions in the proportions defined by the content outline. A panel of exam review SMEs check

each draft exam to confirm that it:

- Reflects current best practices.
- Represents the content as indicated in the content outline.
- Adheres to item writing guidelines.
- Is appropriate for the candidate population as described in the eligibility criteria.

The final approved version of the exam is uploaded to the test delivery vendor software.

PASSING SCORE

The passing score (standard) is determined for each exam by a panel of SMEs trained in standard setting procedures. The panel uses several statistical techniques to set the passing score, or minimum exam score a candidate needs to demonstrate the level of knowledge required to be considered competent in the profession. The passing score is the basis on which exam pass and fail decisions are determined.

ANALYSIS & REPORTS

After the first administration of a new exam form, PTC prepares summary statistics and an item analysis. The CCPDT looks for any anomalies that would indicate that an exam question is not performing as expected and flags those questions for further review.

The CCPDT uses scaled scoring to report the final passing score, which allows each version of the exam to be comparable on a consistent scale, regardless of the difficulty level of individual questions. After the passing score is determined, pass or fail emails are sent to the candidates, followed by an e-certificate to showcase their new certification.

PTC prepares final reports, including exam item statistics, aggregated candidate profile information, and candidate rosters for the CCPDT.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

After each administration of an exam, CCPDT and PTC review the final reports on the exam, including the exam item performance and administration feedback. Exam items that do not perform as expected are flagged for further review. Feedback from candidates on the exam content, or the exam administration process, are included in post-administration debriefs. Corrective measures are identified and implementation plans are developed as needed.

COLLABORATION

CCPDT and PTC have collaborated on exam development and administration since 2001. CCPDT and PTC meet regularly to review the current state of the certification programs, measure progress against goals, and strategically plan for the future. "It has been a true pleasure working with CCPDT on its examination programs. We have developed a great cadence of collaboration, agility, and quality assurance over the years. It has been an honor to work closely with CCPDT, witness the growth of its programs, and collaborate to continually improve them." said Vicki Gremelsbacker, President of PTC.

ACCREDITATION

CCPDT's CPDT-KA and CBCC-KA certification programs are independently accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (I.C.E.). Achieving accreditation is recognition that CCPDT is in compliance with rigorous standards of practice defined by an independent accrediting body. Earning NCCA accreditation demonstrates to the public that a certification program is committed to quality.

By adhering to a strong and rigorous development process for its examinations, CCPDT ensures that its knowledge exams are both psychometrically sound and reflective of current best practices in the industry. CCPDT is proud of the quality of its exams and confident that they meet the expectations of the profession.