

Staff Benchmarking

by

Richard Plumb CEng. FACostE and Howard Malleson CEng MACostE
TASC Management

Introduction

In late 2005 TASC was invited by a well known construction consultant and a major manufacturing company to consider a method of benchmarking their project controls staff for competence against the requirements of the National Occupational Standards for Project Control at the Intermediate and Professional levels. Both companies wanted:-

- An unbiased, external view of competence and individual development needs.
- Whether their staff were ready for qualification programmes and which staff should be on which programme.

As a result of this market need, TASC has developed the Experience and knowledge Self Assessment System which has completed its first successful trial application.

Candidate Self Assessment

The process starts with a candidate completing a two page questionnaire, which is based on the National Occupational Standards, and submitting this to TASC along with a current C.V.

The questionnaire contains 38 statements of competence requirement and, for each statement, asks the candidate three questions:-

- Do you carry out the activity currently?
- Have you carried out the activity previously?
- How can you show that you do ,or have, carried out the activity.?

The application of the self assessment questionnaire process identifies particular strengths held by the candidate and also highlights activities where the candidate would benefit from specific training, work experience or knowledge. The responses also show where candidates have experience and knowledge that is not being used in his or her current role. This can result in the more effective utilisation of staff. During the trials of the system, we identified several practitioners who were not being used to their full potential, due to past experience and knowledge not being used in the present role.

Assessor Review.

The initial review of the returns by the TASC assessor will identify issues from within the candidate's responses that should be discussed with him or her for clarification. Clarification centres on:-

- Making sure that the responses reflect what the candidate does and knows.
- Making sure that the candidate's responses are mutually consistent.

The candidate will then be contacted to arrange a short interview following which the Assessor will use the self-assessment form to create a report that:-

- Indicates particular experience and knowledge strengths..
- Identifies areas where the candidate would benefit from training and /or work experience as part of helping to realise his/her full potential.
- Suggest what steps should be followed to translate the results of the self assessment into nationally and internationally recognised qualifications at the appropriate level.

Benchmarking

Responses by the candidate, as confirmed by the interview, is accorded one of five ratings against each activity depending on the assessed competence and knowledge. The standard ratings are:-

0 – No knowledge or experience

1 – Aware of the activity but little practical knowledge or experience

2 – Competent to deliver at Intermediate level

3 – Competent to deliver at Professional level

4 – Recognised expert can supervise others and advise clients.

The National Standards are split into five activity setions:-

- Using technical skills
- Working with people and managing yourself
- Developing the project
- Project implementation
- Closing our the project

Within these sections are mandatory standards and optional standards that make a total of 51 units. At the Intermediate level a candidate has to meet the requirements of 12 units and at the Professional level 20 units.


Thus the benchmarks can be used to guide the reviewing assessor as to whether the candidate has a level of competence matching the requirements of the Intermediate or Professional level standards.

Activity Group	Intermediate Ratings	Professional Ratings
Using technical skills	10	15
Working with people	6	15
Developing the project	4	9
Project implementation	6	15
Closing out the project	0	6
Overall rating	26	60

Reports

The final evaluation report consists of two parts. The first part is a 'play back' of the candidate's self assessment against the 38 statements of competence with a rating put against each statement and relevant comments made by the assessor.

The second part of the report is a summary Results Report, an example of which is shown below.

The Assessment Service Centre 

**Project Control Practitioner
Experience And Knowledge Self Assessment**

Results Report TASC Contract No. 351

Candidate Name	Graham Watkins
Location	Zenproc Contracting, Chiswick
Date of Candidate Form	23.12.05
Date of Interview	26.01.06
Assessor Name	A.N.Other
Report Date	29.01.06

Activity Group	Assessment Rating
Using Technical Skills	11
Working With People And Managing Yourself	9
Developing The Project	5
Project Implementation	7
Closing Out the Project	0
Total	32

Comments

The Overall Rating indicates that Graham is operating at a Level 3 standard but, in some aspects, he is performing above that level.

He needs training/experience in risk management and in the part professional ethics and values have to play in the work of Zenproc.

He has particular strengths in IT and it may be worth looking at his potential in training and supporting other team members. He is proactive in providing support outside his formally defined scope of activities.

A Level 3 NVQ programme would provide a focus for his development and visible recognition for his competence.

Typical 'bench mark' total ratings are:-

- 26 - fully competent to deliver under guidance and when working to established procedures.
- 60 - Fully competent to 'self start', define approaches to executing project control activities and to provide guidance to others.

TASC Form 106 Copyright ©TASC 2005. All rights reserved

The report contains the summary of the ratings for each of the activity groups and comments on particular areas of special strengths and areas where the candidate would benefit from training and experience development.

The comments conclude with a recommendation about the relevance of a National Vocational Qualification programme to the candidate.

The report also contains statements about the Total Ratings in relation to levels of competence descriptions that correspond to Level 3 (...to deliver under guidance.....) and Level 4 (...'self start', define approaches.....)

It must be noted that this evaluation is only a 'snap-shot' of the candidate's competence and ability at the time of

the assessment and may need to have judgements applied by the candidate's management to complete the picture of the individual in question.

From these reports, the manager:-

- Can determine how to gain the maximum benefit from his training budget
- Has unbiased, external support for the annual appraisal process
- Can quantify the development needs for particular members of staff.

Performed on a regular basis the process will provide an independent measure of progress achieved during a period by individuals or by whole departments or project teams.

Conclusion

The trials carried out on the TASC project control Staff Benchmarking process has shown that it provides a low cost, independent assessment of the

competence, strengths, weaknesses and development needs of project control practitioners and provide a sound preliminary prior to embarking on expensive training programmes.

Several companies have already agreed contracts with TASC to carry out this process on their staff around the UK and it is expected that it will become a valuable addition to the services provided by the Association to its members and to industry.

For further information please contact Helen at TASC in Sandbach on tel 01270-764798 or email tasc@acoste.org.uk.