

Innovative forms for certificating graduates of professional retraining programs: a comparative analysis of the performance

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Abstract: *The demand of the industry and employees for training forms and the content of educational programs is being transformed. Up-to-date and advanced knowledge is required, as well as flexible skills, and quick ways to master them. The request becomes particularly relevant in the case of professional retraining programs. The traditional format of final certification includes tools that simulate a locally limited situation of activity. In this way, it is difficult to identify the formation of competencies for a wider set of functional tasks. This difficulty can be overcome by introducing a new certification tool – a simulator that simulates the working day of a specialist during which he implements a wide list of functional responsibilities, fixed in the job regulations. The purpose of the article is to evaluate the results of using a professional activity simulator as a means of diagnosing the level of professional readiness. It contains evidence of the feasibility of switching to the use of the simulator for the final certification of HR specialists.*

Keywords: EDUCATIONAL SIMULATOR, HR SPECIALISTS, PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT, PROFESSIONAL RETRAINING PROGRAMS, CERTIFICATION, INNOVATIVE TOOLS.

1. Introduction

Global competition in all industries cause a high rate of renewal of professional competencies of specialists. The format of implementation of training processes and active application of the received training is being changed: the sequential one is being replaced by parallel-enabled and learning - through-need actions - formats. The demand of the industry and employees for training forms and the content of educational programs is also being transformed. Up-to-date and advanced knowledge is required, as well as flexible skills, and quick ways to master them. The request becomes particularly relevant in the case of professional retraining programs.

The traditional format of final certification includes tools that simulate a locally limited situation of activity. In this way, it is difficult to identify the formation of competencies for a wider set of functional tasks. This difficulty can be overcome by introducing a new certification tool – a simulator that simulates the working day of a specialist during which he implements a wide list of functional responsibilities, fixed in the job regulations.

This simulator was developed for the specialization "Personnel Management". Some experience has been accumulated its application to students of retraining programs.

The purpose of the article is to evaluate the results of using a professional activity simulator as a means of diagnosing the level of professional readiness.

Performance criteria:

a level of professionalism according to the list of functional areas specified in the activity standard;

cost of diagnostics of a competence fitness unit for functions;

a degree of approximation to real activity.

Observations were made during 4 issues of programs on a sample of about 150 listeners.

It contains evidence of the feasibility of switching to the use of the simulator for the final certification of HR specialists; it provides calculations of the socio-economic impact of investments in the development and the use of the stimulator in evaluation procedures; it provides results of measuring the level of professional knowledge acquired during training using the simulator.

Recommendations for replicating the practice of using the simulator during the final certification of students of professional retraining programs are given.

2. Prerequisites and means for solving the problem

Certification of specialists is a recognized way to systematize and inventory both knowledge and skills; it also serves as a basis for moving to the next level of professionalism, and as a result, career

advancement. This opportunity is quite essential for the rapidly developing field of HR management. Specialists with various basic education (from psychology to IT) come to the profession. From a management perspective, it is very important for specialists to have knowledge in management practices and building basic processes, as well as some knowledge with an assessment of the economic impact of activities. Preparation for certification allows you to form a management vision and develop an arsenal of tools and study modern trends in HR management.

Competition in the market of HR specialists is increasing and confirmation of the level of qualification is a factor of preference for large organizations, especially international ones. In addition, training and preparation for certification allows you to expand the circle of contacts and push the boundaries of the labor market for potential employment.

A career in HR management can be built according to the type of horizontal and vertical growth. Horizontal growth (development) involves the development of related functional areas and the expansion of management practices through collaboration with related functions. This professional strategy creates a multidisciplinary specialist with knowledge and a systematic vision of the implementation of work. Vertical growth is associated with the development of managerial competencies and requires a different vector of specialization. Such opportunities for career advancement are also laid down in the certification system for personnel management specialists. As a rule, certification provides an opportunity to confirm the strategic level of proficiency in the profession, that is the certification of managers, as well as the operational level for a multifunctional set of professions – certification of specialists.

If an HR specialist is aiming for certification, they need at least two years of experience in this field. The process of preparing for certification is long, but quite feasible. In the field of HR management, there are several large institutions with a long history that are engaged in certification, such as Chartered Institute for Personnel Development (CIPD) (UK); Certification Human Resources Institute (CHRI) (USA).

The development of evaluation tools in the field of HR management in Russia began in 2018. By now, evaluation tools have been prepared for evaluating the following qualifications under the professional standard "HR Management Specialist": HR records management specialist; recruitment specialist; specialist in the organization of personnel evaluation and certification; training and developing specialist; staff developing specialist; remuneration, compensation and benefits specialist. For the remaining work functions and qualifications, evaluation tools are under development.

The assessment is carried out in two stages: theoretical and practical. The theoretical section includes questions related to the

diagnosed labor function. Within one and a half or two hours, the person under must answer 40 questions. The task structure includes questions with the ability to choose the correct answer, with the need to write the correct answer in free form, as well as tasks to establish the necessary correspondences and sequences of operations and actions.

In the practical part of the assessment, it is proposed to solve the case, accompanied by documentary support. The applicant for the required qualification must provide reasonable and detailed answers that meet the requirements of current legislation within twenty minutes. All tasks are aimed at diagnosing labor functions that are designated and fixed in the professional standard. Diagnostics and confirmation of the level of qualification is currently possible in several centers in Russia (Moscow, Ufa, Krasnoyarsk).

So, to confirm the HR specialist certification, you need some specialized education and practical experience, as well as the practice of passing qualification exams. Tools for diagnosing the suitability of the subject to the requirements of job positions in assessment centers are constantly being improved.

Since the Russian HR management practice is in the process of active development, the specialists working in it have different professional education and often have to receive additional professional retraining. Additional professional retraining programs are an accelerated format for acquiring knowledge, skills, and skills in a narrowly specialized field over a usually limited period of time.

Customers of professional retraining programs are adults who have professional training and are not able to spend a large amount of time on retraining, as well as employers who invest in the rapid renewal of professional competencies of their employees. Investments and expenditures of resource support should have a greater payback, so all training activities implemented by the performer-educational organization (entrance and final testing of the level of competence, meaningful training) should contribute to the return.

The traditional format of final certification includes tools (testing, oral answers to questions, solving a case or defending the final work) that simulate a locally limited situation of professional activity. In this way, it is difficult to identify the formation of competencies for a broader set of functional tasks in the real business environment. This complexity can be overcome by introducing a certification tool—a simulator that simulates the working day of a specialist during which he implements a wide list of functional responsibilities, fixed in the job regulations.

Interest in the development of educational simulators is stable over a long period and affects many areas of training. At the very beginning of implementing the practice of developing and introducing educational simulators into the educational process [4], priority was given to high-risk areas with a high cost of error in the actions of the labor subject in real conditions (for example, medicine [7;10] and industries: construction [16], aviation [2] - and railway transportation [14], energy supply [17] engineering [1;8], security [12]. The development of technical capabilities for the development of simulators and the development of solutions for modeling tools for phenomena and processes allow us to expand the range of tasks solved using simulators. That is why we started developing simulators for management companies [3;6;9;11], educational [5;13;15], psychological [12] directions and tasks.

Simulators are a kind of bridge between learning in the classroom and the real environment, because they allow you to form skills through actions.

This simulator was developed at the university for the specialization "HR Management" and has accumulated experience in its application to students of vocational training programs.

3. The idea of a simulator and the features of its functioning

The essence of the simulator is to simulate one working day of an HR specialist. We assume that the complex of works to ensure the functioning of the personnel management system is

differentiated by professional standards into eight groups (the so-called labor functions):

- documentation support of work with personnel;
- human resources activities;
- assessment and certification of personnel;
- personnel development;
- organization of labor and its payment;
- organization of corporate and social responsibility;
- operational management of personnel and divisions of the organization;
- strategic personnel management.

In general, labor functions reflect the so-called full functionality assigned to the personnel management service.

In the domestic practice of HR management, as a rule, only large enterprises can build organizational structures of the HR management system, differentiating the full functionality by departments and individual specialists. Companies that differ in size and period of operation on the market are more difficult to build extensive systems of personnel management. Therefore, specialists of HR management services of such enterprises implement a "truncated" set of functional responsibilities, guided by the priority of the current tasks of the organization. The key requirements for specialists of such HR management services are universality, that is possession of professional competencies for a full list of labor functions and flexibility in switching from one set of competencies to another. Therefore, the diagnostics of professional readiness of a HR management specialist should include tools that allow evaluating the universal possession of a full set of competencies set forth in professional standards. To do this, when organizing work on the formation of the Fund of evaluation funds, we are guided by the fact that the construction of a competence-oriented task should model one working day of professional activity of a HR management specialist. The task set includes situations that the manager has to solve in real professional life.

The simulator of final certification of HR-specialists has been repeatedly tested on empirical samples (4 streams of graduates of the program of additional professional retraining, about 150 students). Comparative performance assessments require comparative assessments of flows that have been evaluated in different ways. The accumulated practice of using the simulator allows you to conduct such a performance analysis.

4. Results and discussion

A research question arises: what is meant by the effectiveness of using the simulator? Since we are talking about the educational process, it is important to master the level of competence for the activity that the graduate will be engaged in in reality, as well as interest in the process. Based on these assumptions, the criteria for evaluating performance are identified:

- the level of professionalism in the list of functional areas specified in the activity standard;
- cost of diagnostics of a unit of competence fitness for functions;
- the degree of approximation to a real professional activity;
- attendee engagement in the process

Diagnostics of indicator values according to the selected criteria was carried out in two comparative groups: group 1 – certification exam in the traditional form; group – using a simulator.

The level of professional competence formation was determined on a 100-point scale. The final scores for Group 1 were formed based on the number of choices of correct answers and expert assessments of solutions by case listeners. In general, the analyzed groups obtained comparable assessments of the level of competence. The result is expected, since the simulator was used only for the certification task and it was not used during the training of students. There is an assumption that the add-in to the simulator module aimed at stimulating cases on labor functions and working out management decisions on them will further increase the advantage of this form of certification for this criterion.

Since it was necessary to check the student's competence in the entire set of work functions, the number of tasks included in the traditional exam has significantly increased to 20 test questions, 5 case studies and one role-playing game. This resulted in a significant increase in diagnostic time and, as a result, an increase in the cost of evaluation procedures. Using a simulator that allows you to conduct a comprehensive assessment of a set of functions, fixes the range of time spent from 30 to 45 minutes.

The assessment by the criterion "degree of approximation to real professional activity" was carried out by an expert method based on conclusions about sets of control materials and a set of tasks that make up the simulator bank. Experts were practitioners who directly implement tasks in HR management services. The content of control materials of certification in the traditional format received an average rating of 4.8 points, and in the simulator - 4.5. We can conclude that with proper approach to the preparation of assessment tools, these two forms of certification are practically comparable and there is a potential for increasing quality.

The attendee's involvement in the process was evaluated based on feedback from attendees. As expected, the game format simulating a full-time employee aroused higher interest among attendees (5.0 points in the second group and 4.0 points in the first).

Thus, the evaluation of the use of the simulator according to the selected performance criteria shows higher ratings and is recommended for inclusion in the final format of certification of students of additional professional training programs.

5. Conclusion

Development of the environment and the direct content of professional activity transform the practice of professional fitness diagnostics. Assessment and certification centers regularly develop new tools and improve existing ones for diagnosing fitness for a position. Simulators are a relatively new and modern format for conducting diagnostics. Comparative assessments of the use of simulators in the diagnosis of the effectiveness of training of trainees of professional retraining programs have shown its greater effectiveness in terms of parameters: reducing the cost of diagnostics of a unit of competence fitness for functions and greater involvement of students in the process.

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