

NIST-MEP

FOCUS GROUP ORIENTATION

DOCUMENT AND PROTOCOL

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WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

This focus group is an important part of a research study sponsored by the National Institute of Standards Technology (NIST) Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) to examine the quality, market value, and effectiveness of manufacturing credentials. Conducted in partnership with Workcred, an affiliate of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), the initiative will contribute to the body of knowledge for manufacturing-related skills credentials and identify skill gaps that could be filled by new credentials.

We are going to be talking about why some of you may think credentials are considered important in your facility, and why and how they are used. Equally important, we will also talk about why some of you might feel that credentials aren't used or important and what might make credentials more useful.

In this context, credentials include industry certifications and certificates, licenses, badges, and apprenticeships.

MEETING INFORMATION

Date:

Location:

Focus Group	Date	Time	Location

AGENDA

Time	Activity
8:30 am to 9:00 am	Welcome, Introductions, and Ground Rules
9:00 am to 9:10 am	Confidentiality and Recording Release Documents
9:10 am to 12:00 pm	Questions (Focus Group Protocol)
12:00 pm to 12:30 pm	Anything We Missed, Wrap-Up
12:30 pm	Adjournment

DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Name:
2. In what state do you currently work?
3. What is your current job title?
4. How many years have you been in the manufacturing industry?

5. Please describe your current role in your facility (e.g., foreman, manager, director, vice president, owner, C-suite)
6. How many years have you been in your current role?
7. How many individuals are employed in your current facility?

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL - INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Good morning and welcome! First, we would like to thank you for participating, making yourself available, and lending your expertise to this very important research task.

At this time, we would like to introduce ourselves. My name is <facilitator's name>, I will be the lead facilitator for this focus group. In addition, we will be digitally recording our conversations and if you have not already done so please sign the consent form.

Before we begin to address the questions in this focus group, we would like to review some ground rules:

1. **CONFIDENTIAL.** Everything said will remain private and confidential. In any future reports, we will not identify you or your organization.
2. **YOUR OPINION COUNTS.** There are no wrong answers. We are interested in your expertise, experiences, and above all, your opinion.
3. **SUCCINCT.** Please keep your responses succinct and relevant to the questions.
4. **GIVE OTHERS A CHANCE.** Please be aware of your level of participation. We want everybody to have a chance to respond to the questions. So, if you are talking a lot, I may intervene and ask others to respond. And if you are not talking a lot, I may ask you to respond.
5. **INTERACT.** If you feel like you need to respond to others to understand or expand on the conversations, please feel free. You do not have to interact only with the facilitators.
6. **SPEAK UP.** We are digitally audio recording this session to ensure we capture everything appropriately, so please speak up.
7. **DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGY.** Please turn off cell phones and other technologies that can distract the group.

Now that we have introduced ourselves and laid out the ground rules, we would like you to introduce yourselves. Please state your first name, job title and responsibilities, years practicing, and practice area(s). Please also tell us something about yourself (e.g., humorous experience, meeting/knowing somebody famous, favorite quote, favorite travel destination, favorite food/dining experience, first day on the job, greatest learning moment/experience, and/or any general advice). But please keep it short.

QUESTION BLOCK A: USES AND REASONS FOR CREDENTIALS

1. Can you provide some examples of any credential(s) that are relevant to your facility?
 - a. What jobs do they align with?
2. When you think about the credentials that are most important in your facilities, what skills or attributes do they address, for example, safety, quality, or technical skills?
3. What credentials do you **require** to be held in your facility and why?
 - a. Do you require them for hiring?
 - b. Do you require them for promotion?
 - c. Does a pay differential result?

Prompt: Consider the type of credential, such as whether it's a certificate or a certification; whether its required by law; the skills the credential is supposed to represent; you have had good luck with other employees holding the credential; you have heard good things about the credential; someone else in your facility is requiring it.
4. What credentials do you **prefer** be held by employees in your facility, and why?

(Use same prompts as above if necessary)
5. What is it about any credential, or the skills it represents, that would make it required for employment, promotion, or salary differential?
6. Do you find that multiple credentials could be used for the same job in your facility?
 - a. Can you give some examples?
 - b. If there are multiple credentials for the same job, which one(s) do you think are the most important or useful, and why?
7. Are there certain types of credentials, such as certifications, certificates, or licenses that are more important than others?
 - a. Can you provide me some reasons and/or examples?
8. Are there credentials that are specific to your industry?
 - a. What are they? Can you provide some reasons and/or examples?
 - b. Do you think they are more important than more generic credentials? Why or why not?
9. What other factors, such as experience and/or education, do you think are as important as --or even more important --than holding a credential?
 - a. Can you provide me some reasons and/or examples?
10. If you have to choose between hiring an individual who had the right credential or credentials but little-to-no experience, or hiring someone with a lot of relevant experience but no credential, who would you hire?

- a. Can you provide me some reasons and/or examples?
11. What factors do you think best predict how competent an employee will be?
 12. What difference do credentials make in your facility?
 13. 95% of the responses from a recent survey that was conducted as part of this research study indicated that credentials make a difference, the top two reasons being (1) "credentials allow us to more easily identify qualified people" and (2) "individuals with credentials require less on the job training."
 - a. Do you agree with either or both of these statements? Why or why not?
 14. Do you think there is there less or more turnover with people holding credentials?
 - c. What does it mean to "be in a job longer"?
 15. What else would you add in thinking about the value of credentials?
Prompt: Some examples of value include monetary, promotions, obtaining job easier, recognition from peers, pursuing life-long learning, and so forth.

QUESTION BLOCK B: USES AND REASONS FOR NO CREDENTIALS

1. What do you think might be the reasons that you or others do not use credentials? For example the survey that was recently completed indicates that:
 - a. Nearly 20% of survey respondents said that facilities can't find individuals who hold relevant credentials. Why do you think that is?
 - b. One third of respondents said credentials are not relevant to the jobs in their facility. Why do you think that is?
 - c. 28% of respondents said credentials don't make any difference in an individuals' performance. Why do you think that is?
 - d. 38% of respondents said credentials don't make any difference in an individual's performance because they have to be retrained anyway.
 - I. When you say someone has to be retrained, what do you mean?
 - II. Are you retraining people for a specific need or for something more general?
 - e. 36% of respondents said it is more cost-effective to create their own credential or training program? Why would that be the case?
 - f. 56% of respondents say they conduct training (such as machining, blue-print reading, inspection, etc.) to fill unique training skills for individuals who ALREADY hold credentials. What are some of the unique technical skills that you train on for individuals who already hold credentials?
 - g. 61% of respondents say they conduct training (such as machining, blue-print reading, inspection, etc.) to fill unique training skills for individuals who DO NOT hold credentials. What are some of the unique technical skills that you train on for individuals who do not hold credentials?

QUESTION BLOCK C: IMPROVING CREDENTIALS

1. How could the usefulness of credentials be improved?
Prompt: You can talk about credentials in general or discuss specific credentials. We will not release the specific name of any specific credentials you want to comment on.
2. What skills do you find lacking in your facility?
 - a. What new credentials do you feel are needed to address the skills you find lacking?
 - b. If a new credential was created to address those skills you find lacking, how would you know the credential was successful at doing so?

Prompt: What improvements would you see in your current workers?

QUESTION BLOCK D: KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES

1. What knowledge, skills and abilities are manufacturers looking for when hiring?
2. What is the **MOST FREQUENT** reason that an individual is **NOT** successful in a manufacturing facility?
3. What is the **MOST IMPORTANT** reason that an individual is **NOT** successful in a manufacturing facility?
4. What is the relative importance of soft skills vs. technical skills?
Prompt: In other words, if a friend asked you what percentage of the positions should be soft skill and technical skills, is it 50/50 or 25/75?
 - o What is the reason for your response? Can you provide any examples?

QUESTION BLOCK E: OPTIONAL QUESTIONS

1. 43% of survey respondents reported that **credentials are needed to produce individuals with problem solving and critical thinking skills.**
 - a. How would you describe critical thinking?
 - i. Can you provide some reasons and/or examples?
 - b. How would you describe problem solving?
 - i. Can you provide some reasons and/or examples?
 - c. What specific aspects of critical thinking are important in your facility?
 - i. Can you provide some reasons and/or examples?
 - d. What specific aspects of problem solving are important in your facility?
 - i. Can you provide some reasons and/or examples?
2. What do you think is needed to produce an individual who can think critically and solve problems?

Notwithstanding Statement

This collection of information contains Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) requirements approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Notwithstanding any other provisions of the law, no person is required to respond to, nor shall any person be subject to a penalty for failure to comply with, a collection of information subject to the requirements of the PRA unless that collection of information displays a currently valid OMB control number. Public reporting burden for this collection is estimated to be **no more than 2 hours per response**, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to the National Institute of Standards and Technology, Attn: **Mary Ann Pacelli, Manager, Workforce Development at Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP), NIST Phone: (301) 975-4850; Email: mary.pacelli@nist.gov.**

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APPENDIX A. CONFIDENTIALITY AND AUDIO RECORDING AGREEMENT

Focus Group Confidentiality and Audio Recording Permission Form

1. Purpose of the Study

This focus group is an important part of a research study sponsored by the National Institute of Standards Technology (NIST) Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) to examine the quality, market value, and effectiveness of manufacturing credentials. Conducted in partnership with Workcred, an affiliate of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), the initiative will contribute to the body of knowledge for manufacturing-related skills credentials and identify skill gaps that could be filled by new credentials.

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2. Voluntary Participation

Participation in this focus group is voluntary. Participants are permitted to leave the focus group at any time. In addition, participants are not required to answer any of the questions.

3. Privacy

The privacy of focus group participants will be protected. Names will not be used in any report that is published. The content discussed and recorded will be kept strictly confidential. Focus group participants are asked to keep what we talk about private. A digital audio recording will be used when questions are asked and responses will be recorded. The recorder is being used to allow researchers to later analyze the responses to the questions.

4. Confidentiality

I understand that any information concerning the identities and information shared by people participating in this focus group is to be kept confidential at all times. The only exceptions to the above confidentiality policy are as follows, when:

- NIST and other affiliated partners are required to comply with court orders and properly issued subpoenas.
- NIST staff and other affiliated partners discuss confidential information about the focus group and individual interviews with other project staff who have signed confidentiality agreements.

5. Audiotape Permission

I have been told that the use of digital audio recording devices during the discussion will only occur if all participants agree. If I refuse to be digitally recorded, I understand I will no longer be a participant.

I agree to be audio taped ___Yes ___No

6. Researcher's Contact Information

If I have any additional questions about the focus group, I will contact Mary Ann Pacelli at (443) 716-8075 or mary.pacelli@nist.gov. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

Please print your name and sign below.

NAME

___ Yes, I agree to the terms described above in the focus group.

SIGNATURE

DATE