

# Practice Analyses for a Post-Pandemic World

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As our transition to the other side of this global pandemic progresses, we must recognize that organizations are emerging transformed. Credentialing organizations had to rapidly adjust modes and methods out of necessity, and many changes will be long-lasting or permanent.

Exam development tasks are no exception, particularly for large-scale efforts such as practice analyses. This altered post-pandemic environment has changed how practice analysis efforts are approached, and how they capture the role shifts that impact credential holders.

## Implications of a Virtual Shift

There have been significant conversations around the mode of exam development efforts, particularly the advantages and disadvantages of necessarily shifting committee work to a virtual format, and now considering a return to in-person workshops as it becomes safe to do so. Practice analysis, sometimes called job-task analysis, is a collection of studies to gather information and build evidence for a comprehensive outline of a role within a specific industry. It could be translated from an in-person mode to virtual, or even a blend of these two modes.

It is certainly possible to manage a full-scale practice analysis in a completely virtual format, and in fact, organizations were doing this well before the pandemic pressured a global transition to virtual modality. From a methodology standpoint, shifting practice analysis tasks to a more flexible format will often better fit participant schedules, organization budgets, and overall timelines. More virtual tasks may even shift project timelines forward, or at least make them more flexible.

## Participant Engagement

A virtual mode comes with challenges, particularly when asking participants to commit to significant efforts. Participants are engaging more than ever in virtual meetings, workshops, and conferences, and while this can increase their comfort with the meeting format, it also forces participants to independently prioritize commitments.

Shifting from in-person workshops to virtual further increases this risk because motivation for participation typically includes travel, networking, and the overall experience. With the loss of these factors, greater care must be taken to recognize volunteer efforts and provide even small tokens of appreciation. Organizations must revisit factors motivating participation and identify new ways of expressing gratitude for participation regardless of the format.

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*A **practice analysis** is a study designed to discover, understand, and describe what people need to know to successfully perform the tasks related to a specific role within an industry.*

*The **goal** of a practice analysis is to identify and verify the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for a particular level of competency in the defined area of practice.*

*Practice analysis **results** are utilized to form examination blueprints and content outlines that describe the content measured on a credentialing assessment.*

## Impacts to Survey Responses

The overall increased demands for virtual interactions that workers experienced for well over a year can quickly lead to virtual work fatigue. It may even impact participation as respondents attempt to shift away from their screens. Practice analysis surveys play a significant role in examining our industries, and achieving the necessary response rates can be challenging, even with the most engaged membership.

Therefore, thoughtful consideration should be taken prior to survey development and distribution to ensure necessary engagement. For example, an organization may take additional steps to personally connect with the candidate population and meet them in a convenient format. Communicating during industry conferences allows participants to ask questions in a face-to-face format. Further, communicating the survey purpose and the implications of outcomes highlights the importance of the practice analysis process. Research also shows that participants are more likely to complete the full survey if provided an estimated time for completion. Setting expectations for a virtual task is particularly important for participants already experiencing virtual task fatigue.

## Capturing Post-Pandemic Changes

Conducting practice analyses at regular intervals aims to capture industry changes, and shifting methodology to virtual formats may affect its ability to capture lasting changes to an area of practice. The pandemic affected industries in unanticipated ways, and credentialing programs must approach a practice analysis with the goal of properly capturing the practice's post-pandemic changes.

## Rethinking Surveys

The most common methodology for accredited programs is a blended model that includes developing an industry survey to identify and measure industry changes. A rigid survey structure will not be capable of capturing subtle or unexpected revisions. Revisiting the survey format may involve rethinking common approaches. For example, organizations may need to use scales beyond the typical frequency and importance scales and add sufficient write-in sections to capture unexpected changes and feedback.

Organizations may even consider launching an additional, small-scale survey in a primarily open-ended format to ask pointed questions on the influence of the pandemic and changes to the field. Further, ensure that there are enough demographic questions to determine that respondents are a representative sample of the industry along all parameters. Sampling a diverse perspective gives valuable insight to a practice analysis survey.

## Explore Information Gathering Techniques

Surveys are not the only practice analysis methodology and can be replaced with, or supplemented by, additional techniques such as focus groups. Focus groups are often underutilized yet can be valuable. Meeting with a small, agile group of participants allows the conversation to focus on a specific topic such as industry change. Focus groups can uncover details through deep exploration and may be used both within and supplemental to a full-scale practice analysis.

Methods utilized prior to the pandemic have been effective in outlining industry changes. As we consider the global shifts that were made when transitioning to a virtual mode, we must also consider how they may have impacted the methods themselves as well as participation in these activities. All methods should be carefully constructed in a manner that allows them to sufficiently capture industry changes and meet the participants as we transition together to a new post-pandemic environment.