

A CPDA™ Discussion

An Interview with Neil Constantine



In March 2021, Antonie Du Toit from the PPDM Association's Petroleum Data Management Certification Committee (PDMCC) sat down with Neil Constantine, SWORD, to learn about his experiences with the Certified Petroleum Data Analyst (CPDA™) program. Below Neil shares his thoughts.

At SWORD, and previously DataCo, you have been encouraging your staff to become Certified Petroleum Data Analysts (CPDA™) - to become certified through the PPDM Association. How many of your staff are now CPDA™ certified?

In Australia we've had four of our staff attain CPDA certification, with three of them achieving distinction. These staff have ranged from relative newcomers to the industry with two- or three-years' experience, through to senior consultants working in the industry for two decades or more. It's been great to have this range of ability tested by the certification process and has proved useful internally as we've been able to direct juniors towards this certification and provide appropriate mentoring.

Elsewhere within Sword I have been pushing my US and European peers to guide their staff towards CPDA and you can expect to see more sign-ups ASAP!

Why do you choose the CPDA as a particular certification for your staff to pursue?

Everyone is on board with the idea of life-long learning and CPDA forms a valuable part of that as a practice-based certification, combining the elements of 'what is the correct thing to do' with the 'how would I go about doing this.' There's no other certification that I am aware of that provides that combination in an O&G data management-focused context. Other certifications out there provide more of a test of recall than practical implementation, and in my role running a service-based organisation I value the aspects of the CPDA where practical implementation of knowledge is tested.

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More specifically, I recommend CPDA as from an individual perspective it helps determine areas where your knowledge is strong and areas where you may wish to focus efforts to either deepen your career in one direction or broaden out across capabilities. In my role, with responsibility for development and recruitment, it forms a useful benchmark of capability as I am looking to progress staff up their career with Sword.

As you know, the CPDA is comprised of eight pillars: Data Governance, Data Analysis, Data Quality Management, Data Security, Spatial Data, E&P Life Cycle processes, Communication and Master Data Management. Which elements of the CPDA would you rate as particularly relevant to SWORD?

I could list recent Sword activities that have contained elements of one or more of those pillars, so they are all relevant! You need a strong grounding in Data Governance for any data project – who are the stakeholders and decision makers, what particular controls do we need on data to ensure it is fit-for-purpose?

Data Analysis is a strong capability for us, ensuring data delivers upon its value proposition of helping users derive information in support of technical and business decisions, with this value secured through Data Quality Management and Master Data Management.

We do a lot of work involving business process mapping and defining appropriate data flows, where you need a full understanding of the E&P Life Cycle and to ensure Data Security is designed into your architecture and technology choices. Finally, Communication can't be neglected. Whilst regarded as a soft skill by many, the ability to describe why we do what we do and how this benefits the organizations we work for is key, particularly at a time when budgets are squeezed but demands on people and data are ever higher.

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Has there been an instance of when one of your CPDAs attributed a particular skill or knowledge applied in your workplace to something they learnt when studying for their CPDA? Or an instance of how one of your CPDAs have shown increased competence after being certified?

Two answers to this one. Sword's first CPDA was a senior consultant who took the certification as a 'test case' to define whether this was something that we wanted to include in our development recommendations. With twenty years of experience, it was unlikely he was going to learn too much new, but it certainly was a good revision of many things learnt and then forgotten!

For younger staff with less work experience, I'd say the key takeaway has been an improved sense of 'questioning' – why do we follow this process, does it improve our ability to manage data, does it meet our users' requirements? There are questions in the CPDA exam that challenge the student to answer what they would do in a particular situation when received data is at odds with what is already understood about a data entity. I think this approach of teaching 'how' to think rather than 'what' to think is really valuable and certainly what I would look for in Sword staff.

Have you considered taking the CPDA exam yourself?

Yes, I have, although thus far I've gone a different route with certification as part of a concerted effort across the Sword team to identify appropriate development pathways according to experience, interests, and career trajectory. Or, as my colleagues would have it, I'm scared of missing the benchmark of 'Distinction' that they've established!

The PPDM Association's Professional Data Management Certification Committee would like to thank Neil Constantine for taking the time to share his thoughts and experience with our CPDA™ program. Please visit www.ppdm.org/certification for more information.