EUCIP Driving the IT-Professional Competence in Norway

Renny Bakke Amundsen, CEO of EUCIP Norway

Norwegian Computer Society, Oslo, Norway

Abstract: EUCIP[1], the European Certification of Informatics Professionals, is a professional certification and competence development scheme aimed at IT practitioners and undergraduates. Like ECDL[2], EUCIP was developed by CEPIS[3], the Council of European Professional Informatics Societies. This article gives an overview of the experiences of the EUCIP Operator in Norway, EUCIP Norge[4], in targeting the corporate market through the use of collaborative partners.

Keywords: EUCIP, CEPIS, Certification, ICT Skill, ICT-Competence

1. Introduction

With a population of nearly 5 million in Norway, an estimated 100,000 people are IT-professionals and approximately 3,000 IT students. EUCIP Norge started with the corporate market as EUCIP would appeal to those who either lacked or had an out of date formal certification of IT-professional skills. The syllabus definition in colleges and universities is mainly driven by government which takes time to change. As a result, there has been good interest in EUCIP in the private sector, which should increase following the release of the full range of EUCIP Professional Profiles in late 2007.

2. Launching the EUCIP scheme in Norway:

As an early adopter of EUCIP, the initial work involved promoting the certification concept. Based on DND's (The Norwegian Computer Society[5])

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[1] www.eucip.com

[2] www.ecdl.com

[3] www.cepis.org

[4] www.eucip.no

[5] http://dataforeningen.no/FgdLS4k.ips

credibility as a vendor neutral IT-professional organisation, the society's network was used to promote the concept. This was achieved through:

- Meetings with CIOs or HR managers in companies within the computer industry as well as the user industry (where the highest amount of IT-professionals are working) and also in public service.
- Establishing a separate website http://www.eucip.no, to promote and explain the concept. As one of the most important marketing channels for DND is through mails and newsletters, it was important to have websites to refer to, instead of using extensive mails with attachments. In addition, EUCIP was also well presented on DND's own website[6].
- EUCIP was promoted at DND conferences and seminars and was introduced to some relevant work- or task- groups.
- DND formed a 100% owned Ltd. Company "EUCIP Norge" and its CEO presented EUCIP at relevant conferences hosted by DND or others.

With a geographically spread population, it was essential to authorise Test Centres in the major cities. EUCIP Norge went to the biggest ECDL Test Centres and was able to have 20 operating during the first year spread throughout the country.

3. Courseware to fill the competence gap:

Soon the demand for courseware appeared and EUCIP Norge found a courseware partner, **TISIP**[7]; a foundation cooperating with the Faculty of Information Technology and E-Learning at **Sør-Trøndelag University College**. They wrote text books (in Norwegian!) and E-learning programs for each module of the EUCIP Core syllabus.

   There are also ongoing discussions with universities and college universities about incorporating some of the 21 Professional vocational profiles in their bachelor and master programs. They will probably first be available for the corporate market.

4. Significant Norwegian IT-Organisations as Partners

The EUCIP concept is now fairly well known among IT professionals in Norway. However, EUCIP Norge hasn't yet reached critical mass. EUCIP Norge is currently in a process of inviting the largest employers of IT-professionals to a partnership programme. To date three Norwegian IT organizations, **DND**

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[6] http://dataforeningen.no/?module=Articles;action=ArticleFolder.publicOpenFolder;ID=748

[7] http://www.tisip.no/public/EUCIP/indexEUCIP.jsp

(Norwegian Computer Society), **IKT-Norge**[8] and **Abelia**[9], have agreed to support EUCIP as a general industry standard for professional skills.

In a press release in September 2007 they said: "*The majority of professions set standards which, when met, provide an indication of the skills and level of competence a worker possesses. You would probably be reluctant to let a person without a builder's certificate be the building contractor for your house. Even so, Norwegian businesses purchase IT services worth billions of kroner without requiring formal documentation of the competencies of the persons hired in to do the work. The industry clearly wishes to address this problem*".

"*This is a big step forward, for both the industry and the industry's customers*" says IKT-Norge's Secretary General, Per-Morten Hoff. "*Certainly there are a number of certification programs which document competence within specific products, but a general competency standard has been sorely missed.*"

Paul Chaffey, Managing Director of Abelia, also welcomes the adoption of the EUCIP standard in Norway. "*EUCIP is a common language for describing skills. We strongly recommend that our members start speaking this language*".

Geir Horn, former President of the Norwegian Computer Society, is pleased for the support from the other organizations. "*The Norwegian Computer Society aims to be the leading certification body for IT professionals in Norway, and this co-operation is a breakthrough in achieving this heady goal*".

Adoption of EUCIP implies significant cost reductions for the IT industry. Many companies have found it necessary to develop their own internal standards, and have found that they are of little value outside their own four walls.

"*In Software Innovation we used millions of kroner on internal systems for describing the competence of each of our co-workers, without this being worth anything to the co-worker on the day he or she left the company*" says Per Kveim, former chief executive of Software Innovation[10] and now Chairman of EUCIP Norge AS.

For those that employ IT workers or purchase IT services, EUCIP provides a more general view of competence than today's confusion of certifications for skills within specific products. A certification from EUCIP says much about a candidate's abilities, providing they fall in under one of the 21 job descriptions where EUCIP defines formal and practical competency requirements.

The Norwegian Computer Society has an exclusive license agreement for the programme in Norway and has established EUCIP Norge AS to administer the standard. IKT-Norge and Abelia acknowledge EUCIP as an industry standard and, through co-operation with the Norwegian Computer Society, are aiming to achieve the following goals:

- Recognize, document and protect industry standards for IT professionals

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[8] http://www.ikt-norge.no/Engslish-infopage/

[9] http://abelia.no/english/

[10] http://www.software-innovation.com/en/pages/default.aspx

- Further develop a process for mapping and measurement of IT professionals' competencies
- Develop goal-oriented training plans and stimulate professional development
- Promote knowledge of the EUCIP standard within the media and public authorities
- Create enthusiasm for EUCIP as a general competency standard within the membership of the co-operating organizations
- Assist recognized educational institutions in developing EUCIP training programmes by identifying the industry's needs for skills development

EUCIP Norge is optimistic about the EUCIP initiative following the positive responses received from those visited so far. Essential to this success is the fact that the full range of EUCIP Professional Profiles is now available. This will open further opportunities as these organisations will have an industry standard to use for competence mapping, measuring and development for their IT-professionals.

5. Establishing EUCIP Examination boards in Norway

Essential for providing EUCIP Professional certification is to establish Examination Boards for each of the 21 profiles. Assistant Professor, Ragnvald Sannes[11] at BI[12] Norwegian School of Management, and a member of the EUCIP Board of Directors, has taken a leading role in this.

Each of the Examination Boards has minimum three members: one from the academia, one in Norway with credibility for his or her skills relevant for the EUCIP Professional Profile - preferably one from The Norwegian Computer Society - and one with the same credibility from the user industry. So far, there has been no problem filling these positions as it is seen as an asset to be titled: *A Member of EUCIP Examination Board*.

EUCIP recognise formal education as well as working experience relevant for the applied profile and both behavioural and competence skills are measured. In this, candidates are also given credit for holding other (including vendors) certificates if they prove relevant competence. E.g. a candidate gets credit for a Cisco certificate if applying for EUCIP Network Administrator. Due to this, we have started mapping all other certificates for exact EUCIP points for each of the 21 profiles. Vendors now start to show interest in this and are of course eager to assure their certificates are properly mapped.

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[11] http://www.bi.no/Content/AcademicProfile____63388.aspx?ansattid=/fgl88001
[12] http://www.bi.no/Content/StartPageEnglish____56401.aspx

6. Early adopters for the EUCIP scheme in Norway

The first EUCIP Professional Certified as Business Analyst in Norway was Senior Consultant **David Thomstad** in **Ciber[13] Norway**. His substantial experience within ICT is highly recognised and he has a lot of other vendor- and vendor neutral certificates. He also has significant education, however from earlier time so he wanted an updated proof of his ICT professional skills. He says the rest of the Ciber's consultant staff with follow during the next years to give the company a head start in offering consultancies with highly recognised advisers in the Norwegian market.

Next out is **Devoteam daVinci[14]**, starting with four experienced consultants who will complete the EUCIP Certification programme in June. Two of which are applying for EUCIP Business Analyst, one for Security Adviser and one for Project Manager. daVinci wants a head start in the Norwegian market as well, but also like to see their colleges in the rest of Scandinavia as well as Europe on board.

Another interesting case is **Microsoft Norway[15]** as their Chief Security Advisor **Ole Tom Seierstad[16]** wants to focus on security in Norway in 2008. As a part of his campaign, he is sponsoring four highly skilled consultants from some of Microsoft Norway's partners for EUCIP Security Adviser certification. He would like to make them leading figures within security and says the best way to prove their skills is for them to obtain a neutral accreditation, in addition to their Microsoft certificates.

Next in line is Aker Kværner[17], a leading global provider of services related to design, construction, maintenance, modification, and operation of both large and small industrial facilities. **Stein Schjerve**, Manager - Application Management, in Aker Kværner Business Partner wants to try the scheme with a handful in their staff on different EUCIP profiles during 2008. What drew Schjerve's attention to EUCIP was the standard for categorizing ICT skills useful to define, measure and develop their staff worldwide. Aker Kværner is extremely project oriented and needs an efficient way to put together sufficient project teams with participants from their 35 branch offices all over the world.

These are examples of how candidates as well as their companies make use of EUCIP's ability to a neutral way of documenting IT-Professional skills. It's useful for candidates for proving and for their companies to have the staff categorised as a base for developing individual competence according to the markets need as well as being able to describe their competence when offering their services.

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[13] http://www.ciber-europe.com/

[14] http://www.davinci.no/index.php?lang=2

[15] http://www.microsoft.com/nb/no/default.aspx

[16] http://www.microsoft.com/norge/about/pr/portfolio.aspx?folder=/portfolio/Kontaktpersoner%20i%20Microsoft/Seierstad,%20Ole%20Tom

[17] http://www.akersolutions.com/internet/default.htm

7. Prelaunch of EUCIP IT-Administrator scheme in Norway

IT Administrator is a standalone certification programme that measures practical and theoretical knowledge of computer technicians. The programme is aimed at small to medium-sized companies, including educational institutes, which require in-house expertise in IT as well as individuals who wish to broaden their IT knowledge and be able to administer networks. This matches the company structure in a small country like Norway which means that it's perfect both for the industry and for public sector.

As a pilot, TISIP (se paragraph 3), will start a class for computer technicians and undergraduates in September this year enrolling about 50 students. The duration of the course will be one year and will cover all five modules from *PC Hardware* and *Operating Systems*, to *LAN and Network Services*, *Expert Network Use* as well as *IT Security*. Temporary employment services have shown great interest in this and The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration will be invited to enrol candidates as well.

8. Conclusions

This describes in short how The Norwegian Computer Society has decided to approach the Norwegian market. The most important was to achieve acceptance for EUCIP's way of categorising IT-Professional skills as well as the substantial way of measuring competence. In discussions with a lot of companies, even the biggest, it shows that they need and want a regime like this. They all admit it's important as a base to develop IT-Professional competence for an innovating market approach. They all have tried on individual basis to develop such a regime, and are interested in adopting this European standard as it is open and free with no risk to implement. The biggest and of course the multinational companies benefit the most as they work on a global market and need to describe, measure and develop their IT-skills on a worldwide basis.
By establishing EUCIP as a standard, we believe there will be a pull instead of a push for certifying candidates according to the vocational structure.