

**You need
performance, not just training**

Join the growing number of organizations that realize training alone is almost never an appropriate cure. Here's how to help your trainers become performance improvers, rather than keepers of the corporate schoolhouse

You need performance, not just training

by Geary A. Rummler

Most organizations are missing an opportunity to increase the contribution of their training functions tenfold. To realize this opportunity, top management must change its expectation and perception of the training function. Actually, this change in expectation and the resultant improvement in the contribution of the training function already has taken place in a number of major organizations.

To oversimplify a bit, you must view the training function not as a keeper of the corporate "schoolhouse" but as a "performance improver." This means changing the mission of the training function from "Number of employees trained" or "training programs produced" to "organization performance improved." Naturally, this will lead to a difference in how management (and the personnel function to which training usually reports directly) evaluates the training function.

Under the current mission of "employees trained," evaluation of the training function is some variant of "heads trained per training budget dollar." This, of course, emphasizes the volume of training conducted, not the value. Under the proposed mission of "organization performance improved," the evaluation will necessarily have to be a variant of "bottom-line contribution per training-budget dollar." This will

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correctly emphasize the worth of the training, not the amount.

Obviously, such a change in mission and evaluation of the training function will produce changes in how the training function operates. But the changes aren't going to be nearly as great as you might fear; many training professionals have been moving in this direction for the past five years. Much of the "technology" required for such a change (i.e., analysis of performance problems, measurement of impact on organization performance) already has been developed and adopted.

The key to the change is getting top management to:

1. Expect—even demand—something different and better from training; to view the training director as a business person who must show a return, not as the "dean" of the corporate schoolhouse, somehow exempt from evaluation because of

the "high' purpose" of his or her operation.

2. Let the training function operate in order to accomplish this new mission.

I know many training people who have been "bottom-line oriented" for years, but who have been limited in what they could do because of insufficient technology and strategies. However, it is now technologically possible in most cases. For you to comprehend the potential of your training group, you must understand something about this technology, which is generally known as *performance analysis*. The purpose of performance analysis is to view organization performance as a function of the individual *and* the job environment; any modification of performance has to deal with *both* parts. In other words, the human performer is only one of the following five components in a performance system: the job *situation*, or

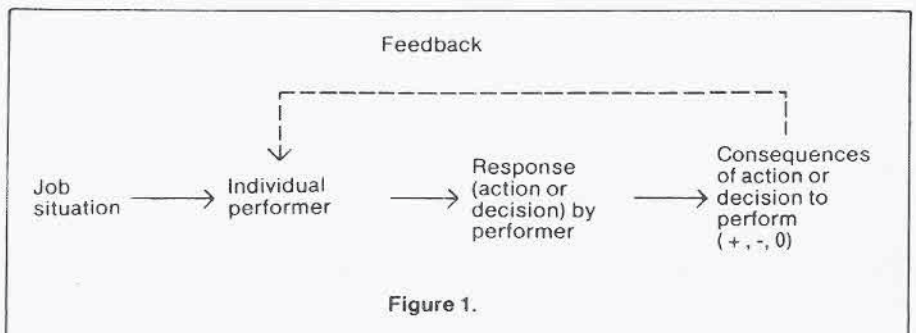


Figure 1.

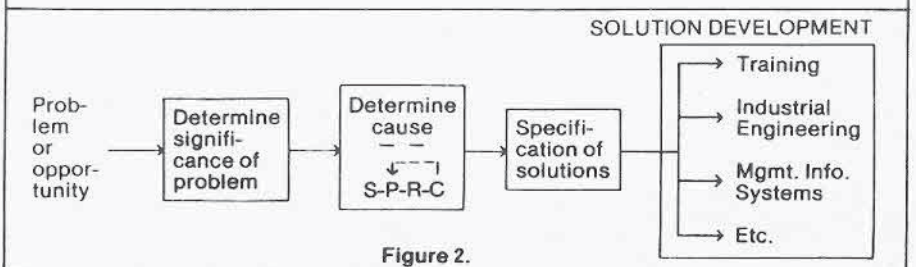


Figure 2.

occasion to perform; the *performer*; the *response* (action or decision) that is to occur; the *consequence* of that behavior to the performer; the *feedback* to the performer on the consequences of the behavior.

Schematically, the relationship of the five components can be seen in Figure 1.

In any job, there is a *situation* or occasion where a particular *performer* is expected to make a particular *response* or take some action which results in some *consequence* to the performer. That consequence may be considered positive, negative, or of little value by the performer. Finally, information on that consequence is *fed back* to the performer.

It is imperative to understand that poor performance (i.e., failure to see the desired response) may result from a breakdown in *any* of the five components of this performance system. For example:

1. The job situation—perhaps it isn't clear that the situation merits the desired action;

2. The performer—perhaps he doesn't know how to perform or is physically or mentally incapable of performing;

3. The response—perhaps the performer doesn't know he is supposed to make the response or doesn't know how, or it is physically impossible to make it, or the performer lacks the necessary tools or support;

4. The consequence—perhaps the consequence is punishing or nonexistent;

5. The feedback—the performer receives no information about his response—whether it was adequate or inadequate, and if inadequate, how to improve it.

A familiar training scenario

Using the "performance system," let's examine a typical request for training.

The marketing function of a bank has launched a major "sales" campaign in which the branch bank tellers will sell additional bank ser-

VICES, with particular emphasis on personal loans. After six months the campaign seems to have fizzled: The tellers aren't selling. Management concludes that the tellers don't know *how* to sell other bank services, so the training department is directed to retrain or conduct refresher training. In terms of the performance system, management has concluded that the desired action—selling—is not forthcoming because of some failure in the performer component, i.e., tellers don't know *how* to perform. In fact, the breakdown was in the consequence component.

First, there were immediate negative consequences to the tellers for errors in handling money, failure to balance at the end of the day, and taking bad checks. This, coupled with long lines, kept the tellers' mind on the essentials of their job. Second, there was no support from branch management for the personal-loan emphasis. The positive consequences for the branch manager (attracting attention downtown) were for building up a sizeable loan portfolio—which could be done quicker and cheaper by making a \$1 million loan to a small corporation; it takes a lot of \$3,000 personal loans (and considerable expense per loan) to equal \$1 million.

Given these two sets of consequences, 30 weeks of training in "selling services" would have negligible effect on personal loans as long as the *balance* of consequences itself was unchanged.

Had this particular training department utilized the principles of performance analysis, they would have:

1. Questioned the extent of the "problem" reported by management to determine the value of solving the problem (the cornerstone to performance-oriented training);

2. Determined the precise cause or causes of the performance discrepancy, using a framework such as the performance system; and

3. Corrected the cause or recommended the necessary corrections, should they be beyond their capability or organization charter.

Based on 10 years' experience with performance analysis, we can predict that: Training is *infrequently* an appropriate solution; training alone is almost never an appropriate solution: the cause of performance problems is almost always a combination of "faulty" components in the performance system.

A number of training organizations are aware of performance analysis and capable of applying it. However, the organization realities they face are usually: low tolerance for analysis ("You people aren't the R&D Department, you know"), and less tolerance for suggesting alternative solutions to training based on the analysis ("Are you the training department or not? I want training").

The result: The frustration of developing training to solve what is essentially a non-training "problem."

An organization shortcoming

In addition to the problems faced by training, the performance system points up a shortcoming in the organization of most institutions. In short, they are not organized to solve problems. An organization can't really deal with a "problem" until it is classified in *terms of some solution*, be it a *training, communications, wage-and-salary, labor-relations* or *engineering* problem.

Once classified, the problem can be referred to the appropriate department (or solution pigeonhole) for action. Frequently, the recipient department is reluctant to claim the problem, saying "we can have some impact, but this won't solve the problem." The result is a program which produces only marginal results. Why? Because the other faulty components in the performance system have gone undiagnosed and unattended. To

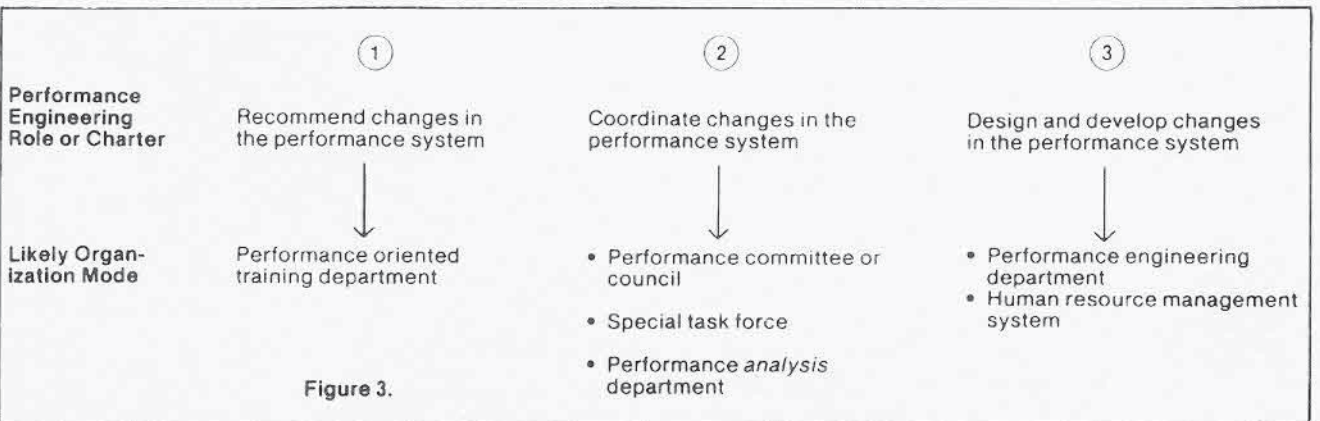


Figure 3.

repeat: Problems seldom result from a breakdown in *one* component of the performance system and seldom require a single solution.

The need

The concept of the performance system suggests the need to analyze all performance problems thoroughly, to diagnose *all causes* and, to put together comprehensive solution strategies. This, in turn, suggests two organizational needs. The first one is for some organizational entity—function or department—to be responsible for an accurate, objective analysis of organization performance problems and the specifications for correcting them. The general process followed by such a function might look like that

diagramed in Figure 2.

I call this process (and would be inclined to call the function) *performance engineering*, as it goes beyond training or any other single "solution."

The second organizational need suggested by the performance system is that of preparing managers to diagnose or troubleshoot human-performance problems in order to enhance the communication between managers and the "performance engineering" function.

As noted earlier, a number of major organizations are moving toward some form of performance engineering or performance oriented training. Their efforts have assumed a continuum of forms like those diagramed in Figure 3.

Training department as performance department

If you, as management, want more from your training function, shift the focus from training programs to improved organization performance. Ultimately, the training function should become the foundation for the performance-engineering department. The people in training are philosophically oriented toward improving human performance and, in many cases, already possess the required basic analysis skills.

Unquestionably, the most critical change required to improve training begins when you *demand improved performance* for your training dollar. Only then can the training people do the professional job of performance analysis that is required. ■