Putting Performance First

PROJECT DEFINITION PHASE

PERFORMANCE-BASED TRAINING BEST PRACTICES

- If the client request is a "given" training solution, confirm that it's truly a skills, knowledge, and/or attitude (S/K/A) shortfall.
- Ask for the business case (including measurable business results) that's driving this project/solution, and align all project activities to it.
- Create the project plan to: 1) include dialogue with stakeholders about required results; and 2) involve expert and average performers in review cycles.
- Immerse yourself in the business — make sure you're intimate with the organization's culture, mission, vision, operating strategies, business goals (especially the department's goals), products/services, workflow, past performance metrics, market conditions, etc.
- Keep your eyes and ears open — learn more about employee suggestion programs, customer surveys, supplier requests and complaints, and anything else that's happening in the business around you.

PERFORMANCE-BASED NON-TRAINING BEST PRACTICES

- If there's no clearly defined business case, ask to help develop the case (including measurable business results) that's driving this project/solution.
- If improved performance requires more than just new S/K/A, share one or more obvious non-training interventions.
- Help the client: 1) determine what performance data would be most useful to collect (level of detail and frequency); 2) find a way to begin collecting that data; and 3) create the data collection tools and process.
- Capture the trigger event(s) that initiated the project — inadequate performance, introduction of something new (process, system, employee, etc.), or increased expectations.
- Propose doing a performance analysis for a clearly defined problem (or opportunity) that identifies: 1) the desired performance situation and the actual situation; 2) the gap or difference between the actual and desired performance; 3) who's affected by the performance gap; 4) when/where the performance gap first occurred or is expected to begin; 5) when/where the symptoms/consequences of the gap were first noticed; 6) what the performance gap costs the organization; and 7) the impact of the performance gap.
- Propose doing a performance cause analysis that identifies if performers: 1) see the results of what they do; 2) are rewarded or provided with incentives for performing as desired; 3) are penalized for achieving desired results; 4) have the capacity to do the job; 5) are given the data, information, and feedback they need to perform at the time they need it; and 6) have the support tools and resources they need.
- Suggest moving the organization or department to begin using a balanced scorecard, which identifies areas to measure with corresponding success indicators.
- Do what you can, given the circumstances — you'll find there are interim, non-training solutions that allow you to proceed with a modest, but workable, beginning.

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ANALYSIS PHASE

PERFORMANCE-BASED TRAINING BEST PRACTICES

- Question stakeholders on the business case for training.
- Ask what the desired performance looks like: 1) be able to articulate the performance gap and desired results from your training perspective; and 2) deliberately link all proposed employee skill, knowledge, attitude (S/K/A) workplace behaviors to key business processes.
- Interview and observe exemplars to identify the desired state, rather than relying solely on input from subject matter experts.
- Identify potential obstacles to attaining the desired state.
- Identify the line of sight between business goals, key performance results, critical actions, and S/K/A.
- Become a better observer of the entire performance arena, not just the actual tasks the learner needs to perform to complete the job; understand the dynamic interaction of your training solution with the other elements of the organizational system; and realize that your training doesn't exist in a vacuum but is part of a larger system.
- Use good questioning skills when gathering data and information.

PERFORMANCE-BASED NON-TRAINING BEST PRACTICES

- Question stakeholders on the business case and/or pain points.
- Observe average performance to define the current state, not only for S/K/A deficiencies, but also for issues with the environment, incentives, data flow, equipment, employee abilities, and/or motivation.
- Document non-training performance findings in the analysis report and make recommendations for non-training solutions.
- Involve non-training managers, who control hiring, benefits, finances, business operations, quality control, engineering, management, and other functions relevant to the business, in your ISD efforts.
- Review performance measures already available in corporate documents like annual reports, audits, benchmarking, sales reports, error reports, etc.
- If your analysis shows the performance problem isn't just a S/K/A shortfall, propose doing a detailed cause analysis to pin down the root causes of the gap between the desired and existing performance.
- Define performance at all three levels — worker, work, and workplace — and design/develop the new S/K/A intervention to harmonize with all three; make sure to: 1) use financial, customer, internal business process, and learning and growth measures; and 2) include a mix of measures of past performance and targets/goals of initiatives that will drive future performance.
- Don't save evaluation until the last phase of the project — begin evaluation during problem or opportunity identification by: 1) collecting pre-performance data to use in comparison with post-performance data; 2) documenting performers' attitudes going into the intervention (positive or reluctant); 3) conducting pre-assessment of S/K/A to compare with post-learning scores; and 4) accurately documenting the desired impact on the organization to map against the actual impact.

Putting Performance First

DESIGN PHASE

PERFORMANCE-BASED TRAINING BEST PRACTICES

- Write three-part, performance-based learning objectives.
- Engineer training to address the skill, knowledge, attitude (S/K/A) shortfalls that link to critical actions, key performance results, and business goals.
- Select a variety of just-in-time, reality-based instructional strategies, with real-time feedback, to simulate "real-world" performance.
- Build prototypes and conduct reviews with both exemplars and average performers to validate your design.
- Recommend the lowest-cost training solution to solve the performance problem (saving money to spend on non-training solutions).
- Build what not to do into your training, based on potential obstacles to the desired performance identified in the Analysis Phase.
- Concentrate training time on filling the gap between what should be and what is rather than on the S/K/A already mastered.
- Determine the level of performance needed to improve the organization's well-being — performance is maximized when people aren't overwhelmed with new information, when they can relate new S/K/A to their work, and when they can apply the learning to a problem on the job immediately (the four Js: just enough, just in time, just the right content, for just the right people).
- Stay customer focused in order to reach business goals — no matter how instructionally sound, interactive, engaging, high-tech, or fun your training is, it will have no value to the company unless it helps learners improve company performance.
- Make sure the solution is targeted to produce results that align with the time, effort, and resources being invested, as well as the time people spend doing this performance.

PERFORMANCE-BASED NON-TRAINING BEST PRACTICES

- Include possible non-training solutions, with rationale and supporting data, as an addendum to your design document.
- During design meetings and in the design document, support your S/K/A intervention(s) by recommending additional non-training interventions to: 1) establish performance, maintain the established performance, or extinguish incorrect performance; 2) address a critical root cause (or two); 3) relate to a specific target group; 4) have associated cost, benefits, and obstacles; and 5) be the least disruptive to the organization's cultural norms and values.
- Suggest convening a design team for creating non-training interventions: 1) use a variety of internal and external experts to ensure covering the range of S/K/A needed to work on the various performance problems/solutions; and 2) involve managers in linking your ISD work to the greater strategic good of the company.
- Work with the larger design team, if possible, and: 1) put together the "right" development team; 2) map out the development effort; 3) make prototypes of the materials tied directly to immediate business results; 4) test them with clients, managers, decision makers, and subject matter experts; 5) change the development plan based on actual prototype use; and 6) begin actual development after taking care of the revision to the overall development plan.
- Determine stakeholder concerns toward each intervention you're suggesting and what it will take to get buy-in — look for a sponsor who has the power to validate change within the organization, is well respected and believes in the suggested change, has the time to support the entire change/implementation effort, and is someone you're comfortable working with.
- Invest a little extra time to create an action plan that suggests the major tasks needed for other, non-training interventions, the resources required to implement each intervention, and a plan for incorporating stakeholder support.
- Begin considering solutions that focus on systems, structure, management practices, organizational performance, as well as the external environment.
- Design all non-training solutions to fit the four Js: just enough, just in time, just the right content, for just the right people.

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DEVELOPMENT PHASE

PERFORMANCE-BASED TRAINING BEST PRACTICES

- Invest time and resources to build high-performance training that: 1) is directed to task-based, observable skills; 2) includes rich activities to engage learners and improve performance (not just build skill, knowledge, attitude [S/K/A]); and 3) allows learners to sustain improved performance over time.
- Develop training with a systems view of performance in the organization by: 1) making learners aware of the systemic factors that will hinder or facilitate effective performance; and 2) integrating learning solutions with work processes.
- Conduct reviews with both exemplars and average performers and be willing to suggest changes to the design of your training to ensure content and practice are driving to desired performance
- Develop practice and evaluation strategies to: 1) improve performance, not blame or punish, by assuring learners the measures aren't being used to make judgments; and 2) use the data only to make changes to the training process or to plan for additional activities that will make a difference in the performance.
- Provide opportunities, before, during, and after the training event, where supervisors, peers, and subordinates can help trainees learn and apply the new learning/performance.
- Ensure training is piloted as designed (right audience, right amount of time, specified environment).

PERFORMANCE-BASED NON-TRAINING BEST PRACTICES

- Add mentoring programs, on-the-job coaching, job aids, etc. to just-in-time formal/informal training.
- Keep solutions simple, as non-disruptive as possible, communicative (allow a forum for people to vent resistance), adaptable, and just in time.
- Be creative in the evaluation review cycle for any non-training solutions being developed: 1) determine what individuals and groups are the best to help evaluate pieces and parts as you develop them; 2) decide who's best to participate in more systemic reviews during development; and 3) try to involve everyone who may be impacted by the change.
- Use training results to go back to stakeholders to suggest additional non-training enhancements.
- Use face time with stakeholders during the pilot to suggest additional non-training interventions.
- Use pilot results to revisit/validate the business case and performance gap; raise the flag if what you're developing isn't/won't narrow or eliminate the performance gap.
- When multiple solutions are needed, suggest creating a decision-making body to oversee development in order to keep the project on course, oversee follow-up efforts, select and direct all resources, manage the budget, revise timelines, etc.
- Consider adding an external consultant to the team — someone to advocate for the solutions and see them through to acceptance by decision makers while the internal consultant acts as the change agent and guides the project through the various channels and personnel.
- Quickly establish a place among the stakeholders — a performance specialist who is perceived as a part of the effort and the people involved with the project is much more likely to be accepted by the employees or performers, their managers, the top-level sponsor(s), and others who have influence on the project.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

PERFORMANCE-BASED TRAINING BEST PRACTICES

- Select and prepare the “right” trainers to deliver instruction the way it was designed.
- Install and validate accessibility and functionality of e-learning to ensure the training is working as designed.
- If you developed a blended solution, ensure that all components are delivered as designed.
- Be prepared to deal with resistance to new performance that surfaces during the implementation. Report on this resistance to stakeholders, important decision makers, and managers.
- Disseminate your reports to managers throughout the company who are responsible for the input, process, or output parts of the work process your training is addressing.
- Throughout implementation, stay in touch with the feelings and attitudes of important players by: 1) maintaining regular communication; 2) keeping them informed of new changes and developments; and 3) letting them know that you’re interested in their continued feedback.
- Be diligent in your training project management process by: 1) creating a robust implementation plan; 2) replicating and distributing all materials; 3) preparing trainers; and 4) providing implementation and maintenance support before, during, and after the training.
- Conduct an evaluation several months after the program is implemented to test the effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and value of the training over time. Be ready to adjust your training materials to align with your findings.

PERFORMANCE-BASED NON-TRAINING BEST PRACTICES

- Install and validate accessibility and functionality of any virtual non-training resources.
- Include stakeholders in updates to discuss the implementation and to continue suggesting non-training solutions.
- Watch how people in the organization respond to the intervention — is it easy to implement? Is it similar to past practice? Can users easily modify it? Does it have any social impact?
- Plan a large-scale, systemic implementation to look for: 1) synchronization between your intervention and the organization’s culture; 2) support for specific items in the strategic plan; and 3) any new negative external forces.
- Partner with the right people to properly implement the interventions — look for business partners in the HR department, SMEs, managers, trainers, other consultants who specialize in compensation, management development, etc.
- Along with your stakeholders and clients, become a champion of the change by helping to: 1) develop a strong communication plan to supplement the launch interventions; 2) emphasize the strengths of the intervention and its changes; 3) acknowledge its weaknesses; and 4) provide rewards, incentives, feedback loops, status reports, etc.
- Provide an ongoing status report that includes how well the non-training solution is working, the effect on the target group, and any modifications made to the original plan to address new concerns.
- Be diligent in your non-training project management process by: 1) creating a robust implementation plan; 2) replicating and distributing all materials; 3) preparing implementers; and 4) providing implementation and maintenance support before, during, and after the implementation.

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EVALUATION PHASE

PERFORMANCE-BASED TRAINING BEST PRACTICES

- Base your evaluation strategy on business metrics. Focus on measurable results and try to collect at least three levels of data.
- Design the evaluation to truly measure the performance the learning was designed to improve. Assess the training according to its effect on performance; begin using Kirkpatrick's Evaluation Level 3 (Behavior) and Level 4 (Results) strategies.
- Involve input from internal and external customers in deciding what to measure and how to measure it. This may be more valuable to achieving performance than the actual collected data.
- Teach trainees how to assess their own learning and transfer it to their daily job performance.
- Collect and report data that are valuable to your unique customer groups — employee interviews and focus group results for line managers versus production and financial data for senior executives.
- Choose the measurement method only after you decide what needs to be measured. The appropriateness of the method depends on what kind of data are needed, sources of the data, circumstances for collecting the data, and how the data will be used.
- Report your evaluation findings, so your customers can understand them and act on their implications. Keep it simple, relate it to the goals that are important to the particular audience, and recommend what should be done about the results.
- Conduct a postmortem review of an unsuccessful ISD project to find out what went wrong — to learn from your mistakes, to avoid future glitches, but most importantly, to be able to open the door to putting performance first.
- Try seeking out evidence that: 1) transfer of your training is having an impact on what's causing the performance gap; 2) improvement is being measured; and 3) stakeholders have established ownership of the training objectives.

PERFORMANCE-BASED NON-TRAINING BEST PRACTICES

- Base the non-training evaluation strategy on original business metrics to determine how well the intervention met its desired outcome. Be sure to measure against valid, objective business results (10% increase in employee retention, not an increase in employee morale).
- Document lessons learned to see if/why/how the gap was narrowed and one or more business goals that were reached. Share with everyone who will listen.
- Include quantitative and qualitative success indicators, including customers, business processes, knowledge, and growth.
- Champion performance improvement efforts/successes: 1) talk to performers, management, and the company's customers and suppliers about their views of the solutions; 2) share your results at the micro, macro, and even mega levels, especially in difficult economic times; 3) suggest that your satisfied customers endorse your services through various corporate communications channels; and 4) use your results to sell your services further or to learn valuable lessons from mistakes you may have made.
- Observe the newly-trained, average performers to determine whether they're using the new skills, knowledge, resources, or tools you supplied during the training and non-training interventions; report to key stakeholders, important decision makers, and/or managers what other obstacles are still impeding the desired performance.
- Suggest evaluating the degree to which: 1) the intervention accomplished predetermined, quantifiable results; 2) the results matched the intended effect; 3) the gap between the desired and actual performance has closed; 4) organizational needs were fulfilled; and 5) the corporate culture adopted the intervention — being sure to report both quantitative and qualitative, positive and negative effects.

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