

PRH Consulting: Building Capability (Dec 2009) [Feb 2010 Msg](#)



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February 2010 v6no1

Building Capability **Process and Capability**

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Dear Peter



Greetings!

By now 2010 is probably well underway for you. If you live in the Midwest, we are still looking forward to more snow and minimal daylight. Unfortunately, we didn't distribute a January issue -- so, even though it is a little late, I'd like to wish you a 2010 that is interesting, challenging (in a good way), and prosperous.

As we promised in our last issue, we are changing our quarterly newsletter to a monthly email. Throughout this year we are planning to focus on process and capability. Processes form the basis of performance and capabilities are pre-requisites for performance.

Process mapping has been around a long time but it seemed to have hit a high point when TQM was the big buzz (maybe, early 90's). We have seen how people work with processes in a number of different environments and there are things that work well and things that are less effective.

This issue also includes a mild rant about a "mini-fad" that seems to be percolating in the training field -- an over-emphasis on virtual environments. There may be future benefits on the horizon but they aren't within reach for most clients from a cost or cycle time perspective. Fun...maybe.

Having just finished our second rapid CBT program, we are planning to make a few modules available for downloading from our website for the benefit of clients and colleagues. These are still in development but we hope to get the first one out before summer.

We are catching our breath after finishing a very busy three-month period and getting ready for the ISPI conference in San Francisco. But we have plenty of capacity, so if you have some performance improvement needs, please get in touch.

Quick Links

[PRH Consulting Website](#)

[PRH Consulting Blog](#)

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Network of Strength

Again this year on Mother's Day, PRH Consulting will be participating in the Network of Strength walk for breast cancer research.



If you are going to be in Chicago on May 9, why not join us at Grant Park at 6:30am? (No worries, there is a Starbucks right across the street!)

Or, participate in one of the other 13 cities. Or participate on the virtual walk. Learn more about the event at

Pete

Peter R. Hybert, CPT

Principal Consultant

www.networkofstrength.org

Look for Team Faith.

Next Issue

We are shooting for an issue every month...we'll continue our focus on process and capability, as well as other relevant topics related to building and supporting human performance. Some topics we have on deck include

- Are you competent? How would you know?
- Supporting new product development
- Is your performance organization more like an army or a group of lone rangers?
- Rant: Is compliance with a standard process equivalent to mastery performance?
- And more...

And for additional content, check out the Library on our website.



Twittering, etc.



We are on Twitter (*though, we are not yet sure why*)

Chirp with us: @Prhconsulting

Related Information

For an article on new products and product support, check out the vintage article "Managing the Interaction of People with Your Product," by Peter R. Hybert, published in Quality Progress (July 1994).

Or check out how we defined a structured set of capabilities required by a large engineering organization.

For general background on our capabilities model, review the two-issue spread from October

Process

Do You Know the Drill?

You can often tell when someone "knows what he/she is doing." Usually, it means they know what tasks to perform, what comes next, what might happen, and what to do if it does. Basically, they know the process. Ultimately, in an organization you want people to know the process. Yet, it seems to be a challenge for many. Often, if you ask, performers can't describe the big steps without bogging down in miscellaneous details. Or, the tools and references are confusing. Recently, we had a project where we referred to a reference document to complete a training exercise. But there was no single description of the process...just lots of supporting information arranged by topic! (*We had to stop and define the process...and found that there were some gaps in the reference materials...*)

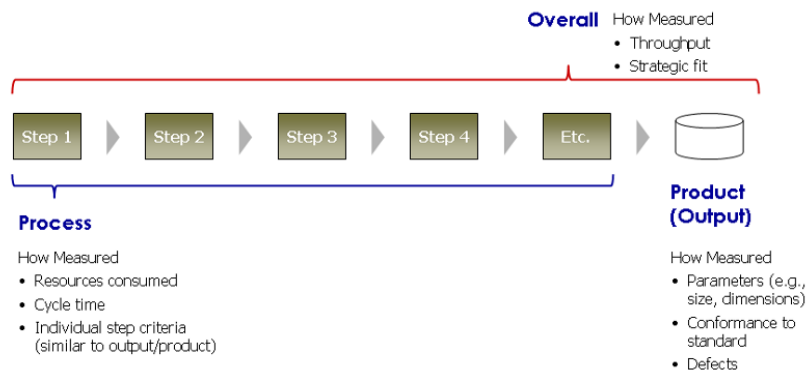
Everything is a Process (Or a Collection of Processes)

All work can ultimately be boiled down to a series of steps to produce an output. The process can be very large scale, such as a product development process spanning multiple years, or very transactional, such as the steps needed to complete a call in a call center. Clearly these levels of detail can exist in the same process -- you can drill into any large process and find smaller steps almost ad infinitum.

Before you can do much to manage or improve results in a work setting, you need to understand what that work is. The process is really the core of the work. Once you understand the process, you can communicate and standardize it. You can define key parameters to measure and track in order to manage quality and production volume. You can identify opportunities for improving it by looking for non-value-adding operations, bottlenecks, or even by re-designing the whole thing. You can identify where tools and references are needed. And you can identify the capabilities needed to perform the process and build them into training and assessment activities.

But processes are abstract...or at least they are not physical objects. They are really a construct that people create to use as a reference for dealing with something we can't actually point to. To communicate about or work on a process, you first need to represent it on paper (or pixels). Below is a very simple model containing the key elements to think about when working on a process.

We use the components of the model to clarify key process characteristics, especially measurements. It may seem obvious, but we often see process measures that are a mixed bag of output and process measures and often they are at inconsistent levels.



We will have more about processes in future issues. But below are a starter list of things we think are important regarding processes.

Start with the Output

It is always a good idea whenever you want to work on a process to define the output and relevant characteristics. Usually, the starting point

2007 and July 2008.

Or, just visit our online library for a range of information.

Discuss Amongst Yourselves...

How long does it take to become an expert?



For the answer, visit our blog.

Pass it On

It's easy to forward this newsletter to interested colleagues -- just click the "forward" link at the bottom!

should be the end user of the output. What do they do with it? Why do they need/want one? What is important to them?

It doesn't surprise us anymore that many people do their jobs well without a clear definition of the output and what is important about it. Usually, it is because it has become second nature to them. But for improvement or training, it is important to look closely and **make explicit** the characteristics that are important. Is it better to deliver quickly or to deliver a custom output? And, the closer you look, the more you see. You might decide it is important that your car "go fast." But, does that mean good acceleration or high top speed? And, while we are thinking about it, how much gas mileage are you willing to give up to get that result?

We think about all process work as a form of engineering. You need to define requirements and then design or modify the process to meet the most important ones.

Most Work has an Inherent Process

Once you know the output, you can look at the steps needed to generate it. It is interesting to note that most work has sort of an inherent process. That is, it is difficult to make fundamental changes. Usually, innovations involve ways of eliminating waste and "cutting to the chase" of the inherent process.

Sometimes tools can help. Sometimes organizational changes can help. Since we are human performance experts, we know that complicated and difficult processes have more opportunities for failure (or at least defects). We try to keep the ultimate performance in focus and continually ask "why" and "what if" to see if there is a way to simplify things to make them easier to do and to learn.

Process Support

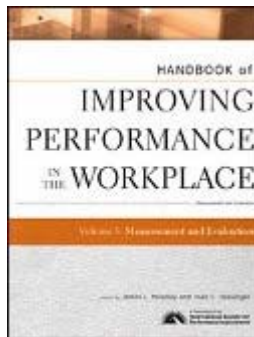
Pretty much everything needed to support a process (including training, infoware, tools, role design) depends on the work but they can, and do, influence each other. We just completed a project where the marketing people used the issues that arose during the training design/development process to inform what they would actually sell. Things that were going to be difficult to learn would be a likely cause of mistakes and extra cost in the field. If they weren't important to the customer, or were going to be prohibitively expensive (to cover the risk) then maybe, they would be better off just not offering them.

Resources

There are a number of books in the market on defining requirements (check out "QFD") and process design. Our all time favorite is the classic ["Improving Performance: Managing the White Space on the Organization Chart"](#) by the late Dr. Geary Rummler and Alan Brache.

Handbook of Improving Performance in the Workplace

Volume 3: Measurement and Evaluation



It's finally out! ISPI recently partnered with Pfeiffer to produce a whopping three-volume set of textbooks on performance improvement. It isn't inexpensive but you get a lot for your money.

Our favorite is Volume 3: Measurement and Evaluation...ok, we admit it, because Pete contributed one of the chapters "Testing Strategies." The main focus of Pete's chapter is on why and how you should use performance testing wherever you can.

Pete found the inside look at the process for getting a book written and published to be interesting...but his role was really pretty easy. After the chapter was written, there was the usual editing "back and forth." But getting the entire set together, managing the size of each volume, and getting it

printed was probably much more difficult for the editors than it sounds. Pete was invited by Jim Moseley to contribute to the book based on a presentation he made during the ISPI conference in the spring of 2007. The chapter was primarily written between May and October of 2008. But, the books didn't become available until December 2009! So, if you are planning on writing a book, our advice is to start now.

The "*Improving Performance in the Workplace*" series is available through [ISPI's bookstore](#).

Capability Management

Though we have experience with process improvement and performance measurement, we are most often brought in to figure out and build training, related performance support tools, and infoware. After we start by defining the performance and the relevant requirements, we most often next analyze the capabilities required to execute it. These include knowledge, skills, and traits. We often include information and tools as separate categories because they are so important to performance. Also, because the existence of information and tools has a big effect on the capability requirements for performers.

The reality for most performances is that, even for fairly "simple" work, there is usually a long list of capabilities needed to perform it. Sometimes people shy away from developing and organizing the list of capabilities but we think it is important to get them on paper (or pixels). If you can't name or define the key capabilities needed to perform, you certainly can't develop or manage them. And, the list isn't infinite...sooner or later you do reach the end of the list.

Even better though, we use a structure (a capability architecture) to organize the capabilities so that you can choose the level of detail you want to focus on at any one time, while still having the detail available when you need it. (Sort of like folders and double-clicking when you are using your computer.) Ultimately, we believe that organizations need to be able to point to specific capabilities that are strategically important, that are needed for specific roles or tasks, and that need to be created. In short, organizations will need to be able to manage their capability inventory in the same way they manage other assets today -- they need to define them, keep track of them, plan for obtaining them, and maintain them.

For more information on how we approach capabilities, you could check a couple of old issues of our newsletter in our [Library](#). Or see the other articles mentioned above under "Related Information." Or, stay tuned for our next email.

Can you connect processes to roles to capability requirements? Would it be a good way to align your HR systems?

Give us a call...we have some ideas.

 **PRH Consulting Inc.**

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ISPI Spring Conference

April in San Francisco

Once again we are planning to participate in the ISPI spring conference. Once again it is being held in San Francisco. Probably, once again we will be too busy keeping up with projects back home to enjoy the opportunities for fun...but who knows? Maybe this year will be different.

If you plan on participating, block out **April 19-22** and get your [registration](#) in. If you are there, we invite you to visit the "Chat and Chew" (a variation on the Crackerbarrel). It is a quick friendly way to learn some new stuff and make contacts. Pete and Dottie Soelke (a colleague and frequent collaborator) will be hosting a table to share web-based collaboration tools. They have presented this at a couple of Chicago training events and it will also be the subject of an ISPI Skillcast in June. If you go to the Chat and Chew, you will get the short version but for no charge (plus, food is involved).



Somehow, through Murphy's law of scheduling, Pete and Dottie also have a 90-minute presentation *immediately following* the "Chat and Chew." The session will be an overview of a project in which PRH Consulting partnered with a client to design and build a 4-week training program for pharmaceutical operations incorporating on-the-job performance testing within a ninety-day development project timeframe. The program was effective too -- the client's financial organization calculated a 44% ROI over the first two years, not including projected loss avoidance.

Our point of view is that, if you can only be at the conference for one-day, make it Wednesday, 4/21! But, we really recommend the entire conference -- you'll learn a lot about the state-of-the-art from a wide range of experienced practitioners. And, you have the Golden Gate Bridge, dim sum, cable cars...go on...cash in those frequent flier points.

Rant: Substance First Please!

Second Life: A Tool for Training?

OK, we can admit that computer games are a little bit of a generational thing. In other words, younger people tend to like them more than older people. Of course there are exceptions -- Pete remembers working with a client who was over sixty years old and was an avid "World of Warcraft" player. He also played tennis every week...may not represent the average sixty-year old. But Pete's son Ian has repeatedly failed to get Pete interested in any number of on-line games to the point where Ian has given up. (Some of this might be related to Pete's inability to make even marginal progress in figuring out how to operate his on-line character before getting it killed. But, the generational reason sounds more scientific.)

Recently though, intrigued by the full-centerfold in ASTD's July '09 issue of "*T+D*" (if you've never seen it, it is not the kind of centerfold you might initially think it is) Pete went online with Ian to view a presentation about Second Life by Anders Gronstedt. A particular favorite quote? **Q:** How would you explain the power of Second Life...to a skeptical CEO. **A:** "I don't waste my time with skeptical CEOs."

We've been hearing alot about Second Life as an up and coming tool for training. Our assumption going in was that it was a tool for creating a virtual world that characters can act within. We expected to see examples of training simulations -- maybe a store where the avatar has to process various customer transactions. Or, maybe some kind of manufacturing plant where the operator avatar monitors various gauges and indicator lights and makes decisions or something. Maybe even a simulation where one avatar plays a manager and another plays an employee and they simulate a coaching meeting. Not at all what we saw.

In fact, the presentation was actually a virtual meeting done in Second Life. We saw a bunch of crazy characters (including a facilitator avatar with a parrot on his shoulder) just talking in a virtual room. Most of the

discussion was about how much time it takes to build even the most rudimentary virtual environment. (Ian corroborated this -- on his previous job he spent a week trying to create an environment in Second Life. Even his bosses, Red-Bull-guzzling viral-marketing Gen Y'ers who would normally love this kind of thing, lost patience with it before it went anywhere.)



Most frustrating was that it was as bad or worse a meeting as any "RL" (that is "real life") meeting anyone has ever been in...and there weren't even any bagels! There was no agenda, there were huge blocks of dead time, there were few (if any) actionable ideas. At one point, the facilitator's cellphone rang and he had the conversation anyway (probably not realizing that he wasn't muted)!

All this further reinforced the importance of the basics for any training or meeting. Have a business purpose. Have an agenda. Have a process for getting through that agenda. Engage the audience. Focus on what people need to *do*, not what you want to tell them or talk about. Sure it is fun doing something new and having a virtual meeting can be an initial draw. But there has to be a payoff if you want people to ever come back. You need to really get something done!

Our take is that Second Life is, in fact, pretty cool. But it is still in its adolescence. If your company is planning to invest in this for training, you should go in with plenty of time and money. It *may* pay off in the future. Or, wait until it gets more commercialized, like computer-based training has with simple authoring software that a busy person can quickly figure out and use.

If you have the time, you can check out some YouTube videos yourself. There is a sample conference about virtual environments. And there is a semi-commercial done on the benefits of using Second Life for training. To be fair, there are even some examples of work environment simulations.

Unfortunately, we couldn't find a working link to "*Building Experiences, Not Banquet Halls*," the video we originally watched. We are pretty sure they deleted it or made it more business-friendly.

The bottom line for us is that, right now, the ratio of effort to effectiveness is skewed the wrong way. The primary benefit is the avoidance of travel, which can often be considerable. But the conference in the YouTube video felt the same as any other conference with the exception of the wacky behavior (*ooh...the avatar did a backflip...crazy!*) and costumes (*look at me, I'm holding a sparkler while I'm presenting*). And the general state of the animation, while intriguing, is not really close to reality. Once again, it seems like the focus is on the media and the technology before the substance.

Thank you for your interest in PRH Consulting! For more about our company, approach, and experience, please visit our website at www.prhconsulting.com.

We hope you think of us the next time you need help improving or supporting performance.

Sincerely,

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