



March 2011 v7no1

Building Capability Design, Then Build

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Next Issue

Stay tuned for more on process and capability, as well as other relevant topics related to building and supporting human performance. Some topics we have on deck include:

- 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...

Dear Peter

Greetings!

Greetings and Happy New Year...maybe a tad late!

One of our New Year's Resolutions was to get this newsletter out every month...even if the articles weren't mind-numbingly substantial. So much for that. But New Year's resolutions do highlight the relationship between motivation and performance. That is, motivation creates excitement about performance and may even initiate action, but the effect is often, maybe even usually, short-lived.



Resolutions also highlight the challenge of setting realistic performance targets. Resolution-setting rarely considers resource requirements. In particular, the time needed. At least when I am doing it, I'm basically just thinking "what do I want to do that I didn't do last year?" The question "why didn't you do it last year?" rarely gets serious attention. The resolutions list ends up more as a wish list than a realistic plan.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy this issue of the newsletter! We have articles addressing one of my favorite topics -- design. Basically, like planning, it is under-valued and under-utilized but can make a huge difference in how an intervention works.

Sincerely,

Pete

Peter R. Hybert, CPT
Principal Consultant

Testing

Test What Matters

Testing is a key part of product development. Granted, it is often the phase where engineers complain about having insufficient time or

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

We've got articles, presentations, and project profiles on the website. Visit our online library for all kinds of materials on human performance, learning, and business.

Discuss Amongst Yourself...

Don't Forget the Blog!

We hope the blog format has not been overshadowed by the 140 character Twitter or similarly brief Facebook and LinkedIn posts.

There are a few new posts on our blog
www.prhconsulting.com/blog.

We use the blog for short notes and commentary on business and human performance issues. Recently, we posted

- Disasters are Unlikely
- Back to the Scroll?
- Practice Makes Really, Really Good
- What do Instructional Designers Do?

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management preventing them from exercising an ideal amount of rigor but it is still an important part of the process. Why does it sometimes get shortchanged? Probably just human nature...the same way proofreading is often skipped by college students -- they are pretty sure they were paying attention to begin with but, in any case, the deadline has arrived.

Testing is also a key part of training design and development. Just as there are multiple levels of testing in product development, there are multiple purposes for testing in training development.



Performance Testing: This is observing the subject executing a task and monitoring the process according to defined criteria. In some cases, instead of monitoring the process, you can evaluate a completed output. Performance testing is the most representative of actual capability but it requires a performance environment (usually, on the job) and a high level of evaluator attention/time relative to the other levels.

Skills Testing: Sometimes you need to test specific isolated skills. We define skills as behaviors or tasks that have to be performed and improve with coaching. For example, serving a tennis ball or deboning a fish or performing a calculation. Often skills testing can be performed in a classroom or simulated environment. The downside is that, knowing that someone can execute a skill doesn't mean they can execute the complete performance -- the person with the best serve doesn't always win every tennis match.

Knowledge/Recall Testing: Testing the participants' ability to remember information and apply concepts is the most common form of testing. The advantage is that this kind of testing can often be done using a computer. The downside is that this type of testing is not really a solid indicator of capability...but it is often used because it is easy to administer.

Aptitude Testing: This is more of an application of testing -- any of the approaches above could be used for aptitude testing but it would most likely be knowledge or skills testing. This is testing someone to predict whether they have certain capabilities that make it more likely that they will be able to perform a specific task/role before they are actually trained in that task/role. This can be very useful in avoiding poor hiring decisions (which are expensive) but it is very difficult to identify the real predictors.

Testing is a critical phase in the development of any intervention. Too often it is treated as an afterthought or a token "quick-check" of learner capability. Instead, it needs to reflect the real performance requirements to accurately predict capability to perform and to identify areas for improvement.

ASIDE: For more on effective test strategies and performance testing in particular, go to either the ASTD or ISPI International Conference this spring and sit in on Pete's session "Test What00 Matters."

Another great resource, particularly for an organization, would be the For more on effective test strategies and performance testing in particular, go to either "Handbook of Improving Performance in the Workplace, Volume #3: Measurement and Evaluation." It was published by ISPI and Pfeiffer and is available through ISPI, Pfeiffer, Amazon, and other sources.

3/30/2011

- If Less is More, Nothing Must be Everything

For the details, visit our blog.

Pass it On

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

Check Out the October 2010 PI Journal

Verifying Capability to Perform

We are very proud of a big project we did a few years ago for a major pharmaceutical company. If you want to read the story, check out ISPI's publication "Performance Improvement" from October, 2010.

The article describes the project approach and . We built about 6 weeks of instructor-led and coached training in about 12 weeks of calendar time (with holidays in the middle of it).

And, the client measured ROI at 44% over five years (and 191% if you included loss avoidance). If you are wondering, their costs included all SME time and the time the operators were being training and qualified.



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ISPI Spring Conference

Orlando -- April 10 through 13



International Society for Performance Improvement

WHERE KNOWLEDGE BECOMES KNOW-HOW

There is still time to make arrangements to attend THE Performance Improvement Conference sponsored by ISPI. It is being held in Orlando, Florida and the theme this year is "Scaling New Heights, Delivering Results." Well, results are good.

Elliot Masie will be delivering the opening session keynote and there are sixty-five education sessions across a range of tracks from "Analysis" to "Research to Practice."

It's a great value for your development dollar! Let us know if you are going to be there or just chime in by tweeting with the conference hashtag **#ispi11**.

Design, Then Build

A Little Planning Goes a Long Way

Quite often, when we are meeting with a client team we will use the term "design" without thinking. We are accustomed to thinking about "designing training" but not everyone is. Ultimately, training is simply a defined learning process -- we **design** that process by starting with the desired end result (i.e., people able to do such and such), then figuring out the knowledge, skills, tools, and information needed to be able to do it. In this setting, we are using the engineering rather than the decorating sense of the term "design."

Once the performance and capability analysis have been completed, we can figure out an effective way to transfer those capabilities to the learner. The heart of this design is defining a reliable series of learning steps for the audience. We strive to take the learner as close to full performance as we can in the shortest amount of time possible. That's not always as easy as it sounds.

For one thing, learners really only learn when they try something and then evaluate how well it worked. If you **tell** someone how to hit a golf ball, they may gain something. If you **show** them how to hit a golf ball, they will gain more. But, until they actually try hitting the golf ball themselves and then watching the ball fly (or not), they won't really be learning enough to give them any likelihood of being able to golf. Think about it -- how many of us watch cooking shows? How many of us can actually cook?

So the exercises are essential. But, in today's cost-conscious business environment the exercises can seem to offer a tempting opportunity for reduction. Maybe if we cut out an exercise, someone will think, we can save a lot of time and then maybe even pack in a little more content. Unfortunately, you might as well just save the trouble because, without the exercises, there is no point presenting the content.

To avoid this common error, and others, the key is to design the training before building it. That way, you start with a bigger picture focus. Without that, you can end up in endless discussions about details such as word-smithing individual slides or discussing "fun" activities for learners. We use a group design process to ensure we get lots of different perspectives involved in all the decisions and to ensure that the key players fully understand what we are doing and why we are doing it.

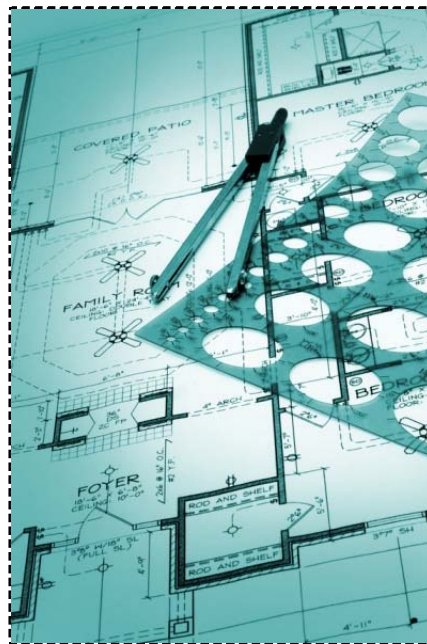
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During the design process, the team discusses what is important, that is, what they really need to include to make the training work. They reinforce each other to keep focused on the performance. Typically, many of the design team members end up volunteering to serve as SMEs. Which is good for the development process -- they already know where their module(s) fit into the overall scheme.

Another tip: don't over-design. We define the learning objects (which are "chunks" of content and/or activities that are assembled to create a module or lesson) sufficiently to make it clear what it is intended to do, the level of detail for any content, and the scope/purpose of any exercises. During development the details are discovered and incorporated.

Having a design upfront allows us to develop the components based on priority (which may be SME or content availability, or may be the most challenging components, or even all the exercises before any of the content presentations) and still ensure all the pieces fit together downstream.

If this is not the way training is built in your organization, this is a real opportunity for improvement. Maybe don't call it design...just call it planning before doing. It will save time, improve results, and align your development team members.



For more on design, check out the Training & Knowledge Management section in our website library. In particular, you might enjoy "Choosing Training Delivery Media," by Peter R. Hybert (originally published in ISPI's Performance Improvement journal, May/June 2000).

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.



Rant: Classroom Training is Still #1

The Instructor isn't Obsolete Yet

In the 2/2/11 issue of the online journal "Chief Learning Officer" publication they mentioned that the most often used training strategy is still classroom training, in spite of the amount of attention paid to on-line learning over the last decade. In all, 65% of learning executives intend to continue using classroom training for soft skills and a little less (41%) for other capabilities though, it still ranked highest compared to

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other delivery method options. In the March issue of "I&D" (ASID's Journal) highlights Deloitte LLP's investment in building a "brick and mortar" training and learning facility to focus on in-person learning. The article also cites GE and McDonalds as two other corporations that rely heavily (and intentionally) on in-person learning.

So, that is good news to us because a lot of our projects involve some form of instructor-led training. We aren't opposed to any delivery method if it is a good fit for the need and situation, but sometimes we feel a little "unhip" when we talk about an instructor-led program. We have actually found it very effective for training that addresses a range of capabilities, including technical, business process, tools, and methods.

In fact, to be a little contrarian, a lot (not all) of the web-based training we see is pretty weak. It either falls short of reaching performance or it tackles such a minor scope of content that the level of effort relative to benefit is absurd...the only way it makes sense is because it is often justified based on cost compared to the same program delivered in-person.

We've been trying to leverage the web a little differently. We really see the power of digital information as an opportunity for performance support via the web. Tools, job aids, reference documents, shared work streams, etc. can all reduce the amount of knowledge/skills needed by performers. Then, the training can target those focused areas for which training is really necessary. Or, you can break the training into smaller bites, which frequently simplifies the work and allows more of the learning to shift to "point of need."

It all comes down to understanding the work, the required capabilities, and the audience/environment. Ultimately, it is a design problem with no one right answer every time. But that is the same thing many of us have been saying since the elearning craze began. It's still true though.

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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