International Society for Performance Improvement

What is Human Performance Technology?

Human Performance Technology (HPT) uses a wide range of interventions that are drawn from many other disciplines including, behavioral psychology, instructional systems design, organizational development, and human resources management. As such, it stresses a rigorous analysis of present and desired levels of performance, identifies the causes for the performance gap, offers a wide range of interventions with which to improve performance, guides the change management process, and evaluates the results. Taken one word at a time, a description of this performance improvement strategy emerges.

Human: the individuals and groups that make up our organizations
Performance: activities and measurable outcomes
Technology: a systematic and systemic approach to solve practical problems

Principles of Human Performance Technology

Human Performance Technology (HPT) has been described as the systematic and systemic identification and removal of barriers to individual and organizational performance. As such, HPT is governed by a set of underlying principles that serve to differentiate it from other disciplines and to guide practitioners in its use.

1. **HPT focuses on outcomes.** Focusing on outcomes, that is results, allows for questioning, confirming, and reconfirming that people share the same vision and goals, the job procedures support productivity, efficiency, and quality, and that people have the knowledge, skills, and motivation they require.

   Where is there an opportunity or a performance gap, a difference between the present and the desired levels of performance? Outcomes or results of an intervention will be measured to determine whether or not performance has improved. Sometimes it is necessary to challenge the assumed answer to a problem or the expected event or activity of an intervention and instead focus on the accomplishment or business need that is the client's true priority.

2. **HPT takes a systems view.** Taking a systems view is vital, because organizations are very complex systems that affect the performance of the individuals that work within them.

   It is important to distinguish a systems approach from a process model. A process contains inputs and outputs with feedback loops. A system implies an interconnected complex of functionally related components. The effectiveness of each unit depends on how it fits into the whole and the effectiveness of the whole depends on the way each unit functions. A systems approach considers the larger environment that impacts processes and other work. The environment includes inputs, but, more importantly, it includes pressures, expectations, constraints, and consequences.

3. **HPT adds value.** This is an assessment that clients will be asked to make. Clients should be offered a process that will help them fully understand the implications of their choices,

set appropriate measures, identify barriers and tradeoffs, and take control. While HPT requires a focus on intermediate goals (such as improving quality, customer retention, and cost reduction), its success is measured in improvements in desired business outcomes (such as sales, profitability, and market share). Alignment of individual performance to intermediate and business outcomes is critical to the HPT methodology. Measurement of results at both of these levels serves two important purposes, that of communicating the importance of what is being done while also assessing the amount of performance improvement.

4. **HPT establishes partnerships.** Performance improvement professionals work in partnership with clients and other specialists. A collaborative effort involves relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process and involves working with specialists in their areas of expertise.

   Working collaboratively includes sharing decisions about goals, next steps to take in the process, and implementation strategies as shared responsibilities. Partnerships are created from listening closely to clients and colleagues, trusting and respecting each other's knowledge and expertise.

5. **Be systematic in the assessment of the need or opportunity.** Analysis occurs in the beginning of the project. Needs or opportunity analysis is about examining the current situation at any level or levels (society, organizational, process, or work group) to identify the external and internal pressures affecting it. This process will determine the deficiencies or performance gaps that are to be remedied. The output is a statement describing the current state, the projected future state, and the rationale or business case for action or non-action.

6. **Be systematic in the analysis of the work and workplace to identify the cause or factors that limit performance.** Cause analysis is about determining why a gap in performance or expectations exists. Some causes are obvious such as new hires lack the required skills to do the expected task. This step in the systematic process will determine what should be addressed to improve performance. The output is a statement of why performance is not happening or will not happen without some intervention. Job task analysis includes the identification of the important tasks that employees must perform and the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform them. The output is performance objectives that describe the desired performance, delineate the conditions under which the performance is done, and identify the criteria for successful performance.

7. **Be systematic in the design of the solution or specification of the requirements of the solution.** Design is about identifying the key attributes of a solution. The output is a communication that describes the features, attributes, and elements of a solution and the resources required to actualize it.

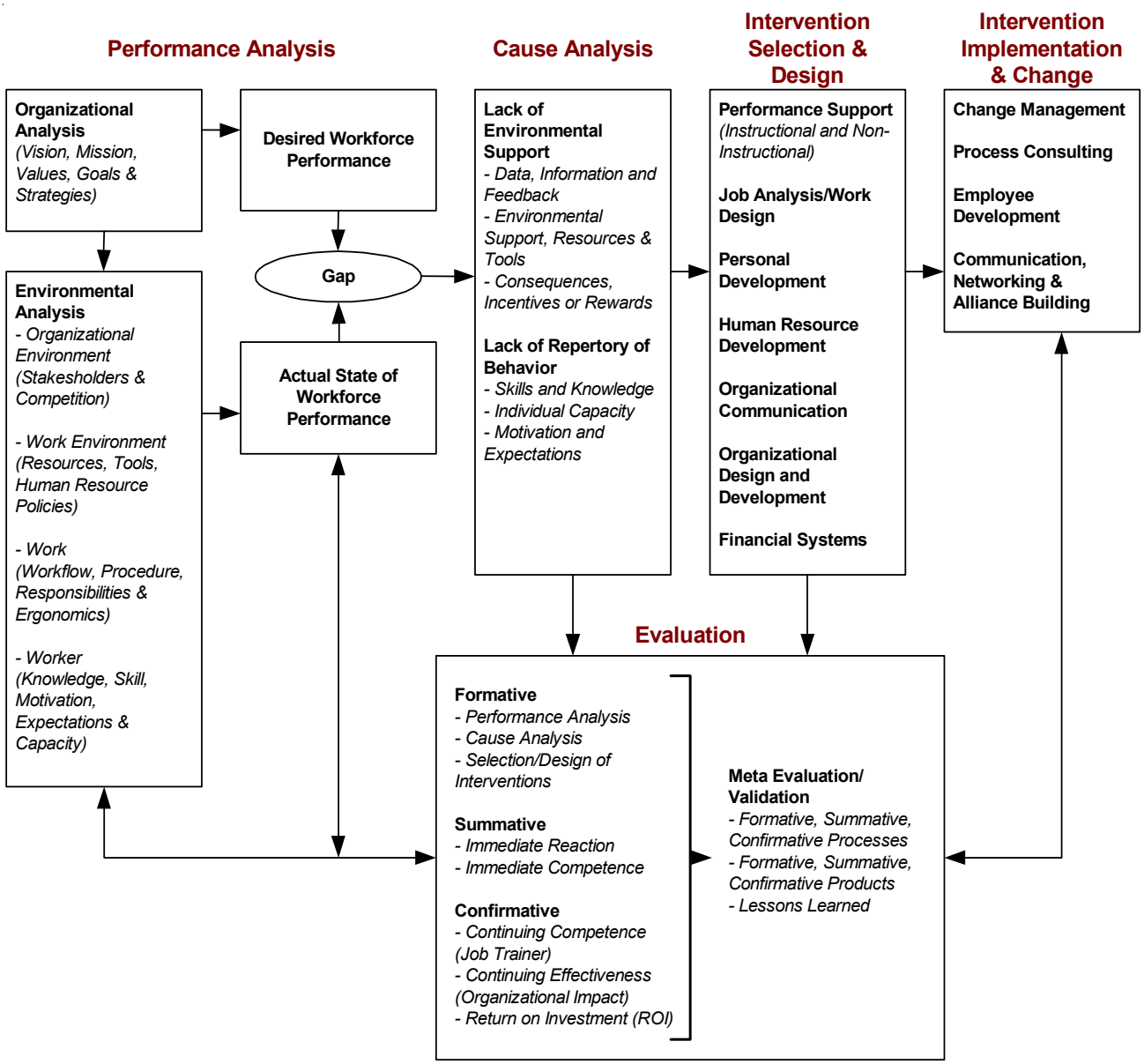

Figure 1. The ISPI Human Perfromance Technology (HPT) Model

8. **Be systematic in the development of all or some of the solution and its elements.** Development is about the creation of some or all of the elements of the solution. It can be done by an individual or a team. The output is a product, process, system, or technology. Examples include training, performance support tools, a new or re-engineered process, the redesign of a workspace, or a change in compensation or benefits.

9. **Be systematic in the implementation of the solution.** Implementation is about deploying the solution and managing the change required to sustain it. The outputs are changes in or adoption of the behaviors that are believed to produce the anticipated results or benefits. This standard is about helping clients adopt new behaviors or use new or different tools.

10. **Be systematic in the evaluation of the process and the results.** Evaluation is about measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of what was done, how it was done, and the degree to which the solution produced the desired results so that the cost incurred and the benefits gained can be compared. This standard is about identifying and acting on opportunities throughout the systematic process to identify measures and capture data that will help identify needs, adoption, and results.

The HPT process begins with a comparison of the present and the desired levels of individual and organizational performance to identify the performance gap. A cause analysis is then done to determine what impact the work environment (information, resources, and incentives) and the people (motives, individual capacity, and skills) are having on performance.

Once the performance gap and the causes have been determined, the appropriate interventions are designed and developed. These may include measurement and feedback systems, new tools and equipment, compensation and reward systems, selection and placement of employees, and training and development. The interventions are then implemented and the change process managed.

Evaluation is done after each phase of the process. Initially, formative evaluation assesses the performance analysis, cause analysis, intervention selection and design, and intervention and change phases. Then evaluation focuses on the immediate response of employees and their ability and willingness to do the desired behaviors. The final evaluations are centered on improvement of business outcomes (such as quality, productivity, sales, customer retention, profitability, and market share) as well as determining return on investment for the intervention.

This overview of Human Performance Technology is taken from the Web site of the **International Society for Performance Improvement**. Additional information is available on their site: **www.ispi.org.**