Human Performance Improvement

The organization that has consistently promoted a systematic approach to human performance improvement is ISPI. They define Human Performance Technology (HPT) as follows:

**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

If readers think that much of this sounds very familiar it is because ISPI practitioners have been thinking in process terms for many years. ISPI is an organization that Geary Rummler was heavily involved in for years and they learned a lot from Rummler and incorporated much of his thinking into their body of knowledge. Thus, although ISPI has its roots in psychology, instructional design and the analysis of employee problems, today's ISPI theorists are as likely to talk process change as they are to talk training or instructional design.

Quoting again from ISPI's description of HPT:

**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, that 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
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.

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.

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.

Figure 1 provides an overview that ISPI often uses to depict the HPT approach.
Too many process practitioners pay lip service to considering the problems involved in changing the way process managers perform or improving employee performance without any real idea of exactly what that implies. HPT practitioners have spent years working out exactly how to go about improving human performance, and all business process practitioners owe it to themselves to be aware of these techniques. To this end, BPTrends has published a variety of articles over the years designed to acquaint our readers with the HPT approach to process improvement. Here are a few of the articles we have published.

**Articles**
One of the first articles we published on HPT was by Carol Panza. It provides a very concrete example of the approach that HPT practitioners use.

**Technical Brief: An Air Travel Security Planning Map** Carol Panza - January 06, 2003
Carol Panza explains how organizational mapping can help managers understand all of the processes involved in a given strategy. In this case she shows how she worked with airline managers to figure out which processes might be affected by new security requirements.

**Performance Modeling & Human Asset Enabler Analysis** Guy Wallace - July 01, 2003
Guy Wallace, a consultant and the current president of ISPI, has spent his career helping companies improve employee performance. In this paper, he describes an approach to identifying problems with processes and determining the human assets needed to solve the problems.

**Human Performance Technology** Donald Tosti - February 07, 2006
Donald Tosti is one of the leading consultants in Human Performance Technology and the past-president of the International Society for Performance Improvement. In this White Paper he provides an overview of the HPT approach which focuses on improving processes by improving the performance of the people who implement the process.

**The Organizational Scan: A Periodic Table for Organizational Change** Donald Tosti - April 01, 2008
In this Article, Donald Tosti argues that SCAN (System Centered Analysis) can provide a way to order the "million or so things" that can affect organizational results in much the same way the Periodic Table of Elements provided order to potential chemical reactions. Read this Article for an illustration of SCAN tools as well as several examples of successful application of the SCAN method.

**Process Is Only Half The Story** Don Tosti - March 07, 2006
Last month, Don Tosti's White Paper described the basic elements that Human Performance Technologists manipulate to improve performance. This month, he discusses the importance of employee and managerial practices and suggests how the two should be changed simultaneously.

**Six Sigma and Human Performance Technology** Darlene Van Tiem - May 01, 2004
Many Six Sigma groups looking for ways to extend their practices have concluded that Human Performance Technology (HPT) offers a way to improve results. Similarly, HPT practitioners are
incorporating more Six Sigma practices in their work. Professor Darlene Van Tiem, of the Performance Improvement program at the University of Michigan describes how the two approaches can be used, effectively, together.

And Then a Miracle Occurs! Ensuring the Successful Implementation of Enterprisewide EPSS and E-Learning from Day One Deborah L. Stone and Steven W. Villachica - May 04, 2003
This article, by Deborah L. Stone and Steven W. Villachica, reprinted from the ISPI's March issue of Performance Improvement, provides a great example of how Human Performance Technology can be used to support the training of employees. Specifically, it discusses how electronic performance support systems (EPSS) can be used to manage learning.

Columns
In addition to the specific Articles, we have published Columns by some of the leading HPT practitioners. We published a Column by Guy Wallace, and later a Column by Geary Rummler and Alan Ramas. This year, following Geary's death, Alan Ramias and Cherie Wilkins are continuing the Column, providing readers with insights into process and HPT.

Performance Improvement: Leveraging the Human Variable in Process Improvement Guy Wallace - March 01, 2005
This month we launch a new column by Guy Wallace. Guy is a performance improvement consultant who has written several books, including Lean-ISD and is the past president of the ISPI. This column presents an overview of the performance improvement approach he advocates.

Improving Performance: Enterprise Process Performance Improvement Guy Wallace - June 06, 2006
In this column, Guy Wallace extends his ongoing description of Human Performance Technology to include an enterprise process model for performance improvement.

Improving Performance: Enterprise Process Performance Guy Wallace - June 05, 2007
This month, Guy Wallace provides a set of tools for evaluating an organization's Enterprise Process Performance Architecture (EPPA). He provides a template and suggests a series of questions BPM practitioners should ask as they analyze their organization's EPPA.

Potential Pitfalls on the Road to a Process Managed Organization (Part I) Geary Rummler and Alan Ramias - November 07, 2006
In Part 1 of a two-part Article, Geary Rummler and Alan Ramias present "The Organization as Systems Lens." Their lens provides a way of looking at organizations that is "essential to the notion of being process-centered."

Potential Pitfalls on the Road to a PMO (Part II) Geary Rummler and Alan Ramias - December 05, 2006
In Part 1, Geary Rummler and Alan Ramias proposed the Organization-as-a-system (OAS) lens to guide efforts to create a process-centered or process-managed organization. This month they examine potential pitfalls in that process and describe "the type of journey that will lead to success."
Managing Performance  Geary Rummler and Alan Ramias  - February 06, 2007
Geary Rummler and Alan Ramias discuss the issue of costly IT projects that fail and are ultimately abandoned by their companies. They believe these costly blunders are avoidable and will devote future Columns to suggest possible solutions.

Performance Improvement: Varieties of Process Ownership  Alan Ramias and Cherie Wilkins  - July 07, 2009
In their Column this month, Alan Ramias and Cherie Wilkins describe the evolution of process ownership. Besides identifying various approaches to process ownership and citing examples from their own experiences, they also suggest the advantages and disadvantages of each approach. The question arises; do we need process ownership at all? Read their Column for their take on the question.

Book Reviews.
We have also reviewed several books on HPT, including:

This month, Paul Harmon reviews an important new book by Geary Rummler that summarizes his latest thinking on analyzing and improving business processes, presented in the context of a major consulting engagement.

Improving Workplace Performance  - Chevalier  - a book review by Paul Harmon  - September 04, 2007
Here is a gentle introduction to Human Performance Technology and management practices for the middle manager who is trying to improve how employees perform.

Till next time,

Paul Harmon