

## June Sponsor

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## Business Process Trends

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## ISPI and Human Performance Improvement

There are so many variations in the meaning and usage of business terms that it's often difficult to know what it is a writer or speaker means when using a particular word or phrase. "Performance" is currently being promoted by a number of groups as a replacement term for "process." In fact, our upcoming July BPTrends Newsletter will focus on the various uses of the term "performance." In this Advisor, we want to focus on an organization that has been using the term "performance" for decades - the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI).

Most who know of ISPI associate it with the improvement of human performance. ISPI has its roots in the Sixties, when it was founded to promote the application of principles derived from behavioral psychology, to training and education. Apocryphally, the behavioral psychologist, B. F. Skinner, attended some of his children's grade school classes and was appalled by the way they were being taught. Skinner wrote a series of articles calling for a revolution that would apply behavioral principles to education and ISPI was founded to promote those principles. Over the course of time, ISPI devoted less time to the concerns of general education (which is well organized to reject efforts at improvement) and more to concerns related to business training and education. At the same time, ISPI gradually expanded its tool kit to include cognitive and managerial techniques well beyond the narrow behaviorism that stimulated its creation. Today, ISPI is a professional organization with some 10,000 individual members.

The constants, over the years, have been the empirical method that emphasizes results and a systems view of organizations. ISPI members have conducted extensive research relating to effective education and training practices. More important, they have emphasized the value of gathering data to determine the effect of changes made to organizational systems. This has led to a gradual accumulation of good practices and development of a methodology for improving human performance that incorporates environmental changes, changes in training and education, changes in motivation and changes in management. This body of knowledge is often referred to as Human Performance Technology (HPT). The HPT methodology is described in a white paper on the BPTrends site, [What is Human](#)

[Performance Technology](#). Similarly, it is described in an April issue of the BPTrends Newsletter, [Analyzing Activities](#). ISPI also offers a program that recognizes HPT professionals and certifies them as CPTs (Certified Performance Technologists).

A number of ISPI members have had an impact on the business process management field. Probably the best known is Geary Rummler. Rummler started at the University of Michigan's School of Business and was an early member of ISPI. In the late Sixties and early Seventies, when I worked for him, he and his partner, Tom Gilbert, were managing a company called Praxis and were primarily focused on helping business organizations analyze and improve human performance. In the Eighties and Nineties, Rummler joined with Alan Brache to found a company, Rummler-Brache, and to co-author a book, *Improving Performance: How to Manage the White Space on the Organization Chart*. (Jossey-Bass, 1990), which describes Rummler's systematic approach to analyzing and improving business processes.

In 1993, Hammer, Champy, and Davenport published their books and began the Business Process Reengineering (BPR) craze that dominated business thinking in the mid-Nineties. The BPR authors emphasized the reasons for process change, but didn't provide a systematic approach for achieving it. Thus, Rummler-Brache suddenly found itself overwhelmed with clients seeking a practical methodology for the analysis and redesign of business processes. To be fair, Rummler has never advocated radical process redesign, but has, instead, emphasized a systematic, gradual, targeted approach to process design. Rummler's emphasis on process redesign is nicely balanced against his emphasis on understanding the organization, as a whole, and identifying specific processes that will benefit from improvement. Rummler often emphasizes that changes in the way managers manage processes are more effective than changes in the way employees actually perform their work. ISPI has just published a new book by Rummler, *Serious Performance Consulting: According to Rummler*, which BPTrends will review in our July issue.

While Rummler is probably ISPI's best known member among those concerned with process improvement, ISPI has many other members who have achieved recognition for helping organizations change human performance. I recently had a discussion with Roger Addison, ISPI's Chief Technical Officer, about work ISPI has been doing to combine ISPI technology with the Six Sigma methodology to provide more powerful human performance analysis tools for Six Sigma practitioners. Clearly, there are some exciting possibilities in this area. There's even a group within ISPI, known as the "Tucson Seven" who meet regularly to discuss BPM issues. One of them, Donald Tosti, this year's president of ISPI, was instrumental in choosing the theme for the 43rd ISPI conference: Process, Practice & Productivity. This 2005 conference will be held in Vancouver, British Columbia on April 10-15, 2005. (For more information,

check the ISPI website: [www.ispi.org](http://www.ispi.org))

Those involved in business process change within organizations need to draw on and integrate a wide variety of approaches and technologies, ranging from strategy change systems and process analysis tools, to ABC, BPMS, a wide variety of software automation systems, Six Sigma, and job design. ISPI represents a well-developed source of theory and practice designed to help improve human performance within organizations. It's a rare process improvement project that doesn't require changes in management and the jobs performed, or that wouldn't benefit from better feedback or an improved incentive system. The ISPI is a resource that business process change practitioners ought to be familiar with.

Till next time,

Paul Harmon

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