

**The Strategic Impact Model:
An Integrative Approach to Performance Improvement (PI)
and Instructional Systems Design (ISD)**

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Training in business settings and instruction in academic settings have never taken place in a vacuum, but in earlier times many instructional technology professionals behaved as though they did. Models of instructional systems design (ISD) placed training and instruction at the center of the universe ignoring the impact of the *external environment*. Some who worked in business consulting, such as Thomas Gilbert¹ and Joe Harless,² began to see the larger picture more clearly in the 1970s as they saw training-only solutions fail to have lasting effect on vexing business problems. The view began to emerge that training or instruction alone seldom was sufficient to enable people to become effective achievers in society or in the workplace. In 1989, Robinson and Robinson captured the essence of this perspective for corporate trainers in their book titled *Training for Impact: How to Link Training to Business Needs and Measure Results*. Over time, a new perspective emerged that the goal should be improvement of human performance, which could best be accomplished by combining instructional interventions with non-instructional interventions, such as enhanced motivation, better equipment, more supportive organizational structures, and so on (Brethower & Smalley, 1998; "Introduction to Performance Technology," 1986; Kaufman, Thiagarajan, & MacGillis, 1997; Mager & Pipe, 1997; Romiszowski, 1981; Van Tiem, Moseley, & Dessinger, 2000; Wile, 1996).

The value of the human performance improvement (PI) perspective grew throughout the 1980s and 1990s as the information age world economy moved forward. In the new knowledge economy human resources have been proven to be more critical to organizational success than physical assets (Hammer & Champy, 1993). As rapidly evolving technology has made it possible for businesses to compete on a global basis, improving productivity has become a key to survival in the marketplace. Organizations operating in this new global economy, including higher education

institutions and non-profits as well as businesses, find themselves having to work strategically and efficiently to compete successfully. That entails finding ways to develop and deploy their human resources wisely (Senge, 1990).

The authors challenged their own thinking about the ISD process during the course of five summers spent offering in-depth workshops for groups of training managers from the LG Group of Korea. Each of the cohort groups had the charge of returning to Korea with recommendations for improving the training doctrine of the LG Group. The program provided us with the opportunity to have a dialog and to get some feedback about various concepts and models as they evolved and were applied back in Korea. As the dialog progressed, we developed a particular vision of a practical way of integrating instructional and non-instructional activities into one seamless process.³ The purpose of this article is to describe our current version of this work, known as the Strategic Impact Model, named to emphasize the philosophy of carrying out PI in a way that focuses on activities that contribute significantly to the organization's strategic goals. The ideas that comprise our approach are summarized in a visual model, shown as Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 about here.]

Features of the Strategic Impact Model

The major theme of the Strategic Impact Model can be summed as: *Training alone seldom solves performance problems*. Almost all performance problems are rooted in more than one cause, and although training or instruction may be part of the solution, other interventions, such as job redesign, incentive adjustments, job aids, better tools, or the like, are invariably required to make the training pay off (Harless, 1975; Romiszowski, 1981; Van Tiem et al., 2000; Wile, 1996).

The model shows explicitly how instructional interventions and other sorts of performance interventions relate to each other, springing from a common performance analysis and intersecting in a common implementation phase. It also illustrates that instructional intervention and other sorts of performance interventions all evolve through a similar process of analysis, design, development, and production; hence the two *wings* of the model, each a mirror image of the other.

Evaluation Central

In the model, evaluation plays the special role of keeping decisions focused on the ultimate target of all performance improvement, impact on the strategic needs of the organization. In addition, evaluation serves the more traditional role of providing quality control at each stage (Molenda, Pershing, & Reigeluth, 1996).

Change Management Integrated

The past several decades have brought renewed appreciation for the importance of preparing people for the changes that are contemplated as part of any performance improvement intervention. This has been found to be as true in the school restructuring movement as in the corporate reengineering movement (Banathy, 1991; Hammer & Champy, 1993). What we suggest in our model is that change management, like evaluation, should be built into each step of the process, not tacked on at the end. The adage we follow is: *People support the ideas they help create.*

Outputs Become Inputs

The arrows in the model symbolize that each step of the process yields identifiable products or outputs, which become inputs for subsequent stages. Of course, systems design projects are dynamic, and not static. Outputs from earlier stages are often revisited and modified during latter stages (Dick, Carey, & Carey, 2000; Molenda et al., 1996).

Procedures of the Strategic Impact Model

The model depicts an ideal case, in which the process begins by revisiting the strategic planning decisions that have already been made within an organization, then proceeds from the diagnostic steps shown in the central column of the model toward the analysis-design-development-production cycles for performance and instructional interventions.

Strategic Planning

An organization's strategic plan explains how the organization intends to allocate its scarce human and physical resources among competing demands in order to optimize its objectives (Drucker, 1974). PI initiatives can only contribute to the success of an organization if they are aligned with its strategic directions, meaning that performance technologists need to think as their organization thinks. This entails in-depth understanding of organizational goals and values, speaking the language of the business when communicating internally, and proactive pursuit of opportunities to get involved in strategic projects (Kern, 2003).

Outputs. The output of this stage can be threefold: first, the identification of a specific performance problem; for example the loss of customers in a business or drop in enrollment at a college. Second, a quality improvement initiative such as increasing market share or the job placement of teacher education graduates. A third type of output may involve adding new services to reach a different customer or student market considered to be critical to expanding the reach of the organization. The performance technologist views these problems and opportunities in terms of

their human dimensions, asking the question: Are our people and our organization ready to meet the challenge? If not, why not?

Evaluation. Strategic plans typically spell out in detail the current status of the organization and forecasts for the future, including specific short- and long-term objectives that are time bound and measurable. Often, for each objective, there will be evaluation criteria that spell out how the organization will know when an objective is met. Many strategic plans include social dimensions, goals, and objectives related to the societal impact and social responsibility of the organization (Drucker, 1974).

Change management. At this stage, the performance technologist is creating a partnership with formal leaders who are in a position to provide the verbal support as well as resources that will be needed to undertake a PI initiative. The key to this support is linking the PI initiative with the organization's mission, specifically some current problem, quality improvement initiative, or opportunity. In short, the analyst needs to demonstrate to the organization's leaders how the performance initiative will help the organization to achieve its strategic plans. This is the essence of strategic alignment (Kern, 2003).

Performance Analysis

The essence of Performance Analysis is ascertaining any gaps that may exist between the current capabilities of the target audience and the capabilities they must have for the organization to overcome its current problems or seize emerging opportunities (Rothwell, 1996; Van Tiem et al., 2000). At times analysts play a reactive role, responding to a strategically aligned need already identified by someone else; at other times they take a more proactive role by anticipating potential human performance needs as they look at strategic goals. In either case, it involves identifying the "difference between ideal (or desired) performance and actual (or anticipated) performance" (Rosenberg, 1994, p. 152). For example, if a company is going to change from selling computers to providing information technology consulting to its customers, do the sales representatives have the depth of skills needed in information systems design?

Performance analysis involves gathering data that enables the analyst to identify gaps in performance which, if narrowed or closed, would contribute to accomplishing the strategic goals of the organization. The performance gaps may involve challenges at the organizational level, the work environment level, the work process level, or the individual worker level (Langdon, 2000; Rothwell, W. J., 1996; Van Tiem, et al., 2000).

Output. The result of these various analyses is a gap analysis, which enables the analyst to identify one or more aspects of the organization, the work environment, or individual performance that can and should be improved.

Cause Analysis

After identifying gaps in people's ability to perform, the next step is to trace the *causes* of those gaps. There are innumerable possible sources of failure, so it is helpful to have some sort of checklist of the most likely suspects. A typology of causal factors that we have found to be succinct but sufficiently comprehensive is that developed by Wile (1996).⁴ He synthesized the categories proposed by the leading human performance improvement theories, settling on seven categories: organizational systems, incentives, cognitive support, tools, physical environment, skills/knowledge, and inherent ability. These categories are shown in the center column of our model (See Figure 1). We list them in the reverse order to simplify the flowcharting of the model, but Wile suggests (p. 34) that there may be a rough hierarchical order to these categories, in terms of their leveraging potential; that is the ability to make a big difference with a small change.

The key to conducting a cause analysis is to link behavior in the workplace with end results. Where are results falling short? What behaviors are associated with the shortcomings? To what extent is the deficient performances caused by forces in the workplace environment, or by organizational policies and procedures, or by the physical or cognitive tools used by the workers, or by factors within the workers themselves (Langdon, 2000; Rothwell, 1996; Van Tiem et al, 2000)?

Depending on the sources identified in the cause analysis, different targets may be chosen for action. Instructional interventions may be targeted if the workers lack the skills, knowledge, attitude, or information needed to do the job well. Incentive interventions would be selected if the workers had the knowledge but did not use it effectively. Cognitive supports, such as printed job aids or digital help systems, may be developed if workers have the skills and the motivation but need access to specific information at specific times. In other cases, physical tools, such as better machines, may help workers to be more efficient and effective. Frequently, any of these types of interventions can have their effects multiplied if changes were made in organizational systems, such as rethinking the chain-of-command or altering supervisory procedures.

The special value of the Strategic Impact Model is that it illustrates how these different causes and interventions, in combination, can be developed and implemented in an integrated fashion, accompanied by timely change-management activities.

After a feasible menu of interventions has been selected, individuals or teams can set to work developing the needed processes, procedures, and materials. As depicted in Figure 1, deficiencies traced to shortcomings in inherent ability can be addressed by selecting different workers, ones that have the potential to perform as needed. Deficiencies traced to skill and knowledge deficits can be addressed by developing instructional materials and systems. Other sources of deficiency can lead to other specific types of instructional or non-instructional interventions. However, all of them need to be created before they can be implemented. We suggest that the familiar cycle of analyze, design, develop, evaluate, and produce provides an orderly way to think about the creation of different sorts of interventions.⁵

The Analysis, Design, Development, Production Cycle

The model reflects the philosophy that both non-instructional and instructional interventions require the same sort of development process. Such products do not just magically appear as needed. Someone has to decide what purpose they will serve and what they will look like before they can be created and put into use. Following are abbreviated descriptions of how each phase of the cycle might be carried out for both instructional and other types of performance interventions.⁶ Also, Table 1 provides more details with examples of *output*, *evaluation*, and *change management* criteria for the analysis, design, development, and production cycle.

Analysis

In this phase the goal is to gather information about the performers, the settings in which they work, and the tasks they are supposed to be performing. The scope and depth of the analysis would vary, of course, with the nature of the intervention being contemplated. Indicated in the model by the Arrow #1, the output of the Analysis stage would be a clear identification of the goals and objectives of the project; for example, *Given reference to a printed decision tree, the social services desk agent will be able to determine correctly a client's eligibility for Social Security disability within 30 seconds*. The evaluation task at this stage, indicated by the Diamond A in the model, is to ensure that the findings (e.g., the characterization of the learners, the description of the work setting, the breakdown of jobs and tasks) are on target. This can be done by sharing the findings with the sponsor, the affected workers, and their supervisors, encouraging them to react to the validity of the descriptions. Involving stakeholders in the sorts of described evaluation activities also functions as a change management activity; that is, informing them of the existence of the project and encouraging them to participate in the decision-making. In addition, assuming that supervisors accept the desirability of the project goals, they would be asked at this point about what

changes are necessary in the work setting to enhance the probability that employees will use their new skills or utilize a new process (e.g., performance interventions such as job redesign, organizational change, upgraded tools or facilities, bonus pay or other incentives).

Design

In this phase, the object is to create a blueprint for the solutions to the problems. Taking into account the findings of the Analysis phase, the designers decide what training events or other performance enhancements would best equip the workers to be able to perform up to the standards specified in the objectives. The output of the Design phase, Arrow #2, is a blueprint or set of specifications for the training event and work environment interventions, including the performance measures that will be used to assess attainment of the objectives. At this point in the evaluation process, the Diamond B in the model, the first question is whether the activities specified in the blueprint are aligned with the previously stated objectives and with the organization's strategic plan. The second question relates to quality-control issues: What is the likelihood that this training event or compensation plan will be successful? Judgments such as these could be made by subject-matter experts, experienced instructors, managers, or consultants experienced with the specific performance interventions. In terms of change management, a major concern at this point is whether the contemplated product or action seems appropriate, according to expert opinion. The instructional designer can check with instructors regarding their reaction to the specified content and pedagogical approach. For other interventions: would such a job aid actually be used by front-line workers...would such a compensation plan be appealing to employees...would the specified organizational change be supported by managers? By asking for the judgments of these stakeholders, the designer is improving the odds that they will eventually buy into the solutions.

Development

In Development, the blueprints are turned into usable, tangible form. The output of the Development phase, Arrow #3, is tested prototypes of products, processes, or systems. Shown as Diamond C in the model, evaluative activities at this stage focus on tryouts and revisions of prototype materials or processes. Samples of the targeted population could try out the prototypes one-to-one, as a team, or in small-group settings with observation of the usability of the materials or processes, after which they would be assessed to determine how nearly they met the intended objectives. For a compensation plan, for example, a reality check could be done by asking a sample of employees to react to a simulation of the proposed plan. To enhance the acceptance of the product or policy being developed, the goal should be to make it as appealing as possible to the

intended users. People are more likely to accept a solution that has a clear personal payoff, is compatible with existing habits and values, is simple to understand and use, and is compatible with the local culture.

Production

After prototype testing and revision, the new materials or processes are ready to be scaled up to serve all the intended users, or some subset, if the program is going to be rolled out in stages. At this point revised prototypes are turned over for mass production, whether by an in-house production agency or by external sources. Any new intervention, such as a job aid, a reconfigured workspace, upgraded tools, enhanced compensation program, or restructuring of the chain of command, requires the production or acquisition of the ingredients necessary to implement the intervention. Final versions of those ingredients would be acquired or produced at this point. The output of Production, shown as Arrow #4, is the fully worked out product or program that has been developed, tested, revised, and prepared for large-scale implementation. Production processes, whether done internally or outsourced, must be carefully managed and monitored; this is the focus of quality control at this point, Diamond D in the model. Typically, for instructional interventions, train the trainer activities are planned and conducted at this point in the process. Parallel activities would be used to prepare supervisors and staff members for the rollout of other new performance interventions.

Implementation

As indicated in the model (see Figure 1), this is the point at which all the instructional and non-instructional interventions are ready to be put into effect. As implied in the previous discussion, the solution may comprise a complex set of materials, instructions, policies, hardware, software, and organizational changes. The team responsible for developments up to this point would ordinarily continue to play a role as the solution is installed. In any organization there are numerous sources of possible resistance to change, so the developers must be prepared to respond. This may include providing technical support during implementation and making on-the-spot modifications as needed to smooth the transition.

Beyond initial installation lies the prospect of long-term maintenance of the innovation, requiring continuing support, which must be built into the overall system. There must also be a mechanism for monitoring the system to decide if and when revision or replacement is needed.

The evaluation focus at the Implementation phase, Diamond E in the model, shifts to a summative judgment about the overall worth of the solution. Having been implemented, has the set

of interventions actually helped the organization solve the problem or seize the opportunity that was identified in the Performance Analysis? Value can be measured in many different ways, including quantitatively in terms of cost-benefit ratio and return on investment. The process has now come full circle, and the question of strategic alignment is revisited: is the organization now better equipped to fulfill its strategic objectives (Kaufman et al., 1997; Rothwell, 1996; Van Tiem, et al., 2000)?

In terms of change management, the acceptance, installation, and maintenance of the innovation can be expedited by pursuing the change management activities suggested above at earlier stages in the development process. Throughout this process the design team can cultivate acceptance by securing vocal support from the sponsor and other formal leaders, a *trickle down* of influence and by persuading opinion leaders to support the effort, leveraging their informal influence with other members of the organization, *stepping stones* of influence (“Introduction to performance technology,” 1986; Kaufman et al., 1997; Rothwell, 1996).

Conclusion

The Strategic Impact Model is distinctive in its portrayal of the integration of instructional and non-instructional interventions and its suggestion that all other performance interventions undergo an analysis-design-development-production cycle, just as instruction does. It also differs from other similar models in its use of evaluative activities at each stage to assure alignment with strategic needs as well as quality control, and its suggestions for improving the chances of successful implementation by carrying out change management activities at each phase of the development process.

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Footnotes

¹Generally, Tom Gilbert is considered “The Father of Human Performance Technology.” He developed his behavior engineering model which looks at a number of factors that impact the performance of workers and devised a system to help organizations to help their workers to perform at exemplary levels. The International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI) published a Tribute Edition of Gilbert’s classic book titled *Human Competence: Engineering Worthy Performance*. Also, Peter Dean, in a book he co-edits with David Ripley, and titled *Performance Improvement Pathfinders*, has a chapter about Gilbert and his various performance improvement models and principles.

²In 1970, Joe Harless published “A Self-Instructional Lesson” he titled *An Ounce of Analysis (Is Worth A Pound Of Objectives)*. This monograph became a classic and is where Harless used the term “front-end analysis” to reorient the way trainers would think about designing training. David Ripley, in a book he co-edits with Peter Dean, and titled *Performance Improvement Pathfinders*, has a chapter about Harless and his Performance Improvement Process (PIP) model and its principles. In the PIP model, Harless talks about the importance of organizational alignment, a concept similar to strategic alignment.

³Details about the training program for the LG Group of Korea are explained in an evaluation article in *Performance Improvement Quarterly* by Pershing and Lee (2000).

⁴For additional typologies of causal factors for performance deficiencies see Gilbert (1996); Langdon (2000); Mager & Pipe (1997); Romiszowski (1981); Rothwell (1996); and Van Tiem, Moseley, & Dessinger (2000).

⁵Molenda (2003) in an article titled *In Search of the Elusive ADDIE Model*, explains the origin as well as the use of the analysis, design, develop, implement, and evaluate (ADDIE) model as depicted in part in the Strategic Impact Model.

⁶For an earlier, and less developed model that explains in greater detail the output, evaluation, and change management aspects of the Strategic Impact Model, see the book chapter by Molenda, Pershing, & Reigeluth (1996) titled *Designing instructional systems*.

Table 1: Examples of output, evaluation, and change management criteria for the analysis, design, development, and production cycle

The Analysis, Design, Development, & Production Cycle		
<i>Analysis</i>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Output</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Context analyses ▪ Job & task analyses ▪ Solution set ▪ Performance improvement plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work environment - Learning environment ▪ Cross-functional team blueprints 	<p style="text-align: center;">Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Return on investment (ROI) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cost/benefit - Cost/effectiveness - Productivity ▪ Social impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Macro - Micro 	<p style="text-align: center;">Change Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify key adopters & seek their input and approval ▪ Differentiate feedback and approval for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sponsors & VIPs - Informal opinion leaders - Those to be impacted
<i>Design</i>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Output</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clear statement of program goals and objectives ▪ Performance objectives ▪ Performance measures ▪ Complete audience profile 	<p style="text-align: center;">Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Subject matter approval ▪ Expert review ▪ Sponsor & impacted worker review & understanding ▪ Transfer criteria established <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organization level - On-the-job level 	<p style="text-align: center;">Change Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Management input and approval ▪ Worker and gate-keeper input and approval ▪ Visualization – share systems with those impacted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is - What should be
<i>Development</i>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Output</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tested prototypes ▪ Tangible products and processes ▪ Tested systems 	<p style="text-align: center;">Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Formative evaluation ▪ Usability testing ▪ Participant reactions ▪ Sponsor reactions 	<p style="text-align: center;">Change Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Motivate end-users <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relevance - Confidence - Satisfaction ▪ Relative advantage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal payoff - Culture compatible - Compatible with personal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Habits - Values
<i>Production</i>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Output</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Completed performance improvement system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ready to disseminate - Ready to implement ▪ Ready for full or staged roll-out 	<p style="text-align: center;">Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Control mechanisms for in-house and external vendors ▪ Plan, program, activities, and budget system (PPB) 	<p style="text-align: center;">Change Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Orientation for those involved in delivery of sub systems and systems ▪ Training of intervention specialists

Figure 1. Visual depiction of the Strategic Impact Model.

