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Introduction

Nancy Lewis, then IBM vice president for sales and on demand learning and now the executive in charge of learning for ITT, contributed to the LearningTown blog on April 11, 2008:

> Business leaders know that the rate of information change is accelerating, growing faster than our ability to consume it. The result being that we will all have skill gaps, all the time, and that skill gaps will be a constant state of life in the future. We also know that our roles are becoming as complex as the knowledge we work with. There will never be enough time to learn everything we need to learn. There is such a consistent and rapid churn of the skills and knowledge required to maintain job performance that learning can no longer be provided as a set of events. This is the new challenge for learning: enabling people to capitalize on new technologies, discoveries and business insights, to be first to the marketplace with new solutions that exceed our clients' needs and expectations. At the heart, therefore, the essence of any company's ability to adapt and grow is its ability to learn. And that involves new ways of thinking about an approach to learning.

What Lewis is touting is not computers, although technology, of course, plays a starring role in the delivery of learning and support. Lewis's focus is learning in juxtaposition with the work and workplace: "We looked at where learning actually takes place most of the time. It's in the workplace, not in the classroom. We learn naturally on the job. We learn by doing, by solving problems. There will always be a need for formal training, but it will likely be much more in direct support of the capabilities that cannot be learned in the workplace."

Placing learning and references closer to the work is brilliant, except when it is the wrong learning or references. Executives favor such an approach, especially in harsh economic times. Employees reject programs that are extraneous, bloated, or obsolete. That's true in the classroom and online. The big difference is the instructor, present for face-to-face experiences. Instructors typically fix instruction when it is not right. An instructor adds an example to make it more relevant. Another reminds the employee of all that he already knows. Yet another instructor provides an opportunity to tackle a problem that is within the student's abilities, to ensure a success experience. And another links the example to the concept, when the students' faces are blank. Finally, a savvy instructor would recognize when a class, as now written, ignores a critical new product or geopolitical reality. She makes fixes to ensure that the class is timely.

When we diminish instructor centrality in favor of on-demand and workplace-based resources and experiences, more responsibility falls on us. We must be certain about the resonance of our programs. What do our people need? What is top priority? What is already known? For what do they clamor? What will add value? What must they know by heart? What can they seek as they need it? It is performance analysis that answers these questions.

In April 2008, Delta and Northwest Airlines announced their intentions to merge. A Delta learning leader, in a personal email that very morning, shared feelings about the merger. She expressed enthusiasm for it, and closed by remarking that she now needs to get her arms around what Northwest learning is all about and what their people require. She has to figure out how to make this merger work at 550 mph. How does she gain insight into their people, challenges, and programs? What should she do first? What next? And how does she engage colleagues in the process, so that her ideas are not just Delta ideas or habits? It is performance analysis that answers her questions.

A former student provided another example. After a dozen years in training and development in financial services, he reports that he is now, finally, getting more control over the "juicy" projects. "I want to use technology to meet the needs of the far-flung IT community. When their executive asked me to look for ways to improve awareness about system security, I immediately thought about Second Life." Why was Second Life (http://secondlife.com/) such a natural here? I asked. He had reasons that began to bring me around, such as the interest the approach would generate in a skeptical audience and the immersive and vivid nature of the experience. But how would he direct their experiences on his corporate island? How would he rivet their attention, since other even "juicier" opportunities lurked on nearby islands? Given all that could be done, how would he decide what they see, tackle, and do? It is performance analysis that answers his questions.

You could be at IBM or Delta, or even contemplating the design of your corporate island in Second Life. Perhaps your organization is rolling out a new product. Or maybe you are tasked with getting more value from the current learning management system or with squeezing cost out of the current enterprise. Or consider the executive who wants assurance that what his people are studying in class will transfer to the manufacturing floor. Then there is the sales leader who notes that great things are going on across the world and laments that the rest of the salesforce rarely profits from these breakthroughs. Your job is to embrace these requirements as opportunities and to customize programs to ensure performance and results. How do you make that happen? No surprise. The answer is performance analysis.

Where once human resources and training professionals enjoyed a niche defined by familiar activities, such as offering classes or facilitating meetings, now there are urgent expectations about results, speed to competence, benefits and efficiencies from technologies, and eagerness to distribute smarts everywhere, accessible where and when needed.

These expectations define us by customers and causes, not by history, habit, or job title. They lead to tailored services. They lead to data and perceptions gathered from associates, managers, experts, leaders, and benchmarking groups. They lead to solutions enlightened by causes and drivers. They lead to uncovering data in unexpected places, including blogs and wikis. They lead to cobbling together solution systems from across the organization, including assets and experiences that compel attention over time and geography.

The basis for all of this is performance analysis. An effective performance analysis delivers the information and support you need to chart a fresh, tailored approach.

Jeanne Strayer never underestimates the value of a training intervention. With her background as a teacher of English as a Second Language (ESL), she understands the importance of a structured curriculum to address a specific knowledge deficit. But what she found upon entering the business world was that training could just as easily be the *wrong* solution to a problem. Whether working as an independent consultant or an in-house instructional designer, Jeanne expanded her repertoire of skills "to include other interventions to solve performance problems."

In her current position as a partner with the Six Degrees Company, Jeanne finds that even repeat clients often think first of training as the solution to a problem, rather than imagine other possible solutions. To address this illogical leap, Jeanne uses one of several techniques to get a client to slow down, step back, and acknowledge the need for some good, old-fashioned analysis.

1. *Ask the right questions in order to lead clients to discover the value of analysis.* Performance consultants have a need and a knack for asking questions about a problem that "bring to light" the unknowns and uncertainties of a situation. Asking those questions together with the client helps the client see the value of doing analysis. Jeanne had a client who wanted to reach a very large target audience of real estate agents, numbering in the thousands. The client wanted an e-learning product to lead the agents to use a new software product. Jeanne said to the client, "Well, let's see. You say the agents need online training on the new software system, but they never used point-and-click training offered in the past. What makes you think it will be different this time? Why do you think they didn't use it last time? Do they not understand how to do it? Or do they not see the value in the training?" Asking questions can create an "Aha!" moment so that clients see the value of investigating further before investing in a solution.

2. *Demonstrate that budgets are easier to develop after analysis.* Sometimes the scope of a project is so big that it's hard to place an actual dollar figure on a solution without some serious initial analysis. In the situation above, the client *thought* that e-learning was the best way to reach the many real estate agents. After a few questions, Jeanne discovered that the problems were due to motivation, marketing, and implementation—in addition to training. Once the client accepted those drivers, it was clear that further analysis was needed to scope the project and to put some budget numbers together. Jeanne used data to show that a live event was the best way to market the new software. With this information, the client was able to budget for the cost of *x* number of events in a targeted geographic area, as well as the marketing campaign to promote the live events.

3. *Use the Gilbert model to de-emphasize training.* The Gilbert Behavior Engineering Model, created by Thomas Gilbert, classifies performance problems into one of six categories: information, resources, incentives, knowledge, capacity, and motivation. Jeanne uses this model as a way for project leaders to think about the performance problem. She then asks, "Before committing project dollars to a training program, doesn't it make sense to see if any of these other factors are at work so that we can use those to leverage performance?"

Jeanne Strayer is a partner with the Six Degrees Company, a firm specializing in sales strategy, marketing, and performance improvement. She holds an MA in educational technology from San Diego State University, and a Certified Performance Technologist credential through the International Society for Performance Improvement. You can reach Jeanne at jeanne@strayer.net.

Is This Book for You?

This book is for you if you've found yourself thinking or saying,

I don't know where to start.

I don't know what to do.

I must get it right or I fear they won't use it.

What is performance analysis?

Why should I spend time on performance analysis, when my clients want ACTION?

What would competence look like, really look like?

A certain amount of analysis is critical, I guess. OK, what's the minimum?

They've reorganized, and now I'm in this unit called "client relationships," and we're supposed to be doing performance consulting. What should we do? How might analysis help here?

How do I avoid analysis-paralysis?

How do I get a better fix on what to do first, second, and next?

It's all about technology around here now. How does the shift to technology and independent learning influence the way we plan?

We have online communities, wikis, blogs . . . should I use them in my analysis? How would I do that?

This analysis is just a small part of my job. I don't have time for all of this analysis. What's the least I can do and still derive value?

Whom do I ask? What do I ask?

What's analysis got to do with evaluation?

My customer says she knows what she needs and that it's not analysis. How can I make a case with her for study prior to action?

They want some courses, and one customer wants scenario-based e-learning. But I have my doubts about whether an isolated course, in the classroom or through high technology, is going to solve this problem. How can I make them see this?

The challenges are numerous: a world economic crisis; skepticism from clients; time pressures; the strength of habits; unfamiliar roles in changing organizations; cultural, language, and time zone differences; uneven technology platforms; and expectations regarding cost recovery and collaborations across units. Whereas the traditional roles of human resources and training were functional, tactical, and blissfully familiar, this new world of performance analysis, consultation services, and solution systems is more fluid and strategic. It demands more of you. The changes won't be easy.

That paragraph ends the sympathy. From here on we talk about how to think about and succeed in these new roles and services, and we'll focus on analysis as the strategy to enable you to do just that.

This book is written for human resources and training professionals who are eager to choose solutions based on the situation, not on habits and inclinations; who are interested in analysis prior to action; who seek to consult with line organizations to establish field-based cases for their recommendations; and who are operating under time constraints. Many are called trainers by their organizations. Some are internal or external organizational developers and process reengineers. Many call themselves instructional designers or performance consultants or even performance technologists. Some have another position entirely, but find themselves tasked with or attracted to solving problems. Still others are human resources generalists. What all share is a desire to shift from predetermined activities and events to consultation and customized solutions. They are working to establish partnerships. Their efforts begin with performance analysis.

Performance Analysis and Needs Assessment?

In the past I've written about needs assessment in a way that defines it as a large, overarching concept that is arguably synonymous with good human resources planning. Although I still hold by that definition, I was, I fear, overly optimistic about the welcome that such a demanding process would receive in the field. As practical experience and numerous studies of practice have shown, my own included, needs assessment is honored more in theory than in practice. What to do? Do we abandon this critical planning simply because so many report that they fail to do much of it? I don't think so.

I'm no longer convinced it is helpful to define needs assessment so broadly, because when you do, a commitment to needs assessment will necessitate the expenditure of significant resources up front. Professionals run up against a wall of resistance when they attempt to gather large quantities of information from many sources at the get-go. Instead, I'm proposing that we reduce the daunting size of the effort by carving the planning process into more manageable and iterative bite sizes: *one swift, targeted bite up front and then subsequent mouthfuls of assessment for subsequent associated programs.*

It's hard to argue with the hundreds who've said in one way or another, "Sure, I'm for assessment. I just don't get to do it. What else do you have for me? I want to make better decisions, do some planning, but not jump into so much study." What I have for this typical professional is performance analysis, that smaller, focused bite.

Performance analysis, then, becomes the front end of the front end. It is an elegant and swift look at the situation. It matches changes happening in human resources and training organizations where a group of professionals, who might be called relationship consultants, requirements consultants, or performance consultants, are tasked with facing the customer and helping them get what they need to achieve their goals. They continuously scan and respond, turning projects over to other human resources and training professionals, depending on the challenge or opportunity. Their job is to swiftly figure things out, as the late, great Ron Zemke put it in his classic text, *Figuring Things Out* (Zemke & Kramlinger, 1982). What these professionals are doing is performance analysis, a precursor to the substantial planning involved in the needs assessment associated with the production of a particular solution, like a class or a reenginered policy or a multimedia program.

Only after it is certain that a training, coaching, or information solution is appropriate does the organization make the investment in more lengthy, substantive training needs assessment. Table 1.1 is a comparison of performance analysis and training needs assessment.

In Table 1.1, note the difference in why, when, and how. In performance analysis, we are attempting to make a preliminary sketch of the opportunity, to figure out what is involved in serving a customer, and then to bring the necessary partners together to collaborate on producing and delivering the solution system. Performance analysis is what we do before we invest in needs assessment or what we can finally, accurately dub training needs assessment. Once we have determined that education, training, or information will contribute, the lengthier training needs assessment can commence.

Performance analysis guarantees doing the right things. Training needs assessment is about doing those right things right.

Table 1.1. Performance Analysis and Training Needs Assessment.

Performance Analysis	*Training Needs Assessment*
Is a process for partnering with clients to figure out what it will take to achieve their goals	Is a process for determining what is in and what is out of an instructional or informational program
Results in a data-driven rationale and the description of a solution system	Results in classes, job aids, coaching, documentation, electronic performance support, and so on
Is an initial response to the opportunity or request from the client or customer	Is a follow-on study that takes performance analysis findings and turns them into the "right" instruction and information
Focuses on defining the limits of the problem or domain in broad strokes and then determining what to do	Focuses on texture and authenticity, on what performers need to know and do in detail
Defines the opportunity or problem and what to do about it	Defines the details necessary to create concrete solutions
Defines cross-functional solution systems	Identifies the details of exemplary performance and perspectives so that they can be taught, included in knowledge-management systems, and communicated

This book focuses on performance analysis. My previous book, *Training Needs Assessment* (1987), covers the more extensive assessment efforts in more detail. Please see Chapter Two for more about these two concepts.

There are precedents for chopping the front end into targeted and related parts, so that what you learn in the first phase enlightens subsequent efforts. General practitioners, for example, do it when a patient presents with a problem such as fatigue. They ask questions to determine likely causes and then turn to more extensive testing to confirm educated hunches. Subsequent contact with specialists, and related intensive diagnostics, are based on that initial once-over.

Another example is the early opportunity analysis conducted by entrepreneurs. In real estate development, an experienced developer quickly reviews the characteristics of a potential site to identify the issues most likely to be fatal to the project. Using as little time and money as possible, the developer confirms the “deal-killer” issue and moves on to another site, or finds that the issue is tolerable and moves on to the next potential deal killer for that site. Only when the largest, easiest-to-investigate killers are retired does the developer invest “real” money and time in the project.

Perhaps you have some questions now. In Table 1.2, I anticipate some of your questions and answer them.

How Does the Book Work?

In this chapter and in Chapters Two and Three, I define performance analysis and explain why, why now, why you, and why do it quickly. I present the performance analysis basics, along with examples, job aids, and templates. What questions should you ask? To whom should you address those questions? Why do it this way? The next two chapters answer those questions.

Chapter Four focuses on handling typical situations, such as a request for support in the introduction of new software or the need to plan to ensure that engineers’ skills are contemporary. The chapter highlights four kinds of requirements: (1) a rollout of a new system, approach, or perspective; (2) a problem with performance or results; (3) development for a particular group of people; and (4) strategic planning. We look at strategies for carrying out performance analysis linked to these standard, familiar requests for assistance.

Chapter Five is all about speed. It describes strategies for putting the pedal to the metal and reviews ways of capturing useful data without large numbers of sources or lengthy processes.

Chapter Six acknowledges that performance analysis is a planning process with two primary purposes. The first is to figure out what needs to be done to serve the client and organization. The second is to establish relationships in

Table 1.2. Concerns About Speedy Performance Analysis.

Concerns	*Responses*
"I like needs assessment. Will I still get to do it?"	Of course. Performance analysis sets the table for needs assessment, finding the right places to direct that focused study. In some organizations, the analyst passes the project on to others who will do the needs assessment. In others, the work is done by the same person.
"It would take me hours to figure out how to do this performance analysis."	This handbook will provide templates matched to the kinds of opportunities you're likely to have. Adapting the template and sample questions will shave time off your study. Use the book in a just-in-time way, if you prefer. Besides, you owe yourself the professional development.
"This doesn't give me enough time."	PA probably doesn't give you enough time to feel certain. What it will do is give you a general picture of what's happening, enabling you to recommend likely, but not certain, directions and approaches. Remember, PA is the beginning, not the end, of your work with your customers.
"I have projects in Palo Alto, Capetown, and Singapore. Will this planning process help me?"	I intend it to. We'll talk about the issues that many countries, cultures, and settings impose on you. Although there are no easy answers, there are some strategies, including the use of technology, that will address issues raised by distance and difference.
"I prefer surveys. Can I do one in performance analysis?"	Yes, you can, especially if you are seeking priority directions, and after you've done sufficient study to be able to present options in the survey. Technology is also useful here. See Chapter Seven for ideas about how to use technology to speed up and extend your reach.
"Performance analysis. Needs assessment. Get serious. My management won't give me that much time."	Take the bull by the horns. Although it is difficult to justify lengthy studies, it is even more difficult to justify hasty actions. Use architects and doctors as analogies. Would your customer respect a physician or architect who plunged into surgery or a building project without diagnostics?

the organization and readiness for subsequent interventions. In this chapter, while reviewing interviews, focus groups, observation, and surveys as methods for performance analysis, we concentrate on the perspectives of executives, managers, employees, experts, and solution partners during analysis. What we'll see is that they are not usually as keen on analysis as we are.

Chapter Seven looks at technology and analysis. This chapter describes the ways that new and familiar technologies can be used for analysis. It makes sense that blogs, wikis, and online communities are influential in how we deliver training and support. But what do they mean for analysis effort? How can we use them to save time? To capture more and better opinions? Chapter Seven presents technology basics and extends to more exotic possibilities.

Chapter Eight describes ways to present the results of your performance analyses and includes examples of both performance analysis reports and briefings. This chapter discusses the challenges related to influencing others and presents touchstones for making analysis efforts more actionable in the organization.

In Chapter Nine, many professionals write about their experiences with analysis. They describe what happened, why they think it happened, and what they'd do differently if they had to do it over again. Their experiences take us to elementary school classrooms, and to the worlds of finance, fish, franchising, technology, and consulting.

Chapter Ten describes trends in our business and how they relate to performance analysis. A source and reference list closes the book.

First Things Fast Is a Handbook

- It's handy. The book is meant to be easy to use. It responds to the needs of two kinds of people: those who want to do performance analyses and those who don't yet want to but might, given good tools and reasons. The book is oriented to your challenges, questions, successes, and concerns.
- It's functional. If you want to know where to start on a performance analysis, the options are here. If you want a sample executive interview for a technology rollout, you can find one to tailor to your

situation. If you are confronting resistance from experts, you'll find an example here that's similar to what you're experiencing and suggestions for how to respond. If you are intrigued with blogs, we'll describe how to use the approach for planning.

- It's chock full of practical stuff. There are many examples, charts, anecdotes, and quotes. Job aids are everywhere. There are also exceptions and irreverent commentary.
- It includes the voice of the customer. Sprinkled throughout the book are typical conversations and anecdotes. There are dialogues between trainers, performance analysts, customers, and experts. They provide a quick way to witness and thus prepare for the perspectives of others and for what you have confronted or will confront when you plan. Most chapters include a sidebar story contributed by a practitioner. Chapter Nine is seven extended analysis cases.
- It's stripped down. I've vacuumed out nonessential details. I've eliminated introductions and foundational materials. Unfortunately, this means I've pulled out many references. I apologize to the wise people whose thinking has influenced this book (such as Joe Harless, Robert Mager, Peter Pipe, Tom Gilbert, B. J. Fogg, Jack Phillips, Dana Robinson, Geary Rummler, Marc Rosenberg, Ruth Clark, Ron Zemke, and many others) for not making the frequent allusions to their contributions that I've offered in earlier writings. My purpose here is to make it easier for human resources professionals to get their jobs done—to get to the heart of the matter, as Robert Mager put it (1970). The references that are included are meant to provide more perspectives and examples, not historical underpinnings.
- It's relevant. We'll visit computer companies, banks, oceans, and government agencies. We'll talk about sales, diversity, teams, software, and management development in this country and others. We'll talk about the implications of global settings for analysis. Examples and dialogues come from real projects in real organizations, and, where possible, I will identify the company or agency. Often, I'll take experiences and combine and even exaggerate them to illustrate points.

Given the choice of several examples or quotes, I'll pick the more irreverent.

- It's fun. Well, maybe fun is too strong a word, but it is lighthearted. I'll write as I would talk to you, as if we were sitting in your office together, chatting about a project, looking at work products, planning interactions with an executive, touring the web, considering the reactions of managers or job incumbents, wondering if we can make a case based on talking to seven people instead of seven hundred.

Performance analysis is your interface with the organization. It is the systematic way that performance professionals understand opportunities and problems and extend themselves into the organization and the field. It is relationships, questions, data, dissection, conversation, synthesis, collaboration, and, yes, marketing too. It is a systematic strategy for figuring out what to do in a swift fashion. I know you will find many uses for it today.