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Stakeholders and Support for Performance

IN THIS CHAPTER we focus on *stakeholders* and their responsibilities in supporting effective performance, another foundation block for improving performance in today's complex organizational systems. Before we discuss stakeholders themselves, we must first set the context for effective performance. Next, we examine the primary stakeholders who are involved in most efforts to improve performance, as well as other stakeholders who may play a role, depending on the organizational setting and the particular performance involved. Then we consider the important factors that affect performance in organizations and the stakeholders who can provide those factors.

The major topics for this chapter are

- Performance and performers
- Stakeholders in performance
- Organizational factors that support performance

Performance and Performers

Stakeholders are the important individuals, groups, units, and organizations that make up complex systems. Before discussing stakeholders and their support for performance, we must be clear on what we mean by *performance* and *performers*. The mission and goals of any complex organizational system are accomplished by the performance of the people who do the work.

Our focus in this book is primarily on the activities and interactions at the *job/performer level* where the work is done, as described by Rummler and Brache (1995). We do not focus in the same detail at the higher *process level*, how work is organized, or the even higher *organizational level*, the way the business is set up and managed. (However, many of the principles of stakeholder support apply at those levels as well.) Our attention is on the way that the organization's work is done and on the people who do that work.

Performance

Effective performance is the goal of every organizational system. Thomas Gilbert's *Human Competence: Engineering Worthy Performance* (1978) is credited by many with laying the groundwork for the critically essential analysis that underlies support for improvement of individual and organizational performance (Chevalier, 2003).

Performance is a combination of *behaviors* by individuals, groups, and teams and the *accomplishments* (products and services) that they produce (adapted from Dean, 1999, p. 6, & Gilbert, 1978, p. 17.). Thus, performance is a combination of the behaviors (decisions and actions) of those who do the work and the products and services that result from those decisions and actions.

For a successful restaurant, one very important performance consists of the decisions and actions by the chef and the food that the chef produces for the customers. Other examples of important performances (behaviors plus accomplishments) for that restaurant are managers' purchases of supplies and the wait staff's services to customers.

Performers

The term *performer* refers to the individual—working alone or in groups and teams—who performs some work. This allows us to consider, as performers, those who work as volunteers or other contributors to an activity, as well as those who are more formally employed. In this book, the term *performers* is used to refer specifically to those whose performance is the focus of an intervention. At the restaurant, performers who are the focus of an intervention might include managers, the chef, all who assist her in the kitchen, the wait staff, the cleaning crew, and others.

Stakeholders in Performance

A *stakeholder* is an individual, group, organizational component, or organization with a share or interest—a “stake”—in the goals or outcomes of an activity, process, project, organization, or intervention in a complex system. Stakeholders provide the information, work, requirements, support, encouragement, oversight, and all the other resources that help shape the survival and success of organizations and communities in today’s complex world.

All major stakeholders must recognize—and look for constructive ways to intervene in—our complex systems to provide useful support and encouragement for improved performance throughout the systems. The goal at the job/performer level is to make sure that *performers*, individuals as well as groups and teams, can perform effectively.

Individual stakeholders have many different roles in supporting performance—as managers at several levels, performers (employees and other community and group members), organizational change agents (such as learning specialists and quality control professionals), internal and external suppliers and customers, regulators, experts, and others. Units of an organization may be stakeholders in a moderately complex system that has a single organization as its major component. In highly complex systems made up of several organizations, more than one organization may be a major stakeholder. We must understand—and help individuals, groups, and organizations

understand—who they are as stakeholders and what they can do to support and improve performance in these complex systems.

Stakeholders Who Support Performance

No matter how timely, ingenious, or creative the strategic goals of any organization or community may be, those goals can only be met through the competent, committed, and often collaborative performance of the people who do the work. Stakeholders, as individuals, groups, and organizations, can provide ongoing support for that performance in several ways: encouragement, recognition, resources, and so on. In this chapter, we concentrate on identifying key stakeholders and the important factors in the work environment that they can provide. Later, in Chapter 4, we explore specific strategies and best practices by stakeholders to support performance.

Stakeholder support clearly becomes very important when an intervention is planned or under way to develop or improve performance to reach a recognized goal. These interventions may be *instructional* (such as training, coaching, or e-learning) to improve or develop new knowledge and skills that performers then transfer to performance on the job. Interventions often are *noninstructional* (such as process improvement, organizational restructuring, changes in compensation, or performance management) that enhance the work environment to support improved performance. Interventions may be combinations of both instructional and noninstructional efforts; they are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Stakeholder support for performance can be applied in both work and nonwork settings, such as civic groups and communities, voluntary creative activities, and performance challenges and opportunities of all kinds. Stakeholders in nonwork situations might not fit easily into some of the typical organizational categories described below, but they can still be identified as having a “stake” in the performance outcomes.

Table 2.1 shows typical stakeholders to support performance, their roles, and when they should be involved in planning or implementation of a performance improvement intervention. Research and best practices in interventions (addressed in Chapter 4) show that visible and demonstrable stakeholder support is essential to achieve full desired performance.

Table 2.1. Typical Stakeholders in Performance Improvement Interventions

<i>Stakeholders</i>	<i>Description of Role</i>	<i>When Involvement Is Important</i>
Executives and Managers of Performers (I)	Executives and managers who are involved in decisions about performance interventions for high-priority strategic outcomes (such as setting priorities, funding, selecting consultants, choosing type of intervention, approving evaluation metrics)	As primary stakeholders when intervention focuses on strategic goals
Supervisors, Team Leaders (I)	Supervisors, team leaders, and other job titles for those who are responsible for and oversee the work of performers who are the focus of the intervention; may have formal or informal authority	As primary stakeholders in all interventions
Performers (I)	Employees or other workers of all sorts at various levels whose performance is the focus of the intervention	
Performance Consultants (I/E)	Professionals who contribute to analysis, design, development, implementation, and/or evaluation of the intervention and may have many job titles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For instructional interventions: trainer, instructional designer, facilitator, instructor, and others • For non-instructional interventions: organizational development specialist, change agent, performance analyst, human resource specialist, and others 	
Evaluators (I/E)	Professionals focusing on intervention assessments that are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formative: design, methods, materials • Summative: reaction, learning, performance, results <p>Note: performance consultants or others may serve as evaluators in some situations (see Chapter 5)</p>	Early in planning and implementation when evaluation is important

Note: Stakeholders may be internal (I), external (E), or either (I/E) to key organizations in the organizational system.)

(Continued)

Table 2.1. Typical Stakeholders in Performance Improvement Interventions, Cont'd

<i>Stakeholders</i>	<i>Description of Role</i>	<i>When Involvement Is Important</i>
Performance Partners (I/E)	Experts in special aspects of performance, such as information technology, physical and information security, health and safety, customer relations, marketing, and quality	Early in planning and development when the stakeholder has the power to support or undermine the intervention
Co-workers (I/E)	Organizational system members whose work is involved with that of performers, but who are not the focus of the intervention	
Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) (I/E)	Content experts who contribute information and review methods and materials for accuracy and completeness	
Clients, Customers, and Users (I/E)	Those who make use of products or services that are developed by the performers who are the focus of the intervention	
Suppliers (I/E)	Those who supply the physical or intangible resources from which performers develop products and services	
Regulators (E)	Monitors from local, state, national, or international governments who oversee or enforce compliance with rules, laws, and treaties	
Union Representatives (I/E)	Those representing local or international unions with contractual relationships with one or more organizations in the system	
Special Interest Group Representatives (I/E)	Advocates for certain issues (such as environment, mental health, civil rights) with strong concerns related to an organization's operations, products, and services	
Community Residents (I/E)	Residents of an area near an organization in the system, or near an area affected by system operations, products, or services	
Mentors, Sponsors, Funders (I/E)	Those who provide support to performers or other stakeholders; foundations that provide funding for nonprofits	

Note: Stakeholders may be internal (I), external (E), or either (I/E) to key organizations in the organizational system.)

Primary Stakeholders Supporting Performance

Primary stakeholders are very important and must always be involved in an intervention to achieve full performance. As Table 2.1 indicates, primary stakeholders for any intervention may include *executives* and *higher level managers of performers* if the performance improvement intervention is focused on reaching strategic organizational goals (affecting the organization's attainment of its vision and mission). In all interventions, strategic or tactical (affecting operational effectiveness), *supervisors* and *team leaders, performers*, and—with increasing frequency—*performance consultants* (who often use other job titles, discussed below) are primary stakeholders.

Executives and Managers of Performers. When a performance intervention focuses on *strategic* organizational goals, executives and managers of performers make key decisions related to the intervention. They help determine the strategic goals, approve funding, often select consultants, help shape the intervention, approve evaluation metrics, and review progress and outcomes. They often make decisions that affect the work environment and how work is done. They should be involved as primary stakeholders for all strategically related interventions to improve performance that affects the organization's vision, mission, and goals. (Managers of other functions in an organizational system, not in the management chain for the performance improvement intervention itself, may fit in other stakeholder roles such as customer or supplier.)

Supervisors, Team Leaders. These primary stakeholders have responsibility for and oversee the performance that is the focus of the intervention. (Supervisors and team leaders of other workers who are not the focus of the intervention may fit in another stakeholder category, such as co-worker or subject matter expert.) For interventions affecting management performance, higher level managers function as supervisors. For front line employees and those in the organization who directly support them (finance, human resources, safety, and other functions), *supervisors* and *team leaders* are typical titles in the traditional chain of command; there may be other titles in nontraditional settings.

Often there are several levels in the management chain (executives, managers, supervisors) who serve as primary stakeholders for performance support for strategic interventions. They usually are formally in charge, although

in unusual circumstances they may exercise informal authority. In the excavation and clearing of the World Trade Center site in 2001–2002, many people became accepted as supervisors and managers—through expertise or take-charge talents—who had no formal authority in the horrific and incredibly challenging days and months after September 11 (Langewiesche, 2002).

Performers. Those who perform the work that is the focus of the intervention are essential primary stakeholders. Their performance is the target for change or improvement through participation in an instructional intervention that results in enhanced job performance, some noninstructional intervention, or a combination of both. These are the individuals and groups (such as miners, physicians, teachers, managers, salespeople, brokers, and police officials) who produce or oversee the production of the accomplishments (products and services) that organizations provide to the community and society.

Performers also help provide and maintain the work environment that supports producers; examples are specialists in finance, safety, human resources, building maintenance, and information technology. Performers' accomplishments include an uncountable number of products and services from for-profit, not-for-profit, and government organizations and from other groups and individuals. The levels of motivation, commitment, and competence of all these performers make very significant differences in the value of the products and services to their ultimate users in the larger system.

There may be subsets of performers in some situations. For example, there may be several cohorts of performers: those who are currently involved in the intervention, those who have previously completed the intervention's activities, and those who have not yet become involved in the intervention. Front-line as well as higher level performers may be primary stakeholders. All performers may not share all characteristics, such as job titles, projects, or location in the organizational structure. What all performers do share is the task of enhancing their performance through involvement in the intervention.

Performance Consultants. The primary stakeholder group to which many readers of this book may belong is termed "performance consultants" here. Our working definition of a *performance consultant* (adapted from Robinson & Robinson, 1995, p. 10) is a professional who focuses on what people *do* (their

performance) and then considers what it takes (in skills, knowledge, and a range of workplace resources) to do that well. (The performance consultant role is discussed in more detail in Chapters 3, 4, and 6.)

The performance consultant role is a quantum leap forward from the role of the traditional trainer. The trainer is engaged in developing and delivering learning experiences that result in new knowledge and skills for the participant. The performance consultant may well contribute to those learning experiences, but is ultimately focused on the effective application of new knowledge and skills to job performance. Thus, the performance consultant's attention is on the intervention, instructional or noninstructional, as well as on the workplace where the application of new learning to performance takes place.

For an instructional intervention to improve knowledge and skills that are then applied to job performance, actual job titles of performance consultants might include trainer, facilitator, instructional designer, or learning specialist. For noninstructional interventions to improve work processes or other work environment characteristics that support improved performance, their titles might include organizational development specialist, performance analyst, human resource specialist, or quality control expert. Managers of some of these specialists may be directly involved. As performance consultants, all of these professionals focus on helping performers—whatever their functions in the complex organizational system—to develop, improve, or maintain desired performance so that the organization's desired results are achieved effectively and efficiently.

Performance consultants have extremely important roles in the design and delivery of both instructional and noninstructional interventions. They contribute to the analysis that determines a performance gap, the content and approach of the intervention, its implementation, and the evaluation that measures impact on performance and results. An essential tool for the performance consultant is the practice of human performance technology (HPT), a systematic and systemic approach to attaining desired performance. (The HPT process is described at greater length in Chapter 3.)

Of course, many interventions are decided on and implemented by managers without direct involvement of other primary stakeholders, such as the

performers who do the work or any of the specialists who are considered performance consultants here. An underlying theme of this book is to show the benefits, in terms of improved performance and organizational results, from involving performers and performance consultants as primary stakeholders in planning, implementing, and evaluating interventions to ensure that all available expertise contributes to important decisions.

Other Stakeholders Supporting Performance

Other stakeholders also may be important in supporting performance in many interventions. They can include individuals, groups, or communities of people at local, regional, national, or international levels who have concerns related to the complex system. Wise primary stakeholders (managers, performers, and performance consultants) should scrutinize the complex system's diagram and speak with other stakeholders to identify all the stakeholders who should be involved. It is not necessary to involve every possible stakeholder, but those who can significantly support or undermine the intervention should be included. Here, and in Table 2.1, are some of the "usual suspects" who may contribute as stakeholders. Also, primary stakeholders should always check for other important stakeholders in their interventions that are not listed here.

Evaluators. There has been a recent and rapid increase in management requests for evaluations of the outcomes of strategically important interventions (Phillips & Stone, 2002). Evaluators are important stakeholders (internal or external to an organizational system) who should be involved from the beginning of an intervention project whenever evaluation is planned. They can assist with selection of metrics and the design, implementation, and reporting of these assessments. Besides their basic measurement functions, evaluators can also develop assessment information that directly supports full performance following an intervention. (Chapter 5 gives a brief overview of recently developed evaluation approaches that directly support performance.) Occasionally, performance consultants and others take on the role of evaluators.

Performance Partners. Primary stakeholders should consider other functions in the organizational system as potential *performance partners* to support an

intervention. These include people with expertise in special areas such as information technology, physical and information security, quality, marketing, customer relations, ethics, and environmental safety and health. They have particular interests in performance that may dovetail or overlap in certain situations with the concerns of the primary stakeholders and may provide significant additional leverage for an intervention. These performance partners may be internal or external to organizational components in the complex system. (Chapter 7 gives a case study involving close collaboration between performance consultants and one set of performance partners.)

Co-Workers. There are others in the organizational or community setting whose work is involved in some way with the work of performers, but whose own performance is not the focus of the particular performance improvement intervention. These *co-workers* may be internal or external customers or suppliers, may provide other kinds of encouragement or support for performers, or may potentially undermine the performance improvement effort. In any case, they should be involved as stakeholders if they can have a significant effect, positive or negative, on the intervention's outcomes. (Chapter 6 discusses ways to involve these stakeholders.)

Subject Matter Experts. Those with content expertise in areas that are involved in a performance improvement intervention are referred to as *subject matter experts* (SMEs). They often contribute to development of content and review the intervention's methods and materials for accuracy and completeness.

Clients, Customers, and Users. Those who use the products and services of others, internally to an organization or externally by purchase or other means, are very important stakeholders in many complex organizational systems. These stakeholders often (although not always) can choose the products or services they use and have varying degrees of satisfaction with them.

Suppliers. Those who provide the resources, internally or externally to the organizational system, from which products and services are developed are another important stakeholder group. These suppliers may provide physical resources (such as materials or equipment) or more intangible resources (such as information or expertise). They definitely have an interest as stakeholders

in how effectively the organizational system, their customer, produces its results.

Regulators. Officials from some governmental entity—local, state, national, or international organization—may be important stakeholders for an intervention. They oversee or enforce compliance with laws and regulations such as local building codes, city or state zoning requirements, civil rights or other national legislation, or international commitments and treaties.

Union Representatives. Officials of local or international unions may inspect or intervene on behalf of some union members and other workers in the complex system. They may have a significant contractual impact on policies, procedures, and activities.

Special Interest Group Representatives. Issue-related advocates may campaign, lobby, or otherwise exert influence on components of the complex system to help the viewpoints of their members or constituents be considered. They may be internal or external to key organizations in the system. For example, members of the Georgia chapter of the Mental Health Association (MHA) served on advisory committees for some of the regional boards and community mental health centers for the Georgia State Mental Health Delivery System (Chapter 1).

Community Residents. Those who reside geographically near an organization's site or near an area affected by the complex system's goals or operations may have strong concerns relating to environmental, political, social, economic, or other issues. For example, many residents of urban neighborhoods become closely engaged with local governing bodies on issues such as housing and commercial development, street repairs, and police protection and insist on involvement as stakeholders.

Mentors, Sponsors, Funders. Those who provide personal guidance as mentors or provide financial or other support to individuals or groups (performers or other stakeholders) in a complex system may intervene to influence the system on behalf of those persons. For example, various groups and individuals sponsor college scholarships for inner city youth who successfully grad-

uate from high school; these sponsors often serve as advocates for school system improvements. For nonprofit organizations, foundations that provide funds may be important stakeholders.

Supporting and Opposing Stakeholders

Usually, stakeholders—wherever they are in the complex system—are considered to be interested in *supporting* or *encouraging* the activity to achieve a common goal. Key supporting stakeholders for any moderately complex organizational system would include the organization's primary stakeholders: top executives and managers, who define the organization's mission, vision, goals, and success indicators; employees of the organization, who perform many different types of work; and performance consultants, internal or external to the organization, who work with other stakeholders to identify and address needs for improved performance.

Depending on specific performance improvement needs, other supporting stakeholders for a moderately complex system might include suppliers of the many resources used in accomplishing the organization's goals, customers who purchase or obtain the organization's products and services, stockholders who have invested in the organization, government regulators, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as community residents and special interest advocacy groups.

Occasionally there are stakeholders whose concern about the activity or goal is in opposition to its accomplishment and who can interfere to suppress or undermine the activity. These stakeholders must always be considered in order to address the reasons for their opposition. When possible, supporters may lessen or neutralize opposition by negotiating acceptable changes to goals and activities with the opposing stakeholders and by strengthening the backing of supportive stakeholders for those goals and activities.

An example of the impact that opposing stakeholders may have is the grounding of nearly four hundred flights of financially troubled US Airways over the 2004 Christmas weekend. The airline attributed the scratched flights—and ensuing chaos for passengers—to receiving “an unusually high number of sick calls from flight attendants and baggage handlers,” although there was no sign of a job action. Struggling to reduce labor costs, the airline's

management had negotiated significant pay cuts with reservations and gate agents, but had not yet reached new agreements with flight attendants and baggage handlers (Rein & de Tantillo, 2004).

There occasionally are some very “strange bedfellows,” stakeholder organizations at opposite sides of issues that may join together on an ad hoc basis to achieve a common goal. An example was the joint 2004 effort by the Sierra Club and Judicial Watch—with very different political perspectives—to challenge the withholding of information on membership and deliberations of the National Energy Policy Development Group, established by Vice President Cheney. The challenge was eventually denied by the U.S. Supreme Court (Sierra Club, 2004). Such ad hoc relationships are usually relatively short-term with rather limited performance impacts.

Examples of Stakeholders in Moderately Complex Systems

National Weather Service

The National Weather Service (NWS), part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in the Department of Commerce, is a moderately complex system with a single organization as its main component. (NWS is, of course, a subsystem of NOAA.) NWS develops weather-related forecasts and warnings for all U.S. states and territories. A new online synchronous and asynchronous training system for forecasters (Advanced Warning Operations Course or AWOC) was launched in 2004. The NWS Warning Decision Training Branch (WDTB) identified the following stakeholders to provide various types of support—before, during, and after forecasters complete AWOC—for full application of the training by forecasters in their work.

Managers at several levels in the organization are among the primary stakeholders for the AWOC intervention. They include the NWS Director and six regional directors; the Director, Office of Climate, Water, and Weather Services; Meteorologists in Charge (MICs), managers of 124 Weather Forecast Offices in all states and territories; and Hydrologists in Charge (HICs), managers of thirteen River Forecast Centers in North America.

Performers who are primary stakeholders are the forecasters, approximately 1,600 professionals who monitor weather conditions around the clock in all

U.S. states and territories. They determine when to issue warnings on potentially destructive weather conditions (such as floods, thunderstorms, tornadoes, hurricanes, blizzards, and high winds).

Performance consultants, also primary stakeholders, provide internal management and assistance for the intervention at several levels. These include the managers of AWOC and its component programs: the NWS Training Division Director, the Chief of the Warning Decision Training Branch (WDTB), and instructors in WDTB who manage key AWOC programs (AWOC for forecasters, facilitator training for onsite AWOC facilitators, and evaluation processes for both AWOC and facilitator training). Also serving as internal performance consultants are facilitators who support AWOC at local sites: the National Science and Operations Officers (SOO) Program Coordinator, and individual SOOs who facilitate AWOC at each Weather Forecast Office; and the Development and Operations Hydrologist (DOH) Representative for Training at the National Center's Field Requirements Group, and individual DOHs who facilitate AWOC at each River Forecast Center.

An external performance consultant, the author, assisted WDTB with identifying major AWOC stakeholders, building stakeholder support, developing Level 3 evaluation instruments for measuring performance on the job, and suggesting possible future Level 4 measures of organizational results.

An additional potential internal stakeholder was a representative of the National Weather Service Employees Organization (NWSEO). Other potential stakeholders external to NWS—who may be considered for future roles to support AWOC during and after its rollout—include private sector organizations (consultants, media, and information service companies) that make NWS information widely available and provide specialized services to organizations and the public outside the NWS mission.

Canadian National Railway, U.S. Operation

Another example of stakeholders in a moderately complex system, the U.S. Operations of the Canadian National Railway, is provided in Chapter 7. Detailed descriptions of the interventions, key stakeholder groups, and their strategies to support performance are provided.

Examples of Stakeholders in Highly Complex Systems

Highly complex systems typically include several moderately complex organizations that work interactively toward a common goal. They may cross regional, state, or national boundaries and include a very wide range of potential stakeholders. Two examples (each lasting only a few years) are briefly described in Chapter 1: the Georgia Mental Health Delivery System and the Long Term Care Innovation and Leadership Institute of Southwestern Ontario.

A highly complex system involving multiple moderately complex organizations, with a much longer successful track record (thirty years to date), is described in detail in Chapter 8. JHPIEGO Corporation is a nonprofit affiliate of Johns Hopkins University, based in Baltimore, Maryland. It provides advocacy, education, and performance improvement services in underdeveloped host countries in relation to family planning and maternal and neonatal care, through the U.S. Agency for International Development. JHPIEGO's long-term success in improving performance in health care, with low resources in very culturally challenging situations, is due in large part to continual efforts to develop productive partnerships with stakeholders of many kinds.

Organizational Factors That Support Performance in Complex Systems

In any complex system, what are the factors that make effective performance more likely? What factors distinguish the work settings in which performers generally meet or exceed expectations from the settings in which performers generally do not meet those expectations? Which stakeholders can provide these supportive factors in the work setting?

Two sets of factors are described below. One set supports performers in any typically supervised work setting (such as a moderately or highly complex organization, a community, or a family). The other set of factors provides additional support for performers who are relatively autonomous in choosing whether to adopt new knowledge or skills. For both sets, the stakeholders who can provide those factors are identified or suggested. Widespread recognition and use of these two sets of factors by all stakeholders can make performance improvement a collaborative priority across the organization.

Factors Supporting Performance That Is Supervised

Several levels of management and supervision typically oversee performance in both moderately and highly complex organizations. Following Gilbert's groundbreaking work (1978), various models have been derived that identify factors in these supervised work environments, at the job/performer level, that are necessary to support effective performance. One of these, widely used, is by Rummler and Brache (1995). An adapted version of their model is shown in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2. Factors That Support Performance in Complex Systems

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Responsible Stakeholders</i>
1. Clear performance specifications	Outputs, standards, and results for performers to attain	Managers and Supervisors
2. Necessary resources and support	Signals to act, priorities, tools, information, responsibility, lack of task interference, practice opportunities, and other support	
3. Appropriate consequences	Recognition, rewards, incentives that are meaningful to performers	
4. Timely and relevant feedback	Timely, relevant, specific information on how well performance meets specifications	
5. Individual capability	The right person in the job: physical, mental, emotional abilities to perform	
6. Necessary skills and knowledge	Ability to perform effectively, based on experience, coaching, or learning	Managers and Supervisors, Performers, Performance Consultants

Adapted from Rummler and Brache (1995).

Factors Supporting Supervised Performers

The model in Table 2.2 for typically supervised performers has six factors. These factors are applicable in any organizational setting and have been very easy to explain and illustrate to stakeholders in many different types of organizations.

All six factors in Table 2.2 are necessary for supervised performers to be able to perform effectively:

- Without *clear performance specifications*, outputs and achievement of standards would be inconsistent.
- Without *necessary resources and support*, performance would be delayed, sporadic, and perhaps below standards.
- Without *appropriate consequences*, motivation and incentives for successful performance would be absent.
- Without *timely and relevant feedback*, performers wouldn't know whether they were performing well or poorly.
- Without *individual capability*, performers would not have the capacity for effective performance.
- Without *necessary skills and knowledge*, performers would not know how to perform.

The first five factors are the direct responsibility of top managers (for strategic interventions) and supervisors of performers (for all interventions). These stakeholders are responsible for defining the work, providing resources and support, establishing consequences, providing feedback, and selecting the right people for the job. Performance consultants do not have a direct role in the first five factors, but can be instrumental in coaching managers and supervisors on the factors and their management responsibilities.

Managers and supervisors also have responsibility for the sixth factor, because they must ensure that performers have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform the work. They share responsibility for this factor with performers, who must use the necessary skills and knowledge, and with performance consultants, who often must design and deliver or manage learning experiences to help performers gain new knowledge and skills.

Applying Factors for Supervised Performers

The six factors can be continually applied to supporting supervised performance. The first four factors provide a supportive work environment. The fifth factor places a capable person in the job. The sixth factor provides the training or other preparation for that person's effective performance. The more familiar all stakeholders—managers, performers, performance consultants, and others—are with these factors, the easier it is for them to communicate with each other about support for improved performance.

When there is a *deficiency* in *existing* performance, unfortunately, there is a well-known tendency for managers to assume that training is the obvious solution to improve performance. Rummler and Brache strongly disagree. They emphasize (1995, p. 73) that in their experience:

- About 80 percent of performance problems relate to the first four factors in the *work environment*;
- Only 15 to 20 percent of performance problems can be resolved through *training* to develop new skills or knowledge (sixth factor); and
- A mere 1 percent, or fewer, of performance problems relate to an *incapable person* in the job (fifth factor).

There is another good reason to avoid selecting training (sixth factor) as the solution without careful analysis of other factors. Instructional interventions are often significantly more expensive than other possible solutions. Performance consultants have an important role in coaching managers on the need to consider the first four factors in the work environment before considering training or replacing the performer as a way to resolve performance problems.

When *new* performance is necessary, an instructional solution to develop new knowledge or skills (sixth factor) may well be required. However, a non-instructional solution such as work process redesign may also be helpful. The first four work environment factors are always necessary for effective performance and should be addressed as part of the intervention package, even when instruction is determined necessary to address the sixth factor.

Factors Supporting Performance That Is Relatively Autonomous

Besides the Rummler and Brache factors, other factors also apply in some less-supervised work settings. A 2004 study by Yelon, Sheppard, Sleight, and Ford addressed factors affecting performers who are relatively autonomous in doing their work. By their definition, autonomous performers are those who:

- Are not required to follow set procedures;
- Are not closely supervised on performance;
- Decide for themselves *how* to operate for some or all tasks; and
- Decide *whether* and *when* to apply new knowledge and skills to their performance.

These autonomous performers may have some flexibility in the extent to which they require (or even desire) support from several of the Rummler and Brache factors in Table 2.2. They may establish their own *performance specifications*. They may develop their own *resources and support* (such as determining their own signals to act and finding the information and tools they need). They may set their own *consequences*, and may function well without *feedback* from supervisors. They may make judgments about their own *capabilities* for the work they do. Finally, they are quite likely to make their own determinations on the *skills and knowledge* they need to perform capably.

The performers in the Yelon, Sheppard, Sleight, and Ford study were physicians who were lecturers on the faculties of medical schools and who attended workshops on effective instruction; they are clearly an extreme example of autonomous performers. At a lesser extreme are the many situations in which employees are autonomous in some respects, such as being empowered to make certain individual decisions that the organization will uphold.

One example is the retail sales staff at Nordstrom stores, who have significant leeway to accompany customers to various parts of the store and provide very personalized sales service. Their sales policy manual for many years has consisted of a small card with a single sentence: *Use your own best judgment at all times* (Tyson, 2004).

The Yelon, Sheppard, Sleight, and Ford study found that autonomous performers usually decide, *during* or *after* a learning experience, whether and how to apply what they have learned to their performance. Three factors they use to make this decision are shown in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3. Factors Supporting Autonomous Performers in Applying New Knowledge and Skills

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Responsible Stakeholders</i>
1. Credibility of new knowledge and skills	New knowledge and skills seem logical, examples are convincing, they are used by respected colleagues, and they seem effective.	Managers and Supervisors, Performers, Subject Matter Experts, Others
2. Practicality of new knowledge and skills	New approach seems clear, reasonably operational, and easy to apply to performance.	Managers and Supervisors, Performers, Others
3. Recognized need to improve own performance	New approach would help achieve a goal, solve a problem, or improve performance.	Managers and Supervisors, Performers, Others

Adapted from Yelon, Sheppard, Sleight, and Ford (2004).

Factors Supporting Autonomous Performers

For relatively autonomous performers, all three of the factors in Table 2.3 are important as they consider adopting new knowledge and skills:

- Without *credibility* for suggested new knowledge and skills, performers would lack confidence that their use would improve their own performance.

- Without *practicality* of easy application, performers would be unlikely to adopt new knowledge and skills.
- Without their own *recognized need* to improve their performance, performers would not be interested in learning new knowledge or skills.

Applying Factors Supporting Autonomous Performers

Because the Yelon, Sheppard, Sleight, and Ford research is very new (2004), there is no hard evidence on which stakeholders can best provide these factors in the work environment. All three factors are important when either *new* performance or *improvement* in existing performance is required for performers who are autonomous to some extent. In those situations, all primary stakeholders should be coached about these three factors, so they can provide the appropriate support for use of new skills and knowledge.

The *credibility* of new skills for improving performance, the first factor, could be addressed effectively by the management chain in the organization—to show the importance of the new skills and the value to the organization of their application in the work environment. Managers should identify and include other stakeholders, such as subject matter experts, who can vouch for the credibility of the new skills. Other performers may also contribute to supporting this factor.

The *practicality* of the new skills for application to performance, the second factor, could also be addressed by managers and supervisors. Performers themselves could contribute to determining the most effective application approaches. There may be other stakeholders who can support the practicality of the new skills.

The *need* for improving their performance using the new skills, the third factor, must be recognized and accepted by the relatively autonomous performers themselves. This factor can also be emphasized by the performers' managers and supervisors. Again, there may be other stakeholders who can support the need for improved performance.

Performance consultants may not have a direct role in providing these three factors, but they may be able to support the responsible stakeholders in several ways. They can emphasize the *credibility* and *practicality* of the new skills, as

vouched for by others, and help performers recognize their own *need* for improved performance. They will also need to coach *all* responsible stakeholders, as well as other stakeholders who may be able to contribute, on the importance of emphasizing these three factors for relatively autonomous performers.

Summary of This Chapter

Success in complex organizations is based on the effective performance of the people who do the work. *Performance* (behaviors and accomplishments) and *performers* must be the focus of efforts to improve the organization's operations, products, and services.

There are many *stakeholders* in complex organizations who have strong interests in effective performance and who can provide necessary support for that performance. For all interventions to develop or improve performance, primary stakeholders include:

- Supervisors and team leaders, and—for strategically important interventions—top executives and managers;
- Performers whose work is the focus of the intervention; and
- Performance consultants who provide the expertise to analyze performance gaps, suggest appropriate interventions, and contribute to design and delivery of the interventions.

Often other important stakeholders also can contribute to the performance improvement process. Stakeholders provide information, suggestions, contacts, encouragement, and other resources that strengthen and support interventions.

Stakeholders are particularly important in providing key factors that support performance for both supervised and autonomous performers. Recognition and application of these factors by all stakeholders makes performance improvement an organization-wide collaborative enterprise with strong chances for success. In the next chapter, we address the role of a particularly important stakeholder, the performance consultant, in helping the complex organization achieve the performance it needs for success.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Stakeholders are frequently described as important players in both fact and fiction, although they may not have that label. Descriptions of the lives and careers of historic personages (for example, the first Queen Elizabeth, Benjamin Disraeli, and Franklin D. Roosevelt) identify contemporary stakeholders who affected their lives in significant ways. Many of Shakespeare's plays, notably *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*, describe the interaction of key stakeholders in power relationships.

Readers may find the following nonfiction discussions of stakeholders of some interest. (There are, of course, many other descriptions of business and historical events involving stakeholders that could be explored.)

Bethune, Gordon. (1999). *From worst to first: Behind the scenes of Continental's remarkable comeback*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. Bethune, CEO of Continental Airlines, describes the detailed interactions over several years with all employees, other internal stakeholders, and with external stakeholders, such as financiers, regulators, and others, that turned Continental into a profitable enterprise (at least for some time).

Block, Peter. (2000). *Flawless consulting: A guide to getting your expertise used* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Pfeiffer. This updated classic describes how to develop the relationships between clients and consultants that are essential for effective organizational improvement.

Langdon, Danny. (1995). *The new language of work*. Amherst, MA: Human Resources Development Press. A common language of work for use by all stakeholders strengthens and simplifies the resolution of work-related issues.

Langewiesche, William. (2002). *American ground: Unbuilding the World Trade Center*. New York: North Point Press, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux. The author, the only reporter allowed total access to Ground Zero, spent nine months there capturing the gripping story of harrowing events and the amazingly resourceful stakeholders of all kinds who developed the relationships and processes that got an impossible job done.