Gayeski, D. and Adams, A. (1999, May/June). "Barriers and Enablers to the Adoption of Human Performance Technology: Or, If we're so smart, why aren't we rich?"

Performance Improvement. 37-48.

Need for a new research agenda

Over the last fifty years, a vast amount of research has been generated about how to apply principles of behavioral science to the improvement of human performance in the workplace. In the early days of our profession, organizations (the military, in particular) were eager to apply newly formulated strategies for programmed instruction, instructional systems design, and scientific management to meet the enormous challenges of wartime preparation and post-World War II economic industrial expansion. Today, however, despite continuing research on training design, incentive systems, ergonomics, and organizational communication systems, practitioners of human performance technology (hpt) and human resources development (HRD) are finding that their clients and sponsors are often reluctant to take their advice.

I have reviewed the entire body of research (approximately 300 articles) published in *Performance Improvement Quarterly* since 1988 and in *Human Resources Development Quarterly* since 1990, and have been reflecting on my own experience in consulting and preparing future hpt professionals. What strikes me is that, despite thousands of pages of research and recommendations embodied in our literature, hpt and HRD professionals seem frequently not to be able to practice what we as a field preach. And this doesn't seem to be a "training" problem; many practitioners *know about* hpt principles, and *want to* put hpt theories

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and models into practice, but can't. In an article reviewing the preparation and subsequent professional practice of human performance technologists, Rossett and Czech (1995, p. 128) found that "The failure of PT-trained practitioners to alter the perceptions and degree of support in their organizations is intriguing. While respondents were generally confident of their skills regarding PT, particularly their ability to make a case for needs assessment, they recognize limits to their influence."

Likewise, Dean (1995, p. 68) reported that, "The conditions that must exist for organizations to benefit from all HPT can offer them are lacking. First, few individuals have the knowledge and skill necessary to implement the methods, measures, and models of HPT, and second, those who do seldom have the opportunity and authority to apply HPT where it will most benefit the organization." Smalley, Inman, and DeJong (1995) also discuss the barriers to getting clients to adopt hpt rather than conventional training solutions, and document a three-year process in getting client buy-in to a new approach.

Why won't clients listen to us? Why are our methods, apparently convincingly powerful and potentially effective to us, *not* accepted and acknowledged more widely? Why do organizations spend millions on TQM, reengineering, "learning organization" proponents, and technological fads but refuse to spend time and money on front-end analysis, evaluation, and other methods which our profession endorses as integral to performance improvement? If we're so smart, why aren't we rich (and famous!)?

Are we unable to explain that our approaches actually save time and money in the long run? Are human performance technologists situated in the wrong departments or structures to be effective? Are we as a profession still not taken seriously as business partners because we lack the essential understanding of business concepts? Have new management approaches such as diversity, empowerment, and reengineering come into conflict with standard hpt practices of identifying and promoting "one best way" to do a job? Are we fighting (and perhaps losing) turf wars with information systems departments, communication professionals, and management consultants? Or, as Nickols (1990) asserted, is human performance technology at the end of an era — an outdated idea that should be put to rest?

We need to answer these questions before we can hope to put into practice all the research that has been generated by the founders and the future leaders of performance technology.

Methodology:

The emphasis of this research was to develop recommendations for a research agenda that would result in sound and practical principles that hpt practitioners could employ to successfully navigate the journey from traditional training and HR practice to what may be variously called "performance technology", "performance consulting" or "performance management".   In order to identify issues that needed further attention, I conducted a six-month research project to investigate what organizational variables and professional practices seem to serve as barriers to or supporters of the adoption of human performance technology approaches.

The research focused on documenting "best practices" by interviewing training / HR professionals and executives in organizations where human performance technology

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interventions and approaches have been implemented and proven successful. Additionally, current journal, magazine, and newsletter articles were reviewed to find documentation regarding the barriers and enablers in implementing hpt initiatives. Finally, I reflected upon my own experience with this topic in terms of my consulting practice and teaching, and my informal interactions with colleagues and workshop participants who were attempting to make this conceptual and tactical shift. Again, the aim of this preliminary research was not so much to *answer* the question of how best to get hpt approaches accepted and adopted, but to *raise the questions and issues* related to this topic so that more complete and systematic research might be done in the future.

For the purposes of this study, "human performance technology" is defined as a systematic approach to:

- identifying performance goals and performance gaps,

- determining the causes of those gaps, and then

- developing and implementing interventions which may include a combination of training, feedback systems, job re-design, performance support materials and job aids, revised incentive plans, performance management and coaching, testing, assessment, placement and recruiting of performers, and design of work environments and tools.

The study was designed according to established methods of qualitative research. Specifically, I used the constant comparative method (in which the researcher simultaneously codes and analyzes the data to develop concepts) and the theoretical sampling method (in which the researcher selects new cases to study according to their potential for helping to refine and

concepts that have been developed) (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). As is supported by the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss (1967), the purpose of this study was to generate concepts and theory, not necessarily to test them.

I solicited subjects to be interviewed in several ways:

- on-line postings on relevant Internet forums and list-serves that announced this study and asked for volunteers to contact me by phone or e-mail;

- reviews of current journals, magazines, newsletters, and on-line discussion groups related to HRD, training, and performance technology, which yielded names of authors or individuals cited who were subsequently contacted by phone or e-mail;

- recommendations from colleagues in academe and industry who identified individuals as potential interviewees

In all, over forty organizations were identified as potential sources of case studies. Subjects were selected through a process of e-mail, telephone, and mail dialogue with me and my research assistant to determine whether they met the criteria of having implemented successful hpt approaches, and whether they and their organizations were willing to be included in the study. We made a conscious attempt to include large and small departments and companies, different sizes of organizations and kinds of industries, as well as a mix in terms of gender, years of experience, and organizational level of the interviewees.

Once organizations were selected, the representatives were sent an informed consent form that described the study, included general interview questions that would guide the open-ended interviews, and asked for their signed approval on behalf of their organization to be included in the study and the subsequent publications. They were made aware that their interviews would be

videotaped or audiotaped, transcribed, and then sent to them for their individual and organizational approval before publication. During the processes of qualification, approval, and coordination of interview schedules, the number of interviewees was finally narrowed down to eight.

Seven interviews were conducted by phone, each with one individual being interviewed by my research assistant or me. One interview was conducted by video teleconference and included four representatives from the same organization who together were interviewed by me. Although the interviews were tailored to the specific organizational situation that we had learned about from our previous research or conversations, all of them followed a general list of questions:

- Describe how you learned about "performance technology" and "performance consulting"
- Describe how you went about adopting it in your organization
- What was your first actual implementation of these principles?
- What obstacles did you face in implementing this new approach?
- Whom did you have to convince of this new approach?
- What factors did you experience as being necessary to getting the necessary "buy-in" (resources, approval, time) to adopt hpt?
- Has your whole department / organization "bought into" hpt?
- What's your advice to other training and HR professionals who are interested in adopting performance consulting and performance technology models?

Interviews were completed with representatives from the following organizations:

- Center for Performance Improvement at the Idaho National Engineering Lab (INEL) of Lockheed Martin

- SOLID/FLUE Chimney Systems (a home improvement company)

- The training department of Agency Management Services, Inc. (a software company)

- The training department of Value Rent-A-Car

- The Monaco Group (an independent consulting company that developed and manages the safety training and performance improvement systems for the National Certified Fork Lift Operator Registry)

- Amtrak's National Training and Conference Center

- The Performance Development Department of Walgreen Company (a national drug store chain)

- The Quality Operations department at Citibank Mortgage Company

Once the interviews were completed and recorded, the major points were identified by me and independently by my research assistant. We identified areas as major points using the following criteria:

- Direct statements by the interviewees indicating given concepts, strategies, or events that they said were most important or crucial

- The relatedness of each point to findings from the literature review or other interviews (either supporting or offering a contrasting view to given areas)

- The uniqueness in concepts, strategies, or events that were related by the interviewees

Summaries and direct quotes from these major points were transcribed and sent in a draft form to the interviewees for final approval by themselves and/or their supervisors or legal departments as

necessary. The subjects thus had the opportunity to review and clarify what they had said, and to elaborate on points once they had more time to consider the questions and issues. Interviewees were also asked to send any related articles, project descriptions, or documentation regarding their adoption of hpt principles that might help us to better understand their approaches. Concurrently, professional literature was scanned and relevant articles were copied.

Once the transcripts were obtained and approved, the data were then sorted into broad categories, using methods of qualitative analysis to group responses by themes, to note frequently repeated words, and to look for areas of agreement and areas of diversity of viewpoints. The data analysis followed the method established by Taylor and Bogdan (1984, pp. 134-136):

1. Read and reread the data

2. Keep track of themes, hunches, interpretations, and ideas

3. Look for emerging themes

4. Construct typologies

5. Develop concepts and theoretical propositions

6. Develop a story-line

The actual coding was also done using Taylor and Bogdon's (1984, pp. 137-140) protocol:

1. Develop coding categories (using themes, concepts, and propositions developed through the literature review and conducting the interviews)

2. Code all the data (using margin notes on the printed transcripts, all sections were coded according to themes and concepts)

3. Sort the data into coding categories (using digital word-processed files of all the transcripts, sections with similar codes were gathered together)

4. See what data are left out (determined which quotes or summaries from the literature review and from the interviews were left out of the major categories)

5. Refine the analysis (I combined some categories into broader concepts and refined the wording of the themes)

The Themes: Barriers and Enablers

The analysis of interviews and literature yielded six major themes that deal with common barriers and how best to overcome them. Because the emphasis of this research was in how to best implement hpt as the systematic "process of choice" in organizations, there was no attempt to categorize or summarize specific theories, models, or interventions. Rather, the study assumed that there were valid and effective models that had already been documented and that many trainers and HR specialists were eager to employ them.

Speak their Language — not the Language of Academe — and Keep Speaking

Communication, in one form or another, was the most frequently cited factor in successfully adopting hpt. Trainers and HR professionals have traditionally been seen as functioning in narrower, more technical roles in organizations and generally have worked using a service-based and reactive model. In order to "sell" hpt, executives and clients must be able to understand it and accept training and HRD practitioners in new roles. That doesn't happen overnight… especially because hpt is not easily defined and is not well publicized in the general business press.

In a poll of fifteen past presidents of ISPI, communication was identified as the second most important skill needed by performance technologists (ranking just below hpt analysis skills). Likewise, Dean (1995) found that facilitation strategies, including partnering, coaching, "talking about it constantly", and educating participants were the most important factors that contribute to successful implementation of hpt.

A common theme in both the literature and in the interviews was that our professional jargon is a major barrier to getting our ideas across. "Too often, performance technologists and their more specialized cousins, instructional designers and developers, retreat into their jargon and expect the client to speak their specialized language. If PT professionals are going to make lasting and valued contributions, they most speak the client's language" (Marker, 1995, p. 26). Robinson & Robinson (1995, p. 13) assert that "Performance Consultants [should] make sure that their language is no different from that of those who work throughout the organization". Kathy Brandhuber, the one-person training department at AMS said "I forget the jargon and really try to speak their language… I try not to be an Educational Specialist." Doug LeFleur, President Chimney Systems of SOLID/FLUE says he uses sports analogies to bridge performance technology with business; he claims that one of the biggest barriers was "getting others to overlook the origin of my approach — academia" — even though he *owns* the company.

Jack Stack, CEO of Springfield Remanufacturing Corporation, (as quoted in *Training Magazine*) said, "I think the problem with training people is that they've defaulted to the consultants. They've brought in people from the outside. That kind of perpetuates the flavor-of-the-month routine" (Filipczak, 1996, p. 64). Using unfamiliar words like "performance technology" and "gap analysis" makes the field seem foreign and abstract to many business people. One of my clients said recently in a briefing, " Never call it a performance gap; call it a business problem." Frank Bell, Project Leader at Amtrak's National Training and Conference Center said he thinks our profession is "one of the most prolific creators of meaningless buzz words on the scene today". He reports that when he's working with a new client he won't come in and say "we need to look at the training and non-training solutions" and he won't lay out any kind of theoretical basis. Rather he says, "let's look at the problem, what's happening that you don't' want to happen

or what's not happening that you wish would be happening here, and what's going on in the organization?".

Rosset and Czech (1995) also found that the one of the biggest barriers to implementing hpt was "insufficient marketing of PT" (p. 128). Mager (1996, p. 54) recommends that trainers change the names of their departments to "something more descriptive of what it really does. If you're still calling it a training department, you're operating like a supermarket that chooses to hang a sign that says 'Bread Store'. Why would anyone think to go to a bread store for a yard of salami or a head of cabbage? Include information about your non-training services in the front section of your course catalogs, and in every course that includes managers as participants."

Doug LeFleur of SOLID/FLUE reinforced this idea that hpt is not well publicized outside the relatively narrow world of training and HR. He told us that he went down many different avenues to learn strategies for saving his business, including going back to school and getting an MBA. It was not until he took a class in industrial psychology and took a class with someone who taught performance technology that he felt that he found a unique and effective concept system and set of tools, and he wished he had heard of it before.

Successful implementers of hpt knew how to publicize their initiatives. INEL's Center for Performance Improvement published new brochures and distributed them to customers, led briefings, and created a home page on their intranet. Kathy Brandhuber at AMS wrote articles in company newsletters, was featured in articles in training publications, and presented her work at meetings of local training societies. Joe Monaco, an independent consultant, looked for opportunities to present the outcomes of his interventions in government hearings on safety. Peter Dean's research on the practice of hpt documented the advice of attending meetings,

publicizing past successes, using weekly update letters, and holding open forums in order to overcome barriers to adopting hpt principles (1995, p. 87).

Another aspect of communication that was often discussed is the skill to remain flexible and open, yet firm in one's conviction to hpt principles. In order to find the time as well as the authority to engage in interventions that are broader than conventional training, it's necessary to be able to adopt the right consulting style. In moving from a "pair of hands" style to a "collaborative" style, sometimes it's important to say "no" to requests for training when the underlying problem can't effectively be remedied by that solution (Robinson & Robinson, 1995). Successful hpt implementers were persistent and frequent communicators about their approaches and learned to act like partners to management, rather than order-takers. This meant adapting more assertive communication patterns.

Finding the Right Time and Problem: Crisis May Be Our Best Friend

One interesting finding in the interviews was that it took a crisis to get some organizations to pay attention to what their training professionals had been recommending all along — more systematic, performance-based interventions rather than event-based courses. Possibly a crisis allows training and HR professionals access to executives that they had not previously had, or it finally becomes worth it to take the time to "do it right".

Oren Hester of the Center for Performance Improvement at INEL reported that they actually had a death of a subcontractor and an electrocution at their facility that put the emphasis on safety. Their training department was being investigated by the Defense Nuclear Facility Safety Board which indicated that it might not have the necessary competencies. They turned this crisis

situation into an opportunity to introduce a new approach that many of them had been studying. They convinced an executive vice president who thought he wanted a training module on safety that they needed to do an "exhaustive table-top analysis" to look at not just safety information, but the culture of the organization, inconsistency of messages, etc. Over a period of several years, their training department was transformed into the Center for Performance Improvement. Similarly, Joe Monaco, principal of the Monaco Group, was called in when a company had a serious accident with a 20 year old woman who had not been trained properly on using a lift truck; he reports that executives then wanted to fix the problem and have it "stay fixed".

Kathy Brandhuber reported, "We had really hit a very, very low point before we opened our eyes. We had some problems of a corporate nature a couple of years ago that were severe enough that executive management had decided to go to an outside consulting firm and have them bring a TQM initiative in-house. Without the focus, the task forces, the communication, the sharing that happened over that 18-month period, I don't think that we would have had the proper environment or the cooperation. We would have never gotten the resources necessary to implement the alternative approaches instead of doing another class".

One of my clients who successfully promoted the concept of the learning organization and performance improvement claims that it was not until several crises, including the first layoff and the secession of one of the organization's most visible units, that she was able to get people to really listen. She also cited their previous TQM initiative as laying the groundwork to promote ideas about hpt. Doug LeFleur of SOLID/FLUE said that the organization he owned was at the brink of bankruptcy and he was desperate to find and try out some new approach that might save it. That's when he first found out about hpt.

Often, organizations are experiencing — or about to experience — a crisis, but HR and training professionals might not even be aware of it. Typically, people in these roles are removed from the operations side of business, don't really understand how the business operates or the language of its executives, and don't have access to the data that they need to be aware of problems. In today's environment of chaotic work schedules, it takes being able to identify significant business problems to be able to spot the right time to introduce hpt. "Deeper subject knowledge will also provide clues about what solutions might be acceptable to the client, and just as critically, whether the client is even interested in a solution to a particular problem" (Marker, 1995, p. 26).

One essential characteristic of a good performance consultant identified by Robinson & Robinson (1995) is "business knowledge". They recommend reading the organization's annual report, discussing with managers the ways they measure operational health, learning the major challenges and competitors that are facing the business, and being able to use business terminology. Mager (1996) recommends finding out how one's company really works by going to the production line and learning how to actually assemble something, or going to the front lines or back offices to watch. Steve Jensen, National Training & Development Director at Value Rent-A-Car says it's been valuable to get to know the organization inside and out. "If you start talking like an operations guy in these meetings with senior executives they are much more willing to talk with you when you are talking with them about a model that is all based on results."

Getting the Ear of Management

Communication and timing lead us to a related theme, and that is getting executives to understand and support hpt initiatives. Most of the research and interview transcripts talked

about the necessity of getting top management "buy-in". Typically, that's not easy since many HR and training professionals are at least four or five levels removed from executive management — and may not even be located at their site. Of five training managers at a recent briefing I conducted, four of them were located not only in different buildings, but outside the main corporate campus — one of them literally in an old schoolhouse. So getting to see the CEO is often a political and geographic challenge.

After studying the effects of inappropriate training applications, Jacquelyn Crawford, Director of Quality Operations at Citicorp Mortgage, noted that most training people were treated as "order takers" and were only allowed to apply training solutions to all performance problems. The dilemma labeled many training directors as ineffective because after the training was done, the problem still existed. She was convinced that training reported too far down in the organization and that training was often not the most appropriate solution to problems that were handed to it. When her company got a new president she made a bold proposal … to merge the Quality and Training departments, to abolish the title "trainer" or "training manager" and use "performance consultant" instead, to let her manage the new department, and to report directly to the president. The president concurred, and she reports that she never could have accomplished what she did without the support of this very creative and forward-thinking executive. Crawford told us, "Without a senior level reporting structure, this focus is definitely more challenging, if one is even able to do it at all!".

But without management support, adopting hpt as the "method of choice" is probably impossible. "Experience of successful organizations shows that key stakeholders (managers, trainers, trainees, and others) must be closely involved in all phases of the design, development, and implementation of training and other performance improvement efforts, to achieve and

maintain effective workforce performance (Broad, 1997, p. 7). Joe Monaco says that you need to get to the top person — "the person most interested in having something happen at all … beyond just training. Get to the person who is accountable, for as Tom Gilbert says, 'worthy accomplishment' ".

Often the problem is not management resistance, but rather unawareness. "Here we are, with these powerful technologies at our fingertips, failing to take the initiative to do the one thing that would most quickly and effectively enhance our survival power — that is, teach managers what they should know about training and performance. Managers don't appreciate what you can do because you haven't taught them" (Mager, 1996, p. 52). Doug LeFleur says that he had to convince one of his vice-presidents that performance technology approaches made sense. This person had no formal training, but LeFleur said that he had "developed very systematic ways to run one of the businesses profitably" and that those approaches had similarities to performance technology. Doug says, "I bridged ideas from his previous experience and my academic work to reach a common ground". To him, performance technology is about managing — and hpt practitioners should sell their skills to management by creating a "portfolio of how you would manage and monitor a business". He — and other CEOs — are looking for "stuff that was really effective… "impactful, the biggest bang for the buck stuff". He cited Tom Gilbert's goal of "creating leisure for ourselves" as a very smart way of looking at business and describing the goals of hpt.

Robinson & Robinson (1995) advise that in making the transition from training to performance consulting, it's important to overcome the history of being viewed as just a training or HR function. They state that the best method for overcoming this is to "build strong partnerships with managers, one manager at a time", to begin where you have access, and let word-of-mouth

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marketing get your message up to the senior level (p. 316). An executive vice-president in one of my client organizations recommends that if your own manager isn't supportive or can't communicate the message to the next level up, find a colleague who reports to another manager. Then you and that colleague can together find a new, more effective channel to the top.

Steve Jensen with Value Rent-A-Car explained that he discussed his attraction to the concepts of performance consulting when he first interviewed with his boss; that person is now the executive vice-president and COO. He reports that he came into the organization when there already existed an issue of an expensive and long classroom-based training program for rental agents for which they were looking for alternatives. "I was able to get everyone to see that we should hold off and do it the right way and that it would pay off for us in much bigger dividends than just in a multimedia based training program." He asked questions like "Where do we want this company to go?" Later, he leveraged his background in mission building and facilitation and asked to facilitate a strategic planning session with executives in order to build a mission statement. This allowed him to be a major contributor to conversations with decision - makers related to the overall "big picture" strategies and goals of the company. "The first meeting was our initial green light…I went out and did a formal gap analysis of what the performance was and where it should be."

The Politics and Pain of Addressing Real Problems

It' not usually difficult to convince most managers that, in theory, a systematic and multi-pronged solution to a performance problem will be more effective than just a "quick fix" like a training class. But when it comes down to real-life projects, pinpointing performance gaps and gathering the support and expertise to solve them can involve exposing sensitive problems and working with colleagues in other departments. For example, Dean, Dean, & Rebalsky (1996, p.

76) found that "not only did the majority of participants perceive that improvements in environmental factors, not training, would contribute most to their performance improvement, their grasp of the premise was immediate and unequivocal". If trainers and HR professionals conduct analyses that frequently result in recommending non-training solutions, they can feel like they are putting themselves out of business or are "biting the hand that feeds them" by identifying weaknesses in the management style or system of their client. This can make the process long, potentially painful, and complex.

Rossett and Czech (1995) discovered that a major barrier to practicing the principles of hpt was the fact that customers frequently want simple, familiar, turnkey solutions and don't want to invest the time in doing needs assessments. They also found that another obstacle was customers' "unwillingness to engage in cross-functional solutions". Often, the clients of training and HR professionals are not responsible for an organization's overall performance; instead they may just want to show that they've taken some action on a problem that's been identified by their supervisor or subordinates. Training is seen as a non-threatening and positive solution to provide, and it's one that doesn't have to involve the client or expose hidden causes for poor performance.

Even when clients are ready to accept a cross-functional solution, such as one that includes job re-design, incentive systems, technology support, and instruction, often the groups responsible for these areas are not accustomed to working together, and may even be fighting internal "turf wars" over budget and headcount. So especially in today's environment, professionals in HR, training, communication, and information systems may be less likely than ever to work together (Gayeski & Woodward, 1996). "Notwithstanding CEOs' efforts to develop a shared view of the organization's purpose, values and goals, everyone else is concerned for the most part with his or

her specific area of direct responsibility, whether it's a subsidiary, business unit, division, function, department, section, role, or project. This prevalent attitude of individuals with different responsibilities is accurately described as competitive — all competing for resources to improve their situations, and potentially to maximize their performance, make their lives easier, or otherwise have things go their way — and such an attitude frequently works to the detriment of the entire organization. In fact … optimizing the parts of a whole will by necessity sub-optimize the whole." (Pepitone, 1995, p. 83).

Joe Monaco agrees: he reports that whenever his performance system was purchased or his services retained, it has never been through a training department or human resources person, but rather a line operating manager or plant manager who has seen the value of this systematic approach. Jacquelyn Crawford of Citicorp Mortgage told us that her president often "ran interference" for her when her unconventional approaches to solutions other than traditional training were sometimes challenged by clients.

Learning to work in cross-functional teams on more extensive and systematic interventions takes not only new skills, but also new attitudes and new networks. Gradually, the perception of hpt practitioners changes: "We are not viewed as someone who dances our own dance, but as someone who writes the music for everyone to dance to", said Richard Holman at INEL.

Just Do It

Successful implementers of hpt approaches found that they couldn't wait for somebody else to give them permission, resources, and new titles. They just started working in a new way. Kathy Brandhuber, while retaining her title as Education Specialist at AMS, recommended an on-line electronic performance support system, a "Brown bag university" approach to lunch-time

training, and began focusing on work processes and job aids. Steve Jensen says he's heard a lot of training people lament about not being seen as mainstream in the organization. "I would advise them to look in the mirror, and ask whose fault that is… have you been responding to requests and pumping out programs to get 'butts in seats', or truly providing learning and performance solutions in support of business plans and goals?"

One participant in an executive briefing reported that she and her manager asked for the support of their executive in moving from traditional modes of training and HR to a performance consulting model. After months of waiting for approval, they finally approached the executive, who was surprised. He thought that he had already given them the endorsement they needed. Another client organization engaged in a prototype intervention using a cross-functional team of representatives from training, HR, information systems, audiovisual, and their clinical practice area. After a rather bumpy start of learning to work together, one team member said that "he would never go back" to his traditional and solitary mode of approaching projects. Their organization subsequently merged HR, staff development, and audiovisual media into a new Human and Organizational Development department.

Doug LeFleur got fascinated with performance technology when he took his first course in it. Eventually he took five graduate courses in this area, and all along the way he implemented little bits of hpt in his work. He advises that the best way to get buy-in is to "find a small project and begin from there" and get feedback from customers. He graphed key business indicators so that everyone could see where problems existed and how interventions were helping. And perhaps the most direct example of this principle is Frank Bell of Amtrak's National Training and Conference Center, who said, "To tell you the truth I never bothered to try to convince anyone of

anything. I just did it Don't ask permission, don't propose it as some revolutionary new way of doing something, just do it and let the results speak for themselves."

Overcoming HR & Training Colleagues' Lack of Skills or Interest

Often it's not clients and executives who resist the move to hpt, it's the training and HR staffs themselves. Many don't see a need to change, are not sure that they can perform well in new roles, or may find the new conceptual models and technologies too challenging. Doug LeFleur, although he was the chief executive in his organization, says he still had to convince employees that the "academic stuff was valuable information for them ... that it makes some sense".

The number one solution mentioned to this was education. The most frequently cited sources of information on hpt were ISPI conferences and publications, ASTD conferences and publications, university courses, and workshops conducted by consultants. Steve Jensen hired a consulting firm that would teach his own staff to produce multimedia in the process of actually creating their first few CD-ROMs. Other organizations found that they finally needed to set a course of action, and see who could learn and adapt, and who could not. The staff at INEL reported that they eventually needed to significantly re-organize their former training department; some people learned new skills, others left, and they hired or transferred new members who had the skills they were lacking.

Jacquelyn Crawford took an additional approach when she faced challenges from clients and even from the "performance consultants" who reported to her: She had developed a structured process and procedure for designing and developing traditional training programs. This Program Design focused entirely on the performance issue and she found it could effectively be used for

performance consulting as well. This tool not only made the process uniform within her department, but it helped to support her performance consultants in asking the right questions to analyze performance problems. Most importantly, it helped avoid problems with clients who otherwise might have tried to talk performance consultants out of doing this type of front-end analysis and insist instead that they provide a training program, which may or may not solve the problem.

Erica Brinkley of the Walgreen Co. Performance Development Department noted that their move from training to performance development was aided by the department director who ordered a copy of Tom Gilbert's book, *Human Competence: Engineering Worthy Performance* for everybody who wanted it in the department as a tool to guide the department through the transition. She also said that several key factors have enabled this transition to take place: "having a central location, having meetings across functions, brainstorming and contributing to the transition". Her new department incorporates training and development, systems and usability training, human resources information systems and planning, meetings and media services, and industrial engineering.

Several interviewees mentioned that rapid organizational changes were making it difficult to pursue the hpt agenda. Of the seven organizations we studied, four had recently bought out, merged with, or were sold to other entities. One workshop participant reported that her department's transformation from traditional training was going well when her colleague and closest ally got a great promotion into another department. This left her without an effective and enthusiastic partner and she said that this really hindered their efforts. One manager we spoke to thought that his company was about to be bought out within a week or so of the interview. Therefore, he was rather cautious in making any big commitments because he thought that the

whole structure of training and performance support in his company might be eliminated or folded into the new parent company.

Summary of Themes

If we were to further refine the themes that emerged from the data, it appears that there are two major activities necessary to implementing hpt:

- Effectively explaining what hpt is to those decision-makers who are receptive to hearing about and able to sponsor methods — even long and costly ones — that have major sustained performance pay-offs;

- Overcoming political obstacles of people (both clients/sponsors and training/HR professionals) who want to maintain the status quo or who are looking for a "quick fix" rather than possibly uncovering some more deep-rooted problems that are impeding performance.

The two major barriers that are evident from the data are:

- Hpt practitioners' typical roles in organizations make it more likely for them to be engaged by middle-level managers who typically do not have the incentives or authority to engage in long-term multi-disciplinary interventions. These clients and sponsors often view HR and hpt practitioners as "producers" who provide short-term and well-defined services such as "delivering" courses rather than as advisors or analysts. Often the clients who engage hpt practitioners are primarily interested in documenting that they have somehow addressed a problem — and sponsoring a course or commissioning a CD-ROM is a non-threatening, possibly interesting way to show management that one has completed this kind of objective. If the intervention does not improve performance, then HR and training staffs can always be blamed.

- HR and hpt practitioners are typically not trained in negotiation or consultation techniques. They also tend to be people who are "service-oriented" and nurturing, rather than competitive and challenging. These factors lead to practitioners being more interested in completing tasks given to them rather than in charting new territories with clients or sponsors who have not come to their door asking for help. Possibly, people who choose these professions also tend to be less risk-adverse and in today's competitive environment, are worried about compromising their careers by going outside the traditional boundaries of their roles.

Just as interesting: Those who didn't participate

As mentioned previously, we had developed a long list of individuals who were potential interview candidates for this study. All of them were identified because their work in adopting hpt was publicized in journals, magazines, newsletters, or conference proceedings or because they saw an announcement of the research project and contacted us. Although many were subsequently disqualified from the study because we determined that their work really didn't fit our definition of hpt, many of them dropped out themselves.

A surprising number of organizations were uncomfortable in giving individuals permission to talk about their work in human performance improvement strategies. Although it was disappointing that we could not publish information about cases that seemed to be very successful, it is encouraging to note that at least some companies consider these approaches a "competitive advantage". Because this study required participants' signatures on an informed consent agreement, many individuals had to think the request over carefully, check with their managers, and also get permission from their legal and/or public affairs departments. Sometimes this permission came too slowly or not at all.

Although we were not given enough information to determine any patterns among potential subjects who declined to be interviewed, each of these cases had previously been identified as having established new methods for performance improvement and learning that had made significant impacts on the business. From our personal conversations, it appeared that there were four contrasting situations:

- Performance technology had been responsible for great strides in achieving business goals, and either the hpt strategies or the specific business results were considered confidential;

- Performance technology had at one time been embraced and found successful, but for a variety of reasons, this set of standards and philosophies was no longer being supported. This often happened when some key executive supporter of hpt left his or her position and was now replaced by someone else who either didn't understand hpt or who wanted to somehow supplant the predecessor's philosophy and programs with his or her own.

- Performance technology had been successful to a point, but the individual champions of it felt that it would not politically be in their best interests to publicize their own roles in it, to criticize other approaches, or to talk about client projects (either internal or external).

- Significant corporate change was impending, making potential subjects uneasy about talking about situations that might not exist in the near future, or making it difficult for them to get permissions because of rapid changes in management.

Even among those individuals who participated in the study, there was uncertainty about the future of hpt. Quite a few interviewees either knew for a fact or had heard rumors that their company was going to be sold or merged with another organization. At least five individuals no longer held jobs that they had only months before. And still others were afraid to call any attention to themselves and their departments, lest it later work against them amidst the re-structuring and layoffs that were happening around them. Since hpt is often supported only by

individual "champions" within a specific political context, it is easy for these approaches and philosophies to be forgotten or deliberately overturned when organizational situations change.

Conclusions: An agenda for research

This study reaffirmed the research of others, such as Rossett and Czeck (1995), Dean (1995), and Marker, (1995) who concluded that many training and HR professionals are convinced of the principles of hpt and feel confident in applying them. They just find that they are often unable to convince clients of the merits of this more complex-seeming approach.   Despite the widespread dissemination of hpt concepts, it was not easy to find subjects for this initial study that met the criteria of having successfully adopted hpt — even in the most rudimentary ways. And those few subjects who *were* successful recounted their many and continuing struggles.

The barriers of communication problems, access to management data and support, and turf wars stem not so much from a lack of skills, but from organizational design. As Dean *et. al.* (1996) point out, the biggest barrier to most people's performance improvement is not knowledge or skills — it's the environment. And this holds true for performance technologists. This environment includes not only physical location, but incentive systems, the organizational culture, role expectations, and performance measurements for both practitioners and their clients.

Human performance technology already has a rich body of research on human behavior, learning, testing and assessment, and information-transfer methods and media. What we seem to lack is the ability to structure organizations so that people really *want to* improve performance — not just "take quick action" and push the responsibility on down the line. Furthermore, performance technologists seem to be preoccupied with solving narrow performance gaps rather than educating executives who can re-design the larger performance system and culture.

Considering the outcomes of this exploratory study, I recommend the following agenda for research in our field:

1. Study the organizational design factors of enterprises that have successfully embraced hpt vs. those that have tried but failed. For example, are there factors that are associated with success, such as size of the hpt/HR department, education level of the manager or director, reporting structure of the department, or location within the organization (such as within HR or reporting to line divisions)?

2. Survey the curricula of academic programs that prepare hpt / HR practitioners as well as continuing education opportunities for this audience to determine to what extent negotiation, communication, and general business skills are taught that would help practitioners become more effective in "selling" their approaches.

3. Analyze where hpt principles are publicized, and assess to what extent these ideas are accessible to and promoted to executives who could effectively sponsor this type of approach. For example, can a CEO of a healthcare company ever read about hpt in her professional magazines, the same way as she might read about "reengineering" or the "learning organization"?

4. Compare the principles of hpt analysis (i.e. identification of exemplary performance and assessment of performance gaps) with other current management ideologies such as complexity and chaos theories and the "learning organization" to see to what extent hpt principles are congruent with contemporary organizational theory and administrative practices.

5. Develop thorough case studies of enterprises that have successfully adopted hpt principles, including a detailed and objective analysis of the steps that were taken along the way.

6. Synthesize the research that we *already* have regarding hpt principles, practices, tools, and theories that includes empirical evidence of change in performance using valid and reliable research techniques.   Much of what is published contains stories and advice without solid evidence regarding results that might be used to successfully argue for our approaches, and the relatively small body of research that does include hard performance outcomes is relatively inaccessible to busy practitioners.

Our field needs to develop better ways to communicate what we know and what we've accomplished to those who can respond — executive management. We need fewer buzzwords, academic articles, and models and more publicity, access to business terminology, and skills to work at higher levels in organizations. With this new set of tools, we should be able to become both smart — and rich!

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