

Human Performance Consulting: Transforming Human Potential into Productive Business Performance

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Chapter 12: Instruments of Performance Improvement

Striving to improve the work performance of others is not a new endeavor. Since the time of skilled craftspeople, capable people have been assisting apprentices in the performance of their work.

Human performance consulting began with the work of Frederick Taylor, as was discussed at some length in Chapter 1. Taylor was the first to apply knowledge to the analysis, study, and engineering of work itself. He called it “working smarter.”ⁱ In Drucker’s words, “Taylor (1865-1915), the inventor of ‘scientific management,’ in all probability also coined the terms ‘management’ and ‘consultant’ in their present meaning. On his calling card he identified himself as ‘Consultant to Management.’ He deliberately chose these unfamiliar terms to shock potential clients into awareness of his offering something totally new.”ⁱⁱ

Taylor’s pioneering efforts gave birth to the field of human-performance improvement. Many of his engineering-based methods, including task analysis, best practices, training, time analysis, and quality improvement, have since launched entire disciplines of professional knowledge and practice.

Years later, with the advent of social science, the field of human-performance improvement began to develop an understanding of human performance in situations in which performance was dependent on people, not machines. Regardless of its potential, though, this knowledge would remain largely untapped for as long as industry was dominated by the machine metaphor for work and as long as the professionals with this new perspective on human performance could not speak the language of industry leaders.

However, it was only a matter of time until the persistent shift of employment from production and logistics jobs to new knowledge and service roles meant that most work performance would eventually become dependent on people. That day has come, and now virtually everyone in organizations must learn how to improve work performance because it is dependent on people.

Much of what is done to improve the work performance of people is not effective, yet many executives, managers, employees, and even some practitioners persist in these methods. The reasons they do so seem to lie in the challenges that they face in the honest attempt to fully grasp the entire field of knowledge on human work performance.

This challenge is not so much an intellectual feat as it is finding the time, accessing pertinent resources, maintaining a learner’s perspective, and having the experiences necessary to absorb the relevant knowledge on this subject. This knowledge must become the wisdom from which human performance consultants devise their work in the service of their clients.

Persisting with the old methods, though they are familiar and therefore comfortable, is not acceptable. Executives, managers, and employees must unlearn these rules, which have guided their success until now. And because learning occurs best when people are involved in applying what they are trying to understand, I propose that human performance consultants are the best

teachers when engaged in the process of partnering with management to improve operations that create value.

And if this is to be the case, then these consultants must first have this knowledge and be confident in its application. They will also learn through their own hands-on experiences and the experiences of other practitioners.

Managing Organizations

What distinguishes a formal organization from a random group of people is the presence of a system of management—purpose, structure, authority, support systems, administration, etc.—to weave the whole effort together. The designers and maintainers of this system are the people with managerial roles throughout the organization. They have a special responsibility: to make it all work.

The manager's job is not an easy one. Contrary to what is presented in simplistic models, the manager's work is much more than planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling. With formal authority come status, special relationships, access to information, and the responsibility for making far-reaching decisions.

These managerial challenges are attended to in an array of roles and responsibilities, including figurehead, leader, liaison, environment monitor, information disseminator, spokesperson, opportunity developer, disturbance handler, resource allocator, negotiator, and others. Unless we have been managers ourselves, we may underestimate the challenges and complexity of this job. Because managers have so many responsibilities, it is virtually impossible for them to add another role to this imposing list. So to improve human performance, managers would do well to pass the torch to human performance consultants who can support management in the challenge.

Management Methods

You may have noticed that keeping abreast of new management methods was not mentioned above as part of most managers' work. My perception is that managers and executives, unless they feel particularly challenged with their assigned objectives, have very little interest in emerging knowledge and methods pertaining to potentially more-effective ways they can accomplish their work. Self-confidence creates an insulation to keep these possibilities at bay until they become a necessity.

Since management emerged as a discipline in the mid-1950s, we have witnessed a virtual explosion of new information and theories regarding every feature of a contemporary business. Much of this new thinking has been in response to the seemingly ever-increasing organizational challenges facing management, and more recently to the recognition that the effectiveness of a company's human capital may soon be the final frontier for establishing a sustainable competitive advantage. This abundance of information has been followed by a rapid expansion of support staffs, whose role it is to compile, interpret, and apply this knowledge.

Since I make a living in part by keeping up with business- and management-related research and writing, I naturally value the data, insights, and models that are offered. However, that can hardly be the case for any executive, line manager, supervisor, or even the director of a staff function. Most business functions have become very complex and sophisticated; the work being done by almost everyone in an organization has its own technology, methodology, emerging theories, research, etc. Even if these busy people wanted to keep up, and even if they could devote a sizable part of their day to the task, they still could not do so without help.

Likewise, the only way I can keep up is to rely on the support of research assistants who gather the product of this knowledge explosion and review it with me. Keeping management up to date on knowledge developments should be a responsibility of staff functions; however, few provide

this service. There could be many explanations for this failure, including internal competition for resources, lack of comfort working around management, traditional thinking, reluctance to encourage change, myopia, hubris, and others.

Keeping Up with New Developments

Executives, managers, supervisors, and directors need help if they are to benefit from the significant developments of the past fifty years in the fields of human behavior, learning, performance, and productivity as they apply to the workplace. All too often, they feel forced to rely solely on personal experience for their understanding of how best to accomplish their organizational objectives . . . and although this is a certainly a valuable starting point, it hardly taps the sophisticated understanding we now have about when, where, why, and how people work the way they do. Only recently has the organization as a subsystem of an enterprise become a substantial topic in the top MBA programs, so we can imagine that most executives and managers have little factual basis on which to incorporate new developments.

As a result, many businesspeople with significant responsibility for and impact on the success of their organizations are compelled to make important people-related decisions—decisions that will have an extraordinary effect on the capability and effectiveness of individuals, groups, and even entire organizations—without a firm grasp of their alternatives and of the probable consequences of those alternatives.

A fitting example is management's current over-reliance on training to deal with almost every conceivable people-related issue in an organization—some people call it the “throw training at the problem” solution. Routinely, the consequences of this approach include higher-than-necessary expenses, lost productivity, unresolved issues, a demotivated workforce, and persistent barriers to high performance. Such waste, not to mention the forgone opportunity for improved effectiveness and financial performance, is no longer tolerable in many industries. Increasingly, management has to find some way to obtain this knowledge so that it can effectively and efficiently support organizations' requirements for enhancements to learning, performance, and productivity.

Managers Set the Course

If organizations are to adapt to changes in their environment and deal with problems as they arise, managers must be continually on the lookout for practical solutions as well as new ideas that will maintain or improve performance. As an organization's information and decision centers, they are often the only ones with the full and current information and authority needed to make strategic decisions. Only managers can commit their organizations to important new courses of action.

When good solutions and ideas appear, then managers initiate development efforts—often in the form of specific projects or initiatives—for their cultivation and eventual implementation. Managers supervise many of these development efforts directly and in certain situations may delegate elements of them to employees, support staff, and trusted associates. In fact, we would expect to find managers supervising five, ten, twenty, and maybe more of these development projects at any time.

This challenge reminds me of the “plate spinning” act at every state fair. Each plate receives a small part of the manager's time . . . and just at that point when a plate is wobbling and threatening to fall, it receives just enough needed attention to keep it going for a while longer. My intent is not to sound critical of managers; rather, viewing managers this way is intended as appreciation for the complex and challenging work they perform.

With this appreciative view of managerial work, ask yourself whether it is hard to understand why managers might be tempted to focus on solutions that appear to minimize their direct effort:

- Calling in a big-name professional firm to take on the responsibility for analyzing the company's problems and determining the best solution
- Implementing a large-scale training and education program in an attempt to drive needed changes in the organization
- Ignoring or replacing experienced yet underperforming workers rather than developing them
- Tolerating situations and systems that to workers obviously impede performance and warrant changing
- Opting for training programs in half-hearted attempts to improve human performance, increase productivity, and resolve complicated operational problems

Perhaps it is simply the inherent characteristics of managerial work that impede managers' direct attempts to improve human performance. Perhaps they lack the time to equip themselves with the requisite knowledge and skills, and without the insight from this learning, their priorities and their interest in what's possible have a limited chance to develop. Perhaps it is simply habit.

Anchored in Past Success

Just like everyone else, managers are compelled to work in ways that are anchored to their past—drawn from lessons they learned through efforts that worked and efforts that didn't—and to attend to issues and use methods that they count on to get the job done. Because managers hold power over the people they manage, we often ascribe to them an all-knowing quality, only to then question how what is so obvious to us is not readily apparent to them.

For those of us who understand the potential for improving human performance, we forget that the knowledge that sustains us in this belief was likely acquired through experiences that demonstrated this fact to us in a meaningful way. Chances are good that most managers have not had similar experiences and so remain uninitiated to this potential.

For the most part, the lack of managerial initiatives to apply the comprehensive methodology available for improving human performance is primarily the result of the managerial job itself. And until managers identify people who are both trustworthy and capable of supporting them in this challenge, this situation is not likely to change.

Current Approaches to Improving Human Performance

With this background, let's now look at the more common ways managers attempt to improve performance. Without the benefit of any scientific study to frame this understanding, I will rely on my observations to characterize the four principal approaches that I most frequently hear about and see managers utilizing when they try to improve the work performance of their people:

- Edict—direct a change in the work situation (e.g., policy, objective, technology, structure) and expect employees to adapt.
- Training—train employees in order to standardize the desired behavior (e.g., how to work as a team, how to make a sales call, how to handle an irate customer).
- Involvement—discuss performance with employees so they figure out better ways to work. This approach typically involves the formation of powerless groups who engage in discussions that, without direct authority, stop short of effecting definitive changes (e.g., performance task force, quality committee, customer service team).

- Systemic—engage employees in changing their own work situation by launching a highly visible program that generates broad employee involvement in making changes that remove or reduce constraints to higher performance (e.g., on time every time, cut turnover in half).

Certainly there are other approaches that managers take, but these are the most common ones that I have identified. Let's now examine briefly how each serves or falls short of its intended purpose of improving human performance.

The Edict Approach

The edict approach is based on management's authority to issue orders to the organization and is reinforced with the implicit threat that management also has the authority to "terminate" workers who don't comply. Management announces a change in policy, structure, process, or some other aspect of the work situation, and employees are expected to adapt to the change and to perform in some new way consistent with the change.

This approach can work in some cases, but only when the change is relatively minor and employees already support it, understand what they need to do differently, and have no difficulty adopting the new behavior. Without an appreciation for the purpose for "management's change" and support to help them make needed changes to existing behavior, workers will be challenged to comply with management's edict. In today's work culture, many employees experience this approach as inconsiderate and unappreciative of their work, and some will even respond with frustration, resistance, hopelessness, and cynicism.

What's surprising about managers' frequent use of this approach is the fact that managers oftentimes respond in the very same way to executive-made changes that fall on managers to implement.

The Training Approach

The training approach is based on early industrial-engineering methods of standardizing the behavior of workers to the demands of the machines they served, and is often reinforced with other "behaviorist" (i.e., based on the theories of Pavlov and Skinner, most notably) methods such as incentives, rewards, contests, and evaluations. Management arranges for training programs that indoctrinate workers in improved work practices, skills, or knowledge in an effort to change their behavior. It's implicit that employees are expected to somehow buy into, develop, and practice the new behaviors, and that doing so will improve their performance.

This approach works only when the desired behavior is necessarily standardized by machinery, technology, or other condition that is inflexible, as is often the case with production and logistics work. Here the role of workers is to back the machinery or process, and doing so effectively often entails following standardized instruction in how to best perform the task.

However, for knowledge and service workers, training can be effective only when the new behavior represents a minor change, is consistent with workers' natural abilities and tendencies, and is already appealing to and supported by workers. Training assumes that employees can't improve their performance (without the training) because they don't understand how to behave to achieve the performance goal.

The inherent problem in this approach is that the behavior of knowledge and services workers is a natural adaptation to the current work situation. Without changing the relevant aspects of the situation to naturally support the desired behavior, management is simply pressuring employees to adopt new behaviors that aren't natural—not an easy task or a likely accomplishment for most workers.

Training can be helpful to all workers if it leads to a solid understanding of current circumstances or to relevant changes that are taking place, if it lets them know what these changes mean to

them and how they need to do things differently as a result, and if it helps them to begin to develop the required new behavior. However, unless there is a situation that workers can first “buy into” that is prompting the training, then training is rarely enough to institute change and usually results in little or no change in employee behavior.

One unintended effect of the training approach on more-capable knowledge and service workers is that, whether true or not, it tells them that management doesn’t really understand their situation and isn’t willing to accept responsibility to make the real changes necessary to achieve improved performance.

The Involvement Approach

The involvement approach is based on social science knowledge concerning methods that more fully engage and satisfy people in their work. As a well-accepted principle for quality function deployment and organization development, employee participation is becoming a more common approach to performance improvement. Essentially, this approach requires that management hold meetings with workers or sponsor groups to involve workers in an examination of a performance problem and to make recommendations for achieving desired improvements.

This approach may be particularly uncomfortable to some managers because it deviates from their customary command-and-control style of management. In addition, many managers do not fully understand or appreciate the approach, but they nonetheless try to use it because of the results it has achieved for others.

Management hopes that involving workers in the process of grappling with performance challenges will help workers understand how to change in order to achieve management’s goal. Management’s second hope is that employees will then readily adopt the desired change, even in the face of an unsupportive work situation (lack of proper equipment, limited financial resources, unreasonably fast implementation, etc.). If the approach worked this simply, more managers might try it.

This approach is commonly attempted by managers who are trying to shift their management styles from “control” to “empowerment.” However, what begins as an earnest attempt to involve the organization in a process for making constructive improvements all too often just fades away without resolution or substantial impact. This approach is often more challenging than expected in its goal of providing a clear focus, convincing employees of the need for a change, or designing a process for the constructive involvement of employees. As a result, management finds it particularly difficult to sustain the required commitment of time and support needed to make it work.

When the involvement approach is not followed through to constructive change, the message to employees is that management doesn’t really care about improving performance, thus lowering employee motivation and commitment to performance.

The Systemic Approach

The systemic approach is based on having a “systems” perspective of organizations and an understanding of what it means to make system interventions. This enlightened view of enterprise provides managers with a perspective that is more accurate than the machine-like understanding that until recent years has dominated industry since the Industrial Revolution.

With the systemic approach, management generally combines the constructive elements of the edict, training, and involvement approaches in ways that effectively support the desired improvement in human performance. The change isn’t just announced—it is confirmed to the workers who have been involved in designing the improved work situation. And the improved work situation is one that naturally supports behavior that achieves management’s performance goals.

The same group of employees is then enlisted to implement the needed changes, including support for all workers as they adapt. Effective employee support may include training but should always consist of more-empowering forms of assistance, such as clear objectives that focus on employee development, models of effective behavior to copy, practice simulations for impact-free learning, tools that provide continuous guidance, and measurement for corrective and affirming feedback.

Of all the approaches outlined here, the systemic approach has the best chance of succeeding. It guides managers to take the required actions to support employees in their pursuit of improved performance. It also sends the message to all workers—not just those directly involved—that management is serious about performance and willing to do what it takes to achieve its goals.

Assessing the Value of These Methods

Some managers remember when the edict and training approaches worked, or seemed to work, in their organizations. No doubt these are attractive on the surface because of the limited expense, political risk, and time commitment for managers. However, it is unlikely that managers ever achieved dramatic performance improvement goals with either approach, because each fails to fully address the principal barriers to improved work performance.

Though employee participation is used more often in the workplace today than in years past, fewer managers have tried the involvement approach for making improvements to employee performance. Rarely are these attempts successful, because this approach is more challenging than initially perceived in its requirement that employees be genuinely involved. It requires a whole new way of looking at employees, work, and performance, and it takes special knowledge, skills, and abilities that not all managers possess. Additionally, this approach can eat up a considerable amount of managers' time—time that most managers do not have.

By comparison, the systemic approach is used least often, yet produces dramatically better results. To utilize this approach successfully, managers must first be aware of the insights presented early on in this book, should have some direct experiences working with them to fully appreciate their dynamics, and need to have the support of knowledgeable professionals to assist with facilitating the process. The systemic approach combines the strengths of the edict, training, and involvement approaches and thus overcomes many of their individual weaknesses. Though the systemic approach is more complex, it is so effective that all managers, regardless of their customary ways of working, are obliged to try it in order to deal with the true complexities of people and organizations.

The manager's role in improving human performance is not taught in any formal way—not in B-schools, MBA programs, or even industry seminars—adding to management's challenge in utilizing effective methods. As a result, managers have few alternatives but to take up this challenge by relying on their personal style, using techniques learned in prior experiences, focusing on only the immediate needs of their situation, and trusting their natural abilities. Though understandable under the circumstances, this strategy may be necessary but insufficient as organizations become a more important factor in enterprise success and as competitive pressures increase.

Managing Performance Improvement

In addition to the time, attention, and interest that are required for managers to make human performance a serious focus for their organization units, substantial technical knowledge and hard-to-develop skills are required. I know of no better way to demonstrate this challenge than to review some of the fundamental principles involved in the process of improving human performance.

Key Principles of Human Performance Improvement

To successfully guide changes in organizations in such a way that worker performance and productivity are maximized, managers will need to understand the universal principles that provide a foundation for human-performance improvement. I suspect that most managers would find these principles rather obscure, arcane, and even off-putting, and yet they provide the guidance managers need in order to be effective in improving performance.

- **Equilibrium:** Organizations function as systems in a state of quasistationary equilibrium, which consists of an ongoing conflict between opposing forces of change and resistance. The current equilibrium produces the current performance. To improve performance, this equilibrium will need to be disrupted in some way and influenced to shift to a different equilibrium point—one that produces the desired performance.
- **All systems:** These systemic conflicts are reflected in interdependent levels of organization analysis (e.g., individuals, groups, and overall) so that changes introduced at any point in the organization will assuredly disrupt the equilibrium beyond the immediate situation and potentially cause unintended and potentially negative effects elsewhere in the organization.
- **Equilibrium movement:** Performance improvement occurs through a shifting of system equilibrium, generally from an intervention that introduces new forces to the system—preferably new forces that reduce the impact of current resistance forces.
- **Resistance:** Resistance forces exist in order to maintain the existing performance equilibrium. Management's attempts to introduce driving forces into the system will result in additional resistance forces so that the performance equilibrium can be maintained.
- **Breaking habits:** Improving human performance requires people within organizations to give up existing habits or customs. Such changes require an intervention that introduces balancing forces to reestablish equilibrium.
- **Emotions:** Emotional reaction and disruption to routine activity are natural responses to system interventions, with the result that people have to give up existing habits.
- **Phases:** Performance improvement occurs in phases, accounting for the time between when the point of equilibrium begins to shift and when equilibrium is reestablished.

Expectations of Management

What is reasonable for us to expect from managers?

My experiences and those of my colleagues suggest that managers who are informed of these principles, who have mildly challenging situations in which to apply them and to develop confidence for their potential, and who have the support of knowledgeable and experienced practitioners who can support them in these experiences are more likely to adopt these principles and methods. However, without any one of these ingredients, it is unlikely that managers can make this shift. Already burdened with great responsibility and innumerable challenges, managers can be expected to continue attempting to improve human performance working as they do now.

Human performance consultants are critical to this transition. They can provide managers with the requisite knowledge, experiences, and application support that are essential if managers are to adopt this more successful approach to improving human performance.

To visualize just how critical this support is to management's transition, imagine managers attempting to implement these principles and methods on their own.

- Can we reasonably expect managers to make an assessment of the organization's tolerance for change before any program for performance improvement is initiated?
- Can we reasonably expect managers to plan ahead for sufficient resources to meet workers' support needs and to deal with other contingencies as they arise so these occurrences don't destroy the improvement effort?
- Can we reasonably expect managers and their immediate staffs to prepare themselves to deal patiently with criticisms raised by affected organization units and customers who do not understand the disruption?
- Can we reasonably expect managers to make appropriate changes in structure and systems to support the desired behavior in ways that are perceived positively?
- Can we reasonably expect managers and their staffs to consistently deal rationally and effectively with the symptoms of changing people and a changing organization, even when these symptoms persistently impact every aspect of the work they are otherwise trying to accomplish?
- Can we reasonably expect managers to resist the use of authority, training, policies, rewards, and other methods for instituting control in a desperate effort to squelch natural symptoms of change so as to create an artificial aura of normalcy?

If we have these expectations of managers, we may be expecting too much. Practitioners will recognize from their own experiences in learning these principles and methods that they require substantial understanding of people, trust in process, and self-discipline to allow them to work. Although these attributes are within the reach of managers, they are not likely to develop without the close support of trusted professionals.

Uncontrollable Factors

In addition to the above challenges managers will face—challenges that make the case for human performance consultants—there will be additional challenges that managers can't meet for reasons they truly don't control:

- Organizations are complex and partly unobservable, and unskilled attempts to learn about how an organization's social processes are working can impact its integrity and negatively impact performance.
- Organizations are full of "soft" data, and they incorporate value systems that are extremely varied, ever-changing, and remarkably difficult to measure.
- Managers are integral elements of the organizational systems they manage and are unaware of some of the effects of their own behaviors.
- Problems and opportunities are rarely the disconnected individual situations we perceive them as, and our responses are often based on incomplete understanding and cultural blindness to complex underlying causal relationships.

- The human trait of hiding our true feelings and intentions for political and strategic reasons makes it especially difficult for managers to learn the “whole” situation because of the distortion that results. This limitation doesn’t preclude investigation, but it does point to the need for alternative sources of understanding from outside managers’ immediate organizations.
- The current emphasis on the importance of individual perceptions in the creation of shared organizational values suggests increased attention to how individuals make sense of experience and construct and maintain their social worlds, and how social constructions take on the appearance of certainty.
- There is often a need for practitioners to emphasize paradox, irony, eclecticism, and pluralism in this work. Unlike the vast majority of managers, they need to break out of the habit of solving problems within accepted and unchallenged theoretical frames.
- Performance improvement is intellectual work that calls attention to the margins and away from a preoccupation with some mythical truth. This work translates into a distrust of grand theories of all kinds. It is opening space for the consideration of voices, texts, and viewpoints previously neglected or ignored.
- The goal is to challenge the content of dominant models of knowledge and to produce applied knowledge that breaks down disciplinary boundaries. Such work often amounts to revolutionary challenges to conventional wisdom—the very practical knowledge that managers use to guide their work.

For all the reasons discussed above, managers will be unable to meet the critical human-performance challenges of the future unless they can identify people who can earn their confidence and trust, demonstrate the effective application of professional methods, and, as a result, create results that support managers’ objectives.

New Support for Management

This book presents a solution: developing within organizations teams of specialists who can support management in the effective improvement of human performance. These specialists would act on behalf of management to facilitate the application of the systemic approach for the improvement of human performance.

I refer to the work of these specialists as human performance consulting. However, human-performance support services and other titles can equally convey this role. In this context, I am describing support for managers that is highly effective in achieving dramatic improvements in operational performance and workforce productivity. Thus the role justifies itself by performing work that creates immediate value-added for the enterprise.

By utilizing this kind of support, managers are not required to unlearn their current ways of working or to spend an inordinate amount of time on performance-improvement processes. Of course, managers will remain the driving force for all improvements and will need to support this work. Thus substantial trust in the support providers is required.

The human performance consultant whom I refer to throughout this book as a human resource specialist, performance improvement consultant, practitioner, or simply consultant is in my mind a particular kind of consultant. Consulting work has become so widespread in the past twenty years that it is now necessary to clarify what we mean when using the word.

The kind of consultants who are essential to the process of improving human performance will define their work as more operational than advisory or educational, and as more process-focused

than project- or function-focused. These distinctions are important because the coach role, as defined by the matrix illustrated in Figure 12.2, has the greatest opportunity to create bottom-line value for clients. I am not suggesting the exclusion of the other consultant roles noted, but I am suggesting that consultants take on these roles temporarily when doing so better serves the client. Based on my years of experience in supporting the development of such roles within organizations, I have concluded that it is the consultant's emphasis on process and operations that yields the kind of results generally required to sustain management's support for the human performance consulting function.

Figure 12.2. Matrix of Consulting Roles

SERVICE	Operational (doer)	Advisory (counselor)	Educational (instructor)
RESPONSIBILITY			
Project (manage tasks)	Manager	Leader	Teacher
Process (guide workflow)	Coach	Advocate	Developer
Function (prescribe methods)	Technician	Expert	Director

Operational Service

Consultants who provide an operational service in their work are the ones who roll up their sleeves to help management realize improvements. Not just a "pair of hands," these field coaches provide leadership to the effort and maintain the respect and trust of management throughout their work. They are continually aware of the most important challenge that requires attention at any given moment, and they are willing to step in and deal with the challenge in order to keep the project moving successfully toward its objective.

Because these consultants are willing to become more involved, their projects generally go beyond the recommendation stage to an active role in supporting implementation. This increased involvement leads to their provision of a wider range of support and often results in consultants becoming integral members of the management team. As a rule, operational consultants are not finished with their work until their clients' desired results have been achieved.

Process Responsibility

Consultants whose work is process-focused are generally equipped with comprehensive knowledge, a range of tools, and substantial experience so that they can guide clients wisely through a situation, change, etc. They really earn their pay when unforeseen problems and opportunities arise in the midst of a project. Changing and unpredictable circumstances are their specialty.

Process-focused consultants know there are many ways to get from here to there, so they are less concerned with specific content. Instead, they stay focused on keeping the process moving forward with their clients' involvement and blessing. As a coach of the process, they provide needed answers for every question that arises.

These consultants will talk about what other organizations are doing in similar situations, and the really good ones can tell you the latest findings from the research literature, but it's unlikely they will recommend that a client choose to do something simply because it worked for someone else. Decisions are best made based on the client's specific circumstances, goals, and resources.

Operational Process-Focused Consultants

For numerous reasons, operational process-focused human performance consultants are essential tools for management. Like field coaches, they can be powerful instruments for facilitating improvements in work systems and organizations. The goal of these consultants is not to change management's fundamental beliefs or approach to their work. However, the effectiveness of the new methods employed by these consultants may have just this effect.

These consultants gain this potential both from the role in which they work and from the methodologies, skills, and knowledge they utilize. Their collaborative and facilitative role parallels the natural process of development, learning, and change. They also bring capabilities to their work that are informed, well reasoned, and proven through experience.

Instruments of Performance Improvement

In this new and rapidly evolving world that has been forever transformed by new technologies and new business structures, the role of human performance consulting—as an instrument of performance improvement—will be increasingly called on to take action that supports the management of enterprise operations and leads to improved work performance. Although managers will always provide the driving force for improvement, human performance consultants, whether internal or external, will perform a critical function in the workplace of the future.

This is a solution for advancing the practice of management in organizations—a solution whose time has come. These professionals will serve as bridges connecting managers with workers. They will stand back far enough to see the whole picture, and they will proactively team with both managers and workers to effect improvements that will keep enterprises competitive and productive. They will enable enterprises to attract and retain knowledge and service workers capable of high performance and able to continuously improve that performance.

The future success of many organizations may depend on these instruments of performance improvement to augment the work of management. The form and substance of this support are decisive in determining its potential for effectiveness. Therefore, in the remaining chapters I will detail practices that have proven successful.

Continuous Process (Chapter 13)

The process-focused approach of the human performance consultant is distinct in some important characteristics from the many consulting processes detailed by authors in the broad field of consulting. This work is continuous and assumes a much broader responsibility for performance-improvement results than implied by most of these other processes. A review of the process, with some elaboration on the work in each of the four recurring steps, provides a better understanding of how human performance consultants support management and create value.

Competent Consultants (Chapter 14)

When the competence of consultants is evident, managers are encouraged to engage their support. For the human performance consultant, there is no other alternative to competence. The effectiveness of their role depends on having their services utilized and having the ability to create value for the enterprise. Though human performance consultants have the pivotal role, the complete challenge is rarely met by one person. Large organizations, with their seemingly endless opportunities for improved performance and productivity, can leverage the efforts of human performance consultants with supporting specialists from a myriad of professional and quasiprofessional disciplines. The solution is a professional team—either a formal organization or a virtual team of external resources.

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Human Performance Consulting can be found at most major bookstores, or ordered online from Butterworth-Heinemann, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Borders, or other booksellers.

ⁱ Peter F. Drucker, *Post-Capitalist Society*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

ⁱⁱ Peter F. Drucker, "Management's New Paradigms." *Forbes*, Oct. 5, 1998, pp. 156.