

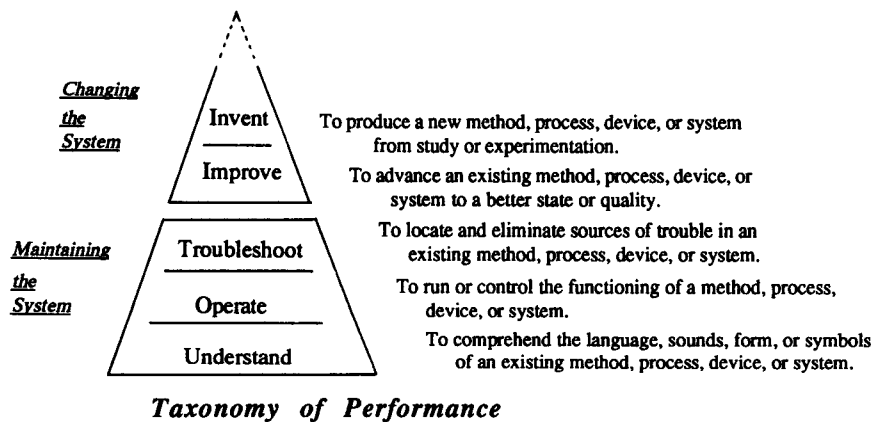
Ready—Aim—Frame

The famous parody of business practice, "Ready—Fire—Aim," is still alive and well. I have been hearing about it from human resource development (HRD) practitioners, but for them it is "Ready—Aim—Blame." These practitioners talk about being put in the middle of impossible situations with the expectation that their efforts will result in improved performance. When there is no improvement, they get blamed. Managers prescribing HRD interventions without proper analysis and support all too often throw their performance problems over the HRD wall and expect big results. As if that is not bad enough, the HRD practitioners on the other side willingly catch and run with the problems only to be tagged out at home base. What I propose here is a taxonomy for framing the desired performance and the analytical work that follows.

Human resource developers are in the business of developing expertise in other people and improving the systems in which they work. Numerous analytical tools are available to analyze work systems and the substance of the expertise required to operate in them. Some of these tools focus on isolating elements of human behavior into the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Other analytical tools go beyond narrow domains to identify critical work tasks and performances (Flanagan, 1954). Others address categories of work behavior such as procedural work, knowledge work, and systems work (Carlisle, 1986; Swanson and Gradous, 1986). Still others focus on analyzing and flow-charting core processes (Rummler and Brache, 1990; Whitehouse, 1973) and on analyzing the purpose and structure of the larger organization as well as the environment in which the organization operates (Senge, 1990; Tichy, Fombrun, and Devanna, 1982).

Organizations and the human performances required to operate them are almost always complex and multidimensional. Human resource developers who accept the charge of enhancing organization or individual performance need to anchor their analyses and interventions at the appropriate levels of performance. Framing the desired performance from a holistic perspective should be done prior to analyzing the scope of an intervention or the specific program objectives. The taxonomy of performance proposed here and illustrated in the figure below allows human resource developers to frame the desired performance level for the purposes of selecting appropriate interventions and directing the analysis, design, development, delivery, and evaluation phases.

The taxonomy of performance identifies five levels. The first three levels—understand, operate, and troubleshoot—are all focused on maintaining



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an existing system. The top tier contains levels of performance—improve and invent—that result in changes in the system.

Without such a performance taxonomy to frame the human issues, aims may be right on target in terms of business goals but not be properly framed in terms of the work systems and expertise required to achieve those goals. Thus, HRD practitioners can end up in some very awkward situations. For example, they could teach workers how to operate a system while management is expecting the workers to troubleshoot the system. Or, human resource developers could provide workers with just a basic understanding of a complex system and then expect them to improve it without an adequate knowledge and experience base in either problem solving or operations.

The complexity of today's workplace often forces the HRD professional to struggle in two directions: (1) developing a work force that is minimally able to maintain the existing system (that is, personnel who can understand, operate, and troubleshoot the existing system) and at the same time (2) engaging other workers in programs to develop expertise designed to challenge and change that same system (that is, improve it or invent a new system).

It is critical to know where the performance issues fit in the taxonomy and what results are expected from HRD interventions. The taxonomy of performance can help keep the issues clear and help communicate them to the stakeholders. With the desired performance levels properly framed, the HRD professional can responsibly partner with line managers in assuring the performance of organizations, work groups, and individuals—sans the blaming.

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