

Training is Dead

Long live results-based
skill development

*Why training programs fall short
and how a renewed focus on
end-state goals brings meaningful
impact to an organization*

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KT



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“EXCELLENCE IS AN ART WON BY TRAINING AND HABITUATION. WE DO NOT ACT RIGHTLY BECAUSE WE HAVE VIRTUE OR EXCELLENCE, BUT WE RATHER HAVE THOSE BECAUSE WE HAVE ACTED RIGHTLY. WE ARE WHAT WE REPEATEDLY DO. EXCELLENCE, THEN, IS NOT AN ACT BUT A HABIT.”

– ARISTOTLE

One of the greatest challenges that training and organization development professionals face is the demand on the part of their organizations for a minimization of employees' time off job. We at KT find that while there is a higher focus on the time and attention spent on developing capabilities across all levels of operation, that time and attention is not in the classroom.

The reliance on in-classroom training by many organizations is dying a rapid death, not out of any ill-will; primarily it is out of economic necessity. Business-impacting results are rare in a classroom setting. Newly formed skills learned and immediately applied, to produce operational results are the order of the day and the future of organization transformation. We all feel it. The rate of organizational transformation is becoming faster, daily.

A number of trends are at play. The primary one ringing in change is the competitive pressure of the marketplace. Corporate trainers are under intense pressure to not only justify their expenditure in measurable ways,

also they must achieve those results with reductions in the amount of time employees are away from the activities and environments of their jobs. The message is clear: learning must be applied to the ongoing challenges of the workplace. A bias for action, active learning, and highly focused engagement, combined with response-based consequences and feedback, are becoming the new model for optimum capability development. The specific response to a decrease in classroom-based learning, however, is not as clear because it is highly dependent on operational needs and business context.

What has occurred to create this change in focus and effort? As businesses have examined the way their business processes add value to the customer experience, they have finally turned their gaze to those internal activities supporting operational performance. Training has come under the magnifying glass. Preconceived notions about what is effective are being questioned. Long-held standards and practices are being afforded a degree of scrutiny often reserved for production lines and sales programs. The result of which is a renewed commitment to creating as many opportunities as possible for skill development, knowledge transfer, and incremental learning, and to compound that learning with habits formed through applied repetition.

The concept of “just-in-time” delivery, long a pattern of production in the coal mining industry, has been transferred to the arena of skill development. Out of necessity, traditional project management training has been set aside. Instead of working on hypothetical case studies, employees of Rio Tinto Energy America (RTEA) apply real-time learning to active projects. Pressure on the bottom line, limiting both funding and available time, precluded training outside the workplace by the management team. With a results-based skill development approach, RTEA has focused on this model in over 15 projects to the extent that key people have not only been developed as project managers, they have effectively been transferred to leading projects full time.

There is an old adage, often referred to in the context of training in the medical profession, "See one. Do one. Teach one." A reflection of that mindset is becoming the pattern for approaching performance improvement through results-based skill development. In a recent survey reported in *Chief Learning Officer* magazine, and conducted by Novations Group, the top five trends impacting organizations' approaches to training and organizational development were:

1. More on-line/e-learning
2. Greater effort to quantify results of training/development
3. Increased on-the-job training
4. Personal coaching
5. Fewer classroom hours/more condensed classroom time

The driver in all of these cases is that there should be a meaningful, behavior-changing impact on the learning that should be sustained within the operational context in which the learning will be applied. These trends reflect current thinking that no matter how close a classroom training program is conducted to the worksite, the distance from classroom to work area has a diminishing effect on business impact. There is a better way to capitalize on learning experiences. It requires a results-based, holistic approach to learning that is in the context of the learners' work.

To arrive at that approach, it is necessary to understand some fundamental building blocks in human performance. As training and consulting specialists, Kepner-Tregoe (KT) has used the Performance System model (see Diagram 1) as our way of articulating best practices in human performance improvement for a number of years. As one of the first organizations in the world to understand the value of a systematic approach to transferring knowledge in order to obtain competitive advantage, we also recognize the utility of this model as organizational needs change.

At the heart of the Performance System lies the Performer. This person possesses a set of skills and knowledge through which they perform a series of activities within a specific organizational context. That context is referred to here as the Situation and it is comprised of expectations for performance, environmental conditions that support the performance, and signals that trigger appropriate performance activities. The Performer's activities result in outputs that add value to the customer. Those outputs are represented by the Response component. As a direct reflection of the outputs, the Performer experiences Consequences that may either encourage or discourage the performance. Finally, based on observation, Feedback is provided to the Performer in the work environment by managers, peers, and more than likely, customers.

It must be noted that there are three primary assumptions that drive any work using

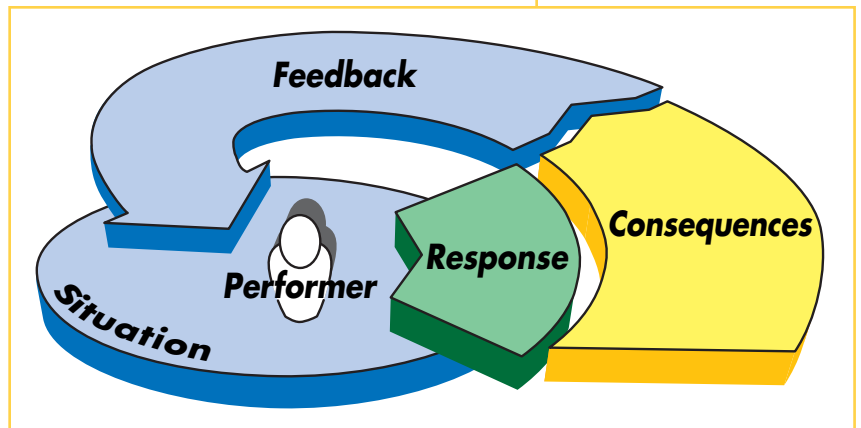


Diagram 1

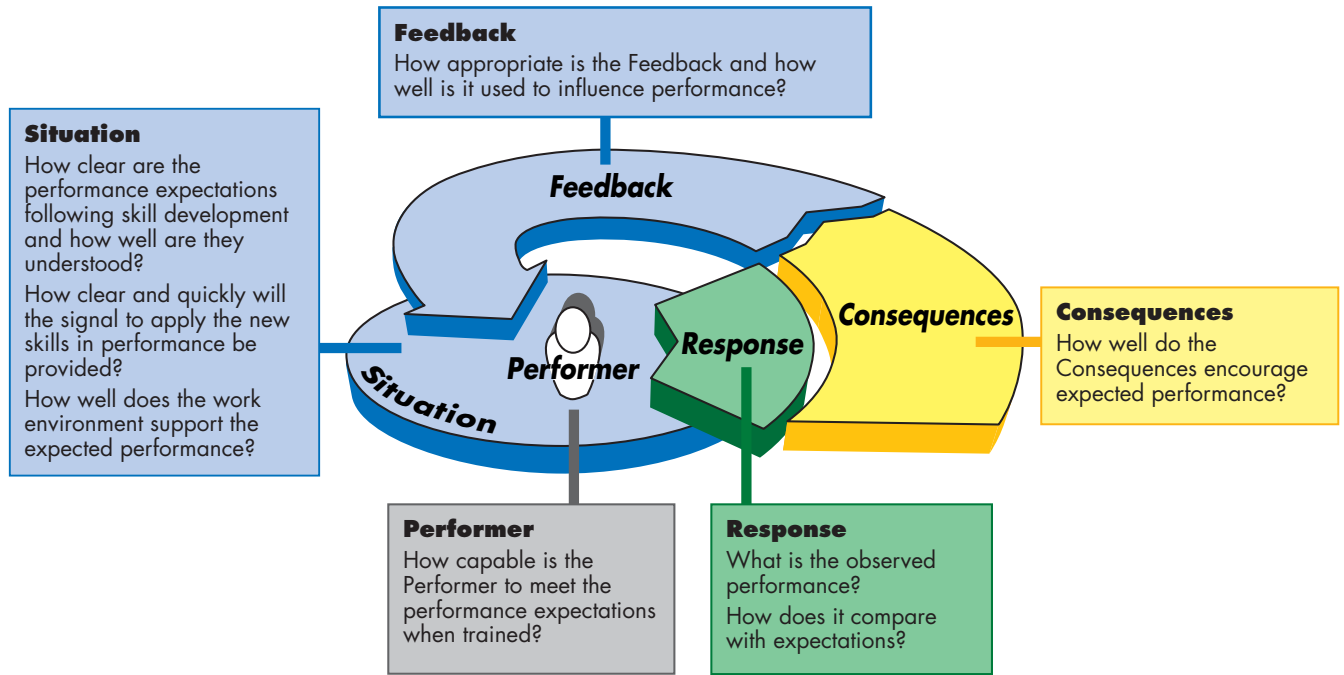
the Performance System. The first is that this model is probabilistic in nature, meaning that it may influence and cannot determine outputs. The second is that this model only functions in a meaningful manner when considered from the Performer's perspective. And third, the Performance System exists whether we choose to recognize it, or not. With these assumptions in place, the Performance System becomes an excellent tool for analyzing, diagnosing and testing new approaches to driving results through skill development. It requires focus and, for most organizations, demands change.

At a large Netherlands-based, global financial services company, one of their divisions was faced with the critical strategic task of developing their future leaders. Project management skill development has been considered not only a crucial ingredient in organizational change, it has become a platform creating these new leaders. Rather than creating an in-classroom leadership development program, KT worked with this organization to develop an approach that was focused on learning through the implementation of initiatives that were critical to organizational strategy. 360° feedback was conducted, enabling the development team to design learning opportunities that directly addressed skill and knowledge gaps in each high-potential employee. By applying structured coaching and feedback around tailored project experiences, talented managers were transformed into the leaders of the future—all accomplished without spending an eternity in classrooms.

The critical question for any organization seeking results from changes to human behavior through skill development is, "What do we need people to be doing to achieve our strategic intent?" Fundamentally, only those skills that drive the change required to achieve an organization's strategy should warrant time and attention. Some of which might be basic or elemental in nature, essentially the price of admission to a market. Other skills might demand the creation of new ways of thinking or being in the context of work. In either case, the required new behaviors must be transferred, applied and tested within a supportive performance environment. They must also be relevant to the production of customer-perceived value as rapidly as possible. By using the Performance System, we can determine the appropriate application of skill development to achieve our desired results quickly and meaningfully.

The best skill development is done by an organization's own practitioners and focused on producing results within the context in which the work will be conducted. Many organizations cannot afford to have their best practitioners always involved in skill development. Nor can they always create the space required to train people in situ in a work environment. The approach we recommend is partnering with people, within your organization or external to it, who can transfer a skill rapidly and who can support the development of that skill through feedback, coaching and mentoring alongside the person being trained as they test their new found knowledge. While KT has been a master practitioner of classroom training for many years, we have seen time and time again through our consulting engagements that structured on-job training results in faster transfer of skills, faster testing of those skills, and a higher chance of those skills being retained over the long term. In terms of the scope of organizational change, it is akin to changing the interior of a jumbo jet while it is in flight. As such, there are some critical ingredients and some key questions on your flight toward success.

Those questions (see Diagram 2) are structured around the Performance System model:



Results-based skills development demands that an organization focus its efforts on developing those skills rapidly so they can be applied immediately to those business processes that result in the greatest customer impact. The delay between classroom training and application defeats the intended benefit. The abdication of responsibility for skill development to the classroom instructor means that managers are off the hook for providing the appropriate coaching, feedback and mentoring that creates habits in the newly developed. The tyranny of efficiency that classroom training implies, and in fact demands, is negated when assessed against its long-term effectiveness. The old training watchwords were: "backsides in seats," minimized costs-per-head, days-long programs, job aids soon lost, and management "buy-in" without commitment. The new results-based skill development language revolves around: rapid development of skills, relevancy to the job, immediately applicable, universally encouraged and sustained through habit.

While results-based skill development drives business results, the economic reality is equally appealing. The return on investment of these initiatives is greater than 1 : 1 because creating value is the target of the learning approach. At a San Francisco Bay Area biotech company, the senior leadership team needed to make a series of critical decisions about positioning the business in light of recent changes in their development mix and the associated external partners. Rather than an executive retreat to discuss strategy, the CEO used this opportunity to "level-set" the senior leadership team's decision-making processes. An external facilitator was brought in, to not only drive to successful decision outcomes, they were also responsible for creating a common language for decision making that the team could share. Each decision was setup so that it focused on a specific aspect of decision making, the

Diagram 2

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end result being clear decisions, commonly understood and supported, that could be implemented immediately.

Training, at least the way many organizations have understood training, is going the way of the dinosaur. A renewed commitment to only doing those things that create a meaningful, positive impact on the performance of our people, and results recognized by customers, is the order of the day. Clear, specific expectations, tied to strategic and operational goals, with targeted skill development activities that can be rapidly applied, tested and improved will move organizations further faster than nearly all knowledge imparted in a classroom. Classroom training is not habit forming. Improved business performance means constant skill development. Business performance excellence created through results-based skill development is not an act, it is a habit.

About the Author

Andrew C. Marshall (Drew) is a Partner and the Chief Innovation Officer with Kepner-Tregoe, Inc. In this role he ensures that the products and services that KT delivers to clients are directly meeting their needs and producing measurable and meaningful results. In this role he also chairs the Technical Leadership Committee which has responsibility for the successful implementation of KT's product development strategy, positioning the firm for long-term growth.

Kepner-Tregoe, Inc. has earned a worldwide reputation for improving business results through people. A global leader in effecting successful change and improvement, KT helps clients achieve lasting results through a proven approach of process, facilitation, and transfer. Focusing on the needs of the organization's people—their skills, capabilities, and performance environment—KT continues to find innovative ways to integrate human resources into an organization's strategy, structure, and systems, and the processes in which goals are accomplished.

Kepner-Tregoe, Inc. (www.kepner-tregoe.com) provides rapid operational and strategic results through consulting and training solutions. KT's renowned rational thinking processes are the basis of logical and consistent approaches that address tough business issues. For nearly 50 years, KT has helped individuals and organizations to meet everyday business challenges with improved processes and new approaches to quality, competitiveness, cost, cycle time, business strategy, and other issues. Many clients embed the systematic KT methods into the way work is done, transform their organizations, and achieve quantum leaps in performance.

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