

YOUR CAREER

Trainer, Assess Thyself!

Do it for you.

By Amy Newman

This article is part 1 of a two-part series. Next month, career consultant Annabelle Reitman will suggest ways for trainers to develop themselves.

Learning and performance professionals are expert at conducting needs assessments. Whether they're formal or informal, for individuals or groups of five or 5000, we have an instinct for assessment as an essential part of the learning and performance improve-

ment process. I'll spare you the analogy of the shoemaker, but many of us neglect our own development in favor of developing the people and organizations we serve. But a learning professional's career shouldn't be left to chance. With a little discipline and a lot of objectivity, we can apply our needs assessment skills to our own careers.

Like a training needs assessment, a career self-assessment involves analyzing competencies (skills, knowledge,

and abilities) as they relate to performance requirements and the context (environment) in which you work. You'll likely want to assess your competencies against your current job and future job prospects. Typically, you'll examine competencies for your current job in an annual performance appraisal or development plan. The focus here, however is skills assessment for future job possibilities.

What jobs are available for learning professionals? Fortunately, the options are many. Pursuing one specific type of job may cause you to miss the boat on new opportunities you couldn't predict. Instead, focus on developing new competencies that can be used in a variety of jobs.

Self-assessment

To get started on the self-assessment, let's look at an example; Emily is a trainer for a company of about 1000 employees. She enjoys designing, developing, and delivering workshops on performance management, new-employee orientation, and customer service. But she doesn't plan to do that forever, and she wants to help her company make better use of technology. To benefit her company in the short run and herself in the long run, Emily wants to explore new career options and build new skills.

She starts by conducting external research. Emily attends conferences, reads industry journals, explores professional association Websites, and conducts informational interviews with colleagues who hold jobs that interest her. She asks people such questions as

- What does it take to be successful in your job?
- How did your skills and experience prepare you for success?
- What are your most important job responsibilities?

- What do you consider the most difficult parts of your work?
- How did you learn to do your job?
- What suggestions do you have for me to make the transition into a similar role?

Emily also visits ASTD's Website and finds lists of competencies for various training careers in www.astd.org/virtual_community/comm_careers the Career Center.

Based on her research, Emily decides that she wants to build e-learning competencies, including

- awareness of the e-learning industry
- interpersonal relationship building and collaboration
- consulting
- project management
- design and development
- knowledge of distribution methodology
- technology evaluation.

www.learningcircuits.org/2001/mar2001/competencies.html

Emily continues her research with reflection and introspection. She explores her interests, values, likes, and dislikes as they relate to future career prospects. First, she reflects on the parts of her job that most excite her. She finds that she can design programs for hours without getting bored and loves learning about new technology. She likes facilitating groups, but it takes a lot out of her. She also wants more flexibility in her work life. She doesn't mind working independently and, ideally, would want to work from home at least a couple of days a week.

View Self-Assessment Forms

To see Emily's form filled out and access a blank, printable form, visit www.astd.org/virtual_community/td_magazine and select July issue.

From her external and internal research, Emily decides that pursuing a career in e-learning is a good way to go. It's a growing area, she has some related skills and experience, she's fascinated by the technology, and she enjoys the type of work that will likely be involved. Next—as with any needs assessment—Emily compares her current competencies with those required for her future career.

Emily enters her competencies into the self-assessment form and rates her current knowledge, skills, and abilities against them using the 1-3 scale. Quickly, Emily realizes that this is more art than science. She gives herself a 1 (unskilled or inexperienced) for the areas that are brand-new to her—for example, “knowledge of distribution methodology” and “technology evaluation.”

Because she has designed and developed several training programs, she gives that a 3. “Consulting” gets a 2 because she has some experience working with clients in an internal consulting role but no external consulting experience. In addition to the ratings, Emily gives specific examples of how she has demonstrated those competencies rated a 2 or a 3.

We know from organizational and learning needs assessments that objectivity is a critical part of this process. How can Emily ensure that her self-assessment is accurate? Because she can't facilitate a focus group with herself, she must find other ways to verify her results. Emily asks a colleague to complete an assessment of her. She also gets up the nerve to ask her manager to review the completed self-assessment and provide her perspective. Finally, Emily examines her recent performance appraisals for clues about strengths and areas for development.

Moving forward

As with organizational needs assessments, all this work is for naught unless Emily takes action to bridge identified

skill gaps. She must create a development plan that she can stick with, choosing two or three areas to work on for the next six months to a year. Then she must be diligent in reassessing her skills at least once a year.

Emily chooses to work on “awareness of the e-learning industry” because that competency will be the foundation for her other development work. And she wants to figure out what “knowledge of distribution methodology” means and learn more about it. Emily’s committed to reassessing her skills in six months, so she chooses only two areas for now. Knowing that she works well independently, she includes readings and self-directed programs as part of her development plan. And she finds an upcoming e-learning conference and asks her manager if she can attend.

After six months, Emily will go through a similar—but shorter—assessment process. She’ll add new competencies and delete the ones that received a 3 rating, assuming that she maintains her skill level for the ones that will be important for her future job.

Great careers rarely just happen; few of us are so fortunate. Most of us need to prepare for an unknown and rapidly evolving future. The good news is that we have the assessment skills to put into action. We just need to apply them to our most important client: ourselves.

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Competencies Self Assessment

Complete this self-assessment at least once a year. Be sure to get input from your manager and/or peers to verify your results. Add pages (or table rows if you’re working online) for additional competencies.

Competencies Include skills, knowledge, or abilities	Rating See Rating Scale	Examples If rating is 2 or 3, provide at least two examples of how you have demonstrated this competency in the past year.
Awareness of e-learning industry	1	
Interpersonal relationship	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Worked closely with HR generalists to create building and collaboration new orientation program. Received good feedback on the process. ● Worked well with the customer service managers during the needs assessment and training program design. ● Negotiated timeframes and often-conflicting demands to ensure that their needs were met.
Consulting	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Analyzed a performance issue in the accounting department and worked with the management team to determine training and other performance-improvement solutions. ● Worked closely with a manager to design a staff assessment process for the marketing department. ● Advised him on conducting the assessments, but this was a challenge for me.
Project management	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Project managed designing the orientation program, which took more than six months to pull together. ● Coordinated scheduling training dates for next year, but this was not a big project.
Design and development	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Designed the orientation program with little direction; developed all materials independently. ● Taught Michael basic instructional design methodology and coached him through designing the telephone etiquette module.
Knowledge of distribution methodology	1	
Technology evaluation	1	

Identify two or three competencies as priorities for future job performance: Awareness of e-learning industry, knowledge of distribution methodology

Remember to complete a development plan to bridge competency gaps.

Rating scale

- 1=Unskilled or Inexperienced
- 2=Somewhat Skilled
- 3=Highly skilled

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See Rating Scale

Examples

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Project management

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Knowledge of distribution methodology

Technology evaluation

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