

# Shoeing the Cobbler's Children

Often so concerned about the development of others, training and development practitioners have a tendency to forget about their own needs in this area.

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The core of the training and development practitioner's job is assessing the development needs of employees, providing the resources for addressing those needs, and anticipating future needs. But while we're busy taking care of everybody else, who's taking care of our professional training and development needs? When was the last time most of us assessed our strengths and development needs and implemented a development plan? In most cases we're the proverbial cobbler's children, running barefoot through the organization.

But we're not completely without shoes. *Models for Excellence*, developed by Patricia McLagan for the American Society for Training and Development, is an excellent competency model which, unfortunately, many of us have not applied in our own professional lives. [See McLagan's article on professional development on page xx of this issue.—Ed.] Maybe what we need most is a systematic way to translate the competency model into practice. The approach outlined below consists of five steps: identification of development objectives, job analysis, self-evaluation, input from other sources, and development planning.

## Identify development objectives

The first step in the competency model is identifying your specific development objectives. Just as objectives guide the development of a training course, they

should also guide your personal development.

Questions you might ask in determining and ranking your development objectives are listed in Figure 1. You may, of course, have other objectives. But the most important thing to keep in mind is that you need to specify and rank these objectives so they can guide your development process.

## Do a job analysis

After you specify your objectives, you need to understand where you've been and where you are now. You can accomplish this by performing a self-directed analysis of your current and past work experiences.

Job analysis in the context of self-

assessment and development planning provides the basis for comparing your competencies with those required for effective performance in a current or future job. You could use the list of 15 roles and critical outputs described in *Models for Excellence* to identify and rank the roles you have performed in your present and past jobs.

Once you have determined the roles you have performed, you can look at the competencies related to these roles. Profiling your current and past jobs in terms of the competencies needed to perform major work roles provides a solid framework for understanding your current competency levels.

You can also use this process to analyze a future or ideal job. You can "build" an ideal job by putting together the roles most suited to your interests and talents. You also could analyze an actual job by gathering information from people who are familiar with the job.

After developing these "job profiles," you can use them in a number of ways depending on your particular development objectives. Training and development practitioners who want to improve current job performance can use the critical competencies identified through this job analysis to guide the next three steps of the development planning process. Practitioners seeking advancement and people

Figure 1—Sample questions for determining development objectives

### For training and development practitioners:

- What can I do to improve my current job performance?
- What do I need to do to stay abreast of changing job requirements?
- What should I do to improve myself for future jobs?

### For students:

- How interested am I in becoming a training and development professional?
- What should I study to prepare myself for the training and development field?
- What work internship experiences would best prepare me to be a training and development practitioner?

### For the human resource professional interested in the training and development field:

- How well would the training and development profession meet my career needs and interests?
- How transferable are my current competencies to the training and development field?
- What do I need to do to become a strong candidate for training and development positions?

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interested in entering the training and development field can compare the competencies required by their current and past jobs with those required for a future or ideal job.

## Evaluate yourself

The foundation for effective development planning is reliable and valid assessment of your current knowledge and skill levels. Making accurate conclusions about your training and development needs is directly related to how well you evaluate your competencies. A natural starting point for identifying your strengths and weaknesses is self-evaluation.

Self-evaluation is nothing more than a structured procedure for taking a good, close look at yourself. Before you do anything else, you need to sit down and ask yourself what you can and cannot do.

The key to effective self-evaluation is a structured framework for gathering, organizing, and interpreting information about yourself. A framework already exists in *Models for Excellence*, which defines the competency requirements for major roles in the training and development field.

Begin your self-evaluation by ranking competencies and eliminating those of minimal concern. Each competency's importance depends on your objectives and the results of your job analysis performed earlier. Focusing your attention on key competencies will help you target your assessment in the most significant areas.

After you identify your critical competencies, you are in a good position to rate yourself on them. You might want to use the rating scales provided in *Models for Excellence*. The scales include behavioral anchors to help you determine your competency levels—for example basic, intermediate, or advanced levels. Your honest and conscientious self-ratings should result in a competency profile that specifies where your strengths and development needs lie. Keep in mind that the old cliché of “you only get out what you put in” really applies to self-assessment.

Be aware that there are innumerable problems in rating yourself. One of the biggest problems is the “halo” effect: the tendency to give yourself high ratings in all areas because your overall rating of yourself is high. It's very unusual for a person to be highly competent at everything, so don't fall into the trap of letting a generally favorable self-image bias your judgment in specific areas.

A good rule of thumb in testing the accuracy of your competency ratings is documenting past accomplishments that

demonstrate your claimed performance levels. This might seem laborious at first, but such documentation will help you avoid inflating—or deflating—your true competency levels, lending greater credibility to self-evaluation.

## Get input from other sources

The next step allows you to verify your self-assessment through “external” information sources. Of course the extent to which you use these sources will depend on a number of factors, such as their availability and your time constraints.

One objective way to confirm your self-evaluation is taking job knowledge tests in relevant subject matter areas. Although finding tests on training and development theory and practices may seem next to impossible, a little digging might yield some results. Possible test sources include colleges and universities that offer training and development programs, test publishers, and training and development departments in large companies. Test results can contribute significantly to verifying your self-perceptions or can alter inaccurate assessments of your competencies.

You can perform a more detailed evaluation of your key competencies by having others observe you on your current job. Suppose you want to determine what your level of expertise is for “Group Process Skills.” You could ask your manager and a couple of colleagues to pay particular attention to your work behavior in this area over a period of time. You should provide these people with some guidelines—easily derived from *Models for Excellence*—for making observations; this will enhance the reliability of their evaluations. After your chosen observers have had sufficient opportunity to see you in relevant work situations, they can assess your performance and back up their evaluations with specific behavior examples.

The most important thing to remember when verifying your own self-assessment is to obtain information about your knowledge and skill levels from as many sources as possible. These multiple evaluations help ensure the accuracy and utility of development planning conclusions.

## Design a development plan

Valid information about your competencies is useless unless you apply the information you glean in satisfying training and development needs. The basic goal of development planning is to help you gain the knowledge, skills, and experience needed to perform your current job more effectively and to prepare you for assum-

ing the responsibilities of future jobs.

An important step in development planning is documenting the competencies targeted for your development. Use your specific development objectives and the information you obtained through job analysis and competency evaluation to help you select up to three competencies that you will attempt to develop. More than three development objectives are unmanageable for most people.

For each target competency, develop an action plan that describes what you intend to do and a timetable for improving your expertise. Refer back to the critical outputs related to each competency; use them to specify how you plan to demonstrate increased expertise in the target competency areas once you have fully implemented your development plan. It's also a good idea to perform regular progress checks to review your development plan and chart your progress against development objectives. Last, but not least, initiate discussions regarding your development plan with your present manager and a few carefully selected mentors, advisors, job experts, or ardent supporters.

A critical part of the development planning process is determining the kinds of development activities most effective for your given development needs, preferred learning style, and work or school situation. Since the most useful learning often occurs on the job itself, you should view the work setting as a primary opportunity for professional development. On-the-job training activities in which you seek and receive constructive feedback can be extremely useful in building competency expertise. You, or someone you know with expertise in a given competency, can create your own set of activities for each target competency in your development plan. Your company may even have some resources. For example, Control Data Business Advisors, of Minneapolis, provides their *Employee Development Manual*, which suggests on-the-job activities designed to increase employees' expertise in given competencies.

The publications and services offered through membership in ASTD also are invaluable development resources. Among these resources are the Resource Center and Member Information Exchange, books, cassettes, videotapes, and other publications and resources.

There are a host of other resources for professional development currently available, taking the form of flyers for courses, books, cassettes, on-the-job ac-

tivities, and the like. Organizing these resources according to the competencies listed in *Models for Excellence* provides a guide for future development planning for yourself and for colleagues.

The networking that occurs at both local and national ASTD meetings provides an ideal opportunity for gathering information about development activities for given competency areas. Local chapters could even formalize this type of resource-sharing and publish an actual development guide that lists development activities suited to each of the 31 competencies listed in *Models for Excellence*. You can be as creative with your professional development as your imagination, budget, and time allow.

### Put it all together

With all the barriers to receiving training and development in organizations—such as budget constraints, lack of time, little management support, and hard-to-find information on development resources—it's no wonder that many of us ask how we can afford the time and effort required for development planning and its implementation. But how can we afford *not* to expend the time and energy when today's dynamic business environment is characterized by a phenomenal rate of technological change for which we must prepare employees?

*Models for Excellence*, coupled with a systematic approach to development planning, can help us maximize our current performance while preparing us to meet tomorrow's demands. The cobbler's children need not run barefoot. All we have to do is practice what we preach—and then preach what we practice.

*Models of Excellence is available from the ASTD Publishing Service. Order Code: MCME. \$43 for ASTD National members, \$65 for nonmembers, plus \$1.75 for shipping and handling. To order, contact ASTD Publishing Service, P.O. Box 4856, Hampden Station, Baltimore, MD 21211 or call 703/683-8129.*



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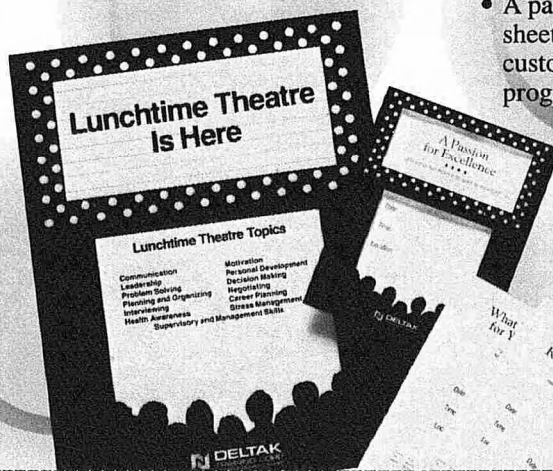
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