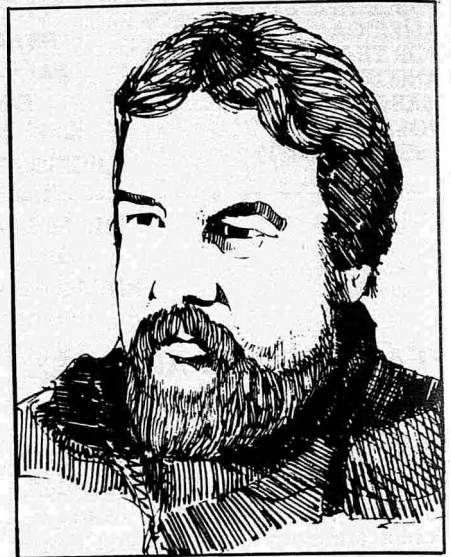# PAGE FOUR . . .

BY MICHAEL H. COOK, Editor

"ASTD AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT — TWO YEARS LATER"

It has been more than four years since ASTD created its Professional Development Committee to design a self-development process for professionals in the HRD field. The Committee sought to develop a model of basic roles and core competencies in an effort to assess more precisely the professional development of T&D practitioners.

In 1977, the PD Committee commissioned an empirical study of professional training and development activities, with the purpose of identifying basic roles performed by T&D practitioners and the basic competencies required to perform these activities. ASTD contracted with the consulting firm of Towers, Perrin, Forster & Crosby (TPF&C) to conduct a survey of national members to determine "what training and development professionals really do." Jim Walker of TPF&C and Pat Pinto of the University of Minnesota were selected to spearhead the effort, seeking to maintain a reasonable balance between research rigor and pragmatic simplicity.

The results of this research are the focus of *A Study of Professional Training and Development Roles and Competencies* ($5 members/ $7.50 non-members). Also published were: *Professional Development: A Self-Development Process for T&D Professionals*, a guide aimed at helping practitioners prepare themselves for increasing success and effectiveness as a T&D practitioner; and *Feedback for Professional Development*, a training professional activities inventory. Both of these publications are available from ASTD at $5 member and $7.50 non-member prices. For additional information on these publications, contact ASTD, P.O. Box 5307, Dept. J, Madison, WI 53705.

It was hoped that such a study would also form a research base for further definition of competencies as the nature of the training and development profession changes. In an effort to keep tabs on further analysis of this data, Mac McCullough, ASTD's director of Professional Development, and I recently had a chance to discuss with Pat Pinto the following questions:

JOURNAL: It has been almost two years since your "A Study of Professional Training and Development Roles and Competencies" was published. I know you are aware of some of the ways ASTD has used the results of this study in development of a self-assessment tool, in shaping the content of our Institutes and National Conference, and in influencing the direction of our professional development efforts. But I was wondering if you have done any additional analysis of the data in addition to that already reported?[1]

PINTO: Yes, we have completed additional analysis of the data.

One study differentiates internal consultants from external consultants.[2] As you might guess, these two types of training professionals are different from each other, but often in subtle ways. For example, external consultants are more like generalists, reporting to top management and less likely to devote full time to T&D. Their specialty is more likely to be group and organization development.

Internal consultants are more likely to be involved in employee skill development, classroom training, individual counseling, and sometimes management of the training function. Their heavy involvement is with conducting need analyses and the design of their own training.

By the way, external consultants earned significantly more income.

We also studied over 300 personnel generalists (more than 10 percent of our total respondents) who were members of ASTD.[3] These were either training practitioners who moved to personnel generalist positions and maintained their affiliation with ASTD to keep current in the HRD field; or they were personnel generalists in small companies who had significant training and development responsibilities.

The results indicate that although they may be distinguished because of their primary job responsibility, there is some overlap in that over half of the practitioners have not specialized beyond that of a generalist.

Demographically, personnel generalists found were found in smaller organizations, primarily served managers as clients, had

greater tenure in the organization, and reporting to a higher level of management than did the T&D practitioner.

Concerning their work activities, it is not surprising that the personnel generalists engaged in less "hard-core" training activities such as needs analysis, program design, developing material resources, and classroom training. However, they engaged in significantly more individual employee counseling and maintenance of working relationships with managers than the practitioners.

A third study is looking at whether the 14-factor model has a theoretical consistency with other authors and experienced T&D professionals. As you know, the professional development (PD) committee reduced our model to nine factors. This may be more parsimonious for practice, but Jim Walker and I want to be sure we do not lose the theoretical contribution that the full model can make.

JOURNAL: Your study intentionally dealt with ASTD members who were practitioners, not with consultants, educators, media specialists, or other professionals. I wonder, particularly in light of the tremendous interest in organization development and career development, how you think the study results relate to these ASTD members?

PINTO: You are correct in that the original focus of the PD Committee was on T&D practitioners. Items were constructed to tap into their basic work activities. However, consultants, educators, and others were also sent surveys because there was no way to distinguish these specialists on the ASTD national roster.

Specifically regarding organization development and career development specialists, I am confident that these members also regard themselves as T&D practitioners. One of our items asked for primary area of specialization. Considering that the survey was developed for practitioners, a large percentage (13 percent) said their specialty was organization development.

Since the model does not describe any specific technology, but merely a process for training, the results would apply to these professionals as well. To the extent that the activities may be viewed as generally prescriptive of all development programs, the model should be useful to those in both group and individual development, as well as those in more traditional training endeavors.

"*Considering that the survey was developed for practitioners, a large percentage said their specialty was organization development.*"

JOURNAL: The study reports on 100-plus activities performed by training and development professionals and states "knowing the activities, it is only a matter of interpretation to identify competency requirements." That sounds very easy, but I am not clear on how you propose we convert those descriptions of activities into competency requirements. Could you explain that?

PINTO: The activities are indicative of what actually gets done in day-to-day work of trainers. Grouping the activities into common dimensions of work (through the statistical process of factor analysis) provides what might be thought of as job functions. These 14 functions represent activities that relate in terms of frequency and importance reported by trainers.

Competencies can be considered

the reciprocal of activities. For example, one of our job functions was "manage working relationships with managers and clients." Simply put, the related competency is *the ability to* manage working relationships with managers and clients": explaining recommendations to gain acceptance, counseling with managers and supervisors on training and development issues, keeping abreast of government regulations (for example, affirmative action and EEO), etc. By the way, these items which further define the competency are taken directly from the model.

Another function was "conduct training and development needs analysis." The related competency is "the ability to conduct needs analyses," defined as the competence to construct questionnaires and interviews for needs analysis, identify T&D needs through surveys of attitudes and perceived needs, and design questionnaires for evaluating and gaining feedback from training and development programs.

Another competency is "the ability to manage the T&D function": prepare budgets and plans for training; organize and staff the function or department; make formal management presentations regarding programs and projects; maintain information on training and development costs and/or benefits; direct supervision of others through planning, organizing, scheduling, etc.; project future training needs; write proposals for program or projects, etc.

JOURNAL: I have heard comments when the report was published that the sample from which you drew your conclusion was too small to be representative. I know you disagreed at that time. Do you feel the same today and why?

PINTO: Our sample of over 2,700 respondents would be considered *large* in any social science research. Considering the length of the questionnaire, and that it was specifically tailored for practitioners (thus discouraging educators, vendors and other members of the society), I am pleased with

the return from our mail survey. Whether this large sample is truly representative depends upon the actual mix of national members of the society. Unfortunately, there are no master lists of job responsibilities against which to validate our sample.

JOURNAL: If you were in charge of ASTD today, what area(s) of study would you direct the society to pursue?

PINTO: I would continue to push for trainers to validate their activities and evaluate their results. One of the most noticeable findings from our study was the absence of a clear function dealing with training evaluation. Reaction was strong that our survey must have missed this important responsibility of all trainers.

Of course we did not miss it. There were several items about training evaluation, but these activities were not salient enough to stand alone. The training evaluation activities were buried in a general factor we called training
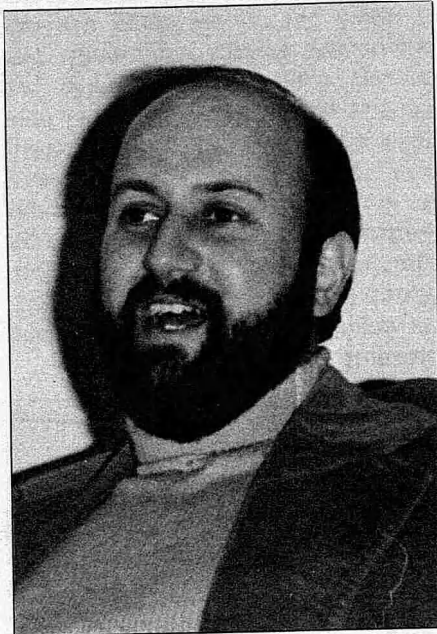
"One of the most noticeable findings from our study was the absence of a clear function dealing with training evaluation."

research. These results indicate to me that we still talk a lot about evaluation, but rarely build a formal system for evaluation (beyond mere reaction-type feedback).

Another program for the society would be to deal with the "retreading" of counselors, teachers, social workers, and others who have surged into our membership. I recommend using the competency model to build an introduction to the field for those already familiar with principles of human behavior, learning, and communication. I feel we should take the lead in their retraining, but not out of any altruism to help the many job seekers and career changers trying to infiltrate the profession. Rather, I am afraid that unless we provide these people a structure for the training process, our field will become "softer" than is currently perceived by many managers. For solving organizational problems there are many solid technologies that ASTD can support and encourage which go beyond a simple human growth and social welfare orientation.

JOURNAL: The study dealt with what our practitioner members actually did, not on what they ought to do. It also emphasized the present, not the future. Having

seen the changes that have occurred in the last two years, and using your crystal ball, how do you think the results of a similar study, taken of our membership in 1987, would be different?

PINTO: I predict the field will *not* stay the same. We will change in either of two directions. In one direction is movement toward a more managerial, problem-oriented approach which is tied to organization goals and human resource planning. We will be closely allied with the personnel functions of staffing, mobility, and organization planning. We will even integrate training with compensation systems as the reward structure of an organization formally affects motivation.

Or, we will move away from identifying with corporate strategy and goals toward human growth and development for its own sake. There would be less objectives set for solving business problems and more objectives for actualizing potential and the full utilization of human abilities.

One movement is toward formal programs to meet organizational needs. The other is individually tailored to increase the individual's comfort and awareness of self, without necessarily solving specific organizational problems.

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