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# PARADIGMS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS: ACHIEVING LASTING CHANGE

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**M**any organizations today are concerned about achieving lasting improvements in organizational performance. For a number of years, my colleagues and I have been involved in a program of research and consulting dedicated to helping organizations implement and maintain effective change strategies. Our strong belief, borne out by experience, is that caring for organizational performance is not unlike personal health care. In both instances, treatments alone are not the complete answer to the "patients" health-care needs. Appropriate attention must also be given to diagnostic activities along with follow-up to ensure compliance with desired change strategies. With organizations, just as with people, one cannot overemphasize the joint importance for cost-effective health-care of ongoing diagnosis, continued treatment, and regular follow-up.

Our approach to ensuring the longevity and success of performance improvement initiatives within organizations is based on two important paradigms we have developed as a result of our academic research and practical experience over the years. The purpose of this article is to describe these conceptual frameworks and explore their implications for achieving lasting change.

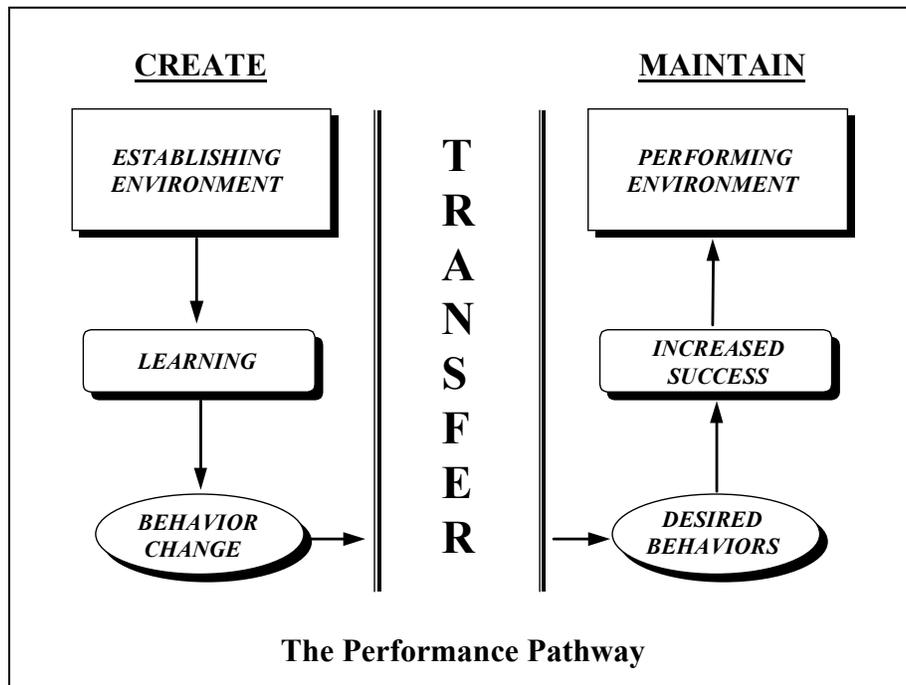
A crucial element of any effective performance improvement strategy is identification of which behaviors a company desires to "rent" from its employees to produce increased personal and corporate success. The concept of renting behavior, first described by Ferdinand Fournies<sup>2</sup>, is an idea that stems from the realization that the foundation of all organizational performance is human action. Without employee behavior there would be no results, outcomes, or other organizational

accomplishments. Behavior is the raw material from which all corporate success is fashioned. Accordingly, behavior should be as precious to a company as any of its other raw materials, maybe more. To maintain their current levels of success, or to improve, organizations must get their employees saying and doing enough of the right things.

Identifying the desired things to say and do is not necessarily an easy matter. However, this critical task must be embraced as a corporate responsibility, not just left up to the discretion of employees, as happens all too often. Once desired behaviors are identified, as occurs when companies adopt as corporate standards the behavioral prescriptions inherent in key training programs, there remains the problem of how to get people to enact these prescriptions on an ongoing basis. Logically, this task involves at least two important, but separate, steps: (1) *Establishing* the capability for the desired behaviors to occur; and (2) *Maintaining* the desired behaviors once they start to occur on the job. That these two steps are separable clearly implies a critical distinction between *knowing how* to do something and actually *doing* it.

## THE PERFORMANCE PATHWAY

This distinction between "knowing" and "doing" is reflected in a conceptual paradigm we call the "Performance Pathway." This paradigm is a framework not only for summarizing many of the issues relevant to the problem of how to improve employee performance, but also for understanding the critical importance of follow-up.



As the above diagram shows, the Performance Pathway represents a connection between two important situations: The *Establishing* and the *Performing* environments. The former is where "know-how" is developed, while the latter is where the desired behaviors must occur to enhance success. The arrows in this figure show the path that performance must follow if an organization is to realize gains in effectiveness from its human resources. From establishing operations that first "plant the seeds" of new knowledge and skill(s), the desired behaviors must ultimately spring forth in the performing environment where they will require careful cultivation and nurturing to "bear fruit" in terms of increased personal and corporate success.

By implementing global corporate or divisional training initiatives, companies take the first important step, on the left side of the diagram, to *create* new job-relevant knowledge and/or skill(s) in employees. For various reasons, the behavioral changes produced by traditional training programs may not be as profound or as stable as might be desired, but they are a definite start. Two important challenges remain to having these small seeds of success grow and bear fruit.

The first challenge comes from the gulf between the two environments in the pathway, a gap reflecting the fact that the *Establishing* and *Performing*

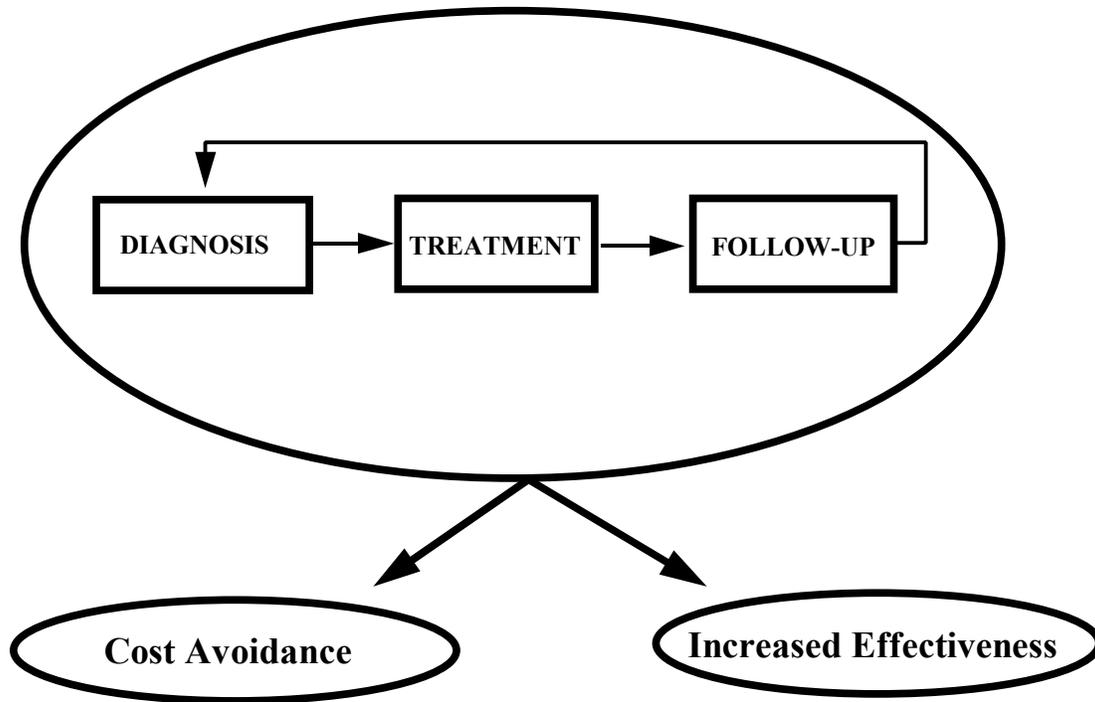
environments are often very different. Consider, for example, that skills practice during many training regimens occurs in training rooms, using simulated situations, rather than in the real circumstances where the target skills actually will be used. This gulf must be crossed if the training is to have its intended consequences. In essence, a bridge must be built so the new behaviors created in the learning environment carry over, or *transfer*, to the job situation in the performing environment. Such transfer does not happen automatically. New skills must be pushed across the bridge from the learning side and also pulled across the bridge from the performing side. During training sessions, the pushing may occur through the use of practice materials and scenarios that are as realistic as possible, or in the form of opportunities for participants to use practice exercises based on their own experience. After training practice is complete, any remaining transfer will depend on the skills being pulled the rest of the way across the bridge from the performing side.

Unfortunately, however, even when transfer to the performing environment occurs, there is no guarantee that the new skills will remain and be used on a regular basis. Special procedures are required in the job environment to encourage, shape, reinforce, and otherwise *maintain* newly "arrived" behaviors. Having sprouted in the performing

environment, the seedlings of increased success must be carefully tended there if they are to achieve full blossom. Otherwise, the desired behaviors will disappear, never to be seen again.

Clearly, each stage of the Performance Pathway represents a critical link in an overall chain of effectiveness. Any weakened link will disrupt completion of the pathway and likely will diminish,

if not prevent, desired skills from being utilized to their fullest extent. Once the seeds have been planted, what happens on the job will determine the ultimate success of this program. So, how does an organization know what to do at this point? What kinds of things need to happen to make sure important change initiatives are fully successful? To address these questions, we will need the help of a second conceptual paradigm.



**The PerformanceCare™ Model**

**CARING FOR PERFORMANCE**

Many different kinds of follow-up activities are needed to ensure the success of training regimens or other change strategies. Some will involve further training, some will involve changes in company policies and procedures, some will involve performance support systems, and some will involve various kinds of communications and tools. Not everything can be (or needs to be) done at once. How does an organization decide what to do? One effective way is to use a process similar to what physicians use when they care for personal health. A reputable health-care professional will not make any decisions about how to treat a patient until diagnostic information is available. This

information is essential for narrowing down the possibilities so relevant, specific and effective treatments can be prescribed.

In a similar way, organizations can utilize PerformanceCare™ which is a diagnostically driven approach to employee development. In this process, developmental events are prescribed only on the basis of documented need. We have discovered that one of the most effective ways of documenting the need for development involves actually observing systematically what employees are or are not doing in the course of their jobs. Based on such observations, organizations can diagnose a variety of needs and prescribe specific treatments to improve the "health" of employee

performance. Then, organizations can follow up with their "patients" to insure compliance and repeat diagnostic tests to further ensure desired improvements have occurred.

PerformanceCare™ allows organizations to replace diffuse approaches to development with more focused and pointed techniques. This, in turn, increases the likelihood that treatments will be effective and helps to minimize unwarranted expenditures for training or other developmental events.

Performance diagnosis, the heart of PerformanceCare™, can serve at least three critical prescriptive or evaluative functions for an organization. First, it can reveal or verify opportunities for development. This leads, as noted above, to the targeted application of specific performance improvement strategies. Second, it can be used as a follow-up tool to check on the degree of skill utilization after a developmental event. This provides useful developmental feedback both for those who are checked (i.e., the performers) as well as for their managers. Third, it can serve as a means to achieve Donald Kirkpatrick's<sup>3</sup> "Level 3" evaluation or measurement of the extent to which training actually results in behavior change on the job. The best performance diagnostic tools are those that can serve all three of these functions as needed.

## MANAGERS AS PERFORMANCE CARETAKERS

Over and over again, the managers have proven to be the single most important factor in determining the success of front-line performers. Line managers are the immediate caretakers of the behavior that has been prescribed by the organization. Managers determine whether or not and to what extent desired behaviors are being exhibited in the *Performing* environment. Managers are therefore critical to the success of organizational improvement strategies.

Our research reveals certain key skills managers must have to produce a significant impact on employee effectiveness. Each one of these has been shown to contribute significantly to performance improvement.

- Establishing *blueprints for action* or *behavioral expectations* is the process for identifying and staying focused on the desired behaviors and key accomplishments needed from employees to make them successful.
- Developing *action inventories* to help determine whether or not companies are getting the behaviors they want to rent from their employees.
- Ensuring that employees have ongoing *feedback* to make them *aware* of how they are doing. This allows them to make timely adjustments in behavior as needed.
- Using *positive reinforcement* shifts the focus of management emphasis away from "what is going wrong" toward "what is going right." This helps to make good performance matter to employees because it matters to managers and executives.
- *Goal setting* allows managers to work with employees to identify challenging yet achievable performance targets and make plans for attaining them.
- *Coaching* is the process of working with employees to examine their behavior and its consequences. This analysis allows employees to decide when they need to make adjustments in their performance to make actual behavior conform more closely to corporate expectations.

By using these skills, managers can effectively cultivate and develop the behavior of their direct reports to ensure long-term utilization of desired behaviors and to produce lasting organizational change.

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<sup>2</sup> *Coaching for Improved Work Performance*, 1978

<sup>3</sup> *Evaluating training Programs: The Four Levels*, 1994