

Chapter 7

Needs Assessment and Cause Analysis

Many organizations that experience poor results either resort to blaming people or investing in a single, sometimes simplistic, solution. They do not always take the time to find out what, if anything, has changed in the work environment, the job, or the people in question. It's almost as if they think that blaming people and spending money will solve of their problems.



FIELD NOTES: SOLVING THE WRONG PROBLEM

Lisa, an independent consultant, was hired by a large community bank to develop a training program for its managers. The bank president told her he was disappointed that some of his top performers were no longer meeting his expectations. During Lisa's first meeting with the management team and the president, one of the managers challenged the bank's lending policies. The manager commented that the bank was founded on the idea of developmental banking (lending money to revitalize inner cities) but that its current loans were no different from those made by traditional banks. Another manager wanted to know why the bank was expanding internationally. The bank's mission was about helping community business expand, he said, not expanding itself.

Later, Lisa attended a meeting with twenty-five managers and their direct reports, which included professional and clerical staff. She wanted to use this opportunity to get a better understanding of the role of managers in the bank. Lisa asked the professional staff to whom they reported—that is, the person they went to for assignments, to get approval for a day off, and for guidance on how to handle exceptions (for example, in loans and check cashing). She asked a similar question of the clerical staff. Much to Lisa's surprise, everyone gave her the same answer: they all went directly to the executive vice president of the bank. No one mentioned his or her supervisor. It seemed as though everyone in the bank reported to the same person for everything. Lisa began to wonder how the training would help improve the performance of the managers as they apparently didn't do any managing, at least of people.

This situation illustrates why consultants, both internal and external, need a way to discover and verify the performance expectations and determine what is preventing employees from meeting them. Without the facts, you are faced with accepting any solution. It is easier to improve or sustain high performance when you have a clear picture of what is expected and what the barriers to performance are.

A PROCESS FOR IDENTIFYING NEEDS

A needs assessment is the first phase of the front-end analysis process. The needs assessment identifies the need to improve performance and discovers opportunities for improvement. The results are used to guide decisions about what to focus on. The second phase, usually the cause analysis, identifies what is preventing performance. The results are suggested interventions—for example, testing or assessing performance, developing training, or redesigning jobs. The next phase is the job task analysis that identifies the activities people should engage in, the resources they should have and use, and the knowledge and skills they should have to perform a task or job effectively (see Chapter 10). The results are used to design jobs, training, and assessments.

At a minimum, the overall process should distinguish environmental factors from people factors. Most assessments are done because of a performance problem, and in these situations, the client typically starts with a premise—for example:

- People in the job lack the required skills or knowledge.
- Processes are poorly designed.
- Expectations are unclear or conflicting.
- The wrong behaviors are being rewarded.

The goal is to validate if the premise is true.

Sometimes needs assessments are done in anticipation of a change, such as rolling out a newly designed work process, replacing technology, or adding a product line. In these situations, the client starts with the premise that people lack the ability to support the change. In both of these situations, the premises might be right, partially right, or wrong. What I've learned is that when you limit the focus of your investigation to a preconceived premise, you reduce the chances of uncovering critical variables that are causing the problem.

What you need is a process that will help you determine which performance problems are worthy of attention and what is really obstructing performance. The process should remind you to consider the organization's goals, the work environment, the way the job is designed, and people's ability to do the job. It should help you find out what is needed to support a major change. At the same time, it is not always feasible to consider every variable. Therefore, the ideal process is one you can expand or contract, depending on the evidence you have and the severity of the consequences if you are wrong. I use two tools for this process:

- *The scorecard*. This tool helps me determine what is worthy of examination and what will be used to measure success or improvement.
- *The hierarchy*. This tool helps me discover what is currently obstructing performance and what might obstruct it in the future.



FIELD TOOLS: THE SCORECARD

The scorecard is a powerful tool. I use it to facilitate discussions with my clients about what is important to them, what gets their attention, and what they use as evidence that things are bad, good, or improving. The scorecard I'm referring to is not the same as the balanced scorecard, which refers to the importance of focusing on more than one initiative. Organizations usually combine initiatives like customer satisfaction, financial return, market share, process improvement, people development, and product excellence. They have learned that by focusing on only one initiative, they limit their ability to compete in the future. When I introduce the scorecard, I explain that I use it to help me in these ways:

- Identify the costs of poor performance
- Quickly identify performance gaps that need further investigation
- Identify the criteria and metrics for measuring the gap and future improvement
- Link programs like training to the needs of the organization

Two forms of the scorecard are presented here: the job aid, which has examples (see [Figure 7.1](#)), and the worksheet, which is a blank and is for you and your client to fill in (see [Figure 7.2](#)). Which one you use depends on your situation.



[Figure 7.1](#). Scorecard Job Aid

<p><i>Objective:</i> To model how initiatives can be linked to business measures. This job aid will help you communicate what information does or does not exist, what the organization does or does not track, and where a deeper analysis might add value. You can also use it to facilitate discussions about evidence—what it is and how to get it.</p>				
<p><i>1. Key initiatives, strategies, or objectives: What the client pays attention to and values</i></p>	<p><i>2. Measures: What the client tracks to measure performance</i></p>	<p><i>3. Standards or goals versus actual performance: What the client wants versus what is real; the gap</i></p>	<p><i>4. Assessment: How to get the data to identify the cause of the gap in performance</i></p>	<p><i>5. Measured results: What has to change for the intervention to be a success and worth it</i></p>
Customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction	Ratings (five-point scale), number of complaints and grievances	Goal: 4.2; actual: 3.7	Survey data, focus groups, interviews	Higher ratings, fewer complaints
Market share	Percentage compared to potential	Gap over competition	Market research	Increased share
People performance: time, quantity, frequency, rework and waste	Process time, cycle time, number of calls or visits per time period	Non-value-added less than x percent, ratio of x percent, number per time period, waste of less than x percent or x dollars	Time sheets, interviews, industry indexes, worksheets, observations	Improved performance of products, people, and processes; less waste
Financial performance: Cost, cost benefit, sales revenue, cash flow	Fixed to variable costs, return on investment, return on assets, return on capital employed, contribution margin, percentage of growth	Cents or dollars per unit, sales call, or proposal; cost of sales less than x dollars or x percent; incremental sales of x percent; growth at x percent	Daily reports, actual dollars versus budgeted dollars, sales analysis	Improved ratios, lower costs, higher margins, higher revenues, increased cash flow
Product performance: accuracy, consistency, compliance	Variance, percentage yield, unscheduled service, formal filings	Zero defects, less than x percent variance, ratio of unscheduled to scheduled service	Statistical process control data, quality control reports, complaint calls and citations	Less variance, higher yields, better ratios, fewer reportables



Figure 7.2. Scorecard Worksheet

<p><i>Objective:</i> To serve as a worksheet to capture what is important to your client's organization. The worksheet can be used to facilitate discussions about what you and your client expect of each other.</p>				
<p><i>1. Key initiatives, strategies, or objectives: What the client pays attention to or values</i></p>	<p><i>2. Measures: What the client tracks to measure performance</i></p>	<p><i>3. Standards or goals versus actual performance: What the client wants versus what is real; the gap</i></p>	<p><i>4. Assessment: How to get data that will identify the cause of the performance gap</i></p>	<p><i>5. Measured results: What has to change for the intervention to be a success and be worth it</i></p>

The job aid version of the scorecard helps me break the ice with clients. I also use it when a client wants to implement a major program that requires a big investment, such as a certification program or a blended learning curriculum. It helps clients begin to understand why they need to build a business case for their program and how to do so. The job aid has examples of common organizational initiatives, how companies measure the performance of such initiatives, different performance gap sizes, how to identify the cause of the performance gaps, and the evidence of improvement organizations accept. In using the job aid with clients, I ask which examples are or are not relevant to them and how they would change the scorecard to make it work for them; their answers give me a much better understanding of what is important to them. The worksheet version is the same, but you fill in the information relevant to your situation. Here is an explanation of what goes in each column:

- *Column 1: Key initiatives.* These are frequently stated as objectives or strategies, like “increase market share,” “reduce turnover,” “reduce costs,” and “increase sales.” They are what the organization (whether it is a major business unit, a department, a small work unit, or a task force) pays attention to.
- *Column 2: Measures.* These are the data the organization tracks and takes as evidence that what it is doing to support the initiative is achieving the goal or purpose. Sometimes these measures are well documented and understood; other times they are chosen intuitively by management. However they’ve been selected, you need to find out what they are.
- *Column 3: Standards or goals versus actual performance.* This refers to the performance gap: the difference between where the organization is today and where it wants to be. Some organizations have sophisticated systems for tracking their performance against goals. Others do not. You need to know if your client has the capability to measure performance and, if it does, how its performance stacks up to its goal. If the organization does not have systems in place to measure performance, then it is making decisions based on incomplete data—and you need to know this too.
- *Column 4: Assessment.* This is how the organization plans to get data that will identify the cause of the gap and measure its extent. Use this column to identify what information is already being captured, where and by whom it is being captured, what other information would be helpful, and how to get it. What you learn as a result of analyzing the data will help you identify the appropriate interventions.
- *Column 5: Measured results.* This column is used both before and after an intervention is implemented. Use it to specify what has to change for the client to consider the intervention a success and worth the cost. This is where you begin the discussion about how much benefit the client must gain to offset the cost of taking corrective action. After an intervention has been implemented, you can go back and put in what actually changed, how much it changed, and how much it cost.

Sometimes the information you need for the scorecard job aid will not be available. The scorecard brings to light what the organization really knows and where it has to do a better job of defining its expectations, its current performance, and its deficiencies.



FIELD TECHNIQUES: FOCUSING YOUR INVESTIGATION

Depending on your relationship with your client and what you already know about the client, you may or may not want to use the job aid version of the scorecard. I always keep a copy of the job aid in my briefcase, however, should a client need help coming up with ideas about what to focus on or how to measure performance. Throughout the process, you will be working in partnership with your client. At one moment, you might participate by contributing ideas and suggestions; at other moments, you might facilitate discussion among members of your client’s group. Whatever role you play, keep your clients’ attention focused on identifying where performance problems exist, which ones they need to address, where to get better data, and how to measure success. Here are some guidelines on how to proceed:

1. Meet with your client. If appropriate, show the scorecard job aid to your client and discuss a few of the examples.
2. Explain that the scorecard can be used to identify opportunities for improvement or to target areas with the bigger performance gaps for a needs assessment.
3. If you are unsure what is important to your client, ask about the client’s major initiatives, objectives, or strategies. Record the answers on the worksheet version of the scorecard.
4. Ask how the client measures those objectives now. Ask what kinds of data the client uses to measure performance.
5. To identify which performance gaps to work on, explain that you want to confirm:
 - Where there are gaps in performance
 - What costs are associated with those gaps
 - Which gaps are worth examining to find out the cause
 - How much an intervention would have to reduce the gap to be considered a success or worth the cost
6. Help the client identify those gaps for which a more thorough analysis would be beneficial.

7. If the client cannot provide all of the information or is unsure about what gets measured, why it gets measured, or how big a particular performance gap is, help the client decide how and where to get the missing information.
8. Once you have the missing information, return to the scorecard and decide with your client which interventions are more likely to reduce or eliminate the performance deficiency.
9. Work with the client to pinpoint which aspects of performance the interventions will have a positive impact on and what data the client will use to measure improvement.
10. With your client, estimate how much change the intervention will produce and if it will be enough to outweigh what you estimate its costs will be.



FIELD NOTES: USING THE SCORECARD TO IDENTIFY MEASURES OF PERFORMANCE

Deborah's company asked her to help the vice president of sales improve sales performance at the company's call centers. The president of the company had recently announced that all call centers would soon be evaluated on sales performance, a significant shift from the past, when call centers were evaluated only on average call-handling time.

Deborah began her meeting with the vice president of sales by asking how sales were currently measured, what types of sales were going to be tracked, and to what degree the centers were already meeting their sales goals. During their meeting, she used the scorecard job aid to illustrate the types of things other organizations focus on when they want to improve sales performance. She believed that stressing sales volume alone would not lead to optimum sales performance and wanted the vice president to consider how to reduce the cost of sales.

As a result of their conversation, Deborah identified what her department could do to support overall sales performance, which was to rapidly improve the CSRs' product knowledge and selling skills, develop systems to improve order accuracy, and provide guidelines to qualify customers' creditworthiness. Errors in orders increased costs because someone had to spend time correcting the order. Selling unnecessary products to customers with poor credit also potentially increased costs because such customers were more likely to require special payment plans.

Russ, the HRD manager at a medical supply manufacturer, was asked to lead a team charged with making a new product line successful. One of the company's divisions had announced that its goal was to be the world leader in diagnostic equipment. The company currently had 40 percent of the market worldwide. One strategy for increasing market share was to promote a new line of equipment the company had acquired from another manufacturer. Russ suggested that the team develop a scorecard to make sure they didn't overlook any factors that could significantly jeopardize the product's success. He handed out the scorecard job aid to illustrate what theirs might look like once they had completed it. He talked about the types of initiatives other companies focus on. The team was able agree on the following initiatives:

- *Improving product performance.* The number of service calls due to product failures was higher than the team had originally expected. They decided that they could track service calls, determine the costs of these calls, and measure improvement in equipment performance by the number of service calls received in the future.
- *Improving customer satisfaction.* Survey data indicated that customers had doubts about the capability of the company's field technicians. The team decided to continue to use surveys to measure if customer satisfaction improved.
- *Improving field technician performance.* The company's field technicians reported they felt unprepared to support this new product line. In particular, they felt they were inadequately trained in diagnosing equipment failures. The team decided to survey the technicians periodically to see if the training and performance aids had increased the technicians' confidence.

Now the team could focus on finding out what caused equipment failures and what the technicians needed in terms of skills, knowledge, and performance aids to increase their ability to service the new line of equipment.

PERFORMANCE CRITERIA FOR THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Once you know what to focus on, you can begin the process of finding out why performance is not at the level the organization wants. At national conferences, I hear a lot about how training was the most expensive, and sometimes the least effective, solution to performance problems. With this in mind, I went about developing a process for discovering and validating what supports performance in an organization and what interferes with it. I began by setting some criteria for my process:

1. It must be based on the idea that the work environment, the design of the job, and the capability of the people involved all contribute to performance. Therefore, it must help me and my clients distinguish among these elements.
2. It must not be biased in favor of a particular solution. If the problem is a lack of skills and knowledge, I want to know that, but if it is something else, I want to know that too.
3. It must be designed to help me get facts and corroborating evidence. Hearsay and folklore are stories people tell to rationalize their behavior. They are not facts. One source of information is not enough.

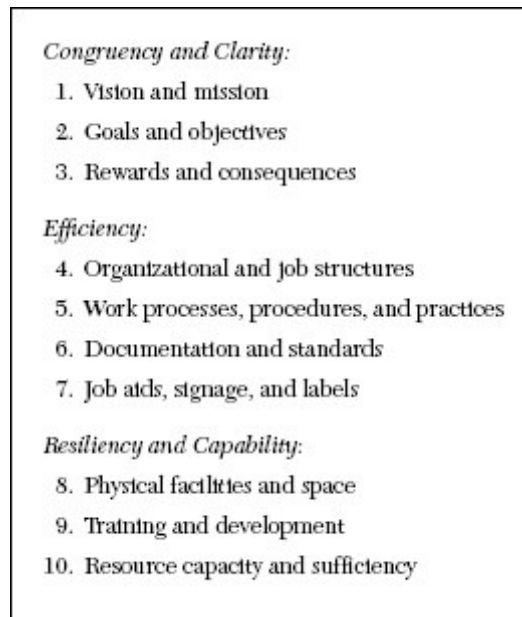
4. It must help me position myself as an expert in assessment and measurement. It should help me contribute expertise as appropriate, yet facilitate the client's retaining ownership of the problem and the solution.
5. It must work for organizational units of all sizes. I wanted a process I could apply to:
- Work groups assigned to specific jobs (such as the CSRs Deborah has to support)
 - Teams working on key initiatives, projects, and programs (such as Russ's team assigned to improve equipment performance)
 - Departments (such as Mike's, Kelly's, and Deborah's departments, which all wanted to move toward performance consulting)
 - Functions or larger divisions in the organization (such as the call centers where Deborah had to improve sales performance)
6. It must provide me with a way to organize my approach to identifying the major causes of performance problems.



FIELD TOOLS: THE HIERARCHY

The result was the hierarchy (see [Figure 7.3](#)). I call it that because problems at one level cannot be fixed by interventions aimed at a lower level. For example, investing in training and facilities will reap fewer benefits if management is not in agreement on where the organization is going or if processes are inefficient. I use the hierarchy to identify what is causing poor performance (lack of congruency, inefficiencies, or lack of investment in environmental, job, or people resources) and confirm that people are prepared to support a change.

[Figure 7.3](#). The Hierarchy



The Need for Skepticism

To use the hierarchy successfully, you have to be skeptical. You cannot believe just a single source of information; you must look for corroborating evidence. Wherever possible, try to obtain direct evidence—that is, see it, read it, or hear it firsthand. Don't accept hearsay or folklore as proof. Hearsay and folklore do not provide credible evidence of what customers expect, how work gets done, or what adds unnecessary costs. Look for ways to get other evidence that supports or refutes your original source.

The hierarchy is in three sections. The elements in the first section are the most important because there must be congruency and clarity before you can fully benefit from addressing the other issues. Note that depending on what you know about the situation you are addressing, your investigation may be limited to one or more of the three areas (that is congruency, efficiency, or resiliency).

Congruency and Clarity

Considering the first three elements in the hierarchy will help you identify inconsistencies between how the organization has defined itself and its actions. Sometimes what organizations say they are about (their vision and mission), what they focus on (their goals and objectives), and what they do (the behaviors they reward) are not in alignment. They may even be at odds with each other. Investigating these issues will help you determine whether people are clear and in agreement on what they are doing and why. When people are unclear about their roles or what is expected of them or when the company's leaders send mixed signals, resources are wasted and performance suffers.

Efficiency

Investigating the next four elements will help you identify operating inefficiencies, waste, and unnecessary cost. How an organization is structured can result in redundant work and waste. For example, processes that appear efficient in isolation may actually consume unnecessary or overly costly resources because the information required to do the work is incomplete or difficult to access.

Resiliency and Capability

Considering the last three elements will help you determine whether the organization is making appropriate investments in its physical and human resources.



FIELD TOOLS: THE HIERARCHY JOB AID

The hierarchy, like the scorecard, is both a job aid and a worksheet ([Figure 7.4](#) is the job aid and [Figure 7.5](#) the worksheet). As a job aid, it helps me remember all the variables I want to look at. I use the hierarchy in the same way as I use the scorecard: to work with my clients in designing needs assessment studies, drive conversations about what is really known and what is hearsay or folklore, and determine how to get the information we need. Column 1 has sample questions for each of the ten elements in the hierarchy. Column 2 has examples of operating hypotheses. Column 3 lists the types of data you might want to get, and Column 4 suggests ways to get the data.



[Figure 7.4.](#) The Hierarchy Job Aid

1. Hierarchy Model and Questions	2. Hypotheses: What to Confirm	3. Data to Collect	4. How to Get Data
<i>Congruency and Clarity:</i>			
1. <i>Vision and mission</i> A. Are there vision and mission statements? B. Does the mission reflect current requirements, desires, and the environment in which the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the mission? • Is there consensus on the mission among all of the work groups? • Who are the customers? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission statement • What people say the mission is • What people say the mission means 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written mission statement • Written communications to staff

<p>organization operates? C. Is there a consensus on what the vision and mission are? D. Does the mission support the vision? E. Does the long-range plan support the vision and mission? F. Is there agreement on the vision and mission?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the mission communicated? • Is there a long-range plan? • Does the company realize it needs to change? 	<p>to them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What customers need and how the business responds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer satisfaction surveys • Market research • Stratified random survey of employees • Interviews
<p>2. <i>Goals and objectives</i> A. Are the goals congruent with the mission? B. Are there clear expectations and business plans for each division, department, and other units that include revenue and cost in both absolute numbers and trends? C. Do the goals reflect the resources and operating specifics required to progress as a whole? D. Do they exist for each operating unit? E. Do people know what they are? F. Are they followed? G. Is there congruence between those who set objectives, plans, and budgets and those who are accountable?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the goals and objectives of each department support the mission? • Do they agree with each other? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department goals and objectives • What people say their objectives are • How well resources match objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nominal groups • Business plans • Managers' objectives
<p>3. <i>Rewards and consequences</i> A. What are the leader's values? B. Are those values known and shared? C. What is the organization's culture, and what specific behaviors does it support? D. Are those behaviors rewarded? E. What are the rites and rituals? F. Do conditions support what the organization says it values, such as commitment, innovation, compliance, teamwork, individualism, or entrepreneurship?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's important? • How are the values prioritized? • Are the values and rewards congruent with each other and with the company's mission, goals, and objectives? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does success look like? • What does the company measure? • What is a "good person" like? • What is rewarded? • How are people promoted? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values statements • Customer satisfaction surveys • Sociograms • Reward and recognition programs: documentation, awards, recipients

<p>1. Hierarchy Model and Questions</p>	<p>2. Hypotheses: What to Confirm</p>	<p>3. Data to Collect</p>	<p>4. How to Get Data</p>
<p>C. Do the company's policies support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups

<p>G. Do the company's policies support the values, mission, and vision? H. Are there consequences for non-performance or violation of policy? I. Are those consequences known? J. Are the consequences acted on?</p>	<p>• What are the consequences of nonperformance?</p>	<p>• Who are the heroes?</p>	<p>• Focus groups</p>
<p><i>Efficiency</i></p>			
<p>4. <i>Organizational and job structures</i> A. Are jobs clearly defined? B. Are jobs given needed responsibility? C. Are positions, responsibilities, and reporting effective and efficient? D. Does structure aid communication, decision making, and accountability? E. Are tasks grouped efficiently? F. Is the span of control effective? G. Is each unit of command appropriate?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the formal organizational structure? • What are the formal job descriptions and responsibilities? • What are people's concepts of the organizational structure and their own jobs? • Who has what authority to make what decisions? • Does the organizational structure match the market? The mission? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational charts • Job descriptions • People's perceptions of the organization and their own job • Decision referral up the chain • Location map and location decision-making process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job descriptions • Focus groups • Asking people to draw the organization, define their job responsibilities, describe who can make what decisions • By listening in on phone calls to see how customer problems are resolved • Site selection criteria and processes
<p>5. <i>Work processes, procedures, and practices</i> A. Could tasks or processes be automated? B. Are processes well designed? C. Are duties assigned in ways that are effective and efficient? D. Do procedures exist, and are they followed consistently? E. Are resources used wisely? F. Do management practices support development, innovation, and commitment? G. Do people get feedback and information when they need it? H. Does nonperformance have consequences? I. Are those consequences carried out?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the formal processes and procedures for getting work done and handling customer complaints? • How is the work actually done? • What information is available at what points in the work process? • What are the consequences for not following the formal process? • How do customers react to the processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal processes and procedures • Actual processes and procedures • Information flow • Feedback, discipline, and reward actions • Customer praise and complaints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies and procedures handbook • Observations of performers in all job functions • "Silent shopping" • Forms • Customer complaint letters and log

	and procedures?		
1. Hierarchy Model and Questions	2. Hypotheses: What to Confirm	3. Data to Collect	4. How to Get Data
<p>6. <i>Documentation and standards</i></p> <p>A. Are procedures and practices documented?</p> <p>B. Are they accessible and usable?</p> <p>C. Do they reflect desired practice?</p> <p>D. Are there standards?</p> <p>E. Does standardization support innovation, compliance, and commitment?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the documents and standards match the work processes and procedures? • Do the same standards work for each location? • Are the standards used? • Can the standards be changed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documents from multiple locations • Employee use of standards documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documents • Observation • “Silent shopping” • Interviews
<p>7. <i>Job aids, signage, and labels</i></p> <p>A. Do job aids, signs, and labels exist?</p> <p>B. Are they used?</p> <p>C. Is intelligent, exemplary performance captured in a usable form?</p> <p>D. Do job aids, signs, and labeling support the desired and required performance?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there job aids? • Are they used? • Are there any that are needed that are not there? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job aids from multiple locations • Employee use of job aids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job aids • Observation • “Silent shopping” • Interviews
<i>Resiliency and Capability:</i>			
<p>8. <i>Physical facilities and space</i></p> <p>A. Is space adequate and used well?</p> <p>B. Do the space and layout facilitate work flow?</p> <p>C. Do the space and layout aid communication?</p> <p>D. Do the technology and systems support the required work processes?</p> <p>E. Are work conditions safe?</p> <p>F. Do environmental conditions (temperature, light, noise) support the required work processes?</p> <p>G. Do environmental conditions support health?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the computer system support desired processes and procedures? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer system capabilities and use • Space use per employee • Facilities and space use studies • Safety records • Summary of health records and claims 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation • Observation • Interviews

<p>9. <i>Training and development</i></p> <p>A. Are skills maintained?</p> <p>B. Are skills developed?</p> <p>C. Are skills and knowledge adequate for required and desired processes?</p> <p>D. Are innovation and self-empowerment supported?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What skills do people in each job have on hiring, get from initial training, get from coaching and feedback, get from follow-up or advanced training? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training curriculum and courses for all employees • Employee evaluation reports and development plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documents
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1. Hierarchy Model and Questions	2. Hypotheses: What to Confirm	3. Data to Collect	4. How to Get Data
<p>E. What methods are used for development (for example, coaching, cross-training), and do those methods support the desired and required performance?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do skills match job descriptions and work processes? 		
<p>10. <i>Resource capacity and sufficiency</i></p> <p>A. Do people have the emotional, physical, intellectual, and economic capacity to achieve the desired and required performance?</p> <p>B. Are there support systems and processes in place to offset, reduce, or remove deficiencies in capacity?</p> <p>C. Are support systems sufficient for the desired and required performance?</p> <p>D. Do values conflict with requirements of the job or the desired outcomes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether they've done capacity studies • How turnover, absenteeism, and injuries compare to industry standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workers' compensation claims • Absenteeism • Turnover • Employee complaints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exit interviews • Insurance records • Turnover, absenteeism records



Figure 7.5. The Hierarchy Worksheet

1. Hierarchy Model and Questions	2. Hypotheses:	3. Data to Collect	4. How to Get Data
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	What to Confirm		
<i>Congruency and Clarity</i>			
1. <i>Vision and mission</i>			
2. <i>Goals and objectives</i>			
3. <i>Rewards and consequences</i>			
<i>Efficiency</i>			
4. <i>Organizational and job structures</i>			
5. <i>Work process, procedures, and practices</i>			

1. Hierarchy Model and Questions	2. Hypotheses: What to Confirm	3. Data to Collect	4. How to Get Data
6. <i>Documentation and standards</i>			
7. <i>Job aids, signage, and labels</i>			
<i>Resiliency and Capability</i>			
8. <i>Physical facilities and space</i>			
9. <i>Training and development</i>			

10. <i>Resource capacity and sufficiency</i>			
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FIELD TECHNIQUES: GETTING EVIDENCE OF CONGRUENCY

The first three elements in the hierarchy are about congruency and clarity. Your goal should be to find corroborating evidence that confirms that where people say they are going, what they are focusing their energy on, and what they get rewarded for are aligned and not in conflict.

Vision and Mission

Examine vision and mission first because you want to verify there is agreement on what each program, team, or initiative is supposed to accomplish. The vision reveals where people want to go; the mission says what people are about or what business they are in. *Fulfilling the mission should bring people closer to their vision.* The organization's guiding principles should also move the organization closer to its vision. Without a vision, an organization cannot move forward; it will have no basis for building a long-range plan or road map to the future. Confirm that the organization's guiding principles are in alignment with the stated purpose and vision of the program, team, or initiative. Again, be skeptical; your hypothesis or operating assumption should be that the vision and mission (or the people) are *not* in agreement. Then look for evidence that people in the organization have a vision, know what the mission is, and share the same understanding of the vision and mission as their leadership. Seek to prove your hypothesis is incorrect. It is not enough to ask people if they have a vision statement or team charter; instead, ask each person in a group separately to tell you what it is and what they think it means. You can then compare their answers with what the organization says about itself. Find out if the organization has devoted adequate resources to programs that directly support the mission.

Goals and Objectives

Next, confirm that the goals and objectives employees are working toward support the vision and are not in conflict with the stated mission. Your hypothesis should be that they are *not* in harmony and are probably in conflict. Look for evidence to prove yourself wrong. For example, it is not unusual for short-term objectives to be so demanding that no resources are left to work on the longer-range goals. Examining the congruence between goals and objectives is similar to confirming congruence between vision and mission. Ask people what their goals and objectives are, how these goals and objectives relate to the company's vision or mission, and what they are currently working on. Then compare the answers. Another hypothesis is that the goals most closely aligned with the vision and mission are not funded or have very limited funding. Then find out what programs are actually budgeted and which ones directly support the goals and objectives.

Values, Incentives, Rewards, and Policies

The next step is to look for evidence that the accomplishments and behaviors that get rewarded are what people have been told will be rewarded and that they support the stated goals and objectives. Again, your hypothesis should be that what actually gets celebrated and recognized does *not* support the goals and objectives. Find out what the criteria are for merit increases, how people are tapped for coveted assignments, who has access to the leaders, and who gets mentioned in the company newsletter. These may in fact be the people whose results and behaviors conflict with the goals and guiding principles of the organization: people whose behaviors are just the opposite of what the organization says it wants. Find out when awards are announced, who won them in the last round, and what the criteria were for winning. You want to confirm that the criteria used were consistent with what the organization professes it values and its goals. Check who has been featured in the company newsletter. Investigate whether the company's HR policies support what the organization says it values, where it says it is going, and how it says it is going to get there. Look for congruency between the first three elements in the hierarchy.



FIELD NOTES: AGREEING ON GOALS

The call centers are Deborah's main customers. She and her department are responsible for helping call center managers get what they need to be successful. Deborah was unclear about how the call centers' performance would be evaluated in the coming year. She used the hierarchy to guide her in finding out if senior managers had clearly stated their goals for the centers and if they agreed on those goals. Her hypothesis was that they were not in agreement and were probably not even clear in what they expected. She decided to interview each vice president separately. She thought this would allow them to speak more freely, and it would give her an opportunity to compare their responses and check her hypothesis.

She met with the vice president of sales first. In answer to her question about what his goals were for the call centers in the coming year, he replied, "The big change is that every call center manager will have full profit-and-loss accountability in the coming year, and they will be evaluated in terms of sales. My plan is to have more contests to reward managers who achieve their sales goals." He also mentioned that two call center managers had been promoted, and he wanted more call center managers like them.

In her effort to get corroborating evidence that senior management was in agreement with these goals, she asked the vice president of operations what he understood the call centers' goals would be in the coming year and what criteria the company had used in promoting the two managers. He answered, "I'm not sure why they were promoted. The turnover rate at one of their centers was at least 30 percent. One goal is to implement an electronic support system for customer service representatives in every center. Our major goal is customer service; we want to be number one in customers' eyes when it comes to service."

Deborah then interviewed the senior vice president of finance and asked what initiatives had been budgeted or funded to support call center performance in the coming year. He answered, "The only initiative under consideration is the electronic support system for customer service reps. I want to know what the costs will be to maintain the system, however, and how the return on investment will be determined. Without a clear business case that shows the return on investment, funding will not be approved."

She also asked about call center managers' having profit-and-loss accountability. He answered, "That's not going to happen. We can't track costs by center. We can't even link revenue to a particular center. We don't have the systems to support something like that. The subject hasn't even been brought up for discussion, and it won't be."

Deborah begins to suspect the vice presidents were not in agreement about the company's goals for the call centers. She also suspected that their lack of agreement has resulted in mixed signals to the call center managers. Her next step was to interview the call center managers to get their understanding about what the goals were and how their performance would be measured.



FIELD TECHNIQUES: GETTING EVIDENCE OF EFFICIENCY

Once you have evidence of congruency, you can shift your focus to issues of efficiency. In fact, you might want to extend your investigation to efficiency issues even if you have evidence there is a lack of congruency, if only to find out if the lack of congruency is having a negative impact on efficiency.

Organizational and Job Structures

While you are determining if the first three elements are congruent, you can also get people to describe how the business or unit you are studying is organized: who reports to whom, who is responsible for what, and why work is structured as it is. Ask people to describe how customer calls are routed, who makes the final decisions, and who has sign-off authority, for example. Your hypotheses are that people are unclear, unsure, or do not agree on the answers and that the existing structure hides redundancy and lack of accountability. Ask enough questions to determine:

- The functions, roles, and responsibilities of each department, unit, and so on
- The customers of each function, division, and so on
- The outputs (deliverables or products) of each function, division, and so on

Just as you did for the first three elements, compare everyone's answers. Again, look for evidence of a shared understanding of the organization's structure and how the organizational units relate to each other.

Work Processes, Procedures, and Practices

This element addresses work processes, procedures, and practices, also referred to as work rules, whether for a discrete task or a job. Your hypothesis should be that processes are poorly designed, resulting in waste and unnecessary costs. Ask people to tell you how they do their work, and then watch them to confirm how many resources they actually require, if and where technology plays a role, how many interactions they have with others, and how many approvals they have to get and at what points in the process they have to get them. Check work records (such as job tickets and time sheets) to find out how long each task took and where cycle times were significantly longer than actual time at task. Look for evidence that work processes are well designed, do not result in rework, and use resources wisely.

Documentation and Standards

Easily accessible, user-friendly, and accurate documentation contributes to efficiency. Standards improve interfaces, allow flexibility, and result in lower costs because they permit economies of scale. When you are watching work get done, pay attention to what documents are used, when, and by whom. Ask where documents and work records are kept; those that are not readily accessible are probably not used. Notice if documents are well worn and personalized by bent corners. Just like the other elements in this section, do not believe they exist or are useful until you see them and have corroborating evidence to that effect.

Job Aids, Signage, and Labels

Check to see if there are visual and auditory cues that help people perform complex, infrequent, or critical procedures accurately. Notice if job aids, signs, and labels are well placed and designed in a way that helps people work quickly and smartly. Look for evidence that cues support efficiency by keeping people on task and on the right task. Your hypotheses should be that cues are lacking, unintelligible, and inconsistent, and as a result there are errors, rework, and added cost.



FIELD NOTES: THE SEARCH FOR OPERATING INEFFICIENCIES

Russ, the HRD manager for a large medical equipment manufacturer, was asked to identify the training needs of the CSRs. It seemed the number of callbacks (customers who call a second or third time because they got the wrong information the first time) was too high.

Russ knew that the customer service center handled all customer requests about how to operate, repair, and install medical equipment. They also answered questions about delivery status, part status, and billing. The company had manufactured four product lines for over sixty years, and it had recently acquired a new line of diagnostic equipment. Customers (medical technicians who worked in hospitals, laboratories, and medical clinics) called a toll-free number that appeared on the equipment. The CSR who answered knew what line the customer was calling about based on the number dialed. The CSR was expected to confirm the customer was capable of safely dismantling and removing parts no matter what the product.

Russ's operating hypotheses were that the design of the CSRs' job (handling all lines, all models, and all types of requests) resulted in inefficiencies and waste, the equipment manuals the CSRs used did not support their need for fast and accurate information, and there were no consequences for giving out incorrect information. He asked to observe CSRs taking calls and to interview a few of them. He asked how CSRs were evaluated and learned:

- They were evaluated based on call volume and average call time.
- Large digital clocks positioned around the room displayed the average call time for the center.
- The CSRs had to be familiar with four different product lines, as well as multiple generations (models) of each line (sixty years' worth).

Russ asked some of the CSRs how they got the information they needed about older models. He was shown where the manuals were kept for every model of every line. He noticed that:

- The manuals were at the far end of a large room.
- It took at least one minute to get there.
- There were hundreds of manuals, all with the same white covers, with the year printed in small blue type on the spine.
- The CSRs were not allowed to remove the manuals from the area. They had to look up the information there, return to their desk, and resume the conversation with the customer.

Russ began to suspect the punishment for giving customers the wrong information (or making it up) was less painful than exceeding the average call handling time.



FIELD TECHNIQUES: GETTING EVIDENCE OF RESILIENCY

The final three elements in the hierarchy are about investment. You need to find out if the organization invests in its people, facilities, systems, and technology so that it can handle rapid change, growth, and market challenges. Not investing delays costs and limits the organization's ability to respond to changes in the marketplace or advances in technology. It can also erode employee and customer loyalty and relations.

Physical Facilities and Space

Shift your attention to how the design and maintenance of the company's buildings and equipment support performance. Be skeptical, just as you were when investigating the other elements. Pay attention to buildings, parking lots, bathrooms, cafeterias, closets and lockers, and so on. Look for dirt, disrepair, poor lighting, rooms, and graffiti. Confirm that the physical environment has adequate lighting, noise control, air quality, water, electricity, temperature control, and space to support the work that is done there. Pay attention to how the work space is arranged: Does it allow for easy access, noise control, and adequate room to support the required tasks and interactions. Check preventive maintenance records, OSHA reportables, and EPA reportables. Appropriately designed physical space will not guarantee that the company will get the desired performance, but it will increase the odds of getting it. The desired performance is more difficult to attain when the physical space is inappropriately designed or inadequate. Also remember that the physical space communicates a lot about what the organization values.

Training and Development

Look for evidence that people's skills and knowledge are maintained, and find out who is eligible for training. Your hypotheses should be that few, if any, employees get training, that it is hard to get training, and that training is not linked to any business initiative. Assume there is no strategy for keeping people current.

Ask to see the training budget, determine how many people have development plans, and ask about how many people have had development discussions with their supervisors. Find out how developmental needs are identified, if training records are kept, and how training programs are evaluated. At the same time, look for evidence that what was planned actually happened, that training and development are linked to the organization's business strategy, and that the training department can substantiate the value it adds.

Resource Capacity and Sufficiency

The last element in the hierarchy is about validating there are enough resources and that those resources have the capacity (emotionally, physically, and intellectually) to perform well. Find out if there are excess resources and to what degree those excess resources increase fixed costs. Your hypothesis should be that when it comes to resources, there are not enough, there are too many, or they are inappropriate for the task. You want to verify that the right amount of resources (systems, space, people, and equipment) exist to do the required tasks and that those resources have the capability to do the task. Look for and ask about what is not getting done (and whether it matters), how much work is outsourced (and whether it matters), how people compensate for the lack of resources, what they put at risk to do so (human or physical assets or customer service, for example), and how much time is spent on task.

Look for clues that indicate resources are insufficient: for example, preventive maintenance does not get done because production lines are operating around the clock, people do not get trained because no one is qualified to fill in for them while they train, vacation time goes unused but the trend in sick leave is up; or exit interviews show an increase in the number of people leaving the organization because they felt overworked or abused. Again, look, ask questions, and check records.



FIELD NOTES: THE SEARCH FOR A DEFICIENT INVESTMENT IN RESOURCES

Mike, who is in charge of performance consulting at his company, worked at corporate headquarters. His department supported the product managers responsible for developing the supply chains for the system worldwide. A long-term supplier was in financial trouble, and the supply company's president was asking Mike's company for interim financing until he could turn his company around. Mike was asked to find out more about what was happening.

The supply company's president told Mike that morale was low, productivity was down, and employee theft was up. Mike suspected that if these statements were correct, something in the supply company's environment had changed because it had been known in the past for being efficient and having a conscientious workforce. Mike asked to visit the supplier's facility to get a better understanding of the problem.

When Mike pulled into the employee parking lot, he noticed the grounds were littered, curbs in the parking lot were crumbling, the lawn had bare spots, and the employee entrance door was filthy. While in the building, he went to the restroom, which was foul smelling, had a broken toilet, and lacked paper towels. Mike suggested that he and the facility manager have lunch in the employee cafeteria but was told the professional staff never ate there. He asked to visit the plant floor, and while he was there, he noticed that some of the forklift drivers did not wear safety belts, the aisles were dirty, one production line was not running, and a number of light bulbs were burned out.

Mike began to formulate some hypotheses: that the president had not reinvested earnings back in the business; that this had resulted in increased cost of operations, which eroded profits; and that there were no incentives to invest.

Mike next began his search for corroborating evidence. He reviewed the operating budget for the plant and the plant manager's bonus plan. Later he compared the budget and bonus plan to industry standards for similar plants. He began to suspect that because the president had not invested in the firm for some time, it could no longer operate cost effectively.

Kelly's company asked her to find out why employee turnover was high. She asked if the problem was across all jobs and departments or isolated. HR told Kelly that the highest turnover was among nonexempt staff corporatewide and among professional staff in information systems (IS). Kelly asked to see any exit interview data that HR had on file. A summary of the data indicated that the subjects felt there was no opportunity for advancement; lack of training came up frequently too.

Kelly began to hypothesize that the lack of training contributed significantly to the turnover problem and that the money saved by not supporting training actually shifted costs to other areas, such as the cost of recruitment and training new employees. She reviewed the training budget and discovered there was no budget for nonexempt workers because they were not eligible for training. She also discovered that very little was budgeted for IS. When she interviewed some of the IS staff, they told her that they couldn't afford to stay with the company because of the lack of training. If they stayed too long, they felt they could never compete on the outside. Kelly decided to continue her investigation of the implications of not investing in human resources, particularly into the cost of turnover, recruitment, and training new employees.



FIELD TECHNIQUES: DEVELOPING YOUR CLIENTS' SKILLS IN ASSESSMENT

Needs assessments are difficult, which is why I want my clients involved in them. Clients bring a deep understanding of the organization. I bring discipline, objectivity, and a fresh perspective. We do a better job together than singly. I use the job aid version of the hierarchy as a way to coach the client, particularly in working with me to create hypotheses and get the data. I use the worksheet to document what we want to find out, our hypotheses, the data we want, and how we will get the data. Documenting the process helps me measure and improve my efficiency. It helps the client participate, explain the process to others, get cooperation, and build a case for change. It also gives the client a model for future projects. Here are some guidelines for working with your client to assess the client's needs:

1. Show the hierarchy ([Figure 7.3](#)) to your client
2. Explain each element and what the concept of the hierarchy is designed to accomplish.
3. If you want to join with your client in designing a needs assessment, use the job aid ([Figure 7.4](#)) to get ideas about what to ask, possible hypotheses, and how to get the data.
4. Come up with some working hypotheses concerning why a performance gap exists or where gaps might exist.
5. Come up with a list of methods to prove your hypotheses right or wrong.
6. Decide how you will get the evidence.
7. Decide who will be involved in the process, how they will be involved, and when.

STAYING DISCIPLINED AND SETTING YOUR OWN STANDARDS

The hierarchy is only a tool to help you take a disciplined approach to needs assessments. It is not a performance checklist on which you sign off after checking each element in sequence. In practice, you might come across information about facilities before you learn anything about the direction of the work unit simply because you have to walk through the work area. Or your client might direct you to improve processes already identified as inefficient or to provide training because of errors due to the lack of skills. Just because you start with what you discover first or where the request directs you to begin doesn't mean you should overlook the importance of confirming congruency in the company's vision, mission, goals, and rewards. You can't improve processes unless there is agreement on what those processes are expected to accomplish and the company rewards people for being efficient. Job skill training will not compensate for conflicting directions from management or inefficient work procedures.

Improving performance is an iterative process. You should not try to improve every process immediately, but strive to improve your ability to measure, be more efficient, and link what you do to the goals that the organization considers most important. Every project is an opportunity to improve. If you set a goal to do every project perfectly, you will fail. What is important is to question the value of each project so as to avoid doing the wrong ones.

The hierarchy is designed to help you consider all the variables that support performance and all that impede it. When you find corroborating evidence, you get the information you need to develop your business case for doing what it will take to improve performance. Your recommendations may be for management to define and agree on where they are going, to start rewarding the behaviors and results that support their vision, to redesign work processes so they do not add unnecessary costs, and to invest in the resources required to accomplish the vision.

Decide at the beginning how rigorous you need to be in your process. Rigor, in this case, means defining your questions up front, carefully recording responses, and consistently engaging people in the same way. You might even pilot-test your data-gathering methods to confirm they work the way you expect them to. How rigorous you need to be depends on:

- The degree of confidence you have in your information (and the degree of confidence you need in order to defend your findings before management)
- The kind and amount of risk associated with acting prematurely on your conclusions
- The extent to which you want to periodically replicate your process to determine the reliability of your findings or evaluate the effectiveness of your interventions
- The extent to which you want to generalize your conclusions (broaden the area of application)

- The extent to which your processes, results, and actions have to withstand outside scrutiny, such as from a regulatory agency or collective bargaining unit

Here are two standards I follow.

- *Use more than one method to collect evidence, and get it from more than one source.* You need corroborating evidence from more than one source. If you interview people, for example, also check their work records. If you send out a survey, combine it with direct observation. The reason to use more than one method is to control any bias you may have introduced by how you asked questions, how you chose to include people, or how you conducted the study. The primary sources of bias are administrative error, questioning error, and sampling error (see [Figure 7.6](#)).

Figure 7.6. How to Control Bias

Source of bias	How to control bias
<p><i>Administrative error</i></p> <p>Administrative error happens when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You do not ask people the same questions. • You ask the questions in a different sequence. • You give people different amounts of time to answer. • Your preamble to your questions is emotionally laden or changes from person to person • Your recording of answers (also observations) is incomplete or inaccurate. 	<p>How to control it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write out what you are going to say to introduce an interview, explain the purpose behind the study, and explain how people were selected to participate. • Stick with the script. This does not mean you have to memorize it. It does mean you strive to be experienced in the same way by everyone. • Prepare your forms for collecting the data in advance. Record your findings as soon as possible. Preferably, record the data as you are getting it. • Give yourself a trial run. Practice explaining the reason and the procedures.

Source of bias	How to control bias
<p><i>Questioning error</i></p> <p>Questioning error happens when the questions you ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are unclear or misleading • Are not relevant to the topic • Fail to adequately cover the subject • Focus on the inconsequential or irrelevant aspects of the topic 	<p>How to control it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask simple questions. Limit each question to a single topic. • Avoid double negatives. • Avoid indicating what other people said or thought before letting the person you are interviewing answer. • If you are concerned that people will censor their answers, interview

- Solicit opinions instead of the behaviors that lead to the desired performance

Sampling error

Sampling error happens when you:

- Rely too much on one voice (audience).
- Fail to include other legitimately vested voices.
- Do not adequately sample the people, the documents, the work records, or the product or outputs of the task.

them individually and in private.

- Do a trial run to see if your questions elicit the quality of responses you are looking for.

How to control it:

- Make sure you include all the relevant voices or populations. There are four categories of people whose voices should be included:
 - The people who are the subject of the investigation, usually called the target audience
 - The targets' bosses (the people who give the target audience direction and evaluate their performance)
 - The targets' customers or clients (the people who are recipients of the targets' output or benefactors of the outcome of the targets' performance)
 - The targets' suppliers (the people, processes, information, and systems the target audience relies on to perform their work)
- Sample all of your populations. You can pick everyone (a 100 percent sample) or select a smaller sample. If you sample (use less than the total), you can hand-pick people, use a convenience sample, or choose people randomly.
- Whether you pick the targets or they are nominated by someone else, they should be:
 - Knowledgeable (able to give you the information you want)
 - Credible (perceived as believable)
 - Capable (able to present a perspective that you can use to test the reliability of data gathered from other sources and in other ways)
- If there is variability in the target population, you can pick a stratified random sample.
- Remember that sampling applies to more than people. You pick places, situations, locations, documents, and types of things to investigate. The objectives for the assessment and guidelines for selecting a sample apply no matter what you are sampling.

- Follow the guidelines in [Figure 7.6](#) to control bias.



FIELD TECHNIQUES: IDENTIFYING BARRIERS TO BECOMING A PERFORMANCE CONSULTANT

To increase your understanding of and proficiency in the process of identifying barriers to performance, practice on yourself. Think of your transition to performance consulting as an intervention, and use the scorecard to link your contemplated services to your client's needs. Follow these steps:

1. Meet with your colleagues, team, supervisor, and key clients. Build a scorecard to identify how adding performance consulting to your services will benefit the organization.
2. Identify the initiatives and performance gaps your becoming proficient at performance consulting will affect.
3. Assess how much success you will have to demonstrate to justify your investment (in time and dollars) in becoming a performance consultant?
4. Apply the hierarchy to identify barriers to and opportunities for adding performance consulting to your services. Confirm that you, your colleagues, your supervisor, and key clients have the same understanding of what performance consulting is. Then follow these steps:
 - Develop your hypotheses concerning what the barriers and opportunities are. For example, is one barrier a lack of understanding of performance consulting or something else? Is one barrier an unwillingness to reward or reinforce the behaviors of following a consulting process, measuring your own effectiveness, developing processes for identifying causes to poor performance, and so on? Do your colleagues, supervisor, and key clients agree on what performance consulting is or even share a similar understanding of what it can contribute? What do they think you will do differently from what you do now? Do you think the behaviors of a performance consultant will be rewarded? How about your results?
 - Share the model consulting process, the suggested measures of efficiency and effectiveness, your vision and mission, your list of products and services, and the model operational definition from Chapters One and Two, and ask them what they think these mean.
 - Ask them which behaviors they think will be rewarded.
 - If possible, get corroborating evidence that supports or refutes your hypotheses about what you think will be the barriers and opportunities.
 - If you discover the group does not share the same understanding, help everyone come to a shared understanding of what performance consulting is and what it can contribute.
5. Confirm that the way your department or work group is structured, the processes you use, your documentation and standards, and your job aids support your being efficient.
 - You will now have a model consulting process, a model needs assessment process, and job aids for evaluating your processes and doing performance consulting. Again, develop your hypotheses concerning the adequacy of these processes and the need for other processes, documentation, and so on.
 - Decide how will you get the data to measure how efficient you are today and what interferes with or supports your being efficient. You can begin to measure your efficiency and see if it improves over time.
6. Confirm how much of an investment you have already made or plan to make in your professional development and in the development of your processes, standards, and performance aids to support this new role.
 - Develop your hypotheses as to how much agreement there is to the amount invested to date and the amount needed in the future.
 - Decide how you will get the data to find out what the investment has been to date and what it will be in the future.
 - Decide how you will get the data you need to confirm what the groups will accept as evidence that you are capable of providing performance consulting.
7. Plan how you will use the scorecard and hierarchy on a client's project.
8. To practice developing hypotheses, think of some organizational unit, like a work group, a team, or department, and ask yourself the following questions:
 - What are your assumptions about how clear the unit's vision, mission, and goals are and to what degree its people are in agreement? How does this clarity (or the lack of it) affect performance?
 - What behaviors and results do you think get rewarded? How does what gets rewarded affect performance?
 - What do you know about the unit's work processes? Are they well designed? How do they affect performance?
 - Are there standards? Is the documentation accurate and accessible? How do these affect performance?
 - Do job aids exist? So people use them? Do people create their own? How does the adequacy (or inadequacy) of the job aids affect performance?
 - What do you know about the facilities? Is the space designed to support the work people do?

- Who gets trained, and why? Who doesn't get trained, and why?
- Do people fill time by looking busy? Are they overworked? Do they have what they need to be effective?

These questions should help you realize that you already know a lot about your client. Developing hypotheses is not that hard. Once you have some idea about what you want to confirm, you and your client can decide how to get the data you need about what is or is not true and the effect on performance.

SUMMARY

Performing needs assessment should become a natural part of doing your business. You are always in a position to question, confirm, and verify that people share the same vision and goals, that job procedures support efficiency, and that people have the skills and knowledge they require. There is always time to find out why accidents, errors, and waste are increasing rather than assuming you know the answers. There is time to find out if the people and the organization can support a new structure. Jumping to conclusions wastes time and resources.

If Lisa had used the hierarchy, she would have known to confirm whether the bank president and his management team were clear on and in agreement with the bank's vision, mission, and goals. Her hypotheses would be that they were not in agreement on their vision, they were unclear about their goals, and the behaviors they rewarded did not support accountability or performance. Another hypothesis might have been that the president's goals for the bank had changed and were no longer aligned with the bank's publicized vision and mission statements, or that the president was unable to explain how the bank's new practices aligned with its vision and mission. She could have interviewed the president privately to learn more about his expansion goals and determine if the bank's lending practices had really changed or if only a few loans had fallen outside its stated goals.

What Lisa discovered when she had people describe the organizational structure of the bank should have led her to still another set of hypotheses: that changes in the bank had disrupted old reporting relationships, managers were being undermined by the executive vice president, and as a result, they did not have a managerial job under this structure; and that the managers were comfortable with the arrangement because it meant they were not accountable for anyone's performance, including their own. She could then have found out how managers were chosen for the job, how their performance was evaluated, and whether there were consequences for poor performance. In her process of creating a training program, she could have begun to get the president to better understand his responsibility for supporting performance.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE

Dillard, J., and Reilly, R. *Systematic Interviewing: Communication Skills for Professional Effectiveness*. Columbus, Ohio: Merrill Publishing, 1988. This book is full of examples and guidelines.

Hale, J. *Standards for the Training Function*. Downers Grove, Ill.: Hale Associates, 1996. Accompanying these standards are checklists and surveys for evaluating the adequacy of processes used to identify client needs, demonstrate leadership, manage capital assets, and measure results.

Hale, J. *Performance-Based Evaluation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, 2003. Chapters Nine (on sampling), Ten (on how to design and conduct interviews, surveys, observations, and document checks), and Eleven (how to analyze qualitative and quantitative data) are particularly useful. The book has over forty-four tools on a CD.

Payne, S. *The Art of Asking Questions*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980. A classic with lots of examples.

Rossett, A. *First Things Fast: A Handbook for Performance Analysis*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998) and *Training Needs Assessment* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Educational Technology Publications, 1987). Both books are useful guides on how to identify the causes of performance problems.

Stewart, C., and Cash Jr., W. *Interviewing: Principles and Practices*. (6th ed.) Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1991. This is full of guidelines and learning activities.