



TRANSFORM WORKPLACE COMPETENCY INTO BUSINESS RESULTS "Rapid Instructional Design"

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Executive Insights
Gordian Transformation Partners Inc.
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Transforming workforce competency into business results—quickly and efficiently—is a significant challenge for many companies. A business transformation can yield immediate cost savings. However, its success is contingent upon the lag time between setting new strategic direction and developing workforce skills that support the new strategies.

Unfortunately, the traditional learning process has not always kept up with the constantly changing business environment. While information is available at Internet speed, the ability to leverage such information to develop training programs is sometimes too slow to produce favorable business outcomes. Learning is often hampered by a lengthy task analysis and development period that can take up to six months to complete. In addition, allocation of extra time and additional resources is required to deliver the training.

There is a solution: ***rapid instructional design strategy***. This training approach enables you to bring mission critical business transformation training to employees faster and more efficiently. More importantly, it is aligned with an organization's business goals. With rapid instruction design, you can deliver instructionally sound, speed-to-market outcomes for all business transformation initiatives. Without rapid instruction design, you risk a higher probability of outcomes that won't deliver much timely strategic value and only provide a limited return on your investment.

What is rapid instructional design?

In a recent paper entitled, "Rapid Instructional Design", Dr. Sivasailam 'Thiagi' Thiagarajan—internationally recognized as an expert in collaboration and active learning—defined rapid instructional design as a systematic process that applies shortcuts, combinations, and deletions to the conventional instruction system design (ISD) model to accelerate the instructional design process without compromising instructional integrity.

The rapid instructional design approach consists of several key components and requires:

- Treating the conventional ISD model as a flexible framework (and not as compulsory commandments), *thus skipping phases in the instructional design process that are unnecessary or superfluous.*
- Involving *exemplary* subject matter experts (SMEs) who understand the work environment. SMEs readily understand the work environment and are more efficient in identifying mission critical skills and knowledge required to integrate change into the organization.
- Aligning mission critical skills and knowledge with business goals and objectives.
- Designing training materials to be delivered in formal and informal venues that reduce training time and cost.

What are the phases of rapid instructional design?

There are four primary phases of a rapid instructional design. Each phase has a group of tasks and activities that are required to expedite the length of time it takes to create the training and for an employee to become productive with a new role or skill.

Phase one allows you to first analyze the necessary skills and knowledge required to incorporate change into the organization; phase two maps the required competencies to the business strategy; and phase three identifies the appropriate training intervention to speed up the training development and delivery process. The fourth phase involves selecting and training subject matter experts to deliver the training programs. Ultimately, the workforce is trained faster, translating into immediate business results.

Phase One: *Identify the gap to determine where business transformation will have the most value.*

Phase one can be accomplished by using a gap analysis, a systematic approach that analyzes and drills down to where the business transformation will have the greatest impact and add the most value to the business. You can always review and refine later, but first focus on the areas that will bring the organization the greatest rewards.

There are two components of gap analysis:

- **Audience:** Identification of the target audiences is a critical delimiter for the gap analysis. Sometimes you may have what appears to be a single audience; but within that audience there are differing levels of training needs including educational levels, primary languages, general familiarity with computers and various learning environments. These levels may call for unique content.
- **Tasks:** Once the target audiences have been identified, the next step is to systematically collect information about the necessary skills and knowledge critical to integrate change into the organization. A rapid task analysis should include:
 - A logical grouping of tasks that have to be performed.
 - When and how people generally perform the tasks to achieve performance results.
 - Skills, knowledge and technology required to perform tasks.
 - How often tasks are performed.

Phase Two: *Map learning to the outcomes employees must achieve on the job if the organization's business goals are to be attained.*

In order for learning to have a strategic impact, training must be mapped to competencies that help the organization achieve its business goals. Without this link, training is a hit-or-miss proposition because it lacks a business focus.

Mapping to organizational business goals and objectives involves building a framework where the output from the rapid gap analysis is mapped to two key elements:

- **Critical success factors:** Key areas of activity in which favorable results are necessary for the company to reach its goal.
- **Key business performance indicators:** The target performance levels and the acceptable variance from that target.

Consequently, mapping defines the relationship between the competencies that directly impacts business execution and performance, ensures employees receive and retrieve training in the context of their job activities, and bypasses the content competencies that don't add value.

Phase Three: *Select the appropriate training intervention to speed up the instructional design process.*

Once you have mapped the gap analysis to the business strategy, select the appropriate training intervention to speed up the instructional design process. The goal is to impart the new knowledge and skills in formats and venues that reduce total training costs, especially with respect to time taken away from the job.

Thiagarajan recommends building the training package around a set of job aids to speed up the instructional design process. Job aids support the work and activity by directing, guiding, and enlightening employee performance.

In their book, *A Handbook of JOB AIDS*, authors Allison Rossett and Jeanette Gautier-Downes highlight the advantages of job aids: saves money and time; enables employees to do their jobs better; helps employees feel better about changing and challenging jobs; and ensures more consistent performance across divisions and distances.

While job aids are highly recommended, there are other instructional design methods that also speed up the instructional design process and facilitate mastery of the concepts: coaching, peer learning, on-the-job training, self-study, one-on-one tutoring, self-managed learning teams and electronic performance support tools.

Learning should not be hampered by a classroom infrastructure with a fixed schedule, limited capacity, and lots of time away from the job. Employees learn what they need to know when they need to know it — not just when the teacher is ready to teach it. More importantly, employees quickly acquire and apply new skills so that the organization can compete at the next level.

Phase Four: *Use exemplary performers and/or supervisors to deliver the training.*

An enormous amount of time and money is spent in having trainers attend train-the-trainer sessions with before, during and after video taping of training presentations. Significant savings can be achieved by eliminating all unnecessary train-the-trainer sessions, by using exemplary and/or supervisors to deliver the training.

In their book, Performance Consulting: Moving Beyond Training, authors Dana Robinson and James Robinson explain that exemplary performers are individuals within the organization who are already performing in a quality manner and are yielding the desired operational results. The rationale is that if these individuals are able to successfully perform, others can also be developed and encouraged to do so. The authors also state that although exemplary performers are very important sources of information, they sometimes cannot describe what they do that results in their success. They are performing in an unconsciously competent manner. However, someone who manages these individuals is in a position to describe what sets them apart. Managers of exemplary performers can indicate what the exemplary performers are doing differently from the more typical performer.

Summary

Businesses are significantly affected by a critical element—the time it takes to train employees to support new business strategies. Companies that experience a lapse of several weeks between the business transformation planning process and the transfer of new knowledge and skills to the workforce realize delays in the business transformation process. The speed with which organizations can adapt their strategies and their workforce to new conditions determines the strength of their operations and the success of their new strategies, along with the opportunities the company can expect to leverage in the future.

In this micro wave business world, accelerated learning speed and competency time-to-perform is the only way to reap high returns on business transformation initiatives. The sooner employees can quickly acquire and apply new skills to compete at the next level, the sooner an organization can produce timely and positive business outcomes.

