

Talent Development 44 Develop Performance Improvement Solutions

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Section 3.5 in the CPTD Certification program for ATD is Performance Improvement. Section B states, “Skill in designing and developing performance improvement solutions to address performance gaps.”

To develop solutions to address performance gaps, first of all you need to know precisely what those gaps are. You must measure current performance against some kind of ideal in order to identify the gaps accurately.

In my leadership work, I do this through a set of instruments that measure the gaps in numerous areas to identify which ones are most critical to improve. I have a series of 10 different surveys that I will apply (sparingly) depending on the specific group I am attempting to help. I never use more than two surveys to avoid survey fatigue.

The two most frequently used surveys are the CEO and HR Manager Evaluation and the Trust Survey. I will describe each of these instruments and tell how I use them.

CEO and HR Manager

This survey contains about 100 different areas of leadership. The individual skills are divided into the following categories.

- Leadership Topics (including Trust)
- Planning for Growth and Change
- Critical Political Skills
- Developing People and Teams
- Building Improvement Skills
- Techniques of Outstanding Communication
- Creating Balance at Work and Your Life

Under each topic area I have listed eight to 14 specific leadership skills.

To identify the most important gaps, I ask the entire leadership team to rate each item on the following scale:

- 0 = no need
- 1 = Low need – maintenance item
- 2 = Medium need – important
- 3 = High need – urgent

That process gives me a numerical score when I combine the collective input. From that scan, I can identify the most critical needs for improvement very quickly. I then match the profile of needs with a set of training modules I have already developed in order to create a proposal that will match the most critical gaps for that particular group.

Trust Survey

A second instrument is a measure of the areas where managers are doing well or poorly on developing trust within the organization. It starts with a few demographic questions. The most important of these is the level in the organization.

It turns out that most senior leaders have a much rosier estimate of the trust levels than do the lower levels of management. I like to check the covariance by level.

Then I ask each person to rate the level of trust for the entire organization on a scale of 1-10. This is followed by two sections designed to highlight which areas of trust need the most work.

I do this by giving 16 positive statements (like “managers here are highly ethical.”) Using a seven-step Likert Scale, I determine what areas are strong and what ones are weak.

I then reverse the Likert Scale and ask 14 negative statements (like “Managers and Supervisors here play favorites.”) The reversed scale allows me to, once again, determine areas of strength or weakness.

I usually administer the trust survey across the entire population that is contemplating some development work.

Pinpoint Gaps

Using these two instruments, I can assess performance gaps quickly and turn around a training proposal in just a few days. Managers are astonished at how accurately the report identifies the most urgent needs.

For example, in most organizations the area of **holding people accountable properly** scores very low, so I often include a module on that aspect of leadership in my training.

These are just two examples of how I go about identifying the critical gaps in skills in order to ensure my training programs have the maximum impact without spending time on needless topics. That is a part of delivering high impact to my clients.

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