

A Perspective Adjustment to Add Value to External Clients, Including Society

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Our realities have shifted. What was comfortable and acceptable will no longer provide useful guidance on what any HRD professional uses, does, and delivers. There is a new and overriding focus on external value added for both clients and society. This article gives the rationale and guidance on what it takes to adjust our perspectives in order to define and deliver success. And prove it.

What used to be good enough does not hold today. Working harder and following the conventional models and approaches to performance improvement and HRD that are the industry standards are no longer viable guides for defining and achieving success. We have entered a new era that requires both achieving useful results and proving that they add value not only to the organization but to our shared society. Although there are still many organizations, perhaps in some ways more powerful than some governments (Estes, 1996), that can affect the lives of many individuals with little or no accountability, a few others are now embracing social responsibility (Hatcher, 2000). For example, U.S. governmental agencies are required to prove their value added to their external clients. Recent research additionally indicates that organizations around the world are beginning to include societal value added as a component of their organizational purpose (Kaufman, Watkins, Triner, and Stith, 1998). A new perspective is required: efficiency or saving money alone is no longer sufficient.

Current performance improvement approaches and methods, including the language we use in describing our profession, commonly leaves unanswered questions concerning value added (Kaufman and Watkins, 2000). At best, we talk about profits, "business needs," client satisfaction, or funding levels, but we seem to miss the emerging paradigm (Farrington and Clark, 2000;

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Popcorn, 1991; Kaufman, 1972, 1992, 1998, 2000) that organizations—all organizations—are only means to societal ends. Recent research indicates that, by and large, performance improvement practices focus primarily on methods and means, and to a much lesser degree on results, let alone social results, on which they rarely focus (Guerra, 2001). If we don't add societal value along with client satisfaction, we will be replaced by others who will. Past successes enjoyed from old paradigms cannot be guaranteed now or in the future. Professionals who employ different approaches that demonstrate organizational and societal linkages and payoffs will replace those who remain shortsighted by old and ineffective practices.¹

The field of performance improvement addresses some critical societal and organizational issues (Stolovitch, Keeps, and Rodriguez, 1999). Hence, performance improvement professionals are in the position to assume leadership roles in raising ethical awareness in the workplace as well as helping organizations realize the ethical and financial power of social responsibility (Dean, 1993; Hatcher, 2000).

The performance professional of the future has to both know how to improve performance as well as understand and justify why to improve performance. If we cannot define, link, and justify what our ends are at the societal, organizational, and individual levels, we cannot confidently determine how we are going to achieve our objectives or whether they are worth achieving at all. In addition to justifying what was used, done, accomplished, and delivered, we must in the new reality prove that the results are useful to both the client and the rest of society. Societal good includes the survival, self-sufficiency, health, and well-being of all partners. Planning for results at the societal level—value added for tomorrow's child—is termed the *Mega* level of planning (Kaufman, 1992, 1998, 2000).

If you take a few moments to step back from the pressures of your life and your job, then some different perspectives might seem useful to you. In order to consider a different perspective, put to rest the large investments you have made to learn how to be successful in the paradigm that drove organizations during the 1980s and 1990s. Now, answer the following question: What organizations, public and private, that you personally do business with do you expect to really put client health, safety, and well-being at the top of the list of what they must deliver?

Exhibit 1 provides a checklist you might use to consider the importance of formally considering societal impact and value added.

When asked, most people put a check mark in the first column for each organization—they want their safety, health, and well-being to be the top priority of everyone they deal with. Most people believe that their own survival and well-being must be basic and primary to the services and products they get from others. “No excuses, no negotiation. Make everything safe, or you don't get my money or my business.”

**Exhibit 1. Checklist for Considering the Importance
of Societal Impact and Value Added**

<i>Organization You Do Business With</i>	<i>Want Them to Put Your Health, Safety, and Well-Being at the Top of the List of What They Deliver to You</i>	<i>Do Not Care Whether They Put Your Health, Safety, and Well-Being at the Top of the List of What They Deliver to You</i>
Organization A		
Organization B		
Organization C		

Of course, you want well-trained and competent people to serve you. For example, you want proficient people to sell you the airplane ticket, pilot the airplane, prepare the food, serve a decent meal on long flights, leave on time, and get your baggage to you before you retire. The airlines focus their training on each of these discrete topics, among others, and do a reasonable job of instilling a sense of these required individual performances in their employees. But isn't there more? Don't we, first and foremost, insist that the planes are safe, that they do not crash, that they are not vulnerable to terrorists, and that everyone arrives safely? Isn't everything else secondary to safety, survival, and well-being?

Although most of us insist on Mega level results—measurable societal value added—for what is important in our life, we often squirm a bit when it comes time to apply it to our organizations and ourselves. We demur: “We don't have control over everything and thus cannot be responsible for societal consequences.” “What can I do in my job—powerless in the overall scheme of things—to have an impact on Mega?” “Won't people laugh at me for focusing on things they have not considered, such as tomorrow's child and safety and security?” There are several answers to this: “You can and must do plenty,” and “If you don't, who will?” To reinforce this importance for everyone to think strategically—to link everything we use, do, produce, and deliver to societal value added—let's take a couple of more mundane examples.

One case in point comes from the observations of a custodian working at a manufacturing plant in rural Florida (Kaufman, 1992). When a group was asked about whether Mega had any importance in their lives, he answered, “If my product isn't good [in this case they made forming fabric that was used in the manufacture of paper bags] then bags break with customers' groceries in them. They get mad at the grocery man who gets mad at the bag supplier who gets mad at the bag manufacturer who gets mad at us for making a

defective product. If that happens often enough, I am out of a job, and my family will be on welfare.” His comments are very insightful and show how Mega—societal and external client value added—is vital no matter where you work, at what level your job is, or where you live.

Another example from a manufacturing operation also makes the point of the Mega focus. A company that produces electrical circuit boards that has a primary focus on value added for all partners would provide this results-and-consequences chain: (1) the company uses the circuit boards to build telephones; (2) the telephones are used to provide fast and reliable communication from homes; (3) this can improve the quality of life and might save lives to summon emergency assistance. Indicators of results for implementing a Mega focus in such an organization might include (1) performance of the system and all of its parts: reliability of calls, durability, and safety of the telephones; (2) the health and well-being of employees, suppliers, and all those involved in the process of manufacturing; (3) the survival and self-sufficiency of those who buy and use the phones; (4) the lessening and elimination of environmental pollution in manufacture; and (5) the careful use of scarce natural resources, with the manufacturer building in the capacity to recycle circuit boards for new applications or to recover their component materials.

We suggest that a primary focus on Mega is both practical and ethical. So how are we doing now in terms of focusing on societal value added? Do we currently include external client survival and well-being in our performance plans? Let’s take a look at how training usually takes place:² courses on all of the splinters and jobs that have been identified, along with the assumption and presumption that each of these training pieces will add up to operational efficiency and effectiveness. The enormous assumption is that when all of the personnel, who are, ideally, competent performers, are fully trained, the sum of each of the individual contributions of these people will add up to health, safety, and well-being of internal and external clients. That is a huge and usually insupportable assumption. Our guess is that none of us wants to rely on any assumptions when it comes to our life, health, survival, and well-being.

Yet most of us, usually and blithely, assume that what we use, do, and produce will add value to client satisfaction. Sometimes we even tip our hats at achieving results beyond client satisfaction: health, safety, and survival. But we rarely start by clearly and rigorously stating that “outside-the-organization” outcome (societal-level results) before selecting the organizational outputs (organizational-level results), followed by products (individual- or small-group-level results), processes, and inputs.

Most in our field struggle with Kirkpatrick’s evaluation levels 1 and 2 (1994), groan at levels 3 and 4, and throw up our hands at the formal consideration of health, safety, and well-being—level 5—that would add societal value added into the chain or results to be evaluated (Kaufman and Keller, 1994; Kaufman, Keller, and Watkins, 1995; Kaufman, 1997b). Yet we expect

other organizations to deliver what we ourselves shy away from delivering when doing business: health, safety, and well-being.

Why do we want others to do and deliver that which we are unwilling to commit to deliver ourselves to our clients? Why do we not insist on and assure that the sum total of our performance interventions (such as training) are linked and measurably add value within and outside of our organization? Fear of being out of the mainstream? Fear of not being able to control everything involved and wanting to take responsibility for only small pieces, letting the results fall where they may? Fear of not knowing how to link everything we use, do, produce, and deliver to value added for the external client and society? When you start to feel uncomfortable with a primary focus on societal value added, ask yourself if you would really want to be a client of yours with this assumption about health, safety, and well-being. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, "We must be the change we want to see in the world."

When you want to consider a practical and ethical perspective adjustment, use something like the checklist in Exhibit 2.

If you are not sure how to link everything you use, do, produce, and deliver to clients with the societal value added, simply ask yourself this question: If we were successful in accomplishing this [job, task, training, etc.], what would be the result? And then ask once again: Now, if we were successful in accomplishing this [for example, trained personnel], what would be the result?

Keep asking these basic questions to adjust your assumptions. Focus on ends and results, not on means and resources, and you will get to the Mega issues: health, safety, and well-being in terms of survival, quality of life, self-sufficiency, and self-reliance. Additionally, you will be acting on and delivering what you yourself expect others to do and deliver to you. Doing what

Exhibit 2. Checklist for a Practical and Ethical Perspective Adjustment

<i>Your Organization and Your Job</i>	<i>Will Put All Clients' Health, Safety, and Well-Being at the Top of the List of What You Use, Do, and Deliver</i>	<i>Do Not Care Whether You Put All Clients' Health, Safety, and Well-Being at the Top of the List of What You Do and Deliver</i>
What you use and do		
What you produce within the organization		
What gets delivered outside of your organization		
What your clients and society gain from what is delivered by you and your organization		

is right for external clients is basic to demonstrating a performance-based contribution. Making certain that everything we use, do, produce, and deliver adds value to everyone is essential. Applying an external perspective is not only ethical but also practical for continued organizational success. There are financial payoffs: evidence is mounting that companies concerned about societal impact are more profitable and last longer (Kaufman, 1997a; Forbes, 1998). If a company or governmental organization adds value to clients and to society, it will be supported. Those organizations that do not add value might prosper in the very short run but suffer in the longer run. There is a shift in organizations moving closer to a Mega focus for the statements of purpose—their mission (Kaufman, Watkins, Triner, and Stith, 1998). Doing the right thing pays.

Keep asking these basic assumption-adjustment questions, focus on ends and results rather than means and resources, and you will get to the Mega issues: health, safety, and well-being in terms of survival, quality of life, self-sufficiency, and self-reliance. If you disagree, what else might you have in mind? Why not do unto others as you would have them do unto you?

Notes

1. We only have to look at the tragic events of September 11, 2001, and ask how much of the security subsystem, including the training of security screeners, was based on societal impact rather than simply individual task goals. Did everything that was used, done, and delivered by the airlines and security services focus on societal impact—safety, security, and no losses of life—or was everything focused on tasks and short-term efficiency for the service providers?
2. Though both the American Society for Training and Development and the International Society for Performance Improvement have encouraged a shift from training to performance, the data suggest that this shift may be verbal rather than actual (Guerra, 2001).

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