ABSTRACT
          This guide, which is intended for project directors,
coordinators, and other professional staff involved in developing and
delivering workplace education programs, explains the implications of
identifying critical job tasks and details a process by which
educational partners can facilitate identification of critical job
tasks. First, critical job tasks are defined as job tasks dealing
with projected changes and/or current performance/training problems
that affect a company's bottom line. The importance of identifying
critical job tasks to the job tasks analysis, skills assessment,
curriculum development, instruction, and evaluation processes is
explained. Presented next are a four-step process for identifying
critical job tasks (identify in-house program experts; facilitate a
meeting of the advisory council; identify and select two or three
critical job tasks; and document the advisory council's decision) and
an eight-step process for conducting an advisory council meeting
(state meeting objectives, describe advisory panel responsibilities,
present criteria for classifying critical job tasks, elicit
information about positive company activities, transition to more
sensitive issues, focus on specific job tasks or
departments/problems, select two or three critical job tasks to
target, and schedule job task analyses). Contains a list of six
informational resources. (MN)

Identifying
Critical Job
Task

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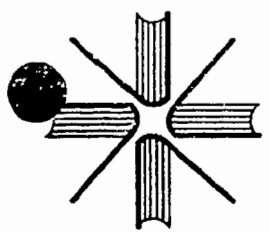
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Identifying Critical Job Tasks

1995

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Funded by
The Adult Education Act 100-297 Section 353
Administered through
The Colorado Department of Education
State Library and Adult Education Office

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Identifying Critical Job Tasks

One of the first steps to developing an integrated workplace education program is to identify the job tasks that the business partner deems critical to the competitiveness and profitability of the company.

This process of identification is very important in that it provides the basis for various components of the workplace education program: job task analysis, skills assessment, curriculum development, instruction and evaluation. This guide will look at the implications of identifying critical job tasks and a process by which the educational partner can facilitate this identification.

Definition:

A job task may be considered critical if it deals with projected changes, current performance or training problems that affect the bottom line.

Projected changes may involve:

- management or organizational restructuring
- technological advancement
- procedural or operational changes
- quality management initiatives
- other

Performance or training problems may involve:

- skill levels of new hires and/or current employees
- quality concerns
- rate of errors and rework
- safety issues
- other

Identifying critical job tasks enables the business and educational partners to focus on the necessary basic skills to deal with these changes and/or concerns through an integrated education program.

Purpose:

As previously mentioned the identification of critical job tasks plays a role in many of the workplace education program components:

Job Task Analysis

Identification of the critical job task limits the scope of the job task analysis to those jobs that directly relate to the target student population and the basic skill applications that are critical to job performance.

Skills Assessment

Through analysis of the critical job tasks, the educational partner will identify the basic skill levels necessary in performing these critical tasks. Once the necessary basic skill levels are identified, standardized and /or customized skill assessment instruments are used to assess the skill levels of the target student population.

Curriculum Development

Because the analyzed job tasks have been identified as critical to job performance, they will be the focal points of the functional context curriculum developed. The curriculum will address the basic skills necessary in the critical job tasks.

Instruction

Instruction based upon the integrated functional context curriculum will rapidly translate to improved job performance. Jorie Philippi (1991) defines the functional context approach in her book *Literacy at Work* as:

> The use of actual job materials and simulations to teach the applications of basic oral, reading, writing, computational, and reasoning skills to enable individuals to use printed and written information to perform specific job tasks competently. (p. 29)

This functional context approach to instruction enables the educational and business partners to observe the results of workplace education instruction on the job.

Evaluation

One of the evaluative instruments designed by the educational and business partner will deal with the measure of progress in the job performance of the students/employees. This instrument should measure the students' progress based upon the indicators that were used in determining the job task as *critical*. For example, if the business partner identified the utilization of quality measurement instruments as a critical job task, an evaluative measure of the effectiveness of the workplace education training might surround the rate of errors made in the use of these instruments prior to and upon completion of the workplace education instruction.

The identification of job tasks serves as an impetus to the workplace education program because it enables the business and education partners to develop an integrated program that meets the needs and expectations of both partners. Furthermore, the measure of program effectiveness will rely heavily on the measurement of progress made in relation to the performance of the critical job tasks. Therefore, it is understandable that the identification of critical job tasks is vital to the success of the workplace education program.

The following section of this guide will suggest one of many possible processes that you might use in identifying critical job tasks.

Process of Identifying Critical Job Tasks

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1.   Identify in-house program experts

In order to identify the critical job tasks, the education partner must communicate with the key players that have agreed to serve on the workplace education program advisory council. The membership of this council consists of a variety of people from the company and the adult education program. For example, the advisory council members from the adult education program may be the program coordinator, director, curriculum writers and instructors. Advisory council members from the company may include the CEO, human resource director, training manager, trainers, organized labor leaders, operation managers, supervisors and employees. The council members will serve as the in-house program experts. These experts will assist in identifying the critical job tasks .*

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2.   Facilitate a meeting of the advisory council

An effective method of identifying critical job tasks is to call a meeting of the advisory council to discuss the projected changes in the workplace, the current performance, and/or training problems which may cause the business partner to identify related job tasks as critical. It is recommended that the education partner facilitate this meeting in order to guide the advisory council members in discussing sensitive issues.

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3.   Identify and select 2 or 3 critical job tasks

Through guided discussion about the projected changes and current performance and training problems, the advisory council will need to analyze and prioritize related job tasks in order to select 2 or 3 job tasks that the council agrees are critical to the success of the company.

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4.   Document the decision of the advisory council

Because the selected critical job tasks will act as the basis of many of the workplace education program components, the education partner should document them and make them accessible to the advisory council members for future reference.

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* For more information on forming workplace education advisory councils, please see the corresponding guide in this series, *Workplace Education Advisory Councils.*

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Conducting the Meeting

The first responsibility of the advisory council is to identify and select critical job tasks. Panel members must prioritize those job tasks that will become the vehicles for instruction in literacy skills applications. Skillful moderating of this meeting by the program director is essential to its success. The following eight steps will help you conduct the meeting.

1. **Begin by stating the objective of the meeting:** to gather information from participants about which job areas are critical and why; to select two or three priority tasks or departments upon which to focus initial program efforts.

2. **Define the responsibilities of the panel members:** to identify job tasks or departments they know of that now or soon will be facing potential performance problems. Explain that ʌfter all problem areas have been identified, the panel members will be asked to prioritize areas and select two or three to be addressed by the program.

3. **Present criteria for classifyin᷄ job tasks as critical:**
    *   job tasks in entry-level to mid-level promotable positions
    *   job tasks that currently are experiencing problems with quality or quantity of work produced
    *   job tasks that currently are experiencing high rates of accidents or safety violations
    *   job tasks for which changes in procedures or equipment are planned, such as shifts in management responsibilities or technical upgrades
    *   other (feedback from company)

4. **Elicit information about positive company activities:** current training programs, safety programs, potential plans for changes that are anticipated to make the company more competitive, and so on.... It is important to use this time to share, and to validate the existing activities of the company and the knowledge of the panel members.

5. **Transition to a discussion of more sensitive issues:** problem areas and concerns that may cause the employee or company to be less competitive or may threaten its survival. These include quality issues, turnover, lack of adequately skilled entry-level or promotable employees, and worries that planned changes or training may not be able to be implemented quickly or successfully.

6. **Focus on specific job or departmental tasks and problems or potential problems:** These are the job tasks that are *critical* for the organization.

7. **Select two or three job tasks from those identified as *critical*** by asking the panel members for priorities. You can accomplish this by explaining that you are able to address only a limited number of critical tasks in the initial round of instructional development for the program.... The rest of the job tasks will be addressed during future program development.

8. **Make arrangements for conducting Job Task Analyses** with competent workers in each selected critical job task area.

Process Steps

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1. State objectives of meeting

2. Describe advisory panel responsibilities.

3. Present criteria for classifying critical job tasks.

4. Elicit information about positive company activities.

5. Transition to more sensitive issues.

6. Focus on specific job tasks or departments and problems.

7. Select two or three critical job tasks to target.

8. Schedule job task analyses.

This guide has focused on the implications of identifying critical job tasks and a four step process to facilitate this identification. For more information and ideas please refer to the resources listed in the back of this guide. As always, the Office of Adult Education will provide technical assistance or training to facilitate your workplace education efforts.

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