Assessing Needs to Identify Instructional Goals

Instructional Goals

The first step of ID is to identify the **instructional goal**, or the desired outcome of the instruction. The subject-matter expert defines a goal in non-observable, internal terms; however, the performance technologist uses active verbs to define observable, external, performance-based instructional goals. These goals are stated as skills, knowledge, and attitudes that learners must acquire to satisfy an identified need.

Needs Assessment

In order to define the broad instructional goal—and to determine if instruction is indeed the best solution for a perceived problem—the designer must conduct a **needs assessment** and analyze processes involved in the targeted area. A needs assessment is a study conducted to determine the precise problem(s) and how it (they) can be resolved. It often includes direct observations of performers and interviews of personnel. There are five components of a needs assessment:

1) **Actuals** are the descriptions of the current state of things in an organization.
2) **Optimals** (goals) are descriptions of the realistic mandated or required level of performance. The difference, or gap, between the optimal status and the actual status is referred to as a **need**.
3) **Feelings** are the involved individuals’ perceptions of the need and its effect on them.
4) **Causes** are the reasons or originations of the problem.
5) **Solutions** are the possible means of rectifying the problem after it has been clearly identified.

Goal Clarification

Once instructional goals have been established, they must be clarified and amplified by the designer. These **fuzzy** goals are clarified by a simple process: 1) write down the goal, 2) list the things a performer would do to demonstrate the achievement of the goal, 3) sort those statements by relevancy, 4) incorporate the indicators into statements describing what the learner will do, and 5) examine these goal statements against the original fuzzy goal. If the goal statements require the learners to demonstrate all aspects of the original goal, then it has been effectively clarified.

During this phase, the designer should also pay attention to the **learners**—who exactly will be receiving the instruction, the **context**—where and how the instruction and performance will take place, and the **tools**—what aids the learners will be able to use during the instruction and performance.

Establishment Criteria

It is important to note that instructional goals may be determined by another source, especially in a hierarchical organization. Factors such as finance, time constraints for both the development and the implementation of the instruction, future need for instruction and currency and stability of content, organizational goals, and other political elements often determine the degree of instruction.