

Effective Learning Systems Models - Part V

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In this series of articles, we address whole learning systems, some of which are rarely used although they have demonstrated effectiveness. We're not certain why some beneficial systems aren't used more frequently, but our experience tells us that many people in the learning and performance world either don't know about them, don't know how to develop and implement them, or simply are fearful of rocking the boat.

We continue to address these learning systems (natural experience, experimental learning, structured on-the-job training [SOJT], learner-controlled instruction [LCI] and individual developmental plans) which have stood the test of time and have demonstrated effectiveness in this edition of the HSA e-Xpress. For each of these learning systems models, we have created an information chart that can familiarize you with them and help you try them out. In the April 2011 edition of the HSA e-Xpress, we presented learner-controlled instruction (click [HERE](#) to read it), in January 2011, we presented structured on-the-job training learning (click [HERE](#) to read it), in October 2010, we presented experiential learning (click [HERE](#) to read it), and in July 2010, we presented natural experience (click [HERE](#) to read it). In this edition, we offer individual development plan. [READ ON...](#)

Individual Development Plan

What is it?

- An individual development plan (IDP) is an organized and detailed training plan.
- There are two major types of IDPs, each one very different from the other:
 - In a person-oriented IDP, an individual is assessed in terms of his or her career potential, diagnosed for training and development needs, and prescribed a customized plan generally containing two or three areas for development per year. The purpose is to build performance capability continuously in a person deemed able to steadily increase her or his value to the organization.
 - A position-oriented IDP is based on an analysis of the skills, knowledge, experiences, and attitudes required for a specific position. People selected for the position are provided with an array of competencies they should acquire, activities they should participate in, and resources that are available. The IDP is adjusted to the background and characteristics of the individual. The purpose in this instance is to enhance performance capabilities until each person in the targeted position is fully functional and capable of peak performance.

- With an IDP created for a specific person, that person is almost entirely accountable for executing the plan, although there is some sharing of responsibility with the supervisor and, in some cases, a performance professional.
- In the person-oriented IDP, planning generally covers a period equal to a full performance appraisal cycle (for example, one year). In the position-oriented case, timelines are negotiated.
- In all cases the IDP is a carefully conceived and documented plan that guides the individual through a series of learning experiences that result in increased competencies and confidence to perform.

With whom can it be used?

- Although it can be used with any population, it is generally used for training and development of management or key professional personnel.
- It is especially useful for one-of-a-kind positions (such as chief executive officer, vice president of advertising, general manager, senior project director, or performance consultant).

For what type of content can it be used?

- IDP can include content for any aspect of a job for which resources (including people, documents, and events) can be identified and accessed by the individual (for example, creating displays, analyzing turnover, and handling employee grievances).
- In the person-oriented IDP, management topics (such as time and stress management or making presentations) or personal growth skill areas (such as leadership or interpersonal skills) are likely to be included.
- The position-oriented IDP tends to focus more on training content (for example, front-end analysis, evaluation); the person-oriented one essentially leans toward development topics that lead to directly applicable performance.

What are the components?

- *Person-oriented IDP:*
 - a manager's guide explaining her or his role in creating IDPs for employees and how to do it
 - an employee's guide explaining his or her role and responsibility in developing and carrying out the IDP
 - a set of IDP forms or worksheets for documenting the plan

- resource lists (such as company course catalog, organization charts)
- a means for verifying performance capability.
- *Position-oriented IDP:*
 - a manager's guide explaining her or his role in adapting a generic IDP model to individual needs/characteristics and organizational requirements
 - an employee's guide that explains his or her role and responsibilities in adapting the generic IDP and in carrying it out
 - Generic IDP models for specific job positions that include
 - areas of responsibility
 - learning experiences that relate to each area of responsibility
 - resources that relate to each area of responsibility
 - recommended/average learning time for each area of responsibility
 - spaces for making adaptations, entering specific timelines, and adding additional relevant resources
 - some means for verifying or demonstrating performance capability.

How does it work?

- *Person-oriented IDP:*
 - During the appraisal or assessment process, specific development areas are identified jointly by manager and employee.
 - Following procedures from the manager's guide, the manager creates an IDP for the employee with the employee's input and agreement. Performance professionals can assist here.
 - Specific checkpoints or milestones are established.
 - The employee executes the plan with the manager's support.
 - At established checkpoints, manager and employee meet to evaluate progress and make needed adaptations.
 - At the end of the appraisal or some other specific period, both the employee and manager critique the end result and determine if development in prescribed areas is sufficient or if further work is required. It is useful to have data or artifacts that provide evidence of performance capability.
 - A new IDP is developed for the individual, which may or may not contain elements of the previous plan.

- *Position-oriented IDP:*
 - Upon appointment to the position (or when promotion to a position has been decided), manager and employee meet to discuss the IDP strategy, adapt the generic plan, establish timelines, and add resources.
 - The employee executes the plan and issues periodic (for example, monthly) progress reports to the manager. These include evidence of performance capability.
 - The employee and manager meet as needed to adapt the plan, make other required resources available, and interact as trainee and resource person/subject matter expert. This process continues until all areas of responsibility in the plan have been accomplished and performance capability concretely documented.
 - At completion of the IDP, the employee and manager meet to debrief and evaluate performance to date. An outcome of this meeting may be a prescription for additional development in particular areas.

What are the advantages?

- Both types of the IDPs focus specifically on individual development needs. There is very little extraneous activity in the plan. It is a tailored, customized plan.
- Manager and employee monitor progress closely. They have opportunities to interact productively, which helps develop their relationship.
- Activities and resources are job related and rarely involve travel, except for specifically selected events (such as a seminar or conference, an off-site visit, or lunch with a specialist).
- The employee learns while performing on the job.
- There is room for adjustment along the way.
- In the person-oriented IDP, every employee reporting to a manager can be working simultaneously on his or her own IDP.
- In the position-oriented IDP, there is no lag time between job entry and training, so unproductive startup time is reduced.
- Because the IDP is created with both the individual's characteristics and the organization's needs in mind, all activities are relevant.
- Other than occasional consultation and assistance from a performance professional or human resource specialist, the training and development of the individual resides essentially with the employee and manager.
- The IDP is performance based and evidence driven.

What are the disadvantages?

- Because it is individualized, some of the peer sharing that occurs in group training is not present.
- It is a long-term training and development strategy, and does not respond to immediate skill/knowledge needs when something urgent occurs.
- The content and activities of the IDP components are not as structured as in a usual training program. Self-selection of experiences can lead to omissions.
- It does not work well with employees who are not self-starters or who are constantly overworked.
- It is demanding of a manager's time--particularly with the position-oriented IDP.
- Because employees perform on the job while carrying out their IDPs, task interference can occur and prevent on-time plan completion.
- There are no formal testing components to measure true competency attainment. The bottom line is the performance outcome.

What resources are required?

- *Personnel:*
 - competent IDP developers and job analysts (for position-oriented IDPs) to define the key behaviors and accomplishments required of the position
 - manager or, in the case of senior managers or executives, a personal coach or counselor
 - learner-employee
 - some human resource department or performance professional assistance.
- *Time:*
 - fairly heavy IDP system development time
 - heavy job analysis, and activity and resource identification time
 - manager and trainee time--a commitment to a predetermined number of employee days is essential.
- *Costs:*
 - relatively high IDP system development costs

- relatively high job analysis, and activity and resource identification costs
- manager, coach, counselor, and employee-trainee salary costs
- resource costs (for example, attendance at seminars, off-site visits, book purchases).

What are some examples?

- An IDP for the new head of the legal department who has not had industry experience
- An IDP for a new Supreme Court justice who has never been a judge
- IDPs for performance consultants transitioning from essentially training-driven environments
- A highly individualized plan for a marketing executive promoted to the senior management team
- IDPs for business consultants coming from industry into a government agency.

This article is an excerpt from Harold Stolovitch and Erica Keeps' bestseller, *Beyond Training Ain't Performance Fieldbook*. Interested in learning more? Click [here](#) to order a copy of the book.