



Performance Support Perspectives And Practice

by Gary J. Dickelman

This special edition of *Performance Improvement* brings you an exciting collection of articles, starting with a lively roundtable discussion among performance support pioneers and professionals on the state of the practice. The issue proceeds with a series of rich topics that bridge gaps between theory and practice. It is *exciting* because it includes not only a synopsis of the state of the practice, but also because it includes all elements of the performance-centered systems development lifecycle, from the tenets of analysis found in the literature on distributed cognition to designing web-based performance support for lay literacy facilitators, to real-world implementation on the shop floor.

Jan Greenberg introduces a fresh perspective on the underpinnings of performance support (PS) in a rigorous exposition of distributed cognition. It is no surprise that PS systems, like distributed cognition, are environments that transcend the boundaries of people to include sets of artifacts, environmental factors, and social/virtual interactions that result in business performance through human performance. It is when we recognize the relationships between cognition and performance that the underlying model for performance support becomes clear.

Duane Degler and Lisa Battle challenge us to consider knowledge proclivity and the role that

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context plays in performance support. They show how a work-enabling performance-centered system can be used to solicit knowledge as a byproduct of working. Among other ideas, they introduce the notion of *stealth knowledge management*. Barry Raybould then updates his 1995 *Performance Improvement Quarterly* article on performance support engineering. He summarizes the convergence of thinking among the disciplines that comprises what we might call *the performance technologies* and articulates processes for designing performance-centered web applications, intranets, knowledge management systems, business information systems, or any other systems designed to support work.

To round out the practical, Jyrki J.J. Kasvi and Matti Vartiainen bring us real-world lessons learned via an exposition of four shop-floor performance support systems implemented in Finland and Denmark in the 1990s. In addition, Brenda Bannan-Rittland, Emily Egerton, Jen Page, and Michael Behrmann tell us of their award-winning design for Literacy Explorer, a web-based, performance-centered tool that enables lay reading facilitators to advance the literacy of children with disabilities. Such diverse but creative means of addressing important performance gaps speak more to our growing understanding of the business/human performance dichotomy than to the ever-increasing application of technology in our web-connected world. In very simple terms, we're getting better at supporting performance, period.

As always, it is my hope that you will find the profound, the mentally stimulating, and the practical in this special issue. We've come a long way since the first performance technologist intruded on a systems development project and fought for things such as context-sensitive reference to ease human pain around achieving business goals. Today we are not only invited to the development table, but are often in the driver seat—because we represent the right perspective. This issue promises to tell you a great deal about the nature of the right perspective for enabling performance. Enjoy! 🍷



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