

# Knowledge Worker

## What Kind of Performance Improvement Professional are You?

(March 2019)

A long time ago, the late Geary Rummler (1983) suggested that ISPI (then NSPI) should be organized around various technology domains. Twenty years later, Guy Wallace (2003) continued that line of reasoning but from the perspective of examining HPT's value proposition and relating it to the value propositions of other improvement experts. Picking up on those ideas but with a bit of a twist, this month's Knowledge Worker column asks the question in the title: What kind of Performance Improvement Professional are you? Why ask such a question? Because there are more people out there working to manage and improve performance than just us folks at ISPI and there are more disciplines and technologies out there than just Human Performance Technology (HPT). This month's column takes a look at some of them and their import for ISPI.

### What is a Performance Improvement Professional (PIP)?

To me, a Performance Improvement Professional (PIP) is anyone who is concerned with, works on and is competent at dealing with one or more kinds or aspects of workplace performance. This includes those who are concerned with the performance of people (individuals and groups, and teams in particular), processes, systems, and of the entire organization. So, trainers, instructional system developers, coaches, OD consultants, job and work design specialists, process analysts and architects, systems analysts and engineers, evaluators, and human performance technologists are all PIPs. Oh yes, let's not forget managers and executives. Let's look a little more closely at the various categories.

### Categories of Performance Improvement Professionals

One class or category of PIP is the Trainer, someone who is concerned with improving performance by way of advancing the performer's knowledge and skill. This PIP aims directly at improving the performer's repertoire.

Another category of PIP is the HPT professional, someone who looks not just at the performer's repertoire but also at the surrounding conditions, the kind of feedback that is present (or absent), any necessary support and so on.

Performers are embedded in and do their work as part of some larger work process. Yet another class or group of PIPs are those who focus on processes, often referring to them as business processes. This includes the quality, Six Sigma and continuous improvement folks.

People work individually, and they work in groups and teams. Teamwork can be a critical factor in performance and in improving it. Those who engage in teambuilding and coaching are just as much PIPs as any of the others.

Just as people are embedded in processes, so are systems that do much of the work that can be done by computers and other machines. The information systems folks are PIPs, too.

Processes, of course, are the lifeblood of an organization but they are only part of the organization. The organization is a complex of people, processes, systems and more. There is, then, the larger or overall organization to consider, especially its structure, strategy and culture. The organization itself can be a target for efforts to improve performance, whether of people, processes, or systems. Enter here another group of PIPs: Organization Development or OD practitioners.

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Last, but far from least, there are those who are concerned primarily with evaluation – not just as a means of determining what happened or didn't but with improving matters. The American Evaluation Association comes immediately to mind.

### ISPI: A Gathering Place for Performance Improvement Professionals

As ISPI struggles with finding its place and striving to be the place where Performance Improvement Professionals gather, maybe we should extend those ideas of Geary's and Guy's a bit farther. Perhaps ISPI should be a gathering place for all those various kinds of Performance Improvement Professionals. Perhaps the ISPI board should be composed of a representative from each major category of PIP. Perhaps the ISPI annual conference tracks should have reflect those categories (e.g., a training track, an HPT track, a process track, a system track, an organization development track, and an evaluation track). Perhaps ISPI should view itself as an umbrella organization, as a gathering place for Performance Improvement Professionals. Perhaps ISPI should once again change its name – this time to the International Society of Performance Improvement Professionals (ISPIP).

Pulling this off would require establishing and maintaining close, collegial and professional relationships with the associations and societies that are home to these various categories of PIPs. Here's a tentative starter list (far from complete or exhaustive):

- American Evaluation Association (AEA)
- American Management Association (AMA)
- American Society for Quality (ASQ)
- Association of Business Process Management Professionals International (ABPMPI)
- Association for Information Systems (AIS)
- Association for Talent Development (ATD)
- International Coach Federation
- OD Network

There can be little doubt that no one person can master all these areas of practice, or even most of them, but managers and executives and the rest of us don't need to. All we need to be able to do is recognize when each kind of professional is appropriate and then bring to bear the right kind of Performance Improvement Professional on the problem at hand.

### What Kind of Performance Improvement Professional are You?

With the foregoing discussion in mind, let me once again ask the question serving as the title of this month's column: What kind of Performance Improvement Professional are you?

### References

1. Rummler, G.A., "Technology Domains and NSPI: A Proposed Framework for Organizing the Professional Content of NSPI", *Performance and Instruction Journal*, October, 1983. Available on the web at <http://www.gearyrummler.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/34.-Technology-Domains-and-NSPI.pdf>

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2. Wallace, G.W., "The HPT Value Proposition in the Larger Improvement Arena," *Performance Improvement*, Vol 42, No 2, February 2003. Available on the web at [https://hpttreasures.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/pij-vol42\\_02\\_03.pdf](https://hpttreasures.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/pij-vol42_02_03.pdf)

### About the Author

Fred Nickols is a solution engineer toolmaker, knowledge worker, writer, consultant, and former executive who spent 20 years in the U.S. Navy, retiring as a decorated Chief Petty Officer. In the private sector, he worked as a consultant and then held executive positions with two former clients. Currently, Fred is the Managing Partner of [Distance Consulting LLC](#). His web site is home to the award-winning [Knowledge Workers' Tool Room](#) and more than 200 free articles, book chapters and papers. Fred is a longtime member of ISPI and writes this monthly column for *PerformanceXpress*. A complete listing of all Knowledge Worker columns is available [here](#).