

ask them if they had enough information, or if they wanted to look at the next one. **Gee...ask the user if it was useful? Then ask if that was enough?** What

would that mean to the evaluation of search tools? Well...

- the NUMBER of things returned wouldn't matter. **More would NOT be better.**
- the **usefulness would be decided by the people using the tool**, not somebody or thing that decides if an object is “relevant”
- **testing the search tools could happen in real life situations**, not in canned experiments, so we could actually make search tools that worked for people doing what they would be doing when they used the damn things.

So, we'd have search tools that were tailored for groups that looked for the same kind of objects. Those search tools would tend to return a few objects that were useful for those people *in the situations where they used the search tools!*

Sounds good to me!

See what you can get if you actually look at what you want to pay for instead of assuming you should pay for what everyone else does?

X Marks the Spot: Communication and Performance

We are, by our very nature, innovators. Evolution is about innovation on a very basic level. Those that could adapt lived. Those that could not died. So, **we are the descendants of innovators.**

Innovation is happening all the time in your company. As I have said, if you listen closely, you will hear the “A HAs!” from all around.

Innovation does not mean success is assured. In fact, **a commitment to innovation means an amount of failure is certain.**

Henry Petroski (read *To Engineer is Human* and *The Evolution of Useful Things*) writes about the evolution of useful things (paper clips, pencils, bridges). He shows how evolution of these objects is the result of improvements based in failures and discontent. **The trick is not to avoid failure, but to learn from it.**

So, **we must encourage attempts.** That leads to failures and successes. **When something succeeds, the real challenge begins.**

How can you get the innovation someone cooked up in

Peoria to help the person faced with the same problem in Saigon while it is still warm and yummy?

If it doesn't get there in time, the opportunity will have passed.

Helping and encouraging the flow of information and ideas between people working on the same type of problem is essential to success in the information age.

Frankly, in many companies, **just reducing the barriers to communication would be a huge step forward.** For information workers, problem solvers, project teams, in other words, the workforce in the information age... **allowing and encouraging communication is essential.**

DOPSS systems, as discussed earlier are one way to do this.

Supporting existing communities of purpose and communities of practice is another. You can read Lave & Wenger's *Situated Learning* and Wenger's *Communities of Practice* to learn more.

What about the many situations when **just communicating an idea is not enough?** When the question is not, “How do I solve this new

problem?”, but is “How do I complete this task?”, **the issue is not innovation, but performance.** The A HA! is the seed, but **growing innovation requires tending the seeds so they grow, develop, and produce.**

In the industrial age, when an innovation was chewed thoroughly before swallowing, training was the answer. When innovations were introduced once every year or two, one could take the time to build a training to share the love AND make sure that everyone was doing the same thing. **However, now that the target is moving and the landscape is changing constantly, there is not time to take time away from problem solving to sit in a class.**

This is a job for Performance Interventions. Big phrase. It can be very simple.

To get an outside line at my University, I have a phone code an 8 digit number. After losing it a couple of times, I wrote it on the phone with a marker. **That's a performance intervention.** I don't need to memorize it, just read the number conveniently located on my phone. If I want to sound official, I can say I am “reducing my cognitive load.” That sounds better than my memory sucks.

Job aids provide support **at the moment of need.** Sometimes you

learn the task (then it is Just in Time Training), sometimes you don't...and just keep using the aid. Usually it depends on how often you do the task, but it doesn't really matter. The aid is there.

Developing good performance interventions requires time and thought spent on analysis.

What is the problem...really? **What is the cause?** Is it lack of knowledge? Then, a training intervention may be the answer. Is it lack of information (like my phone code)? Then a job aid is the answer. Is it motivation (level one support people are penalized if they “follow procedure” and admit they need to move a customer to level two)? Is structure? Stewart (in *Intellectual Capital*) tells of a phone room where workers near an expert did better, so instead of a training, they bought everyone long phone cords.

Tom Gilbert started the field of performance improvement with his book, *Engineering Worthy Performance*. The International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI) is a good place to turn for guidance. I'm not going to shove an entire field into a chapter here, but here are some of the important ideas as they apply to growing innovation.

Analyze Analyze Analyze.

Look at the task being done. Look at the entire system.. **how does that task fit in to other tasks**, with other people, with other parts of the organization. What are the goals REALLY?

The more you know about what is going on, the more opportunities to affect performance you will find.

Measure what you want to achieve:

This is really where you **look for what you want to pay for**. Look at performance and what you want that performance to be. **Try an intervention. Then measure the performance again.** This requires cutting across some organizational boundaries. **You need to see the person at their job, not in a classroom to be able to assess changes at their job.** Remember the motor vehicles department? They didn't measure how long people had to wait. They never will know if they are improving. If you don't measure, you can't care.

Start simple:

Look for the easy way out. Look for the leverage. You can usually spot these by looking for or asking about what happens when things slow down. **Look at the bottlenecks.** What can you do to open em up?

Iterative Design:

I've mentioned Christopher Alexander's view of architecture.

Core to his ideas is that building is a constant job of “repair”. A building, or in this case, an intervention, can only be our best guess. **Even if it succeeds, we must change it, because of its very existence will change the way work is done.** You may be able to see new ways to continue to improve the workflow.

Caution innovation growing. Messes abound! The reason organizations like to measure the wrong thing (on time, on projected budget, training hours...can you add some?) **is that it is easy and clean.** You can project into a mythical future and return with clean measurements that go into a spreadsheet and show up nicely on charts. The problem is, *these clean numbers are worse than meaningless.* They take away the focus from what is actually happening.

Designing performance interventions is a messy business. It is not possible to predict before the project begins how long it will take, how much it will cost, what the result will be either in performance or number of “widgets”. **It is not a product, it is a process.**

So, how do you deal with this? What I do with companies I work with is to **suggest an investment and a time for an initial analysis with no clear deliverable.**

Then we try to paint a direction with broad strokes, building in **regular assessments where we discuss what has been achieved and decide on new directions, budgets, and set the next milestone.**

This kind of work just doesn't fit into a 5 year plan. However, the sanctity of long term planning has come under increasing attack. Peters, in his wonderful new book Re-imagine, says, “You're lucky if you can write a *five-week* plan that makes any sense...yes...after five weeks.”