



4.1.8 Issues in Choosing Performance Criteria

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A well-constructed assessment process can produce quality feedback for the performer. In an ideal world, a performer embarking upon the assessment process chooses relevant assessment criteria by determining the most important areas of the performance that could and possibly should be improved based upon desired performance outcomes. In the real world, however, there are many external and internal factors beyond the desired assessment outcomes that can influence a performer's choice of assessment criteria. This module discusses these factors and their impact upon the choice of performance criteria, the outcome of the assessment, and the improvement of future performances.

Selecting Performance Criteria

When a performer is selecting criteria to be used within an assessment, he or she should choose criteria that will facilitate the use of the feedback in the improvement of future performances. It is important for the performer, prior to selecting performance criteria, to first analyze his or her reasons for participating in the assessment (Mager, 1997). The performer should then take stock of any affective issues or concerns which could potentially impact the selection of optimal and relevant performance criteria. Similarly, it is important for the assessor to review the criteria selected by a performer to determine whether the performer is potentially struggling with any issues which may hinder the assessment process. If this is determined to be the case, the assessor and the performer should work together to remove these obstacles (**4.1.1 Overview of Assessment**).

A good assessment process takes time and strategic thinking to establish (Freeman & Lewis, 1998). Performers should therefore choose assessment criteria that are likely to elicit the kind of feedback that they will be willing and able to use to improve their future performance (**4.1.3 Mindset for Assessment**).

The performer will be *willing* to use the feedback if

- The performer has a desire, either internally or externally motivated, to improve
- The performer trusts the assessor to give useful feedback
- The performer trusts that the assessor is genuinely interested in facilitating improvement

The performer will be *able* to improve by using the feedback if

- The criteria selected by the performer relate directly to the desired performance outcomes
- The performer will have an opportunity to perform in the criteria areas in the future

- The assessor is able to observe an actual performance related to at least one criterion area, observe relevant behaviors, and give timely feedback

If as a result of selecting poor performance criteria, the performer is neither willing nor able to use the assessment feedback, one of the following scenarios could result.

Scenario 1 Performer Does Not Seek Improvement

In this scenario, the performer, who has no desire to improve, chooses performance criteria that are either so narrowly focused or overly broad that there is little opportunity to impact future performances. Within this scenario, the performer might select performance areas for the assessment in which he or she already excels, as a means of guaranteeing a positive assessment outcome.

Example: The institution has made it clear that it wants teachers to demonstrate greater use of cooperative learning and teaching applications based on recent research related to teaching and learning. A faculty member (performer) consents to participate in a peer coaching session with a colleague (assessor) only because this is required once a year at the institution. The faculty member has been teaching a lecture course for two decades from a well-developed set of notes and tells engaging anecdotes in class. The faculty member is uncomfortable in cooperative learning situations and has no interest in exploring changes in his or her teaching based on the sciences of learning (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). So, the faculty member gives the assessor criteria that are related to the number of students paying attention, how well he or she organizes PowerPoint™ slides, and whether the lecture is appropriately paced to facilitate notetaking. These are areas in which the assessee already feels successful.

Scenario 2 Performer Does Not Trust the Assessor

In this scenario, there is a lack of trust between the performer and the assessor, either because the assessor is an expert in the field and is perceived by the performer to be lacking in assessment experience, or because the performer believes that the expertise of an assessor will cause his or her feedback to be evaluative, even though he or she is serving in an assessor role.

Example: A research scientist is assessing students' science fair projects. In this case, a student (performer) might be reluctant to choose performance criteria that would imply an understanding of the science behind the project, not because he or she doesn't believe that the feedback is necessary, but because he or she is afraid that the renowned scientist's (assessor's) deep understanding of the subject will cause the assessor the project in an evaluative way.

Scenario 3 Assessor Will Ultimately Become an Evaluator

In this case, the assessor will make decisions based on a future evaluation. The performer may be tempted to select performance criteria in areas where he or she already has strong skills, hoping to focus the assessor's/potential evaluator's attention on his or her relative strengths and direct attention away from areas for improvement.

Example: A department chair (assessor) is examining an untenured faculty member's teaching performance. Within the next year, the department chair will either be recommending or not recommending the faculty member for tenure. In this case, even if the faculty member (performer) is aware of areas where he or she could improve, he or she is unlikely to choose performance criteria in those particular areas for the assessment, as it might point out areas which could potentially trigger low evaluations in the future.

Scenario 4 Performer Has Limited Self-Assessment Skills

In this case, the performer is not able to distinguish areas that are in need of improvement from those that are not. It is important for the assessor to guide the performer's choice of criteria (*4.1.10 Assessing Assessments*).

Example: A student (performer) is giving a speech in front of a large audience of fellow students and faculty members for the first time. The professor will be assessing the student's performances both in public speaking and in

the content knowledge of a particular subject. Because the performer is a public speaking novice, it is difficult for the student/performer to choose key criteria for the professor to use in his or her assessment.

Concluding Thoughts

The key to selecting instructive performance criteria lies not only in understanding the desired outcomes for an activity, but also in considering the affective issues that the performer might bring to the assessment process. The performer must be willing to engage in constant perception checking, continuously inventorying any potential issues or perceptions which may hinder the progression of a successful assessment process. Further, the performer should have an open and forthcoming relationship with the assessor, so that the two can readily discuss performance criteria, skill improvement areas, and action plans. If issues of future evaluation are a problem, the performer and the assessor must proactively discuss both of their abilities to separate the two processes, as well as the reasons for their separation (*4.1.2 Distinctions Between Assessment and Evaluation*). If these processes cannot be separated, it may be prudent for the performer to select another assessor, if possible.

References

- Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (Eds.). (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Freeman, R., & Lewis, R. (1998). *Planning and implementing assessment*. London: Kogan Page.
- Mager, R. F. (1997). *Preparing instructional objectives: A critical tool in the development of effective instruction* (3rd ed.). Atlanta: Center for Effective Performance.