tasks, many operations managers were simply doing low-level work themselves because it was faster than taking the time to teach a new employee.

Finally, many customer-service and problem-resolution tasks formerly handled by the operations managers had been moved into processing centers. A number of the operations managers had found it more expedient, and better for their customers, to continue to handle these issues personally rather than trust them to the processing centers, where response time was slow and accuracy not dependable.

With these and additional findings, the performance consultants were able to show that the operations managers had the skills and knowledge to do their jobs, thus ruling out training as a viable solution. They then recommended a cascading suite of solutions that included aligned priorities from senior management, delegation tools for the operations managers, and service-level agreements with the processing centers. The solutions were packaged into an offsite meeting exclusively for operations managers that showcased their concerns and gave them a prominent voice in the organization.

In addition to the improved performance of the operations managers, an unprecedented reorganization in the processing centers, and a significant shuffling of roles and responsibilities among senior management, results showed a decrease in the number of operations managers on leave and a considerable increase in customer satisfaction. Let us take a look behind the scenes and examine the tools that the performance consultants used.

Performance Systems

The performance-improvement professionals used performance-architecture tools to repair an existing performance system. They used two of our favorites, the Performance Map and the Iceberg Model, which we will introduce as we explore performance systems in more depth.

Let us begin with the notion of human performance as being those valued results produced by people working within a system. Many performance-improvement professionals have their roots in training. They have broadened their approach from delivering training to improving performance systems. Performance system design is not solution-driven and gives the practitioner the space to engage all relevant aspects of the total performance system in the development of the solution.

We frequently find ourselves in the business of repairing existing performance systems, as did the performance consultants in the operations managers' case. In some situations we may construct new performance systems. According to Tosti (2004), this is very much a back-to-the-future situation. He observes that the earliest practitioners of HPT were focused on building rather than repairing as a way to create new performance-improvement alternatives. As our discipline evolved, we became more concerned with identifying performance problems and fixing them, and moved away from inventing new performance systems. We would like to see among our HPT colleagues once again an increased emphasis on the building of performance systems.

Once, a team of performance-improvement specialists was asked to support a job redesign project. The position, "Manager of the Service Department," was renamed "Customer Service Manager," and refocused from a repair operation to emphasize the selling of customer services. This meant added management responsibilities for the incumbents, new customer service skills and knowledge for them to acquire, and a progressive shift in what had been a very traditional repair shop role. Wisely, the executive responsible for the job change initiative realized that the revamped position required a new performance system to support those in the job and enable them to be successful, and he asked the performance-improvement team to design it. One of the tools they used was the Performance Map.

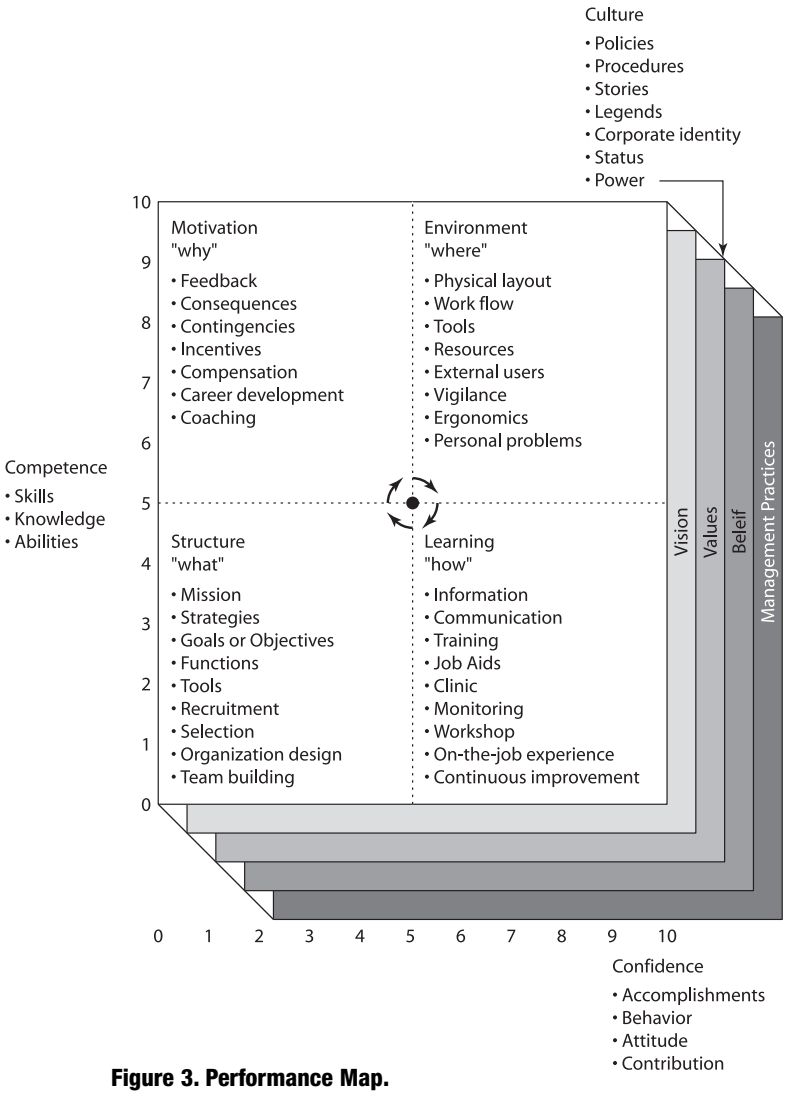

Figure 3. Performance Map.

Performance Map

Whether to solve a problem or to respond to an opportunity, the Performance Map's simple grid format is a useful tool for diagnosing performance-related issues (Figure 3). It is easy to explain to managers, who often pick up a pen and actively engage with the map.

The four key quadrants are

- *Structure:* the foundation of the organization
- *Motivation:* the emotions, desires, and psychological needs that incite action
- *Environment:* the external and internal conditions that affect the growth and development of the organization
- *Learning:* the increase of employee proficiency in a given area

The north-south axis looks at employee competence on a scale of 0 (low) to 10 (high). The east-west axis addresses the employee's confidence in her or his ability to do the job, also on a scale of 0 (low) to 10 (high).

As an example, when you and a manager have identified specific employees who have performance issues, you would follow these specific steps:

- Help the manager determine the identified employees' job competence by asking a question such as, What skills do employees need to complete the job? Ask the manager to rate the identified employees from 0 (no skills or knowledge) to 10 (highly skilled and knowledgeable).
- Next, ascertain the employees' level of confidence by probing for examples of accomplishments, behavior, attitudes, commitment, and contributions. You might say, "Tell me about the general attitude of employees toward this job." Again, ask the manager to rate the performers. Zero means your client has no confidence in the performers and 10, that he or she has total confidence in the performers. You may also want to ask the performers these same questions. In our experience we often get conflicting responses. This is a signal to you to clearly specify the gap between manager and performer.
- Mark the levels for both competence and confidence on the grid and draw the appropriate horizontal and vertical lines to connect the two variables.
- With such information, you can identify the quadrant in which the two variables intersect. This will help you to diagnose the most common areas of organizational problems or opportunities and prescribe a series of effective solutions. For example, if you identify a structural deficiency, possible solutions might include revisiting the mission statement or developing goals and objectives for the individual or group. Other quadrants will suggest other solutions.
- Regardless of which quadrant houses the issue, you need to consider the other three as you work toward a solution. Remember that you are operating in a performance system, and actions taken in one area will have an impact on the others. This is especially important if you have identified the Learning quadrant as the source of the performance issue. If a manager has a confident employee, a high performer who has the necessary skills and knowledge, you would want to engineer the environment for success so that the employee will continue to perform at a high level.
- Finally, consider the organization's culture as you identify solutions, to ensure that your prescription will do the job without unwanted side effects. Few elements of organizational life are as pervasive as culture; ignore this powerful force at your peril. We know from experience that performance-improvement recommendations and implementation plans must be culture-compatible, or they will be destroyed. When strategy meets culture, culture always wins.

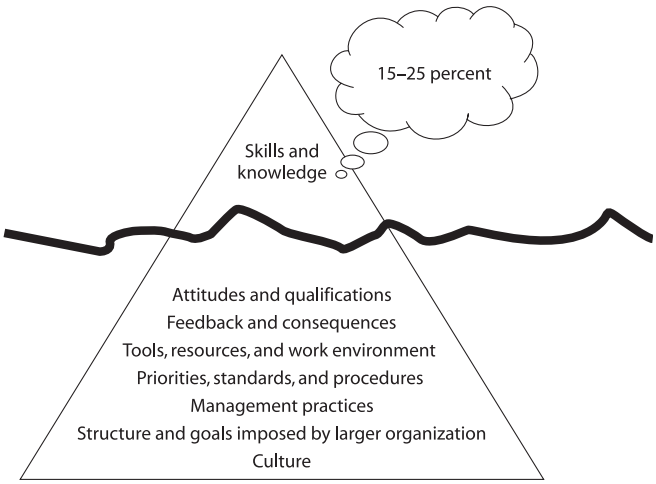

Figure 4. The Iceberg Model.

Tip of the Iceberg

The Performance Map guides us to the probable source of our performance issue. Our second tool enables us to explore further and integrate performance-improvement solutions with all related components of the organization's performance system. The iceberg is a metaphor for much that can go wrong when we start with an assumed solution, at the tip, and create an organizational disaster because we neglect to consider all the layers of the iceberg below the surface (Figure 2.4).

Organizational Level. The Iceberg Model encourages us to start our work at the base organizational level with a cultural audit, so that we get to know the operational norms (Carleton and Lineberry, 2004). With this perspective we can more effectively analyze, diagnose, and prescribe performance-improvement solutions that will address the identified concerns and mesh with the organization's business practices. Understanding the environment avoids costly and time-consuming errors. The cultural audit is also a valuable precursor to using the Performance Map.