THE COBBLER'S CHILDREN: IMPROVING PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT AT AMERIGROUP

LaToya M. Gilbert | Scott Weersing | Susan Patterson | Lisa Renee Fisher | Carl Binder, CPT, PhD

A team of performance consultants at Amerigroup applied their chosen human performance technology (HPT) methodology, Six Boxes® Performance Thinking, to define *their own performance*, identify improvement opportunities, and build performance infrastructure in the form of clearer expectations and regular feedback, better processes and tools, and more relevant consequences, all while developing their own skills and knowledge and conducting client projects using the methodology. This article summarizes the context, process, and accomplishments to date, along with the lessons learned from this ongoing effort.

AS PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT professionals we sometimes suffer from a lack of time and priority for systematically improving our *own* performance. The *cobbler's children* analogy, in which "the shoemaker has no time to make shoes for his children," is applicable to professional groups of all kinds. As Dattner (2008) observed in his popular weblog, "Like the proverbial children of the shoemaker who go without shoes . . . [there are] technology companies that have outdated computer systems, marketing firms that don't market themselves in any way, and consulting firms that fail to put into practice for themselves a single theory or model upon which they have built their businesses."

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

At Amerigroup, an ISPI Advocate organization, our team of performance consultants, working as part of the organizational development (OD) group within human resources (HR), decided to take up this challenge by applying performance improvement methods to *ourselves*. We began with an extensive front-end analysis using the Six Boxes® Approach (www.SixBoxes.com), followed by planning, design, and ongoing continuous improvement. This article provides background, describes our overall approach, summarizes some of the highlights, and concludes with lessons learned.

As part of a larger effort to spread collaborative performance improvement across Amerigroup, this project

---

was an instance of leading by example. We used our own methods to demonstrate to internal clients and stakeholders that we value and actively *practice* for ourselves what we promote and offer to them. This ongoing effort addresses two goals that any organization shifting from *training and development* to *performance improvement* must address:

1. Establish and improve our own capabilities as performance consultants.
2. Market our services to prospective clients and stakeholders so that their requests to us and collaboration with us will lead to more effective *systemic* solutions to performance improvement, not merely training.

This project had its roots in a multiyear effort to move from training and development to performance consulting, a transition that many organizations have been making in recent years. B. J. Vaughn, then Amerigroup's chief learning officer, led her organization in an exploration of more *systemic* approaches to performance improvement that would support more effective communication and partnering with stakeholders. This exploration concluded that human performance technology (HPT), along with its professional home, the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI), provides the most credible and evidence-based vehicles for accomplishing the transition. Attracted to Gilbert's (1978) behavior engineering model and its implications for getting out of the training box and into performance solutions (Binder, 2012), Vaughn committed the organization to pursuing HPT in earnest.

Due in part to their organizational development orientation, HR and OD leadership recognized early in the process how the complexity and jargon of performance improvement models and methodologies can impede communication about performance and its drivers between performance consultants and their stakeholders. After research, sampling, and completion of various HPT programs and workshops, the leadership settled on Six Boxes® Performance Thinking, a plain-English approach to performance improvement based on two simple mental models and an underlying *logic* for describing, measuring, and improving performance. In the HPT lineage of Thomas F. Gilbert (Binder, 1998; Gilbert, 1978; Harless, 1978), this approach offers an added focus on fostering *communication* with nonspecialists and stakeholders using language that anyone can understand. Such communication can accelerate impact through increased cross-functional communication, alignment, and collaboration related to human performance.

IMPLEMENTATION PATH

We began by introducing the models and language of Six Boxes® Performance Thinking to a cross-section of managers, leaders, and process and performance professionals using the Performance Thinking Network's one-day Introduction to Performance Thinking workshop. We invited 50 participants to the workshop and followed up with a webinar for another 50 key employees a week later. We later learned that many nonspecialists who attended the Introduction began to formulate more systemic performance improvement solutions as a result, so we have continued to offer the program periodically with open enrollment.

Following the Introduction, we engaged the Performance Thinking Network to conduct a Six Boxes® Practitioner Program for a dozen performance professionals from OD, plus a handful of process improvement specialists and managers from other groups. The program lays a foundation of performance improvement logic and tools in a workshop, and then coaches participants through application projects over the next several months. Once our core team had become Six Boxes® Practitioners, we began a yearlong Six Boxes® Champions Program focused on applying this approach to our own individual and collective performance.

BUILDING A PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

Amerigroup leadership recognized that building a performance improvement capability would require a *systemic* effort, not merely a few workshops. The goal of the Six Boxes® Champions team was to build a sustainable performance improvement infrastructure over the course of a year of coached practice and application, including projects for developing or improving our processes, methods, tools, and templates, which we tailored to and integrated with other practices within the organization. We sought both to develop an experienced team of individuals to conduct performance improvement projects and to build organizational capability beyond any one or even a group of the individuals themselves. We believe that organization-level performance improvement *infrastructure*, not merely *individual or team* competence, is necessary for sustainability and continuous improvement of HPT practice.

A PARADIGM SHIFT: FROM BEHAVIOR TO WORK OUTPUTS

As anyone who has attempted to build a team of performance consultants can confirm, the problems

We believe that organization-level performance improvement infrastructure, not merely individual or team competence, is necessary for sustainability and continuous improvement of human performance technology (HPT) practice.

and opportunities that performance professionals might encounter can be quite diverse. Classical HPT, pioneered by Gilbert (1978), Harless (1978), and their peers focuses on the identification of *work outputs* or *accomplishments* that people or teams must produce to achieve business results, rather than on what Gilbert (1978, p. 7) called "the cult of behavior." Successful adoption of this approach requires a significant change in thinking— what is commonly called a *paradigm shift.* We use the Performance Chain, one of the Performance Thinking models, to facilitate this shift from behavior to work outputs during the analysis and design of performance solutions (see Figure 1).

The first task of the performance consultant, after tentatively targeting a performance problem or an opportunity for improvement, is to identify the specific work outputs that must be produced or improved to achieve desired business results. We then use the target work outputs to determine what behavior to develop, strengthen, or support in individuals, groups, or processes related to the performance we seek to improve.
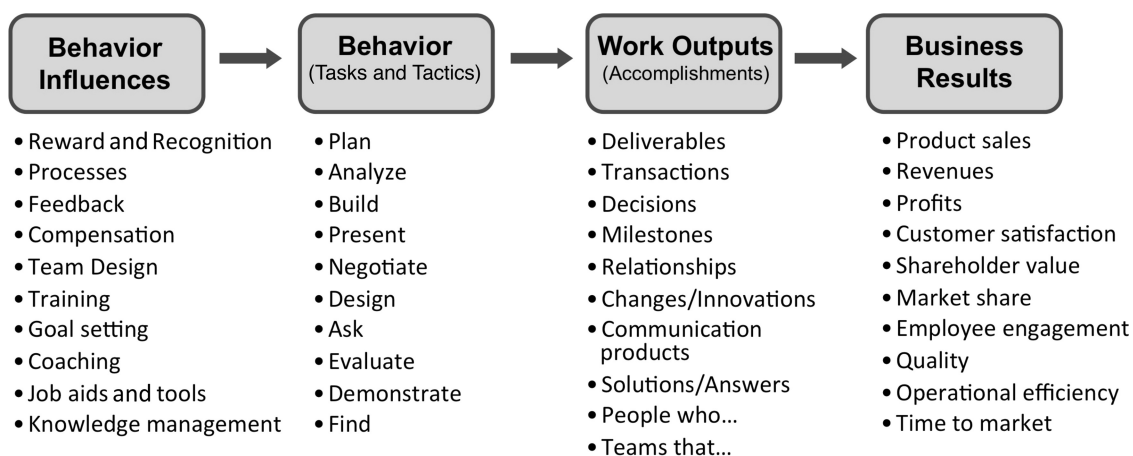
Making the paradigm shift from behavior to work outputs is a key step in the transition from training and development to performance improvement, and it can entail many beginners' mistakes that offer opportunities for corrective feedback and new learning. The precision with which we distinguish between *behavior* (i.e., human activity) and the valuable *work outputs* (i.e., the products of behavior) is critical to effective and efficient performance improvement.

Once having precisely described the elements of target performance, we use the Six Boxes® Model to assess and improve behavior influences, the factors that obstruct or enable desired behavior (see Figure 2).

The logic or sequence of thinking described in these last few paragraphs summarizes the approach that we began to apply to client projects as well as to our own performance.

SAMPLE PROJECTS

A partial list of projects from our last few years of work illustrates the diversity of applications and the wide variety of work outputs that we address.

Behavior Influences	Behavior (Tasks and Tactics)	Work Outputs (Accomplishments)	Business Results
• Reward and Recognition	• Plan	• Deliverables	• Product sales
• Processes	• Analyze	• Transactions	• Revenues
• Feedback	• Build	• Decisions	• Profits
• Compensation	• Present	• Milestones	• Customer satisfaction
• Team Design	• Negotiate	• Relationships	• Shareholder value
• Training	• Design	• Changes/Innovations	• Market share
• Goal setting	• Ask	• Communication products	• Employee engagement
• Coaching	• Evaluate	• Solutions/Answers	• Quality
• Job aids and tools	• Demonstrate	• People who…	• Operational efficiency
• Knowledge management	• Find	• Teams that…	• Time to market

© 2010 The Performance Thinking Network

FIGURE 1. THE PERFORMANCE CHAIN

Environment	Expectations and Feedback **1**	Tools and Resources **2**	Consequences and Incentives **3**
Individual	Skills and Knowledge **4**	Selection and Assignment *"Capacity"* **5**	Motives and Preferences *"Attitude"* **6**

© The Performance Thinking Network
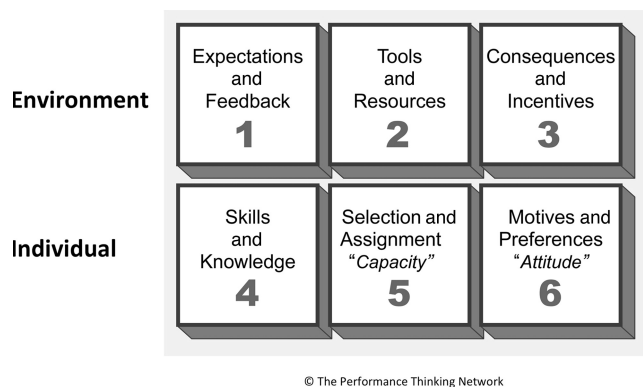
FIGURE 2. THE SIX BOXES® MODEL

To achieve long-term performance consulting impact, we believe that shifting the behavior of our clients is as important as changing our own practices and tools.

- **Define an existing but varying and ill-defined role.** Standardize the major work outputs, criteria, and activities for a senior job title that has evolved in diverse forms over time across multiple locations and in acquired business units.

- **Improve claims processing performance.** Accelerate ramp-up of newly hired employees and improve on-the-job performance during a period in which the claims process itself and the system used to conduct it are changing. Shift from what was originally seen by stakeholders as a training request to a more systemic performance intervention.

- **Define a new role in provider data management.** Define a new job title that will lead a team and will also conduct analyses of problems and issues in the overall data management process. Expand scope of the project to include process analysis and process management.

- **Establish a new call center to foster innovation, rebranding, and improved customer experience.** Building a *petri dish* for innovation in customer service and management practices, this project opened up and clarified decisions about job definitions built around work outputs rather than competencies, applied performance-based screening in the hiring process, and integrated cultural values and branding into an on-boarding program that also delivered technical training and overall alignment to the customer experience. In the course of this project, the performance improvement team introduced a new accomplishment-based way of thinking about differences in performance requirements and support, acting more as project facilitators than as providers of deliverables.

- **Spread collaborative performance improvement at Amerigroup.** Define and monitor progress at Amerigroup with respect to acceptance and productive use of performance improvement solutions versus

training-only, and encourage communication using the plain-English vocabulary and concepts of Six Boxes® Performance Thinking among line managers and other stakeholders. To achieve a long-term performance consulting impact, we believe that shifting the behavior of our clients is as important as changing our own practices and tools.

- **Refine our performance improvement processes and team.** Identify, prioritize, and address opportunities to improve the deliverables, capabilities, and effectiveness of our team. This is an ongoing continuous improvement effort aimed at capturing and embedding best practices in how we conduct our work.

While most of these projects reflect the day-to-day challenges that come to our team, like many performance consulting groups, the last two are long-term efforts designed to create a culture of performance improvement across the company, and to improve our team's ability to respond to opportunities for improving business results through people. The latter project is the focus of the remainder of this article.

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK: REFINING OUR PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS AND TEAM

Like many teams of performance professionals, our team always had more incoming requests for work than it could reasonably handle. As a partial solution to this problem, we prioritize the projects we will pursue or accept based on the *readiness* of internal clients, a tactic to manage incoming demand and increase our likelihood of success. As we worked to partner with clients around more systemic performance solutions, we recognized the need to build greater alignment with other groups in OD, to define and refine our processes and tools, and

to establish other prerequisite conditions and enablers to support our own performance.

Why had we not fully addressed these prerequisites previously? Like many professional groups, we put it off because it is far easier to respond to clients' urgent demands than to set aside the time and attention to improve our own performance. But in this project, we decided to address our own effectiveness head on.

We began by identifying work outputs and key behavior of our own team and determining the *behavior influences* that currently obstruct or prevent us from optimal performance, as well as those that could enable or accelerate our own performance, if established or improved. As our discussions and analysis proceeded, we recognized certain working assumptions that informed this effort, including the following:

- **Customer focus.** Among our most important working assumptions was a focus on our customers—that is, our internal clients—on the value of solutions we deliver to them and on how we do so. This helped us define the criteria for *good* work outputs delivered to clients, using what is sometimes called *the voice of the customer.*

- **A bias for organizational development.** As previously mentioned, Amerigroup's performance improvement professionals are part of a larger OD organization. From the OD perspective, the plain-English terminology and simple mental models of Six Boxes® Performance Thinking provide effective communication vehicles for partnering with clients and stakeholders. Seeding the organization with quarterly Introduction to Performance Thinking workshops, which any employee can attend, and then encouraging key stakeholders to participate helped to establish a shared language for and understanding of human performance and its drivers. For example, one colleague whom we encouraged to attend was easily able to engage with us in a discussion using the Six Boxes® model as a framework about the non-training factors that she and her team would have to manage to ensure application of new learning on the job. As another example, we were able to help human resources managers use Six Boxes® Performance Thinking in work with *their* clients, making them more effective partners in the overall performance improvement effort. In addition, we created an online SharePoint learning community for sharing general information about performance improvement, tools for those who complete Performance Thinking® programs, links to reference documents and videos, and contact information for our team.

- **Doing it right while being flexible.** Recognizing the dangers of perfectionism, we agreed to maintain *precision* in our breakdown of performance into its constituent elements of *behavior*, *work outputs, criteria,* and *business results*, and in use of the Six Boxes® model. At the same time, we remained *flexible* in how we apply the logic of performance improvement, gather information during analysis and implementation planning, and engage clients as partners. Our guiding principle is that the process must lead to verified descriptions of elements in the Performance Chain, including behavior influences.

- **Expecting to learn from experience.** As relative beginners in performance improvement, we used projects and coaching from our consultant, Carl Binder, as well as sharing among ourselves, to

  - Learn from oversights or mistakes.
  - Continuously improve our practice.
  - Integrate the tools and methods that we each brought from our existing areas of expertise.
  - Use our best guesses as we worked in situations with many unknowns.

At Amerigroup, part of the culture is to execute as rapidly as possible to take advantage of opportunities, and then to follow up with continuous improvement. While there were significant and unavoidable bumps along the way in our own efforts, we gained confidence as we worked on projects and found that even imperfect applications of our adopted approach brought valuable clarity and understanding to every situation or project.

STAGES IN THE PROJECT

Following what is known as *performance improvement logic* in the Six Boxes® Approach, our project moved through these stages:

1. **Identifying and prioritizing desired work outputs.** Anchoring the analysis in the work outputs that performance consultants—that is, we, the performers—produce for internal clients and partners, we used a backward imaging process plus interviews with our leadership, one another, and selected internal clients to define the major deliverables, decisions, and other work outputs we were expected to produce.

2. **Linking work outputs to business results and defining criteria for good work outputs**. Using the same interviews, along with additional discussions with

stakeholders and internal customers, we identified the business results to which the work outputs would be expected to contribute as well as the criteria (e.g., timely, within budget, and so on) that the proposed work outputs would need to satisfy in order to ensure those contributions.

3. **Identifying behavior needed to produce work outputs.** On the path to identifying the behavior influences that would be needed to support our own performance, we analyzed our current practices, examined practices that we were in the process of adopting, and discussed requirements with stakeholders to capture information about tasks and tactics (behavior, needed to produce work outputs that meet criteria).

4. **Selecting possible measures to evaluate progress.** As we reviewed the work outputs, criteria, and behavior identified so far, we generated practical options for measurement of business results, work outputs, and behavior that we could use to monitor and evaluate improvement of our productivity, quality, and impact (Binder, 2009). We have discovered in this process that focusing evaluation on work outputs and criteria makes it easier to see where desired performance is not happening and where there are opportunities for improvement. Even during initial training, and certainly afterwards on the job, identifying where individuals' and groups' work outputs do not meet criteria can provide immediate feedback for iterative improvement of behavior influences.

5. **Examining behavior influences, both obstructions and enablers.** Using the Six Boxes® Model as a guide, we conducted observations and discussions with one another, spoke with our leadership, and reviewed our evolving toolkit to identify factors likely to enable and obstruct our own behavior. This provided a foundation for formulating recommendations to improve key environmental and individual behavior influences.

6. **Presenting findings and deciding on next steps.** After summarizing our findings, we presented them to our leadership for review and decisions about next steps.

SELECTED WORK OUTPUTS

Table 1 lists some of the key work outputs we identified for ourselves, the criteria used to define *good* ones, and the business results to which successful delivery of the work outputs would be expected to contribute.

As with work outputs that we identify in client projects, some of these are tangible *deliverables*. Some are

less tangible, such as *decisions* at the end of or during various types of activities. Other important work outputs include *relationships* that contribute significant value to the business and can be evaluated against specific criteria, with ancillary work outputs such as *requests* for performance solutions rather than orders for training. We always attempt to identify criteria that define a *good* work output—that is, characteristics of the thing itself that clarify requirements. We speak with downstream customers and examine the business results to which the work output is expected to contribute. With clear criteria, it is possible to *count* work outputs that are acceptable and those that need improvement and thus to measure work outputs over time in a straightforward way.

IDENTIFYING BEHAVIOR AND BEHAVIOR INFLUENCES

Once we have identified target work outputs and criteria, we attempt to capture exemplary behavior—that is, the tasks and tactics needed to produce each work output as effectively and efficiently as possible. We go only to the level of detail that will be needed to investigate behavior influences that are currently enabling or obstructing needed behavior and to identify possible ways of accelerating the behavior with additional or improved behavior influences. Table 2 presents a simple example for one of our target work outputs.

One way in which our self-improvement project differed from other projects we have conducted is that some of the behavior influences we identified for enabling or improving our own performance are work outputs or new deliverables *we* will need to produce for ourselves. For example, a *product sheet* describing our offerings to internal clients is an important tool for generating informed requests for service and enabling our clients to speak knowledgeably about performance improvement. Ongoing work on this self-improvement project continues to yield ideas for behavior influences that *we* can design and produce to improve *our own* performance. In this respect, the project is partly an effort in self-management.

SELECTING AND PRIORITIZING RECOMMENDATIONS

Before we began this self-improvement project, the team had been functioning well, providing valuable solutions to internal clients and continuously increasing impact. Consequently, this effort was more about *optimization*

TABLE 1	SELECTED PERFORMANCE CONSULTING WORK OUTPUTS	
MAJOR WORK OUTPUTS	**SHOULD MEET THESE CRITERIA**	**TO ADVANCE THESE BUSINESS RESULTS**
Sample Work Outputs Needed to Deliver Value to the Company		
Decision to engage in project with a client	Takes business readiness into account Fits team "product" list Within team scope/resources Approved by leaders	Productivity Cost management Client satisfaction
Findings and Recommendations Report	Follows template for sections and content On time, as agreed Logical and data-based Explicitly addresses business results Concise, easy to read Leads to agreed-upon steps	Operational efficiency Client satisfaction
Project Plan	Follows template for sections and content Enables team alignment Addresses possible obstacles and risks	Operational efficiency
Implemented performance solution	Implemented by agreed-upon time Within budget Accepted and used by associates and leaders Produces measured improvement Credit or accountability shared with others Includes improvement iterations, if needed	Project-specific business results Operational efficiency Risk management
Collaborative relationship with client	Shared vision and goal setting Mutual response to communication within agreed-upon time windows Two-way trust and sharing of information Shared risk and management of both sides' overall responsibilities Mutual delivery on commitments Mutual professional respect	Operational efficiency Cost management
Sample Work Outputs Reflecting Transition From Training to Performance Consulting		
Request from a client to help with performance (vs. provide training)	Client acknowledges that not-training variables also affect performance Seeks our help defining solution Within our "product list"	Operational efficiency Specific business results Client satisfaction
Internal clients who use shared language about performance and its drivers	Client communicates with recognition of performance *system* Client describes performance or its drivers using language of Six® Boxes model or Performance Chain	Operational efficiency Distributed organizational capacity (for performance problem solving)

TABLE 2	SAMPLE ANALYSIS OF BEHAVIOR AND BEHAVIOR INFLUENCES	
WORK OUTPUT	**BEHAVIOR (TASKS AND TACTICS)**	**BEHAVIOR INFLUENCES**
Collaborative client relationship	Set expectations in the beginning and continuously clarify Establish best communication method Document agreed-upon expectations Provide specific, timely, honest feedback following the Five Steps Schedule regular client meetings Negotiate changes to deliverables ahead of time Read related research and articles and share with client judiciously Provide updated materials such as project plans and design documents in a timely fashion Ask for feedback Proactively discuss potential new projects with client to develop long-term partnership	Our list of products and services (1) Agenda and topic checklists for key meetings (1,2) Five Steps of Feedback guidelines and skills (1,4) Project Management Template (1,2) Email, phone, SharePoint site (2) Templates for key documents, reports (2) Project measurement and feedback also function as consequences (1,3) Team library and online resources and subscriptions (2,4)

Note. Numbers refer to cells in the Six Boxes® model.

than about fixing a problem. It was a *design-engineering* project intended to identify opportunities for refinement and to help us deliver as much value as possible as we help the company improve business results through people as cost-efficiently as possible. We identified many opportunities for improvement, including the potential for clarifying expectations and capturing feedback more effectively (box 1), improving our tools and processes (box 2), connecting ourselves more directly to the consequences of our work (box 3), and developing our own skills and knowledge (box 4). Given such a relatively long list of opportunities, we needed to prioritize our recommendations to management for allocating precious time to improve our own performance, for improving our own processes and tools, and for making our own work more cost-effective.

Table 3 provides a partial list of the initiatives and projects that we and our management decided to set as priorities, with indications of progress on each at the time of the completion of this article. Because our first priority is to deliver solutions to clients, this list represents projects we will complete when we can and continue to improve while working on other projects and initiatives.

As we have made progress on these self-improvement efforts, we have continued to learn from projects for clients in which we apply the Six Boxes® Approach to deliver value to the organization, refine our own capabilities, and learn to communicate and partner more effectively with stakeholders. Our actual findings and recommendations, and the progress we have made in addressing them, have been more detailed than can be described in this article.

Particularly in relationship to expectations and feedback, we work daily with our leaders and colleagues to gain greater alignment across levels and functions. In addition, we continue to implement two ongoing recommendations: (1) requesting and using periodic feedback from our coach, Carl Binder, and (2) monitoring implementation of our recommendations against business results to determine and improve our effectiveness.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT

To assess the impact of this effort, we turned to both quantitative and qualitative evaluation. The most immediate form of quantitative evaluation is the measurement of specific project outcomes, which serves as feedback for both our team and our clients. For example, in one project completed in partnership with another organization, the goal was to reduce the variance between the planned time to complete a specific type of administrative review and the time actually required. As a result of implementing our recommendations, variance fell 23% over the course of a year. Such results, considered valuable by our clients, are typical of the measured impact that our work is able to produce for the organization while helping us to sell our services to leaders, teams, and departments that can benefit.

Requesting feedback from clients helps us to evaluate impact as well as to garner informal consequences that we value as a team. For example, a project manager for whom we implemented solutions as part of a customer experience program, said, "The performance consulting

TABLE 3 **PARTIAL LIST OF HIGH-PRIORITY PROJECTS WITH PROGRESS TO DATE**

PROJECT	DESCRIPTION AND PROGRESS TO DATE
List products and services offered by the team	Sets expectations for clients and defines the scope of our work. List has been finalized, and is periodically updated.
Refine criteria for good work outputs delivered by our team	Enables us to better evaluate our own work and operations. Part of process definition and improvement projects listed below, this is ongoing.
Define work intake process starting with client requests	Worked with other groups to define work intake process, including assessment of client readiness, to improve likelihood of success.
Standardize project plan to clarify expectations, track milestones, and provide feedback	Template for plan and ongoing management process are up and running, improving our ability to manage projects consistently and effectively.
Develop processes to manage shared projects across departments	Clarified or defined process for engaging other professionals (instructional designers, trainers) to help implement recommendations. Designed process to manage shared projects so that a coordinated set of solutions will be available for clients.
Create consequences and incentives aligned with expectations including a career path for performance consultants	Began with creation of multiple levels of the performance consultant job title and opportunities to speak at conferences, and so forth. Currently adapting to new organization with acquisition by WellPoint.

team took a project that was good . . . and made it better. Their partnership with the program team had a positive impact on not only the provider experience but on the associate experience, as well" (personal communication, January 11, 2011).

With measurement and active pursuit of feedback built into our approach, the ongoing evaluation of impact enables us to refine our focus, sharpen our application of the Six Boxes® Approach, and find additional opportunities for improving our tools and methods.

LESSONS LEARNED

Applying HPT to our own performance was new ground for us: fertile, but risky in some respects. Our coach, Carl Binder, was able to help us through some of the unexpected challenges, and we used our work together as a context for creative problem solving, stretching our own capabilities and bringing each team member's experiences to bear in new ways.

Here are some of the most important lessons from our ongoing self-improvement project:

- **Self-analysis and self-improvement are difficult.** It is always difficult to analyze one's own performance, especially as one is learning the process of analysis

itself. As Tom Gilbert once said, "The reason an expert tennis player can't tell you what he does is because he's not watching his feet while he plays" (personal communication, June 2, 1988). Like any professionals, we have unconscious competence and cannot always accurately identify or describe our own behavior and behavior influences. It can be difficult to assume the perspective of observing ourselves. Working together in this project was helpful, since we could observe and reflect on one another's performance. The challenge is to continuously check one's assumptions and double check one's findings.

- **Being both performers and analysts narrowed our perspective.** We know that taking a systemic approach is a key to optimal performance improvement and that thoroughly understanding the larger organizational and cross-functional context is critical for identifying *all* factors that influence performance in an organizational subsystem, as Rummler emphasized in his analysis of organizational super systems (Rummler & Brache, 1990; Rummler, Ramais, & Rummler, 2010). Ordinarily, when we analyze performance and develop solutions for clients, we are able to observe the larger context, including cross-functional processes and organizational relationships.

Focusing on our own performance tended to limit our perspective to the immediately surrounding environmental factors influencing our behavior. Were we to repeat this project, we would probably begin by more thoroughly mapping out the larger organizational processes in which our team and department are situated, because this would also include the factors influencing our managers, their managers, and our clients. Such an approach would enable us to more rapidly identify and take into account *all* the factors influencing us as they flow through those above and outside our department.

- **Managing confidentiality is challenging in a team self-improvement effort.** In most front-end analysis projects, we promise those whom we interview, especially the performers, to maintain confidentiality by saying that we will report our general findings up to management but will not disclose individual names or information. This encourages openness, prevents any possible embarrassment, and avoids undue focus on individual situations or personal characteristics. In this project, we, the team members, were both analysts and performers. Because we are a relatively small team, our management knows each one of us very well. In this context it was barely possible to maintain individual confidentiality and not possible to maintain the collective confidentiality for our group that is normally achieved for performers whom one interviews. In other words, anything that we as performers might offer that could be interpreted as a criticism of or a gap in management was not something that we always felt comfortable communicating. Yet to deliver a thorough report of findings and recommendations we were professionally obliged to include such information. In some respects, this was a challenging case of managing up, the classic organizational situation in which employees are encouraged to provide feedback to their managers but are not always sure when and how to do so. In retrospect, had we anticipated this beforehand, we might have discussed this challenge with management at the beginning of the project to define how best to communicate and partner around issues that, at least for some, were personally sensitive or created feelings of vulnerability. We would encourage any team that attempts a similar organizational self-improvement project to clarify expectations from the beginning with their management about what, how, and when information, some of which involves feedback to management, will be communicated.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This project has been enormously useful for our team and for the organization as a whole. By analyzing our own performance, pinpointing our own work outputs and the criteria that make them *good*, and then defining the behavior and behavior influences needed for success, we established a stronger foundation for effectiveness in the future. We also identified enough opportunities for improvement to keep us busy in the continuous improvement process for some time going forward, and created lists of issues and solutions that will support frequent refocus and prioritization in the future. Collaboration with each other and with our management has led to improvement of several key processes in our work, including how we respond to client requests, accept and prioritize projects, and decide how to allocate resources including people, time, and budget.

This effort has also been an exercise of *seeing performance improvement from the inside* that will inform and empower our work as individuals and as a team working with clients going forward. We are grateful to our management and to the organization as a whole, for supporting and encouraging us, the Cobbler's Children, to create some new and better "shoes" for ourselves. ⚜

References

Binder, C. (1998). The Six Boxes®: A descendent of Gilbert's Behavior Engineering Model. *Performance Improvement, 37*(6), 48–52.

Binder, C. (2005). *What's so new about the Six Boxes® Model?* A white paper from The Performance Thinking Network. Retrieved from http://www.sixboxes.com/_customelements /uploadedResources/160039_SixBoxesWhatsSoNew.pdf

Binder, C. (2009). Measurement, evaluation, and research: Feedback for decision making. In J.L. Mosley & J.C. Dessinger (Eds.), *Handbook of improving performance in the workplace, volume 3, Measurement and evaluation* (pp. 3–24). San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer and the International Society for Performance Improvement.

Binder, C. (2012). *Get out of the training box!* A white paper from The Performance Thinking Network. Retrieved from http://www.sixboxes.com/_customelements/uploaded Resources/145954_OutoftheTrainingBox.pdf

Dattner, B. (2008, December 6). *Cobblers children syndrome in the workplace*. In Credit and Blame at Work, Psychology Today Online. Retrieved from http://www.psychologytoday.com /blog/minds-work/200812/cobblers-children-syndrome -in-the-workplace

Gilbert, T.F. (1978). *Human competence: Engineering worthy performance.* New York, NY: McGraw- Hill.

Harless, J.H. (1978). *An ounce of analysis is worth a pound of objectives: A self-instructional lesson.* Newnan, GA: Harless Performance Guild.

Rummler, G.A., & Brache, A.P. (1990). *Improving performance: How to manage the white space on the organization chart.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Rummler, G.A., Ramais, A., & Rummler, R.A. (2010). *Whitespace revisited: Creating value through process.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

LATOYA M. GILBERT is a performance consultant at Amerigroup, where she works with business groups to build partnerships, performs research and analysis for identified issues, proactively looks at performance gaps, and recommends and implements human performance solutions. She is a faculty member at Axia College of the University of Phoenix and has also worked as a technical writer, instructional designer, editor, and program manager. She earned her MA in English professional writing from Old Dominion University, and a BA in English from the University of Virginia. In 2012, she was a guest speaker at the Six Boxes Summer Institute®, where she presented on spreading performance thinking throughout your organization. She may be reached at LaToya.Gilbert@amerigroup.com

SCOTT WEERSING is a performance consultant at Amerigroup, where he partners with internal business clients to discover performance issues and then recommends solutions to close the gap between the current state and the future state. He has worked as a trainer and instructional designer in health care insurance and manufacturing and also has instructional design experience in higher education, including as an adjunct professor for National University and the University of San Diego. He earned an MA in educational technology from Azusa Pacific University and a BA in political science from UCLA. He is completing his doctorate in instructional design and technology from Old Dominion University. He has presented for the ISPI Hampton Roads chapter and has published in *PerformanceXpress.* He may be reached at Scott.Weersing@amerigroup.com

SUSAN PATTERSON is a talent program manager at WellPoint, Inc., currently focused on identifying and developing the company's key talent for current and future leadership roles. A Six-Boxes® Practitioner and Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR), her background includes human performance improvement, leadership and professional development, and human resource management in the health care, retail, and manufacturing sectors. She holds an MA in education and human development from the George Washington University and an MA in English (professional writing) from Old Dominion University. She may be reached at Susan.Patterson@amerigroup.com

LISA RENEE FISHER, director of process improvement at WellPoint, Inc., has worked in the health care, technology, automotive, and financial services industries. Prior to joining Amerigroup, she was employed at companies including IBM, Toyota, Johnson & Johnson, Chartway FCU, and COX Communications in both individual contributor and executive leadership roles. Her career has been primarily focused in the following areas: operations, process and human performance improvement, change management, strategic planning and implementation, client/customer relationship development, and leadership development. With a BS in industrial engineering from the University of Pittsburgh, a Six Sigma Black Belt, and Six Boxes® Practitioner certification, she is currently a candidate for an MBA with expected graduation in 2016. She may be reached at Lisa.Fisher2@amerigroup.com

CARL BINDER, CPT, PhD, is co-founder of The Performance Thinking Network, creator of Six Boxes® Performance Thinking, and a longtime contributor to ISPI and the field of HPT. He was awarded ISPI's highest recognition, Honorary Lifetime Membership, in 2009 and the Thomas F. Gilbert Distinguished Professional Achievement award in 2012. He delivers programs and coaching for performance professionals, leaders, and managers worldwide. He may be reached at carlbinder@sixboxes.com