

## Conclusion

Years ago, Effective Schools researcher Ron Edmonds (1982) declared, “We can whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children... We already know more than we need to know in order to do that.” High performance leaders who act upon their responsibility to manage and coach employee behavior and development as organizational resources can close the knowing – doing gap and teach all children to learn at high levels.

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## Further Reading

The publications and websites below contributed to the information presented in this issue brief and provide additional information to readers.

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Edmonds, Ron (1982) quoted in Lezotte, L. W. (2001). *Revolutionary and Evolutionary: The Effective Schools Movement*. Okemos, MI: Effective Schools Products, Ltd. Retrieved on November 12, 2006 at <http://72.14.209.104/search?q=cache:vmYINN6VVWMJ:www.effectiveschools.com/downloads/RevEv.pdf+Harvard%27s+Dr.+Ron+Edmonds+1982+publications&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=1>

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Pfeffer, J. & Sutton, R. (2000). *The Knowing-Doing Gap: How Smart Companies Turn Knowledge Into Action*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 4 – 6.

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# Issue Brief

Professional Association of Georgia Educators  
Vol. 9 No. 2  
December 2006



**PAGE**  
Professional Association  
of Georgia Educators

## High Performance by Design: Closing the Knowing - Doing Gap

**L**earning does not always translate into action. In spite of significant investments in professional learning, awareness of research, federal mandates and persistent achievement disparities, the knowing - doing gap persists. Effective leaders take a systems view of human performance. They embrace their responsibility to coach and manage behavior and implement appropriate interventions to ensure high performance.

### The Knowing – Doing Gap

A wealth of knowledge has emerged from the Effective Schools research, high poverty turn-around schools research and instructional and leadership best practices. Yet proven practices for student success are not yet systematically implemented. A knowing-doing gap exists. Dennis Sparks (2005), executive director of the National Staff Development Council, laments that educators often gravitate “toward ‘head learning’ whenever they are faced with a new problem. And because that learning often reveals other gaps in academic knowledge, they engage in even more such learning in the quest for ‘complete understanding,’ which further postpones action and the important learning such action can generate.”

This does not mean knowledge is not important. On the contrary, practice uninformed by theory leaves practitioners adrift. Without knowing why a practice is important, educators are unable to address challenges or understand how and why a

strategy works or does not. High quality professional learning equips educators with the knowledge and skills they need to implement best practices. But when learning remains in a binder on a shelf, the return on investment is negligible.

Educators are not alone. Business faces the same dilemma. Pfeffer and Sutton (2000), authors of *The Knowing-Doing Gap: How Smart Companies Turn Knowledge Into Action*, describe, “...one of the great mysteries in organizational management: why knowledge of what needs to be done frequently fails to result in action or behavior consistent with that knowledge.” What can educational leaders do to close the knowing-doing gap? How can leaders help individuals and teams implement what they learn more consistently to move the needle on student learning? It takes leaders with intentionality and purpose and who view high

performance as a human quality that can be systematically and directly addressed.

### Developing People as High Performers – A Leadership Value

One of the greatest contributions a leader can make is to develop people so that they perform at high levels for the greater good. What is the job of the leader if not to help all employees succeed in doing what the organization needs them to do? Leaders hire people believing they have unique talents, strengths and expertise to contribute to the accomplishment of organizational goals. Ferninand Fournies (2000) observes that when organizations hire people, they “rent their behavior.” In other words, leaders don’t manage people – they manage their behavior. As stewards of the organization’s resources, leaders have a responsibility to manage behavior just as they would any other organizational resource.

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People want to succeed. Further, leader success is often judged by how well people assigned to them perform. The way most work gets done is through the efforts of people; therefore, leaders need employees to be successful. Leaders demonstrate their value by creating conditions for success, engaging people in worthwhile work, leveraging strengths, providing specific feedback, building teams committed to a common cause, and making work a great place to be. They inspire loyalty by taking a systems view of human performance and implementing high leverage strategies that help people become high performers.

### Establishing Need and Expectations

Judith Hale (2004), performance management guru, notes that people need specific information to do their jobs well. First, they need to know where the organization is headed and what its priorities are (mission, vision, goals, initiatives). They also need to know clearly what is expected of them individually and collectively so they know how what they do contributes to organizational results. Setting clear direction begins with a focus on results. Defining what people need to do to achieve results works best if leaders focus on desired behavior – what leaders need people to do.

Unfortunately, leaders often communicate only labels describing what they expect. For example, an experienced leader might communicate that she wants a novice teacher leader to be an instructional leader. The term “instructional leader” is broad and wide open to interpretation. The leader’s meaning of what she wants an instructional leader to do may be very different than the novice leader’s understanding of instructional leadership. For clarity sake, leaders must communicate the desired behavior they are seeking, thus giving the performer clear direction for expected performance.

Clearly communicating desired behavior requires leader discipline and an understanding of the work to be done. For example, the leader could easily clarify the expected instructional leadership performance by stipulating that she first wants the teacher leader to: develop a learning community to study best practices related to achieving agreed upon goals resulting in the transfer of best practices into classroom practice. With this level of specificity, the performer has clear direction.

The second job in providing clear direction is to help the employee see the benefits of high performance. This requires knowing employees well and understanding what motivates them to perform. It is imperative that the benefit link the desired behavior with the desired results of the

organization and with personal goals. In the above example, the leader could explain that engaging teams of teachers in shared inquiry, analysis and action to meet shared goals builds team work, creates buy-in, and empowers teams to develop and test solutions for improved student learning. The leader could also help the performer realize that novice leaders who excel in engaging teams in collaborative work that results in improvements are more likely to establish their credibility faster. Helping employees understand why it is in their best interest to perform well serves as a catalyst for high performance.

### Defining and Communicating Performance Criteria

Leaders who help their employees achieve high performance establish clear performance criteria. Leaders need not do this for every assignment; however, they should do this for priority leadership tasks. Page (2006) advises leaders to communicate performance criteria by specifying clear outcomes, outputs, and steps of the required performance and how performance will be measured.

In the example priority leadership task of developing a learning community to study best practices related to achieving agreed-upon goals, leaders must ask themselves: What are the outcomes (results or desired state) I expect to see when this leadership task is performed well? For example, the leader may expect three things: development of a common language, a school-wide focus on 3 – 5 best practices to be used across grade levels, and the consistent and pervasive use of these best practices in all classrooms. Next, the leader must ask: What are the outputs (tangible items the leader can see and touch) I expect to see as a result of this task? Following this example, the leader may expect to see an agenda for the meeting, a written review of best practices, a list describing the 3 – 5 best practices upon which the team will focus; a schedule for teachers visiting each other’s classrooms to observe the identified best practices and a protocol for providing feedback to each other.

Next, the leader must guide the performer to success by thinking through the steps and related actions that will help the person perform well. This is not as easy as it sounds as it requires the highly skilled leader to become consciously aware of what successful performers do and to commit those steps to writing in a logical sequence that the performer can follow. Such clarity, however, scaffolds the work and guarantees that the performer will know what good performance looks like in action. Some leaders go even further to provide “if...then” scenarios that help the novice think through situations and avoid pitfalls. The main idea is to help the novice anticipate problems and think through work-around strategies.

By scaffolding complex work for people, leaders show performers they care about their success and help them learn how to scaffold future work for themselves and others. Finally, leaders review the outcomes, outputs and steps and develop clear, measurable criteria which they communicate to the performer prior to observing their practice. These criteria become a lens through which to observe practice. There are no surprises. The performer knows up front what is expected.

### Conducting Performance Analysis

Because performance does not occur in a vacuum, leaders must take a systems view of the factors that impact performance. W. Edwards Deming (1982), renowned quality leader, noted that 85 percent of problems in performance occur in the processes of the organization, not in the performer’s knowledge and skills. Leaders who systematically analyze organizational factors ask questions to identify organizational barriers, such as: “Does the performer have needed resources?” or “Are there competing priorities?” Identified barriers can then be removed or negotiated, thus helping the performer succeed.

Through the process of performance analysis, the leader identifies and examines gaps between the actual and desired performance (the work); actual and desired performance outcomes of categories of performers (the workers); and actual and desired performance of the organization (school or district workplace). Armed with the analysis, the skillful leader helps the organization remove barriers to high performance, such as lack of time to practice (Page, 2006).

### Providing Lean Instruction with Ample Practice and Feedback

Quality professional learning is not always a 50-hour course. When performers must be able to demonstrate a required skill, think lean. Skillful leaders scaffold work by providing step-by-step, job-embedded instructions with ample practice and feedback against clear performance criteria. This simple, direct method of “learning while doing” is powerful in helping performers translate knowledge into action. Pfeffer and Sutton’s (2000) research found, “knowledge that is actually implemented is much more likely to be acquired from learning by doing than from learning by reading, listening, or even thinking.” Performers need feedback – not only at the end, when it is too late to improve performance, but during the course of learning. In order to be effective, feedback must be timely, accurate, frequent and about performance under the performer’s control (Rummler, 2004). Specific feedback that points to strengths and gaps and provides specific guidance

on how to improve creates fluency, builds confidence, and leads to high performance.

### Determining the Causes of Under-Performance or Non-Performance

Because most people want to do a good job, it is important to determine the causes behind insufficient performance. Binder’s (1998) Six Boxes model, derived from the work of Thomas F. Gilbert, offers a straight-forward framework for cause analysis

<b>1. Expectations &amp; Feedback</b>	<b>2. Tools &amp; Resources</b>	<b>3. Consequences &amp; Incentives</b>
<b>4. Skills &amp; Knowledge</b>	<b>5. Selection &amp; Assignment</b>	<b>6. Motives &amp; Preferences</b>

The top row (cells 1 – 3) refers to organization factors, while the bottom row (cells 4 – 6) refers to individual factors. The model enables leaders to ask questions such as: (Cell 1) Does the performer have the information needed to understand expectations? Does the performer receive feedback that links performance to organization objectives? By asking questions in a systematic way across all six factors, leaders can pinpoint and address the root cause of performance challenges.

### Selecting, Designing and Implementing Appropriate Performance Interventions

Training is the most often utilized intervention to address performance problems. Yet it is appropriate only if analysis shows the performer lacks knowledge or skills. If, for example, the reward system is not aligned with desired behavior, training is an ineffective intervention. Judith Hale (1998) outlines five interventions to consider: 1) **information-focused** interventions define, inform, document or clarify assignments, expectations or activities; 2) **consequences-focused** interventions reward, measure and enforce, thus providing either positive or negative consequences as appropriate; 3) **design-focused** interventions organize, standardize or re-design activities, processes, or structures; 4) **capacity-focused** interventions reframe, counsel, coach, train or develop and expand knowledge and skills; 5) **congruence-focused** interventions create congruency between purpose and practice. The key to coaching high performance is to align the appropriate intervention with the diagnosed problem. Savvy leaders select the appropriate intervention to manage behavior and coach people to high performance. When this has been done, the leader can evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the intervention in helping the performer attain desired results.