

# The HPT Value Proposition in the Larger Improvement Arena

by Guy W. Wallace, CPT

In the late 1970s and early 1980s I, and many others in the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI) (then NSPI), were being exposed to various quality improvement tools and techniques. After a short stint working for Wickes Lumber's Training organization, I was a Training Project Supervisor supporting manufacturing, materials, and purchasing at Motorola's Training & Education Center, the forerunner organization of Motorola University. There I saw first hand, through my many projects, the work of

many *quality gurus* and the work of Geary Rummler, Carol Panza, and Neil Rackham. Besides being exposed to the work of quality experts, I was learning about business finance and politics, as well as participative management, and material resource planning.

One of the eye-opening models for me, simple but key, was the Ishikawa Diagram, also known as the "cause-and-effect diagram" or the "fishbone diagram." Below is an early (non-politically correct) version (see Figure 1).

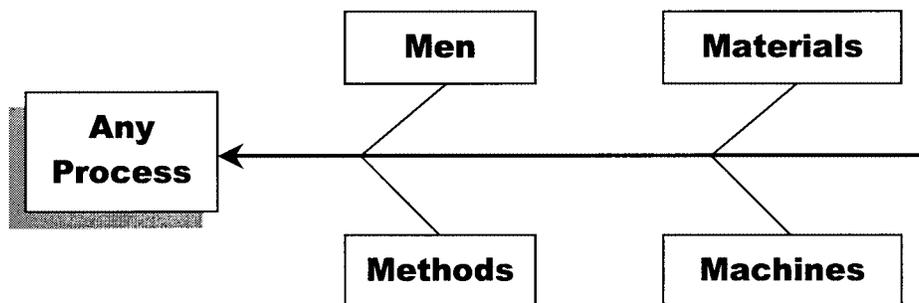


Figure 1. Ishikawa Diagram.

Every process has these four variables: men, materials, methods, and machines. This simple diagram helped me position what I was just learning about human performance technology's (HPT) concepts, models, methods, tools, and techniques and helped me put HPT into a larger framework, beyond human performance. Human performance, I learned from the quality folks, was but one variable of process performance.

My mental model of HPT now had a new framework to exist within; and I had other defined variables to work with when we could conclude from the analysis that, "it ain't the human variable that's screwed up here."

That rang loudly and resonated deeply with one of my favorite Rummler quotes: "Put a good human in a bad system, and the system wins every time."

I see HPT's value in addressing the human variable inherent in any and every process. But HPT doesn't cover every variable. I don't think HPT is the king of the mountain, the be-all and end-all of process improvement. It has improvement cousins.

I see HPT partnering and collaborating with the others in the *improvement space* to respond to the results of someone's front-end assessments and analysis for problem and opportunity causes, no matter who does the front-end work.

I would like to see us clarify HPT, using Rummler's suggested technology domains to better state what HPT is, and thereby clarify what it is not. Not because we don't have a clue, but because our cousins are taking the lead and have the deep expertise outside the human variable.

I also believe several other things that I wish to share:

- We will never convince the engineers and scientists that HPT is the umbrella for their total quality management (TQM), Statistical Process Control (SPC), six sigma, or scientific method.
- We will never convince industrial engineers that we can map complex processes, be they chemical or mechanical or other, better than they can.
- We will never convince the financial experts that our HPT measures of impact supersede the bottom-line metrics they use to measure the enterprise's current health or future potential impact for the equity investments for capital or human improvement.
- We will never convince executive management that their trust and investments in TQM and six sigma should be displaced by HPT.

We need to better figure out what HPT is and is not and then see how we can better partner and collaborate with our cousins' other improvement approaches, without doing a land-grab and claiming that our HPT is the king of the hill.

HPT has demonstrated real value, real returns on investments, but not all the time. Just as TQM was too often and inadvertently partial quality management, HPT is sometimes a partial solution. It's not always the human variable. And I do not expect any one person to be a real expert in all things improvement-wise.

Some of our members have suggested we take off the "H." We could then call our HPT technology "total performance technology" or something along those lines. But then, who are we to claim this as ours? What are our experiences, our successes, when compared to other improvement approaches? They have had their wins and their losses, just as we have. They sometimes recognize that they do not have all the answers, because they do not have expertise in all the many improvement concepts, models, methods, tools, and techniques.

No one has them all. No one is the Renaissance Man/Woman when it comes to improvement. We need each other because there is just too much to know, too much to master. That's also why we need to partner and collaborate with others; and our new certified performance technologist ethics require us to acknowledge that and act accordingly.

We need to invite these other improvement experts into our ISPI tent, to our conferences, and into our journals, and ask them to teach us about their approaches. Not so that we might master them. HPT by itself is probably too large for any one of us to master, let alone take on everything else under the sun improvement-wise. But once we better understand their stuff and ours, we can better clarify our HPT value proposition in concert with their value propositions.

Positioning HPT better with the other improvement specialties' value propositions can create win-win-win situations. HPTers can win, and other improvement specialists can win, and most importantly the stakeholder groups at the process, organization, and society levels can win. Customers and other stakeholders (governments, shareholders, executives, employees, suppliers, and the community) can win when we create real return on investments.

And that's what HPT can help with, for our key variable, is the human variable. For me, HPT is not for addressing every process performance variable, only the human variable. 🏔️

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