

# ISO 10015 - A Trend in Training

An Interview with Dr. Ronald L. Jacobs, The Ohio State University, USA

■ Bryan Wang

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Published version is translated into Chinese.

## **What is your perspective about training for companies competing in the global economy?**

Clearly, having effective training programs is important for organizations competing in the global economy. However, the underlying challenge for managers is not so much about the effectiveness of their training programs. The real challenge is how to manage the competence of their workforce. That is, training is just one means to respond to changes in competence requirements.

Let me give you an example. We have seen many examples in companies where the employees were very good at their jobs. We might call them experts. Then the company introduces a new technology to improve the

product or deliver the service better. Those employees who were once knowledgeable about their jobs have suddenly become beginners, or novices. The challenge for managers is how to anticipate these sudden shifts in competence requirements, and to respond to them in the most effective and efficient means possible. Training programs of some kind come into use at this point.

## **Many people are talking about ISO 10015 in Taiwan, is that a fad? Do you think it will benefit the organizations?**

As you know, I have visited Taiwan many times and have some understanding of the HRD profession in Taiwan. There is no doubt that ISO 10015 is an important advancement. And it carries much



Dr. Ronald Jacobs

promise to help companies deliver higher quality training and improve their company's performance. But, I want to be clear in my opinion. ISO 10015 is organized around two key principles. The first principle is that it helps organizations identify performance gaps. The second principle is that it ensures that the process used to address the performance gap is done appropriately. In general, these principles have been around a relatively long time.

But the question is the extent to which HRD professionals are actually permitted to follow these principles. Thus, ISO 10015 is important because it will help ensure that managers remain committed to best practices in training. This should make many HRD professionals pleased because they can now do the training design process without excluding any steps. However, the risk for HRD professionals is that if they get their managers to commit to ISO 10015, then they need to have the knowledge and skills to carry it out.

**What are some difficulties in implementing ISO 10015?**

This question has two parts to the answer. First, as I mentioned, implementing ISO 10015 may be difficult because HRD professionals will be required to have more knowledge and skills in the training design process. Many people

will say that they have been designing training programs a long time, so this shouldn't be a problem. However, let me share an example with you. Here at the Center on Education and Training for Employment, we have analyzed the ISO 10015 standard and come up with our own interpretation of each part of the training cycle.

For instance, in "Analyze performance problems", we have identified the following tasks that need to be done:

- a. Assess the organization's strategic issues and priorities
- b. Analyze the current performance of a potential problem situation, strategic orientation, or change in operational context.
- c. Analyze the desired performance of a potential problem situation, strategic orientation, or change in operational context.
- d. Identify the causes of the performance gaps.
- e. Identify the most likely

solutions to address the performance gaps, both training and non-training.

- f. Prepare a summary report that describes the gap, the causes of the gap, and the types of solutions required to close the gap.

My question is how many HRD professionals have ever done these tasks as part of designing a training program. Even if the HRD professionals have the knowledge and skills, the second major difficulty will be to obtain management commitment. In the courses we offer related to ISO 10015 here at Ohio State, we ensure that the contract agreement is with the management of the company, not the HRD professionals. We want to ensure that managers clearly understand what they are getting into. But we also want managers to know what their pay-offs will be for their investment.

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**Tell me more about the potential payoffs of ISO 10015?**

The pay-off of ISO 10015 is simply to have training programs that are more strategically linked to the business needs of the company. One of the questions we are seeking to address here at Ohio State is how to calculate the benefits of training programs in financial terms. That is a big question. For instance, my own research on structured on-the-job training (S-OJT) has studied the financial impact of this training approach. I have reported the results of my S-OJT research in numerous journal articles and have made many presentations in Taiwan. My book on the topic is available through CPC.

Now that same scrutiny needs to be directed towards ISO 10015. Some time ago I was interviewed in Thailand, and I was asked what global managers should

understand about human resource development and training. My response was that global managers should learn courage in regards to investing in training. This courage comes from understanding that in the long run, training can be a good investment. But the trust that managers show for training outcomes must be based on sound analysis upfront. That is, we need to show the actual numbers that we are saving the company, not just assume that the savings is occurring. By the way, I should add that there is close link between S-OJT and ISO 10015. S-OJT has proven to have a beneficial impact in organizations. And the ISO 10015 process requires that companies select the most beneficial training approach and confirm that decision when evaluating the training.

It could be that one pay-off of ISO 10015 is that companies will do

fewer training programs, but the training programs they do offer will have greater impact on performance.

**What is the current situation with ISO 10015 among US companies?**

It is interesting to note that few US companies have any knowledge of ISO 10015. In fact, CETE is the only institution in the US that is providing any information about it. I think US companies have been slow to adopt ISO 10015 in part because there is already information about the training design process in the literature. Also here in the US we have some individual certification programs, such as the one offered through ASTD. But ISO 10015 differs from these other initiatives. ISO 10015 focuses on the process, not necessarily on the individuals doing the process.

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However, we are beginning to see many companies become interested in ISO 10015. But their interest is from a quality perspective, not from a training perspective. That is, those companies already involved in ISO certification, such as ISO 9001 and 14000, are asking how they can better achieve the 6.2 Competence section. This section has been a problem area for many small and medium sized manufacturing companies. In addition, the new version of ISO 9001, which will be released in 2008, suggests ISO 10015 as a guide to address the 6.2 section.

So while ISO 10015 is of most interest in Asia – China, Taiwan, and Korea – we anticipate the US to follow soon.

**What has the CETE been doing related to ISO 10015?**

Many people in Taiwan know of CETE [www.cete.org](http://www.cete.org) at Ohio State University. We have been around for over 40 years. I have been director for one year. In that time, we have become partners with the Academy for Quality in Training and Education, in Switzerland. Many people in Taiwan also know of this organization. Now we are offering some awareness sessions on ISO 10015. Soon we will be offering a cohort-based class that will be an in-depth experience to enable HRD professionals to meet the ISO 10015 requirements. We are also offering a certificate program for S-OJT trainers.

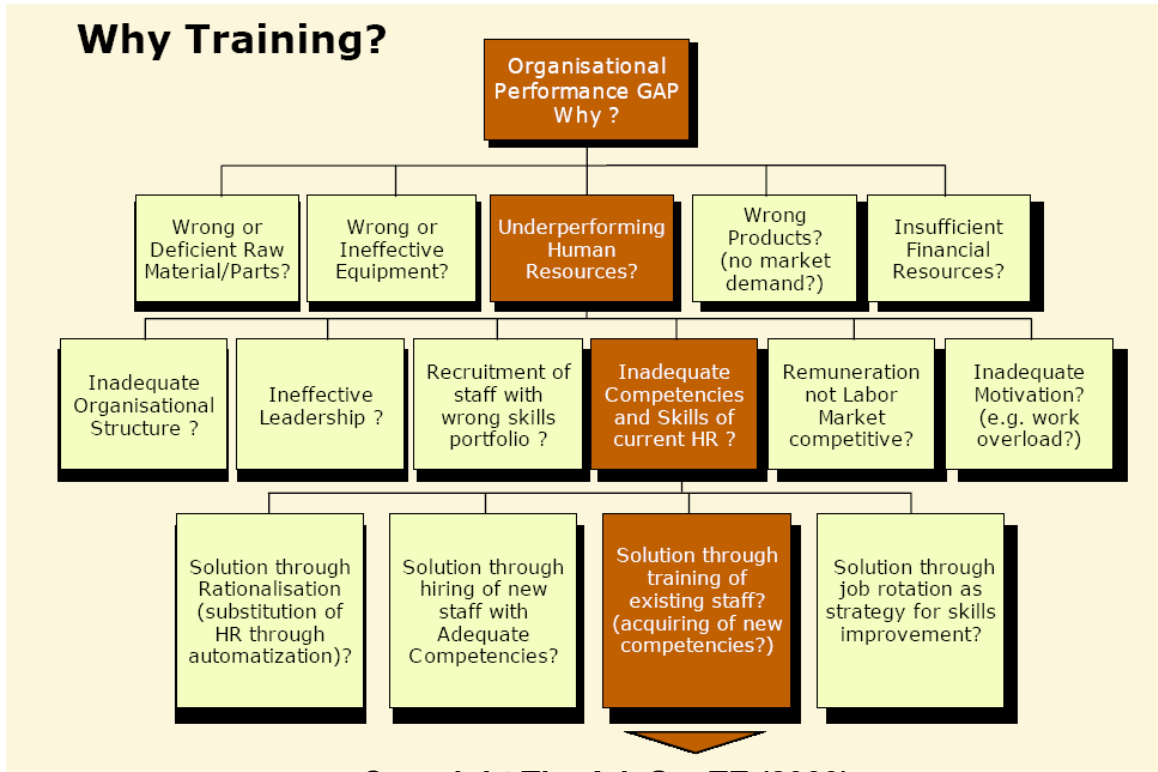
We believe that organizations can use this information to either seek formal certification through an auditor or they can use ISO 10015 as an internal standard for their companies. In the future, we also hope to develop a global

community of practice system, that people could share their concerns, ideas, and solutions as they become involved in ISO 10015. That is an appropriate role for us as a research-based university. ■

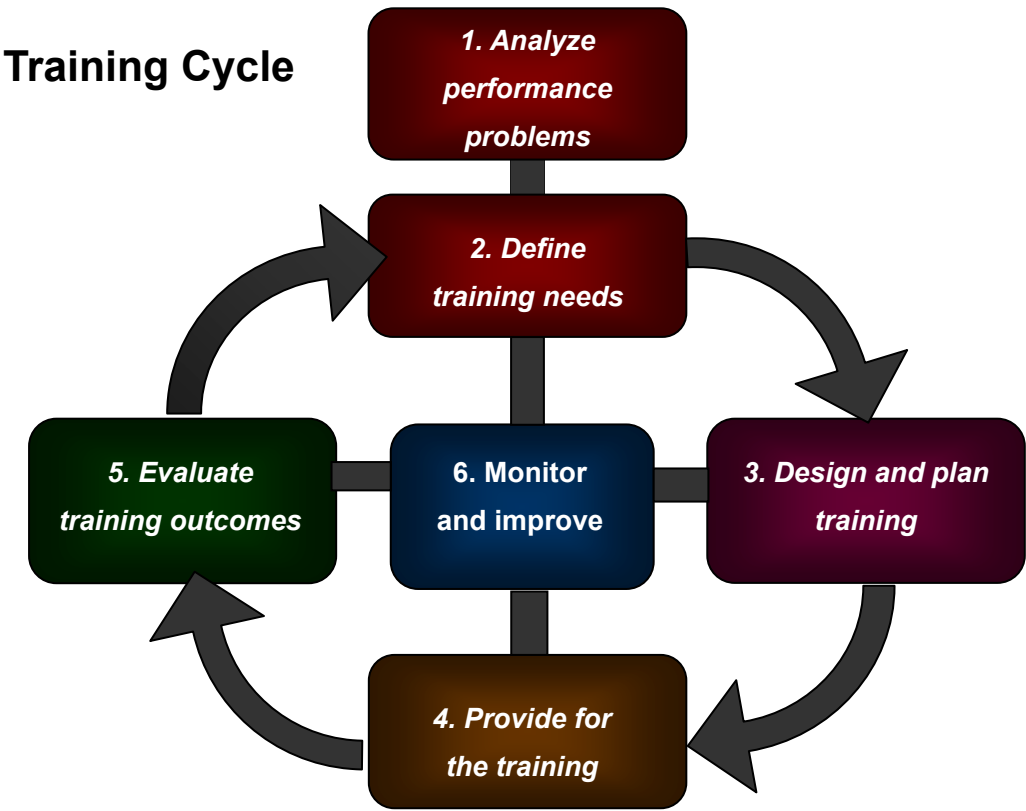
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