
The Role of the Work Plan in Assessing Staff Development and Continuing Education Needs for Library Support Staff

Benjamin F. Speller, Jr. and James N. Colt

Library support employees are expected to meet both organizational and personal development goals as outlined in job descriptions and performance evaluations. Constantly changing societal trends and technological development have seriously affected support employees' abilities to keep their knowledge, skills, and attitudes current with the demands of the work environment. Thus, the work plan has become an important mechanism for communicating the library manager's expectations of support staff, and the performance indicators which will be used in evaluating them. The work plan defines for support employees the specific criteria that are viewed by the library as essential to its operational effectiveness. The work plan for support staff is an essential component of staff development and continuing education, and is the major method of conducting needs assessment for these activities.

A work plan is a process in which employees, with the assistance of their supervisors, determine individual goals and critical activities for a specified period of time. Individual work plans are determined within the context of organizational goals and working unit objectives. An important part of the work planning process consists of identifying evaluative criteria for critical work activities and in developing potential strategies for improvement of work performance and professional growth.

Historically, the work plan has focused exclusively on goal-oriented activities which occur during a specific time frame. The work plan usually consists of four basic components: 1. determining organizational and work unit goals, 2. identifying activities, special projects, and assignments which will meet individual goals, 3. determining

performance expectations and performance indicators, and indicating the methods used to collect data, 4. providing a method of performance appraisal by establishing and defining levels of performance, developing a rating scale, rating objectives, and summarizing accomplishments.

What is usually lacking in the work planning process is the assessment of employee needs for staff development and continuing education within the context of work performance, career planning, and long term institutional effectiveness. Conceptually, the term "staff development" is open to many definitions and a variety of interpretations. For the purpose of this article, staff development is defined as any systematic attempt to direct standard practices of support personnel toward a clearly identified set of activities associated with an organization's goals and objectives. Continuing education is defined as any systematic attempt to address the learning needs of the individual library employee.¹

Staff development and continuing education are the responsibility of both the individual employee and the employer.² Successful staff development programs generally are comprised of three distinct instructional design components: needs assessment, development, and evaluation.³ Needs assessment is considered to be the primary component of a staff development program. It is defined by Geri McArdie as "a series of activities conducted to identify problems or other issues in the work place, and to determine whether training is an appropriate intervention to meet the organizational needs identified."⁴

Needs assessments can be conducted by formal data collection methods such as survey instruments or by informal means such as individual discussions and conferences with staff. However, once this process has been completed, it must be determined if the need is a learning or non-learning one. Larry Davis defines a learning need as a requirement that can be taught to an

Benjamin F. Speller, Jr., is Dean of the School of Library and Information Sciences at North Carolina Central University in Durham. James N. Colt is Associate Professor in the School of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, at North Carolina A & T State University in Greensboro.

individual. A need that can be solved in some way other than by learning is considered a non-learning need.⁶ For example, a specified need for acquiring a CD-ROM player would not qualify as a learning need. However, learning how to conduct a CD-ROM database search would qualify as a learning need.

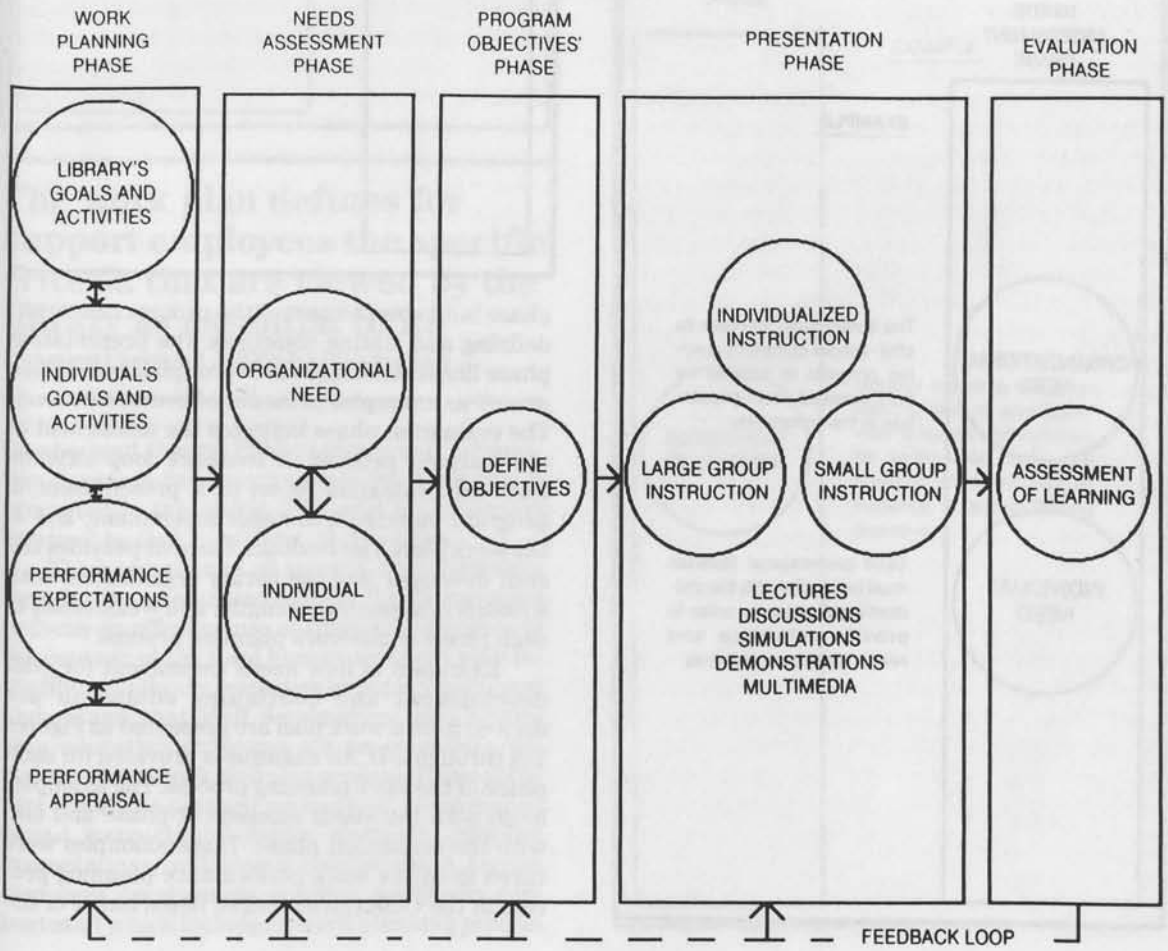
All learning needs should be prioritized and instructional objectives developed for each. At this time the objectives and methods of assessing or evaluating the learning outcome should be specified. This should assure that measurement outcomes are both provided for, and equated to their objectives. As objectives are developed, it is important that they reflect and are consistent with the objectives that have been outlined in the employee's work plan.

Once objectives are determined, strategies for organizing and presenting instruction must be defined. The planner of staff development has a variety of strategies from which to choose. Individualized, one-on-one consultation with an em-

ployee is one format that can be successful because it addresses the specific needs or problems identified by the employee or supervisor. An example of this activity might relate to a support employee who is assigned to overseeing the operation and use of a new photocopier. Step-by-step operating instructions, related directly to the employee's requirements, can be provided without interrupting routines of other staff members who do not share the need for this instruction.

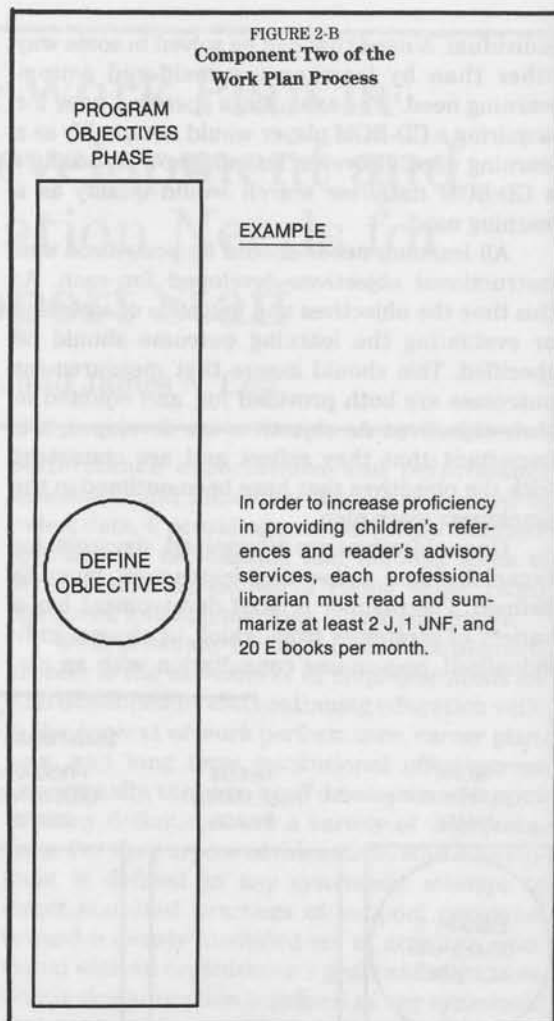
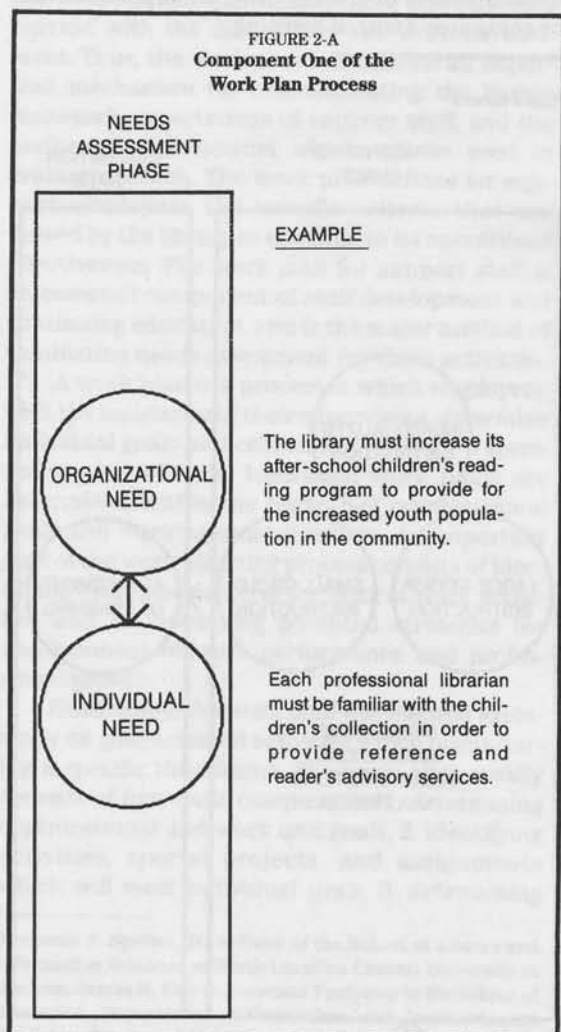
Another successful presentation format for staff development is the workshop. This strategy might include large group, small group, and/or individualized instruction. Within these broad choices, a variety of modes of presentation is available. Large group presentations might involve such choices as lectures or large-screen video presentations. Small group presentation strategies might consist of group discussions and simulations. Both strategies could also include individualized instruction using programmed textbooks or computer-assisted learning.

FIGURE 1
Model of the Work Plan Process



Once the instruction has been completed, it must be evaluated using the assessment methods that have been defined during the development of the instructional objectives. An important element to include is feedback to both staff participants and the staff development designer. Some provision should be made for the employee either to retake or receive other instruction if the individual is not successful in meeting the objectives. This feedback is also important as performance appraisals are evaluated. In addition to the importance of feedback to the employee, such feedback should also provide information to the instructional designer as to the success of the staff development activities.

A conceptual model that illustrates the work plan's role in needs assessment, staff development and continuing education is presented as Figure 1. The needs assessment phase shows that needs may be defined by the individual staff member or the library organization. The program objectives



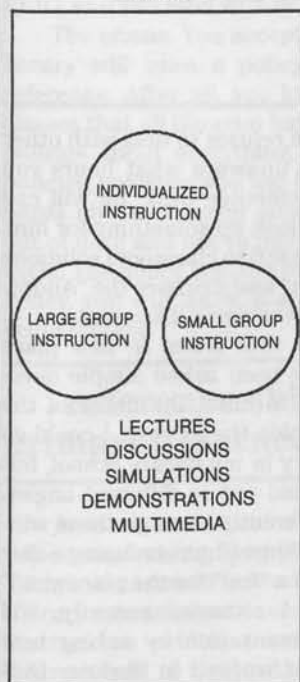
phase indicates the part of the process relating to defining and stating objectives. The presentation phase illustrates methods of grouping instruction as well as examples of modes of content delivery. The evaluation phase indicates the assessment of the learning process. A feedback loop extends from the evaluation phase to 1. presentation, 2. program objectives, 3. needs assessment, and 4. the work plan. The feedback element provides the staff developer and the library organization with a means of assessing strengths and weaknesses of each phase of the work planning process.

Examples of how needs assessment for staff development and continuing education are derived from a work plan are presented as Figures 2-A through 2-D. An example is provided for each phase of the work planning process. The examples begin with the needs assessment phase and end with the evaluation phase. These examples were taken from the work performance planning process in the Children's Services Department of the

FIGURE 2-C
Component Three of the
Work Plan Process

PRESENTATION
PHASE

EXAMPLE



Reading the selected books is an individualized study activity.

with a strong staff development component will receive high marks from the employees and will be successful in meeting their needs.

References

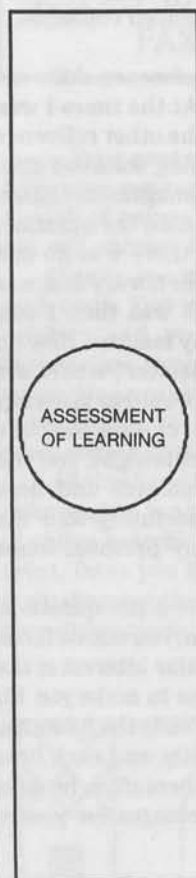
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4. Geri E. H. McArdle, "What is Needs Assessment?" *Performance & Instruction* 29 (July 1990): 12.
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FIGURE 2-D
Component Four of the
Work Plan Process

EVALUATION
PHASE

EXAMPLE



Monthly meetings with professional librarian and supervisor to review and summarize books read during the previous month will serve as evidence of accomplishing objective.

The work plan defines for support employees the specific criteria that are viewed by the library as essential to its operational effectiveness.

Cumberland County Public Library and Information Center. A full description of the work plan is presented in the article, "Training for Children's Services" by Gail Terwilliger, in this issue.

The integration of all aspects of staff development into work planning enables library managers to focus on effective use of support employees in the context of the total human resource plan for the library. Library managers or supervisors must understand that staff development and continuing education programs are an essential component of the work planning process. These activities should be planned using needs assessments, sound instructional design elements, effective presentations, and proper evaluations. A human resources development program for library support staff which includes a work planning process