

Q & A with Ed Tech Leaders: An Interview with Roger Kaufman

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Abstract

In this candid interview, Roger Kaufman shares his knowledge of strategic planning, performance improvement and program evaluation. He discusses his research in Mega planning at Sonora Institute of Technology in Mexico. Dr. Kaufman describes his *Organizational Elements Model* and the value of using a “results chain of objectives” for successful strategic planning. He explains the relationship between strategic planning and Educational Technology, the “right things” of Leadership, and the value of needs assessment in program planning and evaluation. Dr. Kaufman concludes the interview by offering his perspective on distance learning, summative, formative and goal free evaluation, and the influential people who have inspired his life and education.

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An Interview with Roger Kaufman: Performance Improvement

1. *What are you currently researching?*

Perhaps the most rewarding project I have ever experienced. Everything I wanted to do in my past academic work where there was no interest and/or courage we are doing under the leadership of the Rector Gonzalo Rodriquez Villanueva. This is applied research to determine the extent to which a system (singular)/Mega approach to thinking and planning can measurably add value to learners, faculty, and communities/society in a Mexican University. The rector, an economist, sees it as a wealth-creation initiative. The Sonora Institute of Technology (ITSON in Spanish) has been using Mega planning for 14+ years (without my knowledge) and I have been involved for the last 4 years. The Rector and faculty, including an international faculty, have been demanding a positive return on investment for any and all programs, projects, and initiatives. We are using a two-bottom line (not the quasi stuff that is so often quoted in the literature) developed by Dr. Mariano Bernardez (who is also a research professor at the Sonora Institute of Technology) and collecting the data to determine viability. So far we are getting some performance data (mastery, number of funded projects, return-on-investment generated, etc.) and we are having anecdotal feedback, such as being cited as one of two innovative universities in Mexico by Ernst & Young, and a commendation by the current Mexican President. But, at the end of the day, performance data will tell the tale. It is looking quite positive.

2. *What is the Organizational Elements Model?*

Yes, people blame the OEM on me. It started in the 1970s when I realized that there are several levels of results that should be linked and aligned. The older and familiar “systems” model tended to refer to Input, throughput, and Output and this seemed to me to be a more course-grained than was useful for people who had to actually design performance interventions and be responsible for the evaluation of their success both inside and external to their organizations. So, it occurred to me that there are three levels of results:

Mega/Outcomes: external client and societal value added (or subtracted)

Macro/Outputs: organizational contributions... what an organization can or does deliver to external clients and society, and

Micro/Products: contributions of individuals and small groups.

Of course, there have to be resources and means that deliver the three levels of results:

Processes: the means, methods, activity, programs, or projects that are intended to deliver useful results, and

Inputs: the human, fiscal, and physical resources that can be used. This element also includes rules, regulations, policies, and existing culture.

So, that is the OEM. In using it, it is vital to realize that there are dynamic interactions among all of the elements.

Over the years, I have received more than a bit of heat about “my” model of needs assessment and Mega thinking and planning. Both, perhaps drastic for the time, are and were using it is the basic purpose of strategic thinking and planning. One State superintendent of public instruction called me –this was many years ago—and told me to “call your former students off...they are causing problems for us because of the questions they are asking.” I noted that we no longer practiced indentured service and they were acting the way PhD professionals should act.” The education chief was not happy about another paradigm being proposed. Another time I was being driven from SeaTac airport to Microsoft facilities in Washington by a company director who noted “when I first heard about Mega I thought it was a load of nonsense (not her original word) but now it is as obvious as that boulder at the side of the road.” Ridicule and ignoring my model of needs assessment (gaps in results not gaps in processes or resources) was standard as early as 1969 my original formulations, as was the concept of basing everything on societal value added (Mega). While earlier marginalized, it has “caught on” often without credit) for offering these approaches. *Educational Technology* has consistently offered an objective forum for me and others working in this area. I hope it has reached the “tipping point” as more and more people and organizations see that making money and doing societal good must not be mutually exclusive.

3. *How does the “results chain” affect how objectives are written?*

As noted in #2, if objectives are not intended to add value for each of the three levels of results (Mega/Outcomes, Macro/Outputs, and Micro/Products) then you don’t have to have a useful objective. As Professor Dale Brethower observes, if you are not adding value to society, you are subtracting value. I have long urged that objective only define ends and never ever include what processes or resources will be used. Still, most objectives being written blur ends and means and include means and resources. Doing so doesn’t allow for the sensible selection of how-to-do-its” based on what results one has to deliver. By applying the total “results chain” that goes from Society and external clients (Mega) down through the organization you get alignment and a much higher probability of success. It still isn’t done that way by many, and that still baffles me.

4. *Does programmed instruction still dominated training in business?*

Not that I can detect. I hope it did, but those who are in the “training” business (I wish they were in the “performance accomplishment” business) come from such diverse backgrounds and skill levels I fear that that which is known from research-based performance improvement doesn’t usually find its way into implementation. Programmed instruction gave rise to a richer and more responsive set of guides that are now called performance technology...programmed instruction provided us with a scaleable model for defining candidates for performance improvement and how to sensible design to achieve useful results. It certainly is not a linear, lock-step, and narrow process although some tend to use it that way.

5. *Will the ability to use “social networking” tools change the way we train?*

Of course. People are the complex fabric of any organization and all partners, if we are to be successful, have to agree on the common destination (best Mega) and work to individually and collectively get from What Is to What Should Be.

6. *What are some of the common mistakes educational organizations make in regards to technology in strategic planning?*

As I have written (perhaps only providing a cure for insomnia) that most of what is called “strategic” planning is not, but rather tactical or even operational planning. Thus, most of what is foisted on us as “strategic” planning isn’t and it let’s us down because it doesn’t link and align to external measurable value added. As noted earlier in this interview, why do anything that does not end up adding value to external client and our shared society? And to add insult to organizational injury many still start so-called strategic planning with defining the “technology” to be used. Or that no matter what is the problem, the solution will be technology. To me, strategic planning (and thinking) starts at the Mega level. Tactical planning starts at the Macro level, and operational planning is about Micro level. Because the label “strategic planning” is conventionally used to cover any level of planning the concept gets a bad name and people tend to ignore it rather than insist on doing it correctly and rigorously. *Educational Technology* has helped, for many years, to sort out these kinds of confusions.

7. *What works and doesn’t work in program evaluation?*

Program evaluation often fails for a number of reasons (again, we cover this in a book “Practical Evaluation for Educators: Finding What Works and What Doesn’t, Corwin) including (1) poorly defined objectives, (2) evaluation of the wrong things (not based on a needs assessment—no I don’t mean the usual ‘wants assessment’), and (3) a general failure to ask and answer the right questions. By the way, if you use a proper needs assessment—gaps between current and desired

results, and at the 3 levels of results, you get a triple bonus based on the data-referenced gaps in results (and not gaps in Processes or Inputs):

- a. Based on data, you get your objectives,
 - b. You automatically get built-in data-based evaluation criteria...one simply has to measure how far they have moved from What Is/Was and What Should Be.
- And, finally,
- c. You have the data for a costs-consequences analysis and reporting.

This is so basic; it still astounds me that people let their old paradigms get in the way of their own success.

8. *What are the steps for effective program evaluation in education?*

Not to sound commercial, we have a new book with HRD Press out on this ... and the answers are simultaneously simple and complex. Suffice it to say we can be effective. Simply clearly specify where you were headed (after justifying why you want to get there based on a needs assessment) and compare your results with your intentions. If you use a needs assessment to define your objectives at three levels, then comparing your results with your intentions is quite rational and straight-forward.

9. *What types of “right things” are portrayed by good leadership?*

In my recent *Change, Choice, and Consequences: A Guide to Mega Thinking and Planning* (HRD Press) I suggest six critical success factors:

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTOR 1
Don't assume that what worked in the past will work now. Get out of your comfort zone and be open to change.
CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTOR 2
Differentiate between ends (what) and means (how).
CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTOR 3
Use all three levels of planning and results (Mega/Outcomes; Macro/Outputs; Micro/Products).
CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTOR 4
Prepare all objectives—including the Ideal Vision and mission—to include precise statements of both where you are headed as well

as the criteria for measuring when you have arrived. Develop “smarter” objectives.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTOR 5

Define need as a gap in results (not as insufficient levels of resources, means, or methods).

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTOR 6

Use an Ideal Vision (what kind of world, in measurable performance terms, we want for tomorrow’s child) as the underlying basis for planning and continuous improvement.

Successful leaders facilitate all partners to define objectives and work together to get from What Is to What Should Be. This literature is complex, so I won’t try to cover it here. But getting all people to agree to the results—including positive payoffs for external clients and our shared society—is key.

10. What distinguishes Instructional Systems Design from Human Performance Technology?

ISD focuses on instruction and individual performance improvement while the other can—can—enlarge the framework to include the organization (Macro) and external clients (Mega). The distinction is usually blurred in both the practice and the literature. If we don’t get the alignment, we risk meeting lower-level objectives and not every add value to our organizations and our external partners.

11. How can an outsider come into a university and attempt to improve their distance learning program? Where would they start? Where would you start?

Most people start with the system as it exists, and that is often simply putting Band-Aids on brain tumors. They assume the curriculum is right and start looking for technology to deliver it cheaper, faster, and better. But the curriculum is generally moss-covered and not aligned with what learners have to know and do in later school and in life. But that is the current culture.

The biggest challenge is the culture which is now about talking and telling and this is what is rewarded in the Ivy-covered academic Halls under the label “distance learning.” Start with the culture and get agreement on what the university has to deliver outside of itself . . . in measurable terms. I was responsible for helping to start distance learning at Florida State University and my experience is that senior people were more open than those who were still seeking tenure. Also, one can help with defining objectives based on needs (again, gaps in results, not the usual

wants), getting people to be results-oriented, get rid of grading on the curve (the curve of error), design the learning opportunities on the basis of who the learners are and what they bring into the learning experience, deliver, do formative and summative evaluation and help people see how they can be more successful. I am not a fan of most of the distance learning I have seen, in both the public and private sectors.

12. Who has influenced you?

Many. Of course, my father (who was a mathematical physicist) and was insistent on data, research, and result. My wife Jan has been fantastic by telling me what I should hear and not just what I wanted hear. Joe Tucker when we were both at US Industries (remember the AutoTutor?), Ted Blau and Harold Greenwald who were models of real psychotherapy, who showed me the importance of the psychology in facilitating change (I also got from there a basic concept that I used in my recent book *30 Seconds That Can Change Your Life: a decision-making guide for those who refuse to be mediocre* (HRD Press). Another colleague at Chapman University when we were both there, J C Fikes encouraged me during many attacks on my models and approaches by saying “Roger, your friends don’t have to be convinced and your enemies never will be convinced, so go ahead and do what you think is right.” In more recent times, working with the likes of Mariano Bernardez, first in Argentina and now where he is making the ITSON program really model and use functional HPT, and the other faculty members there (Geary Rummler, Dale Brethower, Richard Gerson, Ingrid Guerra-Lopez, and Bob Carleton) provide a constant professional forum on our field and how we can best contribute, The Rector of ITSON and the staff of their Performance Improvement Institute, and their central administration bring life and reality to my work. Finally, I have been influenced by most (but certainly not all) of my former students and my associates, including Bob Gagne and Bob Corrigan who allowed me to bounce ideas off them and made it possible for me to practice continual improvement.

13. On-Line self assessments- how valid and reliable are they and what useful purpose do they serve?

Just like anything else, at all depends on how they are constructed and validated. They can be good. We are launching some based on results-reference question on What Is as compared to What Should Be in any organization relative to our field in a few months and I hope they will be useful examples. We know a lot about developing sounds assessment instruments if we only apply that knowledge. On-line can be very helpful.

14. Can you briefly discuss the importance of formative summative, and goal free evaluation? And why do we seem to do so little of all of these?

Michael Scriven set the stage for us. These three types of evaluation are very useful and important. Why don't we practice what we preach? It might be due to skills gaps and/or a fear of getting "bad news" about our efforts. We often pretend we don't have time to evaluate but we always seem to find the time for failed interventions. I deal with how to get this done in #2 and #8 above.

15. Strategic Planning Plus; and Strategic Thinking—what do they have in common?

They are both related to starting with Mega—adding value to our external clients and society. Strategic thinking is about one's "mind set" and the actual planning implements that mind-set and focus on adding value for our organization as well as for tomorrow's child.

16. What impact does an organization's culture have on training?

It is only vital and critical. And there is some very good research coming out now, from such as Bob Carleton and Bill Daniels.

17. What question have we neglected to ask?

I appreciate your turning one of my favorite questions back on me. Not really. Another question could be "if educational technology is the solution, what's the problem?" Still another might be "what don't we apply what we know?" And "Are universities teaching the skills, knowledges, attitudes, and abilities that are required for more than superficial change?"