

Instructional Design Competencies: The Standards (Third Edition). Rita Richey, Dennis C. Fields, and Marguerite Foxon. Syracuse, NY: ERIC Clearinghouse on Information and Technology in cooperation with the International Board of Standards for Training, Performance, and Instruction (IBSTPI), 2000. 207 pp. \$20.00, softcover. ISBN: 0-937597-52-X.

Reviewed by John M. Keller

□ The third edition of *Instructional Design Competencies: The Standards* presents a revised and internationally validated set of professional competencies for instructional designers. This 2000 list is a timely update of the competencies that were previously published by the International Board of Standards for Training, Performance, and Instruction (IBSTPI) in 1986. It is a welcome addition to the growing library of competency documents pertaining to instructional systems design and performance technology.

I must confess that in the late 1970s, when Barry Bratton and Ken Silber were beginning to promote the development of competencies for defining our field and certifying academic and training programs, I was more than a little skeptical because of the complexity and diversity of skills in this field, not to mention its immaturity

and rate of growth. However, circumstances and people change, and quite some time ago I became fully convinced of the value of competency development for several purposes. These include charting the development of our field, comparing graduate programs as well as nonschool-based training programs, developing and assessing curricula, and assessing student accomplishment, all of which are consistent with the purposes listed in this edition of *Instructional Design (ID) Competencies*. We are doing many of these things here at Florida State University, and I know there are other graduate programs that have also become more competency based.

However, the potential use of the competencies by a certifying board to accredit education and training programs in this field is a different matter. I still am not convinced this would be a fruitful effort. The authors of *ID Competencies* include a brief but excellent discussion of the issues surrounding this prospect (pp. 103–104), but they do not advocate for or against it. I am in agreement with this “nonposition.” It may become feasible in the future, but does not appear to be at this time.

The new *ID Competencies* has several notable features. First is a shift from a “journeyman” focus to a distinction between *essential* and *advanced* competencies. The earlier edition attempted to identify the basic set of competencies that all experienced instructional designers

should possess. The present distinction, between essential skills that apply to all instructional designers and advanced skills, is useful.

Second, this edition has two new domains of competencies that are highly relevant and important to the development of our field. They are "Professional Foundations" and "Implementation and Management."

Another notable feature in this edition is the useful discussions of how the competencies can be used by different audiences, such as practicing designers, design managers, academics, and professional development suppliers. It also describes the subsets of competencies that might be appropriate for specialists who have only limited involvement with instructional design. These include analysts, evaluators, e-learning specialists, and project management specialists.

The book is divided into two major parts and a set of appendixes. Part I, which will probably be the most heavily used portion by most readers, contains five chapters covering history and assumptions pertaining to the competencies, a presentation and discussion of the competencies, and discussions of their use by people in various roles and specialties. Part II presents the validation research on the current set of competencies. The appendixes include the earlier list of competencies, a glossary, ethical considerations, and a list of organizations that participated in the competency validation study.

The first chapter, "Instructional Design Competence," provides an overview of changes in the field since the first edition was published in 1986. The authors observe that the preponderance of practice since that time has occurred in the private sector. The younger generations of professionals in this field may not know otherwise, but prior to that time, most of the work in developing and applying the practices of this field was in academic and military settings.

This chapter also contains a good description of the uses of the competencies and how they are grounded in the IBSTPI competency model. This model illustrates the relationships among the competencies and various inputs such as job behaviors, accepted standards, values and ethics, and future vision. The textual description of the model is clear, but the diagram of it (p. 33) is a

bit confusing because it has boxes with inputs but no outputs, and does not illustrate all of the relationships.

One of the more interesting and useful parts of Chapter 1 is a list of 10 assumptions that cover a variety of points concerning roles, breadth of applicability, and expectations for levels of performance. Some also illustrate newly established functions. For example, Assumption 4 states that instructional design no longer focuses primarily on the outputs of instructional design, that is, instructional products, but on results. In the authors' words, "Instructional design is most commonly seen as resulting in transfer of training and organizational performance improvement" (p. 39). This is in keeping with traditional systems models of instructional design, but calls attention to the systemic aspects of the process. If one system, such as instructional design, is not effectively integrated via results with other systems then its benefits will not endure.

There are 23 instructional design competencies in the updated list and each has a subordinate list of performance statements. The entire set of competencies and 122 performance statements are divided into four general domains:

- Professional Foundations
- Planning and Analysis
- Design and Development
- Implementation and Management

The entire set is presented without elaboration in Chapter 2 and repeated with elaboration in Chapter 3, which is a discussion and analysis of the competencies. It is not clear why Chapter 2 is necessary, given that the same information is repeated in toto in Chapter 3 and that both are short chapters. There is some benefit to having the competency list without elaboration, but that could easily go into an appendix.

The discussions in Chapter 3 range from clarification of the rationale for a given competency through explanations of what is meant by it to admonitions concerning activities for which designers should assume responsibility. The utility of these discussions varies widely. For example, the discussions of Competencies 2, 3, and 4, in the newly added and important domain covering professional development and development of the profession, remind us that

we are members of a defined and growing profession, not just technical practitioners. Furthermore, the discussion encourages us to accept responsibility for contributing to our profession and our personal development. I believe this is extremely useful and important. However, the discussion of Competency 1, which pertains to communication skills, contains two full paragraphs explaining that communication skills are important for instructional designers, a point that is so clearly evident that it hardly requires so much attention. However, I expect these discussions will be useful for most readers, especially those who are using this book as an introduction to their understanding of the field.

This edition of the *ID Competencies* does not include concrete examples of anchoring behaviors that illustrate the performances. This feature was in the earlier edition and is in most other competency books, but was omitted from this edition. It would be helpful if the authors had discussed this issue and why they made the change. Certainly, the present volume is more succinct and easier to use than the earlier editions, which is a plus.

A notable addition to the competencies is the section on implementation and management. This is critical because few development projects are conducted by individuals working in relative isolation from a team. All but a few of the competencies in this section are designated as "advanced." While these designations are based on the validation research conducted by IBSTPI, I am surprised that more of the competencies and performances in this section are not designated as "essential." Perhaps this will change in the next edition, as the responsibilities of instructional designers continue to grow.

Chapters 4 and 5 contain highly useful discussions of how various persons might use the competencies. Chapter 4 discusses their use by design practitioners for benchmarking, by design managers in support of human resource functions and project management, by academics for curriculum development, and by suppliers (consultants) for their professional development. There is also a discussion of the potential use of the competencies for professional certification. The authors provide a detailed and fair discussion of the issues, but do

not take a position on either advocacy or dissuasion.

Chapter 5 focuses on the potential use of the competencies by specialists. For each of four categories of specialist (analysts, evaluators, e-learning specialists, and project managers), the authors provide recommendations as to which competencies might be the most appropriate to include in each specialization. A convenient set of matrices that list the competencies recommended for each role, together with discussion, is included.

Part II of the book is useful for those who want to use the competencies in a rigorous manner in support of curriculum development and job descriptions, or who want to conduct similar research. This part of the book contains a detailed presentation of the research in support of the competencies, including reviews of related research, a validation survey with an international sample of instructional designers, and a final review by the IBSTPI Board of Directors. This provides a broad base of empirical support based on self-report data and expert judgment.

Although it would be expensive, perhaps some or all of the competencies could be validated against actual performance if it were perceived in the future to be cost beneficial.

In many books the appendix pages never get their edges soiled or become dog-eared. I doubt that will be the case with this book. There are several useful inclusions in the appendixes. The list of 1986 competencies, the glossary and reference list, and the IBSTPI code of ethical standards will certainly be useful to us as we continue our competency development and assessment processes here at Florida State, and I predict that others will also turn to them.

Overall, this is a succinct, timely, and relevant book that is a positive contribution to the continuing development of our field. It is pleasurable to be able to get specific information (the wheat) without having to tromp through pages of unnecessary elaborations and reports (the chaff). The clarity and appropriateness of the competencies and performance statements illustrate the tremendous amount of work that went into the competency development and review processes.

Even though it would have reduced the suc-

cinctness of the book, I would like to have seen more behavioral anchors for the competencies, or at least a rationale for not including them. Also, I found it odd that there was no discussion of the relationship between these competencies and the growing emphasis in our field on performance technology. There are a few references to performance technology and being able to prescribe noninstructional solutions to performance problems, but there is no actual discussion of the concept of performance technology, its role in our field, and how it relates to the revised instructional design competencies. I believe this would have been an appropriate and useful thing to do.

The overall quality and utility of *Instructional Design Competencies: The Standards* is excellent, and we will certainly use it here at Florida State. We have moved from a traditional comprehensive exam based on a set of thematic papers to

the development and presentation of competency-based portfolios by our students. We have found this to be extremely useful for our program development and for the students' professional development. We will compare the current IBSTPI list to our list, which was derived from the 1986 list, a prepublication version of the current list, and other sources. This book will help us in our efforts to strengthen our curriculum continuously, based on inputs such as these competencies and our own view of how the field is or should be developing. Without hesitation, I recommend this book be purchased and used by both individuals and organizations in the instructional design and related fields. □

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