

# What's Going on Here?

## Barriers and Strengths

# 2

With gaps defined, let's now focus on the "why." In this section, I will ask you to go deep to identify **root causes**. I sometimes think of it like a mystery to solve as I work to fully understand the likely many things that influence the gap.

### Gap Influencers: Types of Barriers and Strengths

When you contemplate the things that influence a gap, let's first acknowledge that some of our influencing barriers and strengths rest within (think, intrinsic) the *people* involved, and some of the influencers are external forces that are under the control of the *organizations* in which we work and learn. **Behavioral engineering** (Gilbert, 2007) suggests that, as humans, there are things that drive and underlie everything we do and everything we don't do. Said another way, there are things that must be in place for us to complete any expectation with success. That includes the very things our initiatives seek to support people in achieving.

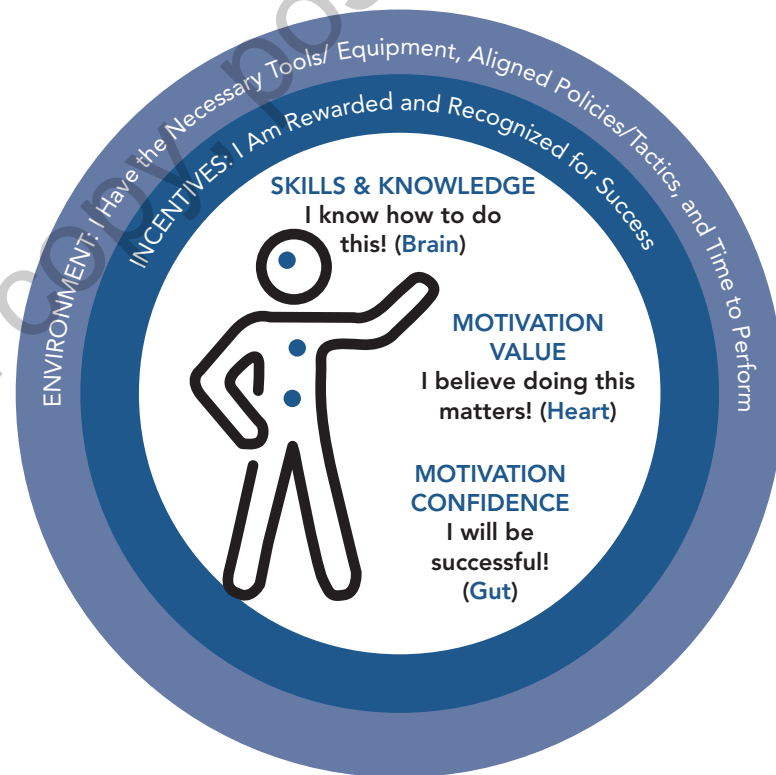
There are four categories of influencers. Table 2.1 and Figure 2.1 provide a quick overview of the categories and a description of where their influence originates.

The categories draw upon the work of three individuals. First, Gilbert (2007), who is considered by many to be the originator of human performance technology. Second, Mager and Pipe (1997), who leveraged Gilbert's work into a helpful framework for analyzing performance problems, defining goals and objectives, and measuring results. And third and most significantly, Rossett (2009), who streamlined these ideas into a set of conditions that are equally helpful and efficient. Rossett also offered the people/organization dichotomy, which helps organize thinking and the solutions upon which your initiatives will rely.

**Table 2.1 Barriers and Strengths Category Overview**

FOCUS	4 CATEGORIES OF BARRIERS/ STRENGTHS	SHORT DESCRIPTION
People	1. Skills and Knowledge	Possessing the necessary skill and knowledge to successfully perform
	2. Motivation	Having value for the work (they care and see why) and confidence in being successful (self-efficacy)
Organization	3. Incentives	Rewards of all kinds that come from performing
	4. Environment	Necessary tools and equipment; aligned policies and tactics—in sum, expectations and available time to perform

**Figure 2.1 Barrier and Strength Categories**



## DID YOU KNOW? WHEN PEOPLE DON'T DO WHAT THEY SHOULD

When titling their book *Analyzing Performance Problems*, Mager and Pipe (1997) chose the subtitle, "They Really Outta Wanna." Isn't it the truth?

- Teachers aren't implementing the new and innovative instructional practices we spent three weeks learning about over summer.
- Students just cannot seem to "get" the order of operations.
- Our annual test scores fell short of expectations, and our students should want to do better.
- That zero-waste, school recycling initiative has done nothing to reduce our carbon footprint!

If you're the one in charge of the school or in charge of the related initiative, it's so easy to find yourself saying, "They really outta wanna do this," and for so many reasons!

But the plain truth is that the "knowing" part is really only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to people being successful in meeting outcomes—no matter what they are. Years of collective work has helped to estimate the frequency with which different "barriers" forestall reaching the sort of "performance-based" outcomes our initiatives involve. Whether it's teachers applying professional development in their classrooms, new leaders finding success in building the master calendar, or students producing a play they wrote, having the "knowing how" is just one part of the larger system that governs doing—and especially successful doing.

While the existing research comes largely from the business and not school world, it's safe to suggest that what we have learned transfers to the training and performance of leaders and staff within school systems.

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Over time, research has established that when something isn't happening, it's likely *not* the result of not knowing how. I like the way Stolovitch and Maurice (1998) say it:

More than 80% of performance gaps have little to do with skill and knowledge deficiencies. Rather, they are mostly the result of

- Inadequate information (e.g., lack of clear expectations; insufficient and/or untimely feedback; incomplete documentation)
- Insufficient tools and resources (e.g., procedures, equipment, personnel)
- Inappropriate, inadequate, and even counterproductive incentives (e.g., lack of appropriate rewards for desired performance; punishments for doing the right thing; rewards for non-accomplishments)
- Task interferences that place obstacles in the path of achieving desired ends (p. 10)

OK. That language may sound a little stilted when read by a school leader. The point remains that our initiatives really need to heed this simple and poignant fact. When someone isn't doing what we want, it's all too common to assume they need some good PD. "Train em up," we simply conclude. Yet doing that—or doing only that—as our "fix" won't fix anything approximately 80% of the time (Dean, 1994; Gilbert, 2007; Rummler & Brache, 1996; Stolovitch & Keeps, 1992).