

# Needs assessment



Now that you've been introduced to the Dick and Carey model of instructional design, it's time to take a closer look at each of the steps in the process. As you do so you will begin to develop your own individual design project. The product that you end up with at the end of each lesson will allow you to move forward to the next step in the process. The first step in the instructional design process is to determine what it is you want the learners to do when they finish with the instruction. Generally you do this by performing some sort of a Needs Assessment, which is the first step in the Dick and Carey model (see below). If you recall, this is also the first step in the ASSURE model (Analyze Learners) as well as the first step in the Reiser and Dick model (Identifying Instructional Goals).

The Needs Assessment is undertaken to identify the goals for an instructional project. In doing so you are trying to identify the gap between the desired goals and the current status. This gap is referred to as a need (hence the term "Needs" Assessment). Burton and Merrill (1991) have summarized six types of educational needs:

Normative need - A discrepancy between an individual's or group's present state and a given norm or standard. Normative needs exist if, for example, a student's score on the SAT is lower than the national standard or average or if general education courses at a college do not meet state requirements.

Felt need - A felt need is an individual desire or want that an individual has to improve either his or her performance. Asking people what they want is frequently used in identifying felt needs. One, however, should be cautious in using this type of data since perceptions of possibilities, social acceptance, and availabilities as well as personal attributes may influence what people

say they want. When searching for felt needs, designers must be aware of needs that are motivated by a desire other than performance improvement.

**Expressed need or demand** - A felt need becomes an expressed need when people put what they want into actions. For example, if more students sign up for an online course than the seat limit, then there may be an expressed need for more sections of the course. Expressed needs are often identified in suggestion boxes and in-house publications with a question-and-answer or suggestion column.

**Comparative need** - A discrepancy between what one group has and what another group, with similar characteristics, has. A comparative need is present when two groups with similar characteristics do not receive a similar service. College A in a given state, for instance, has a modern computer laboratory, whereas College B in the same state does not. A comparative need may thus exist.

**Anticipated or future need** - A discrepancy between what is presently available and the projected demands of the future. Undoubtedly, the identification of anticipated needs is critical in educational planning since this may help equip students with necessary knowledge and skills to deal with " what will be" rather than " what is". Identifying such needs should be part of any planned change so training can be designed prior to implementation of the change. For example, a school principal and supervisors might decide to implement a new instructional technique (e. g., cooperative learning) next year. An anticipated need is the knowledge teachers require to use the cooperative learning method effectively in a classroom.

Critical-incident need - Critical-incident needs emerge when failures that may be rare but have significant consequences happen. Shootings in Columbine High and other schools prompted needs for security measures to be taken in public schools as well as education on violence to be received by the public. Critical incident needs are identified by analyzing potential problems. For example, chemical plants and petroleum refineries often develop employee training programs for handling emergencies such as fires, explosions, or spills. Other critical incident needs are identified by asking " what if." questions; for example, what would happen if the main computer or phone system failed?