CRITICAL INCIDENT
TECHNIQUE

Training Workbook

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Introduction

In this lesson you will learn about the Critical Incident Technique, which is a tool that is used to conduct front-end analysis. Within this lesson, you will also learn of the six steps involved in performing the Critical Incident Technique. All Critical Incident Technique terminal behaviors and most enabling behaviors will be outlined within this structured lesson. Survey results have reflected a knowledge deficiency, therefore additional instruction will be provided on the three topics below.

- Sorting factors using Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale (BARS);
- Filling gaps on Bars;
- Editing recorded incidents.

The purpose of the Critical Incident Technique is to gather information (war stories) on behaviors that contribute to the success or demise of performance. These incidences or war stories were observed and are shared via written reports or oral interviews. War stories are facts derived from peers, subordinates, customers, vendors and management. The result of this technique according to Zemke and Kramlinger (1982),” are reports or descriptions of things people in the studied population report having done or have been observed doing by others” (p. 129).

The benefit of using the Critical Incident Technique is that once all of the steps have been completed, training professionals will have behavioral data that can be used for various training based exercises. Other benefits of this technique is that it is inexpensive and procedurally flexible. The Critical Incident Technique is unique in that it can uncover or identify rare behaviors or tasks that effect performance. Overall, this technique provides a wealth of organizational information from a personal perspective.

The importance of this technique is that it can be “used to measure and evaluate both end-of-training and on-job behavior”. (Zemke and Kramlinger, 1982, p. 130) Also, along with being a benefit, this technique is once again an important and effective tool used to capture data on individual job behaviors and tasks.

In the previous lesson you learned about the Stimulus – Response Table (S-R table) technique. According to Zemke and Kramlinger (1982), this task analysis technique is a more sophisticated form of the task-listing approach (p. 39). Just like the S-R Table technique, the Critical Incident Technique uses observations to obtain data on job performance and or behaviors. And just like other techniques that have already been addressed or have yet to be addressed, the Critical Incident Technique is another investigative tool that can be used individually or part of the front-end analysis process.
Objectives
At the end of this lesson you will be able to:

- Explain the Critical Incident Technique;
- Explain the importance of conducting the Critical Incident Technique;
- Identify the 6 steps involved in the Critical Incident Technique;
- Edit recorded critical incidents;
- Use a Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale (BARS).

Outline
Definition of Critical Incident Technique.
Definition of BARS.
Purpose of Critical Incident Technique.
When to use the Critical Incident Technique.
Six steps in the Critical Incident Technique.
Exercise
Lesson Summary

Definitions
Critical Incident Technique – Is a task analysis technique that through personal narratives effective and ineffective job performance behaviors are determined and identified. This technique is also part of the front-end analysis process.

Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale (BARS) – A vertical scale with points from bottom to top. The points on the scale begin at 1 and can go up to 10. Each rating on the scale is considered a performance measure, 1 being poor and 10 being good. It is a quantifiable method of appraisal.

Purpose of Critical Incident Technique
The Critical Incident Technique is a tool used to gather information (war stories) on behaviors that contribute to the success or demise of performance. When performed correctly, this front-end analysis tool will:

- Identify tasks or behaviors that lead to ineffective job performance;
- Identify tasks or behaviors that lead to effective job performance;
- Uncover overall skills, attitudes, knowledge or values that contribute to effective or ineffective job performance.

When to use the Critical Incident Technique
- When there is a need for qualitative data.
• When behaviors are observable.
• When according to Zemke and Kramlinger (1982), there are “critical behaviors of jobs and tasks that allow a high degree of individuality”. (p. 139).

Example
You are invited to participate in a critical incident task analysis. The purpose of this task analysis is to determine effective and ineffective behaviors that effect job performance within various organizations.

What Will You Be Asked to Do?
As a SME’s, you will be asked to perform the tasks below. Please allot 30 minutes to 1 hour to participate in this activity.

➢ Participate in a discussion concerning job performance behaviors.
➢ On the forms provided, record the best and worst performance behaviors, complete with behaviors that influenced each tasks.
➢ Review recorded stories and agree on identified effective and ineffective behaviors.

Risks
During the discussion portion of this activity, you will have to share personal observations. This may cause you to experience some discomfort.
There aren’t any other risks associated with this activity.

Benefits
This activity will help performance technologist learn job behaviors that promoted effective or ineffective performance, thus helping to improve performance within a job group, department or organization.

Confidentiality
Your anonymity will be maintained at all times as you participate in this activity.

Voluntary
Participation in this activity is completely voluntary. You may choose to terminate your participation in this activity at any time.
Main Lesson

Now that you have finished learning the definition, purpose and application of the Critical Incident Technique, here are the actual steps need to perform this particular front-end analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Create two groups of subject matter experts (SME).</td>
<td>Gather subject experts to participate in the Critical Incident Technique.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Record/edit critical incidents.</td>
<td>After brief icebreaker, have the all SME’s document specific positive and negative job performance incidences on a provided form. Edit recorded responses and translate them into core statements. Write each core statement onto an index card.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Create, review and reduce factors.</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Factor 1" /> <img src="image2" alt="Factor 2" /> Sort similar core statements cards into groups. The end result is different groups that contain like core statements. These groups are called factors. Allow the SME’s review, discuss and agree on individual statements. Have the SME’s further reduce the number of core statements and factors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sort factors using Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale (BARS).</td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale (BARS)" /> Sort factors into two groups – positive and negative. With 7 being good and 1 being bad, for each factor, have SME’s rank individual core statement cards onto the vertical rating scale. A poor performance behavior should be placed at the bottom of the scale (1). A moderate behavior should be placed in the middle (3 or 4). A good behavior should be placed at the top (7).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fill gaps on BARS.</td>
<td>Once all core statement cards per factor have been placed on the BARS, there may be gaps that exist within the rating scale. Identify additional critical incidences. Translate new critical incidences into core statements and write in an index card. For each factor, post new core statements cards along the BARS, thus filling in the gaps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reconcile critical incident differences / discrepancies.</td>
<td>SME's should review the completed BARS and come to an agreement that all posted critical incidences are accurate and relevant. All BARS related disagreements should be reconciled before summarizing data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional</td>
<td>Report findings to management.</td>
<td>Summarize dominate behaviors that effect job performance be it good or bad. Report findings to management.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Exercise**

Please allot 45 minutes to complete.

**Purpose** - These exercises will give you a greater understanding on editing recorded incidents and using the Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale (BARS).

**Activity 1 - Edit recorded incidents**

You have just received 30 critical incidents. Each critical incident has been recorded on an individual form that was provided by the trainer. Below, you will find a sample of the critical incidences received. For each critical incident, edit the story into brief core statements. Refer to example A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recorded Critical Incident</th>
<th>Core Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A.</strong> Leona used only ¾ cup of sugar for the pound cake. She did this because she ran out of sugar and figured that using less sugar would not make a difference.</td>
<td>The baker used less sugar in the recipe than required thinking that the change wouldn’t be noticeable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong> Employee Joe made a follow up call to customer Mr. Leon a week after the sale. Joe wanted to make sure that Mr. Leon was completely satisfied with the equipment that he purchased from the store. Before ending his follow up call with Mr. Leon, Joe gave the customer his contact information for any future issues that may arise with the purchased equipment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.</strong> The mechanic was in the process of replacing a rack and pinion on a '03 Dodge Neon. The mechanic did not use a new replacement part but instead used a recycled part. When the customer arrived to pick up their vehicle, the mechanic did not disclose that the replaced rack and pinion was not new. The mechanic then charged the customer the full price for a new rack and pinion plus labor. The customer did not know about the recycled car part.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong> Mary did not use safety goggles while using the lathe in the machine shop. She stated that she has worked in various machine shops for the past 15 years. She believes that she has too much experience and knowledge to get hurt. As she worked on her project, she still did not have on safety goggles. I noticed that she worked very carefully but at a slower that average pace.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity 2 - Sort factors using Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale (BARS)

Your condensed critical incidents have now been sorted into factors. These groups of factors must now be placed on the BARS. Review each critical incident within Factor 1. Rank each critical incident in order of 1 being poor behavior to 7 good behavior. Refer to example B.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 1 – Lack of Customer Attention</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. Customers were not greeted as they entered into the store.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cashier did not say “Thank You” or “Your Welcome” after the customer made a purchase.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cashiers continued their conversation despite the customer standing by the register ready to make a purchase.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cashier responded to the customers’ inquiry in a nasty, nonchalant manner.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cashier serves the customer with a smile.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now you have ranked each critical incident. The number that you ranked each incident is the same number that appears on the BARS. Example B was ranked 2, so technically that incident is a 2 on the BARS.
Activity 3 - Filling gaps on Bars
As a continuation from Activity 2, after you have placed all of your critical incidents on the BARS, you will notice visible gaps on the BARS rating scale. Below, you will find additional critical incidents. Give each incident a corresponding rank that will fill in the gaps and make the BARS full and complete.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 1 – Customer Attention</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small delay time between the customers’ question and cashiers response.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchandise holds were not labeled properly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each customer was given a sales flyer upon entering the store.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cashier did not secure the correct size for the customer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

To perform a Critical Incident Technique, the following steps must be completed: (fill in the blanks using the answers listed).

1. Create ______________________ groups of ______________________________.

2. _______________________/____________________________ critical incidents.

3. Create, ______________________ and reduce ______________________________.

4. ______________ ______________ using Behaviorally ______________ Rating Scale (BARS).

5. Fill ______________________________ on ________________________________.

6. Reconcile critical incident ______________________ / ______________________.

7. ______________________________ __________________________ to management.

Answers

| 1. 2, SMEs | 2. Record, Edit |
| 5. Gaps, BARS | 6. Differences, Discrepancies |
| 7. Report, Findings |
From this lesson, you have learned the who, what, where, when and why of the Critical Incident Technique. You have also learned the importance, purpose and benefit of this particular tasks analysis process. In addition to this, you have also received comprehensive instruction on the six steps involved in executing the Critical Incident Technique. You have also completed three exercise activities that reinforced the more difficult concepts within the Critical Incident Technique process. Overall, the Critical Incident Technique is a front-end analysis or task analysis tool that is used to determine effective and ineffective performance behaviors on individualized jobs.

From completing this lesson, you are now able to perform the following:

- Explain the Critical Incident Technique;
- Explain the importance of conducting the Critical Incident Technique;
- Identify the 6 steps involved in the Critical Incident Technique;
- Edit recorded critical incidents;
- Use a Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale (BARS).

From completing the lesson exercises, you should now have a comprehensive, working understanding and knowledge of the following:

- Sorting factors using Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale (BARS);
- Filling gaps on Bars;
- Editing recorded incidents.

There are many different front-end analysis and tasks analysis tools which can be used to identify and resolve job performance problems. Using the Critical Incident Technique will allow a training professional to uncover observed critical behaviors that have a direct link to performance issues.

In the next lesson, you will learn how to conduct a Consensus Group. This front – end analysis technique consist of “methods for synthesizing data already known about the tasks in question and getting agreement among subject matter experts on the data” (Zemke and Kramlinger, 1982, p. 154). It’s best to use this technique when there are multiple ways to do one job.
Reference