



DON'T TAKE PERFORMANCE FOR GRANTED

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New expectations, tools or training are often required to get employees ready to perform to changing requirements in today's dynamic work environment. Resources are dedicated to influence change in behavior, yet the business results are often disappointing. A 21st century performance-centered framework is helpful to analyze performance problems, determine why performance is deficient and identify solutions. The framework also provides a means to identify and execute active management reinforcement strategies to influence and sustain desired results.

Supervisors frequently rely on project managers, consultants, training suppliers, human resources departments and others to prepare their teams to execute job and task requirements and perform to expectations. In the 21st century job environment, organization policies, procedures, technology and work processes change frequently. New expectations, tools or training are often required to get employees ready to perform to new requirements. Why is it that, too often, the expected results simply do not happen? There may be many reasons, but three factors play a major role in contributing to the lack of ability to achieve desired results consistently.

1. The nature of an open performance system.

Today the workplace is an open performance system where multiple factors routinely influence performance. An open performance system is typical of today's knowledge worker where the inputs and outputs vary and work specifications are dependent on the situation at hand. Team members are required to make decisions; multitask; and face competing priorities, mixed performance signals, demanding customers, heavy workloads and limited resources.

2. Insufficient management reinforcement when performance expectations change.

Isolated solutions rarely get results. That is, a single solution by itself, such as changing a work process, communicating new expectations or sending team members to training, does not necessarily drive performance change in an open performance system. Supervisors must be active in supporting execution as a follow-up to any performance solution or change in expectations.

3. Current performance habits.

In today's dynamic open system job environment, employees search for anything that resembles stability. They rely on their existing performance habits and the way they have always done things because it is familiar, easy and comfortable. Supervisors must recognize that current performance habits are a significant barrier in bringing about desired change in behavior.

Since we cannot change the nature of the open performance system, we must pursue actions with the second and third aforementioned factors in order to influence expected performance results. Let's review an appropriate context for performance. A performance-centered framework demonstrates how supervisors can

execute their roles in the performance process to achieve the desired results.

Twenty-First Century Performance-Centered Framework

The performance-centered framework is a guide to help supervisors, team members, project managers, training suppliers and others discuss performance requirements of mutual interest and make decisions regarding desired performance and appropriate performance solutions. The framework helps to do the following actions:

- Think about performance in the proper context.
- Frame the right questions to analyze performance deficiencies, identify the performance you want and develop strategies on how to get results.
- Identify performance objectives and measures for projects and performance solutions.
- Communicate with team members, training suppliers and others to negotiate expectations and determine readiness needs.
- Build in accountability for any performance scenario or solution.

Figure 1 presents the performance-centered framework followed by a discussion of each element. The three elements of the framework are business outcomes, execution in

the work setting and performance readiness.

This performance framework allows us to link the elements of performance visibly so that we can address the end in mind and the key factors that influence the desired performance results. As an example, if we want to improve or sustain customer service (business outcome), performers must properly execute product and customer service processes. To ensure that this execution takes place as required, the performers must be performance ready. That is, they must have the confidence and know how to execute, and the work setting environment must be engineered to support their execution. Readiness also means that the proper tools and work processes must be in place and the desired execution must be reinforced by management.

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Business outcomes. Desired business outcomes refer to how the business will benefit when performers execute as expected. Think of it as the end in mind. Business outcomes are the lifeblood of the business enterprise, and they are influenced by many factors. They are usually tied in some way to key performance indicators. Typical categories of outcome measures include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The cost of doing business
 - The profitability of the business (quality of funding for nonprofits)
 - The quality (effectiveness) of research, acquisition, design, development, delivery and management of the organization's business products, processes and services
 - The output (quantity) of products and services (sales, products manufactured, products delivered, orders filled, etc.)
 - The time (efficiency) it takes to complete tasks (output) and business processes, address and correct problem areas and service the customer
 - The achievement of service levels expected by customers
- There are additional categories of

Think about PERFORMANCE

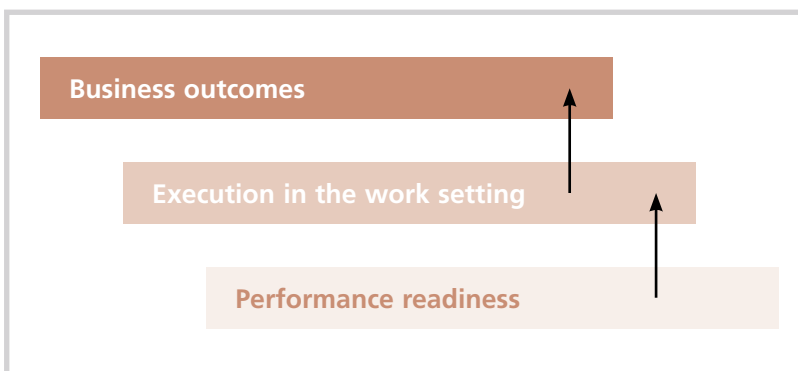


Figure 1. Performance-centered framework

outcome measures and many measures within each category depending on how they are uniquely defined by each organization. Business outcomes are generated from the completion of the business cycle of acquiring, making, marketing, selling, fulfilling orders, delivering, servicing, receiving payment, and accounting for the goods and services.

A business deficiency is anything that takes away from a desired business outcome. For example, customer complaints are a business deficiency indicating that one or more elements of the business cycle are not functioning properly. The issue is to determine the root cause so it can be corrected. It could be poor product quality, such as inappropriate provisioning of a customer order, inadequate service, such as not meeting a delivery promise, inappropriate billing, or some other aspect.

The key questions regarding an outcome deficiency are why does it exist, how and when will it be corrected and how can we prevent it from happening again? Answering these questions requires examining the next element of the performance framework: execution in the work setting.

Execution in the work setting.

This concept identifies what a specific population should be doing or not doing and how individual or team performance may influence the status of one or more desired business outcomes. Execution is the secret sauce when it comes to getting results because the desired business outcome will not occur unless employees execute.

Execution speaks to the activities that people routinely perform in the work setting to accomplish the mission of the organization. Execution and performance are synonymous. By definition, execution occurs in the work setting. It is what people are expected to do. It is the performance of the work itself, the work processes, and how people go about doing it.

Performance readiness. Performance readiness is broad in scope

and includes several components. It is really about execution. When we address performance readiness, we are trying to answer the question: How do we create and sustain a work environment that puts our team in the best possible position to execute and get the results we expect? If someone is not performing, or if we want them to execute in a certain way, we must determine the execution requirements (what they should be doing), how it differs from what they are doing now, and why and how a lack of performance readiness may be contributing to the deficiency.

Competence, tools, technology, resources, work space. Readiness includes individual and team competence (knowledge and skill) that contributes to the confidence of employees as they perform specific tasks and work with other people. It also includes the proper tools, equipment, technology, resources and work space to do the job, all of which are the responsibility of management to provide.

Active management reinforcement.

One additional component that is a significant contributor to readiness

is active management reinforcement (AMR). AMR establishes the tone for the work setting and is the single biggest contributor to influencing individual and team performance. AMR addresses actions of the performer's immediate supervisor or manager to reinforce performance, reflect sponsorship of any performance readiness need or scenario, and be supportive of execution in the work setting. Supervisors must know that their own insufficient AMR could be contributing to the readiness deficiency of the team or a team member.

Execution and performance are synonymous.

Reinforcing desired performance and outcomes

When a business outcome measure is identified as deficient or is perceived to be in imminent danger of declining, attention should immediately turn to the reasons for it. Work activities are immediately suspected as a possible contributor to an undesirable business outcome.

Key performance analysis

questions. To determine the performance problem, root cause and a

Questions about PERFORMANCE

When a business outcome measure is identified as deficient or is perceived to be in imminent danger of declining, seek answers to the following questions.

1. Are people doing what they should be doing?
2. If not, what is the specific execution deficiency that may be contributing to the business outcome deficiency?
3. After the deficiency is known, ask: Why are they not executing? That is, what is contributing to the lack of this individual or team execution? What is the root cause and how do current performance habits or management reinforcement come into play?
4. What else (internal and external) may be influencing the business outcome deficiency?
5. What should be done (performance readiness solution or other solution) to correct the execution and influence the business outcome in a positive way?

Figure 2. Key performance analysis questions

feasible solution, a performance analysis should be performed. The analysis should view the performance situation objectively with no preconceived notion as to the cause of any deficiency. The analysis can be administered through interviews or focus groups with team members and other knowledgeable sources.

While a supervisor may be capable of administering the analysis, it is best to partner with a third party to ensure objectivity and freedom of expression by the sources. The third party could be a professional staff person experienced in analysis or it could be outsourced. The analysis poses five types of sequential questions as illustrated in Figure 2.

Once we know the answer to the five key questions, we can turn our attention to helping the performers become “performance ready.” We should not attempt to address performance readiness until we know the execution requirements, the execution gap and the reasons performers are not executing. It is these reasons (root cause) that indicate the nature of a practical performance readiness solution. The five-question analysis should yield the answers we need along with plenty of examples.

Active management reinforcement revisited. The quality of AMR should be part of any performance analysis when determining the status of a team or individual’s performance readiness. An analysis often reveals that supervisors in an open performance system can easily be distracted from doing their job just as performers are distracted. A remedy may simply be for supervisors to become more active in reinforcing the deficient aspects of employee performance for a designated period of time.

Once performers become accustomed to executing the new performance behavior and they are satisfied with the results — including a distinct awareness of supervisor feedback and reinforcement — it becomes the new

Think about MANAGEMENT

Managers and supervisors must take timely action to provide for these elements of AMR	The benefit of this action
<p>A. Advance communication of information and negotiation of expectations. Communicate goals and requirements regarding responsibilities, work roles and workload distribution.</p>	<p>A. Performers will know what is expected and will be involved in determining what, how, when and the criteria for successful execution.</p>
<p>B. Timely performance feedback. Observe, ask questions and make supportive or corrective comments when offering feedback. Feedback can take place in a fleeting minute on the spot and does not necessarily require a sit down meeting.</p>	<p>B. Current performance will either be reinforced or corrected. Performers will know the work behavior is important and if they are on the right track. If they have fallen back into old habits, they will be steered in the proper direction.</p>
<p>C. Casual coaching. Just as feedback does not have to be time consuming, neither does positive corrective coaching. Show the employee the right way to execute or create a partnership with someone who can. Of course, if an employee needs significant coaching time, find a way to provide it.</p>	<p>C. Employees appreciate your time and attention and they typically respond favorably. A little guidance can go a long way not only to improve a skill or redirect behavior, but also to gain the team member’s respect and commitment.</p>
<p>D. Recognition. A few kind words or an appreciative nod can be powerful recognition whether privately or publicly administered. Keep track of how often you recognize employees and keep it current but genuine.</p>	<p>D. People want approval and they seek it. Rewards and recognition are the most powerful form of incentive and will likely gain continuing commitment.</p>
<p>E. Ongoing support. Be there when your team needs you. Consistently and openly seek out what they need from you and whether or not you are indeed providing it. Be certain that your team has adequate tools, equipment, technology and resources to deliver its products and services to your expectations.</p>	<p>E. When employees feel that you are always in their court and they can call on you to meet their needs, it gives them comfort and a sense of engagement and stability.</p>

Figure 3. Active management reinforcement (AMR) revisited

norm or a new habit. Once performers see that the new behavior brings positive consequences and results, they become comfortable with it and begin to believe in it. Supervisors can then place less emphasis (become less

active) on that specific behavior and shift to other performance issues.

While improved performance may allow supervisors to place less emphasis on a specific behavior, nothing is ever permanent. In today’s

Questions about MANAGEMENT

Relevant needs
How do you know our needs?
How do you know that your program solution will fit our needs?
What will you do to customize the (fill in the blank) _____ program solution to make it relevant to our situation?
Business outcome
How will your program solution contribute to improving the (fill in the blank) _____ business outcome?
What evidence do you have that your program solution has influenced improvement in such measures before?
Execution in the work setting
Can you provide me with evidence on what my team will be able to do after participating in your program?
What is your strategy to ensure that execution in the work setting actually occurs?
Supervisor support and reinforcement role
What is my role before, during and after the program delivery?
What specific suggestions, tools or templates do you have to help me fulfill my role?
How will you help me conserve my scarce time while guiding and supporting me in fulfilling my role?

Figure 4. Training supplier accountability

dynamic work environment things can and do change quickly. Attention to the behavior may need to be revisited and AMR reactivated to sustain the desired results. Figure 3 illustrates typical active management reinforcement actions that supervisors and managers should practice in order to create and sustain a performance ready work environment.

When we ask performers to change their behavior, we are asking them to change old habits. Performers are likely comfortable with their current habits because they represent confidence and stability. When asked to perform differently, one of the first things employees will likely do is observe how management behaves and whether they are serious about this

requirement. If there appears to be no sustaining interest or management support for this behavior, employees may revert to old habits, even if it is weeks or months later. If management ignores the behavior of reverting to old habits, this actually reinforces and rewards the old behavior.

Partnering with others to influence performance. Supervisors and managers must frequently partner with others inside and outside the organization to enable performance readiness for their teams. This necessity occurs due to implementing company policies, processes and technology, training and developing team members, and other reasons. Whatever the reason for the partnership, supervisors have five key responsibilities:

- Negotiate performance criteria for the partnership.
- Work with the partner to identify the team's performance and readiness needs.
- Take an active role in readiness and execution activities.
- Communicate with employees regarding the purpose and benefits of the activity and hold them accountable to participate and execute.
- Hold the partner accountable to deliver a relevant solution and a follow-up strategy to enable the team's execution in the work setting. Perhaps an example can best describe the above responsibilities. Using a training situation as the example, the process is the same whether the internal training department or external supplier is the partner. The general idea is to let the partner do the bulk of the work while the supervisor asks the right questions, negotiates performance criteria for the partnership, supports the necessary activities for a successful effort and holds the partner accountable.

The discussion should begin by focusing on outcome and execution deficiencies (the business driver) and proceed to identify expectations and what is required to identify and deliver a successful performance solution. Figure 4 illustrates sample questions the supervisor should ask the training partner.

When we ask performers to change their behavior, we are asking them to change old habits. Many factors in today's work environment influence employee performance. Employees naturally resist the ongoing change that affects their workday and their work status. This ongoing change, the tendency for employees to cling to current patterns and habits, and the nature of today's open performance system require that supervisors be involved actively to manage the results they want. When it comes to performance, performers have many choices. Supervisors must actively reinforce the most desirable choices to keep the business competitive and economically viable. ❖