

## Performance drivers - doing the best job possible

### Basic tools for improving performance for individuals and team

Most people come to work to do a good job – is that your experience? But how often have you become frustrated and even a little annoyed when people didn't do what you wanted or expected them to do.

#### Case study:

For instance, Ann is a third year accountant. She's served her time in the firm and built on her university learning with some very useful and practical skills that mean she is contributing significantly to both client and the firm's business results. She's got her training hours up to date, and keeps abreast of the latest developments. Because she's achieving good and reliable results her manager gives Ann more work. And because Margaret, her manager is overloaded, Ann doesn't get access to her, consequently missing out on vital feedback and, more importantly for Ann, positive reinforcement. Ann finally figures out that if she can't a) get to see Margaret, and b) get recognised for her work, then she'll not put so much effort into her job. In fact, she's now flicking through the paper each morning keeping an eye on the job market, and her performance on the job is definitely slipping. Interestingly, Margaret often finds this happens with third year accountants.

#### **What's the cause of the drop in Ann's performance, and more importantly, what are the solutions?**

In the 1950s a US behavioural scientist named Thomas Gilbert researched the barriers to exemplary performance and identified six factors that prevented people from performing at their best. In the world of Human Performance Technology (HPT) Thomas Gilbert's<sup>1</sup> work is commonly known as Gilbert's Six Windows.

Gilbert's research answered the question, "Why don't people do what you want them to do?" The work has been further extended from individuals to team performance.

Practitioners of HPT now rely on his work in the Cause Analysis phase of consulting to enable the solution to match the cause of any performance problem.

The six factors Gilbert identified are most simply shown in the following 'window' format. A lack in any of these represents a barrier to exemplary performance.

|                            |              |            |
|----------------------------|--------------|------------|
| 1. Directional information | 2. Resources | 3. Rewards |
| 4. Competencies            | 5. Capacity  | 6. Motives |

The organisational environment provides factors 1 through 3, while factors 4 through 6 are under the control of the individual or team.

Although each factor is discrete in Gilbert's model, there is significant relationship amongst them. Often a performance problem requires a mix of solutions, not simply a one-window cure-all initiative.

So what does this mean in everyday terms? Here's some more detail on what's involved in each of the six windows.

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<sup>1</sup> Human Competence: Engineering Worthy Performance. McGraw-Hill 1978-1996

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## Directional information

The short story on this window is that people need to know what's expected of them and how they are doing. This starts from the top down – with the strategic and guiding statements for an organisation. Strategy, vision, goals and objectives give people focus and purpose, and they must be clearly communicated throughout the organisation.

Key tasks need to have clearly defined conditions (when do I do this?) and standards (how well do I do this?) communicated and available. Role definitions provide clarity on 'whose job is it'. Performance feedback needs to be regular.

For new people learning complex tasks, that may mean as frequently as every couple of minutes, while for people who have mastered the task the feedback may come at the end of each day, week or even month.

Behaviours that support the values of the organisation need to be pinpointed – and developed inside the organisation.

Individuals need to negotiate their own SMART objectives, something often lacking in organisations. In my experience many performance management systems set objectives that are neither specific nor measurable. Consequently when it comes to review time it is opinion as to whether or not objectives have been achieved. Any wonder there is fear associated with performance reviews!

## Resources

There are lots of possibilities in this factor. It may be as simple as access to a manager, through to something as complex as a re-engineering or process redesign project. Think here about physical resources of tools and equipment, workstations, budget, enough people for the task and electronic performance support systems (the Help button on your computer screen). Sometimes there's a dollar value attached to resources, other times it's as simple as providing a checklist.

## Rewards

These are adequate pay, frequent non-financial incentives in a form that is valued by the recipient, and positive reinforcement dependent upon the achievement of objectives. Career opportunities may also be a motivating factor and form of reward.

If people are confused about what is rewarded, then gossip and rumour will prevail along with a consequent loss of productivity and enjoyment.

When positive reinforcement is given, ensure it is linked to a specific action or outcome. Loose praise, like 'well done' encourages people to seek approval rather than repeat specific behaviours. Expand 'well done' to include a statement like, 'the team got all orders out within 3 minutes today.'

In my opinion, the two key factors to remember here are, 'behaviour that is rewarded is repeated' and 'reward must be in the currency of the recipient'. I highly recommend the book entitled **1001 Ways to Reward Employees** by Bob Nelson.

## Competency

This is the first of the factors that falls within the control of the individual. It is based on the skills and knowledge required to do the job to an exemplary level – quickly and error-free. If the knowledge is present but performance is slow, then opportunities for practice and feedback are required. If the knowledge is NOT present, then some form of instruction is required, followed by practice and feedback.

This is also the ONLY problem that training will solve. Care must be taken to align the skills and knowledge being developed with the strategy of the organisation. Often time and money is wasted training people without practice and feedback, or training people for something they already know HOW to do, but don't know WHEN to do it. Simple directional information or resources could solve the performance problem. There is a huge opportunity to reduce money spent on training, and invest accurate cause analysis.

## Capacity

This refers to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual strength of an individual. For example, if I am normally emotionally stable and capable of dealing with upset clients, but yesterday my dog died, then I may temporarily lose the emotional capacity to carry out the task. Similarly, if I score low on an emotional intelligence measure it is unlikely I would have the capacity to regularly deal with upset clients or to lead staff well.

This area requires detailed diagnosis of the cause of the lack of capacity. An effective selection process in recruitment is the most important means of minimising this performance barrier. Sometimes a job can be redesigned to fit the person, especially if the lack of capacity is physical. Scheduling tasks to match the peak capacity may also be a solution. If dysfunctional behaviour is present, call the professional counsellors or use your employee assistance scheme.

## Motives

Does the individual have a passion for the job? This factor is about the intrinsic motivation of individuals. You're looking here for significant alignment between the values of the individual and the organisation, personal goals and objectives that complement organisational objectives and a belief system that supports the job role. Once again, this is part of the selection process of recruitment, together with clear communication of the values and culture of the organisation.

Does the organisation provide jobs that are meaningful and conditions that are pleasant? Are the actions of leaders motivating or de-motivating?

Clarification of values for the individual often allows them to identify why they feel like a mismatch, and astute counseling can direct them to an industry or organisation where there is greater alignment.

So back to the case study with Ann and Margaret. A skilled consultant would identify through dialogue, astute questioning and observation, and perhaps the use of some diagnostic questionnaires, that there are several solutions to this performance problem.

| <i>Window</i>       | <i>Issue</i>   | <i>Solution</i>   |
|---------------------|--|---|
| <b>Motives</b>      | Margaret is not providing a motivating environment in which to work – suggested by her attitude of ‘. . . often finds this happens with third year accountants’. | Some work is done with Margaret to identify any gap in leadership skills, and those skills are subsequently developed.  |
| <b>Resources</b>    | Ann is lacking resources – namely, access to her leader.   | Margaret and Ann schedule more frequent review sessions   |
| <b>Rewards</b>      | Ann is lacking appropriate rewards for achieving objectives – namely, positive reinforcement for good performance.   | Margaret increases the frequency of positive reinforcement to Ann for performance of key tasks and the achievement of specific objectives.  |
| <b>Rewards</b>      | Ann is receiving ‘punishment’ for good performance – namely she gets more work and less recognition.   | Same as in previous solution  |
| <b>Resources</b>    | Margaret is overloaded.  | Her role definition may need clarifying, and some work redistributed to others, or additional resources acquired by way of more people. Margaret may not actually be overloaded, but may need some coaching in her use of time. |
| <b>Competencies</b> | Margaret doesn’t know what Ann’s concerns are.   | Ann may benefit from coaching in the skill of assertive communication – so she can express her concerns clearly to Margaret.  |

In summary, Gilbert’s research established there are six barriers to people performing at exemplary levels. By using a scientific cause analysis, solutions will be tailored to the specific barrier, rather than resorting to intuition or trial and error. Training is a solution **only** where there is a lack of skills.

By removing the barriers to exemplary performance the people in your business can shine, your business results will improve, and people will truly love coming to work.

*Gail Reichert, CA, Director, Leader’s Edge Ltd  
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