

Talent Development 31 Performance Analysis

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Section 3.5 in the CPTD Certification program for ATD is Performance Improvement. Section C reads, “Skill in conducting performance analysis to identify goals, gaps, or opportunities.”

In this brief article, I will share my thoughts on the important aspect of performance improvement.

Understanding the Gaps

There is no way to identify gaps without a clear picture of two things. First, we need to know exactly what the current performance level is, and second, we need to know what it needs to be in the future.

Step 1 Measure Current Performance

Current performance means different things for every organization. Start by identifying the critical few descriptors of performance relevant to your operation.

If you are in a manufacturing plant, the measures would likely revolve around productivity, quality, reliability, and other tangible factors that describe ideal conditions.

If you are a service organization, customer satisfaction would be high on the list of relevant measures. Cost performance would be another important factor.

If you were in health care, then patient outcomes would dominate the discussions along with unit efficiency.

If you were running a law firm, then the percentage of successful outcomes would be vital information along with the time devoted to each type of case.

Look for extant data that already exists and is relevant to the key measures for your situation. Usually there is plenty of information about how the operation is currently running.

Get creative so you look beyond the direct measures and try to uncover some things that are indicative of problems that may be causing the primary measure to suffer. These might be things like turnover rates, grievance documentation, attendance records, or supervisor counseling reports.

If you find key measures where the data is not readily available, then the first order of business is to create ways to identify what the current performance level actually is.

Step 2 Identify a Vision of the future

To identify gaps, you also need to have an accurate statement of the future state. This information should be available by studying the vision statement for the organization.

Break the vision statement into areas that conform to the measures you identified in step one. What you need to generate is a concrete set of goals for every relevant performance measure for that specific unit.

By comparing the current performance level to the desired one on a case-by-case basis, you begin to identify the specific gaps that need to be addressed in your development program.

Step 3 Brainstorm Opportunities

Opportunities become the creative ways you go about resolving the gaps. Sometimes you will use a direct approach that is obvious from the analysis. For example, in a manufacturing plant, if the yield is below the desired level, the opportunity may be to work with the raw materials supplier to have more consistent supplies.

Often you will identify opportunities for indirect development, such as improved leadership skills, as being the most powerful way to change the system.

Step 4 Create Engagement

Keep in mind that the attitude and engagement of the people doing the work is always a key factor to investigate. In most cases only a small portion of the existing workforce is fully engaged in the work. The Gallup Organization consistently estimates that the average organization routinely achieves only about 30% of fully engaged workers. Changing that level to over 50% by improving the quality of leadership would have a major impact on performance.

To improve the level of engagement, focus on creating a culture of higher trust. Raising the trust level just a few points will translate into major improvements in morale, motivation, and productivity in any organization.

Step 5 Keep Track of Your Progress

Regardless of the specific measures you have uncovered, keep track of the performance and design development efforts to close the gaps as quickly as possible.

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