



by Edward MacDougall

Improving Performance: Fundamentals for Maximizing Employee Effectiveness

All seasoned managers have been there before. There is an issue on the floor, in the kitchen, in the office. An employee is not doing his job as he is supposed to. Maybe he used to do his work correctly, maybe not, but the situation is no longer tolerable. There is a problem – a training problem.

Common Management Response to Under-Performing Employees

Once the issue is identified and deemed worthy enough to address, management typically works to devise a solution. However, this is the point when the plan often veers off course, and the desired improvements are never achieved. The reason this goal is not met is because quite often the employee is sent to some sort of knowledge, skills, or attitude training to “fix” the problem, when in fact this is not the appropriate route to take. On its face this approach is logical, and is certainly defensible based on standard business thinking. After all, isn’t that the purpose of training - to teach people how to do their jobs correctly?

The challenge is that this solution should only be prescribed in very specific situations. Additionally, it is rarely successful when implemented without ongoing management support and follow up. Worse still, training alone may not address the root cause of employee under-performance, meaning it may only be a matter of time before the same issues resurface.

When faced with employee under-performance, mainstream thinking is to assume that the employee does not know how to do his job. In other words, he lacks the required knowledge. However, experience will often tell us otherwise. After all, how often have employees attended a training session that provided little to no impact? How often have you attended a training, only to leave thinking that it was not needed? This is because knowing how to do something does not directly translate into effective performance. Knowledge must be accompanied by other elements of performance.

Determining the Root Cause(s)

Once management decides to address under-performance, action should be taken to determine the root cause or causes. Although there are many resources and consultants available to assist in this process, the main concepts are easily understood and require few resources to implement.

When looking at an individual employee, there are six categories of possible causes that create a gap between expected and actual performance. These categories are listed in Table 1, along with questions used to diagnose whether the category is deficient (i.e., do they have the required information, resources, incentives, etc.). The table is an adaptation of the Behavior Engineering Model (BEM) created in the 1970s by Thomas Gilbert, a pioneer in the field of Human Performance Technology (HPT).

Table 1 – Behavior Engineering Model

Category		Diagnostic Questions
Management can affect directly	1. Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do the employees know what is expected of them? Do they receive feedback on their performance?
	2. Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do the employees have the equipment, materials, and time required to perform as expected?
	3. Incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do the employees receive incentives to perform to company expectations?
Management can affect indirectly	4. Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do the employees know how to do what is expected? Could they do it if they absolutely had to?
	5. Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do the employees have an innate ability (physical or psychological) to perform as expected?
	6. Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are the employees interested in performing as expected?

The exercise for management is to ask the diagnostic questions listed in the BEM. If the answer is no to any of the questions, then there is likely a deficit in the corresponding category that should be investigated. In professional circles this is called a cause analysis.

Management should also understand that they only have direct control over the first three categories listed in the BEM: information, resources, and incentives. The remaining three, knowledge, capacity and motivation, can only be

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influenced by management. In other words, the organization can provide better:

- Information, but cannot give an employee more knowledge.
- Resources, but cannot increase an employee’s capacity to do work.
- Incentives, but cannot make an employee motivated to work.

Understanding the cause does not lead to an obvious solution in all cases. If a solution is not apparent, this would be the time to consult an individual or group versed in the field of HPT.

Implementing the Behavior Engineering Model

Implementing this approach requires no significant outlay of capital, but there must be support from executive management. At most casinos, measurable improvements can occur if employees internalize the BEM and if it is embraced at an organizational level. If nothing else, understanding this model will reduce the likelihood of management implementing an inappropriate solution.

Management cannot do it alone, and neither can the training department. Through understanding and implementing the BEM, both groups can work together to create lasting solutions which treat the root cause of any performance issue and positively affect an employee’s performance. ♣

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