

Management of Staff Competence

Are You sure you give Right Tasks to Right People?



Article by Mr. Gleb Smirnov,
Master of Science in Engineering (MSE), Master Mariner,
10 years of Oil, Chemical and Gas tanker experience,
10 years in Maritime training
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Are you safe and secure in the knowledge that your staff are competent:

- To deal with the crises that sometimes happen in business?
- To take key roles when staff move on?
- To achieve the business goals you have set?

You may be confident that your staff have been trained, but do you know they are competent?

It can be risky to rely on training only. One organisation identified what its staff should be competent in, in order to meet business goals. It invested in a big training programme, but it did not demand that the trainees prove that they could perform to the standards needed on the job. So no-one knew whether all the staff were competent. A year later the inevitable happened – the poor business performance was found to be due to deficiencies in staff competence. Had the original training been competence assessed, the deficiency would have been identified and addressed at source.

Assessment is testing each individual against specific standards of performance. It can be a one-off test or some ongoing checks. Assessment can be at a course or, more frequently these days, on the job.

There are some key success factors in making competency assessment work. If you are interested, read on over the page.⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾Reference: www.pact.co.nz

COMPETENCE ASSESSMENT

Management driven

Leaders who want a change-ready organisation know they need competent people to achieve it.

- They make competence matter.
- They identify what people should be competent in.
- They provide resources and support to those developing competence.
- They demand proof that people have achieved competence

Link to other systems

Assessment of the competence of people must flow through into performance improvement on the job. To make sure of this, competence assessment must link with other systems in the organisation including:

- Selection and promotion
- Performance assessment
- Quality assurance
- Health and safety
- Training
- Production and other manuals

Definition of competence

Competence is the achievement of defined standards of performance. Identifying a competency is half way there. An example is "interpersonal communication". Defining competence is describing what you can see, hear or measure when someone is performing on the job at the standard you want. For example, standards for listening skills could include:

- All contributions of speakers are acknowledged (verbally or non-verbally)
- Body posture is open
- Eye contact is maintained ...

Making assessment matter

To make assessment matter, you link proof of competence to:

- Job descriptions/person specifications
- Selection and promotion
- Attractive job/project placements, development opportunities
- Incentives such as bonuses and pay

Relevant assessment

The assessment proves that a person can perform to the standards on the job. Knowledge tests, portfolios of past work, tests of performance in conditions very different from the workplace - all of these are only part way there.

The assessment has to test whether the person is performing to the standard required on the job - just that - no more and no less.

Quality systems

You should have good tight definitions of competence, relevant assessments, and trained assessors.

But you also have to keep the assessment system itself running to standard.

This system ensures:

- The assessors are performing the assessments properly
- The competence definitions are up to date
- The assessments are up to date

GUIDE TO PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

UNDERSTAND

Most employees want to be successful contributors to an organization. They want to know what is expected of them and how they can most effectively achieve those expectations. Performance management is the systematic process that a manager applies to involve employees in accomplishing a unit's mission and goals, improving overall unit effectiveness, and helping employees understand the importance of their contributions. Effective performance management requires that the manager:

1. Identify the job duties that each employee is expected to accomplish.
2. Communicate the competencies (job knowledge and job skills) necessary to be successful in a position.
3. Ensure that employees have the required competencies, or that there is a process and plan by which they can acquire them.
4. Provide timely feedback on how effectively employees are applying job knowledge and skills to achieve the goals established for their position.
5. Reward effective performance.

In the event that performance does not meet established requirements, the manager must understand the corrective processes and methods that can help improve employee performance.

At the UW, a manager may supervise professional staff, classified staff covered by one or more collective bargaining agreements, classified staff covered by civil service rules, and temporary employees. While performance management principles are the same for all employees, the manager needs to be familiar with the performance requirements that apply to the employment programs.

ACT

Ensure each employee has an up-to-date job description. Employees should have an opportunity to review their job description and obtain clarification on any elements they may not understand.

Develop a list of competencies for each position. If you find that some employees do not possess all of the competencies their positions require, develop training goals so that the desired level of competency can be achieved.

Decide how you can most effectively assess and provide feedback about performance. Be sure your employees understand the measures and/or methods you use to determine how well they are achieving the goals established for them.

Provide Feedback

It is important that feedback be timely. Acknowledge really good work just as readily as you would address work that needs improvement. It can be easy to take good performance for granted and only point out problems. Employees appreciate balance, honesty, and fairness.

At least annually, comprehensively review your employees' performance. An annual review is an opportunity to accomplish the following:

1. Sum up an overall assessment of how work has gone over the previous year.
2. Identify goals that have been met and those where additional effort may be required.
3. Determine whether the employee's job description and competencies accurately reflect the reality of the position, and make updates as necessary.
4. Identify performance, achievement and/or development goals for the upcoming year.
5. Make sure that the employee has an opportunity to provide input before the review is finalized.

The annual review should be finalized, then reviewed and signed by the employee. The format of the review and its level of detail depend on the nature of the employee's position and the employment program.

Unsatisfactory Performance

If an employee's job performance is not satisfactory and normal coaching, counseling and training have not brought performance to an acceptable level, corrective action may be necessary. Professional staff employment programs each have their own processes and requirements, with which you should be familiar before initiating corrective action.

IMPROVING STAFF PERFORMANCE: A FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

Managers play their most important role when they set the stage for good performance. By understanding the factors that contribute to performance, management can focus on those factors to improve the results their employees and organizations achieve.

Employee performance can be defined as the accomplishment of work assignments or responsibilities. Organizational performance is the accomplishment of organizational goals. To achieve good performance, organizations and employees must have the capacity and the commitment to perform. Written as a formula, this concept can be expressed as:

$$\text{PERFORMANCE} = \text{CAPACITY} \times \text{COMMITMENT}$$

Note that performance is the product of two factors: capacity and commitment. If either one of these factors is zero, the result is zero. In addition, the relationship of capacity to commitment in this equation means that adjustments to either factor will affect performance. Knowing this, managers can analyze various factors of the equation and address those areas that are weak to improve the result of the equation: performance.

Capacity

In a work setting, the capacity to perform means having available the competencies, the resources, and the opportunity to complete the job. If employees are missing these, the work will not get done and the results will not be achieved. In other words:

$$\text{CAPACITY} = \text{COMPETENCIES} \times \text{RESOURCES} \times \text{OPPORTUNITY}$$

1. **Competencies.** Competencies are sets of measurable skills, knowledge, behaviors, and personal attributes critical to successful performance. Employees must have the right competencies in order to complete a job satisfactorily. Organizational leaders must pay close attention to this factor in the performance equation. They should carefully determine which competencies are important to achieving the results set out in strategic and performance plans so that they can hire the best people for the job, make effective work assignments, and establish individual development plans for employees that focus on the most important competencies.

2. **Resources.** Employees must be given the resources they need to do their jobs. A key management responsibility is to ensure employees have a work environment that contains the tools they need to be effective. If employees have all the competencies needed to complete the job, but lack the resources to perform, the job will not get done. For example, customer service representatives who do not have working phones at their desk will not be able to call their customers to ask if their needs were met.
3. **Opportunity.** Employees may have the competencies and the resources to do the job, but may never be given the opportunity to perform. For example, a public relations specialist assigned to facilitate public forums will not have the opportunity to perform that assignment if no public forums are held. Supervisors should be aware when situations arise that prevent a competent employee from performing assigned duties well.

Commitment

In a work setting, commitment means, at a minimum, that an employee agrees to complete assigned work and meet or exceed specific standards of quality, quantity, and timeliness that add value to the organization and its results. The level of employee commitment to the job is often the key determinant of whether an employee performs marginally or exceeds expectations.

Methods for gaining employee commitment include:

1. setting clear goals for employees that require effort to achieve but are reachable;
2. showing employees how they fit into the "big picture" of the organization's mission and how their work helps the organization accomplish its goals;
3. involving employees and their representatives in decision-making processes that affect how the work gets done as well as the quality of work life;
4. measuring performance and results using credible measures that employees understand and accept;
5. using employee input to develop employee performance plans;
6. creating a work climate where employees feel valued; and
7. recognizing and rewarding-formally and informally-employee achievements.

Obtaining and maintaining employee commitment can be the most challenging factor of the performance formula. But practicing good performance management techniques offers supervisors and managers the ways and means to sustain and improve that commitment and thereby further leverage their employees' capacity to perform.