“*Management by objective works if you know the objectives. 90% of the time you don’t” Peter Drucker*

Being SMART - setting objectives and gathering evidence

- Quick Guide

As managers we’re used to setting objectives in an informal way. However, Performance Review and Development (PR&D) demands a more systematic approach. This quick guide:

* outlines how to use the SMART technique to set clear and meaningful **objectives**; and
* looks at how you might gather **evidence** to assess whether your team are meeting those objectives.

Let’s start with objectives. The purpose of setting objectives is so that you can:

* cascade corporate objectives to service level, then to the section, team and finally the individual;
* make sure individuals are focusing their time and energy on the right areas; and
* have a means of measuring the progress and contribution of individuals at their next review meeting – both as a monitor and a motivator.

Targets and objectives are key to the PR&D process. At the same time they provide employees with both direction and satisfaction in their job so it’s important to take the time to draw them up properly.

The PR&D scheme focuses on **‘what’** a person does (their tasks and objectives) and **‘how’** they do it (their behaviours).

For some, the **‘what’** will be lifted straight from the key tasks outlined in the job description (or job profile), for others, the **‘what’** will be individual objectives that are agreed at the start of the review period.

**For example:**

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| **Task Based** | * *Support the Cook as required to serve meals to residents in accordance with Food Hygiene regulations* ***(Domestic Assistant)*** * *Carry out duties to keep the road network in good order* ***(Road Worker)*** |
| **Objective Based** | * *Carry out a review of how new managers are inducted into the organisation and produce an action plan by February 2013* ***(HR Adviser)*** |

For both objectives and key tasks it’s recommended that anything between 1 and 6 are identified for each individual in a review year. Individual objectives should be derived from the service and team objectives and, as such, could relate to:

* New projects/tasks; or
* Improvements in existing projects/activities.

One of the big changes with the new PR&D scheme is that the evidence used to determine whether objectives (and tasks) are being met or not is agreed up front at the start of the review year.

This means both employees and managers are very clear what’s expected and ensures assessments are fair and consistent. So how can you ensure objectives are set in a way which makes this clear and easy?

You could use the **SMART** technique:

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| --- | --- |
| **S** | **Specific**: the objective should be clear and unambiguous and should relate to a specific task or outcome |
| **M** | **Measurable**: it should be absolutely clear when – and whether - the objective has been achieved. Ask yourself, how will I know the person has done this, what will the evidence be, how objective is the evidence I’m going to use? |
| **A** | **Agreed**: the objective should be agreed between the line manager and the employee |
| **R** | **Realistic**: the employee should be capable of achieving the objective with the resources at their disposal; these resources include their own skills as well as the physical equipment and time to do the job (this is especially relevant this PR&D year as it’s a shorter review period) |
| **T** | **Timebound**: there should be a deadline by which the objective is expected to have been completed. |



**Points to bear in mind…**

Agreeing objectives *with* the individual is very important. Setting objectives that the employee believes to be impossible or irrelevant may result in them being attempted half-heartedly at best and ignored at worst.

On the other hand if objectives are too simple there is no challenge or motivation in achieving them.

For longer term or more complex objectives you might also want to set milestones. These checkpoints will allow you and the employee to know whether sufficient progress is being made and can be monitored throughout the year at 1-2-1 meetings or through regular supervision.

**Agreeing Evidence**

As mentioned earlier, under the PR&D scheme all evidence used to measure whether objectives (or tasks) are met is agreed up front. We’ve seen from the **SMART** technique above that when setting objectives it’s important to ensure these are ‘measurable’.

You can pinch a couple of the principles for **SMART** for ensuring your evidence is not subjective … so ensure the measures (the evidence) you use are specific, achievable and timebound too!

If we take the objective we used as an example earlier for the HR Adviser:

|  |
| --- |
| 1. Carry out a review of how new managers are inducted into the organisation and produce an action plan by February What will the evidence of effective performance be  * 3 information gathering focus groups held with HR Business Partners and managers recruited in the last year by December 2012 * Action plan including recommendations produced by February 2013 |

**Gathering Evidence …**

In terms of gathering evidence to demonstrate effective performance, this can come from a number of places. The example above requires an action plan to be produced, for other objectives evidence could include:

* Meeting key performance indicators
* Samples of work produced
* A project plan
* Customer feedback
* Minutes of meetings or 1-2-1 notes
* Observations that have been recorded/assessed.

And who’s responsible for gathering this evidence? Both the manager and the employee have a shared responsibility.



However, you’ll need to make it clear at the start of the review period what your expectations in this area are.

**What if …**

In some texts the **SMART** acronym is referred to as **SMARTER.** The extra letters are:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **E** | **Evaluate**: the objective should be evaluated on an ongoing basis to check progress |
| **R** | **Review**: if no progress is being made or it looks like the objective won’t be met - review what has been done and agree what else is required in order to achieve the objective. |

**So what if …**

The employee is not meeting their objective or little progress is being made during the review period? First of all, you’ll need to determine whether this is down to the employee or whether there is some outside factor impacting on their ability to meet the objective.

**If it’s the employee, you might want to ask yourself:**

* Are they are 100% clear on what’s required
* Are there any skills gaps, if so, what support and development can be put in place (for example coaching from you, attending a workshop, prioritising actions)
* Are they clear about the impact if the objective is not met.

**If, after all the additional support put in place, the employee still doesn’t meet the objective - what next?**

* Provided you’ve given all necessary support, development and had regular communication about the impact – it should be no surprise at the PR&D review meeting when the objective is scored as ‘not met’.



**If it’s an outside factor (for example a funding stream is withdrawn or legislation or a committee decision has meant this objective is no longer realistic):**

* If the employee has progressed towards the objective as far as they could up to the point when circumstances changed, then, as far as their PR&D is concerned, the objective should be regarded as ‘met’.