

DAFT ANSWERS

Without understanding the causes of a performance that must be stopped or one that must be started, it is impossible to select the appropriate performance development solution. Helen McPhun explains that DAFT analysis is no help in developing SMART goals.

YIKES! IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR again when your team's development plans must be submitted. Over the past year you've had every intention to invest more time and thought into the process so each individual's development plan moves them forward in their careers while simultaneously increasing their value to the organisation.

If only there was time to be that thorough. Instead, again this year, you'll quickly complete the required documents to show you've met your own KPI to have the development plans done and submitted on time.

Of what value are the performance development plans you develop for members in your organisation? We hear about developing 'smart' goals, but did you conduct 'smart' analysis in order to determine specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound development plans.

If you step back and think about the knowledge, skill and attributes each staff member needs to perform their roles well, how have you measured these in the past year? How has competence at work been assessed before development plans have been designed?

There are a suite of tools that can be designed and used to do 'smart' analysis of employee competence for employers with the time and resource.

Firstly, diagnostic assessments can be introduced to assess the level of knowledge and skill individuals have across a broad

range of elements. Or research can be done to analyse and assess the level of skill and knowledge demonstrated as portrayed in a portfolio of recent work documents.

Problem—who has time to design, administer, mark and analyse these types of activities? So, without these sorts of tools, how can you pinpoint which aspects of which skills or knowledge sets need to be developed and how can you determine how much the development needs to be?

There are two key questions to ask when analysing the performance of a staff member.

1. What is the person doing now that they should not be doing?
2. What is the person not doing now that you want them to be doing?

By asking these two simple questions you will be able to pinpoint how the employee's performance must change in order to meet the workplace requirements. From there you can further determine which issues are knowledge-based and which are skill-based.

If they are skill based you can further analyse to see if the skill gap is caused by a lack of awareness, a lack of confidence, a lack of support and encouragement, a lack of practice or a simply a poor attitude.

Once the cause of the gaps is determined you need to analyse what development tools or methods can be used to provide the solution. Traditionally, many people jump to the conclusion

that the employee needs training, but training is not always the most suitable development tool.

Future development can occur through mentoring, coaching, training or performance management. If no time has been spent to identify, isolate and understand the causes of the performance that must be stopped and the performance that must be started it is impossible to select the appropriate performance development solution.

Mentoring can be used to encourage an employee to identify and pursue their own development. The individual has the ability but might lack the confidence or awareness of options to take the steps they need. A quality mentor from inside the organisation can assist.

Coaching can be used to influence, suggest and drive an employee to develop. Unlike mentoring, where the individual charts their own path, in the coaching model the employee is guided to pursue the required development.

Training can expose the employee to new skills and knowledge but training does not guarantee transfer of knowledge and skill back to the workplace. Who is responsible in your workplace for making sure training sticks and translates into performance improvement?

Lastly, in many instances, what is perceived as needing a training solution is really a performance management issue. If the employee has the knowledge

and skills, is confident yet does not perform, training will not fix them. Management of the employee's performance is the best way to help them develop.

There is so much emphasis placed on setting performance goals and so little time or effort spent on using valid and reliable tools and methods to accurately analyse learning needs.

Current analysis practices used in many organisations seem to adhere to the DAFT system (doubtful, ambiguous, fluffy, thin). It is difficult to determine SMART goals to address the findings of DAFT analysis!

So, this year, when you sit down to do your performance development plans for your team, make sure you are doing them to build capability not just meet compliance requirements or KPIs. Know and describe what each employee should stop doing and should start doing and from there determine the cause of the current gap.

You might find the biggest gaps can be addressed by buddying an employee with a star performer who is encouraging and supportive—a far cry from being trundled off to yet another training course from which the employee returns and then repeats last year's performance. **et**

Helen McPhun is the director and learning and evaluation specialist for McZoom Ltd, a consulting practice, and education director, LEARNPLUS, an NZQA accredited school offering management and adult education qualifications.