

Measuring Hard-to-Measure Work

Engineer or Contract specialist: Some work seems hard to measure. For example, some supervisors and employees find it difficult on an annual basis to measure the accomplishments of a civil engineer, or contract specialist— especially when the final result of the civil engineer, or contract specialist's efforts may not occur for 2-5 years or more. How can supervisors and employees develop a results-focused annual performance plan for a civil engineer, or contract specialist who has complex, long-term projects? One example is to use measures derived from work flow charting.

Measures Derived From Work Flow Charting. Supervisors and employees can organize long-term, complex projects into interim accomplishments by charting the flow of the work. A work flow chart maps the major steps in a project by beginning with the first step, defining each successive step, and ending with the result. If a result does not occur annually, at least supervisors and employees can measure interim accomplishments. By analyzing the activities of a civil engineer, or contract specialist who may have multiple projects to complete during the next few years, the following interim and final accomplishments become evident:

Work Flow Chart for civil engineer, or contract specialist

Step 1 - Project Plan(s)

Activities that produce this interim accomplishment include:

1. Identifying avenues of project research;
2. Gathering initial information;
3. Completing analysis; and completing design.

Step 2 - Research Milestones

Activities that produce this interim accomplishment include:

1. Conducting project research;
2. Performing experiments; and
3. Recording findings.

Step 3 - Written and/or Verbal Report(s)

Activities that produce this final accomplishment include:

1. Publishing results; and
2. Preparing verbal presentation.

Example Critical Element. By using the method described above and focusing on employee accomplishments, supervisors and employees might develop a performance plan that includes the following job objectives:

Critical Element 1: Project Plan(s)

Fully Successful Standard: The supervisor typically finds that the employee completes project plans by established deadlines and the plans usually include:

1. A clear, understandable objective;
2. A description of how the project aligns with the agency's strategic goals;
3. Realistic proposed costs;
4. A logical statement of the problem;
5. A thorough description of the proposed approach;
6. A reference to applicable recent results; and
7. Realistic milestones.

Critical Element 2: Project Research Milestones

Fully Successful Standard: The supervisor typically finds that the employee completes research according to the specifications described in the project plan, and that the employee consistently follows safety regulations. The employee consistently completes established milestones.

Critical Element 3: Research Report(s)

Fully Successful Standard: The supervisor typically finds that written and oral presentations are clear, understandable, demonstrate an expertise in the field and a proactive and innovative approach to advancing the field of research, and meet the deadlines established in the project plan.

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Administrative Assistant or Secretary: Several supervisors have told us they have difficulty measuring the results of their executive administrative assistants, or secretaries' work rather than the activities they perform. The method for measuring work that better fits the secretary's role is a customer-focused method.

Focusing on Customer Expectations. The first step to a customer-focused method is to ask the following questions:

- Who are the secretary's customers?
- What products and/or services do the customers expect?

By asking these questions, a supervisor and secretary could develop the following list of customers and their expectations. Note that we list customer expectations as products or services, not activities.

Customers - Expected Products and Services

Supervisor and Staff

- An easy-retrieval file system
- A calendar
- Travel reservations and vouchers
- Correspondence in draft

Other Agency Offices and the Public

- Information
- Messages

Administrative Officer

- Time and attendance records

Example Critical Element: By using a customer-focused method, and by describing the results of the secretary's activities rather than the activities themselves, supervisors and secretaries might develop a performance plan that includes the following job objectives:

Critical Element 1: Administrative Support. Products or services include a file system, time and attendance records, a calendar, travel arrangements, and draft correspondence. Files are easily retrievable, logically organized, clearly labeled, and neat, with documents usually filed within 3-5 days of receipt; Time cards correctly reflect information provided by employees, comply with established procedures, are successfully entered into the automated system, and submitted to the Administrative Officer by established deadline, with no more than three noted errors per quarter; Calendar is consistently accurate with proper additions and deletions, reflecting realistic scheduling, with changes made quickly, and a hard copy provided to supervisor in accordance with personal preference, with no more than three noted errors per quarter; Travel arrangements are realistic, meet the traveler's expectations in terms of timeliness and accommodation to extent possible, and confirmation is received prior to travel. Travel orders and vouchers are completed in accordance with regulations, policy, and automated procedures. Vouchers are completed usually within 3 days of receipt of traveler's documentation; and Draft correspondence is clear, logical, follows Plain Language guidelines, and is presented to supervisor generally 1-3 working days before due date or 3-5 days after receipt of initiating event.

Critical Element 2: Office Information. Messages are given to appropriate persons usually within 3 working hours of receipt or when the person returns to the office, and contain the caller's name, organization, phone number, date, time, and subject of the call; and information provided is generally accurate, meets the customer's requirements, and is given from 6 hours to 3 working days after the request is made.

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Supervisor: Writing a supervisor's performance plan can be very challenging. One way to center the plan on what is important is to focus on results. The results of the work of a supervisor include the work unit's products or services as well as the smooth operation of the work unit. The work unit's performance becomes the central measure of the supervisor's performance plan. Getting results requires good management, supervisory, and human resources management skills on the part of the supervisor.

1. **Cascading Organizational Goals to the Work Unit.**
2. **Example.**
3. **Elements and Standards.**

Cascading Organizational Goals to the Work Unit. The first step in developing a supervisor's performance plan is to determine which organizational goal(s) his or her work unit supports or can affect. The next step is to determine the work unit's products or services that support organizational goal achievement. The supervisor can be held responsible for those products or services.

Example. The Supply Management Officer of a military organization wanted to develop job objectives for his/her supervisors that align with organizational goals and that hold the supervisors responsible for their work units' expected accomplishments. He/she also wanted the elements and standards to reflect the supervisors' general management and human resources management skills. By using the goal-cascading method, he/she completed the following steps:

Step 1. Look at the big picture. The manager referred to his/her agency's annual performance plan and targeted the goals that each of his/her supervisors and their work units affect. Specifically, for the supervisor of the widget production work unit, he/she aligned the performance plan with the following organizational goals:

1. The Supply facility will maintain last year's high customer satisfaction with the timeliness and quality of the supply warehouse's products, which include widgets.
2. The supply warehouse will provide a safe working environment for its employees.
3. The supply warehouse will promote effective leadership and employee productivity.

Step 2. Describe the products and services the work unit provides to help the organization reach its goals. For the widget production work unit, the manager determined that the product of the work unit, of course, was widgets. In addition, in order to produce widgets, the work unit must have a safe and productive working environment and good leadership.

Step 3. Develop work unit measures and set standards for performance. The Supply Manager determined that the following measures were important to include in the supervisor's performance plan:

1. The quality, quantity, and timeliness of the widgets produced by the work unit;
2. The safety of the workplace; and
3. The quality of supervisory leadership shown, which results in productive subordinates.

By cascading organizational goals to the widget production work unit, the manager wrote the following job objective for the supervisor of that work unit:

Critical Element 1: Widget Production

Fully Successful Standard:

1. Usually 90 to 95 percent of the work unit's pallets have no defects;
2. With few exceptions, the work unit has no more than 1.5 to 2 hours of down time per week;
3. Normally, the work unit meets its production schedule 5 out of 7 days; and
4. Normally, the work unit meets its shipment schedule 5 out of 7 days.

Critical Element 2: Safe Work Environment

Fully Successful Standard:

1. The supervisor corrects or improves safety problems usually by agreed-upon date;
2. The supervisor routinely holds one safety audit per week; and
3. The work unit rarely has any lost time hours.

Critical Element 3: Effective Leadership

Fully Successful Standard:

1. The supervisor periodically initiates ways to reduce costs;
2. Most of the supervisor's decisions benefit the organization and are generally satisfactory;
3. The supervisor provides discipline fairly and consistently;
4. Work unit training requirements are met;
5. Most work unit members understand the department's goals and how their performance affects these goals;
6. Work unit members understand how they are performing against their individual elements and standards; and work unit members receive rewards for good performance.