

Diagnosing Performance Problems: What to Look at First

Use these questions as a starting point to develop interview guides for key personnel. You can economize by asking questions about both desired and actual performance to the same respondent or group. Or you can ask to observe typical employees as well as exemplars. The areas of inquiry or questions about present performance might be as follows (this interview protocol assumes you are asking questions about desired as well as actual or "typical" performance):

- If you could imagine ideal performance by employees:
 - What would it look like?
 - What would they be doing?
 - What would their work output be (quantity, quality, timeliness, and cost)?
 - What major job outputs would we see?
- Since not everyone can be that perfect employee you just described, what performance do you think is reasonable to expect?
- Now, along those same lines, describe typical employee performance.
- About what percentage of the employees we are discussing perform at the desired level?
- What percentages are at the more "typical" level that you are describing?
- What is the result(s) of unsatisfactory performance? What impact is that having on your organization? [the "so what?" question]

While the analysis of performance often focuses on employees, the causes of some performance problems may relate to organizational systems. Consider the factors below, in this order, as you diagnose performance problems or specify new performance, addressing them as you go. This tool is helpful in developing data collection instruments, and it is also useful during root cause analysis.

| Factor / Questions to ask | Examples: factor in place | Examples: factor not in place |
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| Organizational systems | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have leaders communicated to employees a clear strategic direction with organizational vision, mission, goals, values, and reporting structure? Have employees had some input into that direction?• Do employees have clear job expectations and authority, communicated orally and in writing?• Are job descriptions in alignment with the organization's strategic direction?• Are job descriptions supported by clear policies and | <p>Mission and goals posted prominently in the office lobby</p> <p>Each employee has a written job description reviewed annually with supervisor</p> | <p>Staff are told to "deliver high-quality service"</p> |

| Factor / Questions to ask | Examples: factor in place | Examples: factor not in place |
|--|---|--|
| <p>processes, and realistic workloads?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effective/efficient are the work processes? • Is there a sustainable system of supportive supervision that promotes joint problem-solving, mentoring, and two-way communication? • Are there policies and procedures that guide and promote respectful interactions among managers, employees, and clients? • How effective are the management systems (finance, human resources, logistics, information)? • How effective is the leadership, at all levels of the organization? | <p>Specific procedures are made known to staff</p> | <p>Promotion opportunities are not transparent</p> |
| Incentives | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are employees clear about their responsibilities, accountability, autonomy? • Do employees receive fair compensation, including salary, benefits and other non-monetary forms of compensation? • How is good performance rewarded or recognized? What are the consequences for poor performance? • How well do employees understand what kinds of performance will result in rewards, recognition or negative consequences? • What input do employees have in identifying incentives for good performance? • Is performance feedback provided in a clear, timely, descriptive, constructive, and direct manner? • What response do employees receive when they identify support needed for good performance? • Do employees characterize their work as interesting or meaningful? Do they have a chance to be assigned tasks that they consider engaging or meaningful? • What are the opportunities in the organization for career advancement, or for development of new skills? | <p>When observing the employee perform well, the manager says "thank you—good job."</p> | <p>When the employee does his/her job well, nobody notices, even though the employee works overtime</p> <p>Employees usually receive feedback only when they make mistakes</p> |
| Tools and physical environment | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do employees have the equipment, job aids, service standards and protocols, and recordkeeping tools they need to work effectively? | | <p>Products are locked in the storeroom so no one will steal them</p> |

| Factor / Questions to ask | Examples: factor in place | Examples: factor not in place |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are adequate supplies of commodities and other consumable materials on hand? • Does the worksite have sufficient and well-organized space and furniture for working? • Is there reliable power, clean running water, clean toilets, and sufficient ventilation? • How reliable and up to date are the information technology and communication systems, including connectivity? • What measures are in place so that the workplace is safe from accidents and workplace violence for its employees and clients? | <p>Staff have access to a private space equipped with products and job aids needed for customers/ clients</p> <p>There is an occupational safety and health policy and procedures that are enforced</p> | <p>(inaccessible to the staff and customers/clients)</p> |
| Skills and knowledge | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do employees have the basic literacy, math, or computer skills needed for the job? • Do employees have the necessary experience, technical and professional knowledge and skills to perform their jobs? • Do employees have sufficient critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and leadership skills to perform their tasks? • Do employees have the necessary social and communications skills? • What is the in-service training policy and does it work as described? How well does it keep staff up to date with the skills and knowledge needed to perform? • Could they do it right for \$1million? (If so, they already have the skills and knowledge.) • Does an exemplary performer have a "secret trick" that no one else knows? | <p>The staff know all information that they need to communicate to the clients</p> | <p>The staff know the information needed, but do not know how to communicate to the clients</p> |
| Personal attributes and motivation | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the mission of the organization and various aspects of the job motivate employees to perform well? • Do the jobs allow employees to use their strengths and abilities (emotional, intellectual, creative, physical)? • How do the employees' understanding of the roles and rights of clients contribute positively or negatively to their performance? | <p>The nurse receives great satisfaction from caring for women and their children</p> | |

| Factor / Questions to ask | Examples: factor in place | Examples: factor not in place |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are employees able to get along with other co-workers and clients? • How do employees' religious, ethical, and moral values support or prohibit employees from performing as expected? • How do the employees' own identity (gender, class, ethnicity) affect their ability to perform as expected? | <p>The employee gets along with customers/clients</p> | <p>The employee believes it is immoral for unmarried women to be sexually active and use contraception</p> |
| External environment | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the national policies, regulations, standards, and professional scopes of work that organizations and employees must adhere to? • What are the licensing or accreditation requirements and processes for the institution, facility, or employee to operate legally? • What societal norms regarding culture, class, religion, ethnicity, and gender may affect the performance of the organization and employees? • How do the socioeconomic conditions, education levels and standards of living affect the ability of the organization to reach its clients and potential customers and the motivation and ability of clients to access the organization's services? • What are the market conditions, such as supply/demand for specific services or types of workers? • Who are the organization's partners and competitors? How are they doing compared to this organization/ departments? • What is the condition of the national and local infrastructure networks (roads, water supply, waste management, power supply, telecommunications/ internet, public transportation, buildings)? • How do changes in national and local government affect the ability of the organization and employees to perform? | <p>Organization maintains accreditation and communicates its licensing status to employees</p> | <p>Roads and rivers are flooded in rainy season, which limits access to the workplace during that period.</p> |