

Fulcrum Search Science Inc.

Setting Objectives Means Facing the Issues



Most managers and supervisors today are attempting to quantify their departmental objectives and pass them on to their employees through performance standards. Despite the simplicity of this management-by-objectives approach, deadlines are missed, quality is relatively poor and productivity is low. The reason for this may not be the fault of the employees carrying out the work. The cause is most often associated with the immediate supervisor's lack of attention to the realities surrounding objectives. Setting objectives and performance standards requires a careful analysis of all the relevant issues.

1. Clarify the Objectives

Objectives and standards have to be set so that both the supervisor and the employees share the same understanding of exactly what is to be achieved and exactly what performance standards will be used for evaluation purposes. This will eliminate a vast majority of the day-to-day frustrations many employees feel about their jobs.

2. Measurability of Standards

This refers to the way in which the supervisor and the employee agree on how to measure a standard and whether or not it has been met. If no numbers are possible, then another type of measurement must be used. If no measurable [standards] have been agreed to, then it is understood that the supervisor's subjective judgement will be used to decide if, or to what degree, the standard was achieved.

3. Attainability and Challenge

If objectives and standards are too easy to meet, then motivation is a problem. If they are impossible to meet, then the problem is frustration. The supervisor must find a balance between the two while leaving some room for employees to excel.

4. Control and Influence

In today's flatter organizations, meeting an objective involves many different people. However, in most situations, one employee will have a greater control and influence on the outcome of an objective than another. The supervisor must realistically assess the reasonableness of assigning a particular objective to an employee.

5. Decision-making Authority

The supervisor must define what resources the employee can commit on their own. In addition, consideration must be given to the routine decisions that have to be made in order to increase the likelihood for employees to meet the objectives. If these decisions will be made by the employees, then the supervisor will have to alert other departments to the authorities assigned in order to pave the way to success.

6. Availability of Resources

It is obvious that employees will rely heavily on the resources that are available to meet their objectives. Employees that are given additional resources must be willing to set higher objectives. Resources are grouped into four categories:

Financial Resources involve the budgets available to meet objectives. Supervisors must provide clear definitions on spending so the employees can take appropriate steps when setting out their action plans.

Human Resources involve clarifying what staff will be made available. When the supervisor and employee have

specific knowledge of the availability and expertise of these resources, then the employees can make decisions on how reasonable the objective is and if the time allotted for completion is fair. Otherwise, the employee will certainly fail to achieve the objective.

Physical Resources involve defining what space, equipment, tools and systems are available to meet the objectives.

The last and most important resource is the **Support of Others** in the organization. Commitment by senior management to the objectives is a key to success. In addition, the employee will want to know what support will come from the supervisor, if any, and how much of his or her time will be allocated to assist the employee. Without this support, objectives fail.

"Why bother, what's in it for me?"

It has been proven in many organizations that imposing objectives on people does not work because it is not a very effective management process. Employees want and need input into the decisions that affect their jobs. Autocratic leadership styles that worked in the past are in direct conflict with today's need for employee involvement. This means a new relationship must be established between the employees and their supervisors when setting job objectives.

For objective setting to be effective, the participants must view the supervisor/employee dialogue as central to the process. Both supervisor and employee must recognize that they (not the "system" or "senior management" or the "human resources department") are the main beneficiaries of the process. To effectively implement an objective setting process, both supervisor and employee must each have an answer to their question "What's in it for me?"

There are many important benefits to the supervisor and the employee if the process is conducted as an open two-way business dialogue between the two parties:

Benefits to the supervisor

Setting objectives with employees will define how each employee will contribute to the achievement of the supervisor's objectives. It will ensure that goals are congruent and that assignments and resources are clearly allocated among all employees. It also commands a much greater commitment from employees to specific objectives. In addition, it establishes the basis for the next performance appraisal and identifies the employee's concerns and needs for assistance and support.

Benefits to the employee

Setting objectives with the supervisor provides the employee with the opportunity to contribute to the way the job is going to be done. This will increase the employee's commitment and motivation to those objectives. It will also ensure a thorough understanding of what is expected of him or her.

In addition, setting objectives achieves a clear and concise understanding of how work will be measured and evaluated, enabling employees to evaluate their own performance during the appraisal period. It will clarify the employees' priorities and allow them to allocate their time and resources more effectively. Most important, it will provide the employees with an opportunity to voice their problems, concerns and ideas about what is to be accomplished.

Supervisors should consider these benefits carefully when they are reviewing their management styles or revamping their performance appraisal systems. Autocratic leadership may deliver results in the very short term but without employee involvement, today's need to do more with less will simply not happen - and doing more with less is the key to success today.

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