
Analyzing Performance Problems

Is Training Really Needed?

Solutions to performance problems are not always apparent. Selecting the best solution requires careful analysis. The model that follows can be used to guide you in selecting the appropriate intervention. While focused on determining if training is an appropriate option, the model is also useful as a generic guide to option selection.

Solutions to performance problems do not present themselves as either/or situations, as depicted in the following flow diagram. The flow diagram is presented as either/or only to help increase the probability that all options are considered. Solutions are not always either improvement in skills, acquisition of knowledge or some change in policy. Many times a combination of these solutions is necessary.

Immediately following the flow diagram is a series of questions that can help guide you through each decision point. For example, to help determine if a training need actually exists, the following questions should be answered:

- ◆ Why do I think there is a training need?
- ◆ What is the difference between what is being done and what is supposed to be done?
- ◆ What is the event that causes me to say that things aren't right?
- ◆ Why am I dissatisfied?

The answers to many of the questions may appear self-evident, however, careful analysis of the answers may prove otherwise. Answering the questions will help guide you to a successful transfer solution.

ANALYZING PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS QUICK-REFERENCE CHECKLIST

KEY QUESTIONS TO ANSWER	PROBE QUESTIONS
<p>I. They're not doing what they should be doing. <i>I think I've got a training need.</i></p> <p>What is the training need?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do I think there is a training need? • What is the difference between what is being done and what is supposed to be done? • What is the event that causes me to say that things aren't right? • Why am I dissatisfied?
<p>Is it important?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is the discrepancy important? (What is its cost?) • What would happen if I left the discrepancy alone? • Could doing something to resolve the discrepancy have any worthwhile result?
<p>Is it a skill deficiency?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could employees do it if really required to do it? • Could employees do it if their lives depended on it? • Are employees' present skills adequate for the desired performance?
<p>Is it a knowledge deficiency?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this information already available in field offices? • Is this information readily accessible by field offices from sources outside NRCS? • Is this information already embedded in NRCS training?

KEY QUESTIONS TO ANSWER	PROBE QUESTIONS
Is it a managerial deficiency?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there motivation problems? • Are there organizational culture issues preventing desired performance? • Are there equipment problems? • Are there policy problems?
<p>IIA. Yes. It is a skill deficiency. <i>They couldn't do it if their lives depended on it.</i></p>	
Could they do it in the past?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did employees once know how to perform as desired? • Have employees forgotten how to do what I want done?
Is the skill used often?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often is the skill or performance used? • Is there regular feedback on performance? • Exactly how do employees find out how well they are doing?
Is there a simpler solution?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can I change the job by providing some kind of job aid? • Can I store the needed information some way (in written instructions, checklists) other than in someone's head? • Can I show rather than train? • Would informal (such as on-the-job) training be sufficient?
<p>IIB. Yes. It is a knowledge deficiency. <i>They don't know what they don't know.</i></p>	
Did they know it in the past?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did employees once use this knowledge: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How often is the knowledge used? - Has the knowledge just been misplaced? - Has there been institutional forgetting?

KEY QUESTIONS TO ANSWER	PROBE QUESTIONS
Did they know it in the past?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can I change the job by providing some kind of job aid? • Can I store the needed information some way (in written instructions, checklists) other than in employees' heads • Has the knowledge just been misplaced?
<p>III. It is not a skill or knowledge deficiency. <i>They could do it if they wanted to.</i></p>	
Is desired performance punishing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the consequence of performing as desired? • Is it punishing to perform as expected? • Do employees perceive desired performance as being geared to penalties? • Would the employees' world become a little dimmer if the desired performance were attained?
Is nonperformance rewarding?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the result of doing it the present way instead of my way? • What do employees get out of the present performance in the way of reward, prestige, status, jollies? • Do employees get more attention for misbehaving than for behaving? • What event in the world supports (rewards) the present way of doing things? (Am I inadvertently rewarding irrelevant behavior while overlooking the crucial behaviors?) • Are employees "mentally inadequate," doing less so that there is less to worry about? • Are employees physically inadequate; doing less because it is less tiring?

KEY QUESTIONS TO ANSWER	PROBE QUESTION
Does performing really matter to them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does performing as desired matter to the performer? • Is there a favorable outcome for performing? • Is there an undesirable outcome for not performing? • Is there a source of satisfaction for performing? • Can employees take pride in this performance as individuals or as members of a group? • Is there satisfaction of personal needs from the job?
Are there obstacles to performing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What prevents employees from performing? • Do employees know what is expected? • Do employees know when to do what is expected? • Are there conflicting demands on employees' time? • Do employees lack <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the authority? the time? the tools? • Are there restrictive policies, or a "right way of doing it," or a "way we've always done it" that ought to be changed? • Can I reduce "competition from the job" – phone calls, "brush fires," demands of less important but more immediate problems?
IV. What should I do now?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I talked to the transfer options experts? • Have I explored various options?

KEY QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

PROBE QUESTION

Which solution is best?

- Have all the potential solutions been identified?
 - Does each solution address itself to one or more problems identified during the analysis (such as skill deficiency, knowledge deficiency, absence of potential, incorrect rewards, punishing consequences, distracting obstacles)?
 - What is the cost of each potential solution?
 - Have the intangible (unmeasurable) costs been assessed?
 - Which solutions most practical, feasible, and economical?
 - Which solution will add most value (solve the largest part of the problem for the least effort)?
 - Which remedy is likely to give us the most result for the least effort?
 - Which solution are we best equipped to try?
 - Which remedy interests us most? (Or, on the other side of the coin, which remedy is most visible to those who must be pleased)?
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