Setting Smart Objectives

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Introduction

In order to achieve a desired goal or objective, it is vital to have a plan in place. Having a **plan** in place alone does not ensure achievement of the desired goal. Therefore, implementing the plan, monitoring and controlling of it and adjusting and fine-tuning the plan where necessary are also vital.

However, a plan is only the procedure or the series of actions intended to be taken to achieve an objective. Whether it is in one's personal life or at the workplace, most individuals are masters of devising precise plans with a degree of certainty to achieve 'preset' objectives. Yet, it is somewhat tricky when it comes to setting the 'right' objectives.

Undoubtedly, some individuals have struggled at some stage in setting the right objectives in their Personal Development Records (PDRs). As a result, this fault is commonly seen in some PDRs, listing some 'intended actions' rather than identifying the right objectives.

This article provides some guidance that helps set objectives that really work.

Your Objectives should be SMART

It is a well known, widely accepted criterion that the objectives should be 'SMART', where SMART stands for **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant and **T**ime-bound.

'Specific' requires the objective to be the exact final outcome that one intends to achieve. For example 'Completing evaluation of the xyz claim' is an exact final outcome compared to 'hiring a claims consultant'. The proposed hiring of the claims consultant is more of an action in the action plan that intended to help achieving the final outcome of 'completing the evaluation'.

This also suggests that hiring of the claims consultant is not necessarily the only way to achieve the objective. However, if hiring the claims consultant was set as the objective, it hinders the opportunity of investigating alternative methods available to achieve the true objective of completing evaluation of the claim.

'Measurable' requires the objective to provide clear evidence of achievement of the objective. It should be evident not only to the self but also to anybody else. Therefore, a measurable objective should ideally have associated physical output.

In the above claim evaluation example, the production of the report on evaluation findings and recommendations could be a clear indication of completion of the evaluation, and it is evident to and measurable by somebody else. Therefore the ideal objective could be 'complete evaluation and recommendation report on claim xyz'

Objectives that use phrases such as 'improve knowledge', 'contribute to', 'liaise with', 'gain understanding of' and the like do not provide clear measurable objectives. Whether the person gained 'understanding of something' is difficult to be judged and measured by somebody else.

'Achievable' is a straightforward requirement of a smart objective. If an objective is clearly unachievable, there is no point of setting such an objective.

An objective should be 'Relevant' to the purpose it is being set. An objective such as 'loosing 15 kilos by 30 June 2011' set in a book-keeping employee's PDR is not necessarily relevant to the employing organization

although it could be a quite relevant personal objective to the employee (unless of course, the employees work performance is likely to be affected by the employee's weight). However, there could be some occupations where 'losing weight' is a quite relevant objective.

All smart objectives should be 'Time-bound'. That is the objective should be associated with an achievable time target. Having measurable interim time-bound targets will also help ensuring progress towards achievement of the objective.

Ensuring Your Objectives are SMART

Asking the following questions helps ensuring the objectives are SMART.

Specific – 'Why do I do this?' helps deriving the underlying specific objective. In the claim evaluation example above, asking the questions such as 'Why do I hire a claims consultant?' helps filter out 'intended actions' and deriving the underlying specific objective.

Measurable – 'How do I (and somebody else) know that I have achieved this?' helps making the objective a measurable one. For example 'How do I (and somebody else) know that I have completed evaluation of xyz claim?'

Achievable - Questions to be asked are 'Can I achieve this?', 'How?', 'Do I have a realistic plan?'

Relevant - Questions to be asked are 'What is the reason of setting the objective?' and 'Is the objective relevant to the reason why it was set?'

Time bound – The question to be asked is 'When am I going to achieve this?'

Fine-tuning Your Objectives

Keep an eye on your objectives and review them regularly to ensure that they are still SMART. The objectives that were once SMART could be no-longer SMART if the underlying circumstances were changed or affected.

Ensure that interim targets (milestones) such as percentage completion are achieved. If a milestone was not achieved, then revise the plan and set new milestones that ensure achievement of the objective.

Allocate time targets to the intended actions in the plan. Monitor and ensure that these time targets are achieved.

William Lacey (Hounslow) Ltd v Davis (1957)

A contractor tendered for reconstruction of war-damaged property and was led to believe that they would receive the contract. William then prepared, at Davis's request, calculations and estimates which Davis used to negotiate a claim with the War Damage Commission, Davis then sold the property without concluding a contract for the reconstruction.

Held that a promise by the defendant to pay a reasonable sum for these service could be implied.