Developing Expectations & Standards
Part of the Performance Management Cycle

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Training & Organizational Effectiveness
Office of Human Resources
Oregon State University
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Overview

Performance expectations and standards build on the employee’s classified or unclassified position description (PD). The PD includes a section entitled "Major Duties" and/or "Duties" depending on whether the classified or unclassified form is used. Expectations and standards are derived out of these duties, and serve as additional documentation to evaluate performance.

Written expectations and standards are necessary to more clearly describe what is expected and the related standards for acceptable work. Following a review of the PD, the supervisor’s conversation with the employee about related expectations and standards clearly directs the work of the employee. It is the second major step in the performance management cycle illustrated on the cover.

Overall, performance expectations and standards:

A. Sets priorities and clarifies work objectives.

B. Establishes basis for:
   - Fairness
   - Constructive approval

C. Eliminates surprises because expectations are agreed upon and discussed up front.

D. Encourages:
   - Constructive communication.
   - Mutual understanding of what needs to be done and how.
   - Empowerment and self-assessment.

E. Sets ground for
   - Coaching.
   - Appraisal.
   - Discipline.

Objectives

- Be introduced to the concept of performance expectations and standards.
- Apply information to designing performance expectations and standards for one of their employees.

Materials

Please have your position description or that of an employee you supervise to review as you work through this topic.
Expectations and Standards Impact Performance

Case Study--Performance on a 20k March

This exercise illustrates an actual research study that examines the performance level of four groups when provided with varying expectations and standards about an upcoming march. After your "Best Guess," you will find the actual results and reasoning for the outcomes at the bottom of the chart.

Drag the Group labels to the left to show your Best Guess at ranking the order of performance of the following groups on a 20K march from best to worst. Performance criteria are based on:

- Time
- Which groups are able to best endure stress (These results were assessed by a pre- and post-test blood sample of cortisol and prolactin whose levels rise when stress increases.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best Guess</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Group 1: Were told how far they were expected to go and were kept informed of their progress along the way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>Group 2: Were told, &quot;This is the long march you hear about...,&quot; and received no information about the total distance they were expected to travel nor how far they had marched.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>Group 3: Were told to march 15 kilometers, and when they reached 14 kilometers, were told to march 6 more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Group 4: Were told they had to march 25 kilometers, but when they reached 14 kilometers, were told they had only 6 more.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case Study Results

Best: Group 1
This group was told how far they were expected to go and were also kept informed of their progress along the way.

Second: Group 3
This group was told to march 15 kilometers and when they reached 14 kilometers, they were told to march 6 more.
Third: Group 4
This group was told they had to march 25 kilometers, but when they reached 14 kilometers, they were told they had only 6 more.

Worst: Group 2
This group was told "This is the long march you hear about..." and received no information about the total distance they were expected to travel nor how far they had marched.

How Expectations and Standards Emerge From Major Duties

Expectations are what gets talked about, but are the expectations measurable?

The "Major Duties" or "Duties" section of the Position Description (PD) lists a set of the major tasks associated with any given position and a percentage of time that duty is performed. The figure below illustrates how expectations and standards might emerge from a major duty.

For Each Major Job Duty...

Expectations and standards should be discussed for each major job duty listed on the PD. This discussion helps the employee make meaning of the job duty and better understand how to translate that into practice. It invites conversation and clarification. The result is expectations will more likely be met.
Expectations and Standards as Additional Documentation

The PD is an official OSU document that accompanies every position. Expectations and standards serves as separate documentation for the supervisor and employee. The expectations and standards are developed by the supervisor often with employee input.

While it can be verbal, it is encouraged to be written and accessible. Example templates of how you might design your expectations and standards are provided later in this training. A written document allows the employee to reference it to support their work. It minimizes misunderstanding. If you decide not to put this in written format, you are minimally encouraged to follow up the verbal discussion in an email and bullet points regarding what and when you discussed expectations and standards.

What Do You Know Already?

An expectation that states what gets done, followed by a standard that provides clear measures to assess performance allows the employee to answer the question for him or herself, “Am I doing the task I am asked to do at an acceptable level?” Below are four samples of expectations and standards. Can you determine which are good and which will need further work?

Exercise: Are These Examples Good or Poor?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sample 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Expectation:</em> Accurately and promptly counts funds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Standard:</em> 99% of receipts will be error free and issued by end of next working day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sample 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Expectation:</em> Prepare and precondition grass seed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Standard:</em> As soon as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sample 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Expectation:</em> Perform maintenance work as requested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Standard:</em> When contacted, be ready to go unless on a priority job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sample 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Expectation:</em> Performance reviews are carried out in a timely manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Standard:</em> Performance reviews are completed for all employees within 30 days of notification that the review is due.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(see next page for answers)
Exercise Answers: Which Examples are Good; Which Examples are Poor

NOTE: These are just examples and can be written in many ways to clarify an expectation.

Sample 1
Good.

Sample 2
Not so good. "As soon as possible" is not clear as this might mean immediately to one employee and next week to another. Better: "Sort, measure and distribute to trays all grass seed samples by 9:00 a.m following daily delivery.

Sample 3
Not so good. "When contacted, be ready to go unless on a priority job." Contacted by whom? What is considered a priority job? Better: "Collect work order forms each morning by 6:30 am and schedule tasks according to due date, with consideration of previous jobs already assigned as "priority" per prior work orders."

Sample 4
Good.

Difference in Standards Used Above

You can see how over-simplifying standards will not provide enough information to assess performance. Terms like "as soon as possible" are vague as this can mean "now" or "when I get done with all of my other tasks." Adding timeframes, deadlines, percentages of accuracy, and other measurable data can better assess employee performance.

Testing the Reliability of Your Standard

When writing a standard, test the completeness of it by asking yourself:

1. Can I determine if I am NOT performing as expected?
2. How will I know that I’ve been successful?
3. Will these statements eliminate surprises in what is expected of this duty?
4. Will the expectations and standards set a fair basis for constructive feedback?

Additional Information to Include

Adding a designation regarding the priority of each expectation and standard is an important element to include in the Expectations and Standards document. This further helps the employee and supervisor determine what what requires the most attention. A simple designation might be used:

- "C" for Critical or High Priority items
- "M" for Major items
• **“S” for Secondary items**
  - designing a job
  - allocating the position to a classification
  - recruiting for the job

**Exhibit: Sample of Well-Written Expectations and Standards**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Advisor</th>
<th>Any College</th>
<th>Any Department</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Position #:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Date: <strong>/</strong>/____</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These expectations and standards further clarify appropriate Major Duties listed below from the Position Description for this position.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority: Critical (C); Major (M); Secondary (S)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Major Duty: Tracks at-risk students in special course placement to assess if early intervention needed.**

Priority: C  **Expectation:** Maintains student data by entering at-risk codes to determine if intrusive advising needed.

Receives, at the end of each term, special course assessments and enters data with 99% accuracy in preparation for "At-Risk Student" report and uses information for upcoming registration and advising.

Priority: M  **Expectation:** Counsels special needs students exploring accommodations to assist in their academic success.

Sets-up individual advising appointment with special needs students during fall term, understands current resources, OSU policy and SSD contact information, and receives a 5 rating on assessments from Special Needs Students.

Priority: M  **Expectation:** Advises low GPA students about tutoring and lab help to help them increase GPA.

Monitors GPAs of 2.5 or below at the end of each term and offers current University lab help services and tutor contact numbers during advising prior to upcoming quarter to avoid academic warning for student.

Priority: S  **Expectation:** Reports to Student Affairs code #23 and #11 students for OSU Counseling intervention.

Within 48 hours of request from Student Affairs, provide reports with codes #23 and #11 flagged students with current data supplied by prior term instructor assessments.
Conclusion

Your development of clear expectations and standards for your employees will provide you with a helpful tool for more effective employee supervision, coaching and discipline. Without written expectations and standards, misunderstandings by employees can lead to problems in performance and make it more difficult to you and the employee to make improvements.

_In the end, standards are ultimately what you tolerate._