How to Improve Individual Performance
*A Highly Rational Approach*

A thorough, systematic approach for diagnosing individual performance gaps, and targeting efforts to improve them.
Introduction

The volumes of material devoted to the topic of improving individual work performance easily outsize any other topic in management and organizational theory. The creation of this material started centuries ago and continues today. And yet managers of all types continue to experience this problem, everyday, in every workplace, all across the globe. Human Resources Departments continue to allocate time and energy to the prevention and resolution of these problems.

Certainly, much of this is because humans are complicated and often insecure or anxious. Learning to manage the complexity and human frailty is a significant task of any manager.

And still, there is room for a purely logical, step-by-step approach to the diagnosis and resolution of performance “problems.” This can serve as a foundation around which all of the human complexities can be addressed and worked with. It can also help you, the manager to see your habitual blind spots and perhaps improve your own performance in this regard.

Good luck!
Let’s start with your Assumption:

**An Individual’s Work Outcomes Could Be Better**

- More quantity, quality, satisfaction, etc.;
- Less waste, delay, cost, etc.

Proceed only if you truly believe this to be the case.
How to Improve Individual Performance

Definitions of the Desired Change, and Return on Investment

Let's start with your Assumption:
An Individual's Work Outcomes Could Be Better
- More quantity, quality, satisfaction, etc.;
- Less waste, delay, cost, etc.
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Definitions and Interest Level

What is the difference between current and desired performance?

Why is this discrepancy important?

What would happen if this problem were left alone?

Is it worth pursuing?
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Capability of the Individual to Perform As Desired

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Definitions and Interest Level
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Is it worth pursuing?

Capability

• What are the skills and knowledge required to be successful?

• Does the person have the skill and knowledge necessary to perform?

• Does the individual have the physical, cognitive, and/or emotional capabilities to perform?

• Does the individual know why the desired performance is important?

• How do you know? Is there enough uncertainty that these questions are worth investigating?
How to Improve Individual Performance

Determination of Adequate Methods and Resources

Methods and Resources

• Are the activities that initiate the work clear?
• Can the work be done without interference from other tasks or people?
• Are the methods and techniques appropriate and learnable?
• Are adequate resources, tools, information, and time available?

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- Does the individual have the physical, cognitive, and/or emotional capabilities to perform?
- Does the individual know why the desired performance is important?
- How do you know? Is there enough uncertainty that these questions are worth investigating?
How to Improve Individual Performance

Understanding of the Expectations for the Role

Let’s start with your Assumption:
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Expectations

• Is a desired outcome clear?
• Does a standard for performance exist?
• Does the person know the desired outcome and performance standard?
• Does the person consider them attainable, reasonable, and appropriate?
• Can the person measure their success?

Definitions and Interest Level

- What is the difference between current and desired performance?
- Why is this discrepancy important?
- What would happen if this problem were left alone?
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Capability

- What are the skills and knowledge required to be successful?
- Does the person have the skill and knowledge necessary to perform?
- Does the individual have the physical, cognitive, and/or emotional capabilities to perform?
- Does the individual know why the desired performance is important?
- How do you know? Is there enough uncertainty that these questions are worth investigating?

Methods and Resources

- Are the activities that initiate the work clear?
- Can the work be done without interference from other tasks or people?
- Are the methods and techniques appropriate and learnable?
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Determination of Adequate Incentives for Performance

Let's start with your Assumption:
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Methods and Resources
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Expectations
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- Does the person know the desired outcome and performance standard?
- Does the person consider them attainable, reasonable, and appropriate?
- Can the person measure their success?

Consequences
- Are the rewards and recognition aligned to support the desired performance?
- Are they meaningful from the person's point of view?
- Are they timely?
How to Improve Individual Performance

Determination of Adequate Performance Information

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Capability
- What are the skills and knowledge required to be successful?
- Does the person have the skill and knowledge necessary to perform?
- Does the individual have the physical, cognitive, and/or emotional capabilities to perform?
- Does the individual know why the desired performance is important?
- How do you know? Is there enough uncertainty that these questions are worth investigating?

Feedback

• Does the person receive information about his or her performance?
• Is the information relevant, accurate, timely, specific, and easy to understand?
• Is there a social system in place that supports the achievement of the appropriate performance?
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The Performance Improvement Cycle

Assumption: Improvement is Possible

Definition of the Desired Change

Capability

Methods & Resources

Expectations

Feedback
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The Diagnostic Questions as a List

Assumption: An Individual’s Work Outcomes Could Be Better
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✓ Why is this discrepancy important?
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Capability
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The Diagnostic Questions as a List

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