

HOW TO:

WRITE SMART OBJECTIVES

Increase clarity and engagement and underpin performance management.



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Why write SMART objectives?

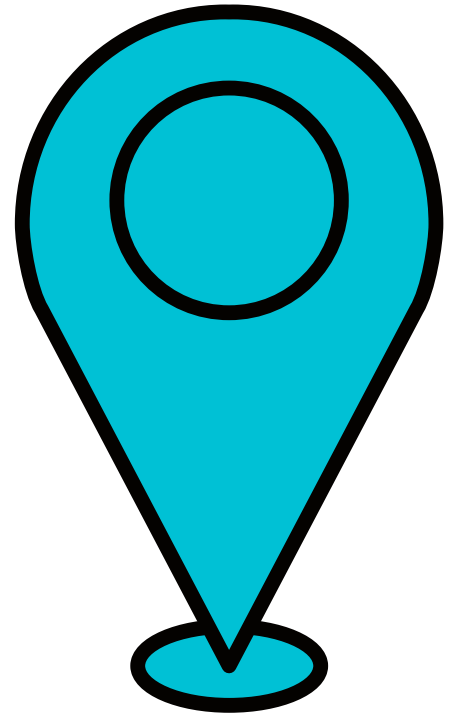
Most of us have heard of the acronym SMART but may well struggle with writing a SMART objective as it is not as simple as you may think. However, SMART objectives are fundamental to a high-performing organisation as they increase clarity and engagement and should underpin your performance management process. Research (Locke & Latham 2002) demonstrates consistently that stretching but achievable goals motivate people to deliver their best. They also provide staff with clarity and purpose which is the foundation of employee engagement.

So what does SMART stand for and how do you write SMARTER objectives?

- S** Specific/Stretching
- M** Measurable
- A** Achievable/Agreed
- R** Relevant
- T** Timed
- E** Engaging
- R** Reviewable

How to be specific

Being specific is all about being clear so that both you and the individual understand exactly what is required. If an objective is general rather than specific it is very difficult to evaluate without being subjective. Given that performance against objectives often ends up being rated, being specific is really important. It should mean that almost anyone could evaluate the extent to which the objective has been met as managers may change over the course of the year and that shouldn't affect the rating.



Notice the difference?



General: Put together a team to reduce service times.

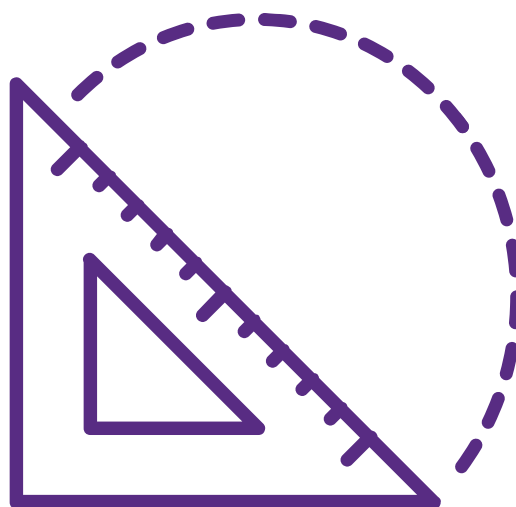
Specific: Put together a Project Management Team from lean accredited production representatives to create and implement lean improvements in order to reduce average engine service times.

How to be measurable

Having a measure isn't always possible but it is desirable. This makes an objective more specific and it also enables you to determine the extent to which it has been achieved. Without a measure, the achievement of an objective is not black or white. So, if we revisit the objective above, it is very difficult to judge whether it has been achieved or overachieved without a measure. By adding in the measure of 20%, this gives us the ability to quantify the extent of the achievement.

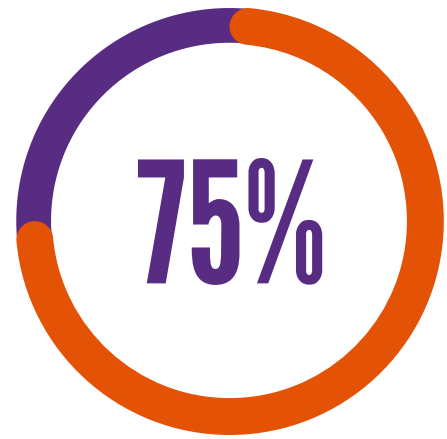
Put together a Project Management Team from lean accredited production representatives to create and implement lean improvements in order to reduce average engine service times by 20%.

This means that we could evaluate the achievement from significantly underachieved to significantly overachieved based on the measure. The way we rate the measure should not come as a surprise to the individual at year-end as this should be discussed over the course of the year and we should have a consistent approach, but it is valuable in bringing focus and clarity to the objective. So both parties need to know ahead of the evaluation whether a reduction of 21% constitutes fully achieved or overachieved.



Is it achievable?

For objectives to be effective they need to be seen as stretching but achievable as research shows that these are actually more motivational than easy objectives. However, I have added the term 'agreed' to emphasise the importance of involving the individual in the setting of the objective rather than simply applying it top-down. For the objective to be motivational it needs to be seen as achievable in the eyes of the individual, not as judged by someone else and this may take discussion. It is recommended to avoid the measure 100% as in many cases that would make the objective unrealistic, it also means it probably can't be overachieved whereas 99% could be.



Demonstrate relevance

Objectives should be relevant to the business strategy or organisational purpose and the individual needs to understand how their goal contributes to that bigger picture. This makes the difference between people going through the motions and having a sense of purpose. It is also empowering as it enables the individual to prioritise in the face of conflicting demands if they understand how they fit into the bigger picture. If we return to the earlier example and are aware that achieving a 20% reduction in service time means increased productivity so we can take on additional customers and save jobs then it is far more meaningful.



Is it time bound?

A clear time frame is essential to know when to evaluate the completion of an objective. It can also be used as another measure as this may make an objective more or less achievable.

Put together a Project Management Team from lean accredited production representatives to create and implement lean improvements in order to reduce average engine service times by 20% by 30th April 2021.

So now you have your SMART objective and if you want to be really clever you can make it SMARTER! The E stands for Engaging and the R stands for Reviewable, both of which we would recommend in an ideal world. Breaking an objective up into key milestones can be very helpful to monitor progress, however, the best way of being engaging is by making the time to discuss progress and offer support so this is more about management behaviour than the writing of the objective.

Top Tips

- When writing a SMART objective, people often feel they need to start at S and work through to the end, in reality, we need to focus on SMT and then use A&R to check and refine the objective.
- Never just cascade the same objective right down the organisation, you need to make sure the objective is at the right level for the individual's job role so that they can actually influence the achievement of it. If it is too high level you can ask 'How' or too low level ask the word 'Why' and set the objective at that level.

Chunk up - Why? Grow market share in product X by 7% in EU by end of FY2021

Chunk up - Why? Gain €250,000 sales from new customers by end Q3

Objective: Hold 3 face-to-face meetings per month with potential customer

Chunk down - How? Double the rate of prospecting calls to new customers

Chunk down - How? Research top 50 users of our technologies throughout Europe

- Be careful about motivating the wrong behaviours by just measuring the things that are easy to measure e.g. Make 30 outgoing sales calls per day. We have all heard of call centre staff calling the speaking clock or their mum in order to meet their KPI's.

Top Tips

- Avoid meaningless terminology that is too general e.g. **Represent** the business at trade shows; **Update** knowledge on; **Liaise** with... **Review**...e.g. Review the succession plan; **Support**... e.g. Support new employees to the business by acting as a Buddy. If you use these terms, you need to ensure you go on to be very clear about the expectation if you are to make the objective SMARTER.
- They don't have to be top-down, I often hear the excuse that objectives can't be set at the start of the year as the goals from above haven't been agreed. This can mean people getting objectives halfway through the year which is ridiculous. Empower people to think about their objectives themselves and start with those, they can always be tweaked to ensure alignment when objectives are cascaded down.



Remember!

Even a pretty SMART objective on paper is still likely to require a bit of discussion to ensure both parties understand exactly what good looks like, particularly if you are likely to rate performance against the objective.

Objective Title: To increase patient satisfaction in the Community

Objective: To achieve 80% coverage of community diabetes patients with a minimum of 2 face-to-face patient visits with the named population between October 1st, 2017 and Sept 30th, 2018. Document patient notes highlighting current satisfaction with service and escalate any concerns to manager within 72 hours.

Agree through discussion

- What the expectation is for an effective patient visit
- Check a common understanding of the named population
- How to document satisfaction effectively
- What would constitute a concern for escalation

Quality objectives motivate high performance and are a skill that can be learned through practice. They should form an essential part of any effective performance management process as without them it is impossible to deliver a meaningful appraisal.



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