A guide to…

Setting objectives

How to use the Guide

This 'how-to' guide is a step-by-step practical guide to support you at each stage of the objective setting and reviewing process. It includes:

- Top Tips
- Checklists
- Important things to think abou.t

This guide provides tools to help you create meaningful and stretching objectives for you, and where relevant, your reports; helping to ensure that all objectives align clearly to support the Vision, Purpose, Values and Behaviours of your organisation as well as delivering the Business Plan.

Research shows that organisations who set goals and objectives at all levels, from the very top right through to team-based and individual objectives, are the ones who are most likely to be successful. Creating meaningful goals and objectives, and being able to track progress along the way, is how you will be able to measure success.

Everyone plays a really important part in supporting and sustaining a strong performance and development culture; this is not just the responsibility of the team leader or manager. This guide encourages you to:
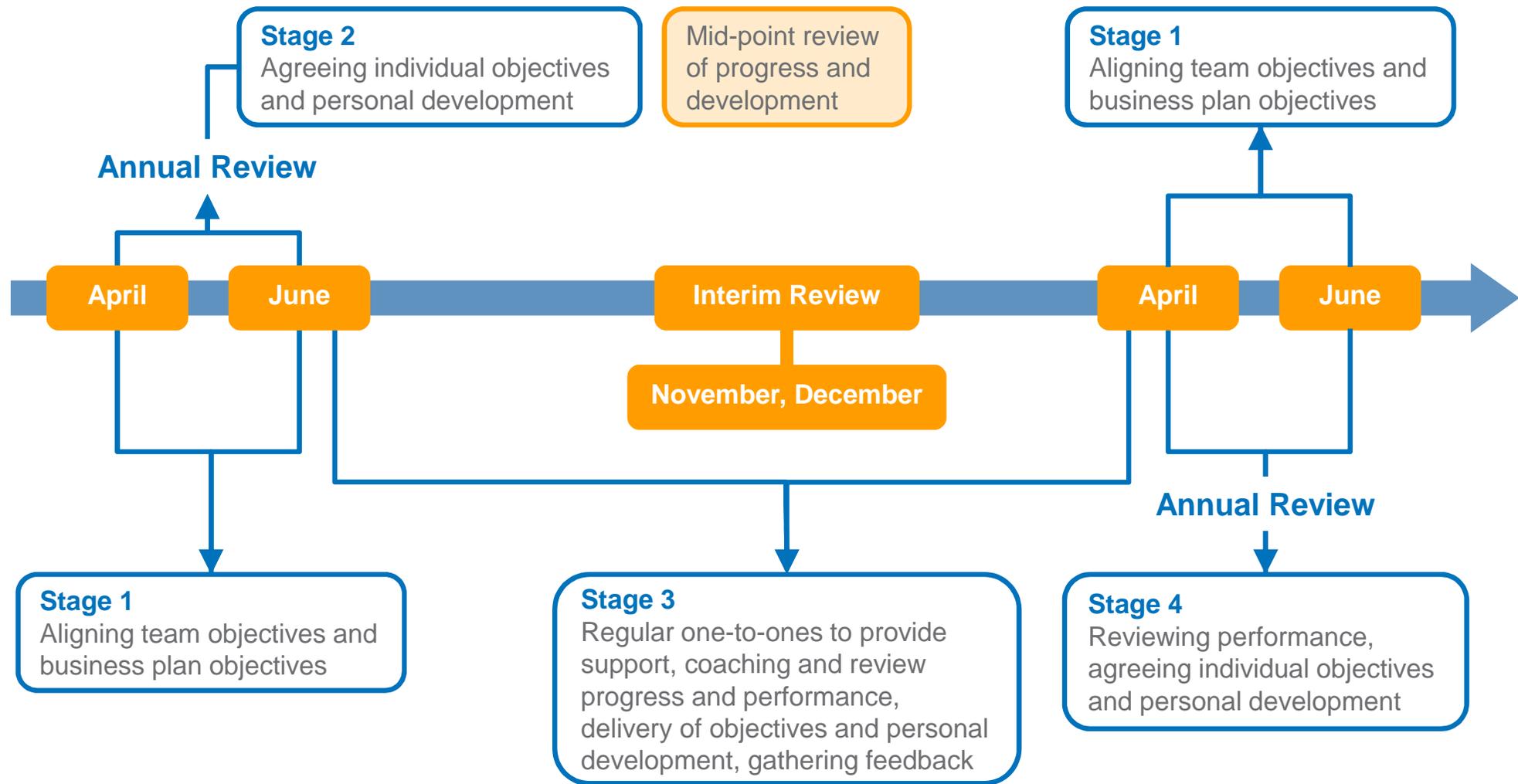
- Reflect on the challenges that lie ahead for you and your team and work to identify shared objectives that align to your Vision, Values and Behaviours and will support delivery of the Business Plan
- Share your team and your individual objectives with other colleagues so they understand your plans and contributions
- Propose and agree challenging objectives and explore associated personal development requirements
- Give and receive regular constructive feedback.

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Agreeing individual objectives and personal development

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Annual Review

| April | June | Interim Review | April | June |

November, December

Annual Review

Stage 1
Aligning team objectives and business plan objectives

Stage 3
Regular one-to-ones to provide support, coaching and review progress and performance, delivery of objectives and personal development, gathering feedback

Stage 4
Reviewing performance, agreeing individual objectives and personal development

Aligning teams and organisational objectives

Organisational Objectives

The 'Pyramid of Purpose' is one way to graphically depict an organisation's strategic plan. By putting the various elements into a pyramid form, it is easy to see the 'big picture' and the relationships between different elements of the plan in a form that is easier to understand.

The purpose, the 'Why' shown at the top, cascades from one level to the next as should the objectives and how they make sense.

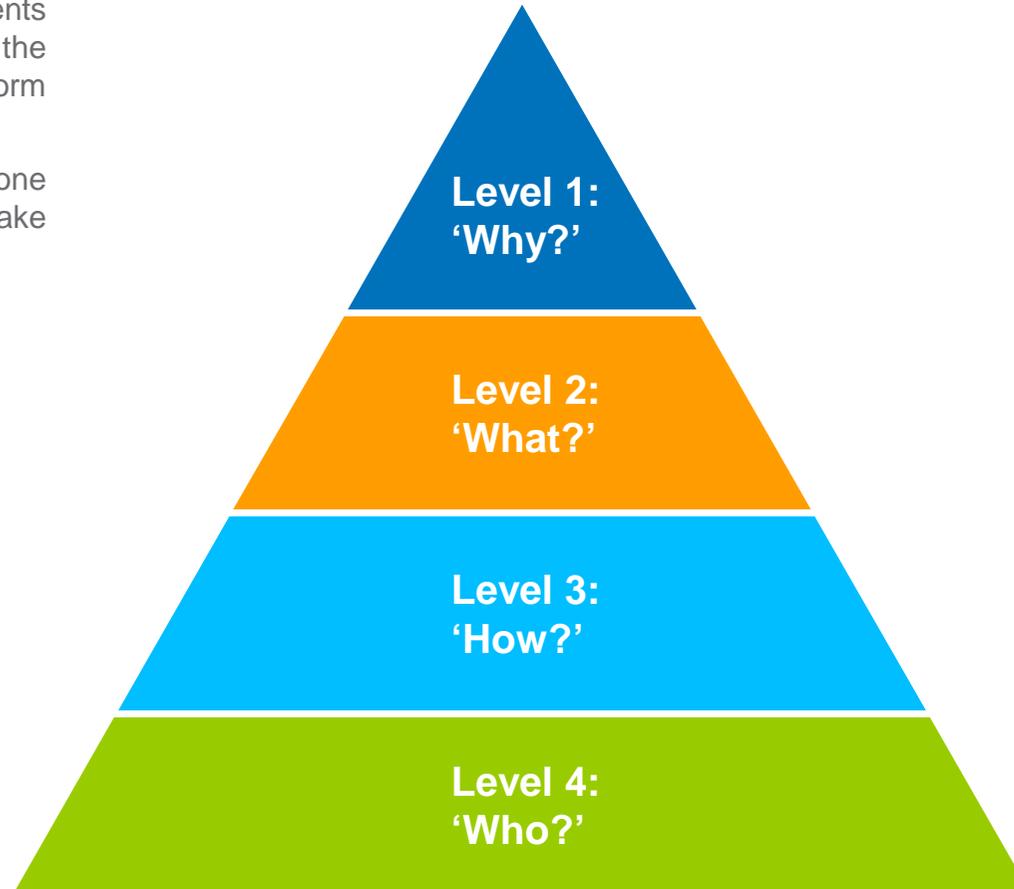1. **Why are we doing what we are doing**?
   - Our Vision and our Purpose

2. **What do we need to do to fulfil our intended purpose**?

3. **How exactly are we going to do what needs to be done?**
   - Business Plan priorities
   - Agree corporate objectives
   - Our Behaviours

4. **Who (or what) is going to make sure it's done?**
   - The team, individuals and partners

Level 1: 'Why?'

Level 2: 'What?'

Level 3: 'How?'

Level 4: 'Who?'

Team Objectives

We are all encouraged to propose our own objectives, and to do this, having thought about our own role and responsibilities, the objectives of the team or teams we are members of, and the organisation's business plan objectives and deliverables.

Teams are expected to set aside time to discuss what their shared objectives are and to consider how these align to business plan objectives and deliverables.

All of us are members of at least one team, working with colleagues in similar specialties in areas, regions or directorates with a line manager to whom we are accountable, our home team. Many of us are also active participants in other teams working on projects or programmes of work, involved in delivering the objectives and deliverables of these work programmes.

Where we are members of more than one team, we are encouraged to think about how significant our contribution to each of these teams is and how this should be reflected in our objectives for the coming year.

Many objectives depend upon team effort so you will all need to agree common, shared objectives. In doing so you need to be clear about objectives, roles, expectations, accountabilities /abilities and timing. The following list can help you with this:

Objectives
- What are the overall objectives of the team?
- What are the objectives of other projects we may be involved with?
- What is the objective of each individual activity?
- Why are we doing this?

Roles
- What are the roles of each individual team member?
- What is the contribution each is expected to make?
- What expertise do we each bring?
- What is everyone else's role and everyone else's expected contribution?

Expectations
- How good is 'good enough'?
- What is the level of performance that is desired?
- What level of performance is not desired?
- Why are the expectations set at this level as opposed to another?

Accountabilities / Abilities
- Who is accountable for each phase of the work – especially on projects that cut across functional lines or involve several people?
- What abilities do we possess that have a bearing on the individual job assignments?

Timing
- When must this be done?
- At what pace am I to work?
- How does the timing of one piece of the work affect other pieces?

Before the team begins to create objectives consider the following statements, gather information and action as required:

- We know exactly what job it is that our customers and stakeholders, both internal and external, expect us to do

- We know how the work of our team connects with the wider organisational vision and business plan

- We know how our team contributes to the finances or resources of our organisation (if appropriate).

- We know which other teams our team is part of and has responsibilities to for the delivery of work programmes

- We understand how significant our 'Away' team contributions will be and have thought through and discussed the impact these might have on the achievement of 'Home' objectives

- We know who has overall responsibility for the delivery of 'Away' team objectives

- We are thinking about what additional development and support we may need to be successful

- We know or have a plan to ensure we can not only measure our own performance but ensure we understand how others will measure us – when and where we will get feedback about how we are delivering our objectives.

Allocating tasks:

The allocation of tasks, responsibilities and priorities of team members is usually done through joint discussion and negotiations in the team. It is the manager's responsibility to see that this is done effectively. The process is supported and strengthened by regular reviews.

Key questions for managers and teams to ask are:

- Has work been fairly distributed between team members?
- Have roles and responsibilities of team members been decided?
- Has each individual member taken personal responsibility for at least some aspect of the team task?
- Which of the elements of the Business Plan will the team objectives ultimately support?

Corporate, Individual and Personal Development Objectives

Having reviewed your team(s) objectives, the next step is to identify no more than five or six individual objectives per annum, and think about how you can deliver these in line with the organisation's values and behaviours. You also should consider how you can develop yourself and others so you can improve your performance year on year.

Corporate Objectives

Objectives are set at various levels within an organisation. From the top (corporate) through to the layers underneath, for example, Directorate and Department. Corporate objectives are typically well defined and realistic goals set by an organisation, that are intended to influence its internal decisions.

Individual Objectives

Your individual objectives should:

- Challenge and stretch you to deliver great outcomes
- Encourage you to learn and develop through doing your job better/differently
- Align with, but not necessarily be identical to, those of your colleagues (within the team)
- Align with the delivery of the Business Plan
- Reflect that how your deliver is as important as what you deliver – think about how you model the organisation's values and behaviours in the way you deliver your objectives.

In discussion with your line manager you should agree:

- Five or six key objectives
- How you will measure success in terms of outcomes, behaviours and development
- How you will seek feedback, from whom and when
- The support you will need to help you achieve your objectives.

Team Objectives

Identifying your individual objectives

Use the following steps to help you identify objectives which are ambitious, challenging and stretching:

1. Make a list of the key work areas or activities you will be involved in delivering over the coming year – you could use the organisation's Business Plan as a starting point for this as it includes all planned activity.

2. For each activity, think about what it will look like to have completed the activity – what the completed objective may look like (to the best of your knowledge). Write down a short description.

3. Think about how difficult the activity will be – will it be:

   - **Easy –** Directly comparable to a previously achieved objective. Well within your current capability. Requiring only application, not the learning of new skills or behaviours, or the extension of existing ones.

   - **Challenging –** Containing some elements of stretch, that is, requiring skills, talent, effort or development greater than previously demonstrated.

   - **Very Difficult –** Requiring completely new skills or behaviours, or a step-change in development. Characterised by a major increase in the complexity or the magnitude of the task.

4. Drawing on your thinking regarding what it will look like to have completed the activity, think about how you will measure your achievement – can you quantify it (report it in terms of numbers)? If not, what descriptive criteria can you use? When you've come up with some possible criteria, put them to the 'JUDGEment Test': Could you verify the descriptive criteria – i.e., could someone else 'judge' accurately whether the objective was completed or not?

5. When you've made some progress on the 'what', think about the 'how'. Consider your behaviours and the practical application of these e.g. working together might include thinking about which key stakeholders you should be including in delivering a project. Listening and learning might involve actively seeking feedback on a project to see what could be improved, or reviewing a lessons learned log from a previous project.

6. Which of the Behaviours and Values will you draw upon if you deliver the objective? Do you currently have the level of behavioural skill required, or will you have to develop more effective ways of using the behaviours? Make some notes.

7. Think about how you will get feedback on your progress for each of your objectives and who you will get this from.

8. Finally, evaluate whether the activities you have listed require personal development and could therefore form a personal development objective?

Personal Development Objectives

In addition to agreeing individual objectives, we need to agree a personal development plan for the year. We know that investing in team and personal development is important to ensure we can be successful now and in the future. Identifying and addressing personal development needs is a central part of the PDR process.

Working with line managers we are encouraged through the objective setting process to identify how we can gain experience, learn and develop skills and capabilities as we deliver our objectives. Personal development is not just about education and training courses, stretching objectives should provide opportunities to learn on the job, to undertake developmental assignments, work with and learn from more experienced colleagues, and to develop from coaching and mentoring others.

Identifying and addressing development needs should be integrated with, and support the achievement of our objectives, not be seen as a separate activity. Line managers should provide coaching and developmental support to colleagues.

Development activities should support us to successfully deliver our objectives, in terms of outcomes, values and behaviours, and help us to improve our future performance. These should be recorded.

The benefits of personal development objectives include:

- An increase in confidence, self-belief and a better idea of what people may want to achieve in the future
- An increase in self-awareness – strengths, weaknesses and impact on others
- An increase in awareness of others, what they need and the importance of different team roles
- Identifying the best ways to learn effectively and how to get there. Everyone learns best in a number of different ways.

You are now ready to talk with your line manager to discuss your ideas.

The PDR Discussion

When you meet with your line manager, you should be encouraged to propose objectives that enable you to deliver your part in the team's operational plans. Be ready to share your ideas – the conversation is a collaborative discussion, it's for you to take an active role in shaping your objectives – don't just expect your manager to present you with a list. Remember that the PDR discussion is that, a discussion about **your** objectives and so the majority of the conversation should come from you. Research suggests that in the best PDRs the individual talks for 80% of the time, the Manager for 20%.

The more input you have, the more you will feel ownership of the actions you will take over the coming period – what better way to feel motivated and in control of the future?
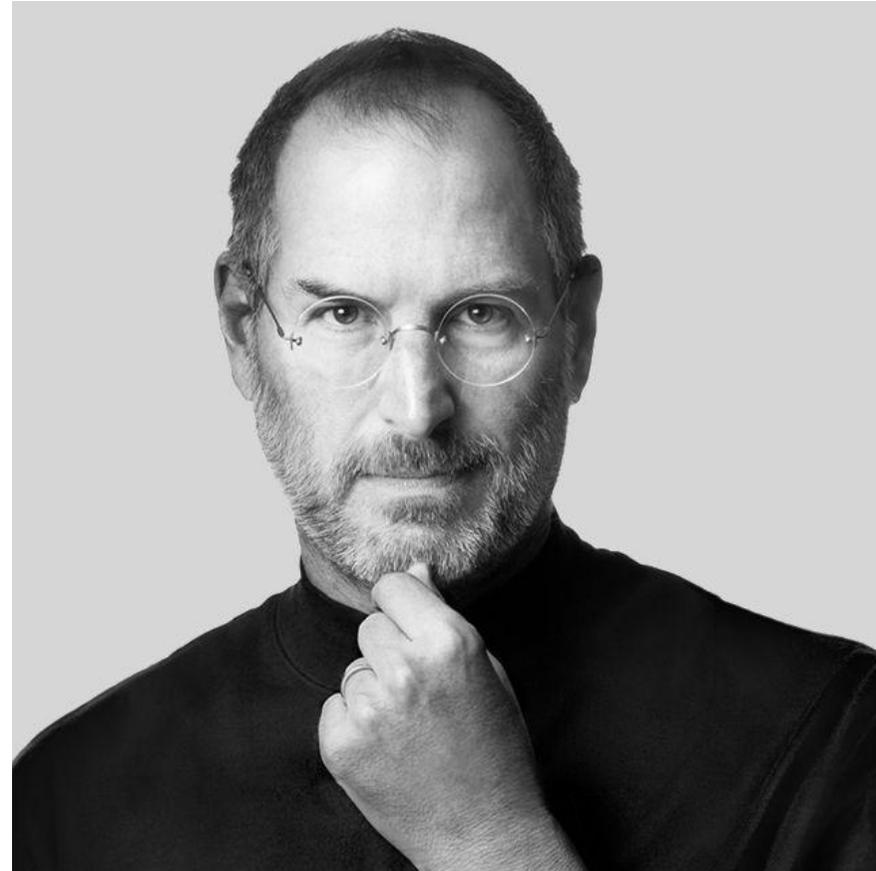
Tools to help you with Objective Setting

Creating SMART individual objectives

" Get your thinking clean to make it simple. Simple can be harder than complex; but it's worth it in the end because, once you get there, you can move mountains. "

Steve Jobs

Tools to help you with Objective Setting

Creating SMART individual objectives

A popular tool for setting high quality objectives is known by the acronymn **'SMART'**. The letters stand for:

Specific
Your objective should state a defined outcome/result as simply, concisely and explicitly as possible and clearly spell out what is required. This answers questions such as: how much, for whom, for what? Specific means that the objective is concrete, detailed, focused and well defined with a single key result being derived. If more than one result is to be achieved, more than one objective should be written.

Measurable
A performance measure is the amount of change or progress achieved toward a specific goal or objective, so objectives should be quantifiable and define the criteria for success (quality/quantity/cost etc.). There should be a reliable system in place to measure progress towards the attainment of the objective. A measurable objective has an outcome that can usually be assessed either on a sliding scale (1-10), or as 'success or failure'. How will you measure success? By quality or by quantity? How will you know whether this objective has been achieved?

Not all objectives can be measured, especially in hard figures, yet most would say 'If you cannot measure it … you cannot manage it'. Choose 2 or 3 characteristics in each objective which best convey the intention of the objective. This might look like "*If we do this…then we achieve this"* OR "*When we have done this people will say…"*

Verifiable versus Quantifiable: Where numbers don't work use descriptive, verifiable criteria. How would you measure a written report? In numbers? What other criteria might you use? Are your criteria verifiable? Can someone (a 'judge') accurately say whether a given report does or does not feature the things you have defined as necessary for reports to be used effectively in your business? Agree what external factors the objective is dependent on too.

Achievable/Attainable
Objectives should be within your capabilities, but challenging and offering an opportunity for development. They should be compatible with your other responsibilities and workload and within available organisational resources – e.g., time/money/the contribution required of others, etc., ASK: Is it possible to achieve this goal? Are there any barriers or challenges along the way? What resources or assistance may be required to achieve it? Are the resources available?

Relevant
Objectives should be directly linked to the objectives and priorities of your team (actual or matrix) and appropriate to your role, current and future career development. This means two things, that the objective being set is something you can actually impact upon and secondly that it is also important to the organisation. A relevant goal should help you on your mission towards the 'bigger' objectives. Is this objective in line with the overall goal? Is it a worthwhile goal?

Timebound
Objectives should be agreed to be delivered within a certain timeframe. Where there are milestones or key delivery dates these should be recorded. An objective with no date for completion is simply no good. An agreed timeframe creates the necessary urgency and prompts action. A time-bound goal includes realistic time frames. When will the objective be reviewed? When is the deadline?

Setting SMART Objectives in 5 Easy Steps

Step	Mnemonic	Description
1	**Specific**	Exactly what is it you want to achieve in your business or personal life? Good objective statements explain: what, why, who, where and when. If your objective statement is vague, you will find it hard to achieve because it will be hard to define success.
2	**Measurable**	You must be able to track progress and measure the result of your objective. Good objective statements answer the question: how much or how many. How will I know when I achieve my objective?
3	**Agreed**	Your objective must be relevant to and agreed with all parties; examples include your line manager, your colleagues and external partners.
4	**Realistic**	The objective should be stretching, but realistic and relevant to you and your company. Ensure the actions you need to take to work towards a successful achievement of your objectives are things you can do and control.
5	**Time-bound**	Objectives must have a deadline. A good objective statement will answer the question: When will I achieve my objective? Without deadlines, it's easy to put objectives off and leave them to die. As well as a deadline, it's a good idea to set some short-term milestones along the way to help you measure progress.

Top Tips for writing 'SMART' objectives

- Limit your objectives to between 5 and 6 at any one time. If you find yourself with more than 6 objectives, you are probably writing mini-objectives or tasks

- New objectives: Be aware as you progress through the objective setting process and through the year that new objectives may appear if organisational priorities change. Will they replace or be added to the original ones? Be careful in these cases of 'objective overload'.

- Organisational values and behaviours: How can you ensure they are embedded in your objectives?

- Focus: Keep your objectives focussed on major areas of responsibility

- Avoid Ambiguity: As a rule, people interpret what they read. Effective objectives should leave no room for interpretation or 'wriggle room'. This means looking at the objective you've written and asking whether it could be misinterpreted

- Use clear, simple language: Be wary of using words that are complex, vague or difficult to define

- Verbs and outcomes: Use verbs (action words) to make clear what is to happen, for example 'to complete the… or 'to redesign the…". However, verbs alone are not enough for a good objective, for each action also write down the outcome - what the result of completing the action will be.

- Two-in-One? Check that there aren't two objectives in one – e.g.: "*By August 1, 2015, implement a new performance management system for all staff using the opportunity to update the relevant project management processes so employees and managers can more competently evaluate performance, develop their careers and use the updated project management processes for their own future projects.*"

Divide it into two distinct objectives:

1. *"By August 1, 20XX, implement a new performance management system for all staff so employees and managers can more competently evaluate performance and develop their careers."*

2. *"By August 1, 20XX update the project management processes for implementing an ICT system so employees and managers can use the processes for their own future projects."*

What and How: An objective should state only what should be achieved, not how to achieve it. Unless someone is new, it's best to give them some choice of how they should accomplish it. You will want to monitor how they do it, but do give people the freedom to do something 'their way' not necessarily how it's 'always been done'

SMART Objective Examples

Not SMART
- Increase employee satisfaction levels in the learning resources provided by the HR/OD department
- Reduce the amount of time it takes to respond to Freedom of Information requests.

SMART
- Increase employee satisfaction levels in the 2015 HR/OD learning survey by 25% for the learning resources provided to support coaching interventions
- Ensure all Freedom of Information requests received by the department are dealt with within 3 working days by October 20XX

Supporting people throughout the year

Regular one to one meetings

The PDR process runs throughout the year, not just at the interim and annual reviews, so you should be having on-going conversations with your line manager and with colleagues you are working with on projects and programmes in other teams. This ensures that everyone is regularly checking how things are going, reviewing objectives, seeking feedback and providing feedback where asked.

You should agree with your line manager the frequency of regular one to one meetings. These should provide you with a regular opportunity to seek advice, guidance, feedback and support from your manager to enable you to deliver your objectives. This is also a powerful way to talk about how you are living up to the organisation's values and behaviours, what you are learning, and how you are developing yourself and others.

These regular conversations ensure there should be no surprises at the interim and annual review meetings.

Structure of an Effective Review Discussion

Review conversations are a two-way process so it is important to not only ask for feedback about what is going well, and what could be done better or differently, but also for line managers and colleagues to receive feedback about how they are doing and what they could do differently and better to help their team perform as well as possible.

### Before you meet what can you and the individual do to prepare?

- Reflect
- Gather feedback
- Consider the messages you have heard
- Self-evaluate.

How to lead a One to One PDR Review Conversation

It will help if you can keep the conversation structured. Let the person you are reviewing lead the way. Be empathetic and try to see it their way. Give good feedback. Resolve performance problems and if it goes wrong take time out. A good structure to use is:

- Allow them to do most of the talking
- Begin by asking what is/has gone well and, encourage them to talk about their successes
- Help them to think about and reflect on what they have learned, what they could do better
- Provide constructive feedback
- Ask for feedback about what you can do to more of, or differently, to enable them to do a great job
- Agree what you will record
- Try to end on a positive note.
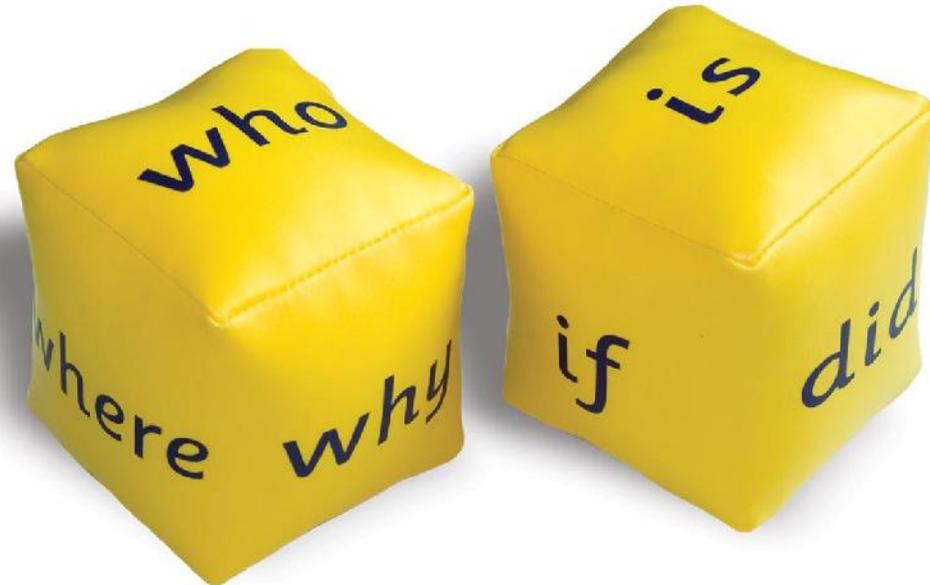
Throughout this process it might be helpful to keep the following model in mind:

1. **RECOGNISE:** Tell them what they are doing right, show appreciation of their skills, knowledge, and behaviours you want to encourage. Not just praise though – this has to be clear and evidence based.

2. **EMPATHISE:** Suspend judgement and let them describe things their way; get them to analyse their own performance – and see it their way. If you genuinely listen, suspend your own judgement; ask questions only in order to understand better and not to challenge. Finally, sum up everything they have told you – in your own words – and ask "have I got that right?" When you do, you establish two things: firstly the other person feels understood (which is rare in life) and secondly you have established the principle of reciprocation – in return for your listening and understanding without judging them - they owe you something!

3. **ENCOURAGE:** Encourage them to talk about improvement areas. Ask them whether they think there are any areas in which they could improve. If you have done step 2 properly you will get suggestions!

4. **ASK:** Ask them to consider improvements you want. Having identified their own step for improvement they should be amenable to hearing your ideas for how they could improve.

5. **COACH:** Use coaching skills to improve performance – listen, question, clarify. You now have some agreed areas for improvement and a person willing to improve - which means you can coach for performance. Coaching will not work unless the coachee *wants* to improve their performance. It is a performance tool only for the willing.

6. **BUILD:** Build confidence in future success. Finish by building the person's confidence that they can do what they have agreed to do. Do *no*t go back to recognition or praise of the past – build confidence in their future.

At a glance – Are you?

- Ensuring that adequate time is being set aside to prepare for and take part in interim and annual review meetings to get the most out of these conversations?

- Arranging to meet regularly to discuss feedback in a timely manner, to review progress and amend objectives and development activities?

- Asking for feedback about what we can do more of, less of or differently to enable us to do our jobs well?

- Reviewing progress against each objective and assess if this in line with what is expected?

- Reviewing any performance improvement plans?

- Recording progress against objectives, personal development and the outcomes of Interim and Annual Reviews?

- Gathering evidence along the way, especially where objectives are not measureable in 'hard' facts or figures?

- Reflecting on feedback received and taking steps to secure any further feedback in the coming period?

- Checking out how development is going generally?

- Providing regular constructive feedback so that people know when they are doing well, and what they could do differently or better?

- Talking to other colleagues in other teams to gather feedback about how they are doing?

- Offering to coach and mentor others to support them to achieve great performance?

- Agreeing what further support might be needed from others, not just our manager?

- Looking forward to the next period and agreeing any revised objectives or plans?

- Celebrating success!?

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