

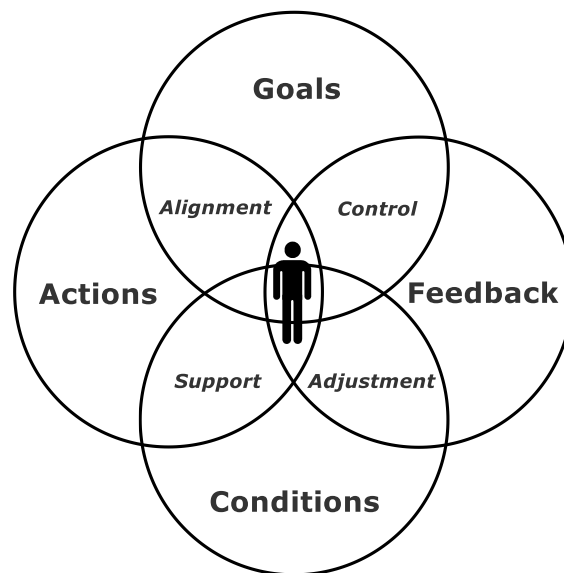
Knowledge Worker

The Performance Sweet Spot

(August 2014)

The diagram below depicts a person – the performer – at the point where the major factors affecting performance come together: The “Performance Sweet Spot.” When they come together the performer will very likely meet or exceed expectations – whether they are his or her own expectations or someone else’s.

The Performance Sweet Spot



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When Goals are matched by appropriate Actions there is *Alignment* between the two. When Conditions are conducive to performing as expected there is *Support* for those Actions. When the performer receives accurate, timely Feedback about progress and achievement, *Control* of performance is enabled. And when Feedback also informs the performer about new, unforeseen or changed Conditions, *Adjustment* is possible. If any one of these factors is absent, performance is impeded. If two or more are absent, performance is next to impossible. *Alignment, Support, Control and Adjustment*, these are the keys to ensuring that performance meets expectations.

And what about the performer? Well, presumably the performer has the necessary skills, knowledge and abilities needed to figure out and carry out the required Actions. If not, that’s a failure on the part of management. Perhaps there was an error in selection, assignment or in preparation. Or perhaps the incentives are wrong or non-existent. Those are management problems, not a performer problem.

There are many more detailed views to be taken of these factors. For example, under Conditions we could ask if the necessary tools and equipment are available, or if the necessary cooperation on the part of others is forthcoming, or if the performer is subjected to any unnecessary restraints or constraints

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that interfere with adapting and adjusting as Feedback might indicate. Goals specify some desired value for a targeted variable. Is the performer clear about the variable and its desired value? Is the context or rationale for the Goal clear? Does the Goal make sense to the performer? Does it tie to some larger initiative? Does it conflict with other goals? Feedback informs the performer of progress and achievement. Does the performer have direct access to that information or is it being provided indirectly? Is Feedback being confused with praise or criticism and thus true Feedback is not being provided at all? On and on the questions go.

The next time you experience or encounter a performance problem, or are working to ensure that desired performance is properly supported and enabled, think about these four factors and how they relate to one another. Chances are you'll put your finger on what's needed or what's missing.

About the Author

Fred Nickols, CPT, is a knowledge worker, writer, consultant, and former executive who spent 20 years in the U.S. Navy, retiring as a decorated chief petty officer. In the private sector, he worked as a consultant and then held executive positions with two former clients. Currently, Fred is the manager partner of [Distance Consulting LLC](#). His website is home to the award-winning [Knowledge Worker's Tool Room](#) and more than 200 free articles, book chapters, and papers. Fred is a longtime member of ISPI and writes this monthly column for *PerformanceXpress*. A complete listing of all Knowledge Worker columns and access to them is available [here](#).