

Performance Theory: The MEKS-Model

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Leveraging project management for excellence, growth and transformation



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1.1 Why measuring performance is important

Performance of the employees in any organization is extremely critical to the company's success. Successful companies have a strong and loyal workforce, which helps the company achieving its stated target. Low employee performance is a hindrance to success in any company.

Successful companies have one of the most important things in common – Employee loyalty to the company. Without this no company can sustain in the long run and performance is a key contributor to this. If an employee is performing well, he/she feels satisfied which in turn gets him/her a sense of belongingness to the company. How about getting to know about performance of an employee in a tangible and more accurate form?? Let us discuss this below-

1.2 Accurate and tangible form of measuring performance

We can't improve things, which we can't measure. We have several theories on performance and motivation.

But managers have not been successfully measuring the performance in a tangible and accurate form in most of the companies.

In all cases we come to know about the performance of a team

- ◆ After the completion of the work or Project.
- ◆ We then evaluate the performance, which is more subjective in nature, ambiguous and biased.
- ◆ Senior Executives generally know about the performance of their groups/teams after the team has completed the work.

This theory talks about measuring the performance in a tangible, accurate and unbiased form and alert the Company's senior management or executives before it is too late. This model is not a replacement to the Yearly performance appraisal in any company. This model is to be applied by the HR manager or Human resource Generalist attached to the team instead of the employee manager. The HR Managers will have an option to increase the performance of an employee by concentrating on different low ranking parameters.

1.3 The MEKS- Model of performance (Motivation, Effort, Knowledge & Skills)

Let us look at the measure of performance.

Performance is a function of three elements – 1) Motivation, 2) Effort and 3) Knowledge & skills

Let there are J factors (parameters) determining Motivation (M): $m_1, m_2 \dots m_J$

Likewise, K factors determining skills and Knowledge (S): $s_1, s_2 \dots s_K$

Likewise factors determining effort (E): $e_1, e_2 \dots e_L$

J, K, L are numbers (integers) 1, 2, 3.....10

And $1 \leq m_i, s_i, e_i \leq 10$

Performance mathematical model

$$P = 0.45 [(m_1 + m_2 + \dots + m_J)/J] + 0.30 [(s_1 + s_2 + \dots + s_K)/K] + 0.25 [(e_1 + e_2 + \dots + e_L)/L]$$

P lies between 1 and 10

1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest

For $M_1 \dots M_J$, $S_1 \dots S_K$ and $e_1 \dots e_L$ are set of questions that you as a HR manager need to ask to the employee in your team and give a rating of 1-10 or NA (Not applicable)

The HR managers, HRG or HR Consultant, should ask these questions to the Employee

These questions should not be asked by the employee manager, as there is a possibility of a biased rating. The Employee manager should be intimated and discussion can be held with him/her once the value of P is measured.

1.4 Motivation parameters and its descriptions

Motivation Parameters	Description	Ratings
m_1	Position and compensation Employee is not at all happy with his/her salary and/or position in the company. He is being paid a low salary as compared to his peers who are performing the same job. Salary is not commensurate to his experience and skills You can provide ratings based on criteria like If the employee is getting what his worth It could be that employee is happy with the variable pay or incentives or perks but not happy with the Base salary It could be that the employee is happy with the salary but not with the position and vice versa a. Low morale (1-3) b. Average happiness (4-5) c. Pleased with the salary and position in the company (6-8) d. Extremely pleased with the position and salary (9-10) This rating should be based on a comparison with the company's policy and salary structure and role position. Sufficient data should be available to validate this rating.	1-10 or NA

m2	<p>Manager: This talks about how his/her manager is. My manager cares for me, my problems and supports me during crisis? If he is able to list few instances where he faced a problem and his manager has come out to help him. There could be instances where the manager does not blame him for any crisis but instead encouraged to work on his improvement areas and help finding a root cause of the issue. a. Low morale (1-3) b. Average happiness (4-5) c. Pleased with the situation (6-8) d. Extremely pleased with the situation (9-10) Negative straits could be his manager always tries to blame his employee in case of any crisis and find fault in them instead of finding the root cause of the issue. Manager could also be trying to find a scapegoat in his direct reports to escape a crisis situation. Specific instances/incidents of this behavior should be noted and analyzed before giving the ratings.</p>	1-10 or NA
M3	<p>Likability of the work Employee could be very dissatisfied with the work he is doing. Either could be because he is not interested in that technology/domain/nature of work or could be current work does not add any value add to his own career. a. Low morale (1-3) b. Average happiness (4-5) c. Pleased with the situation (6-8) d. d.Extremely pleased with the situation (9-10)</p>	1-10 or NA
M4	<p>Long-term Career Plan I do have a long-term plan in the project, group or company I work. The employee should have a defined career plan in his group/project/company. He knows what is he will be in 1 yr/3 yrs/5 yrs if he stays in the company and Perform to the potential. It is not only important to have a plan but the employee should agree to this plan and convinced. a. Low morale (1-3) b. Average happiness (4-5) c. Pleased with the situation (6-8) d. Extremely pleased with the situation (9-10)</p>	1-10 or NA

M5	<p>Clear Roles and responsibility</p> <p>I have a clear roles and responsibility in the company. I know what tasks I need to do in a day/week.</p> <p>Employee knows clearly what is his roles and responsibility in the group/project or company. There is no ambiguity in his role. Related questions may be asked to ascertain the points and give a rating</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Low morale (1-3) Average happiness (4-5) Pleased with the situation (6-8) Extremely pleased with the situation (9-10) 	1-10 or NA
M6	<p>Awards ,Rewards and feedback</p> <p>I'm appreciated for what good things I do and get to know my weakness and shortcomings. The manager should give regular feedback to his employee and not just during yearly performance appraisal. The employee should know how his performance is evaluated in the company and the basis of giving rewards to any employee. The employee is getting awarded for all his good work and feedback is given to him on his improvement areas on a regular basis</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Low morale (1-3) Average happiness (4-5) Pleased with the situation (6-8) Extremely pleased with the situation (9-10) 	1-10 or NA
M7	<p>Being part of the larger team</p> <p>I have clear idea about Company's objective and goals (This is important because the whole company should have a common goal so that people get cooperation from different departments). The employee knows the company's direction and is updated with company's policies and goals from time to time. The Employee feels being part of the company as a whole. Sense of belongingness prevails in the company where he works</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Low morale (1-3) Average happiness (4-5) Pleased with the situation (6-8) Extremely pleased with the situation (9-10) 	1-10 or NA

1.5 Effort parameters and its descriptions

Effort parameter	Description	Ratings
E1	<p>Workplace logistics</p> <p>I have all the logistics (hardware, software, office space, Internet/network etc) to work full day in the office or necessary network connection at home</p> <p>a. Not happy (1-3) b. Average happiness (4-5) c. Pleased with the situation (6-8) Extremely pleased with the situation (9-10)</p>	1-10 or NA
E2	<p>Flexi work timing</p> <p>I can balance my own work-life and decide which time I can work provided I complete my work on time</p> <p>a. Not happy (1-3) b. Average happiness (4-5) c. Pleased with the situation (6-8) d. Extremely pleased with the situation (9-10)</p>	1-10 or NA
E3	<p>Flexibility of workplace</p> <p>I can work from anyplace provided I complete my work on time.</p>	1-10 or NA
E4	<p>Disjunction of E2</p> <p>I have the liberty of working late hours in the office to compensate the loss of time during the day for any reason</p> <p>a. Not happy (1-3) b. Average happiness (4-5) c. Pleased with the situation (6-8) d. Extremely pleased with the situation (9-10)</p>	1-10 or NA
E5	<p>Average Effort hours</p> <p>I'm putting 8 hours of effort every day and maximum 40 hours of work per week</p> <p>a. Not happy-unable to put necessary effort (1-3) b. Average happiness (4-5) c. Pleased with the situation (6-8) d. Extremely pleased with the situation (9-10)</p>	1-10 or NA

1.6 Skills & Knowledge parameters and its descriptions

Skills and knowledge parameter	Description	Ratings
S1	Job training and clarity of work I have taken necessary training for the job to have a clear understanding of the work I'm going to do a. Not happy (1-3) b. Average happiness (4-5) c. Pleased with the situation (6-8) d. Extremely pleased with the situation (9-10)	1-10 or NA
S2	Technical help in the project I have the support of my seniors in my team or in the organization to help me when I face problem a. Not happy (1-3) b. Average happiness (4-5) c. Pleased with the situation (6-8) d. Extremely pleased with the situation (9-10)	1-10 or NA
S3	On-the-job training I'm capable of doing my work while I learn on the job a. Not happy (1-3) b. Average happiness (4-5) c. Pleased with the situation (6-8) d. Extremely pleased with the situation (9-10)	1-10 or NA
S4	Facility of fast-track training I can learn the technology needed for the project in very short time after I'm put in the project a. Not happy (1-3) b. Average happiness (4-5) c. Pleased with the situation (6-8) d. Extremely pleased with the situation (9-10)	1-10 or NA
S5	Skills and experience for the Job I have the necessary knowledge, skills or experience to do my job a. Not happy (1-3) b. Average happiness (4-5) c. Pleased with the situation (6-8) d. Extremely pleased with the situation (9-10)	1-10 or NA
S6	Appropriate job role and position (Best person for the Job) I have got this role/position by virtue of my capability and capacity and not just sheer number of years of experience a. Not happy (1-3) b. Average happiness (4-5) c. Pleased with the situation (6-8) d. d.Extremely pleased with the situation (9-10)	1-10 or NA

If any of the parameter is not applicable in a given situation or two parameters are in logical disjunction to each other, you can mention NA for that parameter and consequently deduct 1 from the denominator of the Element. For example if S5 is NA in a case, then the formula for P would be like this

$$P = 0.45 [(m1+m2+...+m7) / 7] + 0.30 [(s1+s2+...+sK) / (K-1)] + 0.25 [(e1+e2+...+e4) / 4]$$

1.7 How different parameters are related and how these will influence the performance

It is not possible to achieve a higher rating in all the parameters of M, E and S. So companies may try to balance among these three elements and various parameters. Someone may be low on few parameters of motivation so you can increase in other parameters of motivation along with parameters in E and S and vice versa. But it does not mean that you can have very low total M value and very high E and S. We need to understand the importance of all the elements M, E and S and their weighted contribution in the overall performance.

The basic rule of this model is that if we concentrate more on the Motivation parameters then there is more likely that we will be able to improve the P value considering the weights of Motivation in the model.

- ◆ If we keep a low M value and try to increase the E value meaning people have to work very hard without much motivation and it will only result in attrition, low productivity and failure of projects. Because employees will be under pressure to just do hard work without any motivation.
- ◆ Similarly with little bit of increase in M value and corresponding increase in S value will result in substantial increase in P value. This is a case where people will be more satisfied with their work with little effort. Work-life balance will be maintained.
- ◆ Third scenario – if we only increase the S value without any good M value – this will result in long duration of stay at work. Because Employees will be less motivated to work even though they have the knowledge and skill on the job.
- ◆ If we have both low M and E and only good S – it will result in employees only proud of their skills and arrogance and not concentrating on the work they need to do. This will encourage politics at work. All those knowledgeable employees will not do any work but ask others to do more work and blame others for failure of projects.

The reason of higher weight for M and S is because if we have high motivation and High skills & knowledge on the job then the effort needed to complete the work will be low. And the vice versa is true.

(It is true that the success of a project can be influenced by several external factors which sometimes out of control of the employee. The answer is that if someone is highly motivated he/she does the work inspite of many external challenges or issues. He does it whatever it takes to complete and does not give excuses. See the later section on 10 signs of motivation)

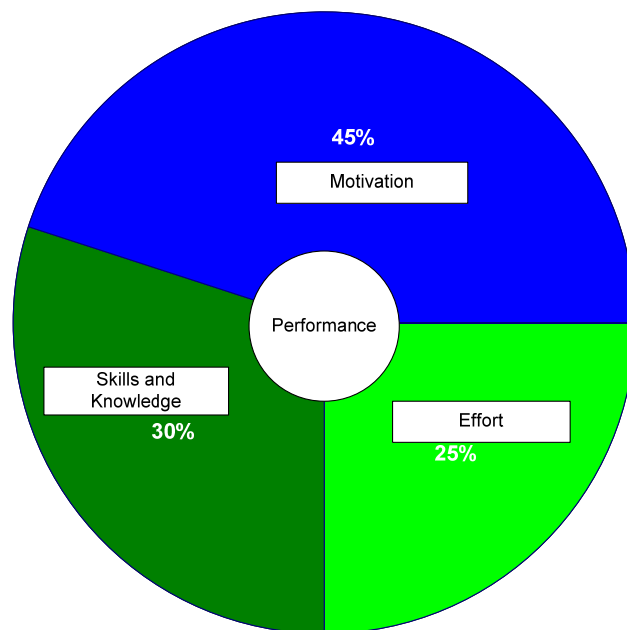
If a team has a higher M and S then E needed is low and the employee can still be a high performer in the group.

One can't achieve performance if any one of the elements is not present.

1.8 Why the different weights given to Motivation, Skills & Knowledge and effort:

There is an extensive research done before arriving at the percentage of M, S and E in the MEKS-Model. There may be a margin of error up to 4-8% with regard to the accuracy of the contribution of M, S and E in the Mathematical formula. This model stresses that Motivation is the key to success of any project or work. If employees are highly motivated then they won't give any excuses of less E and S. They themselves will try to learn the skills of their own if they are highly motivated. They will find their ways to complete the work whatever it takes. But it is not only Motivation that is sufficient for good performance; we need to have good S which means S coupled with M will have a higher impact on the performance of the team. The time needed to complete the work will be very less. It is observed that if someone is highly motivated and knowledgeable then the time needed to complete a work will be $\frac{1}{4}$ or 25% of the total effort that an average person can take. So E is just 25% contribution. Motivation is the key so it will have the highest contribution (45%) in the performance model. The next important element in Performance model is Skills & Knowledge, which is at the remaining 30%. M has 15% more than Skills and Knowledge is because, it is observed that if someone is highly motivated, he/she can learn the subject thru self-study or learns from external sources like friends, different technology groups or similar sources.

As we know that Bottom-up estimation model is the most accurate. A similar thought has been put forward in this Model. For example if you ask someone to rate an employee from 1-10 on motivation, then he/she will have a guess estimate which has lesser chance of being the most accurate. If we break down the motivation into different parameters and ask him to rate and then take an average, then it will be more accurate. As PMI states that we should decompose an element into different tasks/sub-tasks and then estimate. This mathematical model is influenced by Decomposition method, Bottom-up estimation technique.



Performance Model

1.9 How can we improve the P value?

The highest contributor to P is the value of M. It is not that we don't need any other elements and just increase the M value. But we must try to increase the M elements and its parameters for the company to have substantial improvement in P value. We discussed about the various combination of M, S and E and its implication in the previous paragraphs. Many small/start-up companies find it hard to increase the M value because of lack of brand value of the company and being a start up, lacks a good organization structure or HR policy. In this case we may rely more on E and S to have a better value of P. However as the organization grows, the company should start investing more on the M element and its parameters to have sustainable performance in the company.

Large corporations should implement this model with a major thrust on the M elements and a balanced E and S to sustain their performance level.

1.10 What are the different P values and their significance?

P values of	1-3 = Low performance
	4-5 = Medium
	6-8 = High
	9-10 = Exceptional

A real-life example of P:

$$\begin{aligned}P &= 0.45 [(5+6+6+7+4+3+6) / 7] + 0.30 [(4+5+7+3+5+8) / 6] + 0.25 [(4+5+6+3+9) / 4] \\&= 0.45 \times 6.16 + 0.30 \times 5.33 + 0.25 \times 4.5 \\&= 2.77 + 1.6 + 1.12 \\&= 5.5\end{aligned}$$

Rounded 6

1.11 What HR managers should keep in mind while implementing this Model?

These questions for each parameter in various elements can be given directly to the employee but it is observed that the answer may not be entirely accurate. Because many employees can give low ratings in all parameters if they are angry over some reasons or unhappy over one situation. Their anger/frustration would be reflected in the questions and it would be an wrong assessment of each parameter. So it is advisable to either hire a consultant or HR generalist of the company should discuss with the employee and give a balanced and matured rating to each parameter.

1.12 Conclusion

This model will be successful in getting the true assessment of Performance before the completion of the project or any work with a view to improve it. This talks of an independent and un-biased estimate of Performance in the team. There is very likelihood that a company may not be able to score very high in all the parameters in each elements of P. However P can be analyzed and take corrective actions to improve the performance of any employee and the team.

Certainly this is a true measure of performance in an objective, un-biased and Accurate form. What the company should note is it should be implemented not at the end of the year but during mid-year/before the start of the project when we decide about the resource assignment or any point in time when we feel that our performance is not up to the mark and projects are running with issues.

1.13 Author(s) Profile



Sujit Mishra, certified PMP, ITIL expert and an Executive MBA has an experience of over 18 years in the IT Industry. He has published many papers in International journals like PM World Today and in India's leading newspaper (The Economic times). Most of his publication is centered on Human resource management. He has a lot of success in terms of containing attrition in his group and improving people motivation. He has received above 90% score in Employee satisfaction survey in different companies. He has presented papers in Various International seminars including the PMI and QAI Conference. Currently he is working at SunGard.

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