Agreeing objectives during PDR

Being clear on your aims is a crucial part of the PDR process. It’s also one of the things that concern reviewees and reviewers. Imposed objectives rarely achieve buy-in, so discussion and agreement are vital. Accuracy is also important: trying to work towards something that is ill defined can be frustrating and waste valuable time. Finally, agreeing objectives that allow reviewees to see how their contribution fits into the overall strategy for the University, department, faculty and team can support motivation.

Types of objectives

It’s tempting to focus on task objectives in a PDR. In fact, objectives can be:

- To do with a task
- To do with confidence, in terms of the way we do something
- About maintaining the way we do something (recognising that not all jobs have new or changing content and that we need to go on doing some things consistently and well)
- About learning something new
- About learning to do something better
- About the way we behave in relation to others or to a particular task
- Milestones in a project

Accurate objectives

The SMART framework may help you define your PDR objectives accurately. SMART stands for:

- Specific
- Measureable
- Agreed (or achievable)
- Realistic (or relevant)
- Timebound

SMART is just a checklist, so don’t feel that you have to follow this sequence in writing an objective.

You may find it helpful to start by looking ahead to how this objective will look when it has been achieved (in other words, what success looks like). Think about your measures of success, qualitative and quantitative. Add a timescale. Consider how realistic the objective is and add any conditions or resources that will be needed in order for it to be completed. Once you have done these things, check that the objective is specific enough. If you said it to someone else would they understand exactly what needs to be done? Finally can you agree it with your reviewer?

In fact, a more helpful order can be MTRSA, which is far less memorable!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example:</th>
<th>Instead of:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By the end of March, I will clear course files over 4 years old from the shared drive, deleting and archiving in line with our data security policy.</td>
<td>Tidy up the H drive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SMART tips

Specific
Think about:
- What are we going to do and why is it important? How does it align to strategic objectives?
- How do we describe it? Use action verbs to focus the objective e.g. change, create, identify, perform, increase.
- Consider the following issues:
  - What will we do?
  - Who will we do it?
  - How will we do it?
  - Where and when will it happen?

Measurable
What does success look like?
- Is the outcome quantifiable and can we measure it?
- How will we measure progress towards achieving the goal?
- How will I know when it has been achieved – what is being measured?
- What is the current situation (baseline) and what change am I looking for, e.g. a percentage increase, or change in numbers?
- What is the system of measurement – how much, how many?

Achievable/Have the potential to be Agreed
Objectives should be attainable and might be stretching. Too little and too much stretch will demotivate.
- Can the objective be done given constraints?
- Is it within my power/influence?
- Is it in principle possible?
- Is it measurable?
- Are the necessary resources available?
- What are the limitations and can they be overcome?

Relevant/Realistic
The objective’s outcome should matter – goals that are important receive support.
- How will this objective link to the University’s department’s/faculty’s/team’s goals?
- Is this worthwhile?
- Is it the right time?
- Does it align with other objectives/needs?
- Do we have the right people?

Timebound
What is the deadline by which the objective should be completed? (Having a deadline focuses the mind and increases urgency).
- When will this objective happen?
- How do you prioritise?
- Are there competing demands?
- Is it realistic with the resources available?
- What is realistic in different timeframes, e.g. 3 months, 6 months, a year