
4-2 DETERMINANTS OF PERFORMANCE: ABILITIES AND OTHER TRAITS, KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS, AND CONTEXT

Why do certain individuals perform better than others? What factors cause an employee to perform at a certain level? A combination of three factors allows some people to perform at higher levels than others: (1) *abilities and other traits*, (2) *knowledge and skills*, and (3) *context*.⁴

Abilities and other traits include such things as cognitive abilities (i.e., intelligence), personality, stable motivational dispositions, and physical characteristics and abilities. Also, knowledge and skills include job-related knowledge and skills, attitudes, and malleable motivational states. Knowledge and skills can be divided into *declarative knowledge*, which is information about facts and things, including information regarding a given task's requirements, labels, principles, and goals; and *procedural knowledge*, which is a combination of knowing what to do and how to do it and includes cognitive, physical, perceptual, motor, and interpersonal skills. Finally, contextual issues include HR policies and procedures (e.g., compensation system), managerial and peer leadership, organizational and national culture, issues about time and timing of performance, and resources and opportunities given to employees to perform.

As shown in Figure 4-2, performance results from a combination of all three factors. Also, the three factors have an additive relationship. This means that two employees can achieve the same level of performance by having different combinations of factors. For example, one employee can be more motivated and spend more hours at work, whereas another can work fewer hours, but have higher levels of skill.⁵

In addition, however, if any of the determinants has a value of 0, then overall performance is unlikely to be satisfactory. For example, consider the case of Jane, a sales associate who works in a national clothing retail chain. Jane has excellent declarative knowledge regarding the merchandise. In particular, she knows the names of all of the brands; the prices for all products; sizing charts for clothes for women, men, and children; and sales promotions. So her declarative knowledge is very high. Jane is also intelligent and physically able to conduct all of the necessary tasks—both considered important traits for the job. However, her interactions with customers are not so good (i.e., procedural knowledge regarding interpersonal skills). She does not pay much attention to them because she is busy restocking clothes on shelves and hangers. She does not greet customers and is also not good at providing answers to their questions. Her overall performance, therefore, is likely to be poor because although she has the declarative knowledge necessary to do the job, as well as cognitive and physical traits, she lacks procedural knowledge. In short, it is necessary to have at least some level of each of the determinants of performance.

FIGURE 4-2

Determinants of Performance: Abilities and Other Traits, Knowledge and Skills, and Context

