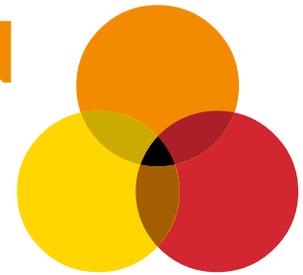


Understanding strengths and career goals

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UNDERSTANDING & USING STRENGTHS

A key insight from research in the field of positive psychology has been the importance of utilising someone's personal strengths in order to bring out their best performance. This is a positive approach to harnessing your potential, which tends to be more energising and relevant to you as an individual. Previous approaches to performance management have focused more on identifying weaknesses and dedicating efforts towards fixing these. It is still important that we are aware of our weaknesses and don't let them hold us back from performing well, but focusing on strengths shifts the conversation into how to maximise performance rather than just avoid poor performance.

KEY BENEFITS OF WORKING WITH STRENGTHS

- Investing in building on your existing strengths tends to produce faster and greater returns in learning and performance improvement, with mutual benefit for you as an individual employee and the public sector as your employer
- Utilising strengths tends to bring out more energy and positive emotions in people, helping you feel more optimistic, resilient and experience less stress over time
- Recognising your individual strengths helps you compliment other team members and collectively become more flexible and agile as a team in responding to work demands
- You are more likely to succeed and be recognised for your contribution and when you have been working on goals which utilise your personal strengths, increasing your motivation to take your performance to the next level



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WHEN TO CONSIDER STRENGTHS

- When setting career goals and plans for the future
- When applying for new roles trying to find the right fit when
- When you are assigned specific tasks by your Manager or identifying new initiatives that you want to propose
- When you are having planning conversations and setting goals or objectives as part of performance management and development
- When discussing relevant development activities for the future

HOW TO IDENTIFY STRENGTHS

A key skill for employees is learning how to identify what your strengths are and how you can position yourself to make the most of them. Sometimes we can become so absorbed in our work that we take some of our strengths for granted, particularly if we have not had the opportunity to demonstrate them in our current role. You may have colleagues who refer to you as having a particular flair, a talent or a knack for doing something well. These may all be different words for describing some of your strengths. What to look for is an ability you have to do something which feels like it comes naturally to you, that you can do consistently time after time, and that you tend to gravitate towards.

Some techniques for learning more about your strengths include:

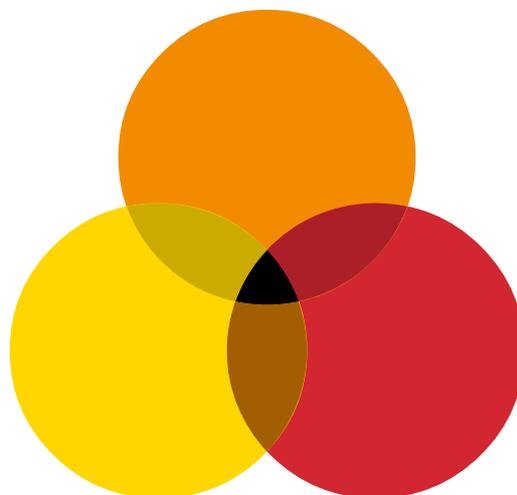
- Reviewing your track record - Spend some time to reflect on your work history, and if you are comfortable discuss this with your Manager. Some initial questions to ask yourself might include:
 - “What are some of my achievements that I feel most proud of?”
 - “What are some situations when I have been at my best?”
 - “When have I felt like I have been in ‘flow’, where I was really energised by what I was doing and so absorbed that I lost track of time?” This could be at work, or in other parts of your life.
- Gathering feedback from others – Speak to your Manager and colleagues that you have worked with in the past to ask for their feedback and observations regarding where they see your strengths.
- Psychometric assessment – A more formal way is to use psychometric assessments to identify underlying strengths in your abilities or personal style. There are a wide range of profiling tools available that can assist someone in pin-pointing some of their personal strengths. It is important that you work with someone who has the right qualifications and skills to help you in selecting the right tool for you.

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KEY POINTS

- Everyone is different it is important not to assume you have the same strengths as other people you work with
- It is easier to build on existing strengths than try to get your weaknesses up to the same level
- Strengths are not always obvious and you may require some personal reflection and feedback from others to help you pinpoint what they are
- We can't be strong at everything, so finding the right fit between your strengths and specific job requirements is key to getting your best performance





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CAREER GOALS

Performance management and development conversations are a prime opportunity to discuss your career goals and plans for the future. The nature of career development has changed significantly over time from being very linear and structured with one employer to becoming far more dynamic and multi-dimensional. The South Australian Public Sector is committed to the learning and development of our people to create a mutual benefit: supporting career resilience and the realisation of employee potential, while ensuring sustainable public sector performance through an engaged and skilled workforce.

KEY BENEFITS OF CAREER PLANNING

- Makes your performance management and development plan relevant to your broader personal goals and personal situation/ commitments outside of work
- Promotes personal and professional growth over time by identifying opportunities to stretch yourself and gain exposure to different responsibilities
- Enables you to identify different pathways for directing your career development and gaining the type of experience that you want to
- Assists you in using all of the experience you have gathered to date and to keep building on this over time

WHEN TO LOOK AT CAREER GOALS

It is worthwhile checking in with your Manager at least twice a year, either through one of your formal performance and development reviews or other conversations, to discuss your career goals. Your personal situation can change from time to time, and this can influence your appetite for career development. For example, if someone has recently started a family or is a carer for another family member, this may be more important for them than their career at that point in time.



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EXPLORING DIFFERENT OPTIONS

The nature of career planning conversations is to step back and reflect on some broader questions about how work fits into your personal goals. Your Manager may be able to support you in thinking through your career goals, but you will need to decide for yourself what you wish to do next. While everyone has different interests and personal values which impact on what they want to do in their career, there are some general questions that can be useful to ask yourself about what you might want to do next.

- **Autonomy** – Some employees will aspire to take on jobs with more responsibility, where they have more latitude to make decisions about how to go about work or solve problems. Others might actually want to scale back their responsibility for a while so they can concentrate on other commitments outside of work. Reflecting on how much responsibility you want in your role can help clarify your thinking.
- **Mastery** – Some employees may want to explore jobs where they can specialise more, building on specific technical or professional expertise in a particular field. Some might want to explore opportunities to gain a broader experiences and exposure to new responsibilities and activities, using more of their generalist skills and knowledge. Others might want to focus on mastering the job they currently hold, getting better through practise and experience. Reflecting on what kinds of skills you want to master can help identify relevant options for your next career step.
- **Purpose** – Some employees are more driven by their values and passion for a particular cause more than the nature of the work you are doing in a particular job. They might feel a strong connection to the purpose of a given organisation and the opportunity make a difference in that area. Reflecting on what you stand for or what kind of organisations you identify with can be useful to draw out where you might want to go next.
- **Strengths** - Knowing what your strengths are is a key piece of information to help inform your career goals and plans. It helps to identify different jobs or types of work where you most likely to succeed in the future and could provide the right person-job fit for you.



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PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Not everyone necessarily wants the same things from a job and is planning to take on a larger role or a management position as the next step in their career. For some employees, their job may be the main focus of their time and energy. For others a job may be a relatively small part of their priorities in life. Other responsibilities or interests outside of work that might be important at a particular point in time – e.g. caring responsibilities, being involved in the community, or pursuing a personal passion.

Performance management and development conversations about career goals can be a good opportunity to discuss whether you want to change something about your job. This could be your working hours (e.g. from full-time to part-time or a different shift pattern), your work location (e.g. to closer to where they may be living), or maybe your working basis (e.g. from casual to ongoing). One of the benefits of working in the South Australian Public Sector is the range of flexible working options available. By pro-actively raising this topic in conversations with your Manager, you have the opportunity to work together and explore what options might work for you.

KEY POINTS

- Thinking about and sharing your career goals with your Manager helps put your performance and development into context of the “bigger picture” for you as an individual
- If you are prepared to share what you want/ need from your job this gives you the opportunity to work with your Manager to explore what is possible and try to find activities which will be mutually beneficial
- Your Manager’s role is to facilitate and support you, where possible, in identifying your career goals but you need to take ownership for making any decisions about what you want to do
- It is better to share your intentions if you want to move to another job so your Manager can assist you in finding what you are looking for and put the right plans in place to backfill your position
- There are a wide range of ways that people can develop their career in the South Australian Public Sector.