

WHITEPAPER

# Performance DNA Analysis—a Toolset to Target Performance Improvement Opportunities

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## Introduction

Ask most managers how to improve the performance of people in key roles and most will answer, “more training” or “hire better skills.” Organizations annually spend considerable funds chasing improved performance, but in many cases these monies are ill-used. Above average performance doesn’t just happen. It requires the confluence of many factors—some intrinsic to the person (e.g., skills and motivation), and others extrinsic (e.g., tools, processes, feedback). Selecting solutions or interventions to improve performance without an analysis of the performance rarely achieves desired results.

Previous analysis methodologies often focused on “how do we improve our below-average performers?” Time and money was then spent analyzing what poor performers were doing “wrong.” The better approach is to examine *exemplary* performers—those who are performing above average—and figure out what factors seem to be contributing to their level of performance. Then we apply that knowledge to improve the performance of others. In this way we “find out what’s right to fix what’s wrong.” The analysis findings help pinpoint the ‘DNA’ of successful performance in ways that can then be used to enhance the performance of the sea of average performers that exists in most organizations.

At Silver Bear Group, we use *Performance DNA* to conduct the analyses that enable us to understand how star performers are achieving higher levels of success. *Performance DNA* is a systematic, holistic “front end” analysis methodology developed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the human performance analysis process. This document provides an overview of *Performance DNA* and its phases. First, it gives a top-level description of *Performance DNA*. Then it describes the 4 phases within the methodology.

## What is Performance DNA Analysis?

*Performance DNA* is a holistic approach to the analysis of human performance. The principal theory underlying this approach is that human performance is similar to any organic system – it is organized according to a blueprint or code which enables the organism to thrive. *Performance DNA* is designed to unlock the ‘genetic’ code to optimum performance in a way that enables that performance to be transferred throughout the organization.

*Performance DNA* is based on the concept that performance factors unfold in a predictable order: from influence through goals. Consequently, the *Performance DNA* approach leads the analyst through the HPI<sup>1</sup> journey—from articulating the organization’s business goal, through the entire performance analysis process, leading to the identification of the key influences that affect performance in the workplace.

*Performance DNA* is different in that it approaches performance ‘organically’ – as a system made up of interdependent parts (outcomes, task and processes) that are affected by influencing factors. Viewed this way, *Performance DNA* defines the individual ‘parts’ first, in order to uncover what influences them. This process has the effect of mapping the performance – creating the optimum code for producing the desired business outcomes (the DNA of performance) – enabling that same performance to be reproduced across the organization.

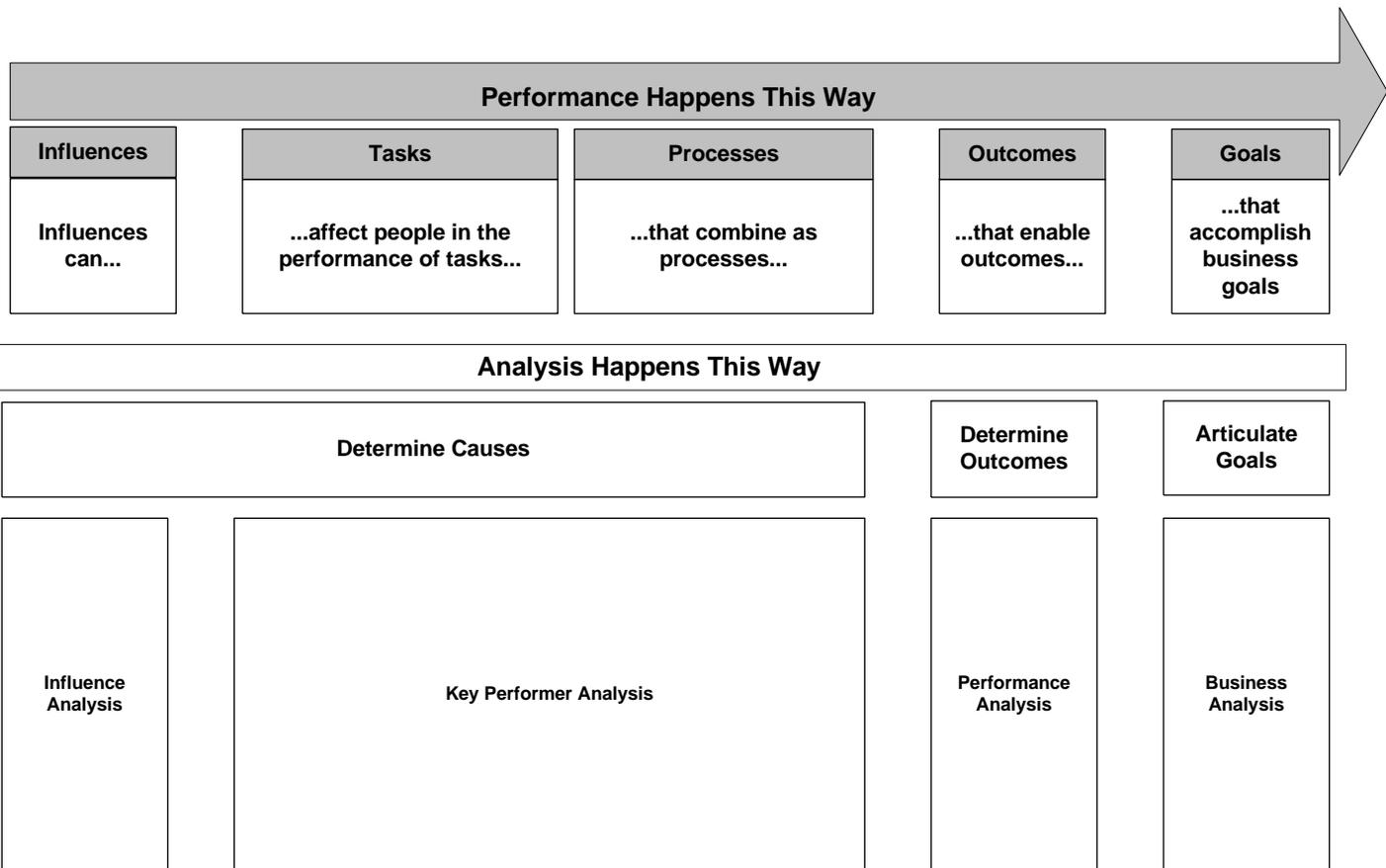
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<sup>1</sup> HPI is an acronym for Human Performance Improvement

PERFORMANCE DNA ANALYSIS—A TOOLSET TO TARGET PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The top section of the graphic that follows represents the process of how performance unfolds, from left to right. This includes hiring the right person for a job, then training, motivating, and managing them, and finally, providing adequate work environment and tools (each of which is an “influence”). Given enough positive influences, the performer completes individual tasks that combine into work processes, which results in the production of valuable outcomes and the achievement of business results.

The bottom section of the graphic represents how *Performance DNA Analysis* unfolds, from right to left. First, the focus is on the articulation of business and project goals and the definition of desired job outcomes. Given the target job outcomes, analysis determines the cause of exemplary performance, including examining the work processes and tasks the performer completes and the influences that support (or detract from) performance (and ultimately, the achievement of business goals).



### Performance DNA Phases

The *Performance DNA* hierarchy contains four analysis phases:

- Business Analysis
- Performance Analysis
- Key Performer Analysis
- Influence Analysis

These four phases are rooted in ATD's<sup>2</sup> Human Performance Improvement (HPI) model. Each analysis phase is composed of job aids that support the performance of the analyst and ensure consistency and reliability in documentation. Each job aid may contain one or more activities that are performed by the analyst to complete the phase.

Each phase has an associated toolbox, which is a collection of guides, templates, tables, and checklists. The toolbox is designed to assist the analyst in assimilating the various pieces of the performance puzzle and producing the outputs and results.

### Business Analysis

The Business Analysis phase is the foundation for a successful project. It guides the analyst through the critical stages of:

- Clarifying and defining the scope of the project sponsor's request
- Defining the desired outcomes
- Assessing the value of the analysis
- Identifying key roles and responsibilities
- Logging any critical issues and requests
- Preparing and presenting a summary project plan

Each of the activities in this phase is important to the tight integration between the client organization and the analyst. The analyst gains the necessary data and insight regarding the client organization and need. In addition, the activities in this phase will help the client sponsor establish a clear vision for the project. This process better enables the sponsor to focus on the results their organization wants to achieve, rather than prematurely suggesting a solution to a problem that may not be defined clearly.

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<sup>2</sup> ATD is the Association for Talent Development.

## Performance Analysis

The Performance Analysis phase sets the stage and direction for the balance of the analysis. If Business Analysis is the foundation, then Performance Analysis is the framing. The central focus during this phase is the analysis of *outcomes of value*—those things produced by the job performer or functional area that is the subject of the analysis. The analyst uses a variety of tools to identify outcomes and distinguish those outcomes which produce value to the organization.

The Performance Analysis phase guides the analyst in examining outcomes from multiple perspectives: key performers, managers, and stakeholders, as well as organizationally. Much of the data gathered during this phase is gained through targeted interviews and observations. This phase provides tools to assist the analyst in preparing for and conducting these sessions. In addition, tools in this phase help the analyst identify cross-functional processes that form the context in which outcomes for the target job are produced. This knowledge helps the analyst understand how outcomes combine to produce business results.

## Key Performer Analysis

The Key Performer Analysis phase takes the project goals and outcomes identified previously and drills down to explore the specific factors that enable exemplary (i.e., ideal) versus standard performance. The primary focus of this phase is on a deeper level of analysis of performance, targeted at the following:

- Work processes the performer follows
- Specific tasks performed within each work process
- Information and tools used to complete tasks and work processes
- Critical decisions that must be made.

The goal is to identify the primary drivers for optimum performance and the facilitators and barriers to the successful achievement of outcomes and business goals. The starting point is at the process level. While the previous phase examined *organizational* processes, this phase examines key work processes used by the *individual*. By identifying and mapping critical work processes, the analyst gains a context for the work being performed. This perspective enables the analyst to determine more easily which tasks are relevant to the creation of outcomes of value, and which are not.

Through structured interviews and observations the analyst is then guided through the process of gathering significant details about the task performance, as well as the tools, information sources, decision making, and critical technologies that surround task performance.

## Influence Analysis

The Influence Analysis phase is the culmination of work started in the preceding phases. It is the point at which the analyst uses the data and insights gathered about the influences contributing to performance gaps to assess them in depth. The Influence Analysis phase consists of a set of assessments and activities which are meant to be used *selectively* in response to suspected performance issues. The tools in this section do not follow a particular order of use *other* than first identifying hypotheses about the influences that should be explored in more depth. The influences that can be examined include the following, each of which is supported by a separate assessment tool:<sup>3</sup>

- General workplace structure and environment
- Learning, development and training programs
- Factors affecting personal motivation
- The overall structure and support of management
- The factors involved in the hiring and selection of personnel
- The usability and usefulness of critical tools and technologies used in the creation of outcomes.

## Pulling it all Together

At the completion of the Influence Analysis phase the analyst will be ready to consolidate findings and prepare a report of findings and recommendations to the client sponsor.

A job aid is provided to help the analyst consolidate outcomes, work processes, and tasks into a ‘model.’ This model should indicate the primary outcomes produced, and the work processes and tasks that are performed in order to achieve business goals effectively and efficiently. This model will also indicate the factors that influence the ability to produce a high level of performance.

When *Performance DNA* Analysis tools are used in an organization the target performance is clearly identified, including all influences that enable this level of performance. In addition, areas of influence that need further attention or correction (such as skill/knowledge issues) are highlighted for further investigation.

Using the *Performance DNA* methodology has numerous benefits. It is a standard toolset built on best practices from over 30 years of human performance improvement. It enables analyses to be completed in less time than previous methodologies because it guides the analyst to focus on what is important (avoiding “analysis paralysis”). Many projects can be completed in as little as six weeks. Finally, and most importantly, the results of these analyses provide organizations with the information they need to make better decisions about how to spend resources to improve performance.

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<sup>3</sup> Processes, a critical influence on performance, were examined in the previous 2 phases and not captured here.

### About Silver Bear Group

Silver Bear Group is a business consulting and performance improvement firm in Austin, TX. We improve the value of your most important asset—your people—by helping make the organization work more effectively. Our high impact tools and processes enable us to help your organization unleash performance, faster. We are a Native American, woman-owned firm in Austin TX.

### About the Author



Dr. Karen McGraw, “the Performance Doc,” is the President and Principal Consultant for Silver Bear Group. She is an accomplished organizational consultant specializing in human performance improvement, leadership, and change. For over 30 years, she has helped clients achieve desired outcomes through training, process, technology, and change projects. Connect with her:

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