



## 9-Box Tool



### Performance

- Definition: sustained business results demonstrated over time.
- Managers and HR professionals in most organizations are able to accomplish this process with a great deal of accuracy and precision depending on the current performance management process.
- SPOC will use the performance management process to assess candidates along the “performance” axis.

### Potential

- Definition: readiness, willingness, and the ability to grow into a future job as determined by functional expertise, aspiration, required competencies and learning agility.
- Assessing potential and predicting future performance is far more challenging than categorizing current performance.
- SPOC will score candidates along the “potential” axis.

Note: The 9-Box descriptors are found within SAP’s Success Factors online product. These descriptors are being used to stay consistent with recognized public domain definitions.

## 9-Box Descriptions

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Enigma</b> High potential Low performance</p> <p>These individuals are exceeding expectations along potential but failing along performance. They are the “problem children” who are high potentials (“hi-pots”) not performing up to standard.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Growth Employee</b> High potential Medium performance</p> <p>These are employees of your talent pool who may not have achieved in performance what they reveal in potential.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Future Leader</b> High potential High performance</p> <p>These are people in your organization who are realizing their full potential while at the same time performing at their peak. This is the dream team of organizational players.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Dilemma</b> Medium potential Low performance</p> <p>These employees have some potential to be great, yet are not high performers. Dilemmas pose unique challenges for your succession plan.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Core Employee</b> Medium potential Medium performance</p> <p>Assess where these employees stand in their career-development pathway. Some may not be ready or interested in advancement yet. Recognize that your Core talent does not need to be pushed at this time. It's acceptable for them to stay where they are.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>High-Impact Performance</b> Medium potential High performance</p> <p>This group shows some potential for having a greater impact. Often, it's a matter of readiness that prevents them from moving into those larger roles.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Under Performance</b> Low potential Low performance</p> <p>Employees in this dark corner of the matrix are often said to be “icebergs,” not because you can only see the tip of their potential, but because they are capable of sinking your organization. An often-overlooked component of succession planning is the ability to recognize a failure of the system – people with no potential and below average performance who need to be moved rather quickly to another box or be moved out of the organization.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Effective</b> Low potential Medium performance</p> <p>This category refers to those performing acceptably and possessing limited potential for future growth. Depending on short-term and long-term business priorities and organization goals, sometimes you may want to leave this category alone. They may not exceed expectations but they are steadily reliable.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Trusted Employee</b> Low potential High performance</p> <p>These individuals are exceeding expectations along performance but failing along potential. They are high-performing “backbones” in your organization who possess limited potential.</p>

## **9-Box Suggestions**

SPOC may use the following suggestions when considering “assignments” based on an individual’s placement in the 9-Box Grid.

### **Under Performer**

### **Low Potential, Low Performance**

- Poor performance; spotty track record of delivering results; doing just enough to get by; and not considered ready, willing, or able for future roles.
- These people are capable of sinking your organization.
- Be careful not to make the mistake of investing in more training resources rather than moving them out of the organization, or at least out of the key position they occupy today.
- Find a more appropriate assignment for them.
- Sometimes employees in this category may be "stuck" due to issues they perceive to be beyond their control – anything ranging from personal (e.g., family crisis, life change) to professional (e.g., conflict with a co-worker, discomfort with a work practice).
- In a few cases, your inquiry may reveal hidden potential toward a path different from the one prescribed by their current role. Uncovering these disconnects often leads to a new understanding of what role the employee should be in. The Under Performer in this case is a mismatch and needs to be reassigned.
- An often unforeseen consequence of not dealing with Under Performers is that they can form a sort of roadblock in your organization, keeping others from realizing their full potential. Because of this, it is important to identify and remove the blockers, poor performers with a limited future who stand in the way of potential stars.

### **Effective**

### **Low Potential, Medium Performance**

- Have a valued, but narrow and non-transferable skill set; limited to current role; solid performance; comfortable with where they are.
- The ideal path for Effective employees is to move up/out. The Effective category refers to those performing acceptably and possessing limited potential for future growth.
- Depending on short-term and long-term business priorities and organization goals, sometimes you may want to leave this category alone; they may not exceed expectations but they are steadily reliable.
- It is recommended though to push to formulate action plans for this group to improve performance and/or enhance the limited potential they display.
- Put the ball in their court rather than invest development dollars in people with limited potential. If, after working their action plan, the employee can move up, then you've achieved success with a minimal outlay of resources.
- Perhaps other roles exist in the organization where they can continue to perform, but do so with more potential for the future.

- Sometimes employees in this category may come to the realization that being "OK" in a role is not enough for them and will seek more promising opportunities elsewhere.

## **Dilemma**

## **Medium Potential, Low Performance**

- Low or no demonstrated track record; future potential is unclear; may be trying hard but struggling to achieve results; match between the role and their skills is questionable.
- The other category that should move up/out is Dilemma. These are employees who have some potential to be great, yet are not high performers. These Dilemmas pose unique challenges for your succession plan.
- If they are new to the organization, consider reviewing their on-boarding experience. Was something poorly communicated during orientation? Is there a misunderstanding about job expectations? Are there disconnects between recruitment expectations and the realities of the role? New members to an organization often find themselves in this particular box because something has gone wrong.
- Alternatively, you may have a Dilemma who is rudderless in your organization. Seek out root causes for the performance issues and encourage the employee to develop and own an action plan for remedying deficits.
- Dilemmas benefit greatly from a peer mentor who can guide them through the predicament they are facing.
- Assessing the role match is key. If addressing performance barriers and action planning do not work to move them up in the Nine-Box, then moving them out to a different role is another option.

## **Trusted Employee**

## **Low Potential, High Performance**

- Recognized for a valued, unique, and expert skill set; strong performance; can exceed expectations; can serve as seasoned advisors; thought leaders who typically enjoy their area of expertise and do not typically desire upward mobility.
- These individuals are exceeding expectations along Performance but failing along Potential. They are high-performing Backbones in your organization who possess limited potential.
- Help your Trusted Professionals to reach their potential. These are the high-value experts that are the go-to people when there are problems. They are performing extremely well in their current role, and the classic mistake in management practice has been to promote these individuals, thereby achieving the oft-maligned "Peter Principle" – promoting a person into a role where they perform incompetently. Instead of risking this blunder by investing developmental dollars on an individual that you have already identified as limited in potential, consider taking the following actions:
  - Encourage their retention as a key asset in their present role. Watch for signs of boredom, lack of challenge and other retention risks. Provide recognition and rewards for their accomplishments.
  - Look for ways to publicly acknowledge their efforts. Have them take the lead on presenting information or explaining processes to others (corporate presentations, participation at external conferences, etc.).

- Provide them with opportunities to develop in places where they can grow a deeper and broader skill set and knowledge base. Utilize their assets toward teaching or coaching others.

## **Enigma**

## **High Potential, Low Performance**

- Highly driven; ambitiously aspire to move swiftly upward in the organization; junior to the organization or new to the industry; do not have a fully demonstrated track record of performance.
- These individuals are exceeding expectations along Potential but failing along Performance. They are the Problem Children who are high potentials ("hi-po's") but who aren't performing up to standard. These Enigmas are much harder to crack – they are employees who have all the potential for greatness, yet fail to meet expectations. They are the rookie sensation that flops in the big leagues; the brilliant young minds that can't make it; the disappointing Olympian that comes home with no medals. Several action steps should be taken to address these cases.
  - Find the root cause of the failures in performance and collaborate on a development plan to address identified deficiencies. If the issue is more about poor fit than role failure, consider moving them to different roles in the organization. After you have taken actions to address any issues, review the assessment you did on their potential. Are these employees truly hi-po's in your organization?
  - Make their developmental plan contingent on performance improvement.
  - Include efforts to give them the technical skills they need to perform at the required level.
  - Ensure that any investment in development only occurs after measurable improvements are made. If these employees do not respond, consider moving them to another role or out of the organization.

## **Core Employee**

## **Medium Potential, Medium Performance**

- Backbone to success of business and team.
- Well placed with opportunity to grow within current role.
- Recognize that your Core talent does not need to be pushed at this time. It's acceptable for them to stay where they are. Until they're ready for that next step, here are some actions you can take:
  - Provide coaching and training that builds both technical expertise and leadership skill
  - Give them short-term assignments or projects that expose them to the types of challenges they'll face at the next level; gauge their reaction to the experience
  - Praise their accomplishments in the present role and build trust with them so they'll let you know when they're ready to make the next move
  - Ensure that they know they are valued, listen to their ideas and monitor their behavior for signs of complacency or dissatisfaction

**High-Impact Performer****Medium Potential, High Performance**

- Outpace others; very high performance and consistent results; worry-free candidates for future growth and development.
- The High Impact Performer group shows some potential for having a greater impact. Often, it's a matter of readiness that prevents them from moving into those larger roles. Accordingly, the focus should be on development and preparation for longer term opportunities.
- Look to provide them with “stretch” assignments – projects that may require them to do things that they don't already know how to do or that require skills and abilities that are beyond their current role.
- Challenge them to be high performers in a higher profile role.
- Find a mentor for them that is at least one level up on your organization chart.
- Promote relationship-building among other high performing talent in your 9-box.
- Make short-term rotations or job swaps readily available to them; give them a chance to operate in a completely new role; and assess reactions to those experiences.

**Growth Employee****High Potential, Medium Performance**

- High growth employees; high capacity and ambition to expand role, scope, and complexity; solid performance most of the time and at times exceed goals; high global mobility and willingness to go where the opportunity is.
- The last category of your stars is the Growth Employee. These employees in your talent pool may not have achieved in performance what they reveal in potential. The key is to focus on competency gaps and remove performance barriers in an effort to shift this group from “good to great.”
- Challenge them with a start-up assignment where they have responsibility for creating a new process or opening a new market; make it a high-profile activity that no one else has done.
- Consider matching them to a higher performing mentor who can help them along the path.
- Make short-term job rotations or job swaps readily available to them; give them a chance to operate in a completely new role; and assess reactions to those experiences.

**Future Leaders****High Potential, High Performance**

- Best of the best; exceptional performance; deliver consistent and sustainable results; possess enormous drive for achievement and ambition; stellar role models for both “what” and “how” results are achieved.
- These are people in your organization who are realizing their full potential while at the same time performing at their peak. This is the dream team of organization players. They are well-equipped to take on any assignment and poised to transform your organization into a better version of itself.

- Caution should be taken with this group, for they can easily become bored and to your dismay may be lured elsewhere. These are some actions you can take to retain them.
  - Find ways to make them shine. Give them challenging, stretch assignments doing things nobody else has done.
  - These employees should be tasked with high-stakes, high-profile assignments.
  - Earmark them for start-ups or spin-offs where they will add even more tools to their arsenal while helping to take your organization in new directions.
  - Identify parts of your organization that may need financial or operational turnaround and assign a Future leader to transform performance.
  - Grant them access to exclusive training opportunities, send them to national or international conferences, and appoint them to high-profile committees in the organization.
  - Allow them elite access and exposure to the CEO, senior leaders and the governance structures in your organization.