OPM

U.S. Office of Personnel Management

Performance Elements – A Supervisor's Quick Guide

There are three types of performance elements: critical elements, non-critical elements, and additional performance elements. Agency appraisal programs are required to use critical elements, but the other two types can be used at the agency's option.

Critical Elements

A critical element is a work assignment or responsibility of such importance that unacceptable performance in that element would result in a determination that the employee's overall performance is unacceptable.

Characteristics

- **Aligned with organizational goals:** Tied to the agency's mission and strategic objectives.

- **Measurable and results-oriented:** Clearly defined so performance can be evaluated objectively.

- **Job-specific:** Reflects duties that are central to the employee's position.

- **Mandatory for success:** Failure in a critical element typically means the employee cannot be rated higher than "Unacceptable" overall.

Non-critical Elements

A noncritical element is a component of an employee's job that is important but not essential to determining overall job performance. Unlike critical elements, unacceptable performance in a noncritical element does not automatically result in an overall "Unacceptable" rating.

Characteristics

- Supportive in nature: They often enhance or complement the work described in critical elements.

- Optional in some systems: Agencies are not required to include noncritical elements in performance plans, but they may choose to do so.

- Used for development: These elements can help guide employee growth, recognize additional contributions, or support broader organizational goals.

- Do not affect retention decisions: Poor performance in a noncritical element alone cannot be used as the basis for removal or demotion.

Examples

- Participating in optional training or professional development.

- Volunteering for cross-functional teams or special projects.

- Contributing to workplace culture or mentoring others.

Why Use Noncritical Elements?

- To encourage broader engagement beyond core duties.

- To recognize and reward contributions that go above and beyond.

- To support succession planning and employee development.

Additional Performance Elements

An additional element is a type of performance element that is used for developmental or recognition purposes but does not impact the summary performance rating.

Key Characteristics of Additional Elements

- Optional: Agencies may include them in performance plans, but they are not required.

- Not rated at the summary level: Performance on additional elements is not factored into the overall performance rating.

- Used for encouragement: They can highlight areas where employees are encouraged to grow, innovate, or contribute beyond their core duties.

- Cannot be used for adverse actions: Unlike critical elements, poor performance in an additional element cannot be used to justify removal or demotion.

Examples of Additional Elements

- Participating in a mentorship program.

- Contributing to a workplace wellness committee.

- Supporting interagency collaboration efforts.

Why Use Additional Elements?

- To motivate and recognize discretionary effort.

- To support agency culture and values.

- To encourage leadership development and cross-functional engagement.

Element Characteristics

Element	Required in Employee Performance Plans	Credited in the Summary Level	Can Describe a Group's Performance
Critical Elements	Yes	Yes	No
Non-Critical Elements	No	Yes	Yes
Additional Performance Elements	No	No	Yes