

# The Beekeepers and Their Bees

Once upon a time, there were two beekeepers who each had a beehive. The beekeepers worked for a company called Bees, Inc. The company's customers loved its honey and wanted the business to produce more honey than it had the previous year. As a result, each beekeeper was told to produce more honey at the same quality. With different ideas about how to do this, the beekeepers designed different approaches to improve the performance of their hives. The first beekeeper established a bee performance management approach that measured how many flowers each bee visited. At considerable cost to the beekeeper, an extensive measurement system was created to count the flowers each bee visited. The beekeeper provided feedback to each bee at Midseason on his individual performance, but the bees were never told about the hive's goal to produce more honey so that Bees, Inc., could increase honey sales. The beekeeper created special awards for the bees who visited the most flowers. The second beekeeper also established a bee performance management approach, but this approach communicated to each bee the goal of the hive—to produce more honey. This beekeeper and his bees measured two aspects of their performance: the amount of nectar each bee brought back to the hive and the amount of honey the hive produced. The performance of each bee and the hive's overall performance were charted and posted on the hive's bulletin board for all bees to see. The beekeeper created a few awards for the bees that gathered the most nectar, but he also established a hive incentive program that rewarded each bee in the hive based on the hive's production of honey—the more honey produced the more recognition each bee would receive.

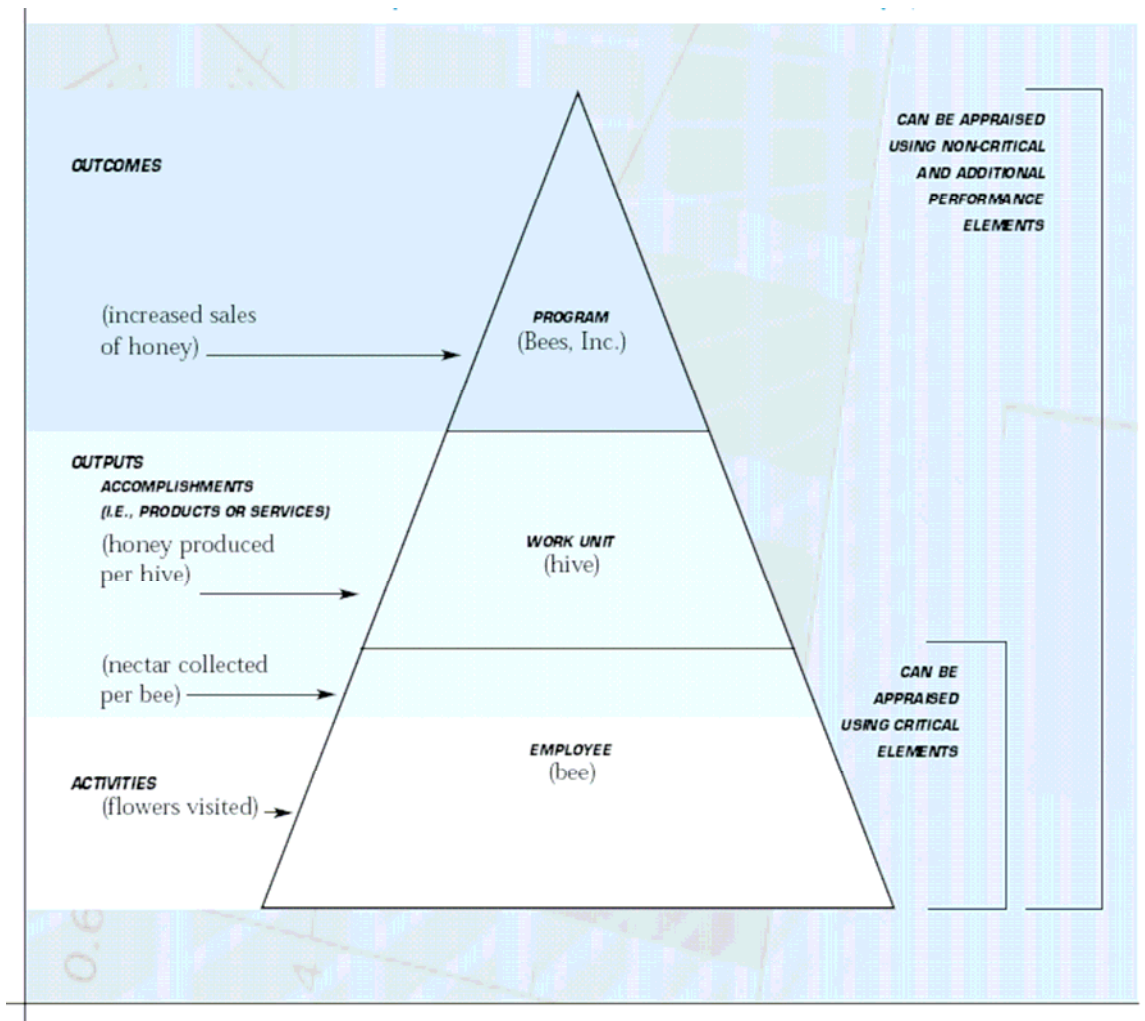
At the end of the season, the beekeepers evaluated their approaches. The first beekeeper found that his hive had indeed increased the number of flowers visited, but the amount of honey produced by the hive had dropped. The Queen Bee reported that because the bees were so busy trying to visit as many flowers as possible, they limited the amount of nectar they would carry so they could fly faster. Also, because the bees felt they were competing against each other for awards (because only the top performers were recognized), they would not share valuable information with each other (like the location of the flower-filled fields they'd spotted on the way

back to the hive) that could have helped improve the performance of all the bees. (After all was said and done, one of the high-performing bees told the beekeeper that if he'd been told that the real goal was to make more honey rather than to visit more flowers, he would have done his work completely differently.) As the beekeeper handed out the awards to individual bees, unhappy buzzing was heard in the background. The second beekeeper, however, had very different results. Because each bee in his hive was focused on the hive's goal of producing more honey, the bees had concentrated their efforts on gathering more nectar to produce more honey than ever before. The bees worked together to determine the highest nectar-yielding flowers and to create quicker processes for depositing the nectar they'd gathered. They also worked together to help increase the amount of nectar gathered by the poor performers. The Queen Bee of this hive reported that the poor performers either improved their performance or transferred to another hive. Because the hive had reached its goal, the beekeeper awarded each bee his portion of the hive incentive payment. The beekeeper was also surprised to hear a loud, happy buzz and a jubilant flapping of wings as he rewarded the individual high performing bees with special recognition.

***THE MORAL OF THIS STORY IS: MEASURING AND RECOGNIZING ACCOMPLISHMENTS RATHER THAN ACTIVITIES—AND GIVING FEEDBACK TO THE WORKER BEES—OFTEN IMPROVES THE RESULTS OF THE HIVE.***

Although it somewhat oversimplifies performance management, the beekeepers' story illustrates the importance of measuring and recognizing accomplishments (the amount of honey production per hive) rather than activities (visiting flowers). The chart below depicts the type of measurement that should occur at each organizational level of Bees, Inc., and includes measurements used by the beekeepers.

*Note that outputs occur at two levels – the work unit and the employee level.*



PERFORMANCE PYRAMID

## DISTINGUISHING ACTIVITIES FROM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**Activities** are the actions taken to produce results and are generally described using verbs. In the beekeeper story, the *activity* being measured was *visiting* flowers. Other examples of activities include:

- ✓ *filing* documents
- ✓ *developing* software programs
- ✓ *answering* customer questions
- ✓ *writing* reports

**Accomplishments** (or outputs) are the products or services (the results) of employee and work unit activities and are generally described using nouns. The examples of *outputs* used in

the story include the amount of *nectar* each bee collected and the *honey* production for the hive. Other examples include:

- ✓ *files* that are orderly and complete
- ✓ a software *program* that works
- ✓ accurate *guidance* to customers
- ✓ a *report* that is complete and accurate

**Outcomes** are the final results of an agency's products and services (and other outside factors that may affect performance). The example of an outcome used in the beekeeper story was increased sales of honey for Bees, Inc. Other examples of outcomes could include:

- ✓ reduced number of transportation-related deaths
- ✓ improved fish hatcheries
- ✓ a decrease in the rate of teenage alcoholism
- ✓ clean air

If supervisors, team leaders, and employees want to develop performance plans that support the achievement of organizational outcomes, they might try the second beekeeper's approach of sharing organizational goals with the hive, measuring and rewarding accomplishments rather than activities, and providing feedback on performance.

*From "A Handbook for Measuring Employee Performance", Office of Personnel Management, U.S. Government, September 2001.*