

MANAGING PERFORMANCE

“Forget diversions and smoke screens”

Given that service orientated businesses are relatively labour intensive you don't need to spend too much time analysing the numbers to recognise that an organisation's poor results are more than likely due to the under-performance of its people.

“Evidence shows that team members whose performance is reviewed regularly will perform more consistently and often to a higher standard to those who have infrequent reviews.”

Why performance management goes wrong

1. **Lack of role clarity** – there are team members in many organisations who don't really understand their role. If this is the case, they probably don't understand how to make the best contribution to the business either.
2. **Breakdown in the relationship** - generally speaking we are not great at giving structured, considered, evidence-based, appropriate feedback to each other on a regular basis. A breakdown in the relationship often occurs when a team member is told of their under performance when it's too late. Usually they have been under-performing for some time and there is resentment that no one has said anything before.
3. **The process** - performance management often conjures up visions of conflict, disciplinary hearings, lengthy investigations and huge amounts of resource. Managers tend to believe it's a process that is invoked only when the performance of a team member is so poor that there's nowhere else to go. Given its negative connotations, the term 'performance management' is in itself a part of the problem. When a team member is told their performance is being managed, they habitually become defensive and less than inspired to raise their game. The result is a lose:lose situation.

Manager's responsibility

Managing performance is all about regular, meaningful interactions that facilitate appropriate relationships, which in turn promote continuously improving performance and therefore generate the desired results. In this context, it's clear that accountability for managing performance sits firmly with the line manager.

Messages

Organisations are constantly sending out messages about what the company expects and how it manages performance. The brand, media adverts, the interview process, communication and existing team members all provide evidence of what might or might not be expected of someone joining the business.

Role profiles or job descriptions should make crystal clear what the manager and the business expects and what the potential team member is signing up to. Add to this a well structured interview and a succinct and transparent set of terms and conditions and there is a good chance that the manager will set both himself and the new team member up to succeed.

What good looks like

It is said that it takes approximately 28 days to form a habit, which suggests that the first 28 days of a team member joining a business are the most critical. Following a thorough induction, draw up a clear list of the various tasks that the individual is required to undertake and plan the training in advance. Use trusted members of the team to help the new team member to integrate into their role in particular and the organisation in general.

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Poor Performance

A “line in the sand” needs to be drawn if the performance of an existing team member is some what short of the required standard or has deteriorated over time. The manager should clearly articulate the standard that needs to be achieved and agree realistic milestones with the team member that can be measured and reviewed.

Constant review

Why wait 365 days to conduct a review? It is much more palatable and productive for both the line manager and team member when performance reviews are conducted at least monthly, blended with impromptu and informal reviews when the need arises. Engagement and motivation is further improved when the team member is actively involved in determining the solution.

Consequences

Dependent upon the company culture, the word ‘consequence’ may have negative connotations - this doesn’t need to be the case. Someone’s actions may result in both negative and positive outcomes. This blend, never a balance, precipitates a sense of choice as to the consequences an individual might expect based upon the actions and attitude they decide to take: “If I choose to perform well the consequences may be praise and recognition, perhaps reward. On the other hand, if I choose to perform less well I may be set improvement milestones or disciplined”.