

Performance Appraisal and Management

Reviewing and improving individual and team performance should be an important part of every Manager's role as each staff member's performance can have a significant impact on organizational performance

Whilst much of performance management can happen informally, it is important to adopt a strategic, integrated, planned approach. Any performance management system will need to be acceptable to the team involved; therefore, a transparent and equitable approach works best.

The employees' perception of the process is crucial to its success; a good performance management system should help employees feel valued and supported.

Many businesses run annual appraisal meetings with staff to discuss their recent/current performance, motivations and ambitions, and to identify any areas where improvements can be made by either employee or employer to improve overall performance. Appraisals should acknowledge current performance and, if appropriate, recognise and reward areas of achievement. Appraisals should also highlight areas where improvements can be made and generate ideas about personal and team performance.

The appraiser should be familiar with the role their employee and how they routinely perform. Ideally, the appraiser should have considered each known achievements and shortcomings (if any) to ensure that appropriate recognition and feedback can be given constructively. It is important to go into the appraisal with an open mind and listening ear.

Appraisals should always be focused on learning from and fully understanding the employee - rather than just on delivering a pre-determined message.

It is common for managers to feel uncomfortable giving feedback which could be construed as criticism. In the event of an appraiser having to raise concerns about poor performance, it may be helpful to follow these tips:

- Ask the employee if there are any areas where they feel their performance to date could have been better. See can you help them identify their own weaknesses and come up with their own solutions to address them.
- If the employee is genuinely unaware of the problem, understand that becoming aware of the issue may cause distress and raise it gently – perhaps after acknowledging an area in which they did achieve a high standard.
- Always have notes of instances or examples of the employee's behaviour which you can refer to in case you are challenged; however, it is usually more constructive to focus on the future rather than on reliving previous mistakes. For example, if a complaint was received regarding a staff member's conduct, and the matter is to be discussed at a performance appraisal, the details of the incident should be to hand, even if they are never referred to.
- If you are expecting an employee to react in a confrontational manner, it may be useful to introduce the topic by acknowledging your concern, e.g. "There is an area which we need to discuss, but I am concerned about how you might react." This mentally prepares the employee for "bad news". It is advisable to stay focussed on problems with the behaviour and not problems with the individual.
- Don't confuse an appraisal with a disciplinary meeting. It helps to remain very positive and to talk about future improvements much more than old mistakes. If necessary, reiterate during the meeting that the aim of the appraisal is to be.

Preparation for the Appraisal

Both parties should prepare for the review meeting beforehand if a successful outcome is to be achieved.

The Manager should consider:

- how well the individual has performed since the last meeting
- the extent to which any agreed development plans from the last meeting have been implemented
- the feedback to be given at the meeting and the evidence that will be used to support it
- the factors that have affected performance, both within and outside the individual's control
- the points for discussion on the possible actions that could be taken by both parties to develop or improve performance
- potential directions the individual's career might take
- possible objectives for the next review period.

Employees need to consider:

- what they have achieved during the review period, with examples and evidence
- any examples of objectives not achieved, with explanations
- what they most enjoy about the job and how they might want to develop the role
- any aspect of the work in which improvement is required and how this might be achieved
- their learning and development needs, with arguments to support their case for specific training
- what level of support and guidance they require from their manager?
- their aspirations for the future both in the current role and in possible future roles
- objectives for the next review period.

Self-assessment

In some instances, it may be helpful to guide appraisees through a self-assessment process encouraging them to assess and analyse their own performance as a basis for discussion and action. This can improve the quality of the appraisal discussion because individuals feel actively involved in the process and as this encourages them to work through the points identified above in advance. This approach may be particularly useful with more junior staff or those not used to appraisals.

However, self-assessment can only work if individuals have clear targets and standards against which to assess themselves. It can also only be effective in a climate of trust where individuals believe their appraisers will not take advantage of an open self-assessment.

What a good appraisal looks like

- A good and constructive appraisal meeting is one in which:
- appraisees do most of the talking
- appraisers listen actively to what they say
- there is scope for reflection and analysis
- performance is analysed, not personality
- the whole period is reviewed and not just recent or isolated events
- achievement is recognised and reinforced
- the meeting ends positively with agreed action plans to improve and sustain performance in the future.

A bad appraisal meeting:

- focuses on a catalogue of failures and omissions
- is controlled by the appraiser
- ends with disagreement between appraiser and appraisee
- leaves the appraisee feeling disengaged or demotivated by the process.

Appraisal skills

All managers expected to carry out performance appraisal should have some training. Ideally this should not just include the skills of performance appraisal – the ‘how’ to do it – but also encompass the reasons for performance appraisal, or the ‘why’ the organisation does it. Managers should understand how the process fits into the wider strategic process of performance management and how the information and data generated contributes to an understanding of the capacity of the organisation’s human capital to contribute to business strategy and value.

However, a basic requirement is that appraisers have the skills to carry out an effective appraisal. This means that they need to ask the right questions, listen actively and provide constructive feedback.

Listening

- To be good listeners during the review meeting, appraisers should:
- Concentrate on the speakers and be aware of behaviour, body language and nuances that supplement what is being said.
- Respond quickly when necessary but not interrupt.
- Ask relevant questions to clarify meaning.
- Comment on points to demonstrate understanding but keep them short and not inhibit the flow of the speaker.

Providing Feedback

- Feedback should be based on facts, not subjective opinion, and should always be backed up with evidence and examples.
- The aim of feedback should be to help employees understand the impact of their actions and behaviour. Corrective action may be required where the feedback indicates that something has gone wrong. However, wherever possible, feedback should be used positively to reinforce the good aspects and identify opportunities for further positive action. Giving feedback is a skill and those without training should be discouraged from doing so.
- Feedback will work best when the following conditions are met:
 - Individuals are given access to readily-available information on their performance and progress.
 - Feedback is related to actual events, observed behaviours or actions.
 - Events are described rather than judged.
 - Feedback is accompanied by questions soliciting the individual's opinion why certain things happened.
 - Individuals are encouraged to come to their own conclusions about what happened and why.
 - There is understanding about what went wrong and an emphasis on 'putting things right' rather than censuring past behaviour.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch at HR@ISME.ie or 01-6622755.