



The Cambridge Perspective

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Is Your Appraisal Process *Hurting* Performance?



If you find yourself getting anxious, nervous or distracted when preparing to conduct a performance appraisal, you're not alone. In fact, most people are uncomfortable conducting performance appraisals.

As a result, most are poorly planned, conducted in an abrupt, perfunctory manner, or repeatedly rescheduled for a later date giving employees the impression they are a low priority. This naturally results in resentment and lack of motivation on the part of the employee. Ironic, isn't it?

The ultimate goal of performance appraisals is to improve performance. But can you really expect your employees to maintain peak performance year round when the

organization provides only an occasional reminder?

We believe it is far more productive to concentrate on day-to-day performance *management*, than to rely on a specious, subjective process of annual reviews. *Everyday* is an opportunity to manage performance!

Frequent, ongoing coaching and positive reinforcement are the most effective means to ensure that employees, at any level, understand what is expected of them and remain focused on achieving their goals.

On the other hand, many organizations, particularly large ones, seek the security and consistency of a formalized performance assessment process. A quarterly review, in our opinion, is more effective than an annual review because it allows the employer to provide feedback about *recent* performance issues and deal with them when they are still relevant.

This is particularly true when correcting negative behaviour, in order to prevent it from developing into habit. If you wait until appraisal time to address behaviour, and then surprise the employee with a negative review, you're guaranteed to create resentment. Obviously, if the employee leaves the meeting feeling beaten down, you won't achieve your objective.

There are, in fact, a number of things you can do to minimize the inherent drawbacks of performance assessment.

Prepare Thoroughly

The most critical factor in properly assessing an individual's performance is to ensure

that the measurement criteria are clearly understood; therefore, whenever possible, quantify. Take the time, beforehand, to list the agreed upon criteria, and to provide concrete examples of your assessment statements to back them up. By focusing on specifics, your statements will have greater impact.



Further, you should always include a self-assessment component to the review, i.e. ask the employee to complete a review of his/her OWN performance beforehand, while you complete yours, then agree to meet in the near future to discuss the review together. Human nature is such that the employee will almost always be far harder on him/herself than the boss is likely to be, providing a great opportunity for you to praise and coach!

The 360° assessment, where input is collected from superiors, subordinates and peers, is an excellent way to obtain a complete overview of how an employee fits into the organization as a whole. This type of assessment can



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pinpoint specific issues that might otherwise be overlooked by a unidirectional process.

Another tool that can aid in the assessment process and help improve performance is the Brantas Performance tool. The Brantas approach helps team members to better understand themselves and their impact on others, appreciate and adapt to the management style of others, and improve the effectiveness of group communication. The program is web-based and also provides a highly effective daily coaching component.

Many individuals simply do not buy into how their role impacts the organization or the team, so this is an excellent time to demonstrate and reinforce the value of their contributions.

Be Specific and Clarify Expectations

The inherent flaw in the review process is its subjective nature, but you can minimize this problem somewhat by providing specific quantitative, and/or concrete examples to support or illustrate your comments. The challenge is to focus on coaching - not judging - to motivate the employee.

Areas of focus, in general:

- Achievement of Goals
- Leadership Ability
- Attitude/Motivation
- Interpersonal/Team Skills
- Adding Value

Provide specific areas for improvement, and obtain a written commitment from the individual to make the necessary changes to correct any problems. Detail specific goals, and clarify measurement criteria once again to ensure that the individual thoroughly

understands his/her goals.

The review is also a means to identify any training needs, and other personal or developmental issues that can affect an individual's performance.

Since financial and performance goals are often separate, we recommend dealing with the personal financial component at a separate meeting, and focusing strictly on performance for maximum impact.

Finally, written performance reviews can provide a sound formal and legal basis to support a dismissal for lack of performance, without legal or labour relations problems by demonstrating that issues were addressed in a fair and professional manner with the employee.

Close Constructively

It is critical that you end the review on a positive note to ensure that the individual understands what is expected, and feels motivated to achieve their goals. Most importantly, the process should leave them feeling confident in their ability to succeed.

By creating a performance driven environment and rewarding exceptional performance, employees understand the value of their daily contributions, feel appreciated and are motivated to succeed.

Attracting and retaining top talent is more critical than ever. Can you afford to lose your best employees to poor internal processes? Cambridge can help your organization develop an effective performance management strategy and process to achieve overall corporate performance goals. We will also work with your senior management to develop

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*- Harriet Braiker
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