



UNDERSTANDING PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

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By Peter Quarry, Psychologist, Ash.Quarry Productions
info@7dimensions.com.au www.7dimensions.com.au Telephone +61 3 9686 9677

Performance Appraisal (PA) has been a topic of interest to trainers, managers and consultants for many years. Recently, the topic has been under the microscope even more, as organizations search for ways to harness the competitive edge offered by their human resources.

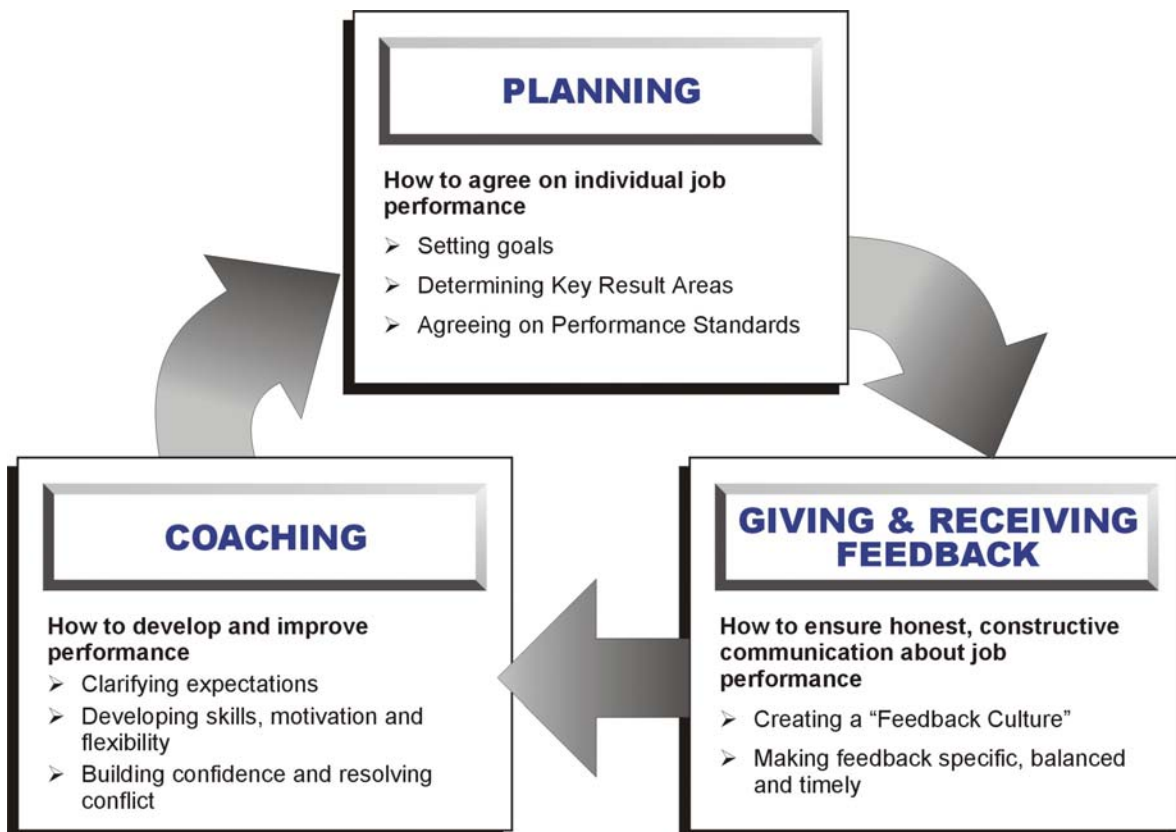
The traditional Performance Appraisal process, though, does not have a good name. The annual PA 'interview', between manager and employee, is widely seen as an undesirable chore, imposed by a zealous and 'out of touch' HR department. Research supports this. One study found that employees tend to be more confused about their job performance AFTER the PA interview than before! Managers also dislike the process, feeling uncomfortable in the role of 'playing God', handing down judgements and assessments.

The problem with Performance Appraisal is the 'Appraisal' part. PA is effectively a retrospective activity, where the focus is on looking back at past performance. Inevitably, this encourages defensiveness, anxiety and, too often, conflict.

So what is the alternative?

Many organizations are trying out a different approach called Performance Management (PM). The key to PM is that the process starts with a Performance Planning step. Flowing from that are the Feedback and Coaching steps.

The diagram below shows the essence of the PM process.



PERFORMANCE PLANNING

Performance Planning is a collaborative process whereby a manager and employee agree on what the employee's job is. It involves starting with the overall team or department's goals and then devising a set of goals for the individual to achieve over a period of time.

This may sound terribly obvious or wastefully unnecessary. But just try asking people in your organization the following questions: "Are you really clear about what you are meant to be doing in your job?", "Do you have unambiguous priorities?", or "Do you know how your manager assesses your job performance?" You will be amazed how many people cannot say "Yes" to most of these questions.

Having clear Performance Plans (or job goals, to use another expression) provides a number of benefits:

- The employee knows what is expected.
- The employee can self assess his or her own performance and self correct, if necessary (surely, the epitome of empowerment!).
- Both manager and employee have an agreed basis on which to assess or appraise performance.
- Provides a basis for managing change in a person's job.

Many people confuse Performance Plans with a person's Job Description. They are definitely not the same! A Performance Plan is a snapshot of

what is expected from the person now and in the immediate future. The Plan will evolve and change over time, as the person develops and the job and other circumstances change.

TECHNIQUES FOR GIVING FEEDBACK

Next time you need to give someone feedback about some aspect of their job performance that you want to change, try this simple formula:

"When you... *(describe the UNDESIRE BEHAVIOUR in specific terms here)*..., it is a problem because... *(describe the CONSEQUENCES of the behaviour here)*. What I would like you to do in the future is... *(describe the DESIRE BEHAVIOUR here)*."

Example

"John, when you come in late in the morning without letting me know in advance *(the UNDESIRE BEHAVIOUR)*, it is a problem because I do not have the time to organize alternative staff to attend to front counter customer enquiries *(the CONSEQUENCES)*. What I would like to do in the future is, when you are running late, please phone ahead and let me know *(the DESIRE BEHAVIOUR)*."

Taken from the 'Feedback Solutions' video series, distributed by Seven Dimensions.

TECHNIQUES FOR PERFORMANCE PLANNING

Try out this simple exercise, which is part of the Ash.Quarry approach to Performance Planning:

Write out an overall goal for your job!

An overall goal is a one-sentence statement of what your job is and why it is needed. Use the following formula:

"The... *(write your Job Title here)*...is responsible for... *(write WHAT you are meant to achieve in your Job here)*... *(write WHY you need to achieve this here)*."

REMEMBER: ONLY WRITE A ONE SENTENCE STATEMENT!

Example

"The Financial Accountant *(the Job Title)* is responsible for supervising all company ledger entries and balances *(the WHAT)* to provide an accurate record of company transactions and for the preparation of month, year end and all statutory accounts *(the WHY)*."

Taken from the 'Reinventing Appraisals' video series, distributed by Seven Dimensions.

GIVING PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK

Organizations are slowly starting to realise the enormous benefits that feedback (both positive and constructive negative) provides. Research clearly shows that giving positive feedback (ie: praise) improves motivation and morale. Properly given, constructive negative feedback improves job performance.

But there are three key issues about feedback that are crucial.

1. Feedback will not work if it is given only once or twice a year (say at Performance Appraisal time). Feedback needs to be given on a regular, frequent basis. To achieve this, a 'Feedback Culture' needs to be established. This is a culture in which giving and receiving feedback is a normal part of the way we work, rather than some rare, anxiety-provoking event that happens every now and then.
2. Managers and leaders need to role model the appropriate behaviours by regularly seeking feedback on their own performance and then being prepared to accept it. This is a necessity, not an option. Some of the recent trends towards using 360 degree feedback will facilitate this.
3. It is not just enough to want to give feedback; it has to be done in a skilled way. Research shows that poorly given feedback lowers the recipient's confidence and commitment and is one of the top 5 causes of conflict in the workplace. This means that everyone needs training in the interpersonal skills of giving and receiving feedback, for Performance Management to work!

COACHING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The third element in effective Performance Management is coaching for improvement and development.

When one thinks of a 'coach', the most common association is with sports. A sporting coach does many different things in order to get the best performance from his or her team. So it is with a work performance coach. Coaching is not one simple activity. It is a number of different activities. The key to successful coaching is to know which activity to use in each individual situation.

The main coaching activities are:

- Clarifying expectations (for when the person is uncertain of what to do, or to what level to perform).
- Building skills (for when a skill deficit is the cause of underperformance).
- Enhancing confidence (for when the person has the skills but lacks the confidence).
- Encouraging flexibility (for when resistance to change is effecting performance).
- Resolving conflict (for when disagreements are causing poor performance).
- Developing motivation (for when the coach needs to find what will excite and energise an under performing employee).

A competent coach has a range of specific tools and techniques to respond according to individual needs.

TECHNIQUES FOR COACHING

When coaching to build skills, either technical, interpersonal or managerial, avoid the following common mistakes:

<u>COMMON MISTAKE</u>	<u>WHAT TO DO INSTEAD</u>
Not checking whether the person has done the task or activity before	Check and build on existing knowledge
Confusing the person being coached	Explain the task in a logical order
Not responding to possible confusion	Read body language and check understanding
Just explaining how to do the task	Explain, demonstrate, provide practice, and give feedback until the skill is mastered

Taken from the 'Performance Excellence' video series, distributed by Seven Dimensions.