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Key Considerations when Implementing Performance Management in the Public Service



(This post is a follow-on to Debra's previous – [TBS & Performance Management: Hit & Miss?](#))

Unfortunately, many Performance Management (PM) systems are structured with relatively junior employees in mind, and even for that employee segment often carry parental overtones.

When an employee starts off in their career, they do need fairly close guidance and assistance with goal setting, frequent feedback about performance, and help with making adjustments. That help may sometimes even be described as "a push." People at this stage of their professional development probably need weekly performance discussions either in one-on-one or in group sessions. By the time the probation evaluation comes around, if they don't cut it then that ends it. Those who make probation are assigned more responsibility and greater discretion, but will still require ample opportunities for feedback. The goal should always be to move people forward as quickly as possible.

Don't Ignore Experienced Employees

Applying the same kind of close scrutiny with mature individuals who have demonstrated skill and professionalism is quite likely to be perceived as heavy handed at best, and downright offensive at worse. However, most mature – let's call them journeymen – employees need a development plan to grow within the organization. A development plan should be contextualized, and joint manager-employee goals should be negotiated. Mature professionals also need affirmation, particularly when facing "stretch" assignments or when difficult challenges come around as is normal in any career cycle. Both of these situations – development and challenges – require periodic "performance review conversations" to keep things on track.



Don't Ignore Teams

A lot of work today is done in teams. Performance, therefore, should be evaluated not only on an individual basis, but on a group basis as well. The entire work team needs to be involved in setting goals and negotiating outcomes – not only with the manager, but also with each other. That being the case, the role of manager/supervisor changes and managers become more of a coach while journeymen often take on the role of trainer.

Unfortunately, most Performance Management systems don't adequately deal with these subtleties.

Implementation and Change

Before you begin to implement a new performance management system, you need to assess the current climate and change readiness of your organization:

- Is there a fairly widespread sense that a new PM system is necessary?
- Is the change part of a widely understood strategy?
- Does the culture of your organization validate the idea of helping employees deal with the problems they encounter, or are they pretty much on their own?
- Do most people accept that a new PM system is an effective response to the underlying problem?
- Does your organization tend to blame people if they make mistakes in a new situation?
- Does your organization provide people with adequate training for the new situations and roles that it thrusts them into?
- Has the change been explained to those who are going to be affected by it in as much detail as is currently possible?
- Has the proposed new PM system polarized the workforce in any way that is going to make the transition more disruptive?
- Is the level of trust in your organization's leadership adequate?
- Has your organization set up some way to monitor the state of the change?
- Has a clear set of responsibilities been established for seeing that the human side of the implementation goes well?

Culture and Engagement Matter

In general, the [TBS Directive on Performance Management](#) appears to be a well thought through “how to” guide, but it is very much a “horizontal solution” and is not likely to be very effective unless individual departments and agencies tailor its implementation to suit their own specific environment, culture, and climate. Implementing a procedural approach can be problematic even in a healthy work environment. Given an environment like the Public Service, the potential for disaster is high. One of the main supporting documents is [Performance Management: A Shared Commitment to Sustaining a Culture of High Performance - Manager's and Supervisor's Guide](#).

Sustaining a culture of high performance is directly correlated to employee engagement. In turn, employee

engagement is highly dependent on the quality of the relationship between the employee and the immediate supervisor/manager. In many cases this relationship can be problematic – perhaps even toxic. So in a real sense, this directive is both a threat and an opportunity; managers can use the PM Directive as an opportunity to "reset" their employee relations to be more functional, and to perhaps even eliminate cases that are toxic. Or, they can implement it poorly and end up with even greater engagement problems.

Hitting the Reset Button

So how do you use the new Directive to push the reset button in your department? How can you make sure that the process of implementing the new performance management system will improve employee performance, engagement, and workplace culture and climate – not make it worse? Right off the bat you need to shift your focus from bureaucracy, process, and control to the improvement of communication and employee engagement, which is at the heart of what performance management is really all about.

- Assess your employees' readiness;
- Manage the implementation of the Directive on the workforce – this is a change initiative and needs to be treated as such;
- Practice continuous communication – Unbundle and don't rely on once or twice a year processes to drive performance management;
- Shift to continuous feedback – foster a culture that values and encourages feedback – from the top down and from the bottom up;
- [Engage your staff](#);
- Solicit input and [listen to your staff](#);
- Encourage open constructive discussion of diverse perspectives;
- Understand your employees – know what motivates them;
- Recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach does not meet your organization's needs;
- Build [employee trust](#) and trust them in return;
- Make best use of employee talent – employee fit does matter;
- Realize that creativity, collaboration, and teamwork are needed to produce results;
- Invest in coaching skills – enable employees to give and receive feedback well;
- Create a positive work environment;
- Focus on development – it is a critical piece of the puzzle to solving employee engagement issues; and,
- Take advantage of additional [CSPS training offerings](#) (beyond the one mandatory course).



Once you've gone through this list and identified some areas where you think improvement is needed, ask your people if they agree with the things that you have in mind.

But only ask for feedback if you really want it. Never ask for feedback if you have already made a decision about next steps as this is a sure way to destroy trust. And be open-minded about the recommendations you receive – we rarely learn much from the people who agree with us.

Act visibly on feedback and implement change.

Don't shoot the messenger – reward constructive and respectful challenges.

But mostly, you have to [care](#).

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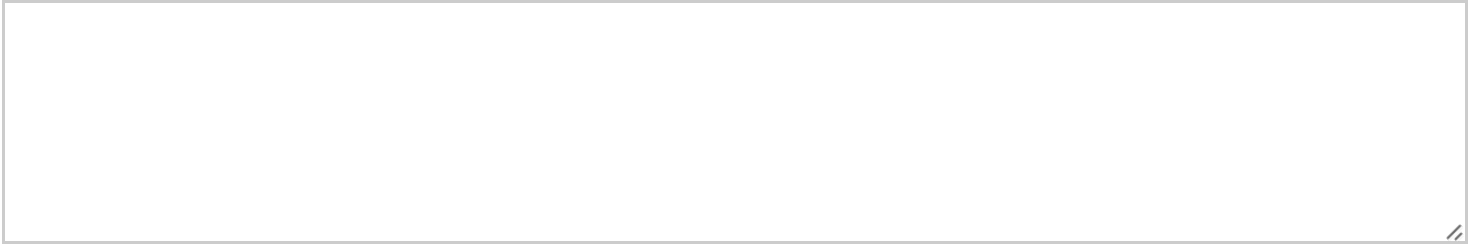
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