

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT



-THE UNHOLY ALLIANCE

There is currently an increasing emphasis on maximum performance from each individual in organisations. At the same time there is a corresponding concern as to how to achieve this in a way which is effective and focused for the organisation, and motivating and constructive for each employee.

In most organisations the assessment process take the form of an annual performance appraisal review between the manager and the employee. This interview provides the opportunity for a full and frank discussion about the individual's job performance for the previous 12 months, and for both parties to agree the key performance and development issues resulting from the discussion. These issues normally include updated performance measures, new personal objectives, and the delivery of training and personal development plans.

Whether appraiser and appriasee admit it or not, pay is also an important part of the agenda, and in the future it will become even more so, as remuneration becomes increasingly performance-related.

However, the irony of the current situation is that whilst Performance Appraisal is being undertaken by many organisations with a fresh urgency and focus, feedback from managers and employees suggest that very little is being achieved. In fact, current Performance Appraisal procedures seem to excite most staff to a level comparable to a visit to the dentist!

Why? Surely an organisationally-supported discussion which gives managers and employees the opportunity to discuss their views and ideas on critical work issues like performance, pay, and career development should only benefit both.

What is going wrong?

There are a number of key issues which organisations need to urgently review:

- unclear and unreviewed job roles
- 'woolly' or ill-defined performance measures
- inconsistent and unimaginative pay and performance policies
- 'wayward' and frankly inconsiderate interpersonal skills on the part of the managers.

However, the most critical factor requiring a complete re-think is that of a personal development planning forming an integral part of the Performance Appraisal Discussion.

For the majority of employees, the Annual Appraisal Meeting is still the only time that their career path and personal development will be discussed in any detail with their manager.

Many employees complain that their personal agenda of career development, job satisfaction and personal development is just 'tacked-on' to the Performance Appraisal discussion, and in an atmosphere where all too often subjective opinions about performance are being expressed and a pay award is up for grabs? Not easy.

So why is the atmosphere of the Performance Appraisal meeting not at all appropriate for Personal Development Discussions? Because the emphasis and focus of each should be different.

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

- Manager led
- Results based
- Past performance
- Organisational needs
- Pay/Compensation related
- Judgmental

DEVELOPMENT DISCUSSION

- Employee led
- Skills/Talents based
- Future growth
- Individuals' needs
- Career related
- Developmental

Performance and pay cannot be sensibly discussed alongside growth and development. The danger is that the shorter term pay issue will always cloud the longer term development issue. The development issue, which is actually of greater long-term benefit, will always come a poor second.

Organisations must recognise and signal that employee success is not just about past performance, it's as much about their future personal development.

So what is the remedy?

1. Personal career and development planning requires the same organisational priority as performance management, assessment techniques, training and compensation. It needs to stand alone as an essential piece of personnel practice in its own right.
2. The view that career development can only be measured in promotional terms has to be put into perspective. The stark reality is that 'right-sizing' will preclude promotion for an ever-increasing number of employees. Organisations and employees need to accept this and redefine the meaning of success at work.
3. Each employee must be taught how to take responsibility for their personal growth and development. They need time and encouragement to prepare a regular personal development agenda for discussion with their manager.
4. Growth and development should concentrate on an individual's personal skills and talents, particularly those which individuals want to use more and are also crucial to job success. The result is a win/win for the individual and employer.
5. People's growth and development will require more flexible organisational job structures where new responsibilities, assignments and projects will provide the opportunities for personal growth.

Recent research has shown again and again that growth and development are amongst the top motivational issues for employees today. To increase corporate performance the personal development issue must be tackled as a strategic issue.

Employees must be given quality time and opportunity to discuss with their manager their development and growth plans and aspirations. They also need a means to achieve this.

Just as Performance Appraisal never works in the hands of untrained managers so it is with Personal Development Discussions. They simply won't happen unless Managers are trained to handle them effectively.

Performance Appraisal Meetings and Personal Development Discussions are essential for any organisation wishing to increase performance, maintain motivation and retain their staff. Both activities are ultimately inter-dependent and inter-related, yet with an emphasis and focus which are different.

Performance Appraisal discussions should focus primarily on 'how effectively did you perform against the objectives which we discussed and agreed, and what needs to be done to improve performance in the coming year?'

Personal Development Discussions should focus primarily on 'what actions do you feel need to be taken to make your job more satisfying, and to make greater and more effective use of your talents and skills?'

There is a 'wind of change' blowing which recognises that individuals hold the key to organisational success. Individuals will provide the organisation with increased performance if the organisation provides the individual with real opportunities for personal development and growth. Organisations won't grow if the individuals within them are not growing.

The message is clear. Personal Development has outgrown Performance Appraisal; it now stands as its equal and must be treated separately.