

Effective Performance Management

The words performance management evoke a sense of dread in many organizations. Supervisors don't like to give negative feedback, and employees don't like to receive it. What's more, the rating process can feel like an administrative burden with no real impact. In those cases, performance management is reduced to little else than "checking a box."

Fortunately, it doesn't have to be that way. To do performance management right, though, it is important to:

- Articulate clear goals for the performance management system;
- Ensure that the system design truly reflects the organization's goals; and
- Give supervisors the tools needed to deliver targeted and effective feedback.

We have decades of experience helping clients design and implement customized, effective, and efficient performance management systems. We also help supervisors "go beyond the numbers" to facilitate employee growth through the performance management process.

Integrating Organizational Goals

In the performance management arena, one size does not fit all—each system must reflect an organization's unique structure, priorities, and constraints. For example, we developed a performance management system for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) in response to a truly unique set of challenges. A class action lawsuit triggered a redesign of the human capital programs associated with the criminal investigator occupation, including their performance management process. The resulting system needed to provide input that could be used to make personnel decisions, such as promotions, and provide a means to offer constructive and actionable feedback to employees.

ATF also did not want supervisors to be overly burdened with a time-consuming process. The new system allows strengths and developmental needs to be identified, clarifies whether an employee's performance meets expectations, and is flexible and easy to use. We met these goals through an innovative "hybrid" system,

which keeps the developmental and operational components of the system as independent as possible:

- Developmental ratings are seen only by the employee and his/her supervisor, which reduces the tendency for supervisors to inflate ratings.
- A separate operational component is used to for administrative purposes.
- Detailed behaviorally-based rating scales, tailored to more than 25 unique criminal investigator positions, provide a rich source of feedback for employees with minimal supervisory effort.



Clearly, a formulaic approach to performance management would not meet ATF's specific needs. Similarly, we were asked to offer our personal touch to a unique situation faced by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), which was charged with increasing collaboration and integration across the intelligence community following 9/11.

We developed a 360-degree feedback program for ODNI that provided over 1,000 intelligence community (IC) leaders with rich feedback focused on cross-agency coalition-building and collective leadership. This program served as a vital component of a larger performance management effort to transform the culture of the post-9/11 IC.

Given our reputation for objectivity and technical rigor, other clients reach out to us to conduct evaluations of existing performance management systems, including the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC). As a result of our work, the FDIC implemented several system improvements, including a process we developed to collect multi-source supervisor and manager ratings that integrates 360-degree feedback, job performance data, organizational climate survey results, and customer service reports.

Facilitating Performance Feedback

Even the best designed performance management system will fail if employees do not receive clear and actionable feedback. This is a thorny issue, especially when the feedback is negative. Without the right training and tools, few supervisors will be able to effectively coach employees in a way that fosters meaningful change and improvement. We understand this challenge through our work providing one-on-one developmental feedback to executives participating in the Office of Personnel Management's Leadership 360™ program, and to the Director of National Intelligence's top leadership team.

To put the right tools directly in the hands of those who need them, we have developed a series of job aids that help supervisors deliver effective feedback:



- Train-the-trainer materials focused on effectively implementing a performance management process, including how to deliver effective feedback.
- Modules to help managers work with their employees to synthesize and interpret 360-degree feedback data.
- A web-based *Supervisor's Toolkit for Leadership Development*.

Practicing What We Preach

Our expertise in performance management and our commitment to employee development is reflected in our own internal performance management system. All HumRRO employees receive multi-source feedback, regular feedback sessions beyond the formal annual review, and strong support for professional development activities. This process has helped us appreciate—as our clients do—how organizational growth and development begins with employee growth and development, and how effective performance management is the tie that binds them together.

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