5 reminders to roll out a more agile approach to performance assessments

By Anja van Beek

In a business world where the pace of change is so fast, now more than ever, we need more frequent feedback discussions.

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I believe that performance reviews provide the structure to link your team's goals and performance with the strategy of the business – we should not necessarily scrap the process, but rather change our thinking about them.

Employees flourish in environments where they are empowered to make a decision and have the autonomy to decide without the traditional bureaucracy and red tape. Leaders should embrace the Agile People principle of "tell the why and what and leave the how to the people".

This means to be crystal clear about what needs to be achieved. Once you have clarified the output and boundaries (if applicable), allow the team to approach and achieve the goal as they see fit. This emphasises the importance of everyone being aware of and aligned to the common direction of the business.

Performance management is not about the software or the procedure used but rather the *quality* of the continued conversation between the manager and team members.

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Everyone wants a quick solution, but the truth is that it is a never-ending process. Here are my 5 reminders to consider:

1. **Keep it simple:** Get rid of those long performance review sheets and focus on the most important questions and metrics.
2. **Look towards growth:** Rather than dwelling on past glories and failures, focus on what the team member can do to grow in his/her role and how the business can support the person's ambitions and performance.
3. **Set clear expectations:** Have clear performance goals that are linked to the overall business strategy with objective metrics, so that teams can understand what is expected of them.
4. **Give feedback more often:** A single performance review session each year is not effective and regular feedback and discussion should be the norm. In addition to formal feedback sessions, encourage managers to have monthly or even weekly check-ins with their teams.
5. **Automate the process:** Use technology to make the process as user-friendly as possible. Performance trends in the business and within specific teams is insightful and the data can be useful for future decision-making.

How productive is your culture?

Becoming a learning organisation will be a competitive advantage and a mindset of continuous learning and improvement is key. Leaders and managers need to foster a psychologically safe workplace where people can bring their authentic self to work. It is about candour and sharing diverse views without the fear of being punished for your honesty.

Leaders need to ask the question: "What do I need to unlearn as their leader to build and contribute to the new world of work and lead the conversation in defining what will work for your team in this reality of having blended workspace?" Once leaders can honestly answer this question, will they be able to lead and transform their team. New ways of working equate to the extent to which a leader is willing to role model and transform themselves.

The blended workspace, a combination of remote and office work, will be the reality for a long time. Leaders and HR teams need to be mindful of the colleagues with young kids (that can't return to school) or older employees that don't want to risk going to the office.

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How productivity is measured remains a key question. For the parents – how can leaders assist those working parents and reiterate that work is measured on output and not based on the number of hours worked? And once the kids are back at school, how can these working parents have more control over their schedules to find a healthy balance? This will be a mind-shift change for some leaders, but a necessary one.

To track progress in these uncertain times, consider using Objectives and Key Results (OKRs):

- The Objectives are the inspirational qualitative description of what you want to achieve.
- Key Results are outcomes you want to achieve; the quantitative measure of results that will measure the value and impact to your clients or employees.

OKRs is based on tracking data, instead of just a data point. OKR's increase alignment with the overall organisation objective. The OKR's cadence can be monthly, quarterly, six-monthly or annually. During these uncertain times, a quarterly cadence can work well.

A shift towards continuous feedback and an intention to turn every moment to a learning opportunity, is needed. Companies that learn the quickest and adapt to change, are the ones that are successful in the future.

ABOUT ANJA VAN BEEK

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