



# Human Resources Notes

*“The aim of Human Resources Notes is to provide concise information on topical human resource management issues to guide effective people management practices.”*  
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### Dimensions of performance management

The aim of a company’s performance management system is keep employees at the upper levels of their performance capacity referred to as the ‘Target Zone’ in Figure 1 below, which in turn contributes to the

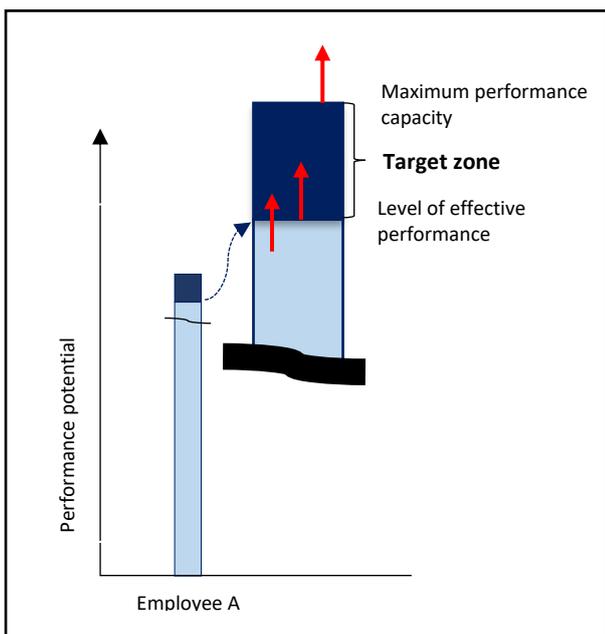


FIGURE 1: REALISING HUMAN PERFORMANCE POTENTIAL AT WORK

achievement of business goals. At the level of each individual employee there are three ways, represented by the red arrows in the diagram, to improve an employee’s work performance:

- Increase time spent by an employee at or above the level of effective performance,
- Raise, and ensure that the employee achieves the level at which the company accepts an employee’s performance as effective,
- Raise the employee’s maximum performance capacity with a commensurate increase in the required effective performance level.

Companies customise performance management processes to their needs but generally there is a four-stage cyclical process shared by most companies: (1) Managers, typically with the input of employees, set performance goals; (2) there is ongoing performance feedback in the form of recognition or correction; (3) there are formal performance appraisals once or twice a year; and (4) compensation and / or career development decisions are based on performance achieved.

Following decades of dissatisfaction with performance management processes there has been a worldwide re-configuration of performance management processes. Managers and employees have been unhappy with the time-consuming nature and reliance on subjective scores in performance appraisals.

Conventional performance management has been linked to high levels of attrition, low productivity, and significant problems with collaboration. A Korn Ferry Institute study concluded that despite decades of investment in performance management systems, on average, managers are worse at developing their employees than at anything else they do.<sup>1</sup>

The most common trend in the reboot of performance management has been to increase the prominence accorded to immediate performance

feedback (stage 2 in the above cycle). The principle underlying this shift is that to ensure consistent work performance improvement, the feedback must be as close to the event or behaviour as possible.<sup>2</sup>

In any company, the process of performance management does not stand in isolation. In our consultancy, we believe that there are at least another ten employee management processes which act interdependently with performance management as levers to improved company performance. They are: workforce planning and succession; job analysis; recruitment & selection; learning & development; remuneration; employment relations; diversity; employee wellness; communication and change management. These levers are also affected by and influence the behavioural factors of leadership; organisation culture; engagement and governance.

Managers need to consider the interdependency of jobs. Aside from a small minority of cases, the work of individual employees does not take place in isolation. The superior work performance of some individual employees can be undermined by the underperformances of weak team members. The trite saying that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link applies. Managers must work towards achieving optimal team performance, which can be neglected in an individual based performance management process.

A mistake that managers can make is to believe that if the performance management process is effectively implemented, then superior employee performance is assured. This belief does not consider half of the equation. Managers can only create an environment conducive to employees consistently maintaining superior work performance. Each employee chooses at every moment how close to their maximum performance capacity they are going to work. An employee's decision to consistently deliver discretionary levels of performance is internally based.

Finally, the best contributor to consistently superior work performance by employees lies beyond implementing an optimal performance management process. Researchers have shown meaningfulness of employees' work to be more important to employees than any other aspect of work, including pay and rewards, opportunities for promotion, or working

conditions. Meaningful work can be highly motivational, leading to improved performance, commitment, and satisfaction.<sup>3</sup> A performance management process is a vital management tool but is not a panacea. ■

#### References:

- (1) Rock, D. Davis, J. & Jones, B. (2014) *Kill Your Performance Ratings* [Online article] <http://www.strategy-business.com/article/00275?gko=c442b> Accessed 25 May 2016
- (2) Bussin, M. (2017) *Performance Management Reboot* Randburg KR Publishing. p. 17
- (3) Bailey, C & Madden, A. (2016) What Makes Work Meaningful or Meaningless MIT Sloan Review pp 53 - 64

## 10 Interviewers' mistakes

Jim Collins, best-selling business success researcher, pointed out that a company's journey from good to great begins with hiring the "right people". He said that if you employ the right people, the challenges of motivating and managing employees largely goes away.<sup>1</sup>

Selection interviewing remains the primary tool managers use to choose the best candidate from a shortlist. There is a huge volume of readily accessible information and many skills training options available. Managers will benefit personally as will their companies if they take the time to master the skill of selection interviewing.

One accessible source of recruitment and selection information is the website of UK based recruitment firm Coburg Banks. It is there that I came across the following 10 interviewer mistakes which can easily be rectified to improve selection decision making:<sup>2</sup>

1. **"Winging it"**. No amount of experience of interviewing justifies an interviewer being unprepared by not having reviewed the applicant's CV and planning questions. In addition to key topics being omitted, it harms the company's reputation.
2. **"Being anxious"**, which can transmit and unnerve the applicant. Two tips to overcome this

are for the interviewer to practice (role-playing is useful) in advance, and to use the ice-breaker intended to settle the candidate for the interviewer's own benefit.

3. **"Being uninterested"**. Conveying an image of nonchalance is unprofessional. An interview is a sincere two-way fact gathering exercise. The interviewer must be thorough and probe the candidate's answers for clear understanding and demonstrate active listening. Doodling, answering phone calls and other distracted behaviours are unacceptable.
4. **"Asking inappropriate questions"**. Any question which may be discriminatory must be scrapped. Chapter 1 of the Employment Equity Act provides a comprehensive list of prohibited discriminatory grounds including the *catch-all* "any arbitrary ground".
5. **"Dominating the interview"**. A simple rule is to listen more than you speak. Also, ask open questions to prompt comprehensive answers.
6. **"Be too quiet"**. At the other end of the behavioural spectrum lies the error of being too quiet. An interviewer who limits their questions to a few broad questions like, "Describe your career to date". Are not going to elicit the necessary insights from the candidate. Awkward silences will leave a candidate unsure of the interviewer's capacity to lead an interactive process.
7. **"Be unfair"**. The validity of bombarding candidates with strings of difficult questions or questions beyond the candidate's knowledge base is not empirically established.

Before introducing a policy to ban them, Google interviewers were notorious for asking candidates brain teasers which would make even geniuses feel dumb, such as "How many golf balls can fit in a school bus?" Or, "How many piano tuners are there in the entire world?"<sup>3</sup>

8. **"Oversharing"**. It is inappropriate to try and build a rapport with the candidate by disclosing too much and inappropriate non-public information. It is never right to bad mouth superiors, colleagues, employees and / or the organisation.

9. **"Dishonesty"**. Don't make things up to get someone to accept a job offer. An outcome of a properly conducted interview is to demonstrate the employer's trustworthiness and integrity.
10. **"Bias"**. Every interviewer has personal biases which if not taken into consideration, can lead to unfair assessment of candidates. Panel interviews are an effective way to balance and lower the risks of biased decision making. ■

#### References:

1. Collins, J. (2001) Good to Great London: Random House pp. 41 – 64
2. Ball, J. (2017) 10 Huge Mistakes Interviewers Make [Online slideshare] <https://www.coburgbanks.co.uk/blog/assessing-applicants/mistakes-interviewers-make1/> Accessed 22 January 2018
3. Carlson, N. (2012) 15 Google Interview Questions That Made Geniuses Feel Dumb. *Business Insider* [Online] Available at: <http://www.businessinsider.com/15-google-interview-questions-that-used-to-make-geniuses-feel-dumb-2012-11/#how-many-golf-balls-can-fit-in-a-school-bus-1> Accessed 22 January 2018

### Peer-to-peer coaching

Coaching is an effective developmental tool to elevate the work performance of individual employees. It involves a focussed learning path of self-discovery and self-development to improve personal effectiveness and is facilitated by someone with the skills to objectively observe the work performance and direct the 'coachee's' attention to growth opportunities.

Ron Friedman has described the increasingly used peer-to-peer coaching as a successful performance enhancer:

A coaching session starts with a 'coachee' identifying a work challenge he or she is facing and would like to solve. The coach's role is to ask a series of open-ended questions that are designed to help the coachee generate options for tackling the problem.

The session is successfully concluded when the coachee has identified a solution and actions to take. The peer-coach and coachee then meet on an agreed

future date for a progress report and to identify a new challenge. The process then begins again. The peer-coach and coachee do not usually come from the same department. Some do's and don'ts for a peer-coach:

**Do:** pose questions instead of providing answers; focus on topics selected by the coachee and not the peer-coachi; and do not have a vested interest in the outcomes of the coachee's decisions.

**Don't:** give advice; provide mentoring; and rehabilitate problem employees.

There is no implication of ineptitude on the part of the coachee. Peer-to-peer coaching is about enhancing the performance of strong performers and not about 'fixing' under-performers. ■

Reference: Friedman R (2014) The Best Place to Work New York: Perigee pp 171 - 173

### Getting facts in a disciplinary hearing

A primary aim of a disciplinary hearing is to determine all the facts relevant to deciding whether an employee has committed misconduct or not. Facts usually come from the following:

1. **Witnesses** - A witness is someone who comes to the disciplinary hearing and tells the chairperson what she personally saw or experienced in relation to the case. A witness may say for example, "I saw Joe asleep behind the counter at 10h00."
2. **Documents** such as an attendance register, a sick note or production book can be proof that someone broke a company rule. A witness must explain to the chairperson the relevance of a document.
3. **Objects** - This type of evidence is any "thing" which the chairperson can inspect at a disciplinary enquiry such as the weapon used in an assault case.

4. **Commonly known facts** - Certain facts are common knowledge to everyone and so parties do not have to prove them in a disciplinary enquiry. In legal jargon this is referred to as "Judicial notice". Sometimes the parties in a disciplinary enquiry agree upon certain facts; in legal terminology, these facts are "common cause".

5. **Admissions and confessions** - A witness who acknowledges one or more facts relating to the case, which supports the other side's case makes an admission. When the alleged wrong doer acknowledges her guilt in respect of all the elements of the misconduct allegations, she makes a confession. To be valid, people must make admissions or confessions freely and voluntarily. An admission or confession made because of a threat or promise of reward by someone in authority is improper.

6. **Circumstantial evidence** - This is indirect evidence that helps to prove that misconduct has been committed. For example, money goes missing from a safe for which there is only one key, which is in the possession of Piet and there is no evidence that the safe was broken or forced open. Then the circumstantial evidence is that Piet took the money (even though nobody saw him do it). The following two rules from the law of evidence apply to the use of circumstantial evidence in a disciplinary enquiry:

- The inference sought to be drawn must be consistent with the proved facts. If it is not, then the enquiry chairperson cannot draw the inference.
- If the facts permit more than one inference, the enquiry chairperson must select the most plausible. If this favours the initiator's case, then the initiator has fulfilled the onus of proof.

The contents of Human Resources Notes do not constitute legal advice. For specific professional assistance tailored to your needs consult an expert.

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