



Moving from performance appraisal to performance management

Jake Kimball describes his organisation's road from performance appraisal to performance management.

Are you ready to implement performance management (PM) at your workplace? Not sure what it means, what exactly it entails, or how to initiate the process? Performance management is a management system for employees and organizations. An effective performance management program aligns employee contributions with the goals and values of an organization. Googling performance management offers a wide variety of definitions ranging from vague to very descriptive. However, the idea of employees and management working together to improve organizational effectiveness is a common denominator.

A detailed search of the Internet demonstrates that performance management is a complex process, not to be confused with performance appraisal. It is more than a framework for organizational improvement with leadership and employees at the core. Performance management is a proactive partnership. It is proactive because it not a guaranteed process that automatically happens. It requires continuous planning and monitoring. It is a partnership because it involves effort and reflection by both management and employees. Sustained commitment is necessary if the rewards and benefits of employee and organizational improvement are to be realized. In fact, cultivating performance management in the workplace is no easy task. This early

warning is not meant to discourage readers from testing the performance management waters, but to emphasize that stakeholders need to embrace the notion of performance management for it to work.

As a teacher turned owner/manager of a growing language school, I have a commitment to providing the highest quality service to my students and employees. When I first opened my school three years ago, teachers performed satisfactorily. However, they lacked a certain enthusiasm and commitment that I was looking for. During teachers' meetings and appraisals employees responded positively. Unfortunately, their short-lived eagerness was more lip service

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than genuine enthusiasm for a job well done. Charisma, wit, and charm, and finally exhortations to "Do the best you can!" only motivated my employees for several more days. After a week, most employees returned to the status

quo of 'getting by'. This is likely to be a common situation in many organizations. I had heard other managers complain about this problem, and I had read about similar experiences on e-mail discussion lists. I had also previously worked in environments where the daily grind of teaching left little energy for 'best practice' and sincere reflection. As a manager I thought, "Is it them, or is it me?" Is this situation indicative of underlying organizational problems?

My road to performance management began with a plan. This initial stage included researching performance management and Total Quality Management (TQM) on the Internet and in introductory management texts. One salient feature of both concepts is the notion of involving employees in the management process.

Critical Incident/Global Essay

My original evaluation system was a type of critical incident appraisal. With this kind of appraisal an assessor records specific incidents, positive and/or negative, and notes details such as date, time, incident description, outcome, and individuals involved in the incident. By detailing specific examples of an event, the appraisal, in theory, assesses performance—not the individual, thus ensuring neutrality. Identifying and remedying ineffective work performance is a central focus.

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Teachers welcomed the appraisal process, especially the feedback. I observed one or more classes and made notes for strengths and weaknesses and areas for improvement or advice. More often than not, I took on the role of 'participant-observer' (Baszanger, 1997). Additional references were also taken from previous, intermittent glimpses into the classroom, relevant feedback from parents, students, other teachers, and administrative records. Afterwards the observation form was discarded and a summary, or global essay, was written and presented during an interview. The teacher read the essay and we discussed its contents.

This system was well liked by teachers for being brief yet very constructive (when asked, 6 out of 6 teachers responded favorably to this appraisal). As a manager I found the appraisal interview easy to conduct and not excessively time consuming. However, I had reservations about the lack of systematization in the observation process. After six months I investigated other options that I thought would add structure and a means of goal setting to the appraisal process.

Rating Scales

I then modified the appraisal system. This second appraisal was adapted from White (1991), Brown (1994), and Richards (2001) and introduced in February 2002. I designed a work performance rubric from a job description. The assessment compared actual work performance to the job description rubric and measured with rankings ranging from 1 through 5, with 1 being poor and 5 outstanding. As with the first system, I observed classes (this time more often in the role of observer) and silently took notes. In this appraisal, the appraisal form was given to the teacher approximately one week prior to observation. I filled out one form and the teacher completed his or her own form as a self-evaluation. Results were compared and discussed during the appraisal interview.

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English speaking teachers (NESTs) felt more comfortable with the process than Non-Native Speakers (NNESTs). Most of the latter felt low ratings to be insulting or personally disparaging. As a manager, I found rating scales to be ineffective in my context. Too often, teachers focused on their ratings and not on their performance. Much of the appraisal interview time was spent negotiating ratings and discussing classroom performance. Not enough time or thought was spent on overcoming performance gaps, which was the topic of page two of the appraisal.

SMART goals were one new feature added to the rating scales appraisal. Setting SMART goals (Rees, 2001; White, 1991) means working with employees to develop goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely. Both NESTs and NNESTs experienced difficulty in setting SMART goals. After brief training and modeling, NESTs began to independently set appropriate goals. However, NNESTs continued to have difficulties identifying and planning appropriate SMART goals. I presumed that goal setting might be a culturally bound skill. NNESTs required far more assistance and encouragement in setting goals. Handy (1993: 196) discusses one possibility—the cultural phenomenon of power distance and role culture. Korea, like Japan, is noted as having a high power distance and role culture. Non-native speaking teachers preferred to have me assign SMART goals for them. When asked about SMART goals, the Korean teachers collectively

noted, "supervisors usually assign this kind of work. Since you are the expert and you have more experience you can make better goals." At the same time, I also have to recognize that performance appraisals themselves can be a source of apprehension, especially if conducted in L2.

360° Appraisal

My investigation of Deming's Total Quality Management (TQM) approach, especially the notion of continuous improvement, led to my school's most recent appraisal—the 360° Appraisal. It is a broad, comprehensive appraisal system with data being collected from multiple sources including, but not limited to, self-appraisal, peers, supervisors, administrative records, and internal and external customers. Data were collected from a number of areas including student evaluations of teachers, observations, a self-evaluation, a job analysis, a job description checklist, input from other staff members including co-teachers and the secretary. In addition, school forms including a mission statement, vision statement, and school goals were designed with teacher input. All were packaged together to form a new school handbook and appraisal package.

Teachers were consulted for their input in designing a job description. I introduced the idea and reason for eliciting their input. I gave them one week to prepare a role set analysis, a list of activities or tasks that they routinely perform. I also informally observed teachers outside of class and noted their activities. We then condensed the teachers' lists into one job description. I wanted to involve staff as much as possible, as is suggested with TQM. By directly involving teachers in the creation of official school documents, I felt teachers would feel a greater sense of commitment to the performance management process. Secondly, the role set analysis clarified job responsibilities. Interestingly, as one Korean teacher noted, "We've never done this before. I guess we're [Korean teachers in general] always expected to just know what we have to

do. I mean, yes, we're told what to do, but not how."

During another teachers' meeting, I asked all teachers how they would feel about being evaluated by their students. A majority of teachers acknowledged the need to be assessed by students and even welcomed student-based evaluations. Some teachers voiced concern about the reliability of student assessments and what, if any, repercussions student evaluations of teachers would have on teachers' employment. Of concern was that students' evaluations of teachers could become either a popularity contest or possibly even an instrument for student retaliation—not a valid assessment of teacher performance.

I informed the teachers that student evaluations would be used to 1) gauge student satisfaction levels, 2) reveal general trends in teacher performance, 3) elicit student suggestions for improving the quality of classroom practice, and 4) create a teacher training agenda based on teacher and student needs. The secretary or administrator would conduct the surveys to avoid possible influence by the teacher's presence. Surveys would be completed anonymously. I then asked teachers how they wanted to be assessed. Teachers worked together to make a teacher assessment form for students, which was then translated into L1 for students.

Since teacher performance extends beyond the classroom, administrative records were also included in the 360° Appraisal. These included teacher attendance records, student attendance records, lesson plans, call logbook data where parents' feedback is usually recorded, students' test scores, and student attrition rates. These daily administrative records also provide concrete, quantitative data needed for critical incident appraisals.

The rating scales assessment originally used called for a fairly subjective performance classification of 1-5. This rating system was not well liked by teachers, especially during the interview sessions. As a manager I was also uncomfortable appearing to apportion blame or criticism in what I

felt could be a fairly subjective rating, especially knowing some teachers were indeed doing the best they could. Because teachers often focused on their rating instead of their performance, I felt it was necessary to eliminate the negative association of 1=poor, 3=average, 5=outstanding. In lieu of numbers I used adverbs of time (seldom, sometimes, always). This change allowed teachers to think in terms of performance and how to remedy performance gaps.

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One week prior to the appraisal interview, teachers were given an appraisal package and expected to reflect on their performance during the week. However, the self-appraisal was not discussed at the appraisal interview unless warranted by under-performance. This was necessary in light of time constraints.

Having staff dedicated to organizational objectives is a factor in achieving goals. Constructing a mission statement with employee participation and consensus seemed like a logical step, since "the idea of commitment based on shared goals and values is at the heart of the interest in corporate culture as a potential competitive advantage" (Davis, 1996: 97). Another staff meeting was spent identifying school goals and a set of core beliefs. The day's task was to produce a mission statement, vision statement, and shared goals to which a *Learning Company* would aspire (Pedler, 1991: 107-115). All of the documents were designed to be simple and brief, yet clear and articulate.

While investigating appraisal systems, I asked my teachers for a great deal of input. Many workshops were spent brainstorming issues that directly affect

teachers' work life. Suggestions from teachers have resulted in newly designed teacher-parent tele-conferencing forms, a new homework marketing campaign, and lesson plans. These three forms have resulted in greater productivity and efficiency.

Observations continued as part of the appraisal process. However, less emphasis was placed on formal observations. My presence altered class dynamics, thereby affecting observation outcomes. This was quite noticeable in classes that I did not share with teachers. The effect of 'observer's paradox' (Schiffrin, 1994) is a phenomenon that needs consideration if observations are to be considered an accurate portrayal of normal classroom routine. 'Observer's paradox' is the sociolinguistic phenomenon described by Labov whereby subjects' behavior changes when they are being observed.

Teachers at my school suggested that my previous pattern of teacher training via participant observer had been more effective than my role of passive observer. This role put the teachers and the students more at ease because they felt as if they were not being observed.

Teachers offered positive feedback to the 360-degree appraisal. Although the process was time consuming, my teachers engaged in the tasks with enthusiasm. Comments were made such as, "*This is unexpected. Managers have never asked us to be this involved in the running of a school. It feels good to be asked for advice and to give it.*" As a manager, I was quite satisfied with the display of cooperation and teamwork amongst the staff.

The move from performance appraisal to performance management took three years. At the start of this project I was puzzled by my employees' performance. I asked, "Is it the teachers or me as a manager? Or is it the organization itself?" This performance management project has helped me to see that organizational effectiveness is not dependent on any one individual, but on a whole team—employees and management—and that pervasive yet invisible 'thing' called

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organizational culture. Our efforts and time were well spent. In fact, the entire process was a learning experience not only for me but the entire staff. My staff and organization as a whole are profiting. The most observable improvement is employee self-management.

Conclusion

What I have learned and what I want to pass on to other managers can be summarized:

- Gain consensus on merits of appraisal system
- Encourage staff input on relevant issues
- Collect data from multiple sources for objectivity
- Appraise staff quarterly or as needed
- Set SMART goals for future performance
- Include post-appraisal monitoring
- Link in-house training to appraisals and satisfaction surveys
- Align the needs of management, teachers, and students

- Allow for a means of appraisal system evaluation and modification.

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Teachers Net
<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/payandperformance/performance/management/>
2GC
<http://www.2gc.co.uk/resources.asp>
Employers Organization
<http://www.lg-employers.gov.uk/people/performance/index.html>

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