Reflections on Performance Management (PM)

A. Introduction and Important Principles

Performance management is a day-to-day ongoing process that creates an environment in which individuals and groups are enabled to perform to the best of their ability. Skills, abilities and behaviors are monitored, encouraged and nurtured to allow workers to meet, and perhaps exceed, the targets and standards required for organizational success.

There are two reasons for managing performance of your workers. First, to ensure employees are competent in their work so that they can achieve the performance you want from them. Secondly, help employees grow in their abilities so they can perform as needed and expected.

If this happens, productivity will increase while also developing future managers and leaders.  (source link)

B. Too often PM is reduced to an annual form. That’s why people write and thousands buy books like Get Rid of the Performance Review and Abolishing Performance Appraisals.

Forms are included at the end of this topic. It is, however, best to understand successful practices -- lest someone buy a copy of one of these books for your organization.

C. Next, watch this product promotional video. You might not be in the market for HR software so while you watch, please ignore the issue of process automation. Consider, “Are they describing my employees’ and supervisors’ current reality?” “What ought our new normal be?”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HF07Cp8YCOQ

D. There is one watchword of your, well, not just performance management system but your company-employee relationship culture. Feedback must be the experience that stands out and speaks above all others.
If supervisors are doing a reasonable job at giving regular, clear, accurate feedback and an employee does not want that, then you probably don’t want that person as an employee at this time.

However, most of the time a staff member baulks at feedback is because more often than not, manager feedback is infrequent; saved, stored and poured out when the manager is frustrated and the employee – if not honestly surprised, is at least – caught off guard.

You may know the brain’s prefrontal cortex’s conscious logic systems are bypassed when cortisol floods around, the amygdala accentuates emotional reactions, adrenaline and other neurotransmitters peak or plummet and … then not much productive happens for an hour. Should someone happen to act on all that neuroscience activity in some, at this point, almost unavoidable ways, the consequences of create long term distrust, fear and … you get the idea.

Don’t lose the point in all the words. Many supervisors make PM a bad process that ought to be blown up.

But we don’t recommend throwing the PM form out with the bathwater (that is, the dirty waters of miscommunication and disrespect).

It is not within the scope of the document to address supervisory training. If nothing else, watch Dan Pink in his Ted Talk video, and read publications like the Harvard Business Review which has some useful blogs on the topic.

The problem, however, is reading seldom, seldom changes behavior. That requires an investment in well-delivered training. Not a head-on-the-stick-of-a-podium training. Education like this document provides, yes, and then classroom practice followed up with peer-to-peer, boss-to-manager and, yes, subordinate-to-manager feedback.

There’s that word again.

E. So if our assumption about supervisors being able to do a decent job of regular communicating (1) what a team member needs, (2) provides the resources for and removes the obstacles in the way of great performance, (3) then we can have, and should have, proper paper/computer documentation of performance.

There are legal reasons to have documented performance information. Some site/business certifications require a PM system to be in place and used. All fine. What about productivity in your workplace? Ever read the Gallup 12 questions? So, did you stop and watch that Dan Pink’s Ted Talk and memorize the three words of his “AMP” model?

(Pink’s book Drive is a good read though some say the Talk is plenty clear and it has nearly 10 million views between the Ted and YouTube websites. Towards the end of the video Pink mentions several programs to drive autonomy into the workplace: you are not likely to directly replicate.) Human motivation and business results are connected.

Tightly connected is the idea of employee engagement. This Gallup two-page article makes the case on the difference between highly and unengaged on performance. Bad PM crushes engagement. Great PM supports engagement.

F. The form does make a difference, although the process is more important.

Staff must also believe the process is fair. Have them complete a self-review and then manager’s complete an appropriate evaluation.

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