BY HEDDA BIRD

DON'T JUST **MANAGE PERFORMANCE** - IMPROVE IT!

5 Principles for

Brilliantly Effective

Performance Management

Introduction

Performance management has a reputation for repetitive bureaucracy, form filling and dreary conversations. Take a room full of company people and ask them what they think of performance management: the chances are they'll groan in unison. But if you ask those same people to describe a life changing moment when they were given feedback by an inspirational manager or mentor, then you wouldn't think you were in the same room. Suddenly, the room is full of people recalling how they changed direction, found new purpose in every-day work or made a tiny improvement to a process that helped their organisation immeasurably.

I like those moments. It's what I believe in, and it's what I've done for the past fifteen years. I've instilled my team at 3C Performance Management with the belief that organisations who manage performance are the ones that win. The organisations I have helped look to the future rather than to the past. They are stimulating places to work in because people and managers have the same shared goals and aspirations, and use constructive feedback to create a supportive working culture.

It's not easy, however. Performance management cultures vary hugely between organisations and I've learned that despite what you may read in the industry press and in leading academic journals, there are no simple hard and fast rules that can be applied without distinction across any organisation. Rather than rules, I've developed a set of principles that work pretty well in most of the organisations I see.

The principles have helped me to introduce performance management to a range of organisations, from start-ups managing performance on spreadsheets, to global companies rolling out multi-million pound software programmes.

My principles keep things simple, and give you the best chance of winning your colleagues' respect and recognition for making your organisation a better place to be in every day.

Five principles of performance management:

In this book I explore each of these principles, examine why they are important, and suggest how you might think about implementing them in your own working environment.

I encourage you to apply these five principles whenever you think about managing and improving performance.

Shared Purpose

If we talk about **'shared purpose'**, it's natural to assume that we are talking about the shared purpose of an organisation - what the organisation does, and what it stands for.   But I'd like to take the concept of shared purpose a step further, and explore the idea that shared purpose can also be a valuable principle for managing performance.

The idea that there needed to be a shared purpose for managing performance only came to me when I started talking to organisations at a senior level. I asked managers and chief executives an apparently simple question.

‘Why are you doing performance management?’

Their answers surprised me. It seems that many leaders think that performance management is a monitoring operation, that in fact the process of managing performance is no more than simply measuring it. So, there is a high focus on 'how many goals has an individual achieved' and 'how shall we distribute ratings' or even 'shall we rank people by performance?' These activities may possibly have some use but improving individual or organisation performance is not known to be one of them. And yet, why would anyone spend time on performance management if there wasn't at least some intention of improving performance? Who really seeks only to maintain the status quo?

In fact, my experience of much performance management has led me to conclude that managing performance and performance management are too often disconnected. Little in the typical process of performance management addresses improving performance.

Managers are of course taught in management development programmes that a prime part of their role as managers is to manage performance. Yet they experience 'performance management' as a separate activity determined by the HR department which may have many uses (or none) but does not seem connected to business performance. It's hardly surprising that many employees think that performance management has little value and creates little impact in their daily working lives.

What to do?
Leaders need their organisations to improve, it would be strange if they didn't. While improvement can come from investment in technology, better marketing or sales, and improved service or waste reduction, none of these improvements happen without people thinking, planning and implementing – turning strategy into action. At every level, organisations need people to contribute to improving performance. So, how can we move away from sterile debates about what merits a rating of 3 or 4 in an annual appraisal, and into a meaningful conversation about performance?

I've experimented with different ways to encourage people to reflect on the purpose of performance management. I learnt that if you ask 'Why should we do performance management in this organisation?' then the answers are predictable and unhelpful. People repeat management mantras about setting challenging objectives, giving feedback or assessing performance. They don't really know why the organisation should do performance management but assume there must be a good reason.

I've discovered one question that triggers thoughtful discussion on the purpose of performance management. It is

'How do you want to be treated at work?'

I find most people can answer this question, or variations on it, easily and clearly. Common answers include:
'I want to be treated
- with respect
- equally, independent from my seniority
- fairly and consistently, in line with how others are treated
- as someone who takes pride in their work
- as someone who can make a contribution beyond their immediate tasks
- as someone who can be trusted'.

I then typically follow up with a second, related question:

'What do you expect from other people at work?'

Again, this is a simple question, easy to understand and as it turns out, easy to answer. Here are some of the most common answers:
'I expect other people at work to
- get their part of the work done (on time)
- be helpful, be a co-operative colleague
- enable me to get my work done well
- think about their impact on others
- contribute some practical ideas about how to make things better'.

Alongside the positive statements are a few that sum up destructive behaviour:
'I do not want colleagues to
- play politics
- waste my time
- undermine me or others'.

When I look at these lists, I see striking parallels with the expectations that organisations have of their employees. What do organisations actually expect from employees? Amazon summed it up very well in a slogan run on recruitment posters in the UK in the year 2000 which was to: work hard, have fun, change the world. Indeed, most organisations want their employees to work hard, get on with each other (have fun) and change the world (deliver the results). So, it turns out that

what we most want and expect from each other as colleagues and co-workers is the same as what the organisation wants from us.

Just think about that for a moment. If organisations and employees have roughly the same expectations, then turning the expectations into a set of processes we can all use should give everyone something near to what they want.
It was this insight - that organisations and employees want pretty similar things from each other - that encouraged me to keep stripping away all the nonsense that has grown up around performance management, and discover what will actually work. Because when it does work, everyone is happier, more productive and less stressed – what's not to want?

Armed with the insight that employees and organisations have remarkably similar demands from each other we can:

Stop
thinking about performance management as an imposed process from above, and

Start
thinking about it as what we want to hold each other accountable for

And so,

the shared purpose of performance management IS
what we want and expect of each other.

The reality is, employees tend to care about the results of their work – be that to provide the best value mobile telephone contracts or reduce local homelessness. If you find this hard to believe, try talking to employees who for whatever reason cannot do a good job for their customer, and just hear the level of frustration and anger in their voices. Of course, if the systems prevent people from doing what they consider to be a good job, sooner or later they will give up trying and just aim to mitigate the amount of grief and blame that comes their way.

REFLECTION

How much are current performance management processes designed to deliver the strategy?

Think about your own answers to the question 'how do you want to be treated at work?'

ACTION

Use focus groups to find out what **EMPLOYEES** want to hold each other accountable for.

Explore with managers what the **ORGANISATION** wants from the time and effort spent on managing performance.

Build the business case for re-designing performance management to deliver the organisation's purpose and strategy.

If you start on a journey to build a shared purpose for managing performance, you may uncover a number of stresses and strains within the business. You may discover the blockers to people delivering, the system failures that make them feel bad, or, even worse, result in them being blamed for faults they are powerless to prevent. Be glad – you are finding out what is holding back performance. Knowledge is power! Even if you cannot solve the problems, you can at least create an open discussion that acknowledges them. Enabling senior managers to develop a deeper understanding of how blockers are holding back performance creates enormous value for the organisation.

Whatever you discover along the way, if there is a broadly agreed shared purpose, it is possible to create processes for managing performance that feel less like imposed bureaucracy and more like practical activities that help us all focus on the things that matter. Thus, performance conversations will feel more consistent as the whole organisation discusses the same overall aims, and feedback and coaching can be structured to support the shared purpose. Such conversations are more likely to be open, honest, and create a sense of trust across the workforce.

The more we can design our approach to performance management as a true reflection of 'what we really want to hold each other to account for' the more it becomes part of 'how we get things done around here'. Holding each other to account, informally and formally, is ingrained in any high-performance culture. It's why a shared purpose is the first of my principles for effective performance management.

Employee-led

The senior leaders and HR professionals that I talk to across industries are all very different. But they have a couple of important goals in common, goals they care about very deeply.

They ask me how they can get their people

- to take more ownership and responsibility for what they do every day
- to think about how they behave while doing it

There is a sense that the organisation must DO something to push people into taking greater ownership of their work as well as responsibility for their behaviour.   But if you stop and think about it, organisations cannot 'make' people change. An organisation can provide guidance, feedback, and training, but as far as an employee is concerned, the only person who can change my performance is me.

Employees need a clear understanding of their responsibilities. It is in every manager's interest to develop a culture of responsibility within their team. Taking ownership of performance does not come from a parent-child relationship where people are told what to do. Ownership comes from adult-adult relationships where people understand and accept what is expected of them by working 'with' their manager.

Here is one of my favourite examples of what can happen when an employee takes full ownership of their performance.

I was invited into the investment division of a FTSE 100 financial services firm with a brief to 'improve goal setting'. At first glance it seemed that apart from specific financial targets set for fund managers, goal setting for other staff in the division was weak – one junior manager had a goal to 'bring on the team', but neither she nor her manager really knew what it meant.

I spent a while talking to people, and I didn't get the sense that anyone really cared about goal setting anyway.

After a couple of weeks, I met the chief operating officer. He told me that eight months earlier he had given a mid-year review to a woman on his team, let's call her Chris. She was doing well in a demanding role, and rating four out of five on the firm's bonus scale. Naturally, she had asked what she had to do to get a five.

'The truth was,' said the COO, 'I didn't really know, I just told her to work harder.' Chris pushed for a clearer answer, since there was a substantial bonus at stake. The COO told me he sat down with her, and over several hours 'we mapped out what more she could achieve in some key areas of the business. I knew she wouldn't achieve it all, since the bar was really high, and she wouldn't have the time.' You won't be surprised to hear that Chris delivered on it all.

The observations of the COO are what interested me. He said: 'It made me realise that if Chris had not pushed me, the business would not have got all those things done. I wonder how much more we are missing out on because we aren't challenging ourselves.' Now I knew why goal setting was on the agenda!

This story is a perfect example of what happens when an employee owns their performance. Chris achieved far more than the organisation thought possible because she and the COO had worked together to set demanding goals. Her performance was managed by mutual agreement, rather than by a numerical rating.

In this situation, Chris did not need coaching, what she needed was a clear expectation of what she had to do. Once she knew and understood that, she took ownership and responsibility for delivering the results.

It is also worth noting that it takes far more time to develop challenging goals for senior people than anyone normally allows. Writing really demanding goals is about turning a strategy into action – it's hard to do well, and it takes time. Just because a process is employee-led, it does not mean a manager should invest less time in working with their people.

Employee-led performance management can also work well for employees on minimum wages. Indeed, those working in shops, restaurants, on trains and in hospitals often have to make decisions about how to respond to different situations all day. It is easy to laugh at employees in service jobs who are obviously repeating a company script but what it points to is an utter lack of confidence by managers that employees will take any responsibility for what they say or how they say it. In the long run, no service business can survive if they can't trust their staff to deliver the service.

So, the organisation must create an environment where people know what is expected of them, and feel capable of delivering it.

Employee-led means that employees

-have access to data that will help them understand how well they are doing
-feel they have 'permission' to talk about performance matters with their colleagues and managers
-are confident and capable of holding (and eventually leading) a conversation about their performance.

The employee-led criteria vary across different organisations depending on their every-day operations, but the underlying principles are the same. The data about performance in a restaurant kitchen, for example, might be about food hygiene, while in an investment bank it might be about stock movements. Kitchen staff might talk about performance during a five-minute coffee break with their manager, while fund managers might need to book an hour for a meeting in their manager's online diary. Either way, employee ownership comes from the organisation making the space – sometimes literally – for the meetings to happen.

It takes a while to get used to employee-led performance management. Some employees will need to develop more confidence and competence. The data about performance may need to be restructured to make it more accessible, and managers will have to re-think how they plan and discuss performance issues.

In my experience, most organisations have a mix of people, from those already taking full ownership of what they do, to those who don't expect to do anything other than follow instructions.

The role of the manager

When employee-led performance is up and running, the manager's role tends to shift. He or she spends less time on 'telling' and gives more attention to feedback and coaching. The manager must still ensure the team know how well things are going in relation to targets, KPIs or business plans.

The manager remains responsible for results, for holding people accountable. If an employee is not delivering, then the manager needs to take action. Employee-led performance management does not mean a manager can abdicate responsibility for delivering results.

However, serial under-performers are rare in most organisations. The real challenge is to improve 'average' or 'mediocre' performers. My experience suggests that, in most cases, it is only when people start to take ownership and responsibility for their own performance that there is the opportunity to make significant lasting improvements in organisational performance.

REFLECTION

How many of your employees are ready to take the lead on performance conversations?

What data would be valuable to employees as they think about their performance, and how could they access it?

What support will managers need to move to an employee-led approach to managing performance?

ACTION

Prepare your workforce to take the lead on performance conversations.

Work with leaders and managers to clarify what 'excellent' would look like for the core roles.

Start a conversation about maximising the potential of employees in existing roles.

Feedback to Learn From

Feedback is about the future, not the past. Great feedback helps us learn from what has happened in the past in order to influence what we do in the future.

But conventional performance reviews in most organisations are not structured to deliver feedback in order to influence the future. Instead, annual performance reviews are just that, 'reviews' of previous actions taken in the last 12 months by the employee. The review meeting is designed to push managers and employees into agreeing about events, actions and behaviours that are in the past. A satisfactory performance review is seen to be one where manager and employee agree on the events that took place, and how the employee dealt with a variety of situations. But the review misses an important factor, it mostly fails to create a space where we can learn from what happened.

When personally receiving feedback, I aim to focus on how the feedback can make a positive impact on what I do in the future. Usually, this means that the sooner I receive relevant feedback, the more use it is to me, and the more likely I am to be able to use the feedback to influence positively what I do next.

I have always found that looking back at whether I rated three or four out of five on last year's work is an unrewarding exercise. Usually, however good or bad it was, the time to learn has passed. I undoubtedly need to learn from what happened last year - and plan to change how I work this year – but I'll do that best if I have constant feedback during the year. A one-off formal meeting at the end of the year isn't helpful, it is too late.

If you have children studying for exams, they will no doubt have a number of tests and mock exams along the way. No school would risk not giving any 'exam style' feedback to a child before the real thing. Yet that is exactly what we do to many of our employees – give them no real feedback all year, and then tell them what grade they got.

Conversely, we all receive feedback that is sometimes very unhelpful – someone honks their horn because they want right of way; someone else criticises our appearance, a customer is angry about a matter beyond our control. We have got so used to filtering out this unhelpful noise that we can miss the genuine feedback – the feedback we can learn from.

Feedback is how we learn, from our first days of life onwards. Babies cry to get attention, they continue to cry until they get what they need. As we receive more information from the world, we apply that information in different situations, and learn from what happens. Feedback is how we learn, it is necessary and critical for improving performance.

The tragedy we live with is that in working environments we have allowed feedback to become criticism, and our reaction to feedback to become defensive. No wonder organisations seem not to learn from past mistakes, and no wonder improving performance has become so difficult. Part of the problem is that people under

pressure criticise others for what they are doing, rather than enabling them to learn. Over the years I have reflected at length on why we find giving and receiving feedback so difficult as adults, when it is how we have learned to survive throughout our lives. I think it is do with the complexity of the data we are processing. A child learns 'this is hot, best not to touch it' pretty quickly after one burning experience. An older child learns 'when I keep my eye on the ball I score more goals' or 'if I practise my handwriting it gets better'. In other words, as we develop, we discover that we can learn and improve over time.

The challenge comes in working environments when either we don't get clear feedback, or we don't accept the data on which the feedback is based. One client of mine employed a doorman who scowled at everyone who approached the company's front door. People I spoke to told me 'the doorman is always so miserable'. When we finally spoke to him, we discovered that he thought he was communicating a 'strong and protective' face to the world, and that was the right thing to do.
The doorman needed some feedback about the impression he was creating, compared with the impression the company wanted him to create – or to put it more simply, he needed some useful, non-critical feedback based on information. Feedback we actually learn from is based on information that we accept as trustworthy. All sorts of information may be useful, from customer comments and colleagues' reactions, to sales figures and market research. Whatever information we use, the point is to move away from opinion about what has happened, and into some level of evidence about the impact of actions taken.

Broadly, there are three core opportunities for giving helpful feedback, and they tend to use different types of data, information and evidence to enable learning.

1. In the moment feedback

In the moment feedback is a quick response to something that has just happened. It's not planned in advance. It can be as simple as

'your very thorough preparation helped that negotiation meeting go well'
or
'your late arrival at the meeting upset the client making the negotiation more difficult'.

It is feedback that is best given straight away otherwise its impact will be lost, or the moment forgotten.

The evidence or data to support the feedback is often very simple, resulting in a quick learning moment, e.g. 'it was worth taking the time to prepare properly' or 'being late can have unfortunate consequences'.

However, even this level of feedback can go wrong if the person receiving it does not accept the data, e.g. 'though I was late, the meeting went badly because someone else had not prepared properly'.

In this situation, it is even more important that the two people giving and receiving the feedback engage in the discussion, otherwise the problems will never be addressed. It may be that several people bear some responsibility for the meeting not going well. Not giving anyone feedback will only exacerbate the problems in future.

The *general rule* is that if there is some sort of problem, the sooner the feedback is given

the easier it is to both give and receive

the more likely it is that the problem can be addressed.

Many managers do not realise the power of 'in the moment' feedback, and so don't make enough use of it to drive performance. Of all the three feedback situations, 'in the moment feedback' is the one that managers can most easily build into a habit. Even a simple aim to give a single specific piece of feedback to each member of their team once a day, or once a week, can quickly build a feedback habit that will change how people perform.

2. Regular one-to-one meetings

The feedback at a regular, planned meeting is typically about deadlines, delivery, timings and budgets. If given well, the feedback should have an immediate impact on how a job is done, and deliver the results required. It may lead to coaching or a broader discussion about blockers to performance. Both manager and employee can prepare for the meeting and may have feedback for each other. The frequency of regular feedback meetings depends on the employee's level of autonomy and the pace of work. A customer service employee paid the minimum wage may benefit most from 15 minutes of one-to-one feedback and coaching every week. Salaried knowledge workers also benefit from specific feedback and coaching, but a longer meeting once a month may be more useful.

For managers, the vital aspect of regular one-to-one meetings is keeping people on track to deliver results. When managers worry that employee-led approaches reduce their ability to control, my response is that managing work and results is central to the regular one-to-one conversation.

Through the feedback given at regular one-to-one meetings, managers can build confidence that results are being delivered, and employees can learn what is going well and what they need to do to improve.

Too many people at all levels tell me that their regular one-to-ones are often cancelled or postponed at short notice. My experience is that the more employees tell me that they don't get regular one-to-ones, the more likely chief executives are to tell me that performance is weak, and people are not being held to account. Ironically, some of those same chief executives will tell me that they don't have one-to-ones with their direct reports because 'they are all great people and don't need me to tell them what to do'.

We learn from feedback. If we don't get specific feedback, we will make assumptions about what we are doing. If the chief executive does not have regular one-to-one meetings with their direct reports, they may assume they are

a) doing well

b) being ignored

c) on their way out.

In other words, the decision NOT to give people feedback is simply to give them a different kind of feedback, which may not be the message intended at all.

3. Regular 'big picture' performance conversations

I can't stress enough my view that the annual appraisal conversation with employees needs to be replaced with three or four conversations about the 'bigger picture' that take place throughout the year. These meetings enable the organisation to deliver strategy, transformation and change. They move beyond targets and KPIs. A competent manager will use the meeting to give an employee a sense of the bigger picture, of his or her role in the organisation, and their impact on team and departmental performance.

Coaching forms an important part of these meetings and looks at long term improvements, skill development, individual contributions and other challenges facing the organisation where the individual may be able to make a difference.

Feedback in these conversations is most helpful if it moves beyond current responsibilities and towards development for the future. For some that will be a conversation about taking on wider responsibilities, while for others it might be about upgrading skills to reflect the changing demands of work.

Final thoughts

Whether we like it or not, we give people feedback, verbal and non-verbal, all the time. From the speed with which we respond to email, to the amount of time we spend talking to them, everything we do communicates to others what we think about them. No-one can monitor every aspect of body language or get the tone of every email perfect. What matters is that we take the time to give each other feedback that enables us to learn. Without this feedback, the organisation is highly unlikely to improve its performance in any sustainable way.

REFLECTION

Does your workforce use feedback effectively to focus on the future?

How confident are people at giving and receiving feedback?

Is useful data available to support big picture conversations?

ACTION

Start a conversation about the role of feedback in the organisation.

Compare the feedback the organisation is giving itself (summarise the quantitative data from all reviews) with other relevant organisation performance data. What does the comparison reveal?

Implement a learning opportunity for all employees on how to make the most of feedback they receive, and how to give useful feedback to others.

Team contribution

DEFINITION:

Real Team: No-one can succeed unless we all succeed.

A Group: We work together, or have the same overall goal, or have the same manager, but individuals can be seen to succeed while others in the same group may not.

Individual Contributor: I achieve my results pretty much independently of anyone else (though of course I still need support functions such as IT and finance).

In today's working environments, very few people are delivering results independently of others. It is unusual, even in the creative arts, for people to create their best work when sitting alone in an attic. So most of us are to some extent working with others in what we loosely describe as teams.

However, a team can mean very different things in different situations, even when in the same organisation. When exploring how to make teams effective it is really helpful to understand what sort of team we are talking about. How is responsibility shared across the team, how long does the team function as a team, are members of the team also members of other teams at the same time?

Like so much else in managing people, team working appears to be a simple idea, but once we start exploring the practice of improving performance in teams, the very different nature of teams will lead us into some different practices. However, there is some very valuable research that indicates the power of team working.

The Research

An academic called Michael West spent some time researching the impact of various HR policies on hospital performance across the NHS in England. Within this he researched the effectiveness of 'real teams' in hospital environments. A real team is a group of people who can only succeed if all members of the team succeed. An obvious example of a real team in a hospital is a surgical operation where a surgeon, no matter how brilliant, cannot perform a successful operation without a good anaesthetist and nurse.
The research found that there was a correlation between the number of hospital employees working in real teams and a reduction in mortality rates.

Reflect on that statement before you read on – it says that the more employees with shared team goals the fewer people will die.

And the power of that statement is that we aren't just talking about surgery where staff work in real teams, the implication is that the hospital will benefit if all employees work in real teams. A receptionist, for example, may have an individual goal to 'be a better receptionist'. If management replaces that individual goal with a shared team goal to 'run a better reception' then the research suggests the overall performance of the hospital will improve.

Not every organisation will want to move all employees into real teams with team goals, but the principle can be included in performance management through a focus on contribution to the team.

In my experience, organisations and senior leaders face a paradox when thinking about team working. They see data and evidence that real teams drive organisation performance, but believe they rose to the top by individual effort, rather than through team work.

So, there is a deeply ingrained belief at a senior level that it is the individual's performance that matters most, and not the contribution to team performance. The impact of this belief is that leaders want to rate and rank employees to find 'the top performers'. Employees see that the way to success is to be seen to be the best, and unfortunately, that can lead to disrupting others rather than improving our own performance. You may think this is cynical, but I am constantly told by employees with high bonus opportunities that they spend more time fighting each other than driving the business. In-fighting, high levels of internal politics and 'seeing off your colleagues' can be the highly destructive norm. Is this really what we want?

So, though I see organisations using time and resources to talk about teamwork, and training people to work well in teams, I see a lot of the impact of teamwork dissipated as individuals compete with each other to be seen as the top performer. Organisations improve performance when people have shared goals, where no-one can succeed unless the whole team succeeds. Taking a real team approach means thinking differently about assessing performance, and ensuring that performance conversations include meaningful sections about contributing to the team.

Simplicity

By now you will have realised that although managing performance is underpinned by powerfully simple ideas, its implementation is much more complicated. You would not have expected it to be any other way. If managing performance was easy, you wouldn't be reading this book.

The job of those designing ways to manage performance is to keep the process as simple as possible. Unfortunately, in an effort to 'cover every eventuality' and document every detail, performance management processes become complex and bureaucratic. It is so easy to complicate performance management and much more difficult to make it simple.

'Simplifying' performance management means to

be clear about what is expected from managers and employees

strip away every activity that is not focused on the prime purpose

minimise documentation at every level

make it as easy as possible to record and capture essential information

design a 'little and often' approach to prevent more complex issues developing.

This is easy to say, but in practice can be hard to do.

What does a simple approach to performance management look like?

You will have a sufficiently simple approach when employees can describe in a few sentences how their performance is managed.

For example:

A project-based knowledge worker: I meet with my manager every month to review project targets and budgets. We have a longer conversation three times a year looking at the bigger picture and reflecting on how well I am doing. Once a year we talk in detail about my development options.

A coffee-bar worker: I have a quick debrief with my supervisor at the end of each shift – what's gone well, and how I coped with problems. Once a month we have at least fifteen minutes in private when I can raise any concerns I have, and discuss what I have to do to get on. Every three months we have a 90-minute team meeting when we talk about how we could run the café better and look at any changes to the food or drink we are offering on our menu.

Simplify by focusing on the purpose

Complexity sets in when many other apparently desirable outcomes are added to the design. Before long, the purpose is lost, and the motivation gone. Additionally, the use of much performance management software and documentation exacerbates the problem. Since software developers need to enhance their software with an endless string of 'new releases', they create a stream of new features that though simple in themselves, add complexity to the total offer. HR professionals see the possible use of each of these features, but before they know where they are, the simplest of approaches is burdened with endless choices and options. Even explaining the many different choices and options creates more than enough complexity. Of course, software is useful in many situations, but it is essential that those in the driving seat are ruthless in eliminating all but the most vital elements.

REFLECTION

Can your employees describe how their performance is managed?

If not, what needs to change?

ACTION

Review and simplify documentation and software.

Streamline processes to minimise the need to make decisions – you want people to talk about performance, not be puzzled by the process.

What's next?

So there you are, five principles that I know from experience will help you design and deliver an approach to managing performance that has a good chance of success. You are now in a position to start trying and applying these principles in practice. The principles work at every level in all kinds of organisations.

Reading about performance management is far easier than talking about it and championing it within your organisation. To get you going I recommend that you

kickstart new ideas with the Reflection and Action boxes

share this book with your colleagues to give you a common language to talk about performance

engage people, whether on the Board or on the front line, in developing a new approach to managing performance

look back at the very first principle of Shared Purpose, and remind yourself that most people want the chance to do well, excel and develop. That is what you will be offering them. Get started!

I would be delighted to hear how you get on!

Hedda Bird

For more resources, a quick benchmarking exercise, or some case studies visit

www.3cperform.co.uk

IF YOU WANT A FRESH APPROACH TO PERFORMANCE REVIEWS OR APPRAISALS, THIS SHORT, THOUGHT-PROVOKING READ WILL GET YOU THINKING DIFFERENTLY ABOUT PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN YOUR ORGANISATION.

Performance management is changing rapidly. Rigid systems with heavy bureaucracy are being replaced with a wide range of more flexible approaches that differ widely across sectors and cultures, and sometimes within one organisation. Too many people are tinkering with changing forms or adding 'a coaching focus', yet fail to create any value. And yet, no organisation can deliver high performance year in and year out without effective performance management.

Renowned performance management specialist Hedda Bird distils her expertise into 5 principles that consistently underpin the most successful approaches to managing performance. Don't start without it!