



SPECIALISTS IN
PERFORMANCE
MANAGEMENT

Case study

How to appraise experts and professionals

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Many of today's knowledge-led organisations depend on a workforce of highly-educated subject experts and professionals.

A College set the goal of becoming a University within five years.

The leadership knew this would need a radically different approach to managing the performance of all staff - particularly the academics.

When 3C were engaged, the academics had agreed their performance would be assessed, but not exactly *how* it would be assessed.



Evidence-led explanation of why you recommend one approach over another is essential

Hedda Bird says: 'people who are experts in their field often think they know more about Performance Management than HR professionals, their managers, or external experts. In these circumstances, it's essential to use evidence-led practice. You need to explain why you are recommending one approach over another. You need to be confident in handling an academic level of scrutiny and be prepared for demanding discussions.' Overall, the message to the academics was: 'you are welcome to propose another approach, but it must have the same outcome.'

Wide consultation and transparency breaks down barriers

Everyone was invited to open house working groups, attending as few or as many sessions as they wanted with the output circulated and available to all. The group provided space for honest and in-depth discussions.

The consultation and engagement led to widespread ownership of the process as it developed. Potential concerns about 'time-wasting' and 'pointlessness' were gradually overcome, and, as more and more people came on board with the process, a shift in attitude towards the benefits of performance management started to take place.

"I thought performance management was all about making everyone work harder, and that made me feel bad because they work so hard already.

But actually it's been about bringing us all together to focus on what matters, and that has been excellent."

Dean of one of the Schools



'How can I be appraised by someone who is not an expert in my subject?'

It's not unusual for subject experts to ask: 'how can I be appraised by someone who knows less about my subject than I do?' As well as teaching, academics now needed to establish and develop courses, set standards, manage and mentor staff and students and meet a number of new requirements in the move to University status.

The question of what to appraise and how to appraise therefore shifted away from pure subject expertise to a wider range of criteria that impact overall performance.

Forum Theatre has huge benefits when applied to an expert workforce

All employees were involved in Forum Theatre sessions as part of the training and roll out. 3C has found Forum Theatre to be highly effective with experts and professionals because it goes straight to the question of behaviour and cuts through any intellectualising.

Success comes from deep engagement with the staged interaction rather than 'being clever' or 'winning people round' to a particular viewpoint. Forum Theatre showed how a successful performance conversation worked rather than told the academics what to do. The result was the academics taking ownership of the outcomes and a high level of good practice being implemented in the workplace.

Tackling the issue of reward payments

Once positive performance reviews were taking place and a set of Professional and Academic Behaviours were agreed, the team addressed reward. This subject needs careful handling in public and not-for-profit sectors: well-paid experts and professionals are unlikely to put in discretionary effort because of the reward. Indeed, they might be insulted by such a suggestion. Given the relatively small amounts available (in this case a maximum of 5% of salary) 3C recommended using phrases such as 'merit award', 'thank you', and 'acknowledgement of your hard work', rather than expressions such as 'to motivate you', 'to raise your performance', or 'to reward your results'. This subtle but important shift in emphasis was well received.

Commitment to continuously improving how performance is managed

The College achieved the goal of University status within its target 5 year timeframe.

Of the 50% of managers who responded to a survey, over 90% agreed or strongly agreed 'that their team appreciated the time spent discussing their performance and development'. A further 94% agreed or strongly agreed that overall the conversations were constructive, even where people were given some difficult messages.

Perhaps the single biggest outcome is the recognition that managing performance is a journey not a destination; there is widespread commitment to continuously improving how performance is managed in future.

"A formulaic approach to appraising simply does not work with technical experts or professionals."

3C insight – Hedda says:

'In projects involving engineers, medical professionals, academics, accountants, lawyers and even rocket scientists, we have found that a rigorous approach to designing, assessing and improving performance based on evidence is really important.

Such employees are often in short supply, hard to recruit and retain. Formulaic appraisal does not make the most of their capabilities. Technical 'experts' may see themselves as equal or superior to their managers, have little regard for people management skills, and may struggle to become effective people managers themselves.

To counter the argument that performance reviews 'are all subjective' a helpful approach is to develop the message that 'we are all developing our expertise to make professional judgements.' When managing the performance of valuable experts and professionals it really pays to understand their mind-set and motivation.'



Hedda Bird, 3C Managing Director and Founder



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"We saw a marked difference with all our people. Our managers and employees are now more enthused and motivated, and there is a real drive to get their Performance Reviews done - and done effectively."

*Victoria Wilkins, HR Business Partner,
Land Securities plc*

"...thank you for the expert work you and your colleagues at 3C have done to help set our objectives and implement our strategy. I did not fully appreciate the benefits until I saw how it has worked out this year. There has been visible change in focus. Much of the success was due to the clear and engaging way you presented the issues to senior staff."

*Professor Steven Cowley,
CEO, United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority*

"3C has enabled Iron Mountain to transform Performance Management from being a form-filling exercise into a value added activity that is seen to fundamentally drive engagement, commitment and overall business performance."

Rachel Greenway, Leadership Development Manager, Iron Mountain Europe

Since 2001, 3C has been helping HR professionals create high-performing organisations.

As Performance Management specialists, 3C's refreshing and energising approach is designed to address and resolve the key Performance Management issues that HR Professionals face.

- Engaging your senior leadership team
- Providing your managers with skills and knowledge for effective performance reviews
- Enabling your people to take ownership of their own performance.

Contact 3C today to discuss how we can help

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