

Performance Management and Development Schemes

In theory all public service managers should be doing performance feedback with employees as that was agreed with the union at the peak level.

When done properly Performance Feedback systems can be good for employees because they force supervisors to say how they will assist anyone who they think isn't doing well rather than focussing on punitive behaviour that does nothing to help the employee. In many cases where there are problems with such a scheme it may be that the supervisor has failed to provide fair feedback on performance via an agreed performance feedback system.

In each agency the performance schemes have different names e.g. 'performance development', 'performance feedback', 'coaching and performance' etc. Many members express concern that managers may misuse Performance Management.

Prepare for the interview

It is very important that employees are not passive in the exercise otherwise the supervisor may make all sorts of subjective assessments that are not fair. The best way to do this is to think about your job and define some goals you would like to be measured against **before** you go into an interview.

Read your official job statement (statement of duty or position description). Performance Development should not require you to work beyond your job statement.

If you work in an area where a lot of people do the same work the supervisors may be tempted to measure you all against the same criteria but this isn't helpful because you all have different needs/skills.

If you work in a team consider getting together with your colleagues, even if you don't get along with all of them, and discuss whether there should be some common goals against which you should be measured either as individuals or as a group. This way you can probably develop a list of common goals as well as ones that are particular to you or goals that might help with your training and development. While your performance assessment is confidential, nothing stops you disclosing what you want with your colleagues

Be assertive not aggressive

Using assertive language in these assessments gives you a tool to help redress some of the power imbalance in the relationship. It allows you to spell out what you need and how you feel without being accusatory and escalating any tension.

Assertive language is not accusatory. Assertive sentences usually start with 'I' and emphasise your needs. So instead of saying "You always give me the paper work late" try "I need to receive your paper work by 12 to meet the publishing deadlines". The first sentence focuses the supervisor on defending themselves whereas the second one will focus their attention on your needs. Remember, even if your supervisor *is* at fault, it is easier for them to agree to your request for help than to agree that they are at fault. So focus on what you want instead of getting into a pointless argument.

Hint: Supervisors will tend to focus on the needs of the job as it relates to them. However, your career aspirations probably go beyond the narrow needs of your current job and the area you work in. Don't be afraid to mention your career development needs or possible ways you might pick up relevant skills.

If the supervisor is suggesting a goal or a measurement method you aren't happy with then suggest other ways the issue might be resolved. Don't be rushed - you don't have to think of a solution on the spot. You can ask to resume the session later when you've had time to think or speak with your colleagues.

Don't be afraid to identify areas where you'd like assistance or areas of work that you think might impede your performance. That way if you don't meet the goals you can check to see whether the agreed assistance was given e.g. if technology broke down or you didn't receive the agreed support then you have a valid reason for not achieving the goal.

If you don't agree with an assessment you usually have the right to dispute it or at least make your own annotations on the paperwork. You have the right to refuse to sign the paperwork. Indeed for a performance management system to work properly there has to be consent about the goals and what is to be measured. Ideally managers shouldn't be attempting to measure everything you do but rather some indicative things that you will be working on in the next 6 months. A good system should identify what you need to do your job e.g. if people don't give you paperwork in a timely manner does that affect your ability to meet deadlines. If you are given poor quality "tools of the trade" or inadequate training does that affect the quality of your work? At the end of the 6 month period you might agree that certain goals were not met but it isn't your fault if new priority goals were set or technology failed or you weren't able to go on the course that would have given you the key skills to finish your work.

Is there a reward for 'success'? Is there punishment for 'failure'?

There is no reward for 'success' in the Performance Management and Development Scheme beyond the normal pay as there is no separate agreed 'reward' system. Nor is there a link to increments. The emphasis should be on developing the performance of the employee not on reward or punishment.

Don't be defensive. Make the exercise work in your favour. Know what you want before the session begins and don't let your supervisor do all the talking. After all that if you find that the supervisor is using the session in a negative or non-constructive way and doesn't allow you fair input to the process then simply tell the supervisor that you will not sign the proposed assessment as it doesn't reflect an agreed position. Then seek assistance from your colleagues or a delegate. It's better to learn through this process that you have different expectations than to blunder on for months each being frustrated with the other. Performance feedback systems are not meant to be part of the disciplinary process and there are other guidelines for handling poor performance.

If any performance issues are identified by any review then the focus should be on how to develop and assist the employee to meet the expectations and job requirements e.g. constructive feedback on written work, mentoring, formal courses etc. No one should be told point blank that they are 'not up to standard' without being offered assistance to meet the goals. The best words to memorise when walking into one of these sessions is 'and how will you support me in meeting these goals' or better still 'in order to meet these goals I expect that you will x, y, z'.