

Performance Management

MYTH BUSTERS

While the practices of Performance Management and Development have been around for some time, they have not always been embedded consistently which can lead to some misunderstanding about how they should actually work. Here are some myths that you may come across in your workplace which may have started through some of these misunderstandings.

Performance management is about managing bad performance

Performance management and development is primarily about working to optimise and improve the performance of all employees in an organisation through setting goals and clarifying expectations, building effective performance partnership between managers and employees, and coaching and developing employees to perform at their best. You will find people performing at the top level in a wide range of occupations using the practices of performance management and development to help them continually improve.

Participation in performance management and development is voluntary

Participation in performance management and development is a requirement of employment in the South Australian Public Sector. Aside from being a key ingredient in good governance, it is the foundation for delivering value, meeting agreed standards of service and following through on commitments made to the community. This is why it has been highlighted in the Public Sector Act 2009.

Performance reviews are just a one-way conversation.

Good performance reviews require open communication between managers and employees – that means both need to ask questions, listen and contribute to the discussion. To work in genuine partnership, this also means that managers need input and feedback from employees. This would include a “self-assessment” of performance, the development activities that will best support them, and thoughts about goals in the future. It is also important for employees to provide managers with feedback on their approach and how this has supported them in performing to their best.

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It is up to the manager to set goals and objectives

While it is a manager's responsibility to facilitate performance management and ensure that appropriate goals in place, they cannot do this without the partnership of employees. If goals/ objectives are to be achievable and relevant to the individual staff member, there needs to be discussion and agreement on what they are and the how they will be achieved. For more information on how to set S.M.A.R.T. goals and objectives, see the quick reference guide [here](#).

You can't have a good development plan without getting funding for external training

Often people think about development at work as formal training or education programs which required specific funding. While these can be valuable, there are many other ways that learning can take place at work through on the job experience, mentoring and coaching from other colleagues, and gaining exposure to new responsibilities or tasks. For more information on development planning, see the quick reference guide [here](#).

You can't do performance and development reviews during times of change

Change in the South Australian Public Sector is a reality of life and necessary in order to reflect the evolving needs of the communities and the environment we operate in. If we were to wait for things to stop changing, we would not make any progress. Performance and development reviews can actually be a very helpful tool to help managers and employees track how priorities and expectations may need to shift when change occurs in your agency.

I am busy managing the work and don't have time to waste on performance management.

Managing performance and development is part of getting work done rather than an additional task in itself. Investing time in building relationships with your colleagues and helping them to develop is not time wasted - on the contrary, it will improve their performance and hence their work output.

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I should only provide feedback during formal performance reviews

Performance feedback should be regular, timely and mostly informal. Regular check-ins help managers and staff to identify issues early and prevent performance going off track. Don't wait until the mid-year or end-of-year performance review to provide feedback to one another – the opportunity has been lost and issues have been left to compound and escalate. During formal performance reviews no-one should not be met with any surprises! To this end, although there is a place for formal performance reviews, they simply should be seen as another coaching conversation in a continuous cycle of conversations. For more information on giving and receiving feedback, see the quick reference guide here.

Giving critical feedback causes conflict and makes me look like the 'bad guy' or that I am being difficult

It is true that some people – both managers and employees can feel uncomfortable about providing critical feedback, but when shared in the right way is unlikely to cause conflict. If feedback is provided in a regular, timely and informal manner, managers and staff will have a clear understanding about how they are performing. Showing appreciation and building rapport frequently with your colleagues also helps ensure they will be more open to feedback. It does take practice, but sharing critical feedback with others can often build more respect.

People who are performing well don't need to participate in performance management

Almost everyone, no matter how high performing, will have things to work on. No one wants to be left alone to fail and even high performers appreciate offers of guidance from time to time. High performers are more likely to feel the 'lack of challenge' more acutely than others given their skills and motivation.

People should just know that they are doing a good job, managers don't need to tell them

It's not a guessing game! Positive recognition of good work is an important motivator for everyone. Without it, even the most skilful people will fail to achieve their potential as they feel unrecognised and taken for granted. Providing positive feedback helps create a positive and personally rewarding working environment in which people are much more likely to shine!

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Showing appreciation takes too much time

Showing appreciation is usually the sort of thing you can do quickly, and as frequently as sincerity permits. It might be as simple as saying thanks to someone at the end of the day or acknowledging the pressure someone is under. It can be just as helpful for managers to know what staff members appreciate from their contribution as it is for staff to know what managers appreciate.

Employee goals should only be aligned with the team and organisation's goals

Whilst it is important that staff goals be aligned with the team and organisation's goals, where possible goals should also be aligned with a person's own strengths and career goals, to ensure they are fully engaged and motivated. Set goals collaboratively – goals that you dictate to a person won't do anything to inspire performance and may even be resented. For more information on setting goals, see the quick reference guide here.

People's output and results are the most important thing

Whilst it's important to produce great results, the way a person behaves towards others in order to achieve these results is equally important. Remember, good performance = results and behaviour. For information on assessing performance, see the quick reference guide here.

People generally don't like to be involved in performance management.

Most people want and expect feedback. Even critical feedback is valuable because it gives people a chance to improve their performance and be more successful. Sometimes, giving critical feedback can be difficult; however, this is an essential part of managerial responsibilities and our responsibilities to others as colleagues in the public sector.

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I shouldn't ask people about their weekend, hobbies and interests as it's not work related and people may not like to be asked.

Whilst some people may not like talking about their weekend and hobbies, it is nevertheless important to connect with people at a personal level to form a positive work environment in which people are engaged and motivated. People like to feel valued as a person, not just their work, so it's important to understand who they are and learn some of the things that are important to them in life. You will need to watch and listen for cues that reveal a person's likes and dislikes. You will pick up their preferences through what they choose to talk about, their facial expressions, body language and tone. This will help you develop a sense of the person and enable you to adapt your approach to match. For more information on building rapport with employees, see the quick reference guide [here](#).

It's risky to talk to people about something that needs improvement, as they may take offence.

While it is not possible to control the way everyone responds to feedback, you can provide honest, critical feedback in a way that is likely to be perceived as constructive. Failing to address an issue in a timely manner is riskier, as it can cause significant problems in the future, especially if formal processes become necessary. If we don't share feedback with others we work with, we actually deny them the opportunity to develop. Done well, people can actually appreciate critical feedback.

I don't have a right to discuss someone else's behaviour at work unless it's about their actual work tasks. They have a right to behave how they like.

In the workplace, conduct and behaviour are conceptually one and the same. All conduct by an employee is relevant to the assessment of whether or not they are performing their role satisfactorily. The Code of Conduct makes it clear that the behaviour of public sector employees may be subject to scrutiny and considered as unsatisfactory performance, even if it occurred outside working hours.