



Leadership for performance, not performance management!

Performance management hangs heavily in many staffrooms. When invited into staff TPL or PD sessions we are regularly surprised at how often we hear comments from attendees such as, “That was actually useful”, “I really enjoyed that” or “I can do something with this”.

Working with executive teams trainers often engage in deficiency based PD sessions, targeting one to two people in the room and berating or demotivating the otherwise engaged staff. Our conversations focus on “gaps”, “issues” or “systems” without entertaining an emotive perspective, value proposition or inclusive approach. As such the resistance to development, training or personal development becomes associated with negativity; staff begin to dread the time rather than embracing it as part of their long term career and personal development plans.

As leaders there are a number of considerations you must entertain and ideally embrace to turn your own thinking and that of your teams to increase outcomes from development time, costs and opportunities. Below are just a few for your reflection.

Recognising staff as talent

Commercial businesses have long thought of their employees as “talent”, individuals with strengths and abilities independent of others in their team, department or potentially, business. Engaging with employees as talent management has extended business capability, reduced reactive recruitment and improved training functions which ultimately support the achievement of essential business strategies through maximising staff entering and within the business.

Within education we often hear of faculty or departmental “silos” where managers are established through longevity, systems are immobile and challenge from staff is discouraged. The issue with this thinking is that it is stagnant. As employees, educators grow and develop within their profession and they should be offered opportunities to extend knowledge, to build capability and diversify their skillset to benefit their personal career aspirations and the goals of the school itself.



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Embracing a learning model

Einstein famously said, “Once you stop learning, you start dying”. Harsh as it may sound, as leaders responsible for empowering our staff to inspire youth to embrace a lifetime of learning, we must role model the same behaviours.

Learning as educators can be achieved in a multitude of different manners to respond to diverse personalities and so learning styles. Just as we seek to individualise and extend our students’ learning we must show the same respect for our talent. A few approaches include:

- **Review** – Learn through reading and sharing with others
- **Practical** – On the job learning through team teaching
- **Analysis** – Situation and example-based analysis
- **Structured** – Extended formal training
- **Conversational** – Interpersonal discussions and story sharing.

Career planning of talent

Once you view your staff as talent you can begin to engage with them in proactive, non-judgemental discussions relating to their particular career plans and aspirations. We have been involved in many engagements with educators aspiring to be leaders who have yet to develop the finer skills and qualities required to thrive in an executive position. Through individualised discussions we were impressed to note that these professionals were open to sharing their goals, having a discussion about their current performance and engagement within the school community and so potential areas to focus on, improve or establish to support achievement of their goals.

Career planning should be perceived as a series of steps to consolidate capability towards attainment:

- 1 Immediate or short term, with a **current plan** to result in peak performance in the present role.
- 2 **Medium term**, focusing on the two to three years ahead, building in a range of skills across the curriculum, interpersonal and logistical proficiency.
- 3 Finally an “ideal”, including **aspirations** of where they would like to be in five to 10 years, and potential pathways.

Identifying capabilities and strengths

Each of us present with a unique combination of skills and talents that result in our performance and natural response to situations. Identifying skills, strengths and capabilities supports leaders in a range of manners:

- Engagement through capabilities has been shown to increase staff engagement and performance, reduce sick leave and result in greater innovative thinking
- Individualised goals and development plans for each member of staff, if established through positive and constructive techniques, build capability rather than focus exclusively on deficits
- Increased self-awareness improves the emotional intelligence of the individual and so results in greater understanding of the collaborative benefits of differences as much as alignments.

Additionally, schools benefit in utilising capability focus within staff through a great variety of means:

- Mapping out staff for the broader school utilises core skills and ensures teams complement one another, rather than mirror each other
- Supporting proactive committee planning for strategic goals, school initiatives and community activities through positivity rather than dictatorship

- Positive retention of motivated staff through personal and group values, as well as alignment and clarity of vision.

Providing opportunities for development

Leaders must retain the thought that their engagement with others may come with resistance, questioning, doubt or hesitation. As such we need to ensure proactive opportunities to reflect on and refer to personal statements. Goals and aspirations build trust in our employees, also demonstrating understanding and compassion.

While corporate organisations have structured performance reviews incorporating quarterly meetings, biannual reflection and annual reviews, ensuring leaders build a thorough understanding of the individuals within their team allows for opportunities to:

- Utilise strengths and capabilities
- Provide new challenges and so personal growth
- Understand and support achievement of longer term career goals
- Develop self-awareness in team through candid and positive means
- Extend relationships and establish new cross-school associations.

Recognising achievement with constructive feedback

Corporate and educational institutions alike note the lack of recognition of effort and achievement as well as constructive feedback. Whilst we are vulnerable in receiving feedback, if shared well it takes our performance and engagement to a new level.

Achievement and effort are essential to commence discussions relating to performance. Respected leaders will ensure they:

- Create a non-confrontational setting for the discussion
- Seek feedback from the individual first
- Demonstrate active listening through repetition and assurance
- Use open body language and positive non-verbal communication
- Utilise questions as a method of establishing comfort
- Affirm the individual’s good intentions, excellent efforts and improvements aligned to aims
- Establish next steps and expectations to continue personal growth.

With all these thoughts in mind, as you walk into your next staff meeting silence the groans at the first opportunity. Recommend that everyone take ownership of their career and role model your support by suggesting your professional learning needs and plans to your leader. When colleagues phase out, staff resist or you are asked, “What box will be ticked?” through the training, remind staff it’s for their future and to benefit our school community as a whole.

Quotes on leadership

I am not afraid of an army of lions led by a sheep; I am afraid of an army of sheep led by a lion.

Alexander the Great

Innovation distinguishes/tween a leader and a follower.

Steve Jobs