

Creating two-way year-end performance reviews

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Contrary to current sentiment that year-end performance reviews are becoming obsolete, they offer companies valuable opportunities for leadership development. By evolving the year-end review into a two-way process, many top companies are able to not only assess the performance of individual employees but also gain crucial feedback on how their leaders are performing.



A growing number of companies are starting to recognise the significant impact its leaders can have - whether positively or negatively - on employee and company performance and ultimately the bottom-line. Moreover, in order to identify challenges and opportunities for leadership development, feedback from the teams they lead are crucial.

For leaders who are invested in personal development and gaining mastery in their roles and ultimately the business unit and company's bottom line, quality performance reviews in which the leaders themselves are reviewed by their team members are critical.

These types of leadership feedback processes are not without their challenges and can be tricky to manage.

For leadership feedback to work, it is important that the review process shifts, from a box-ticking exercise, to a qualitative dialogue. However, unless there are some solid fundamentals in place, the objective of constructive feedback that can be used to enhance all round performance will be defeated.

Successful two-way reviews

The key foundations for a successful two-way review process include:

1. Creating a safe and confidential environment, to enable honest conversations
2. Being open and willing to hear some critical feedback, without being defensive
3. Managing expectations on how the feedback will be used and then ensuring that commitments are acted upon

There has been a sharp rise in leadership development programmes globally, in recognition of the fact that even naturally great leaders can build on their existing skills. In addition, many of these programmes have similar areas of focus, which are helpful when considering what kind of feedback one wishes to elicit during employees' assessment of their managers.

One of the most important predictors of individual success within a team is whether members are clear about what is required of them. It is important then that leaders engage with the members of their teams as regularly as possible to ensure everyone is on the same page in terms of expectations and performance, and that any issues or uncertainties are eliminated as soon as possible, to enable an empowered and confident team.

The year-end review provides the perfect opportunity for managers to once again ensure their teams are on the same page as them regarding expectations.

Shifting to team leader

Another development, over the past decade or two, is the shift for leaders from being viewed as the boss to being viewed as team leader.

On paper, it is still the same thing, but in reality, people want to feel part of a team and work collaboratively rather than be bossed about. Good leaders realise that their success is dependent on the success of their teams and that happiness at work goes a long way to achieving this.

Therefore, top leaders have become, or should aim to become, more humanised. They treat their teams with respect, provide positive feedback, encouragement and redirection where necessary, clear direction in terms of growth and an enabling environment. So year-end reviews should also aim to determine whether a leader is enabling a positive environment conducive to growth, or whether some work can be done in terms of leadership style.

Various research studies and surveys consistently confirm the importance of having leaders who can motivate, inspire and effect positive change. Recent research from one of the top global business institutions, London Business School, indicates that organisational performance is directly impacted by the mindset of the leader. Additionally, more than 97% of respondents in the Jack Hammer Executive Report Volume II (2014) said bad leaders could cause them to jump ship.

The benefit of getting feedback from teams on their leaders, is that managers are able to see and respond to challenges and opportunities that may not have been evident through self-evaluation only.

By default, it will likely be the more self-aware manager with a healthy level of EQ who will be open to this type of interaction with a subordinate, as opposed to those who are more desperately in need of the reality check. Including the leader-review dimension to the performance appraisal process can have a significant impact on all the key stakeholders, as well as company bottom line performance.

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