

Tuned for Performance

Communicating Winning Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

More than just consummate practitioners of music, symphonic conductors are impeccable as managers, orchestrating every instrument to pitch and rhythmic perfection. Any one of them would tell you that a flawless performance is borne from thoroughly understanding each and every musician, and converging their talents into a singular musical spectacle.

The conductor's supervision of his ensemble is a fitting parallel for any manager, where they are tasked with the challenge of bringing out the best in the members of staff under their care. Most managers today are familiar with the importance and fundamental mechanics of employee performance management, which essentially is the charting and monitoring of an employee's progress with regards to predetermined goals and milestones.

But employee performance management is often practised as nothing more than a checking of completion for delegated tasks. Lacking in inferential evaluation and thus, effective communication stages, employees are not made aware of their performance and impact, and run the risk of becoming stagnant. Performance management protocols are also the most immediate channel to solicit feedback from employee to manager, without which the most efficient deployment of tasks and responsibilities is almost impossible to achieve.

It is up to the manager to make sure that tasks are well thought out and communicated clearly through carefully formulated key performance indicators (KPIs). Great employee appraisals are a delicate balance of the company's strategic objectives, and the potential and capabilities of a staff member.

Setting the tune

Just the way a conductor leads every musician's melody or beat into a piece of music, so should a manager align his employees with the company's direction and core strategies. By outlining its immediate and long term objectives, and making it relevant to the function of an employee, he will be able to see his worth and significance in the larger scheme of things. This lends an emotional rather than rational attachment to a job, which can prove to be the most compelling motivator for performance.

Listen to the music

The most important thing a conductor does is to first listen. He pays careful attention to each and every sound simultaneously to correct any lapse or overcompensation. In the same vein, effectuating performance from staff requires managers to complement their leadership with empathy. Managers should listen to their subordinates' motivations, concerns and difficulties faced on the job. Only then can they then seek to create an informed equilibrium and environment for each of his staff members to function at his or her best.

Better equipment, better performance

A symphonic performance can be boosted by premium instruments, better acoustics and a bigger concert hall. Similarly, managers have their own tools to aid them in managing employee appraisals. The digital age has availed a broad palette of performance management programmes to help managers organise and execute staff assessments. The general function of these software is to manage performance-related data and churning them into digestible graphs and metric tables for a dynamic perspective of the corporate performance climate. This is especially helpful for large companies where senior management executives might need to keep track of significantly large staff numbers.

Every instrument plays its own melody

Specificity and clarity are paramount in communicating what is required of each staff member. Even between different employees bearing similar job descriptions, a manager must understand them enough to differentiate between their intrinsic individual strengths. That way, individualised KPIs that

are biased towards the unique skill combinations of employees will result in more realistic expectations, more accurate evaluations and greater productivity.

Putting them all together

Implementing thorough performance management is worth the effort. Effective performance indicators and appraisal systems are ultimately about leveraging on understanding and communication to inspire results. Besides providing greater top-down awareness of individual performance, it creates realistic and achievable goals and thus greater job satisfaction.

Ultimately, a piece of music is the sum of its sounds. In a grand coming together, all the melodies and rhythms form a unique blend of sonic textures where every sound is reliant on the other. Similarly, as the different clearly defined responsibilities of all staff come together, led by the overhead corporate agenda, the company can collectively conduct and achieve a higher level of performance.

This article is contributed by Ms Annie Yap.

