

Emotionally Intelligent Performance Management

Many managers we work with seem to intensely dislike their performance management systems. They typically feel that conversations at the end of the year about development planning are difficult, at times confrontational, and often simply a waste of time.

And yet, there is not a person we have talked to who is not interested in knowing what their manager thinks about his or her performance. And most managers would like to be able to tell them. So why doesn't it happen more often and more successfully?

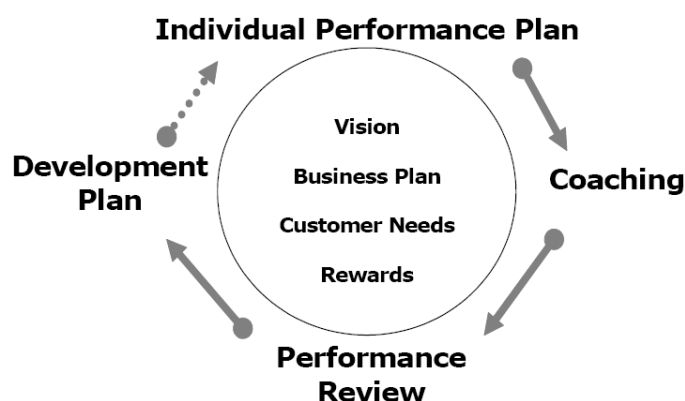
In our experience, whenever intelligent people are stuck and find it difficult to solve an existing problem, there are almost always strong emotions present somewhere in the situation. By focusing on the emotional aspects of the problem, it is possible to generate innovative options that might not appear otherwise.

Why do so many people dislike their organisations' performance management systems?

The answer to this question is partly due to the way the components of high performance are arranged in most organisations. Figure 1 shows a typical performance management cycle where planning is followed by coaching or training, then performance review, followed by a discussion about development. Sound familiar?

Looking at this through the Emotion Roadmap™ (developed by Charles J. Wolfe Associates and based on the MSCEIT model of Emotional Intelligence) shows why the practice that exists in most organisations whereby a supervisor is asked to tell someone what they need to develop at the end of the year, after the year is over, is emotionally unintelligent.

Figure 1: Components of High Performance Planning



Here is an example of how the Emotion Roadmap™ applies to this emotionally unintelligent cycle of performance planning:

- 1. Identify emotions:** What is the situation? Who are all the people involved? How is each key person feeling?

Salima and Andy have finished going over Salima's performance and now have the task of creating a development plan for her which includes identifying areas for her to improve. Andy is feeling worried and insecure about talking to Salima about areas for improvement. Salima is feeling a little defensive about the discussion about performance, and somewhat anxious about what she will hear next.

- 2. Use emotions:** What feelings will lead to success?

For Andy, ideal would be confident, supportive and open.

For Salima, ideal would be moderately open, confident, comfortable with the discussion, and ultimately accepting and appreciative of the outcome.

- 3. Understand emotions:** Are the current feelings the ones you want or is there a gap?

Clearly there is a gap between what Andy and Salima are feeling and what would be ideal. Andy may feel, based on a few recent situations that have occurred, that Salima needs to improve her ability to communicate. Salima worries that if she agrees with Andy about needing to improve her communication that this will impact Andy's performance rating of her and it may affect a career opportunity at a later time. In fact, she may think that she communicates very well. She even may wonder how Andy can say she needs to improve in communications when she feels Andy does not communicate that well.

Andy really dislikes this whole situation about giving development planning feedback. He finds people are often defensive and, on at least a couple of occasions, it has gotten confrontational. He feels he is not a very good judge of identifying specific competencies that need to be developed, but he knows he has to do this in order to do what the organisation needs from him to complete the paperwork for Salima.

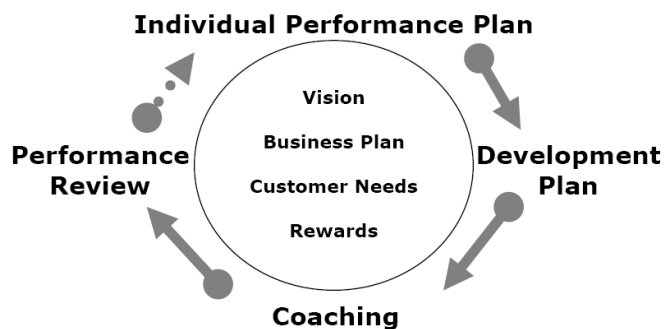
Sound familiar? Situations similar to this one happen all the time when organisations force leaders at all levels to write something to improve from last year. Almost everyone we have talked to over years of involvement in this type of work find the process uncomfortable, at times confrontational or emotionally distressing, and most importantly not very useful. This certainly meets our criteria for an *emotionally unintelligent* organisational process!

In our experience the entire emotional tone changes to the positive when you focus development on current, real time objectives and not the past year's performance.

A more emotionally intelligent strategy: discuss development after objectives

By shifting the components to a more emotionally intelligent configuration we can create inspired performance and have people throughout all organisations come to value the conversation about development.

Figure 2: An Emotionally Intelligent Sequence that Leads to Inspired Performance



Let’s look at what might change the negative and unpleasant feelings that Andy and Salima are feeling to the more positive ones identified in the section referred to as ‘Use Emotions’. The innovation that would change the negative to positive feelings is profound and yet quite simple and it can be done by separating the development plan from the performance review.

Once you are done with the review of an individual’s performance for the year, and you have finished talking about compensation, you focus next on the performance plan for the upcoming year. Only then do you talk about development!

The need for development is thus tied to the newly created, forward looking performance plan. In this scenario, Andy and Salima would both end up feeling much closer to the ideal feelings. Here is how the conversation might be different:

“Hi Salima, we have finished with last year’s performance review and, as I indicated, the year overall was very good and you accomplished most of your objectives. Hopefully next year will be even better. So what we need to talk about next is what developmental help you might need to meet your objectives this year. Once we agree on what skills and competencies are critical to your role this year we can then consider what help if any, you might need to be as successful as possible.”

The first step in this new and improved way of addressing performance involves first getting clear agreement on Salima’s goals and objectives for the upcoming year. At that point Andy and Salima both discuss what are the critical competencies needed for successful achievement of her objectives. It is important to be discriminating at this point and not say every competency is critical. Once Andy and Salima have determined these critical competencies and both agree that communication is one of them, Andy could then share that he would like to help Salima improve her communication ability this year since it will have a meaningful impact on her ability to succeed. Andy and Salima would then begin exploring how to improve her communication skills and/or find compensating strategies to make sure there were little to no gaps in communications.

Once Salima realises it will not impact last year’s performance rating and other career opportunities, she becomes freer to explore with Andy what might be done to insure that her communication ability improves enough to facilitate successful accomplishment of her current

goals and objectives. She feels like Andy is being more helpful than critical in this sequence of events.

Obviously there are many different scenarios that take place regarding development needs, but ultimately the switch to talking about the development plan based on helping people be successful in achieving current objectives has many advantages over trying to say someone needs help based on last year's poor performance in that area.

On an emotional level, development discussions conducted in a supportive and proactive way rather than from an evaluative stance can feel much more comfortable and cooperative. It also makes development planning meaningful because it is about the present and is tied directly to a person's immediate goals and objectives. This in our view is an *emotionally intelligent* response to performance management.



This is an abridged version of Chuck Wolfe's article "Emotional Intelligence (EI) High Performance and the Emotion Roadmap™", based on the Emotion Roadmap™ developed by Charles J. Wolfe Associates, a strategic partner with The Acumen Company in the area of Emotional Intelligence and leadership. To listen to Charles' radio talk show, "The Emotion Roadmap, Take the Wheel and Control How You Feel" go to www.cjwolfe.com and click on 'Live Radio'.

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