



Management Support Unit (MSU)

Managing Staff Performance: Information Sheet 18

An Overview of Human Resources Management

This information sheet is the one of a suite of four resources that aims to assist managers in the critical task of human resources (HR) management. While HR management is an important responsibility in any organisation, it takes on an even sharper focus in the community services sector. It is only through the capacities of our most valuable resource – our staff members – that we are able to achieve our primary objectives. Our people are our ‘tools of trade’. It is therefore essential that careful attention is paid to this aspect of organisational management:

Resources

The following NCOSS information sheets and resources are available on this topic:

(They can be found at www.ncoss.org.au/component)

Information Sheets:

1. Recruitment – Good Practice (Information Sheet No 15)
2. Managing Staff Performance (Information Sheet 18 – this resource)
3. Annual Performance Review (Information Sheet No 19)
4. Addressing Poor Performance (information Sheet No 20)

Management Support Online (MSO):

Performance Management and Staff Development

Sample Documents/Templates/Directories:

Performance Appraisal Process – sample

Optimising Performance and Staff Satisfaction

This information sheet outlines a process for managing staff performance effectively so that employees are supported and accountable for the performance of their duties. This ensures that they work to their maximum potential, quality services are delivered and the goals of the organisation are achieved.

The task of ensuring quality staff performance does not take place in a vacuum. It is essential for the staff management process to be part of planning to achieve the organisations goals. It is only in the context of clear organisational goals, strategies and policies that it is possible to select and manage staff to achieve those goals.

Many managers mistakenly view the Annual Performance Review (Refer Information Sheet No. 19) as the sole tool for managing staff performance. However, this approach leads to unmotivated workers and missed opportunities in ensuring quality outcomes. Problems tend to remain hidden or ignored until the annual 'event' – the Review. At this point it may be too late to resolve the matter satisfactorily.

Effective managers are focused on bringing out the best in people – supervision in this context is viewed as an enabling function which makes it possible for people to do the best work they are capable of performing. The dual focus of the approach outlined here is to describe performance management as a process that both develops the employees' skills and capacities and assists them to maintain and, if necessary, improve their performance through counselling and support. In the event of unsatisfactory performance, this approach aims to ensure that employees are treated fairly and that they are provided with every opportunity to meet the standards required in their work areas.

Begin at the Beginning – Recruitment

Managing staff members begins with effective recruitment (Refer Information Sheet 15 - Recruitment: Good Practice). In order to maximize performance it is essential for the manager to be clear about:

- The expectations of the particular position they are seeking to fill;
- How that position fits into the organisation as a whole;
- The knowledge, skills, values and behaviour required to fulfill the responsibilities of the role.

From the outset, the employee needs to know what is expected.

Induction and Orientation

A clear and comprehensive induction and orientation program – that includes a job description and relevant performance indicators – lays the foundations for effective performance. To achieve the outcomes expected of them, and which they in turn want to deliver, it is essential for employees to:

- **Know what to do.** Effective performance is only possible when the worker understands the expectations of the role (the job purpose, the results expected including the associated standards required and the ways in which success will be measured.) These expectations need to include both task goals and process goals – that is the values and behaviours expected of the worker. This requires effective work planning. Individual work plans (that fit into the overall organisational and team plans) including major and continuing areas of work and agreed time frames, need to be developed by each staff member in consultation with their supervisor. Meetings concerning progress against work plans need to take place at regular intervals.
- **Want to do the work.** In order for an employee to want to do the work, the job needs to be well designed, the worker well matched to the position on the basis of their skills and they need to be internally motivated to do the work. This means that the work is congruent with who they are and their aspirations. In addition, they need external motivation beyond the basics of fair salary and working conditions – they need to feel the work is worthwhile, valued and respected.
- **Know how to do the work.** This means that the employee have to be competent for the role, have the education, training and experience relevant for the tasks and receive further training so their skills continue to be developed.
- **Have the chance to do the work.** The employee has the necessary tools and equipment to do the job effectively and systems and resource are in place to ensure the employee is able to carry out their responsibilities. Relevant information needs to be passed onto the employee in a timely manner and they require sufficient time and resources to complete the work. Processes for effective teamwork need to be in place. In other words, the work environment needs to assist and not hinder the employee.
- **Be led effectively.** Effective leadership sets clear goals and a good example, and inspires team members with a vision of what is possible. Effective managers have high self-esteem and high standards; they have ambitious but achievable goals, are proactive, focused and have excellent interpersonal skills. They inspire confidence in employees and enable them to feel valued and trusted.

Principles of Effective Performance Management and Development

Effective performance management and development is grounded in clearly articulated principles. These include the need for:

- Regularity in supervision and consultation;
- Balance to ensure accountability, support and skill development;
- Mutuality - both worker and manager need the opportunity to offer their assessment of how the work is progressing, where there are difficulties and how the worker can be assisted to achieve the desired goals;
- Cooperation based on mutual respect and agreed processes;
- Clarity about performance expectations and criteria for assessment and
- Commitment to conduct the process in a supportive and constructive manner.

Management Support Online – Performance Management and Staff Development Information Sheet 6 – 3:

ncoss.org.au/projects/msu/downloads/resources

Staff Supervision

Managers are responsible for ensuring that all staff members have effective supervision and support, that they are assisted to identify any problems in their performance and that any problems are dealt with in a fair and supportive manner. The purpose of performance management and development is to:

- Ensure that work is being performed at the required standard
- Improve job performance
- Improve the employees' job satisfaction
- Develop the employees' capabilities.

To achieve these goals, the staff performance management process needs to ensure accountability, personal support and skill development and to provide opportunities for staff to take on greater responsibilities.

Clinical and Management Supervision

Clinical supervision (for some staff members who work directly with clients), also sometimes referred to as professional supervision, involves support, debriefing and guidance in relation to the employees' direct work with clients. It also examines the impact of the work on the employee and supports them to maintain professional boundaries. (Refer NCOSS Information Sheet No 10 – Professional Supervision). Clinical supervision is sometimes provided externally by a person who is not the employee's line manager.

Management supervision is always conducted by the line manager. This refers to general supervision and includes performance against the employee's workplan, accountability and workload. It may also include issues such as staff dynamics, team building and relationship management.

Providing feedback

One of the most dangerous things a manager can do is provide no feedback to an employee – implying that they are simply not worthy of attention or comment. It is critical to provide feedback, both positive and constructive or critical. Generally, a manager focused on developing people and promoting peak performance uses a positive approach to motivate and uses specific constructive feedback to improve performance.

For feedback to be useful it needs to be:

- **Balanced** – It includes both positive and constructive feedback. This builds both capacity and self esteem.
- **Actionable** – The employee needs to be able to take appropriate action in an area for which they are responsible on the basis of the feedback received.
- **Timely** – The need to make a considered judgement on the best time to give feedback.
- **Meaningful** – Feedback needs to be based on facts and must not be so overwhelming that it cannot be assimilated.
- **Framed using 'I'** – Language is critical. The word 'I' generates less defensiveness and resistance.
- **Constructive** – Aim to be helpful, not hurtful.
- **Empathic** – Feedback needs to be considerate of the employees' perspective and represent feedback on a task or behaviour, not criticism of the person.

It is also essential to ensure that the employee has the opportunity to provide feedback, both constructive and positive, to the manager.

Professional Development

It is essential to provide opportunities for professional development if the goals of effective performance management and staff satisfaction are to be achieved. Professional development opportunities can take place as part of staff meetings, in-house training, on-line courses, attendance at seminars and conferences, continuing education courses and formal tertiary level programs. These needs should be determined and agreed upon annually, as part of the Performance Review.

Adequate funds for professional development needs to be a discrete component of the organisations annual budget.

Probationary Review

Best practice in performance management ensures that each employee has a probationary review, usually within the first three months of employment in the position. This gives the employee an opportunity for systematic feedback that brings together the input they have received over the previous months from supervision.

The purpose of the probationary review is to assess:

- Both the employee's and the manager's experience of the initial period of employment.
- Identify any areas requiring change on the part of the employee (for example attitude to work, the manner in which work is conducted and its quality, the workload completed and communication skills).
- Whether changes to the job description or work practices affecting the employee are required.
- Training and development needs of the employee.
- Ultimately, whether the employee's services should continue to be retained. This is always a vexed issue but there are times when termination of employment is necessary. This can only be justified if the employer has systematically implemented fair employment, supervision and review processes.

Performance Review

The annual performance review represents the culmination of the performance management process cycle and – if communication about performance has been conducted effectively – should provide no surprises for the employee. This review provides an opportunity for the employee to reflect on the overview of their work, assess their strengths and challenges and plan their priorities for the year ahead. It should be an affirming, growth promoting experience. (Refer NCOSS Information Sheet No 19: Annual Performance Review).

Counselling - Dealing with Poor Performance

While the goal of an effective performance management process is to identify any difficulties early, there are times when issues of inadequate performance need to be addressed. (Refer to NCOSS Information Sheet No 20: Addressing Poor Performance.)

Rewarding Employees

Some managers tend to focus on identifying and responding to what the employee is doing wrong. It is of central importance to take note of all that the employee is doing well. While salary is one important aspect of rewarding staff members, there are many other ways to let them know they are valued – positive feedback and publicly acknowledging their contribution and achievements is one example. Flexibility in the workplace, such as hours of work, is another way of indicating to the employee that their needs are important.

The most difficult part of the job!

Frequently managers are heard to say that dealing with people and their foibles is the most challenging part of the job. It is true that people – with all their strengths and limitations, their sensitivities and needs – can be extremely demanding. But an effective performance management process will ensure that many difficulties are avoided and employees experience their job and workplace as a rewarding experience. This is a major incentive for managers who want their team members to thrive under their leadership.

References

Cole, Kris, 2005, Management Theory and Practice, Pearson, Prentice Hall, Frenchs Forest, NSW.

Hesta Super Fund, Policy Bank, www.ourcommunity.com.au, prepared by Accenture Human Resources Services.

Management Support Online (MSO), Information Sheet 6 – 3: www.ncoss.org.au/projects/msu/downloads/resources,

Some useful links to resources

The NCOSS Policy and Procedures Template includes some useful information on effective human resources policies: www.ncoss.org.au/component

The NSW Department of Industrial Relations offers some useful guidelines: www.industrialrelations.nsw.gov.au/resources/managing_performance.pdf

Community Builders (a website supported by the Department of Community Services) has a range of helpful resources which can be downloaded freely: www.ourcommunity.com.au,

Management Support Online has a range of useful resources. Discounts are available for NCOSS members.

<http://www.managementsupportonline.com.au/>

PeopleStreme has a range of resources relating to Performance Management that can be readily accessed:

<http://www.peoplestreme.com/index.html>