Managing Staff Performance

Staff management is an important responsibility for any manager. Staff are the most valuable asset in any organisation. In community organisations it requires a combination of the development of skills and knowledge, access to appropriate tools and a management approach that is supportive but also very clear about standards and the need to focus on the clients. Staff need a sense of common purpose, a feeling of being relevant and valued. They also require a clear understanding of what is negotiable in their job and what is not negotiable but is reasonable to expect them to do.

Optimising Performance and Staff Satisfaction

When managing staff performance it is essential to ensure that employees are supported but also accountable for the performance of their duties. This ensures they work to their maximum potential, quality services are delivered and the goals of the organisation are achieved.

Ensuring quality staff performance does not take place in a vacuum, it is imperative the management process is part of the planning to achieve the organisation's goals. It is in the context of clear goals, strategies and policies that it is possible to select and manage staff to achieve the required outcomes.

Some managers mistakenly view the Annual Performance Review as the tool for managing staff performance.   This can lead 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 focus on bringing out the best in people, where supervision is an enabling function encouraging people to do their best work. Effective performance management 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 provided opportunities to meet the required standards.

In summary the basic principles[1] are:

- A common sense of purpose: Often the reason for staff being there is not discussed and they are not regularly reminded of the history and accomplishments of the organisation

- Well thought-out values, such as honesty, respect and so on, that are discussed with staff and used as the foundation for any actions or reactions of management

- Simple rules or policies that are accessible and in plain English providing information about actions and behaviour that are required and those that are not.

- Every person knows exactly why they are there, what has to be done, how to do it and when it is done properly

---

[1] From The principles of Managing Staff – The Australian Federation of Employers and Industries

- Clear sign that staff members are valued, including reasonable working conditions, market rates of pay, respectful, client focused and staff supportive management

- Trust is developed in each staff member and in turn each staff member can have trust in the leadership. Honesty and integrity are at the centre of all relationships in the organisation

- Clarity in what is negotiable and what is not negotiable for staff as a whole and what each staff member is allowed to do, as well as what independence he or she has in each situation

- Clear goals for what the organisation wants from its staff as a whole, each team and each individual

- A simple approach to managing staff based on a coaching model where team leaders and managers work with and not "on top of" staff

- Problems are dealt with immediately but within the values and guidelines of the organisation.

Begin at the Beginning – Recruitment

Managing staff members begins with effective recruitment (See NCOSS Sector Support – Templates and Resources: Recruitment and Good Practice). In order to maximise 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 fulfil the responsibilities of the role.

From the outset the staff member needs to know what is expected of the role and of them as an employee.

Induction and Orientation

A clear and comprehensive induction and orientation program that includes a job description with relevant performance indicators that lays the foundation for effective performance. To achieve these outcomes it is essential the staff member:

- **Knows what to do**
  Effective performance is only possible when the worker understands the expectations of the role (job purpose, results expected including the associated standards required and the ways in which success will be measured). These expectations need to include both task and process goals, ie the values and behaviours expected of the worker. This requires effective work planning. Staff, in consultation with their supervisor, need to develop individual work plans that slot into the overall organisation and team plans. These include major and continuing areas of work and agreed time frames. Meetings assessing Progress against work plans need to take place at regular intervals.

- **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. 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**
  The employee has to be competent for the role, have the education, training and experience relevant for the tasks and receive further training and support so their skills continue to develop.

- **Have the chance to do the work**
  The employee has access to the necessary tools and equipment to do the job effectively where systems and resources are in place to ensure the employee is able to fulfil their responsibilities. Relevant information needs to be communicated to the employee in a timely manner with sufficient time and resources to complete the work. Processes for effective teamwork need to be in place where the work environment is designed to assist and not hinder the employee.

- **Be led effectively**
  Effective leadership sets clear goals and a good example. It 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. They provided a climate where both the employer and employee can objectively discuss issues and concerns.

Staff Supervision

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

- Regular supervision and consultation
- A balanced approach ensuring 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 barriers, strategies are agreed on to assist the worker achieve the desired goals
- Cooperation based on mutual respect and agreed processes
- Clarity about performance expectations and criteria for assessment
- Commitment to conduct the process in a supportive and constructive manner.

Managers are responsible for ensuring all staff members have effective supervision and support where they are assisted to identify any barriers to effective performance and develop strategies to manage these issues. The purpose of supervision 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 this, the process needs to ensure staff are held accountable for the outcomes of their position (as per their work plan) but also have access to personal support, skill development and opportunities to take on greater responsibilities.

ncoss
NSW Council of Social Service

Clinical and Management Supervision

Clinical or professional supervision (for senior staff and those who work directly with clients) involves support, debriefing and guidance in relation to the employee's direct work with clients and/or staff. It examines the impact of the work on the employee and supports them to maintain professional boundaries. Clinical supervision is generally provided externally by a person who is not the employee's line manager.

Providing feedback

One of the most dangerous things a manager can do is not provide feedback to an employee potentially implying they are not worthy of attention or comment. It is critical to provide feedback, be it positive, constructive and/or critical. A manager focused on developing people and promoting peak performance generally uses a positive approach to motivate providing specific constructive feedback to improve performance.

For feedback to be useful it needs to be:

- **Balanced** – Providing both positive and constructive feedback building capacity and self esteem
- **Actionable** – The employee is provided with relevant and necessary information to take appropriate action
- **Timely** – Care is taken as to the best time to provide feedback
- **Meaningful** – Feedback is based on facts and not so overwhelming that it cannot be assimilated
- **Language** – The words used are objective, avoiding emotive language
- **Constructive** – Helpful not hurtful
- **Empathic** – Considerate of the employees' perspective and represent feedback on a task or behaviour, not criticism of the person
- **Respectful** – Takes into account natural justice, providing the employee the opportunity, possibly at a later date, to respond to the feedback, particularly if constructive.

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. Professional development opportunities can take place as part of staff meetings, in-house training, online 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. However there needs to be sufficient flexibility to consider unexpected opportunities as they arise.

An adequate fund for professional development needs to be a discrete component of the organisations' annual budget.

ncoss
NSW Council of Social Service

Probationary Review

Best practice in performance management ensures that each employee has a probationary review, usually after 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.
- Whether changes to the job description or work practices affecting the employee are required (eg job design, access to tools, unrealistic expectations).
- Identify areas requiring change on the part of the employee (eg attitude to work, the manner and/or of quality the work, the workload completed and communication skills).
- Training and development needs of the employee.

Ultimately, it assesses 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. It is recommended that industrial or legal advice be sought before beginning this process.

Performance Review

The annual performance review represents the culmination of the performance management process cycle. If communication about performance has been conducted effectively it should provide no surprises for the employee. This review provides an opportunity for the employee to reflect on the overview of their work, celebrate their achievements, assess their strengths and challenges and plan their priorities for the year ahead. It should be an affirming, growth promoting experience.

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 Templates and Resources: 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. There are many ways to let staff know they are valued, positive feedback and publicly acknowledging their contribution and achievements is one example. Flexibility in the workplace and the capacity to work from home 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. 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.

Managing staff requires good recruitment, strong management systems to work to and the ability to convert clear staff principles into actions.

Resources

NCOSS Management Support

- Templates and Resources
  - o Addressing Poor Performance
  - o Annual Performance Review
  - o Job Evaluation
  - o Professional Supervision
  - o Recruitment and Good Practice

Fair Work Ombudsman

- Managing performance and warnings

- Best Practice Guide: Managing underperformance

NSW Industrial Relations

- Managing employees

- Workplace policies and procedures

- Motivating staff

- Employment Essentials - Managing people

- Employment Essentials - Workplace policies and procedures

- Employment Essentials - Managing performance

Australian Federation of Employees and Industries

- The principles of managing staff

Institute of Community Directors

- Managing unsatisfactory performance policy template

NB: The above websites were accessible on 2 December 2015. If the links do not work search on the title of the document or go directly to the organisation's website.