

The PEOPLE Ultimatum

A Resource for HR Professionals in the Public Sector



Celebrating Unsung Heroes:

A Month of Gratitude for Public Employees

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ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER



Dear Professionals,

It is February, the month of love, and we have decided to dedicate this month's newsletter to appreciate you, our Nation's Public Workforce—the men and women who dedicate themselves to serving the public and work diligently behind the scenes to keep our communities, cities, and the entire country running.

Let's take a moment to reflect on why we are truly thankful for public employees.

The Backbone of Our Country

Within the time it takes to read this newsletter, federal, state, and local government agencies will have prevented multiple crimes, supervised the free flow of traffic on the roads, ensured the safe take-offs and landings of hundreds of airplanes, monitored the borders for any sign of enemy attacks, planted trees, cleaned our streets, offered free education for millions, and provided free medical treatment to thousands of patients, etc. Their dedication is what keeps our society functioning.

Not Appreciated Enough: Misunderstood and Maligned

Yet, for the most part, Nigerians tend to take all this public service for granted. The only time the government attracts much attention is when things go wrong.

The Public Workforce are some of the most misunderstood, judged, maligned, and criticized people on the planet. Everyone, including their cats and dogs, criticizes the men and women working to keep this nation afloat, often without considering the impact on their psyche.

We think this is unfair because we know for a fact that a significant proportion of the men and women of the Nigerian public workforce are some of the most competent and committed individuals in the country. This, coupled with the fact that the success of our nation literally rests on their backs, makes it perplexing to understand how we want the nation to transform when we harshly criticize those who work hard to make transformation possible.

There Are Two Sides To Every Story, And It's Time To Tell Their Side Of The Story.

After years of neglect by the political class, cracks are beginning to show. The system is under intense strain. In almost every sphere of the public sector, there are backlogs, customer service failures, security lapses, cost overruns, and, in some cases, real challenges such as spates of kidnapping and other security issues.

The primary reason for these challenges is that the civil service is trying to function in an increasingly complex world while hobbled by an inflexible, outdated management structure. It is run by a revolving door of political appointees, many with limited management skills and little interest in long-term efficiency. In short, the federal government is an anachronism in a world where technology enables new and versatile ways of working. It is increasingly unsuited to deliver complex services.

A Crisis Looms and There's Urgent Need for Reform

What threatens to turn this slow decay into a real crisis is the looming wave of retirements that, in the next decade, will strip away most of the federal government's experienced managers. Many of the federal employees running the government are getting close to retirement, but the political agenda keeps ignoring the urgent need for civil service reform. The civil service needs a plan to attract, train, and retain its fair share of the "best and the brightest" in a competitive job market. This will not happen until the nation adopts a fresh approach to managing the government's human capital. The government is becoming dangerously over-dependent on private contractors to perform core government services. Without action, the entire system will struggle to maintain the standards of efficiency, honesty, and accountability that every citizen has a right to expect.

Our Unwavering Commitment to Public HR Professionals

As HR Professionals you are right at the center and pivotal to this reform. At Workforce Consulting, we are fully committed to providing you with all the strategic learning and development support you could need to birth this transformation. This newsletter is one of the avenues through which we will do so. It is loaded with powerful insights and resources to enable you to become the force for change that our civil service needs. We invite you to maximize this newsletter. We encourage you to keep learning, don't get discouraged, stay engaged, and share the message advocating for reform.

With that said, let's dive into the second edition of The People Ultimatum.

Do This If You Want To Grow And Achieve Outsized Results



A young professional approached me recently at the end of a Strategy Session. "Excuse me," he began, hesitant yet eager. "I know this might be out of line, but... could I ask you a question?"

I smiled, intrigued. "Of course," I said. "What's on your mind?"

He leaned in and said: "What's the single most important factor that has contributed to your success as a professional and as an entrepreneur? The one thing that made all the difference?"

I paused, considering his question, and spoke only one word: Mentorship.

The reason behind my choice is straightforward - I can trace every single achievement of mine to my interaction with mentors. Every single one!

The benefits of having a mentor/coach/advisor cannot be overemphasized. If you want accelerated progress and success in any area of life - relationship, career, business, financial, spiritual, etc. - get yourself a suitable mentor.

I am convinced that if people heed this simple advice and find the right mentors for themselves, the world will be a much better place.

God could have decided to parachute you into the earth when you were born and leave you to sort yourself out. You know He has the power and know-how to do so. But rather than this, he orchestrated your birth through your parents.

He also physically engineered them to be two. And you know, two (good) heads are better than one.

When you went to school, you had several teachers who understood their subjects better than you. Your parents sent you to school against leaving you to figure it all out for yourself or wing it by themselves at home.

If you want accelerated progress and success in any area of life - relationship, career, business, financial, spiritual, etc. - get yourself a suitable mentor.

When it was time to start driving, you hopefully hired and paid a qualified driving instructor. To learn to swim, you hired a swimming trainer.

When ill, you go to the doctor to sort you out. And God forbid, but you will hire a lawyer to defend you when you have legal matters.

So, why in the world do people fail to employ the same approach to their lives, relationships, careers, or business?

Why don't they invest in coaches, trainers, mentors, and advisers to help them succeed in life and business?

Why don't people seek out relationship counselors, business coaches, and money mentors?

Why is it that people will instead feel their way in the dark, making all unnecessary and sometimes potentially devastating mistakes without proper guidance, support or accountability, especially with the most important things in life?

By contrast, successful people invest continually and significantly in coaches, mentors, advisers, etc.

One of the most important decisions you can ever make if you want to achieve outsized results in your most crucial endeavors is to 'Get a mentor or coach!'

We all need mentors, coaches, trainers, accountability partners, etc.

We all need to learn from the best - people who have successfully walked the path we are about to embark on.

If you want to be the best, the wisdom is to learn from the best.

However, the best people are also the busiest. They don't have so much time on their hands. So how do you get access to their wisdom?

For those who genuinely have the desire and drive to succeed, here are the steps to follow to gain access to the best minds;

- 1. Pick a mentor, coach, or teacher—someone who's got a lot of experience in something you want to learn and shares a lot about their experience in books, blogs, videos, social media posts, etc.*
- 2. Read or watch everything they've ever created, multiple times. Re-visit the content occasionally. Read their social media posts, articles, books, and blogs. Watch their videos, attend their seminars, and listen to their talks.*
- 3. Put what you have learned from them into practice. Make sure to practice as often as possible. Remember, nobody gets good at anything without practice and repetition. At the very least, get a notebook or journal and write the summaries of what you've learned. A lot of clarity comes from writing. And make sure you are not learning for learning's sake... you must apply what you've learned. You must execute!*
- 4. Once you've applied what you have learned, consider teaching it to others as soon as possible. This helps with retention and also, the more you teach, the more you achieve mastery of the subject.*
- 5. Once you've learned almost everything this mentor has to teach you, move on to the next mentor. You will eventually instill the lessons, outgrow your mentors, or at least pick up the lessons you need and be ready for a new mentor. It is wise and highly beneficial to pick one mentor/coach/teacher at a time. Maximum of two so you can get the most out of the experience.*

Over the years, I've had several mentors in different areas (and I still do). Very few of the relationships have been formal mentor-mentee/teacher-student relationships. Most of the mentors/teachers don't even know I exist.

I am convinced that if people will heed this simple advice and find the right mentors for themselves, the world will be a much better place.

To your success

Bolaji Olagunju

Are you a **Senior HR Professional in the Public Sector?**

- Are you passionate about repositioning the HR function in your MDA to heighten its impact on organizational effectiveness?
- Would you like to unleash your potential as a leader and build teams that are forward-thinking and bound to succeed?



Join fellow visionary
Public Sector HR leaders
at SHREC 2024.

What is **SHREC**?

SHREC is short for Senior HR Executives Conference.

SHREC 2024 is more than just a conference, it is a catalyst for transformation, strategic advancement, personal development and networking in Public Sector HR.

An invitation only event exclusively designed for Nigeria's top public sector HR professionals, SHREC provides a forum for visionary leaders to delve deeply, reimagine HR's impact, and address the critical human capital challenges hindering peak performance in the Nigerian Public Sector.

What is **expect** at SHREC?

You can expect to dive deep into advanced strategies to reposition HR as a central driver of national progress.

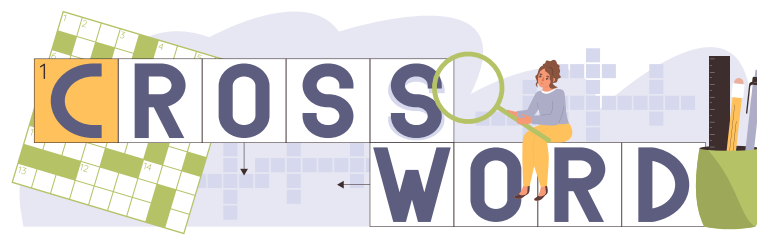
Be at the forefront of HR innovation and influence.

Join us on the 20th & 21st of March 2024 for a groundbreaking event that promises to reshape the landscape of Public Sector HR

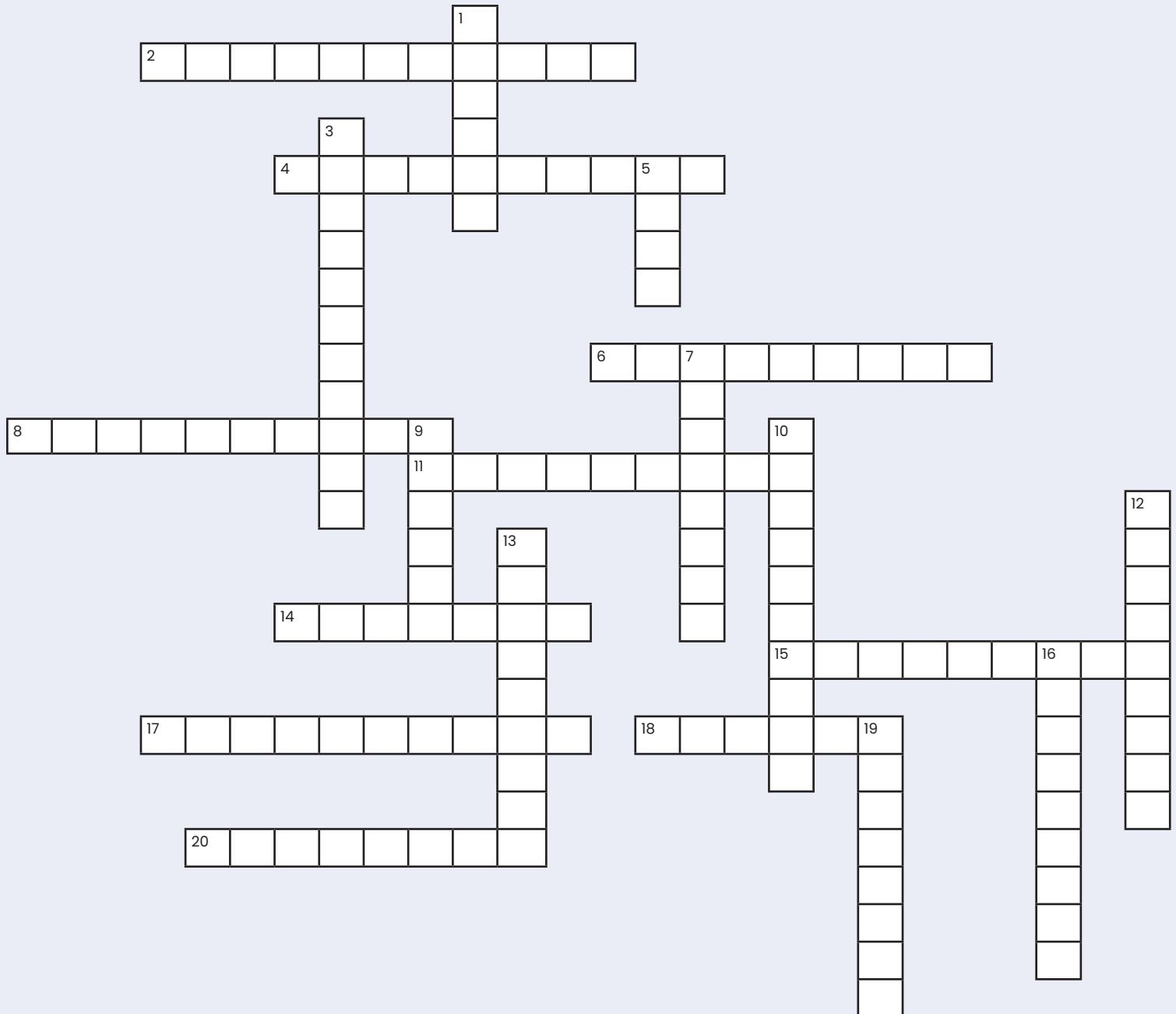
To secure your exclusive invitation:
Contact us on WhatsApp:

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Your journey to redefining HR excellence begins at SHREC 2024



Puzzle for **HR** Professionals



ACROSS

2. Assessment of job effectiveness.
4. Tools and systems used to enhance business operations.
6. Efforts to maintain workforce stability.
8. Analysis or evaluation of employee performance.
11. Reduction in workforce due to resignations or retirements.
14. The shared values and beliefs of an organisation.
15. Range of differences within a group.
17. Compliance requirements for organisational conduct.
18. Adaptation to new circumstances or methods.
20. Wellbeing Focus on holistic health and satisfaction of staff.

DOWN

1. Skilled individuals with potential.
3. Hiring procedure to fill job vacancies.
5. The demographic cohort following Millennials, characterised by digital nativism.
7. Employee development programme.
9. Acquisition The addition of new talents to an organisation.
10. Orientation for newly hired personnel.
12. Examination of data to derive insights and make decisions.
13. All the talents employed by a company 16. Formal meeting to assess a candidate's suitability.
19. Engagement Degree of commitment and enthusiasm shown by staff.

7 Practices of Highly Effective HR Professionals

How They Build High-Performance Organizations and What You Can Learn from Them



The term ‘high-performance organization’ gets thrown around so much these days that, much like the word ‘strategy’, it is fast becoming another cliché.

Yet, based on its definition, high-performance organizations are anything but commonplace. In fact, researchers and analysts speculate that due to the characteristics and achievements of high-performance organizations, they might be as rare as 1 in 1000 organizations. So what exactly is a high-performance organization? What does it mean to be a High-Performance Organization?

One of the most widely used definitions of the term is provided by organizational performance expert Andre de Waal. Here is how he defines it:

*A High-Performance Organization is an organization that achieves **financial and non-financial results** that are **exceedingly better than those of its peer group** over **a period of time** of five years or more, by focusing **in a disciplined way on what really matters** to the organization.*

In this definition, I’ve intentionally underlined four key parts worth addressing:

A High-Performance Organization achieves results that are exceedingly better than those of its peer group over a period of time of five years or more, by focusing in a disciplined way on what really matters to the organization.

The first part is “financial and non-financial results”. As can be expected, an organization that is not financially profitable will find it challenging, if not impossible, to achieve high performance. In addition to this, there are also non-financial indicators that predict whether an organization is high-performing or not. For instance, if an organization is doing well financially but neglects its responsibilities to the community, or if it fails to meet its commitments to stakeholders, resulting in their dissatisfaction, then such an organization cannot be judged to be high-performing.

The second critical aspect of the definition is “exceedingly better than those of its peer group.” This implies that high performance is relative. In other words, an organization can only be deemed a ‘high performer’ when compared to its peer group. In the private sector, this peer group typically consists of competitors or similar organizations. In the realm of governmental agencies or public institutions, the comparison becomes even more intriguing because it

assesses how effectively a country utilizes its potential. No country can assert itself as a high performer if nations with significantly lesser potential are outperforming it. A pertinent question to consider is: With the resources and potential for value creation available to us, how do we fare compared to our peers? Answering this question provides a measure of objectivity.

The third area of emphasis is: “over a period of time.” What does this mean? It means that to be classified as high-performing, an organization’s performance cannot be a flash in the pan. Organizations that have performed well for only one, two, or three years are not considered HPOs. High performance is characterized by sustainable good results over a prolonged period, at least over five years. This proves that the organization did not perform well due to luck but because it has been doing the right things right.

The fourth important aspect is: “in a disciplined way.” It is very difficult to achieve high performance if an organization is not disciplined. There have to be disciplined thoughts, disciplined actions, and disciplined execution. And to be disciplined is to be laser-focused on the priority of the organization, that is, doing what really matters to the organization.

Now that we’ve defined what a high-performance organization is, the question this article seeks to address is:

What role does HR play in the process of achieving and sustaining high performance? What do high-performance organizations have in common from an HR perspective?

How HR Builds Organizations that Outperform Their Peers

Over the last couple of decades, there has been significant research into what distinguishes the highest-performing organizations from the rest. These empirical studies have identified key factors that characterize exceptional performers.

Riding on this research, best-selling books have been written, brilliantly distilling the data into applicable principles that can guide organizations in achieving high performance. Some of the best books on this topic include “Built to Last,” “Good to Great,” and “Great by Choice,” all by James Collins; “What Really Works” by William Joyce et al, and “Chess, not Checkers” by Mark Miller.

These remarkable books explore why certain organizations thrive while others struggle or fail, despite facing similar circumstances. From them, we have extracted seven critical factors within the realm of HR professionals’ influence that contribute disproportionately to the success of high-performing organizations.

These factors offer actionable strategies for organizations aiming to achieve and maintain high performance.

So, what exactly are these seven key factors? What do the highest-performing organizations do better than everyone else? They are as follows:

Factor #1:

High-performance organizations bet on leadership. Consider the mechanism of a bottle. Where is the bottleneck in a bottle? It is at the top. This well-worn but powerful analogy illustrates the critical role of leadership in achieving high performance.

High-performing organizations are extremely well-led. Leadership is at the very core of their competitive advantage. They understand that as far as organizational effectiveness is concerned, leadership is the cause, and every other thing is the effect. If things are not going well, it’s because of leadership. Even if external factors are challenging, it is still the responsibility of leaders to implement strategies that can help to make things a lot better. It is their responsibility to have foresight, to see issues coming, and to prepare adequately for it. Everything boils down to leadership. So high-performing organizations invest disproportionately in building leaders across every level within their organization. They think along these lines: “Beyond the people at the top, how do we build leaders at every level so that even at entry-level, we have people with a strong leadership orientation and competencies and can lead at their level?”

Factor #2:

They Bet on the Right People. This is so compelling that we wrote a best-selling book on how to hire the right people. In the book, we stated that hiring and keeping the right people is a matter of life and death for businesses and business executives. We stand by those words. When you see an organization achieving outsized results, look closely, you’ll find that they have some of the best people in the industry.

This indisputable fact is why high-performing organizations go to extreme lengths to get the right people on their bus. They know that where quality matters, quantity can never be an effective substitute. They understand that the right people in the right numbers determine how well an organization performs relative to its peers and, ultimately, how it achieves and sustains high performance. HPOs know that people can be an organization’s biggest liability or greatest source of competitive advantage. So they go over and beyond to find the right people, hire them, manage them, develop them, and keep them engaged. This is supremely important.

Factor #3:

High-performing organizations act as one. They align every aspect of their organization around common shared objectives. They go out of their way to ensure that everyone and everything is in sync and moving in the same direction. They are laser-focused on their goals, and everyone is carried along. From the personnel at the security gates to the reception, all the way to the highest office in the organization, there is strong alignment. They push hard to ensure that all are focused and marching in the same direction because they understand that organizations that fail, do so because of misalignment. So they avoid this at every cost.

Factor #4:

High-performance organizations help their employees succeed. They go beyond employee engagement and create an environment where their employees thrive and succeed. They understand that successful employees are engaged, but engaged employees are not necessarily successful. These days, there's a lot of talk about employee engagement, but HPOs know that it is really not about the level of engagement; it is about success. Employees want to succeed in their careers, they want to grow in an organization, they want to be the best they can be, and high-performing organizations recognize that. So they commit to their people and go out of their way to ensure they implement practices, interventions, and activities that help employees succeed so that beyond the organization, the employees can thrive in new careers or become entrepreneurs. This level of commitment wins them the hearts of their people.

High-performance organizations help their employees succeed. They understand that successful employees are engaged, but engaged employees are not necessarily successful.

Factor #5:

They are obsessed with their customers. High-performing organizations focus on helping their customers become more successful as a result of doing business with them. They understand that at the end of the day, customers don't just want service; they want success. So they invest in understanding from the customer's perspective what success will look like and go out of their way to ensure their customers succeed.

Factor #6:

They excel at execution. High-performing organizations are exceptionally skilled at getting things done. They don't just follow up; they follow through. They understand that without execution, it is impossible to succeed or achieve any level of performance. Therefore, they create enabling environments, systems, and rhythms that make execution a reality. Then, they hold their employees to the highest performance standards possible. In essence, they design structures, processes, and systems that initiate, sustain, and maintain the discipline of getting things done.

Factor #7:

High-performing organizations are learning organizations. They have an entrenched culture of continuous and never-ending learning and improvement. They understand that companies that learn together succeed together. Therefore, they invest substantially in building the capabilities they need today and tomorrow to succeed in the marketplace. HPOs recognize that having the best people all the time ensures business continuity and enables continued growth and learning in the future. So they invest disproportionately in developing leaders who can then be held accountable for developing other leaders, thus creating a continuous cycle of success. This closely ties into Factor 1. This is one core reason why some of the highest-performing organizations have been in existence for over 100 years – they've thrived for so long because they've never stopped learning.



In conclusion

Through their interventions, initiatives, and activities, the best HR professionals in the world provide all of the aforementioned services for their organizations. The results? As their organization succeeds, they succeed too.

Would you like to set your MDA on the path to high performance? Here's what you must do immediately:

Start by assessing the effectiveness of your organization by evaluating the extent to which it exhibits the traits of a high-performance organization.

Use the scale below to assess where your organization stands today and where it needs to be in the next 3-4 years. Then, identify the gaps. Once you've identified your gaps, you can then as HR, create solutions to address these challenges, setting your organization on the path to success.

To your success!

High Performing Organisation - Effectiveness Assessment



Use the scale below to assess where your organisation is today and where it needs to be in the next 3 - 4 years.
What is the gap

5 = World Class

4 = Industry Best

3 = Industry Average

2 = Below Industry Average

1 = Noticeably Below Industry Average

ASK WORKFORCE



Got burning HR questions or stuck on a work challenge? We've got your back! Our team of experts is here to answer all your toughest HR questions.

Don't wait! Ask your question now on WhatsApp and get expert insights in 48 hours.



Send us a message on
09044898444

When your team is aligned, **anything is possible.**

The importance of clear goals, strong teamwork, and high-level innovative thinking has never been more crucial, particularly in light of the Federal Government's strong focus on improving public service performance.

Is your team prepared for the tough year ahead?

Our Expert-led Strategy Retreats build strong, forward-thinking teams with a clear path to success.

Why is Workforce Consulting the Go-to Expert in Facilitating Strategy Retreats?

It's simple. We've spent the last 20 years working with leaders to transform their organization and boost performance. We excel in creating strategic alignment through strategy and team-building retreats.

Our retreats provide a powerful platform for public and corporate leaders to assess their organization, identify strengths and weaknesses, and create a clear plan to achieve their goals. We work with you through the entire process - from an insightful pre-retreat diagnosis and meticulous planning to the impactful delivery of the strategy retreat and the critical phase of post-retreat implementation.





Still Think Playing Politics At Work Is Beneath You?

Think Again.

In every organization, industry, or sector, there are two Ps that govern human enterprise: Performance and Politics. Both are critically important for success.

However, a lot of people scoff or turn up their noses at the thought of playing politics at work. Sadly, they do this to their own detriment. "Work hard, play fair, and you'll get ahead," they say. Um, sorry, but there's actually a lot of evidence that shows this just isn't the case.

In one popular survey, people surveyed said 'effort' was the number-one predictor of success, but a large body of research shows it's actually one of the worst. Appearances seem to trump truth at the office.

According to Stanford Graduate School of Business Professor Jeffrey Pfeffer, "*Managing what your boss thinks of you is far more important than actual hard work.*"

Another study shows that those who made a good impression got better performance reviews than those who worked harder but didn't manage impressions as well. Often, this comes down to something we're all very familiar with: good old bootlicking. For some people, this is a hard pill to swallow. But going by hardcore research, it is a pill that one must learn to swallow to stay ahead of the game. But is bootlicking and boss flattering really effective? You can bet that it is.

A surprisingly large body of research has proven that flattery is so powerful that it works even when the boss knows it's insincere.

Jennifer Chatman, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, did a study to see at what point flattery backfired . . . but she couldn't find one.

You Think **Politics is Dirty?**

Here is Why You Absolutely Must Learn to Play Politics at Work.

Tekeme wore his refusal to engage in office politics as a badge of honor. To anyone who cared to listen, he would say things like: "*Office politics is not for people like me. It is dirty, low, and unnecessary, and I'm not interested in sinking to that level. Only people who don't do their jobs well need to play office politics. I come to work to do my job and go home, not to lick anyone's boots or play games.*"

A few years down the line, he had a different tale to tell. In his own words, "*I began to reconsider my position on office politics after I was passed up for promotion five times! After some investigation, I found out that my name kept failing to make the list not because I was performing poorly or failing to meet my goals, but because I had neglected to form relationships with people who had the power to advocate for my promotion.*"

Drawing on these facts, Professor Jeffrey Pfeffer advises professionals to stop thinking of the world as unfair, or of politics as a dirty game. He puts it bluntly: *"The lesson from cases of people both keeping and losing their jobs is that as long as you keep your boss or bosses happy, performance really does not matter that much, and by contrast, if you upset them, performance won't save you."*

For those of us expecting to be rewarded for long hours and fair play, this can be tough to stomach. Yet, considering that this is more a game of facts than sentiment, it becomes prudent to understand at the very least why it is a strategic move to understand the game of office politics and to use it to one's advantage.

So What Exactly is Office Politics and Why is it So Important?

First, let's be very clear, when we talk about playing politics at work, we are not talking about cutthroat office politics – the stab-you-in-the-back, I'll-take-credit-for-your-every-idea, reputation-smearing, dirty-gossiping, and character-assassination kind of politics. That's not politics. That's dirty play, and it's never a good idea.

By its nature, office politics is not inherently evil. Politics is about building two things: influence and relationships, and the power these two things give you – or don't.

Now that we've clarified what office politics is, let's take a look at what you can do to ease yourself into playing politics at work well.

Reframe what "politics" means to you.

Start to be aware of what the word 'politics' means to you and how that understanding is framing your reality, specifically how it frames the way you understand the work environment and how you choose

to show up in it.

Playing politics is almost never about the activity itself, but rather the intention behind the activity. Instead of terming it 'sucking up to your boss', change your mindset, and try calling it something else. Tell yourself, "I am building strategic relationships with my stakeholders," or "I'm expanding my coalition of support." What you call it doesn't matter. What does matter is that you see work politics as valuable and important and put effort and energy into it.

Continuously work to strengthen your "relationship currency."

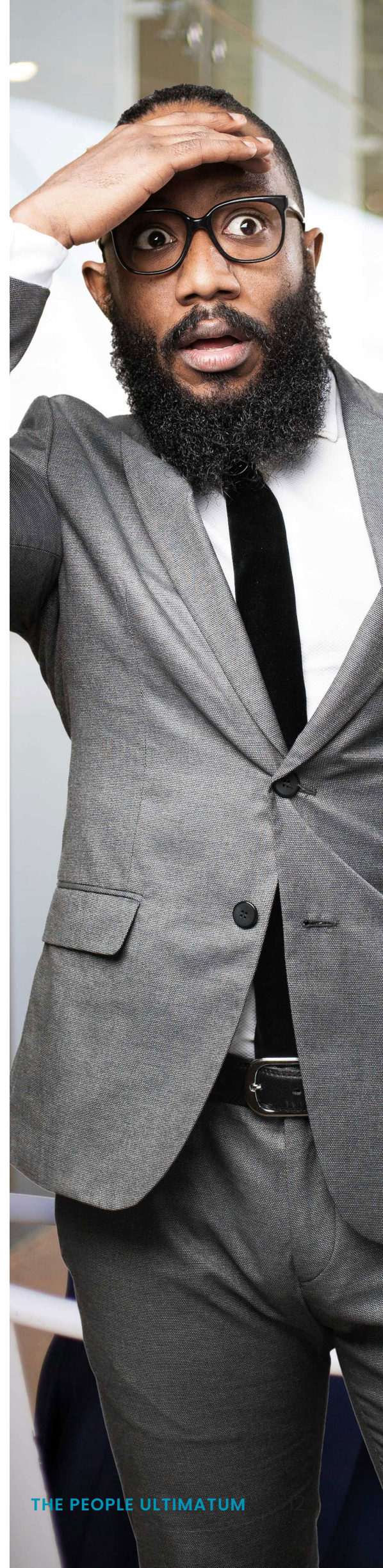
Focusing only on your performance currency, or the credibility you build through your work, is very unlikely to get you the success you're aiming for – be it a bonus, promotion, or recognition from senior executives. However, investing time in your networks and building the connections that can speak for you and your work will get you those things.

This investment in strategic relationships is not a distraction from your "real" job but, in fact, one of the most important aspects of it. While it's clearly important to build relationships deliberately with people who can be your allies, don't make the mistake of neglecting to build relationships with people who have the potential to be your adversaries. Every additional adversary that you have lessens your political capital and your effectiveness.

Your Next Steps

Does this sound like we are encouraging you to intentionally manage perception and occasionally flatter your boss?

No, absolutely not. We are not encouraging you to flatter your boss. We are **INSISTING** that you deliberately manage perceptions and engage in flattering your boss.



The evidence is overwhelming, and merely encouraging you will be too mild and borderline irresponsible on our part!

Simply put, let them know that they are the world's greatest boss.

Your hard work will not pay off if your boss doesn't know whom to reward for it. Will you expect a great product to sell without marketing and promotion?

To succeed spectacularly in your role, whether old or new, you do need to be visible, and your boss needs to like you. This is just human nature. By all means, work very hard and put in the effort, but you must also let your boss know that you are working hard and that the contributing factor is that you absolutely love working for them and learning from them.

Here are three specific steps I will recommend that you take going forward:

Step One: Meet with your boss and find out her definition of success regarding your role (whatever you do, please do not assume this. You must find out directly from your boss).

Step Two: Every Friday, send your boss an email summarizing your key accomplishment(s) for that week. Keep it high level and make sure they are aligned with her definition of success.

Step Three: Once a Month, let your boss know how much you are learning from her and the extent to which you value working with her.



In Conclusion

Remember, politics is about building strong and strategic relationships that can speak for you when it matters most. The goal is to play politics on your own terms, with a clear-eyed view of why you are doing it.

Everyone plays some form of politics, and getting better at the version that you want to play is critical to your career success and your personal well-being. Because it really is true— if you don't play politics, politics will play you.

So move past saying things like "My work will speak for me". You can't wait for your work to speak for you because work doesn't speak. You need to speak about your work, and you need other people to speak about it too.

You have to be VISIBLE ... don't wink in the dark and expect to be noticed.

Ignore this advice at your own risk!

To your success!

Regardless of sector, it is the dream of every HR professional to ascend the ranks and take on senior HR leadership roles. Sadly, research has shown that not every HR professional who rises to become a leader will succeed in that position. According to extensive studies conducted by the Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM), 31% of new HR leaders fail in their first 12-18 months. Most are either fired or leave on their own. This throws up a critical question: why do so many HR leaders struggle to succeed in a position they've trained for and have experience in?

The senior HR leader whose insights we share in this interview was a former Vice President of HR in a

well-known global organization. He has worked with and coached hundreds of HR leaders across sectors and at all levels in his 25-year HR career.

The insights he shares will help HR leaders starting a new role to avoid preventable and devastating mistakes that have derailed many others in the past. It will offer deep insight into what it takes to succeed spectacularly in a new leadership role.

Question: The statistics are quite startling: 31% of new HR leaders are likely to fail within their first 18 months on the job. Drawing from your experience as a senior HR leader and a coach to HR professionals, could you please share with us the reasons behind this high failure rate among new HR leaders?

Answer: Often, when I'm coaching HR professionals who are in the process of getting back on track after experiencing their first or second setback in an HR leadership role, I start by asking them what they believe went wrong and caused them to stumble.



Cracking the Code on The #1 Reason HR Leaders Fail.

Hard-earned Insights from a
Global HR Leader

More often than not, their answers have revolved around issues like: "I had trouble figuring out the new culture." Or "I did not succeed in winning over my team, and they worked against me." Or "I did not deliver results and make my mark fast enough." Or "My boss and I did not have good work chemistry".

Indeed, all of these are important contributing factors. However, in my experience, both as a professional who had to navigate a lot of difficulties in my first months in multiple leadership roles and as an avid observer and coach to other HR leaders, this is what I have found to be true 100% of the time. The number one reason HR leaders stumble on the job is much

more subtle and can often be traced back to their failure to start strong from the beginning. By that I mean they failed to proactively seize their critical 90- to 100-day honeymoon period. They made bad early decisions that produced missed expectations, and this ultimately caused them to derail. In essence, what I am saying is this: the decisions and choices an HR professional makes or does not make in their crucial first few months are the ultimate reasons they fail.

Question: In the context you have just described, what exactly does it mean to start strong? Kindly provide very clear specifics.

Answer: To start strong is to put infrastructures in place that enable you to hit the ground running. Remember, you are not just a leader, you are an HR leader! The stakes are higher in your case. The entire organization expects you to step up and establish yourself early on. You are expected to proactively understand the organization and close any knowledge gaps you have within a few months of your resumption. You are

expected to learn the culture, navigate the politics, and build relationships, all of which will enable you to deliver the expected results early enough. This may seem like a no-brainer, but believe me, it is difficult because all this learning is on you! You cannot rely on your boss or the organization to onboard, train, or prepare you for the new role. It is on your shoulders to take charge and figure it all out because you are a leader, and that is what you are paid to do. All of this can be daunting, especially if you're making a big career step up.

Question: That sounds tough. How is it possible for HR leaders to come into a new role, in a new organization and immediately begin to deliver results?

Answer: That's a question I was hoping you'd ask. I'd be lying if I said achieving high-quality results on the job in less than 2 years was easy. It is not, but it is very possible, and the answer lies in the crucial first few months on the job. It is much like laying the foundation of a house. The depth of foundation you'd lay for a 5-storey apartment is not the same as that you'd lay for a bungalow. No matter how many years of experience an HR leader has, it is a very bad decision to underestimate the power that the first few months wield over your tenure in an organization. If you get your first 90 to 100 days right, if you ride on good advice and set off on the right foot, you will be amazed at the kind of results you will deliver in a very short while. It's all about the strategy you deploy in settling down. That is where the magic happens.

Question: We understand that you're a coach, and providing quality advice is what you do for a living. However, we would be delighted if you could share with us some vital strategies to deploy in the first 90-100 days to help HR leaders emerge as high performers.

Answer: I'd be happy to. My first advice for HR leaders starting in a new organization is this: Start your transition well BEFORE you officially arrive on day one. This is so important! Think about it. Ninety days is not enough time for you to get up to speed, take charge, build your team, and get results. It takes a lot of pre-resumption groundwork to hit the ground running. Always remember that as soon as you resume, the clock starts ticking, and the pressure is on. All eyes are on you, with high-performance expectations. Therefore, it is a fundamental mistake to wait until your resumption to do your groundwork. You must start ahead of resumption!

That being said, what kind of groundwork must you do ahead of your resumption?

Do your best to get these three things right:

1. First, find out who your key influencers are and start building relationships with them before you

resume. Key influencers are those people who can directly influence and impact your performance, your success, and how you are perceived in the organization. They include: your direct boss, the department/business leaders you will be serving, your direct reports, and your key colleagues.

2. Second, draft your own Onboarding Plan. What does this mean? It means asking well-targeted questions that will help you draft a simple 1-2 page document that identifies key priorities and high-payoff activities that will quickly get you up to speed. If you take my first advice to have early conversations with your key influencers, you will have enough material to create a good Onboarding Plan.
3. The third thing you must get right is to proactively deepen your knowledge of the business/organization and how your role fits. Too many HR professionals take this step for granted, and it comes back to bite them in the end. As a new HR leader, if you want to gain real credibility as a potential asset to the organization, you must craft a strategic point of view about the organization and how your role fits. This means taking quality time to understand the organization's priorities and its unique needs and identifying how your capabilities can deliver value to meet those needs.

Question: This is really insightful. But it raises another question. Considering the amount of groundwork that HR leaders must do to start strong, how much time should they take between jobs to prepare? What do you recommend?

Answer: If you're changing employers, I recommend that you take at least four to six weeks or more, as a minimum. Less won't work. You need time to get your act together first. Your early days on a new job are one of the toughest and riskiest periods of your career, no matter how much experience you have. You don't want to start feeling frazzled or uncertain. You must never appear unprepared. It is difficult to recover from that. It is way better to delay your start date and show up charged up and ready, than to start early and feel like a fish out of water.

Question: This has been quite helpful indeed. Thank you for sharing your insights with us.

Answer: It has been a pleasure. Thank you for having me.

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- Knowledge of how to learn
- Knowledge of how to get things done
- Knowledge of how to communicate
- Knowledge of how your mind works and how to use it / How to think
- Knowledge of how to optimize time
- Knowledge of how to leverage other people's talent and resources
- Knowledge of how to be of service
- Knowledge of how to network, make friends, and influence people
- Knowledge of how to sell
- Knowledge of how to solve problems
- Knowledge of how to lead
- Knowledge of Finance / Money
- Knowledge of how to motivate yourself
- Knowledge of how to take care of oneself



Driving Performance

with Public Sector Promotion Assessment

A Case Study

CLIENT PROFILE

Our client is the independent regulatory authority for the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

CLIENT ISSUE/BUSINESS SITUATION

Their decision to engage our competency-based promotion assessments service was driven by two key factors:

First, the understanding that promoting unqualified individuals to high-level roles leads to poor performance, poor decision-making, operational inefficiencies, and low morale. This is because employees promoted beyond their competence reach a point of stagnation and frustration, hindering both individual and organizational progress.

Second, the realization that the organization can only achieve strong results as mandated by the current administration if individuals with the right set of capabilities and competencies are promoted to senior positions.

In response to these factors and the pressure to deliver on strategic goals and provide value to stakeholders, our client made the bold decision to deviate from the tradition of promoting individuals based solely on years of service and instead opted to base promotions on competency.

With this in mind, they engaged us to utilize our competency-based promotion assessment process to identify the right candidates for various higher-level roles, including Special Assistant positions in four divisions: **Legal, Technical, Media, and the Office of the Chief of Staff.**

In line with their strategic management plan that identified effective leadership as a critical success factor to the achievement of the strategic imperatives of the body, they needed us to:

- *Identify the success profile for each of their management roles to serve as a guide in determining the best-fit profile of employees to promote to their Special Assistant roles.*

- *Design the framework for the execution of the project.*
- *Develop valid, reliable, and customized assessment tools.*
- *Conduct an assessment exercise that is objective, valid, and reliable to help identify the most suitable candidates.*
- *Generate individual reports detailing the gaps and strengths of each individual, along with recommendations for individual development.*
- *Recommend suitable candidates for their Special Assistant roles based on the data gathered from the promotion assessment project.*

THE APPROACH

We took a strategic step towards achieving the client's goals using the 5-D Methodology:

Diagnose, Design, Develop, Deliver, Drive

1. **Diagnose:** *We conducted a clarity of mandate meeting with the client to clarify expectations, review relevant documents, and define measures of success. Subsequently, we designed a comprehensive project delivery framework.*
2. **Design:** *We reviewed the existing competencies provided, examined the responsibilities of the role, analyzed participant profiles and job descriptions, developed behavioral indicators for each competency, and created standard success profiles depicting full capability for each role.*
3. **Develop:** *We developed and validated assessment instruments to evaluate staff capabilities for the various roles. We considered measuring potentials and performance, hence the utilization of psychometrics, review meetings/competency-based interviews, and role-based case exercises.*
4. **Deliver:** *Candidates were scheduled for various assessments over the execution period. Our well-trained assessors were deployed for the project, and candidate responses were collated. Subsequently, the candidates' results were compared with the organization's success profiles.*
5. **Drive:** *We submitted an assessment report on each individual who participated in the assessment process. The report included a corporate action plan and recommendations for subsequent interventions.*

ASSESSMENT TOOLS DEPLOYED

Review Meetings/Competency-based Interviews: These were utilized to gather behavioral evidence from candidates' past experiences, focusing on predetermined competencies crucial for effective performance in specific roles. Questions were designed to elicit specific responses, and the collected evidence was used to assess the candidate's potential performance at the Special Assistant level.

Simulation Exercise/Case Work: Candidates participated in a role-based exercise where they were tasked with making decisions and generating scalable solutions independently to address specific problems presented in a business case.

High-Potential Assessment: This assessment was deployed to identify employees with the qualities needed for broader responsibilities. It assessed critical competencies such as intellect, drive, agility, and leadership orientation, providing insights for future success in the roles.

OUR FINDINGS

During the assessment process, we evaluated candidates based on competencies such as Technical Expertise, IT Savviness, Self-Drive and initiative, Strategic Thinking and innovative problem-solving, People Management, Industry & Organizational Knowledge, Interpersonal Relationship Skills, Analytical Thinking, Interpersonal Effectiveness, and Report Writing Skills across the four roles.

Our performance evaluation analysis revealed that the candidates possessed the necessary industry and organizational knowledge to fulfill their roles effectively. Throughout the promotion assessment, we identified critical gaps that could impact performance at the next higher level, and we made recommendations on how to close these gaps. Similarly, we offered learning interventions to address these gaps.


Additionally, we recommended that these individuals be provided with ample opportunities to make strategic and critical decisions that will stimulate their innovative thinking and foster a more strategic and analytical approach to their work.

OUTCOMES DELIVERED

- 1. Individual findings on each participant revealed their strengths and weaknesses relative to their respective roles. We also identified competency gaps that could hinder their performance and that of the organization.*
- 2. The client received a comprehensive report on each candidate's areas of strength and gaps. Specific development interventions were also provided to address each gap.*
- 3. These development interventions/initiatives are expected to help the candidates achieve the required level of independent excellence in their respective roles.*
- 4. Consequently, it is expected that these interventions will significantly contribute to the organization's advancement, aligning it with its management plan, fostering a performance-driven culture, and positioning it for sustained success.*

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Why Your Performance Management System Is Not Making Your Organization Perform Better

There is a saying, “An ounce of performance is worth pounds of promises.” When we hire someone, we trust they’ll deliver based on their qualifications and potential. But over time, how do we objectively assess whether they’re adding value to the organization, developing their skills, and addressing their weaknesses?

This is where a Performance Management System (PMS) comes in. But what exactly is it?



In its simplest definition, a Performance Management System is a broad collection of activities designed to maximize individual, and by extension, organizational performance. It is an ongoing cycle of setting expectations, creating a performance plan, observing, documenting, and measuring employee behavior and results, and providing feedback, coaching, mentoring, and evaluating performance over time to use in decision-making.

Why is Performance Management Important?

Through both formal and informal processes, an effective PMS helps organizations align their employees, resources, and systems to meet their strategic objectives. It also serves as a dashboard, providing an early warning of potential problems and allowing managers to know when they must make adjustments to keep an organization on track. Performance management is not a singular event but rather a continuous process, the benefits of which will ultimately improve both the employee and the organization.

From this definition, it is clear that a Performance Management System is the foundation of performance excellence in an organization. It is critical to have an effective PMS in place because that is the only system that keeps an ongoing track of the returns of the organization on its investment in people resources. Organizations that get performance management right become formidable competitive machines.

For Most Organizations Effective Performance Management Remains a Struggle

Strong performance management rests on the simple principle that “what gets measured gets done.” In a well-designed system, an organization establishes a series of goals, targets, and metrics, starting from its most important objectives and extending to the daily tasks of frontline staff. Managers continually monitor those metrics and regularly engage with their teams to discuss progress in meeting the targets. Good performance is rewarded; underperformance triggers action to address the problem.

As straightforward as this sounds, for too many organizations in both the public and private sectors, the system put in place to manage performance is not effective. It is often slow, unstable, or even broken. At its best, organizations with ineffective PMS won't operate as efficiently or effectively as they could. At its worst, changes in technology, market, regulations, citizen demands, or budget constraints can leave

them crippled and unable to respond adequately to the needs of those they serve.

Why Performance Management Often Fails

When a performance management system fails to deliver the desired outcomes for the organization, there are key factors that can contribute significantly to the challenge. They are:

Poor Performance Targets

What is a performance target? It is the specific, planned level of result to be achieved within a clear timeframe.

Selecting the right targets is often an area where problems arise in a performance management system. If targets set for employees are too easy, they won't improve performance. If they are out of reach, employees won't even attempt to meet them. If the targets are irrelevant to the organization's priorities, meeting them will not reflect on the organization's performance or employee growth. The best targets are relevant and attainable but with a healthy element of stretch required.

Poor Performance Metrics

If a performance management system will deliver effectively, the metrics that an organization chooses must promote the performance it wants. If the chosen metrics do not accurately reflect the organization's objectives, employees may focus on the wrong priorities, leading to inefficiencies and missed targets.

Metrics that are poorly designed or unreliable can result in inaccurate performance evaluations. They will fail to provide meaningful insights into performance, making it difficult for managers to identify areas for improvement or make informed decisions. This can lead to unfair assessments, demotivation among employees, and ultimately, decreased productivity.

Lack of Transparency

Employees need to understand how their efforts contribute to the organization's overarching objectives and impact its performance.

Unfortunately, all too often, as metrics and targets move through various levels of management, they can become distorted. This occurs when managers buffer targets to benefit themselves or cover weaknesses elsewhere. If this continues unchecked, there will eventually be some disconnection between what employees are doing and what the organization needs them to do, which will affect their performance.

In the best performance management systems, the entire organization operates from a single, verified version of the truth, and all employees understand both the organization's overall performance and how they contributed to it.

Lack of Quality Dialogue

Performance management doesn't work well without frequent, honest, open, and effective communication. Managing performance should not always be about the metrics; it should also focus on helping employees improve. It should be about connecting with your team and keeping everyone on track, whether it's through meetings, reviews, or just informal performance conversations.

A good performance management system is about helping employees learn from mistakes and sharing what works. In many high-performing companies, supervisors don't just give orders and monitor compliance; they also mentor, coach, and support their teams. This level of support demonstrates to employees that the organization cares about their growth and development, energizing them to continue giving their best.

Ultimately, effective performance accountability relies on numerous positive and productive conversations aimed at enhancing employee performance.

Lack of Consequences

Performance must have consequences, and they could be rewards or sanctions. While the consequences for consistent weak performance may not be as severe as termination, weak accountability tells people that just showing up is acceptable.

Nevertheless, we have found that rewarding good performance is far more powerful than penalizing bad performance. Most organizations have various kinds of formal and informal recognition-and-reward systems, but few do enough of this kind of morale building, either in volume or frequency.

High-performing organizations, whether in the public or private sector, create systems that reward and motivate strong performance. These reward systems could include anything from lunchroom celebrations to town-hall announcements, employee-of-the-month, and team-achievement awards. What is important is that the reward systems encourage behavior that improves performance and keeps it high.

Lack of Management Engagement

Management interactions with employees at all levels of the organization are an extremely powerful performance management tool. They convey a

message of respect for employees as experts in their respective areas of the organization. Additionally, these interactions provide managers with an opportunity to gain firsthand insight into the challenges employees may be facing, enabling quick problem-solving and identification of improvements. When such interactions are few or nonexistent, the organization loses all the benefits that it can produce.



How to Build a Strong Performance Management System

Every organization stands to gain tremendously from recalibrating its performance management system. With strong commitment from their leaders, HR professionals can strengthen their performance management system by following this guide.

Define Clear Objectives and Expectations:

Start by clearly defining what you want to achieve and what you expect from your performance management system. A strong performance management system should not only help in getting everyone aligned with the organization's mission and objectives, but it should also go a long way in building a culture of trust and meritocracy.

What purpose do you want your performance management system to serve? Define it and ensure that it aligns with your organization's mission, vision, and strategic goals.

Then, clearly communicate performance expectations to employees. Ensure that they understand how their individual goals and targets will contribute to broader organizational success. Next, make sure that deadlines for targets are collaboratively set by employees and their managers to foster ownership and accountability.

Implement Continuous Feedback Mechanisms:

Move away from traditional annual performance reviews and embrace continuous feedback mechanisms. Encourage regular one-on-one meetings between managers and employees to discuss goals, progress, challenges, and development opportunities. Provide constructive feedback in real-time to facilitate continuous improvement. Performance conversations should occur daily and not be reserved for an annual event.

Foster a Culture of Development and Growth:

Shift the focus of performance management from solely evaluating past performance to fostering employee development and growth. Encourage managers to act as coaches and mentors, supporting employees in setting meaningful goals, acquiring new skills, and advancing their careers. Provide opportunities for training, skill development, and career advancement.

Promote Transparency and Accountability:

Be open and honest about how performance is managed. Make sure everyone knows what's expected of them and how their performance will be evaluated. Set up systems to hold employees and managers

accountable for meeting these expectations and achieving results.

Leverage Technology Solutions:

Where possible, use modern technology solutions to simplify your performance management processes. Invest in performance management software that enables goal setting, progress tracking, feedback collection, and performance evaluation in a centralized and user-friendly platform. Leverage analytics tools to gain insights into performance trends and identify areas for improvement.

Measure and Evaluate Performance Effectiveness:

Regularly checking how well the performance management system is working. This involves getting feedback from employees, managers, and others involved to see what's working well and what needs improvement. By using performance data and analytics, you can see how the system is affecting things like employee satisfaction, productivity, and the overall success of the organization.

In conclusion

In a recent Gallup survey, employees cited four primary needs from their organizations:

- *Job clarity and priorities*
- *Opportunities to learn and grow*
- *Ongoing feedback and communication from managers*
- *Accountability*

According to this study, only one in five employees strongly agreed that they had talked to their manager in the past six months about reaching their goals. A performance management system structured in this fashion can hardly improve the performance of its people, let alone performance management systems that are structured to provide annual reviews and performance feedback. These are some of the most common ways that organizations manage performance, but ultimately, they do not work.

This paper aimed to provide clarity on the concept of a performance management system, the benefits it brings to organizations, why it often fails, and how it can be built to deliver better results. We encourage you to go through the material again objectively, adjust your performance management methods where you need to, and adapt the recommendations offered to suit your organization's needs.

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