



Case Study: Local Government

Local Government and People Improve Performance Programme

Introduction

Richard O'Rawe of Stellar Leadership has been working with local government for many years and in 2004 he was asked to design a new approach to performance management that incorporated a strong leadership dimension. This led to the People Improve Performance initiative.

The proposition was that '**people improve performance**' and therefore the key to continuous improvement lay in a leadership development programme that engaged, energised and empowered people.

People Improve Performance

Having undertaken research into best practice and consulted with local government officers the People Improve Performance (PIP) programme was created. It is a programme based on Stellar Leadership's flagship programme, Unlocking Leadership. This is aimed at achieving performance improvement by facilitating managers to reflect on and further develop their leadership, team working and management practices.

Council Participation

Four Councils were selected to join a pilot of the People Improve Performance programme. It was sponsored and promoted by the Local Government Staff Commission.

The participating Councils were:

- Antrim
- Ballymoney
- Newry and Mourne
- Dungannon & South Tyrone.

Conclusions Arising from the Pilot

A central finding from the pilot is that the PIP programme is a practical approach that is clear in philosophy (leadership-based and people-oriented) and not a system or procedure to be adopted. Each of the pilot Councils adopted whole-heartedly the PIP methodology which

they were able to adopt or integrate into their existing process.

Based on formative feedback from the Senior Management Teams and consistent with the conclusions of research findings, we found that:-

- Leadership and management competencies, including coaching skills in particular, are considered necessary to ensure that performance reviews are successful¹ and sustainable
- Commitment to a culture of supporting people, as a mainstay of performance management, must start at the top and the SMT must lead by example if this is to be adopted Council-wide
- The basic skills of "managing tasks" and "managing processes" are not enough to create the conditions for continuous performance improvement. Line managers (including SMT) need to "lead people" if they are to be innovative, empowered and allowed to drive continuous performance improvement
- Managers need development in the use of 'soft skills' if they are to be confident and competent in clarifying job expectations and motivating people to do better
- The performance management process should be team-based so that the culture of collaborative working as well as supporting individuals is embedded in the organisation
- Although everyone wanted paperwork kept to a minimum, it was agreed that records should be kept of the outcomes of a performance review meeting with each Council agreeing a pro-forma approach and/or an informal agenda-minutes approach to record-keeping.

Corporate Cascade

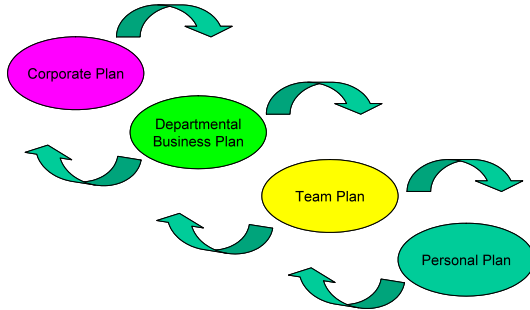
All the Senior Managers involved agreed that it is desirable to introduce a performance management support process based on the People Improve Performance methodology.

¹ The primary measures of success are improved performance and increased job satisfaction



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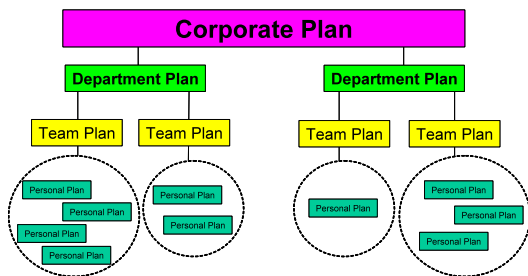
There is widespread commitment to the idea of a cascade from the top of the organisation to front-line operations with provision for 'bounce-back-up' as feedback is received and acted on. This is illustrated below.



Importance of Team Based Approach

The principle that performance management support should involve attention to team working as well as supporting the individual is accepted by all Councils.

This will ensure that plans are understood by all and coordinated at every level within the organisation. A team, be it a management team or service team, will therefore need to have consistency of purpose so that individuals are clear about their roles and responsibilities and able to work collaboratively.



The implication of this approach is that every team must have a clear briefing on the team's overall purpose, objectives, action plan and individuals' roles and responsibilities, preferably in written form.

Less Formal and More Open

Everyone agreed that the process of performance review should be less formal and more open than in previous systems tried. This will mean promoting a coaching and emotionally intelligent approach to leadership and management.

The proposal that Councils should treat performance review meetings as **SMART conversations** is well received. The idea is to ensure that performance reviews are based on dialogue – two-way conversations – so that employees are listened to and feedback discussed and in a way that leads to specific action plans capable of producing positive results **aligned** to agreed plans.

Training and Development Support

It is agreed that the overall process simply will not work without full Senior Management Team backing and the development of line managers in terms of competencies necessary to hold SMART conversations.

The skills of leadership, coaching, listening, questioning, giving and getting feedback, motivating people, dealing with conflict and poor performance, are all considered necessary to success.

A clear finding is that senior managers agreed that the key to success for a People Improve Performance approach is the capacity and capability of managers to lead people rather than to manage procedures.

Making Contact

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