Performance frameworks

‘The system doesn’t help.’

DEVELOPING

Everyone sees change - and managing it - as the norm:

• the leadership team believes that changing the way people think and behave is the most important factor in improving performance - and this is clear from what they say, how and how they act;
• the leadership team spends time thinking hard about how it needs to change and how it thinks and acts itself, as individuals and as a team, in order to lead change effectively - and how it needs to implement a new structure or system; it seeks feedback from staff and outside experts if necessary; it communicates discussions to staff to set an example;
• the leadership team develops good ‘soft’ performance indicators so that it can measure the success of the changes; it gives equal attention to technical skills – and puts money into ongoing training. People are rewarded for what they do and not for what they say;
• staff are not involved in designing the change in any way and not tailored to different staff audiences; the benefits of changes and the impact of its decisions to help it plan service delivery; it prioritises in-year interventions and takes remedial action if needed; managers use the national targets and also develop local ones;
• every level in the organisation – this is done by first checking their performance against the organisation’s expectations as well as its own; the leadership team consults staff about changing the organisation at the beginning of the process, but consultation tends to stop when there are difficult decisions to make, that involve winners and losers; individual needs are supported and encouraged;
• each individual has internalised the corporate values for himself or herself – they have worked out how they fit in;
• managers clearly outline what good performance looks like in practice;
• the organisation values good people management skills as much as technical skills – and pulls money into ongoing training. People promoted clearly behave in a way that will help the organisation achieve its goals;
• accountability and responsibility are clearly separated and dealt with as far as possible down the organisation – managers feel they are responsible for their actions and decisions.

CONSOLIDATING

Everyone understands that they need to do things differently to get improvement:

• the leadership team is developing its thinking on how to address the ‘soft’ issues (people issues) to make sure change happens and this is clear in its plans - but it is less clear on how to do this;
• the technical changes still seem to be a priority for the leadership team – how people will do things differently is usually put at the end of the agenda; there is little open discussion and it is not worked through in advance; the leadership team seems to make decisions on its own and then share them;
• the leadership team consults staff about changing the organisation at the beginning of the process, but consultation tends to stop when there are difficult decisions to make, that involve winners and losers; there is a communication to staff – but it is often ‘management speak’ and not tailored to different staff audiences; the benefits of changes and the consequences of not changing are unclear;
• the organisation encourages managers (and staff) to work out how they will change their part of the organisation;
• middle managers have specific delegated responsibilities for parts of the change plan – and they receive the support they need to deliver.

STARTING

The framework is creating work, not helping performance, for example:

• the performance management system has service level and corporate elements, which are recognised and applied in both business planning and monitoring performance;
• the visible face of the framework is the raft of performance data – but this doesn’t command people’s confidence; there are several ‘hunch’ performance indicators, each with the same weighting;
• the performance management framework does not reflect the significant changes in the organisation; it may have been imported from outside with an attempt to tailor it to 6 to the organisation; it does not serve the executive and scrutiny functions effectively;
• the leadership team is keen to get good performance information on its new strategy; there are no discussions about the benefits and values that have to change to improve results;
• the leadership team focuses on achieving improvement through system/structure/process – it does not recognise that things largely change through people changing what and how they do things; it does and how it behaves (individually and as a team), in order to lead change effectively - and how it needs to implement a new structure or system; it seeks feedback from staff and outside experts if necessary; it communicates discussions to staff to set an example;
• the leadership team develops good ‘soft’ performance indicators so that it can measure the success of the changes; it gives equal attention to technical skills – and puts money into ongoing training. People are rewarded for what they do and not for what they say; everyone sees change – and managing it – as the norm:
• finance and resource allocation discussions are separate from discussions about performance – it is clear that there is no one system.

CONSOLIDATING

The performance management system is just the way the management team runs the organisation:

• the leadership team sees performance management as running the business – it sees the system and infrastructure to change the corporate values for themselves – they have worked out how they fit in;
• the organisation has built its own framework or adapted another one so that it fits; staff understand the performance management framework and talk about it easily – they have worked out how they fit in;
• service managers recognize that they cannot use the same measures for everything – they may have to develop different measures for improvement; they use the national targets and also develop local ones;
• the organisation has streamlined the frequency and timelines of performance indicators in the posts where managers and staff can make decisions; it is not really clear how they can tell if the system is working;
• staff do not really understand how the system operates – some people don’t perform.’

DEVELOPING

People understand how to use the performance framework:

• the leadership team is keen to get good performance information on the relevant factors that help to do it. It sets service delivery; it prioritises in-year interventions and takes remedial action if needed; managers use the national targets and also develop local ones;
• the leadership team consults staff about changing the organisation at the beginning of the process, but consultation tends to stop when there are difficult decisions to make, that involve winners and losers; there is a communication to staff – but it is often ‘management speak’ and not tailored to different staff audiences; the benefits of changes and the consequences of not changing are unclear;
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Leadership
‘Leaders aren’t interested.’

**STARTING**
Leaders do not show clearly through their words and actions that self improvement really matters:
- the leadership team’s statements about where it wants the organisation to go and how they want it to change, are confusing (eg, different strategies in different documents; inconsistent messages from individual members of the management team);
- the leadership team rarely talks about improving performance publicly; leadership meetings focus on discussing the current situation and may sometimes simply apportion blame;
- there is very little delegation of accountability for achieving results, from the leadership team to senior managers or the operational boards;
- people see that the leadership team makes all the important decisions, paying lip service to delegation;
- there is no structured leadership development programme for leaders and senior managers; and
- the leadership team does not take time to look at its performance.

* Note: ‘Leaders’ includes politicians and top managers.

**DEVELOPING**
Leaders start to give clear messages about performance:
- the leadership team sets out one clear direction and shares its objectives with all the staff; messages from individual members are generally consistent;
- the leadership team sees the written documents as only one of a continuous communication with staff; they constantly reinforce the organisational direction when they talk to the staff;
- senior managers tend to take all the key decisions themselves rather than supporting/coaching those better placed to make the decisions;
- most managers have participated in some form of leadership programme; there is a focus on meeting the needs of professionals;
- the leadership team does reflect on its own performance, but stage, discussions tend to be unstructured, sporadic and not completely honest.

**BREAKTHROUGH POINTS**
Show your staff that you think performance matters:
- be clear about what you want for the organisation;
- state and re-state the focus and priorities – and not just on paper;
- what you do is much more important than what you say – make the doing the principal for the management team;
- build staff and champions at all levels – encourage them to delegate and coach, rather than control;
- make sure people see that your management team wants to improve its own performance; and
- delegate decision making to the right level.

Help people to perform:
- tell people mistakes are OK as long as they are put right;
- make sure people really know what good performance looks like;
- be clear about the differences between responsibility and accountability;
- make people accountable;
- delegate and coach, rather than control;
- make sure your values are more than words on paper.
Starting

No one is very clear what performance means – and about whether and how the organisation really deals with under-performance:

• the organisation does not have a fully developed objective setting and appraisal system for every employee;
• the leadership team appears to ignore poor performance at senior level – although it may hold other managers accountable for performance;
• service managers set some performance standards, operate the appraisal system and identify training needs;
• the organisation tends to identify ‘problem’ individuals and move them sideways, rather than looking at the wider environment or checking whether they are in the wrong job;
• managers feel that they will not be supported ‘up the line’ if they try to resolve under-performance issues;
• many managers have limited people management skills, especially in dealing with under-performance; they do not have an open attitude to encouraging change and learning from mistakes and they rarely reward positive behaviour;
• there is little recognition of how difficult dealing with under-performance is for managers – and it is not given priority in discussions about training or support; and
• staff are not clear where accountability or responsibility lies – and it tends to stay at the top of the organisation.

Developing

People are becoming clearer about what is expected of them - and more confident about addressing performance issues:

• the organisation has properly developed appraisal systems and training provision for all staff;
• the leadership team has established corporate values and behaviours, and is clear what this means for different levels in the organisation; departmental managers translate corporate values and behaviours into what it means for them;
• departments have goals and targets, many staff are clear what is expected of them – but not everyone;
• the leadership team is beginning to deal with under-performance at the senior level;
• service managers know how to assess performance and give constructive feedback to staff; they deal with under-performance; there are clear examples of support from above, when managers address under-performance issues;
• managers reward positive behaviours that help improve users’ experiences of the service, they recognise outstanding merit and good results; and
• for most people, the difference between responsibility and accountability is still unclear – and too many decisions are still made at the top level.

Consolidating

Everyone sees how necessary learning is for developing and improving:

• the leadership team regularly takes time out to review what is working well; the team actively seeks external challenge/competition; it gets the feedback from other managers and stakeholders and shares the results across the organisation;
• the leadership team sees learning as part of understanding ‘cause and effect’. It finds the impact of management decisions; it is willing to stop any activities that do not deliver the required result;
• problems showing up in performance data are rarely a surprise, the issue is usually well on the way to resolution;
• managers see the organisation as a system and review services from a user perspective; they involve key stakeholders;
• the leadership team now expects teams/individuals to review projects at regular milestones, in well-facilitated sessions; appraisal/reward systems reflect the outcomes from this process;
• people are happy to share mistakes openly and make sure that the wider organisation learns from their experience; and
• teams regularly use facilitation and process mapping; they know that experimentation is critical to continuous improvement. Managers give innovative projects time to produce results.

Priorities

‘There are too many priorities.’

Developing

Priorities are not clear and no one says what can be dropped, in order to take on new work:

• the leadership team identifies clear corporate objectives; it is beginning to state priorities but these do not relate directly to the corporate objectives; the leadership team has not yet made a realistic assessment of capacity to deliver them all;
• there is little involvement of politicians/non-executive board members or users, in deciding priorities; there may be insufficient hard evidence to guide priorities; political involvement may happen inappropriately at an operational level;
• the leadership team does not make explicit decisions on competing demands, as part of the discussions about objectives and priorities; performance indicators are ‘indeterminate’ at this stage, due to a lack of coherence between the corporate objectives and the priorities;
• people blame the national agenda for the confusion that results; and
• people feel as if everything is a priority.

Managing change

‘People don’t understand what we do have to change.’

People have confidence that priorities will be followed through and everyone copes with changing demands:

• the leadership team consistently states and reviews the priorities and reviews them regularly in the light of the changing environment, performance information and feedback;
• politicians/non-executive board members and users regularly take full part in the discussions about priorities; the quality and impact of their contributions is improving as they gain experience;
• managers tell their teams what they can drop and support them even when things get difficult;
• resource allocation clearly follows the priorities, even if this means that previously unused resources have to be dropped; and
• staff can say that the main priorities are and everyone understands the link between priorities and the performance targets for service delivery.

Consolidating

People start to concentrate on the things that matter:

• there are clear priorities in objective and performance indicators and a limited number of each;
• politicians/non-executive board members and users take part in the discussions about priorities, however the quality and impact of their contributions varies according to their experience;
• the leadership team takes time to think through how the organisation can manage all the competing demands; it takes decisions about priorities against the agreed direction of the organisation – and staff can see this;
• leadership team meetings focus only on exception reports for most non-critical areas;
• although the organisation has established priorities, resource allocation does not completely reflect this as yet; resources are beginning to follow priorities at the periphery;
• managers tell their teams what they can drop – but under pressure, managers may revert to asking their teams to do too much; and
• people see the national agenda as just part of the territory – self-improvement is the primary focus of attention.
The management team are clear that their job is about leading and supporting the organisation to improve: • the leadership team sees written documents as far less important than what they do as a team and how they act as an example; they clearly speak with "one voice" about the organisation's direction; • leadership team meetings focus on future strategy and only on what they can change or improve in the organisation -- they delegate "maintenance" discussions to operational teams/boards; • the leadership team members act as coaches, not only as decision makers; • the leadership programme is ongoing and well resourced; it ensures that new managers come up to speed quickly; follow-up arrangements are in place (eg, learning sets, coaching and mentoring); and • the leadership team review its own performance regularly in a structured and open way; it bases rewards on team as well as individual performance.

Learning 'There's no time to learn.'

Learning doesn't seem to feature in the organisation: • the leadership team rarely talk about it; • the leadership team rarely seeks customer or staff feedback and it is not a major factor in its decision making; • the leadership team does not track key management decisions to see if these have led to improvement; • the approach to performance information is reactive -- data showing problems tends to come as a surprise; • projects are reviewed briefly, only at the end and in a token way; the project team retain the results and fails to share the learning; • experimentation is not encouraged as a necessary part of improving services; • people do not feel free to admit that there might have been a better way of doing something, as they do not want to look foolish; and • learning is not encouraged at either individual or team level -- it does not feature in any appraisal/incentive/reward scheme.

Learning is starting to happen: • the leadership team says learning is important and does initiate it but it is still sporadic and unstructured; the team accepts external challenge/comparison rather than actively seeking it out; • the leadership team sees customer and staff feedback as an important part of improvement; • the organisation is beginning to develop performance information that shows the impact of management decisions; the leadership team reviews this information regularly and challenge assumptions, asking 'what does this information really mean?'; • problems that are revealed by the data are not surprises and often they are already being addressed; • management teams are encouraged to review how they are doing -- but sessions may be curtailed because of operational priorities; • people are comfortable with admitting when things don't go well and there are incentives for individuals to learn; and • people are starting to map processes and think of the organisation as a system. Teams use facilitation to help open up discussion.

Breakthrough Points

Join up your thinking and learn!
• set aside time and resource for learning and set an example; • try new things, don't give up but be prepared to fail -- know whether things are working or not; • make sure your reviews focus more on what you are going to do, rather than what you have done in the past; • make sure you follow up on agreed actions; • seek external challenge and comparison; • see things from other people's perspective -- including that of your service users -- work with partners to improve the users' experience and • think of your organisation as a system -- with inter-dependent parts.

Consolidating

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the breakthrough model