



Case Study: Southwood School

This case study examines the implementation of a new performance management system designed specifically for support staff at a school in the United Kingdom.

Background

- This fictionalized case study is based on a real organization. The school is a public, mixed comprehensive secondary school located in the United Kingdom with an average annual turnover in excess of £1 million. Because it is government funded, it is a non-profit organization.
- Although the case study is in a school setting, many of the issues identified are the same across different countries and different industries—for example, the tension between the exempt employees and support staff.
- There are 120 employees: 80 teaching and 40 non-teaching employees. The school has more than 800 students aged 13-18.
- The case study's author was the school's HR manager.
- The actual events took place in 2004-05.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this case study, students will:

- Understand the components of an effective performance management system.
- Appreciate the complexities involved in designing a performance management system.
- Demonstrate an awareness of the practical issues surrounding implementation of a new performance management system.
- Understand the benefits of performance management to different stakeholders.
- Recognize the importance of training and continuous feedback.

The Case Study

Five years earlier, Southwood School, located in the United Kingdom, implemented a performance management system for all school employees. The performance management system was designed for teachers by the British Department for Education and Skills (DfES), but was used to evaluate school support staff as well because there was no system specifically geared toward support staff. The school had no HR personnel to custom-design a system for support staff; and at the time, most of the emphasis in terms of performance management was paid to teachers. Because few support staff members were classified as exempt employees, a specialized performance management system was not perceived to be a priority.

School Staff Support Roles Include:

- Administrators
- Teaching assistants
- Learning mentors
- Science technicians (who support the work of Science teachers)
- Computer technicians
- Finance managers

(For more information on what some of these jobs entail, please see the job descriptions provided in Work tool #3.)



The DfES system required employees to:

- Agree to 3-6 performance objectives for the upcoming performance period. One of the objectives that must be included requires that teacher performance encompass “pupil progress as well as ways of developing and improving teachers’ professional practice.” Another objective must be related to meeting School Development Plan goals.
- Undergo at least one classroom observation annually.
- Conduct a formal performance review focused on the identified performance objectives. The meeting should also include the following:
 - Review, discussion and confirmation of the teacher’s essential tasks.
 - Identification of employee strengths and achievements.
 - Identification of developmental areas and an action plan on how they will be met.
 - Agreement to future performance objectives and an action plan for the upcoming year.

Support staff members were assigned teacher appraisers. Teacher appraisers had been trained to use the system; support staff members had not. As a result, support staff employees were appraised by someone who had little knowledge of their roles and responsibilities.

Review of the DfES Performance Management Process

An HR manager was hired at the school. Because of concerns raised by support staff about the DfES performance management system, the HR manager reviewed the system.

During the review, the following issues were raised:

- A large percentage of staff members did not meet the annual deadline to complete the appraisal process.
- There was confusion among staff about what exactly needed to be completed and when.
- Staff members thought the system was a ‘waste of time’.
- A trade union representative thought the system was not appropriate for all staff members.
- The DfES system was irrelevant to support staff. For example, support staff members could not set objectives in pupil progress or have lessons observed.
- Little attention was paid to identifying training needs and further, when needs were identified, there was no follow-up with appropriate actions.
- Appraisals were led by teachers who had little knowledge of the support staff member’s job.
- Performance meetings were a one-way process with some performance objectives established before the meeting started.

New System Design

It was crucial in designing the new system that the HR manager address the concerns raised about the DfES system.

Involving support staff and relevant trade union representatives in the process was critical to gain support of the new system and to ensure transparency, a key organizational goal.



Table 1 shows how some of the practical issues were addressed.

Table 1. Practical performance management issues.	
Issues with the old system	How it was addressed in the new system
Meetings were held on short notice.	Both parties must agree to the date of the meeting at least one week in advance.
Employees didn't know what to talk about.	Employees must complete a pre-meeting document highlighting proposed areas of discussion. The completed document must be sent to the appraiser in advance of the meeting.
Job descriptions were out-of-date, making performance expectations ambiguous.	Job descriptions are reviewed on an annual basis to ensure they are accurate.
There was too much documentation required in the old system, some of which was confusing.	Required documents are kept to a minimum, are written in plain terms and avoid unnecessary jargon.
Appraisers were not knowledgeable in training issues.	All appraisers are given information on available local training programs and are expected to help the appraisee identify the most appropriate training intervention.
Both parties were under-prepared.	Training is provided to all staff members so everyone is clear about expectations. Performance appraisal checklists are also distributed to both parties.
Reviews were conducted in public areas.	A private meeting room is available for all review meetings.
Appraisers not matched to appraisees.	The appraisers and appraisees are scheduled so that the most appropriate person conducts the review.

New System Content

The new system allows the appraiser and employee to review past performance; set goals and objectives for the upcoming year; and identify training and development needs. Performance review meetings occur annually, but both parties are encouraged to meet at regular intervals throughout the year to discuss progress.

In the new system, most support staff employees' performance reviews are conducted with their direct line manager (usually another support staff member). This way, the appraiser understands the employee's job and can fairly assess the employee's performance. In some cases, though, the most appropriate appraiser may be a teacher. For example, the best person to appraise a Chemistry class science technician is the teacher in charge of the classroom, since the teacher works with the technician on a daily basis.



Reviewing Performance

Appraisers and employees must independently complete the *Performance Review Meeting* form (Work tool #2) before the performance review meeting. The new system does not use a formal rating scale; this approach was too closely associated with the DfES system. Instead, the system is designed to assess general performance and then employee-specific projects and/or tasks. The new system is also designed so that the appraiser can evaluate if the employee has met the objectives identified during the last performance review.

The new system also requires annual review of job descriptions to make sure they are up-to-date. Support staff jobs have changed significantly during the last few years; support staff members are increasingly asked to complete tasks traditionally performed by teachers. Today, many support staff employees prepare learning materials and work directly with students to meet their learning needs. It is important, then, that job descriptions are reviewed regularly so that both parties understand employee roles and responsibilities and can avoid misunderstandings. Job description changes must be approved by line managers to ensure there are no negative implications for the organization or other employees.

Another issue employees raised in regard to the DfES system was that it was a one-way communication process where the appraiser often identified goals and objectives before meeting with the employee. To ensure that the new system is a two-way communication process, employees must complete the *Preparing for the Performance Review* form (Work tool #1) before the meeting. This form helps employees identify issues and areas they would like to discuss with their appraiser.

Finally, the new performance review system requires appraisers and employees to document any agreed actions so that everyone understands the action plan for the upcoming year. This documentation can also be used to monitor progress throughout the year.

Setting Goals and Objectives

The new system is designed to help employees understand how their jobs contribute to the wider objectives of their team, unit and the overall organization. To achieve this, employee goals and objectives must be specific and achievable, and not phrased in broad strategic terms. To help, employees are asked to complete the *Performance Review Meeting* document (Work tool #2).

The new process uses the SMART system to help employees define their goals and objectives. In the SMART system, goals can be monitored and reviewed objectively as part of next year's review process. Using the SMART method means that objectives are:

Specific. The objective must be clear and unambiguous.

Measurable. The objective must be quantifiable in some way in terms of quantity or quality.

Achievable. The objective should be challenging but also realistic.

Relevant. The objective should be related to the employee's job or organizational goals.

Time framed. The objective should clearly state the date for completion.

Identifying Training and Development Needs

In the final step, appraisers and employees identify training needs. Training should be linked to the goals and objectives set for the coming year. Employees can request additional personal or professional development that they feel would benefit them. The appraiser then works with the HR manager to create a training and development action plan. The appraiser is responsible for monitoring the employee's progress toward the training and development goals throughout the year.



Supporting the System

To successfully implement the new system, all employees had to be trained. With agreement from support staff employees, two training courses were created—one for appraisers and one for appraisees. The HR manager who designed the new system led the training. Table 2 shows key areas that are explored and discussed in both sessions.

Table 2. Key areas covered in performance management training.

- Benefits of performance management to staff, managers and the organization.
- Characteristics of a successful performance review.
- How to prepare for a performance review meeting.
- General communication skills, with an emphasis on effective listening.
- Understanding and setting SMART goals and objectives.
- Identifying training and development activities.

The training for appraisers included how to provide effective feedback. The following points were emphasized:

- Feedback should be constructive and provide potential solutions.
- Emphasis should be on the positive and acknowledge strengths.
- Feedback should be based on facts rather than opinions and backed with evidence.
- The goal should be on moving forward in a positive way.

Embedding Performance Management

To ensure the new system is an ongoing process rather than an annual event, regular reviews were built into the design. Six months after the annual performance appraisal, the appraiser and employee meet again to review the status of performance objectives and take any necessary action. There is also flexibility in the system so that reviews can occur more often if desired. Because effective feedback is critical at each step in the performance review process, delivering effective feedback is highlighted in the managers' training program. Refresher training on the performance management system will be held annually for all staff and will be required for all new staff with line management responsibilities.

Conclusions

Southwood School recognized that their existing performance management system was not meeting all employees' needs, undertook a comprehensive review to assess where it was coming up short, and introduced an improved process. The new system reflected support staff input, allowing them to feel more engaged in the new system and gain ownership. Since the new system was launched, there has been more employee participation; training and development activities have increased by more than 200 percent, bringing new skills into the organization.

Although this case study is a success story, it is important to recognize that there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to designing a new performance management system. It is important to take the context and culture of the organization into consideration.



Notes for Teachers

This case study is intended to promote learning and understanding in the area of performance management and feedback.

Purpose of the Case Study

This case study will allow students to understand the complexities involved in the design and implementation of a new performance management system.

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Use of Resources

This case study is intended to give instructors flexibility; you can use all or part of the activities. The PowerPoint slides should be presented before students read the case study. Instructors can choose from a selection of discussion areas and group activities, depending on the session's learning objectives and student learning styles. For your convenience, suggested responses are included for student tasks. The responses cover key areas students should identify through their work.

A separate Student Workbook accompanies this Instructor's Guide. Only the Student Activities shown in Part A of this Instructor's Guide are included in the Student Workbook. Please note that Part A, optional items 2a and 2b do not appear in the Student Workbook; nor does Work tool #4 referenced in items 2a and 2b. All optional activities are presented only in the Instructor's Guide to allow maximum flexibility to the instructor. If you choose to use the optional activities shown in Part A, 2a and 2b or in Part B, please photocopy the activities from the Instructor's Guide to distribute to each student. Possible answer keys appear on separate pages so that you may distribute only the activity pages to students.

Accompanying Resources

- PowerPoint presentation
- Case study
- Student activities
- Preparing for Performance Review document
- New performance review document
- Sample answers to student activities



Recommended Resources

Books

- Armstrong, M., and Baron, A. (2005). *Managing Performance: Performance Management in Action*. CIPD.
- Dessler, G. (2005). *Human Resource Management*. 10th edition. Prentice Hall.
- Ivancevich, J.M. (2006). *Human Resource Management*. McGraw-Hill.
- Milmore, M., Lewis, P., Saunders, M.N.K., Thornhill, P., and Morrow, T. (2007). *Strategic Human Resource Management: Contemporary Issues*. Prentice Hall.

Contemporary Journal Articles

- Brown, M., and Benson, J. (2003). Rated to exhaustion? Reactions to Performance Appraisal Processes. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 34(1), 67-81.
- Catano, V.M., Darr, W., and Campbell, C.A. (2007). Performance appraisal of behaviour based competencies: A valid and reliable procedure. *Personnel Psychology*, 60(1), 201-250.
- Cunneen, P. (2006). How to improve performance management. *People Management*, 12(1), 42-43.
- Den Hartof, D.N., Boselie, P., and Paauwe, J. (2004). Performance Management: A model and research agenda. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 53(4) 556-569.
- Denisi, A.S., and Pritchard, R.D. (2006). Performance Appraisal, Performance Management and improving individual performance. *Management and Organization Review*, 2(2), 253-277.
- Fletcher, C. (2001). Performance appraisal and management: The developing research agenda. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*. 74(4), 473-487.
- Kurtzberg, T.R., Naquin, C.E., and Belkin, L.Y. (2005). Electronic performance appraisals: The effects of email communication on peer ratings in actual and simulated environments. *Organization Behavior and Human Decision Processes*. 98(2) 216-226.
- London, M., and Edward, M. (2004). Performance management and assessment: Methods for improved rater accuracy and employee goal setting. *Human Resource Management*. 43(4), 319-336.
- Mushin, L., and Byoingho, S. (1998). The effects of appraisal review content on employees' reactions and performance. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*. 9(1), 203-214.
- Pettijohn, L.S., Parker, R.S., Pettijohn, C.E., and Kent, J.L. (2001). Performance appraisal: usage, criteria and observations. *Journal of Management Development*, 20(9), pp. 754-771.
- Stiles, P., Gratton, L., Truss, C., Hope-Hailey, V., and McGovern, P. (1997). Performance management and the psychological contract. *Human Resource Management Journal*. 7(1), pp. 57-66.
- Wiese, D.S., and Buckley, M.R. (1998). The evolution of the performance appraisal process. *Journal of Management History*. 4(3), pp. 233-249.



Activities

1. Review the PowerPoint presentation and make notes if appropriate.
2. Read the Southwood School case study and clarify any unfamiliar terms.
3. Now that you are familiar with the organization and the concepts of performance management, review Work tools #1 and #2. These are copies of the actual forms used at the school. A sample of Work tool #1 is provided to guide your thinking. Next, please review the sample job descriptions (Work tool #3) to understand some of the support staff job responsibilities.
 - a) What are the advantages of using the *Preparing for the Performance Review* document (Work tool #1)? Are there any other areas you think should be added to the document?
 - b) List some strengths and weaknesses of the *Performance Review Meeting* (Work tool #2). Is the document's length appropriate? Is it easy to understand and complete?



Work tool #1

Preparing for the Performance Review

Name:

Job Title:

1. What parts of my work have I been particularly pleased with or proud of since my last review meeting?
2. What parts of my work have not been as good or successful as I would have liked?
3. Has my job changed since my last review (duties, responsibilities, working relationships, etc.)?
4. What training and development have I had since my last review (coursework, working with other staff members, observing other staff members, projects, visits, staff meetings, etc.)?
5. Was this training effective? Why or why not?
6. What changes would I suggest for my job (for example, duties, responsibilities, work hours)?
7. What objectives have I set for myself for the next 12 months?
8. What training and development needs do I think I have?
9. Are there any other points I want to discuss at my review meeting?

Signature:

Date given to line manager:

Date scheduled for performance review meeting:



Work Tool #2

Performance Review Meeting

Preparing for the Performance Review: An example of a completed document

Name: James Burn
Job Title: Administrative Assistant
Line Manager: Gill Bradley

1. What parts of my work have I been particularly pleased with or proud of since my last review meeting?

I have worked really hard this year and learned a lot of new skills. I am now trained to give First Aid and feel much more confident using some of the Microsoft Office software. I also received two nice thank-you letters from parents.

2. What parts of my work have not been as good or successful as I would have liked?

I am still struggling to use the new electronic student registration system and this is taking up a lot of my time. I don't feel comfortable when I have to use software like Excel and Publisher.

3. Has my job changed since my last review (duties, responsibilities, working relationships, etc.)?

I have several new responsibilities, like selling school uniforms and depositing the money from them. I also have to phone parents to find out why their children are absent from school and report the information to the class teacher. Finally, I have been asked if I can take over the responsibility for organizing the annual student awards evening, as the person who used to do it now has too many other jobs to do.

I have a new manager and two new colleagues to work with.

4. What training and development have I had since my last review (coursework, working with other staff members, observing other staff members, projects, visits, staff meetings, etc.)?

Unfortunately I have had very little training this year as I only work part-time and my manager says that I can't attend as I have too much to do. I did observe someone using the new registration system before I had to start using it on a daily basis.

5. Was this training effective? Why or why not?

This training wasn't very helpful because it was very quick and there was not time to ask any questions. The person who I observed was not a very good trainer because they did not explain what they were doing and they did everything very quickly. If I had received better training it would make my job much easier and less stressful.



6. What changes would I suggest for my job (for example, duties, responsibilities, work hours)?

At the moment I have too many duties, which I feel is a bit unreasonable when I only work part-time. I am also asked to complete tasks that could be carried out by different people who are more experienced.

I would prefer to work exclusively for one person. At the moment I work with 5-6 people which is hard when they all have 'urgent' work for me.

Ideally I would like to increase my working hours by 5 hours per week.

7. What objectives will I set for myself for the next 12 months?

To continue to carry out my work to a high standard.

To develop my IT skills.

8. What training and development needs do I think I have?

To carry out my daily routines I would really like some training on using the new registration system. This would mean I could finish the task more quickly.

I am interested in developing my IT skills further and need to become more competent using programs like Excel. I would also be interested in trying to gain some formal qualifications in administration, as this may enable me to apply for a promotion in the future.

9. Are there any other points I wish to discuss at my review meeting?

I am concerned about my working relationship with one of the new staff members. I feel that she is always criticizing my work. She does it in front of other people to embarrass me. Sometimes this makes me not want to come to work.

I would also like to talk about whether there may be any vacancies in the future for the next level of administration assistant. I would like to apply for a higher-level job.

My computer equipment is now quite old and is very slow – might it be possible to update it?

I cannot think of any other issues that I need to discuss.

Signature: James Burn

Date passed to line manager: 7th August

Date agreed for performance review meeting: 18th August



Work tool #2

Performance Review Meeting

Please review all of the following:

- Last year's performance []
- Current job description []
- Issues highlighted in personal review []
- Plan for the upcoming year (including training and development) []

1. Review last year's performance

a) General review

b) Review specific objectives set last year

2. Review current job description

Please record any tasks or job responsibilities that have changed. Please note that all changes must be approved in writing by your line manager.

Tasks or Job Responsibilities	Agreed?

3. Discuss issues highlighted in personal review

Please record any issues discussed and actions agreed upon, if appropriate.

Issues	Actions required

Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary.



Work Tool #3

Sample Job Descriptions for Southwood School

Job descriptions for the following roles are included in this case study:

- Office manager
- Administrative assistant
- Classroom assistant
- Computer technician

The job descriptions include key responsibilities for each position. You can use these job descriptions to support some of case study activities.



Job Description 1

Position Title	Office Manager
Department	Administration
Manager/Supervisor	Director of Administration
Direct Reports	Secretaries Administrative Assistants

Date of job description review: August 10, 2007

Date for next review: August 10, 2008

Job description author: F. Robson, HR manager

Job purpose:

- Ensure all administrative tasks in the School are executed accurately and efficiently.
- Develop, implement and/or monitor processes that ensure all the required administrative tasks are completed.
- Coordinate and manage the work of administration department employees.

Key activities/responsibilities:

- Ensures that all administrative staff are familiar with standard procedures.
- Ensures that all statutory responsibilities are completed.
- Conducts new employee orientation training on the school's administrative procedures.
- Manages administration department budget.
- Works with the Director of Administration to plan events.
- Manages the administrative team on a daily basis.
- Conducts regular performance reviews with the direct report staff.
- Presents reports to the management team when requested.
- Works with teachers to ensure that they receive appropriate administrative support.
- Provides administrative support to senior managers in confidential and complex matters.
- Works with the examinations manager to ensure that exams are administered accurately and on a timely basis.
- Other tasks (appropriate to this level) as requested by senior management team members.



Job Description 2

Position Title	Administrative Assistant
Department	Administration
Manager/Supervisor	Office Manager
Direct Reports	Not applicable

Date of job description review: August 10, 2007

Date for next review: August 10, 2008

Job description author: F. Robson, HR manager

Job purpose:

Provides routine administrative support to meet school needs.



Job Description 3

Position Title	Classroom Assistant
Department	Student Support
Manager/Supervisor	Teacher in charge of Student Support Services
Direct Reports	Not applicable

Date of job description review: August 10, 2007

Date for next review: August 10, 2008

Job description author: F. Robson, HR Manager

Job purpose:

Under the direction of a qualified teacher, supports the learning and personal and social development of students in the school.

Key activities/responsibilities:

- Works with small student groups or individual students to carry out work assigned by the teacher.
- Develops positive relationships with students.
- Maintains records of work with students and assists the teacher in assessing student progress.
- Carries out relevant administrative tasks as directed by the teacher.
- Assists students with special education needs where directed by the teacher in charge of student support services.
- Participates in internal training events to develop skills and knowledge.
- Works with parents (as assigned by the teacher).
- Assists with student goal-setting and monitors goal achievement on a regular basis.
- Works with relevant agencies where appropriate.
- Assists the teacher in development of learning resource materials.
- Proctors examinations as required. This may include supporting students with special education needs.
- Other tasks (appropriate to this level) as requested by members of the senior management team.