



PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

SUPPORT NOTES FOR MANAGERS

**Workforce & Core Strategy
Trafford Council**

PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

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What a Performance Development Review is – and what it should achieve

A PDR is:

- A review of the past and present performance of an individual, from which lessons can be learned.
- An identification of the future needs of the individual, for better performance and personal development.

PDR schemes vary from organisation to organisation, but common characteristics of good review/appraisal schemes include:

- Discussion, recognition and formal recording of individuals' work and development within the context of organisational and departmental plans.
- Forward-looking analysis of individuals' needs, potential for more challenging work and raised performance, and commitment to objectives.
- Meetings which are genuinely two-way interchanges, fair, and as unhindered by power, pay and promotion issues as possible.

A PDR should be seen in the wider context of the organisation's overall approach to performance management, including, for example:

- How the organisation's strategies and goals are communicated.
- How objectives, standards and targets are managed.
- How getting the work done is balanced with developing people's skills.

A PDR should achieve three essential outputs:

- Development of working relationships.
- Raised motivation and morale.
- Raised levels of performance.

So, good PDR meetings should involve:

- A continuation of frequent feedback and one-to-one meetings.
- Careful preparation beforehand.
- Genuine engagement with staff during the meeting.
- Agreement and commitment to objectives and action plans to be followed up after the meeting.

Key processes in conducting a Performance Development Review – an overview

There are at least four key processes and two important people to consider in a PDR.

| PROCESS | MANAGER | INDIVIDUAL |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fix meeting with individual • Prepare paperwork • Hold brief pre-meeting to brief individual, give paperwork (Pre-PDR checklist and guidelines), deal with any concerns and encourage self-appraisal • Consider overall performance in last period against objectives, key results areas, standards and targets • Determine key messages, anticipate areas of concern • Consider actions and objectives for next period, how the individual and their job could be developed in the light of organisational goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check out how clear the job/role responsibilities, limits of authority, accountabilities and boundaries are • Complete the Pre-PDR checklist • Consider current strengths and areas for development • Consider how the job could be developed • Consider how personal performance and skills could be developed • Be clear about what is wanted/needed |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducting meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use an agenda, explain purpose, put individual at ease • Encourage individual to talk about their strengths and areas for development, recognise and praise their achievements • Ask open questions, listen actively, respond, summarise, track the conversation • Be ready to probe, or to take a firm but fair line (particularly with standards) • Focus on developing working relationships and improved performance • Finish on a positive note | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take opportunities to express views, needs and concerns • Listen and respond to the manager • Recognise both opportunities and organisational constraints • Use the meeting to reflect on performance and what can be learned from the past • Look to the future and what can be developed in terms of skills, the job, career, etc • Be ready to put up some objectives/targets to be agreed by the manager |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement to actions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear about what actions and objectives/targets are agreed (what, who, when, how measured) • Summarise and record | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear about what actions and objectives are agreed (what, who, when, how measured, etc) • Confirm and record |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete paperwork • Make sure actions are done, objectives are met, support is provided • Meet to review progress and future development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate actions done, objectives achieved, support utilised • Show progress |

Developing and maintaining good working relationships

These are key when it comes to performance, motivation and PDR meetings. Four areas on which to focus are:

Attitude – you get what you give or expect!

- **Awareness leads to understanding** – and to become aware of how relationships are working, or not, people need to avoid imposing their prejudices on what they think they see, and to accept that others have equally valid beliefs.
 - **Respect leads to results** – valuing people's individual skills and contributions, respecting people's boundaries (eg, work-life balance) and taking account of different motivations builds good working relationships.
 - **Attitude is *the big issue*** – positive attitudes breed positivity, while manipulative behaviours such as aggression and passivity breed resistance and inhibit the development of good working relationships.
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Communication – it's not just what you say, it's how you say it!

- **Balancing honesty with sensitivity helps** – openness and fairness are important, but so is being aware of people's feelings (eg, it may not always be good to focus on work at the expense of some interpersonal support).
 - **Consistency and trust need attention** – any messages which may be regarded as inconsistent, or related to hidden agendas, will be trusted by recipients more on the tone of voice used and body language displayed than on the words themselves.
 - **Face to face is best** – but remote working and busy work lives can intrude, so every opportunity should be taken to keep people in touch (eg, at regular one-to-ones and at ad hoc meetings or social gatherings, via telephone in preference to e-mail alone, and by circulating important information swiftly).
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Agreement – and mutual commitment to ways of working

- **It takes time to agree** – but it's time well invested for the future.
 - **Getting to win-win is vital** – this may mean spending some time handling conflict constructively, as a spur to finding mutually attractive solutions and outcomes benefiting all parties.
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Climate – and creating a healthy environment

- **Work should be a learning experience** – organisations who have a 'no-blame' culture and encourage people to think for themselves and learn from their mistakes perform better. Managers can help to create the right climate at work through openness, trust and honest feedback.

Benefits of Performance Development Reviews

A survey by The Industrial Society found that the top seven benefits of staff reviews/appraisal were seen as:

- planning training – 78%
- motivating individuals – 70%
- employee involvement – 53%
- upward communication – 34%
- employee relations – 32%
- quality measures – 29%
- customer service – 27%

Performance Development Reviews (PDR)/Appraisal is an important foundation for good people management and an intrinsic part of wider performance management. It is an opportunity for managers to build relationships, develop the individual, help them to see how they fit in to the organisation as a whole, and support them to do their job. Managers need to recognise the value of PDR and communicate this to their team to make the process meaningful. The individual's performance and development should be seen as a joint partnership between the manager and the individual.

Various benefits will accrue to different stakeholders in the review process – i.e., individual staff, managers, teams, divisional/departmental heads, the organisation itself, clients/customers/service users and the community. Well prepared and conducted PDRs should bring the following benefits:

- **Raised levels of performance** – through feedback and discussion of work progress, achievements, learning and personal development
- **Reinforcement of working relationships** – through recognition and praise which lead to renewed motivation and raised morale
- **Mutual understanding** – about work, standards, objectives, development and progress between the manager and the individual
- **More focused work and developmental activities** – through reinforcement of the cascade of organisational goals, priorities, objectives and action planning
- **Agreement of new/stretching objectives** – involving delegation, coaching, encouraging people to believe they can achieve higher performance and wider development, and to take up opportunities
- **The chance to reflect in and on busy work lives** – many individuals and managers welcome this opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved, to give and receive feedback, and to look at work-life balance
- **A formal record** – of achievements, new goals, objectives and priorities, personal development, and any performance issues that need to be resolved

- **Employee involvement** – chance for employees to give their opinion as to how job/ department/work processes could be improved, as well as an opportunity for upwards appraisal.

Longer-term benefits may include:

- Improved results at individual, team, departmental and organisational level
- Addressing the problems of poor-performing staff
- Retention of high-performing staff
- Management information for the Organisational Development Team/ Strategic HR/ IBUs

Measuring performance through objectives, standards and targets

A key management requirement is the ability to motivate, develop and measure staff performance, by setting objectives, standards and targets. This relies on the following process: defining **objectives**, identifying **key result areas** from them, and setting **performance standards** and **targets** against them.

Objectives

Objectives are motivational and challenging goals, which provide a sense of direction and focus. The end result required, determines the course of action. They are:

- The required, clear and defined end result for people or jobs
- Specifically applied to individuals, teams, departments or even the organisation as a whole.

Job example – Administrative Assistant

Job objective – To assist the manager by providing an efficient and effective administration service at all times.

Key result areas

These are the key tasks, responsibilities that must be carried out in order to meet the job objectives. For the administrative assistant they might look as follows:

1. Dealing with all correspondence, paper or electronic
2. Handling telephone enquiries
3. Receiving callers
4. Arranging meetings, recording the contents.

Performance standards

These are set for the job and therefore identical for each holder of the same job. They are a ruler, and define the minimum standards of performance in key result areas, to meet the objectives. Some example standards for the administrative assistant, if we look at key result area one, 'dealing with correspondence, paper or electronic', might be as follows:

- Electronic mail to be checked on an hourly basis throughout the day.
- Receive and sort all mail, draw attention to urgent matters, by 10 am.
- All paper correspondence to be date stamped and dealt with, or acknowledged within two days of receipt.

Targets

Targets are concerned with raising levels of performance, quality or output. They can be applied to individuals or, in some cases, teams or departments. Targets may be set to bring performance up to standard. But they should primarily be concerned with raising performance and standards to higher levels. They may also be required to address areas over and above routine work, or in times of change.

Effective targets are:

- Agreed for the key result areas – consultation is key here
- Agreed and 'owned' by those they apply to – eg, organisation, department, team or individual
- Challenging – eg, leading to the introduction of significant change or new ways of working
- Resourced, monitored and measured – and celebrated when achieved
- Concerned with sales, productivity, profitability and human resources, telling people what is expected of them and providing a regular self-checking mechanism.

Targets are set to:

- Bring performance up to standard, and to aim for continued improvement.
- Motivate, by addressing areas in addition to routine work such as significant change or new ways of working, shifting priorities, special projects, and developing potential
- Monitor, improve communication and feedback between manager and staff.

Objectives, standards and targets are, where possible – **SMART**

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**greed
- **R**ealistic
- **T**imebound.

They can be measured in a number of ways

- Numerically – sales figures, productivity, absenteeism
- By deadline – meeting project dates, paper turn around
- Procedurally – following quality or health and safety procedures
- Financially – profitability, turnover, meeting budgets
- By feedback – number of complaints, non-compliances, recommendations
- Recognisable consistency – house style, behavioural skills such as customer focus, time management.

Some jobs, e.g. sales, adapt well to measurable standards. Others may use recognisable methods of good practice, such as observing health and safety at work procedures.

Tips on setting targets

These may be tested against SMART criteria (having done so, good managers may want to add the two extra criteria to make them **SMARTER** – **E**valuated and **R**eviewed)

- *To attend a course on PowerPoint next month.*

This seems to be SMART enough. But would it help the individual to be clear about what they should get from the course and how they will be expected or encouraged to use it? If a good working relationship exists with the manager this may be implicit. Take opportunities to highlight the 'why' of a target.

- *By the end of the year, to have conducted the PDRs of all members of your team, using the new system and form.*

See how starting with an end date and expressing the objective in terms 'to have conducted' gives it strength? All involved will be clear about its achievement. Managers with good working relationships, able to trust their supervisors, might feel it unnecessary to monitor such a target themselves, and might take the chance to empower the individual to demonstrate achievement of the target. Managers should not always feel they have to do all the work to monitor targets.

- *Within six months, to have achieved increased sales of £X/to have gained at least three new clients.*

This is straightforward and would be fine for an individual and manager with a good working relationship, encompassing the 'how' of the target, any necessary support (e.g., coaching or resources) and the base figure for the 'increased sale' version. The 'three new clients' version might need an indication of size? And might the 'increased sales' version lead to the establishment of higher expectations or standards next year? People with good working relationships will be able tackle this issue constructively.

- *Over the next quarter, to have explored with all members of the team their ideas for improvements to our office layout and work flows, and by the end of the quarter after that to have produced a comprehensive report making recommendations that would lead to reduced costs or improved levels of service.*

This is a complex target. It usefully explains the 'how' (although managers should note that leaving the 'how' of a target to the individual when they know the 'what, why and who/m' can be empowering and motivating). Do the 'reduced costs' or 'improved levels of service' need explanation? What about the cost-benefit of the whole target? Should the manager seek an estimate before the 'comprehensive report' stage is tackled? Finally, what about any potential politics if the members of the team suspect the agenda to be to reduce costs? Is it fair to expect the individual to cope with any resistance from his/her peers (i.e., is anything in the target potentially outside the control of the individual)?

Evaluating and Reviewing targets

Adding the **ER** can:

- Make some targets **SMARTER**, and more likely to be achieved
- Help to develop a focus on those activities (inputs) which should lead to the desired results (outputs) and on to the required change (outcomes)
- Lead to better prioritisation. Six substantial targets would probably need prioritisation, and would be a sensible limit for one person to focus on well
- Ensure that appropriate resources are supplied
- Help to keep them in line with organisational needs and strategies, which can change rapidly
- Provide an opportunity to give more feedback, and to celebrate any early successful achievements.

A final note – in many organisations the terms objectives and targets are used interchangeably.

PDRs, feedback and motivation

Raised motivation is one of the key outputs from good PDR meetings. In today's busy work lives, feedback on performance and achievements only at a PDR meeting is not enough – people cannot easily recall examples of work (what they did and how they did it) which was done up to a year ago.

Frequent feedback on performance – at regular one-to-one meetings or as work progresses, at the time successes or shortcomings emerge – helps people to:

- Understand the results of their past efforts
- See how their efforts and performance relate
- Adjust their efforts to raise their future performance.

These benefits link to Expectancy Theory – a useful framework about motivation for managers to bear in mind. Essentially, the theory proposes that people:

1. Will put in the amount of effort...
2. to reach a level of performance...
3. that leads to valued rewards.

Frequent feedback helps to reinforce stages 1 and 2, by providing people with an external – and, hopefully, relatively objective – view about their efforts and their resulting performance.

Managers need to consider stage 3 very carefully:

- Does the individual only value pay and bonuses as reward? These are infrequent forms of motivation, compared to praise and recognition of efforts and results. Managers should develop good working relationships with individuals to learn what really motivates them (apart from pay, most lists of motivators include feedback and recognition, job satisfaction and autonomy, and challenges).

Preparation for good PDR meetings – a checklist for managers

Throughout the year

- Keep notes on people's performance. **Tip** – a simple sheet headed '++' (good work), '--' (work needing improvement) and '??' (missed opportunity to do better or to develop self) is easy to keep and powerful for individuals to see (at one-to-ones – remember: no surprises at PDR meetings).
 - Give frequent and timely feedback to individuals.
 - Conduct frequent one-to-one meetings and team briefings.
 - Keep people in the picture about the organisation, its strategy, circumstances, changes etc.
 - The more managers appreciate where their staff are coming from, their aspirations, their problems and their motivations, the better – and the continuation of genuine dialogue throughout the year will help achieve this.
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In the run up to the PDR round

- Remind yourself that a PDR is an investment in the future performance, development and success of your staff for their own good and for the organisation – make sure you put in the time and effort to get a good return.
 - Review – the job description, last PDR form, your records of individuals' performance, one-to-one meeting notes, etc.
 - Consider the whole of the last period – objectives, work plans, targets, service level agreements, training and development plans – how well were they achieved?
 - Consult – colleagues and customers/clients – what feedback can they provide about the individual's work and working/professional relationships?
 - Consider – individual, departmental and organisational needs.
 - Be aware of – individuals' results, achievements, new qualifications.
 - Anticipate – areas of concern, questions, aspirations, development needs – how will you handle them?
 - Decide – on a few key messages. **Tip** – three is a good number for focus, impact and memorability.
 - Consider for the forthcoming period – objectives, work plans, targets, service level agreements, training and development plans.
 - It may be worth checking the review procedure in case any issues arise on which the manager and the individual cannot agree – normally the manager's boss or HR manager will review.
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Pre-meeting

- It is a good idea to hold a short pre-meeting before the PDR to explain the objectives, purpose and procedure.
- If this is an individual's first PDR meeting, the manager might want to explore the individual's feelings about reviews to allay any concerns, as well as stressing the benefits.
- Give the individual the relevant paperwork – such as their job description, the form from the last PDR, the form for the forthcoming PDR, their Personal Learning & Development Action Plan their Pre-PDR Review Meeting checklist and the agenda to help them prepare.
- Encourage the individual to self-assess their performance and bring along relevant facts and examples of achievements to discuss at the actual PDR meeting.

When setting up any PDR meeting

- Prepare an agenda – covering purpose, benefits/opportunities of PDRs, work to be praised, key messages, and how to gain commitment to the process.
 - Check the paperwork.
 - Fix a quiet venue – and make sure you will not be interrupted.
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Sample agenda for a PDR meeting

1. Welcome and introduction – purpose, plan, timing, mutual note taking
2. General discussion of the period under review, overall objectives and achievements
3. Key results areas – objectives, standards and targets: individual's performance in each (*their opinion, then manager's*)
4. Discussion of individual's strengths and potential to develop (*their opinion, then manager's*)
5. Areas of performance that could be improved (*their opinion, then manager's*)
6. General concerns and problems confronting you both in the organisation
7. The future – discussion and setting of objectives, standards and targets for the period ahead
8. Support, training and development needs
9. Action planning by both parties
10. Book date for review/form sign-off/next one-to-one.

The PDR meeting – some tips

- If good working relationships have been maintained throughout the year, and frequent one-to-one meetings held, there should be no surprises – and the meeting can focus more on the future than the past.
- The PDR meeting is the opportunity for relaxed, extended, structured conversation, so welcome the individual and put them at their ease. If possible, avoid sitting opposite each other across a desk.
- Managers should never underestimate the motivational value of recognition and praise and this is a good way to start the meeting by acknowledging something the individual has done well.
- Both sides need to listen, actively – that means acknowledging (not discounting) comments, reflecting back and on statements, clarifying and analysing what has been said, and summarising.
- Managers need to ask open questions to encourage individuals to assess themselves and come up with their own solutions to problems – a stock of good questions should be developed.
- Be ready to explore issues about performance, motivation, morale and job satisfaction by using techniques such as *'tell me more about...'*
- Be receptive to people's ideas about their jobs, the systems within which they have to work, and any feedback from them about the way you help or hinder them in their work.
- Managers should ask for the individual's opinion about their performance before giving their own, and then discuss how and why responses differ to reach consensus. This helps particularly when dealing with difficult issues.
- Focus on performance issues, be ready to help people with personal problems that impinge on their work, but avoid personality issues and don't let promotion issues cloud your judgement about their performance.
- A good balance of the use of airtime is 60-70% by the individual and 30-40% by the manager. If surprises arise, or there is a need for reflection, both sides should be ready to tolerate some silence – there is no need to fill all the air time with conversation, and adjournment is quite acceptable.
- Managers who take opportunities to seek feedback on the way they work with the individual will gain useful insights into their own performance and ways of developing good working relationships.
- It is essential that both parties have clear, specific action plans to implement agreed changes. The more positively the manager can finish the meeting the more likely the individual will be to be motivated to achieve these plans.

Conducting PDR meetings – Essential skills for managers

From the start

- Get the individual talking – aim for an airtime split of at least two-thirds in favour of the individual.
 - Keep your messages clear and unambiguous – remember: if messages are thought to be inconsistent, recipients put only 7% trust in the words, with 38% of meaning going to tone of voice and 55% to body language displayed.
 - Take opportunities to ground the discussion in the context of ongoing performance management (eg: *'We've talked about this in our one-to-ones'*) and wider performance management (*'As you know, the business strategy this year is about expansion, so I want to look at some stretching objectives for you'*).
 - Be emotionally intelligent – pick up clues in what people are trying to say and in their body language.
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Feedback

- Be constructive and build on strengths.
 - Be fair and balanced.
 - Be prepared to give and receive.
 - Keep it factual – use evidence, but use it sensitively.
 - Encourage feedback about your own performance as a manager.
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Self-appraisal

- Get the individual to talk about their performance (by encouraging the use of self -assessment or asking good opening questions like: *'What are three things you've done really well this year, and that you're really proud of – and what are three things you'd do differently if you had another chance or more time?'*)
 - Self-assessment helps to clarify the individual's insights and sustains good working relationships. It's much easier if an individual can acknowledge under-performance themselves rather than having it pointed out to them by the manager.
 - Individuals are often quite critical of their own performance and this gives managers scope for valid praise, building confidence and raising self-esteem.
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Empowerment and ownership

- Talk through problems and encourage people to come up with their own solutions. This is the basis of good coaching and empowers the individual.
- The same applies to setting targets – these should always be agreed by both parties, but ask the individual what their ideas are around a realistic means and an achievable deadline.

Questioning

Questions allow us to get information, open up dialogue, steer conversations, and convey messages. There are various types:

- **Open** – good to start an appraisal meeting, eg, *‘What do you feel has gone well?’* These questions gain information and feelings and do not assume or influence the answer. They usually begin with what, why, when, where, how, who or which. **Tip** – ask ‘what’ before ‘why’ – the latter requires people to justify themselves, the former elicits more factors to explore (as long as you are listening properly).
- **Closed** – these are questions which have a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. They can be used to check facts, gain commitment, summarise, close conversations and secure complete understanding, eg, *‘Have you completed all aspects of the project?’* Beware of closing down conversations and influencing the answer with this type of question, eg, *‘You’re not having any problems, are you?’* (leading question).
- **Probing** – begin to narrow things down or gain more information to get to the root of a problem, eg, *‘Which aspects in particular worry you about the project?’* and *‘What exactly do you want to use the computer for?’*
- **Reflective** – by reflecting the speaker’s comments back to them in the form of a neutral statement you can check understanding and feelings and encourage the speaker to expand and give more information. For example: *‘So, you’re saying that you enjoyed the challenge but you might do it differently in future?’*, *‘You feel your contribution isn’t being recognised?’*
- **Behavioural** – these questions seek specific examples of past actual behaviour and are often used to help predict how someone will behave in the future. For example, *‘Can you give me an example of how you’ve contributed to the work of the team in the last six months?’* or *‘Tell me about a time when you disagreed with your boss’s decision and needed to tell him.’*
- **Hypothetical** – provide opportunities to steer conversations and see how people might react in future, eg, *‘If you were to take on this task how would you plan it?’* or *‘If you were faced with this problem again, how would you handle it differently?’*

Listening

- This is hard work and it needs to be practised!
- Both sides in a PDR meeting should try to clear their minds of other issues, be receptive, acknowledge different points of view

and try to see things from the other person's perspective. Listening is active and involves focusing on the other person, reflecting back comments, taking notes, being patient as explanations are being made, checking back and clarifying understanding.

Summarising

- This should be done at key stages and certainly at the end of the meeting.
 - Make sure all agreements to objectives, targets, developmental activities, plans for monitoring are clearly understood and agreed – covering what, why, who, when and how. **Tip** – getting people to monitor themselves and to take the initiative in demonstrating achievement of objectives or completion of plans can empower and motivate them, and take pressure off busy managers.
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Closing

- Do it cleanly.
- End on a positive note – so morale and motivation are lifted, and commitment to actions more likely to result in their completion.

Conducting PDR meetings - deeper skills for managers

Giving feedback

Giving relevant feedback objectively and positively is one of the key skills of conducting excellent PDR meetings. Feedback deals with behaviour, which the individual can change, not their personality, which they cannot. It's worth considering four different styles of feedback and their potential impact.

- **Negative – non-specific criticism**
'You failed to meet the deadline, again!' This is unlikely to motivate people or make them want to improve.
- **Positive – non-specific praise**
'You did a really good job on that report!' This may raise morale and motivation, but the recipient may have to guess what the giver particularly liked, and why.
- **Positive – specific and work-related praise**
'You handled that customer really well – listening to his complaint, taking notes to show you were paying attention and promising to follow up within the week. I think they'll calm down now and still use our service.' By highlighting what worked well, this reinforces the behaviour for the future.
- **Positive – and developmentally focused**
'We need to look at what happened at that meeting yesterday, when tempers were lost and not all present were pleased when you had to take a tough decision to adjourn it. I'd like you to think about how things went wrong, and what we can do to make the meeting successful when you reconvene it next week.' Spoken in the right tone, this should help the recipient to assess the situation for himself or herself, without becoming too defensive, and to come up with some plans for the future. It is developmental feedback, and just the sort that would be good in a coaching session.

If you do need to give negative feedback, avoid evaluative, critical or judgmental language. Compare *'If only you'd had the common sense to tell me Sarah was off sick, this report wouldn't have been late'*, with *'In future if Sarah is off sick, please let me know straightaway, so we can prevent reports from being late.'* The second statement depersonalises the message and concentrates on future behaviour.

NB – these examples are deliberately not bound to a PDR meeting context. They show how feedback can be given in different ways, and managers should remember that timely feedback – specifically around the situation itself – is far more powerful than saving it up for a PDR meeting in the future.

| Destructive criticism | Constructive feedback |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on personality and attitude • Is often impulsive and emotional • Is critical and judgmental • Damages relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • concentrates on behaviour and results • is planned, uses specific examples • is depersonalised, non-judgmental • builds trust and strengthens relationships |

Tracking what's being said

Skills needed here include:

- Earlier establishment of the sort of open working relationship that allows things to be discussed openly
- Careful listening
- Readiness to tolerate silences
- Asking questions based on genuine interest in the possible responses
- Summarising and rephrasing comments to check a shared understanding
- Avoiding a 'ping-pong' conversation with closed questions, and each side thinking what to ask or say next, instead of absorbing what's being said now.

Probing what's really being said

Skills needed here include:

- Asking probing questions (eg, *'So, what will you need to do before tackling this sort of work next time?'*)
- Listening to patterns and reflecting them back (eg, *'The comments you're making about the department seem to me to be quite negative, and you've complained about feeling excluded. What connection do you see?'*)
- Listening to what is not being said and reflecting it back (eg, *'I don't think I've heard you say anything about the big project that took up most of your time earlier this year.'*)
- Getting to the bottom of the key issue with poor performance – is it 'can't' or 'won't' improve (the former implies training or job redesign, the latter points towards discipline but only after all the facts have been uncovered and every effort made to help the individual to improve).

Keeping to the point

Skills needed here include:

- Being clear about what are the key points/messages to focus on
 - Not being sidetracked
 - Being sensitively assertive.
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Handling conflict

Skills needed here include:

- Sticking to the facts
- Avoiding accusations
- Looking for win-win and mutual benefit outcomes.

Not all conflict is bad or destructive. Here are four routes to handling conflict – with some pros and cons for each:

- **Avoiding** – the problem may not be worth arguing over, and it might be better to drop it in favour of more important issues. However many personal review problems are the result of avoiding performance issues, which rarely go away on their own.
 - **Competing** – the goal may be important, but it will not help if the other person feels that they have lost (good PDRs will take account of different views about goals, and how they should be prioritised. **Tip** – managers may feel it helps to raise awareness in individuals of how their job fits in and how their objectives contribute to the work of the team and ultimately the department and the organisation.)
 - **Accommodating** – the other person's point of view may be more important to them than it is to you to get your own way (good PDRs will take account of different points of view, but will not allow individuals to 'get away with things')
 - **Collaborating** – both sides are looking for win-win outcomes and will take time to get to what are often innovative and very fruitful solutions to conflicts of view or interest (the best PDRs will achieve this).
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Coaching and counselling

These can be specialist skills, but managers can apply the basics very easily.

- **Coaching – managers can**
 - Reinforce people's self belief, encouraging them to think for themselves (eg, expecting people to come up with solutions to problems, rather than just presenting the problem to the manager)
 - Help people to see the reality of their situation
 - Help people to see their strengths and opportunities to develop

- Delegate by setting the what, why and when, but leaving the how to staff
- Set challenging targets, goals and objectives and, through frequent feedback, help people to achieve them.

Tip – managers can do the coaching themselves or provide further development for a 'star performer' by asking them to coach others.

- **Counselling – managers can**

- Keep in touch with people and note when things are not right
- Offer to talk things through as a colleague
- Listen in a non-judgemental fashion and discuss options
- Refer to specialists when the problem is becoming too big.

All these things can be done around PDRs – but, really, they are all ongoing performance management techniques that managers should be using throughout the year.

Emotional intelligence

Daniel Goleman defines emotional intelligence as:

“...the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and our relationships”.

He lists five 'life competencies' that are relevant for managers who want to conduct good PDRs and to provide sound and welcome feedback to people:

- **Self-awareness** – the realistic assessment of one's own strengths and weaknesses (for managers this can be enhanced by upward and 360 degree feedback)
- **Self-regulation** – using emotions to facilitate rather than interfere with the task in hand (this is important in giving feedback and conducting PDRs)
- **Motivation** – having goal orientation and the will to improve (the more of this managers can demonstrate, the more people will be ready to accept delegation and opportunities for motivation and development)
- **Empathy** – seeing others' feelings and motivations in ways that accept them as valid (an important skill in PDRs)
- **Social skills** – in order to interact smoothly, to lead and persuade, to solve problems, and to promote co-operation and teamwork (these are all important performance management skills).

Analysing performance problems

A PDR meeting is sometimes the point where performance problems crystallise or finally have to be faced. (Of course, it's always better to tackle performance problems early, but managers are often so busy with work that they miss the chance to tackle the person whose work or other behaviour is causing problems.)

Prevention is always better than cure – the trick is to see the need to invest time and effort upfront, rather than bemoaning the problem later. It is draining on managers to hold onto negative feedback in the vain hope the problem may go away, or not recur or be worth pursuit.

Getting to the root of performance problems is essential. Here is a series of possible questions for managers to use in their thinking.

- What is the person not doing that they should be doing? (Do they know that there is a problem?)
- What may lie behind this problem? (Is it work-related, or is something outside the workplace influencing the individual's behaviour?)
- Is there a pattern of occurrence? (What seems to prompt the problem, what are the 'payoffs' for the person – eg, avoiding responsibility, exercising power, getting back at the system or people?)
- Is it an issue with the work itself, or working relationships?
- What obstacles are in their way? (What resources are they not accessing?)
- Would training help (or make no real change)?
- Are they in the right job? (Can/should the job be changed to fit them better?)
- Is this a 'can't' or 'won't' problem?

A 'won't' problem may involve going towards some sort of disciplinary procedures, but only after all avenues have been explored – to get to the bottom of the problem, to help the individual to improve, to find other win-win solutions.

Tip – discussing the problem with the individual

Get the individual to self-appraise the situation (using a mixture of open, specific, reflective, behavioural and hypothetical questions) by:

- Introducing what you wish to discuss
- Specifically identifying the behaviour being reviewed, using clear examples
- Asking what happened and why
- Asking how the individual felt about it
- Asking what they have learnt from the situation
- Asking if a similar situation arose in the future, how they would handle it
- Agreeing options and solutions.

Handling difficult relationships and PDR meetings

Difficult relationships

These might be between the manager and individual, or the individual and others.

Again, if it impinges on the work, it almost always pays to address it early. Managers can help themselves by noting how and when any problems arise, and by getting to the bottom of things as soon as possible – perhaps following a line of thinking about what prompts the problem and what any individuals are trying to achieve by it.

Spending time building relationships, trying to understand the other person's point of view, feelings, fears and aspirations, and concentrating on the positive (rather than seeking to accuse or blame) will always help.

Being aware of power differences/imbbalances and role stresses (overload or underload, confusion and overlap) will also help – if they are acknowledged and understood to be changeable or not.

Difficult PDR meetings

It is important to know how and why these have arisen. Some suggestions for handling PDR meetings in the situation are given below.

- A history of poor performance? The focus now needs to be on current and future performance, and many individuals will respond to good management and lift their performance if given a chance.
- Bad experience of PDR/appraisal in the past? Get buy-in through consultation, building good working relationships and plenty of balanced/sensitive feedback in one-to-ones and the encouragement of self-assessment.
- Performance problems ignored/overlooked in the past? Now is the time to tackle it – show that the individual's potential to contribute is valued, but be firm about improvement of performance for the future.
- Cynicism about the value of PDRs? Point out the benefits, and make sure that actions are followed up promptly so that individuals see that you will deliver/mean business.
- Remote working? Make sure you keep in touch throughout the year, even if it is by phone or e-mail. Keep notes of these exchanges and encourage self-monitoring and self-assessment.
- Insufficient communication and relationship building during the year? Just do something about it!
- Surprises being sprung in the PDR meeting itself? Don't do it!