

Managing by Numbers is Easy—But How do I Manage Behaviours?

'In the past 15 years we at graveneyhenshaw have been working with managers in training programmes, workshops and 1:1. In this series of regular articles we answer Frequently Asked Questions – the questions managers ask us most often – and use these to outline a range of solutions to the key issues facing managers today.

In our first two articles we began to address the 'why' of performance management by answering the FAQs 'What is the point in managing people's performance?' and 'Managing People's Performance – Why Me?'

In this third article we move on to the 'how to' of performance management and focus specifically on the area of performance management that can be so challenging – managing behaviours.

NUMBERS VS BEHAVIOURS

In our workshops we ask the question 'What do you want from the people you manage? Ask yourself the same question and note down your responses.

You may have identified some of the following - taken from a recent workshop:

- *Good communicator
- *Reliable
- *Good attitude
- *Motivated
- *Doing the job to standard
- *Honesty
- *Confidence
- *Team worker
- *Enthusiastic
- *Solution focussed
- *Trustworthy
- *Committed
- *Open to change
- *Creative
- *Give & take

We would use one word to encapsulate all of the above – **performance**. Yet often when we use the term 'performance management' many managers think we are simply talking about managing the **numbers** – ensuring that their staff members are producing the right amount of work on time. Managers tell us this is where they focus most of their managerial attention. The above exercise illustrates so effectively that although the quantifiable elements of the job are very important, success and competitive advantage are achieved through the **behaviours** demonstrated in the business. Let's look at this in more detail.

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE – A NEW UNDERSTANDING

Our understanding of competitive advantage is being challenged. The traditional model of competitive advantage i.e. product or service features, cost control, value of return, technology and distribution - is flawed. These forms of competitiveness can, and will be, easily copied. Excellent products and service, competitive cost, high value returns, sophisticated technology and distribution channels are required to be a player in your field—they are your 'table stakes'.

However, these alone will not guarantee you to be a winner.

The new model of competitive advantage proposes that winning will spring from the organisational capabilities of:

· **Speed** · **Responsiveness** · **Innovation** · **Learning Ability** · **Employee Competence**

To state the obvious, organisational capabilities = behaviours!

THE KEY CHALLENGE IN MANAGING BEHAVIOURS

Managers often tell us they cannot effectively manage their staff's performance because so much of that performance cannot be quantified. They say that the quality of the work, the way the person works, the way they manage relationships with others – is subjective and therefore cannot be measured and subsequently managed. Not surprisingly we don't agree! We believe the answer lies in the ability to define and agree performance standards that incorporate both the **quality** and **behavioural** elements of a job as well as the **quantifiable**.

We call this 'cracking the code'.

CRACKING THE CODE OF POWERFUL, COMPELLING PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Effective performance standards incorporate the elements of the job that can be:

C ounted -		the aspects of performance measured by value, time, numbers etc
O bserved -	-	the observable behaviours which contribute to successful performance
D emonstrated -	-	the quality elements of performance: the demonstration of successful behaviours in action
E videnced -	-	the evidence of successful performance – feedback from clients, colleagues and stakeholders.

How to Crack the Code of Performance Standards

Counted

These are the performance standards most managers find easy to define simply by agreeing the numbers. Here is an example related to 'creativity':

Achieved when 80% of your innovations are accepted and implemented.

Observed

These are more challenging to define - we use a three-step process to define the behavioural elements of the job:

Step One – Identify the Crucial Behaviours

The key questions managers need to ask are:

What are the behaviours that differentiate us from our competitors?

What are the behaviours that contribute most to our success?

"We believe the answer lies in the ability to define and agree performance standards that incorporate both the quality and behavioural elements of a job, as well as the quantifiable"

What behaviours must a person demonstrate to be successful in this job?

or back to our original question:

What do I want from the people I manage?

Step Two – Define the Behaviours

Having identified the behaviours here are some methods for defining them. The overriding question managers need to answer is ‘what does this behaviour look like demonstrated in practice?’

1. Think of someone who already demonstrates this behaviour. If, for example, managers are seeking to define ‘creativity’ they need to think of someone they, and others, consider to be creative and then write down the behaviours that person demonstrates in that area
2. Using their own experience, managers simply need to ask the question: *what does it look like?* So, for example, what do creative people actually do that makes us think of them as creative?
3. Turn the question around by asking ‘*what do non creative people not do?*’ It’s strange but it’s often easier to define what ‘it’ looks like done badly than done well!

Step Three – Write the Behavioural Performance Standards

The skill here is in the language used and the discipline lies in the ability to focus on **observable** behaviours. Consider the following frequently used descriptors:

Enthusiastic / effective / consultative / supportive

Can you observe someone being enthusiastic? – only if you can describe enthusiasm behaviourally. Here’s that mantra again - *what does it look like?*

Here are some examples related to ‘creativity’:

- ***Achieved when you demonstrate a consistent approach to evaluating current working practices so that you can identify areas for improvement***
- ***Achieved when you demonstrate a consistent approach to researching and analysing client needs and market trends***
- ***Achieved when you demonstrate consultation with interested parties and obtain feedback on your proposed innovations.***

Demonstrated

This is the all-elusive **quality** element of the job. We approach this by focussing on the processes a person would use in their work in order to be successful and the outcomes of using those processes. Here the question to ask is *what would this behaviour look like as an outcome?*

“The overriding question managers need to ask is ‘what does this behaviour look like demonstrated in practice?’”

For example what does the outcome of effective creativity look like?

Here's our example

Achieved when the innovations you make:

- **clearly reflect business strategy**
- **take into account resource constraints**
- **clearly reflect the identified client needs**
- **correspond to market trends**

Evidenced

Finally this type of performance standard defines the evidence of successful performance as judged by a third party (most often the client). The question to ask here is- *What is the feedback I want to receive from the third party on this element of performance?*

An example related to creativity:

Achieved when feedback from your clients is that your innovations are well researched and have the potential to add value.

“Whatever you are looking for from your staff, if you can describe it you can probably get it, if you can't describe it—is it fair to keep expecting it?”

TO SUMMARISE

The process of defining performance standards that clearly define effective performance for the job in its entirety – cracking the code – is challenging and time consuming. It requires managers to probe their understanding of what effective performance looks like in its widest sense. So why bother? Managers tell us they regularly judge their staff on their 'attributes' without being able to clearly define those attributes as behaviours. They say 'he's *just not committed enough*' or 'she's *not a team player*'.

We often say to managers: whatever you are looking for from your staff -if you can describe it you can probably get it, if you can't describe it—is it fair to keep expecting it?

AND FINALLY

In this third article we have focussed on the first part of the 'how' of performance management. We believe that effective performance management is crucial to the success of organisations and to the happiness of the people who work in those organisations. We feel passionately about the power of effective performance management. In subsequent articles we will continue to explore the 'how' of performance management.

We hope you have enjoyed reading this article. Please feel free to copy it to anyone you think would find it interesting, or visit our website www.graveneyhenshaw.co.uk to download the articles in pdf format. If you would like to discuss this article, to pose your own questions or to explore how we could help you make these ideas come alive in your organisation we would be delighted to hear from you.

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graveneyhenshaw is a training consultancy that works with a diverse range of clients in both the private and public sectors in the UK. They help individuals, groups and teams learn how to become more effective, how to maximise their potential and how to learn. They add value to their client organisations by tying personal learning to business goals.

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