

Down Under John Jeston and Gina Craig

Bureaucracy and High Performance

There is a view that bureaucracy and high performance are incompatible. Are they?

In this Column, we will explore how performance is often managed within a government agency or bureaucracy; the typical issues and challenges that are faced; and how the manager is an essential element to achieving high performance in a bureaucracy.

The traditional approach to achieving and managing performance in a government agency (or bureaucracy) is through the development of an annual Performance Agreement.

This Performance Agreement document is typically drafted by the individual employee, then negotiated and agreed upon with the employee's manager. There is nothing preventing a manager from sending out a list of goals or targets to an employee for discussion and negotiation.

Goals or targets are often referred to as Key Expected Results (KERs) in this environment. In most instances an agency will set mandated KERs. These are typically KERs that govern workplace behaviour, code of conduct, values and employment principles.

KERs help employees to understand what they need to achieve during the performance cycle and the standards that need to be met. As such, ensuring KERs are meaningful and measurable is very important.

When agreeing to these KERs, managers and employees should ensure that the KERs are developed in such a manner to ensure that they are achievable and can be chunked into tangible achievable sub-tasks if necessary. The KERs must set out clearly defined outputs and specify by what date they need to be achieved.

Throughout the performance period and typically at the halfway point there is a formal review to agree how the employee is tracking. The employee usually self-assesses their performance, and then agrees to it with their manager. This presents an opportunity to update the agreement if circumstances have changed and, if necessary, corrective action is put in place. On completion of the performance period, the employee's self-assessment and first and second level supervisors' assessment of the employee's performance during the performance year are recorded.

Practically, in a government agency or any large bureaucracy, the real challenge may be, first, to motivate managers to manage and second to motivate employees to perform.

A manager is responsible for the work performance and the conduct of their employees. A manager needs to ensure that the employees understand the

organization's values as well as some key Mutual Responsibilities¹, and that employees demonstrate this understanding through their behavior in the workplace.

Let's assume that managers do manage and the issue becomes how to make corrective action for the employee count or mean anything.

The questions that may arise at this point might include:

- what action can you take if employees don't meet their KERs because of poor performance?
- what to do if employees don't meet their KERs because they don't want to? They may be perfectly content just coming to work every day, earning their salary and going home with minimal effort.

A simple and yet powerful truism for managers to keep in mind is:

actions (a KER) are only truly 'delegated' when they are accepted.

If an employee does not truly accept and embrace their KERs, then do not expect them to be achieved.

In a government agency, while managers can provide feedback and guidance on performance and behavior, they can't dismiss employees easily, or reduce or cancel their bonuses, because there are usually no financial incentives available (beyond their salary).

The type of actions often implemented for non-performance include:

- establishing regular meetings to review progress and agreed upon corrective action
- developing a performance improvement plan at the individual level
- establishing a mentor and coaching program or a buddy system as a support mechanism
- making non-performance transparent and visible to all. This may be a motivator for some and a significant de-motivator for others. It should only be used if it does not violate a country's privacy legislation. Such a measure could also be perceived as bullying by other employees.

Employees could and often do counter with such excuses as:

- I have too much to do and therefore can't meet my KERs
- I don't have the right skills or resources to perform the job.

Of the approaches mentioned above several are quite negative. Perhaps managers should be concentrating and concerning themselves with good performance, not poor performance.

If managers were to adopt a positive approach, they would be recognizing good performance that enhances an employee's pride in his/her performance and strive for the recognition that a good job inspires. How do employees become recognized? They achieve their KERs!

Recognition could be a simple public or private thank you. It could be an award (a certificate of merit); it could be a celebration of team success – a simple 'celebration morning tea or a lunch' can make the world of difference.

People love to be part of a team and particularly a successful team. They love to be seen by others as successful. Creating an environment in which employees can be successful is the role of the manager.

It is a myth that setting up a competitive environment within an organization is better and inspires employees to performance. Cooperation and collaboration is what creates desirable working environment and thus a better organization.

If employees are not meeting their KERs, maybe they are not the problem, perhaps the environment is. It is the manager's job to create an environment that enables employees to flourish. When did people become second or third behind cutting back on salaries and leaning processes and finding savings?

If employees are not performing managers usually set out to change the employee. It's possible that this is the wrong approach. Perhaps managers should be setting out to change the conditions or environment in which employees operate. Managers should be creating a culture that inspires people to give their all, simply because they love coming to work.

How do managers start this process?

It starts with the manager. Remember: *culture is 'caught' not 'taught'*.

Employees need to know that the work they are doing is valued by others, especially those in their 'group' or 'team'. This is not just about 'telling' someone that they have done a good job. It is about creating a trusting environment that shows that managers truly care for employees and employees care for each other.

To earn the trust of employees, the managers of an organization must first treat them as people. To earn trust, you must extend trust.

Leaders are only really leaders when they accept and take responsibility for protecting those in their care.

Remember, trust is a reciprocal relationship. If leaders want our trust (therefore our respect and effort to achieve) then they must give employees their trust.

So is high performance possible in a bureaucracy? Can we now conclude that these two things are in fact compatible? I believe we can--by building a positive and trusting environment that focuses on the achievements of employees rather than their failures.

ⁱ Mutual Responsibilities (Manager)

- Ensure your employees are attuned to the organisations priorities
- Ensure the performance of your team is results focussed
- Maximize learning and development opportunities for employees
- Manage workload issues so employees are not unreasonably overloaded with work

Mutual Responsibilities (Employee)

- Strive to achieve performance and results of a high standard
- Reassess workload priorities with supervisor when workload becomes too much

Author

John Jeston



John has serious experience getting things done—the right way. For over 30 years he has covered Business Process Management (BPM), business process re-engineering, project management, systems development, outsourcing, and general management. He has held the positions of Financial Controller, Divisional Manager, Company Director, HR Director and Chief Information Officer. John is internationally recognised as a key opinion leader in BPM strategy and implementation. He has provided these services to significant organisations throughout Australia, Europe, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, the United Kingdom, U.S.A., Singapore, Mexico and Brazil. He has authored a number of books and more than 20 articles on BPM and high performance management. He is a regular speaker at conferences and a Master Project Director, with the Australian Institute of Project Management and is a Chartered Accountant.

John has authored or co-authored:

Business Process Management: Practical Guidelines to Successful Implementations (2006 and 2008)

Management by Process: A Roadmap to Sustainable Business Process Management (2008)—the only book to provide a roadmap to sustainable BPM and High Performance Management

Beyond Business Process Improvement, On To Business Transformation (2009)

He also writes a regular Column in the international *BP Trends* Monthly Update. He can be reached at johnjeston@managementbyprocess.com

Gina Craig



Gina has 30 years' experience as an adult teacher, trainer, facilitator, designer of training courses, writer and senior manager. Gina has provided these services to the higher education sector, private enterprise and large and complex government agencies.

Gina has proven expertise in the creation of, and transformation to, an extremely large and complex shared services environment. She then demonstrated that the new entity was designed and structured correctly by successfully managing the largest team within that entity. She also leaned the processes within the entity to find work and workforce efficiencies.

Gina has also been a lecturer and tutor with University of New South Wales, Australia where she lectured and tutored economics, calculus, statistics and accounting; managed and supported a Learning Management System and Learner Content Management System; lead and managed large teams of 100 plus staff; and managed numerous projects some of which resulted in \$10'sm in savings.

Gina's consulting, communication and relationship skills enable her to successfully manage and mentor individuals and teams.