



a practical guide to teacher performance management

Quality Performance Management - It's about people, not processes

63%

OF AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS FEEL
PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT
IS DONE TO MEET

ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS



Though at times it might feel like it, Performance Management for teachers is not about getting forms filled in correctly for an auditor, nor is it about trying to formulaically rate your staff on an arbitrary scale. The purpose of Performance Management is simple: to continually develop teachers into the future. Effective Performance Management requires ongoing communication between teachers and their supervisors focused on improving teacher capabilities and effectiveness. It starts when a teacher commences their tenure with a school and only finishes the day they leave.

The Performance Management Cycle



Self Reflection and Assessment

Best practice performance management begins and ends with self-reflection under the guidance of a supervisor, coach or mentor. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has developed an online questionnaire called The **Teacher Self-Assessment Tool (Teacher SAT)**. This tool enables new and experienced teachers to reflect on their performance against the **Australian Professional Standards for Teachers**.

Barriers to self-reflection

Some teachers will have a greater capacity for self reflection than others. As a leader, it is important to identify the barriers you need to overcome to help your teacher identify their strengths and development opportunities. These barriers might include: previous negative experiences; accepted beliefs; unchallenged assumptions; the emotional state of the staff member; or just that they are comfortable with the way things are and simply don't want to change.

Giving teachers a reason to change

Discovering what matters to teachers and how best to motivate them is a complicated challenge. Extrinsic rewards like merit based pay have been tried in the past but have generally not produced the desired results. Research suggests that teachers are most likely to value intrinsic rewards such as self-respect, responsibility, and a sense of accomplishment associated with career growth and student achievement. Helping young people learn is still the primary reason staff enter the teaching profession; and when tied in a meaningful way to performance development can increase a teacher's motivation to improve their practices.

Goal Setting

Armed with a more realistic picture for where they are and what they want to work on, a teacher is then in a strong position to focus on goal setting.

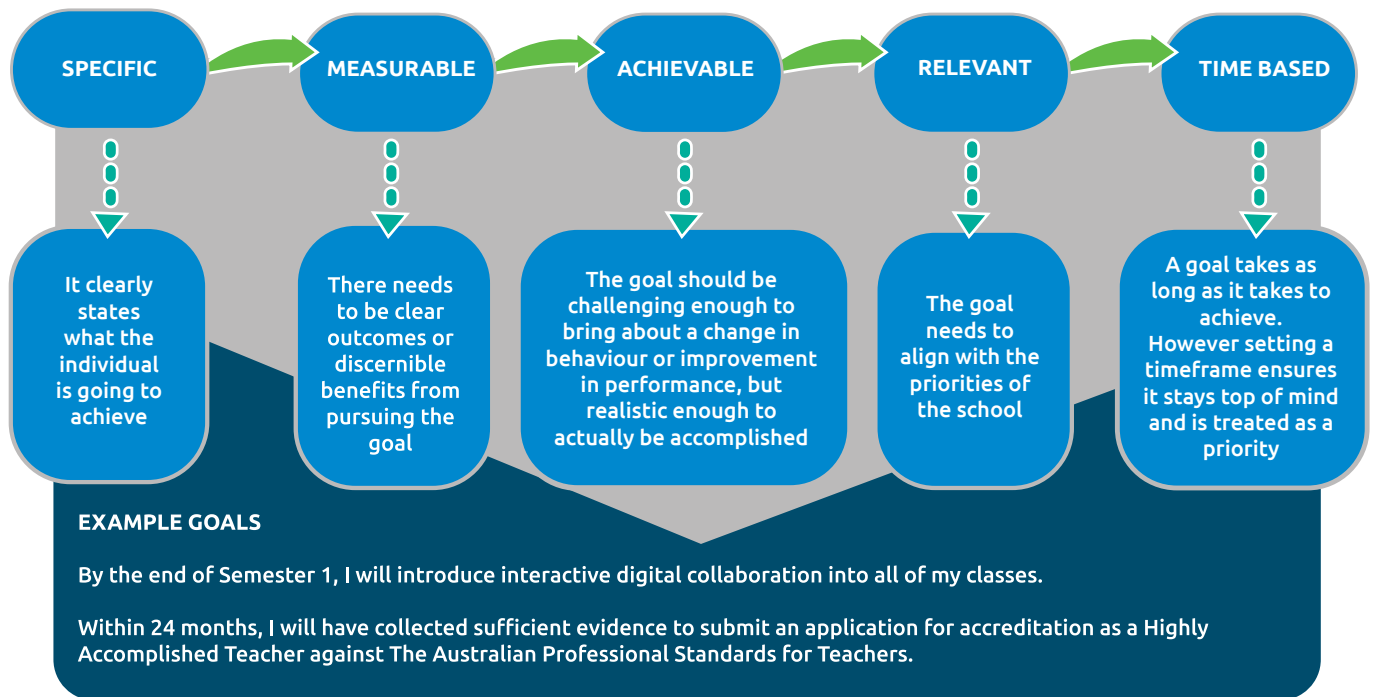
Prioritise - don't try to do it all at once

Teaching is demanding, and schools are busy and dynamic environments. Many staff fail to achieve meaningful goals simply because they spread themselves too thin and try to accomplish too much at once. Try limiting performance goals to two or three key areas. Focus on the most important goals - the ones that can make the most difference in the classroom and will produce tangible results.

Make sure the goals are SMART

The term SMART goals was first coined by George T. Doran in 1981 in an issue of Management Review. SMART goals have been the anchor point for most performance management systems and are still very relevant today.





Changing goals mid performance cycle

It sounds logical and admirable to set long-term goals and then proceed to work like a diehard squirrel to achieve them. Planning a teacher's professional development for the year certainly isn't a bad thing; but a lot can happen during that time.

You may discover that a goal that once seemed desirable may ending up seeming like a bad idea (for a whole barrel of reasons) or potentially becoming a waste of time in the wake of a new development.

To accomplish truly meaningful goals, all participants must be willing to question assumptions and re-evaluate as necessary. Is this a realistic goal for the individual? Is this still a priority? Are there more pressing or productive ways the person could be investing in their development?

Professional Development Activities

Rarely will a single goal involve a single task. A task is basically a "to do" item you need to perform in order to achieve a goal. Likewise each development activity should be viewed through the lens of the role it plays and how well it supports the greater goal.

Throw away the fairy dust

Traditional professional development activities such as external training workshops have long been used like fairy dust: thrown at staff in the hope that, like magic, they will bring about a change in teaching practice. What we have now come to understand is that mastering a new skill is a lot more complicated than that. In fact, it is believed that it takes teachers on average 20 separate instances of practice to master a new skill. [1]

Multi-pronged approach to learning

Just like their students, teachers learn better when they engage with the material, are able to actively participate, and collaborate with each other. Professional development activities are more successful if they allow teachers the opportunity to make sense of the information using a variety of interactive approaches including: professional readings; role playing techniques; peer discussions; live modeling; and classroom observations.

Further accreditation or higher education is not for everyone

While the focus of graduate teachers is to satisfy the proficiency requirements and register as a teacher, for experienced staff the pathways for development will differ depending on the individual. For most experienced teachers, professional development activities will be classroom focused based on their particular interests and needs. This is where techniques like one-on-one coaching or mentoring activities have the most to offer. For teachers that wish to pursue leadership roles or are generally considered high performers, further qualifications such as accreditation under the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers or post-graduate studies may be appropriate. However, these decisions may be influenced by school funding and other factors.

Build a framework of support - coaching, collaboration, modelling and mentoring

Most teachers will only change to a new teaching practice once they have seen material results with students for themselves. [2] The risk therefore is teachers abandoning new techniques if they don't see benefits quickly enough. Professional development frameworks need to confront this problem head-on by building a significant amount of support for teachers during the critical implementation phase of new knowledge and skills.

Coaching

Studies have found that coached teachers transfer newly learned teaching practices consistently [1], while teachers without coaching quickly lose interest and fail to implement their new skills. Coaching may be undertaken by school leaders or department heads. Alternatively, many schools buy-in coaching expertise in a given area sometimes even sharing the resource and more importantly the salary cost with other schools with the same needs.

Collaboration - Teacher Learning Circles

Teacher learning circles complement traditional coaching models but carry less of the cost as they use local resources. Learning circles are made up of small teacher communities that learn from and support one another, with the ultimate aim of improving student learning outcomes. The groups reflect on current teaching practices and develop and implement action plans to address the challenges they face in the classroom - reviewing and tweaking their strategies as they go.

Modelling

Modeling has been found to be highly effective in helping teachers understand a new practice.

When a respected colleague demonstrates how a method can be used successfully in a class of real students the new practice, a teacher is significantly more likely to apply a concept and remain open to adopting it.

Mentoring

Many teachers have successfully achieved their goals after benefiting from the guidance and advice of an experienced or accomplished educator. The focus of mentoring is purely on the development of the teacher. Suitable mentors are best selected from outside of the teacher's usual supervisory or peer group.

Allow enough time

Professional development that is longer in duration has a greater impact on teaching practice. It is suggested that teachers may need as many as 50 hours of instruction, practice and coaching before a new teaching strategy is mastered and implemented in class. [1]



Real-Time Feedback

This is the linchpin of successful Performance Management in modern schools. Frequent and ongoing coaching and feedback is a way to forge strong working relationships between peers and between teachers and leaders. Face to face feedback is enriching but can also be universally challenging when there are tough conversations to be had. A firm foundation of trust, and an environment where regular feedback (both good and bad) is the norm, can make all the difference in bringing about higher performance.

Principals and School Leadership

All teachers want feedback from their Supervisor. Even the superstars.

But it can be challenging for Principals to find the time to get around to classrooms to observe performance and provide feedback to each and every teacher, particularly in larger schools. Like any leader, they may need to delegate and share the responsibility with their Assistant / Deputy Principals and Department Heads if the teacher population is too large.

Frequent classroom visits and informal chats are helpful for building trust. Understandably, Teachers are more likely to accept criticism from a leader that has followed their progress and given them lots of positive comments in the past, so a leader must take advantage of as many opportunities to talk about performance in as balanced a way as possible.

Other Sources of Feedback

Even the best Principals can't be across everything their teachers do. Significant contributions could easily go unnoticed or ideas and innovation in the classroom unrecognised if a teacher's only source of feedback is their school leader. Meaningful self evaluation is central to performance management of teachers. Multiple sources of feedback and information helps staff develop a more rounded view of themselves and results in more meaningful goal setting.

Triads - peer feedback

Many schools are seeing clear benefits from introducing teacher triads. Triads are groups of teachers that come together to work collaboratively to improve practices through peer observation and feedback.

The triad model is not judgemental. It has a development focus and is intended to support those committed to delivering high standards of teaching practice.

Peer observation techniques such as those used by the triad model are a proven method for improving teaching.

Parent and Student Feedback

This is probably one of the more polarising sources of feedback for teachers. Many teachers are still hesitant to introduce student feedback as they believe it may shift the balance of power in the relationship. Others feel it has given them the most direct and valuable insights into their teaching they had ever received.

Parent feedback is generally believed to be most useful in the early childhood years when a child's feedback is less reliable but may not be as useful in the Secondary years.

Techniques for delivering feedback

There are many techniques for structuring feedback. The feedback technique you choose will depend on the audience. Here are some examples:

The Sandwich

- » Start with the bottom slice of bread = praise for something the person did well
- » The meat in the middle = offer some constructive criticism
- » Top the sandwich with another slice of bread = finish the conversation on a positive note with more praise.

This technique is often used when the subject needs a confidence boost or a reminder that constructive feedback does not equal failure.

Example:

"I was really impressed by how well the new classroom layout has increased the level of interaction between students. Although I did notice that not everyone completed the task on time so you will need to monitor this. I am very excited that you are implementing what you have learnt about innovations in learning environments."

The Direct Approach

- » Start with the what, where and when of the situation
- » Describe the behaviour you observed
- » Outline how the behaviour has impacted others

This technique works effectively with staff that need help diagnosing issues with their performance.

Example:

"During this morning's lesson on social values, I noticed that you invited the children to self-manage the discussion. I am concerned that this allowed a few students to dominate the discussion and didn't encourage contributions from everyone."

Questioning technique

- » Explain the outcome you observed
- » Ask the person to reflect on why they think it happened.

This technique works best with teachers that have a high capacity for self-reflection.

Example:

"You aren't as progressed towards demonstrating proficiency for registration as you had hoped to be by now. Why do you think this is?"



Annual Performance Review Discussion

In the bad old days the performance review discussion was a once a year thing - if it happened at all. For both the leader and the staff member it was about as appealing as visiting a toxic waste disposal facility. Both filled people with anxiety, and both soon became a dumping ground for nasty little surprises.

With 12 months of formal and informal feedback and coaching discussions under your belt, the annual performance review should be a walk in the park by comparison. Most importantly, the cyclical, ongoing nature of modern performance management means that you are always looking to the future - rather than trying to agree on the past. The outcomes and learnings from the Performance Management cycle aren't filed away at the end of the year; instead, they are used as the basis for discussion and reflection needed to set new goals in the next performance cycle.

Establishing The Vision - The Role of the Principal

The level of direct involvement a Principal has in the performance management process will largely depend on the school. In some instances, Principals may need to delegate individual performance or feedback discussions due to the size of the workforce. The responsibility they can not and must not delegate however, is their role as the overall performance leader.

If performance management is to be an authentic and rewarding process for teachers, the Principal must leave the school community in no doubt of its importance. Principals with high performing teachers consistently:

- » articulate clear goals and priorities for the school;
- » challenge team members to remain focused and committed to excellence; and
- » build a framework that supports the achievement of performance goals.

Streamlining The Process

There are many reasons why Performance Appraisals often fall into the trap of becoming box ticking exercises. Reasons given often include:

- » Too busy
- » Lack of preparation
- » Lack of clear goals
- » Supervisor doesn't work with you or doesn't know you
- » Get too caught up in the process and forms and forget the interactive bit
- » The process is unnecessarily cumbersome.

A lot of these issues can be avoided with better planning and execution.

Timetabling

The performance management cycle can begin and end at any time. Most schools have their highest intake of new teachers at the beginning of the year - so it may be best to follow a calendar year cycle. The only downside is that it this may also be the school's busiest time.

Following a financial year timetable is a valid option so long as induction processes capture new teacher performance management in those critical first six months. Robust monitoring and tracking processes can help with this.

Using Technology

A good performance management software can really make the process easy. Not only will this keep the process paper free - and your employee files thinner - a system that is easy to use and mobile compatible will ensure feedback notes and coaching records are always kept in one place for easy reference.

There Are No Losers Here...

Development focused performance management enriches the careers and lives of Australian teachers. Teachers experience greater job satisfaction when they are given the opportunity to hone their skills and become better equipped to meet the demands of their roles through feedback and coaching. But the most significant benefit is undoubtedly the improvement in the results of Australian students. More effective teachers means better student outcomes. It's as simple as that!

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1. <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Staffingstudents/Teaching-the-Teachers-Effective-Professional-Development-in-an-Era-of-High-Stakes-Accountability/Teaching-the-Teachers-Full-Report.pdf>
 2. http://www.osba.org/Resources/Article/Employee_Management/Motivating_Teachers_to_Improve_Instruction.aspx
 3. https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/australian_teacher_performance_and_development_framework_august_2012.pdf?sfvrsn=e7c2ec3c_0
 4. <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/unpacking-and-implementing-the-australian-professional-standards-for-teachers>
 5. <http://www.ahisa.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Independent-schools-Helping-to-build-Australias-future-25May16.pdf>
 6. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPG2JkMz8qY>



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