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## Optimising Performance

### Optimising Staff Performance through feedback

The ideal work environment consists of high performing teams and individuals who are committed, engaged and motivated. The culture is open, honest, respectful and inclusive.

The department's managers and supervisors should foster an environment in which all staff members can produce their best by:

- clearly communicating the department's strategic direction and objectives;
- promoting an understanding of how each staff member's role contributes to the department achieving its goals and objectives;
- ensuring that everyone knows what capabilities and behaviours are expected;
- making sure everyone is aware of how they are tracking against their performance goals; and
- seeking and responding to feedback about how you can better support and enable staff.

To get the best from staff, supervisors can use powerful tools to motivate and enhance performance, such as:

- providing staff members with appropriate guidance and support;
- facilitating regular and meaningful two-way feedback conversations; and
- conducting formal performance assessments accompanied by formal feedback, in accordance with the PDS Guidelines.

The 2 Way Talk: useful coaching questions may assist you when preparing to provide feedback.

### Principles of providing effective feedback

Effective feedback is timely and regular, based on open and honest two-way communication, constructive, factual, specific and understood:

#### **...timely and regular**

- feedback is more effective if given on a regular basis. It should not be limited to the formal mid cycle and end of cycle assessments. In consultation with staff members, supervisors and managers should identify the relevant frequency for these discussions and both be committed to ensuring that they occur.
- good performance should be encouraged, commended and recognised.
- concerns about performance or conduct should be addressed promptly. Early intervention may assist to remedy the issues at hand without the need for more formal action.

#### **...based on open, and honest two-way communication**

- open and honest communication provides staff members with the opportunity to talk about their own performance, to discuss areas where they have met or exceeded expectations and also to highlight areas where they might need additional support or guidance in order to perform to their best capacity.
- feedback discussions should give the staff member the opportunity to express their views on the supervisor's performance. 'Upwards' feedback from a staff member allows a supervisor to accurately measure how effective they are.
- by giving genuine consideration to the feedback provided by the staff member, the supervisor/manager can reinforce the message that the staff member's contribution is both valuable, appreciated and taken seriously.

#### **...factual and specific**

- staff members need to have confidence in the basis of the feedback and the supervisor needs to be confident that they have information that can support and explain the feedback.
- feedback **should include** factual examples of performance, and consist of statements about observed or verified events or

behaviour related to performance expectations.

- feedback **should not** evaluate the person based on assumptions, interpretations, generalisations and judgments about what the behaviour or facts mean.

#### **...constructive**

- discussion should be framed around ways to optimise performance.
- a constructive outcome can be achieved if the discussion focuses upon positives, and also covers areas that could be enhanced.

#### **...understood**

- staff members need to understand what the performance expectations are and how individual performance contributes to the achievement of team, section, branch, division and corporate objectives.
- staff members need to understand by what standards their performance will be assessed.

### **Feedback must be followed up**

Supervisors should continually monitor and evaluate the performance of staff members and provide feedback. When a course of action is agreed on to optimise a staff member's performance (e.g. training, developmental opportunities, on the job coaching etc), supervisors must follow up on their commitment. Equally, staff members should follow up their actions.

#### **To promote an environment where feedback is regular and positive, managers and supervisors should:**

- ensure all staff members have a current PDS Agreement formally reviewed in line with the PDS cycle;
- ensure the allocation of tasks and workloads are balanced and appropriate;
- ensure the PDS Agreement is linked to the relevant capability map and regularly reviewed informally;
- ensure every PDS Agreement includes a current Individual Development Plan that includes formal and informal development activities;
- provide staff members with regular and constructive feedback on their performance and behaviour;
- encourage staff members to seek feedback and to give feedback to you;
- prepare appropriately so all discussions regarding an individual's performance are conducted professionally and respectfully, providing specific examples related to the performance;
- be mindful of the PDS principle of 'no surprises' – keep staff informed of their performance throughout the PDS cycle with any performance issues defined and discussed as early as possible; and
- ask about and consider any relevant external factors, health issues and any work issues beyond their control in the context of the employee's performance. This may necessitate the need for the PDS to be temporarily adjusted to reflect any such circumstances.

Further advice is available from People Management Solutions, People Branch.