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**Integrated Human Capital Blueprint: Re-Engineering Performance and
Job Design at Aether Innovations**

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Table of Contents

Part 1: Re-Engineering Performance and Job Design	1
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Current Practices in Performance Appraisal and Job Design Among Tech Companies	2
3. Diagnosis of Aether's Current Performance-and-Role Problems.....	4
4. Proposed Modern Performance Appraisal System for Aether	5
4.1 Goal Architecture and Review Rhythm	5
4.2 Developmental Feedback and Leadership Calibration	5
4.3 Risks and Governance	6
5. Job Analysis and Redesigned Role Architecture for Six Key Positions.....	8
6. How Appraisal and Job Design Create a Performance-Driven Culture	12
7. Conclusion and Implementation Priorities	13
Part 2: Reflection	14
8. Reflection Using Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle.....	14
8.1 Concrete Experience	14
8.2 Reflective Observation	14
8.3 Abstract Conceptualisation	14
8.4 Active Experimentation.....	15
9. Staying Relevant in an AI-Shaped Workplace.....	16
10. References	17

Part 1: Re-Engineering Performance and Job Design

1. Introduction

The core problem at Aether Innovations is not lack of effort, but flawed system design. Being a 300-person technology company, it should be possible to turn expertise into customer value within a short period but flat growth, high turnover, and poor customer satisfaction indicate a lack of clarity in what is expected, poor feedback, and roles that do not favour innovation. Companies in the technology industry are moving towards shorter goal cycles, more intensive feedback, and more expansive role designs rather than just annual appraisal (Johnson, Johnson and Dave, 2022; Wowerath, 2026). This report claims that Aether should revise its appraisal system and job architecture of six major roles to ensure the accountability, development and performance support each other.

2. Current Practices in Performance Appraisal and Job Design Among Tech Companies

In technology companies, the practice of performance management has shifted away from less frequent judgements on a yearly basis to shorter feedback periods. Johnson, Johnson and Dave (2022) believe that feedback design is equally important as frequency, Giamos, Doucet and Leger (2023) report an increase in performance, motivation, and task engagement in the case of continuous, person-mediated feedback. Such evidence is helpful, but it can tell more about enhancing the performance continued by the task than demonstrating that monthly check-ins indeed increase the performance of the firm on average. In the case of Aether, it would be to maintain the centrality of managers and employ technology as a support.

Staying wary is also an approach methodological reason. The reason i find Giamos, Doucet and Leger (2023) useful is that feedback design is more intimately isolated than more general practitioner commentary, but that this study nonetheless addresses individual behavioural responses, rather than long-run organisational performance. Wowerath (2026) is helpful to comprehend how middle managers utilize OKRs in the implementation of strategies, but sheds more light on sensemaking and coordination than enduring productivity impacts. Silva and Santos (2024) are thus important since they deflate the zeal: practice is outpacing theory.

Setting goals has changed in line. Wowerath (2026) demonstrates that the use of OKRs may assist middle managers in coordinating the strategy implementation, whereas Silva and Santos (2024) mention that the body of research is rather thin and diffuse. In contrast to annual rating systems, OKRs are more focused on forward alignment than on retrospective evaluation; when poorly implemented, however, they result in metrics churn and empty target setting. The same is asserted in the job design literature. Parker, Morgeson and Johns (2017) and Daniels et al. (2017) demonstrate that redesign is most effective when the roles, systems and managerial practice are in a unified movement. So, improved appraisal minus improved jobs would thus be a better measure of dysfunction, rather than eliminate it.

Table 1: Comparative benchmark table for technology-sector appraisal and job-design practices.

Practice	Strategic advantage	Main limitation	Relevance to Aether
Continuous feedback and monthly check-ins	Faster correction and stronger coaching	Can become noisy or superficial	Useful if manager capability is strengthened
OKRs and quarterly goal cycles	Improves alignment and visibility	Easy to overload teams with metrics	Appropriate for executive and team-level goal setting
Developmental 360 feedback for leaders	Wider view of leadership behaviour	Vulnerable to bias and gaming	Best for the six core leadership roles only
Skills-based and enriched job design	Increases flexibility, autonomy, and innovation potential	Can create ambiguity if role boundaries are weak	Valuable for redesigning Aether's executive spine

3. Diagnosis of Aether's Current Performance-and-Role Problems

The symptoms of Aether are indicative of a broken performance architecture. Sluggish growth indicates that priorities in strategies are not being translated to disciplined implementation. Turnover means that poor development, lack of clarity of expectation, or confidence in the leadership takes place among at least some employees. The declining level of customer satisfaction is an indication that internal friction is finding its way into the market. These issues do not have a high chance of being independent.

The most likely diagnosis is a combination of indiscriminate success measures, inconsistent following through on the part of the managers, and overlaps of roles among the top posts. According to Ulrich, HR seems to be too deep within the administrative professional position rather than being a fully-fledged strategic partner and change agent (UWTSD, 2026a). Performance management is thus turned into an ordinary occurrence as opposed to the process of converting the priorities, capability and accountability into business results. The role clarity is also important: De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia (2017) demonstrate that role ambiguity increases turnover intentions. In Aether, there are defocused lines on the executive spine, which will slow decision making, work duplication and frustration to the staff used to clear direction.

4. Proposed Modern Performance Appraisal System for Aether

Instead of the annual-review-intensive method, aether recommends four interconnected practices that are quarterly Objectives and Key Results (OKRs), monthly manager check-ins, developmental feedback (360 feedback) based on six core roles, and calibration meetings. The point is not to have more data but to make judgement and have more clear priorities.

4.1 Goal Architecture and Review Rhythm

On the highest level the executive team is supposed to establish a limited number of firm OKRs which are connected to the growth, innovation throughput, retention, and customer outcomes. These ought to cascade to team OKRs and role scorecards. Wowerath (2026) is helpful as it demonstrates that the value of OKR is in the discussions that they impose on priorities, but not the template itself. Nonetheless, Silva and Santos (2024) warn that the adoption of OKR tends to exceed good evidence and rigorous application. Aether must then restrict every leadership position to three or four effects and consider quality in lieu of the sheer metric volume.

Progress, barriers, and support needs should then be addressed by monthly check-ins. Giamos, Doucet and Leger (2023) propose that the continuous feedback is more effective when it involves a mix of both the quantitative and qualitative input, and when technology does not centralize but managers do. In the case of Aether, the manager talk ought not to be substituted with software-generated comments.

This is also an indication of why an annual-rating pure logic is weak. Annual systems are used to summarise the performance of the previous year, and the use of the OKRs is intended to refresh the priorities in the context of the rapidly moving work. Nevertheless, the breakdowns of OKRs include writing too many key results in a team, revising objectives without a reason, and considering it a compliance document instead of a strategic discussion (Silva and Santos, 2024; Adler et al., 2016). Aether ought to thus test the quality of OKR in a pilot, as opposed to adopting that alignment will be enhanced by adoption alone.

4.2 Developmental Feedback and Leadership Calibration

Developmental 360 feedback cycle of the six leadership roles should also be undertaken twice in a year. This must include communication, cross-functional teamwork, accountability and coaching. Hezlett (2008) demonstrates that multisource feedback usually leads to rather small

improvements, whereas Brown, Inceoglu and Lin (2017) reveal that 360 systems are susceptible to response bias. Emam, Fakhry and Abdrabou (2024) provide more encouraging evidence, but it is only the cases of feedback incorporated in a development programme. In the case of Aether 360 feedback must therefore be used to complement and not to substitute manager-led evaluation and in no way should pay decisions be made based on 360 feedback.

Evaluations conducted by managers and the 360 feedback cannot be considered equal. Day-to-day delivery, obstacle removal and short-cycle improvement are best perceived by the line manager, and 360 feedback is more effective in revealing relational blind spots like quality of coaching or cross-functional behaviour. Brown, Inceoglu and Lin (2017) demonstrate the importance of such a distinction: after 360 data is applied as hard performance scores, bias and defensiveness are more difficult to manage. Aether should then consider 360 input as diagnostic evidence as opposed to direct performance management.

4.3 Risks and Governance

The key threats include metric inflation, shallow check-ins, survey fatigue and political feedback. Adler et al. (2016) posit that the inaccurate performance management performance is generally a symptom of poor design, rather than the presence of ratings themselves. Aether thus requires calibration meetings, bias controls and separate developmental/reward conversations.

Table 2: Appraisal design matrix for Aether

Element	Purpose	Benefit	Risk	Safeguard
Quarterly OKRs	Align strategy and execution	Clearer priorities	Too many metrics	Limit key results and review quality, not just volume
Monthly check-ins	Improve coaching and course correction	Faster issue resolution	Becomes routine and shallow	Use a fixed agenda: progress, blockers, support, development
Leadership 360 feedback	Broaden insight into leadership behaviour	Better self-awareness and collaboration	Bias, inflation, politics	Small rater pools, anonymity rules, coaching debrief
Calibration meetings	Improve fairness and consistency	Reduces manager drift	Consensus pressure or defensiveness	Require examples and compare against role scorecards

5. Job Analysis and Redesigned Role Architecture for Six Key Positions

The appraisal system cannot be effective unless the six senior positions are re-structured as well. Job descriptions, job specifications, and performance appraisal depend on job analysis (UWTSD, 2026c). Role architecture is thus a requirement by Aether to elaborate ownership, required capabilities and innovation contribution.

The redesign must be done using the Job Characteristics Model directly: task identity should be more pronounced with the CEO and CFO, skill variety should be higher with CTO, CIO, and HR Director and task significance with the Head of R&D and explicit autonomy and feedback via the scorecards linked to the OKR. Parker, Morgeson and Johns (2017) and Daniels et al. (2017) substantiate this systems perspective, yet both warn against thinking that the rewritten roles will be sufficient to improve performance. Kim and Lee (2024) also reveal that fit is important with supportive supervision; redesigned jobs will not work in case the leadership quality is poor.

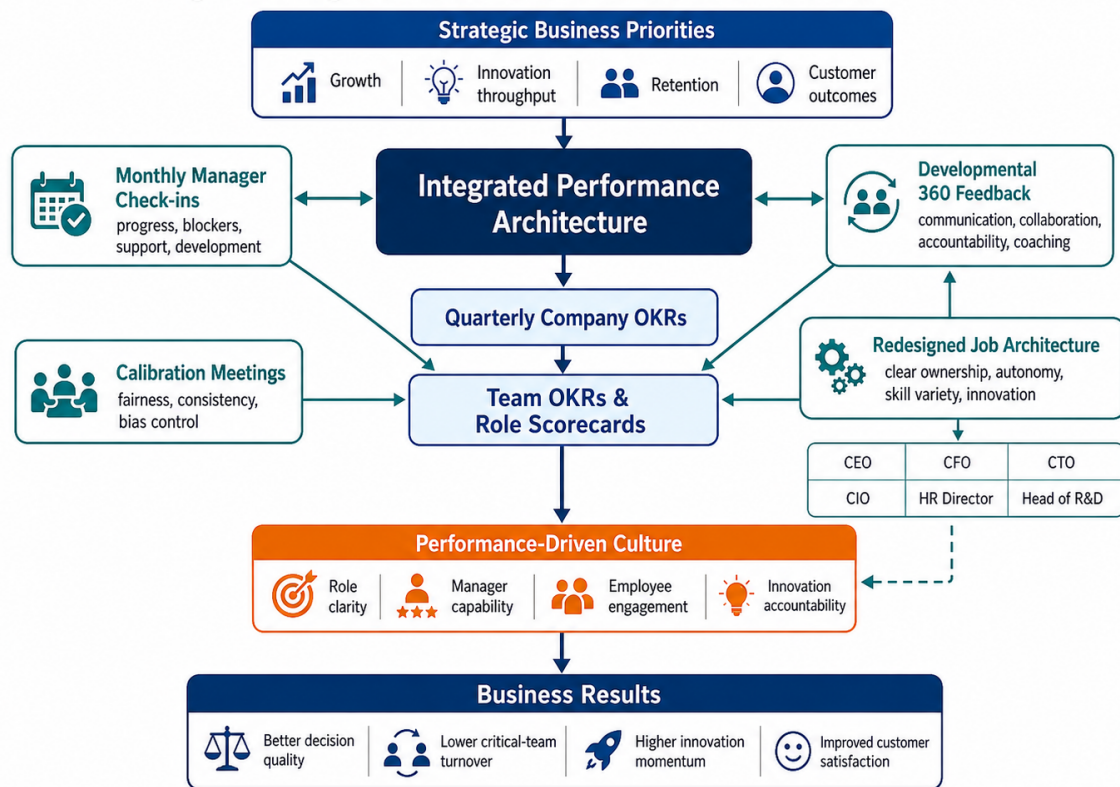
The JCM lens matters because Aether's jobs must be both clear and motivating. Task identity, skill variety, autonomy and feedback should be built into role scorecards and cross-functional reviews so redesign does not become job enlargement without learning (Parker, Morgeson and Johns, 2017; Daniels et al., 2017).

Table 3: Six-role job architecture for Aether Innovations

Role	Core purpose	Key responsibilities	Key specification requirements	JCM / design upgrade	Performance link
CEO	Set strategic direction and integrate business priorities	Growth strategy, culture sponsorship, executive alignment	Strategic judgement, scale-up leadership, investor and customer credibility	JCM: task identity and feedback through enterprise OKRs	Responsible for overall growth, retention, and customer outcome dashboard
CFO	Translate strategy into disciplined financial choices	Capital allocation, cost control, scenario planning, investment discipline	Finance leadership, analytics, commercial judgement, governance	JCM: autonomy and task identity through end-to-end resource decisions	Owns margin, investment quality, and people-cost productivity indicators
CTO	Lead platform, product, and engineering execution	Technical roadmap, architecture, delivery quality, engineering capability	Deep technical leadership, agile delivery experience, cross-functional communication	JCM: skill variety plus feedback from delivery and reliability metrics	Owns delivery reliability, technical debt, and platform enablement metrics

CIO	Drive innovation portfolio and experimentation discipline	Innovation pipeline, sprint governance, cross-functional experimentation	Innovation leadership, portfolio thinking, design-thinking literacy, change leadership	JCM: task significance and autonomy through explicit innovation ownership	Owens tested ideas, conversion rate of pilots, and learning-cycle speed
HR Director	Build people systems that support strategy execution	Workforce planning, appraisal design, learning, talent risk, leadership support	Strategic HRM, performance management, analytics, organisational development	Ulrich shift from admin expert toward strategic partner and change agent; higher skill variety and feedback	Owens turnover, internal mobility, manager capability, and appraisal quality
Head of R&D	Convert technical exploration into commercial value	Research prioritisation, product experimentation, collaboration with CTO/CIO	Research leadership, innovation management, stakeholder influence	JCM: skill variety, task significance, and clearer autonomy at exploration stage	Owens pipeline quality, prototype success rate, and knowledge transfer

Figure 1: Integrated Performance Architecture for Aether Innovations



Source: Author's framework based on integrated HR strategy for Aether Innovations.

Figure 1: Integrated performance architecture for Aether Innovations.

This is important since a case of weak boundaries at the top tier results in downstream confusion. When the CIO and Head of R&D are overlapped, then the experimentation process becomes political; when the HR is mostly administrative, then the Ulrich shift never takes place; when the CTO is focused on delivery, then capability development will be reactive. Clarified architecture would hence enhance rapidity of decisions, decrease duplication and enhance the credibility of appraisal.

The second way of improvement is improved horizontal coordination. Enterprise priorities are established by the CEO; financial health is checked by the CFO; scalable delivery is owned by the CTO; the innovation portfolio is regulated by the CIO; exploratory work is led by the Head of R&D; and capability, succession, and the quality of managers are controlled by the HR Director. This separation is important as it prevents overlapping of authority but maintains cooperation. It also simplifies the process of making each role responsible to specific contribution to growth, innovation, and customer recovery.

6. How Appraisal and Job Design Create a Performance-Driven Culture

When individuals know what is important, the role boundaries and when performance will be evaluated, then a performance-driven culture is created. OKRs provide focus, check-ins establish learning rhythm, 360 feedback enhances self-correction of leadership, and redesigned roles increase task identity, autonomy, and feedback. The HR Director at that time becomes a strategic partner and change agent, as opposed to just conducting reviews (UWTSD, 2026a). Since the engagement connects the HRM practice to performance (Alfes et al., 2013), the combined design will be more effective in enhancing innovation, retention, and customer recovery than any one HR initiative.

This is also the reason why stand-alone HR interventions are so disappointing. Daniels et al. (2017) have reviewed the literature on intervention studies and demonstrated that redesign is most effective when it is linked to broader employment practices, rather than when redesign is considered as a single structural edit. Similarly, Alfes et al. (2013) indicate that the behaviour of the line managers would determine whether employees will find the HR practices credible. In the case of Aether, the cultural impact will not be as much about introducing new tools but rather about the usage of those by managers who will use them regularly, clarify, and implement them equally.

7. Conclusion and Implementation Priorities

A broad culture programme is not the best solution to the problem of performance in Aether but a sharper operating model for people and accountability. One of the first things that Aether needs to do is to start with a pilot: to redesign the six leadership positions, to implement quarterly OKRs, monthly check-ins, and developmental 360 feedback in senior positions only. The pilot should be assessed against a small set of measures: role clarity, feedback quality, critical-team turnover, innovation throughput, and customer satisfaction.

In the first three months, Aether should clarify the six senior role profiles and train managers in OKR setting and feedback conversations. Between months four and six, the company should pilot monthly check-ins and developmental 360-degree feedback with the leadership group. After six months, HR should review role clarity, feedback quality, critical-team turnover, innovation throughput, and customer satisfaction before deciding whether to scale, redesign, or pause the model. If this sequence improves decision quality, role clarity, and manager behaviour, Aether will be better placed to restore innovation momentum and rebuild customer trust.

Part 2: Reflection

8. Reflection Using Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

8.1 Concrete Experience

The Human Capital Management altered my perception of HR at the initial stages of the MBA. My pre-programme understanding of HR was the association of the HR with recruitment, policy and employee relations. These experiences with job design, strategic HR roles, performance management and the future work revealed to me that HR can influence innovation and organisational outcomes, rather than facilitating them. This was concretized by the Aether case which involved design decision making as opposed to mere description.

8.2 Reflective Observation

I sought a single visible solution at first e.g. a new appraisal process or a more innovative culture. I continued to study, and I realised that these ideas are related. Positive appraisal system will not assist where there are roles that are ambiguous and positive job design will not go far where managers are not able to make constructive feedback. Being a Bangladesh based student only in the initial phases of studying MBA, I, too, felt the academic approach change. The module has challenged me to compare sources, seek contradictions, and consider more carefully how it is going to be implemented and not just the theory.

8.3 Abstract Conceptualisation

The primary idea I am bringing away in the module is that human capital systems must be architected as systems. The model provided by Kolb can be applied in this case since the assignment helped me work through the experience, transition to reflection and subsequent clearer conceptualization. I can now see more clearly the reasons why theories like the strategic HR model proposed by Ulrich and work-design perspectives are important in practice: they help us understand that performance tends to increase or decrease with the help of the daily-life systems, as opposed to the dramatic ones.

The next lesson is that good management is about making judgements regarding trade-offs. Tighter appraisal process may help bring more focus, however may also cause pressure or gaming. Flexibility can be enhanced by broader job roles, but it may also bring about ambiguity. The balance is important to me as a future manager since I would not wish to mimic trendy practices without knowing the repercussions.

8.4 Active Experimentation

The last phase of the Kolb cycle inquiries what I would do differently in the future. The first step that I have to make is academic: I should be more disciplined in reading so I can read journal articles not only when I have to but also on a regular basis. My second step is pragmatic: I would like to pose the structural questions sooner in people-management issues, like where the accountability is low and where the behaviours are being reinforced. The third course of action is related to digital and AI literacy. I would like to apply AI to support and arrange research and maintain my own judgement central. Lastly, I would like to improve leadership practices of listening, coaching, and positive feedback.

9. Staying Relevant in an AI-Shaped Workplace

The routine analysis, information search, summarisation, and drafting are increasingly processed by AI. Due to that, the most secure career plan is not to be faster than AI but to enhance such abilities that can be less easily automated: judgement, ethical reasoning, communication, relationship management, contextual thinking, and leadership.

I would continue to actively scan literature, organise notes, and compare ideas at an early stage with the help of AI. It must not however substitute responsibility. I should not lose the sense of evidence interpretation, the impartiality of judgment, and the quality of human interaction. Applied passively, AI might undermine my own tendencies to analysis; applied intentionally, it might enhance them by creating more time to make judgements and think them through.

That is why, to remain relevant in the era of AI, one should be able to blend digital confidence and good judgement and credible leadership.

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