

Driving Performance

A Line Manager's Guide

Line managers play a crucial role in driving performance across the Company through the use of business and HR initiatives, whilst maintaining a well developed and performance minded group of colleagues. If a team is underperforming, it can reflect on the manager's ability to carry out their role effectively.

Senior leadership need to provide clear direction to the organisation so that managers can operate in line with this and manage their teams accordingly. An individual's goals and objectives should filter down from the top of the structure through the ranks down to entry level positions (Leighton, 2022). This ensures that all colleagues are working towards the collective Company vision (Weddle, 2025). It is also the manager's responsibility to bring to life a colleague's contribution and involvement in the Company's performance. This will drive engagement and commitment whilst giving an employee's work meaning and purpose.

There are various HR processes that provide managers with a clear, consistent and fair method in managing performance. These range from performance improvement and attendance management to learning and development programmes and funding.

Adaptability

Managers need to be adaptable when managing performance. The policy and principles for managing performance remain the same, but the approach should be individual.

Generational co-hort theory demonstrates that different age groups require varying levels of intervention and engagement due to differing values, workplace norms and expectations. For example, 'Baby Boomers' tend to be vocal and expressive with a strong desire for achievement and self-improvement and are willing to take career risks for financial prosperity and growth, whereas 'Millennials' place a higher value on flexible working arrangements and social impact rather than solely on financial reward (Huyler et al., 2025). Managers should tune into what individual's driving forces are when setting goals and aligning personal and Company expectations with objectives.

Fostering a constructive, progressive approach is linked with a colleague's psychological safety at work. Feeling able to work creatively, take risks and feel heard are crucial elements to employees being able to perform highly and drive performance within the Company (Cooper, 2023).



Informal Initiatives

Touch points in an employee's career provide opportunity for managers to discuss performance. Managers should have confidence in addressing underperformance and striving for a high performing team (Horne, 2024). Each point interlinks and, if underperformance continues, leads to the formal improvement avenue, which is made simpler when managers have followed all informal steps first. It is best practise to keep records of 1 to 1 meetings so individuals can reflect on the content, both positive and constructive (Timms, 2020). Touch points include:

Accurate and realistic job descriptions that outline expectations and performance metrics. They should not be static but collaboratively reviewed regularly as business focus and objectives evolve.

Probation periods last 6 months and should have SMART objectives with regular progress catch ups. These interactions contribute to a solid foundation and a sense of belonging. They offer an opportunity to address concerns and how improvement can be made. This is crucial, as highlighting issues early gives the colleague time to implement change (Humble, 2022). When managers have concerns with an employee's conduct or performance, HR will assist with a formal review where expectations can be reaffirmed and possible formal action taken.

Training requirements should align with the colleague's workload, with new starters having an induction plan. Training, whether mandatory or desirable, should be discussed regularly to ensure continuous development remains central to a colleague's progression.

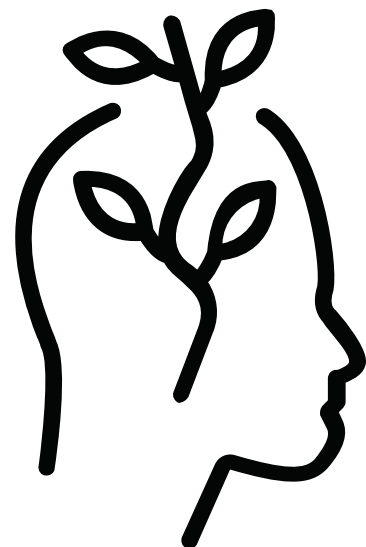
Managers should be conducting regular 1 to 1 meetings with their teams - monthly at a minimum. Concerns should be raised in a timely, constructive manner with well rounded feedback, support and next steps provided (Investors in People, 2019).

Development conversations offer a platform for managers and colleagues to discuss progression and career plan. They should be held regularly and focus purely on development, separate from a business as usual catch up. They can take place at various points in the year:

- Annual Appraisal
- Regular Catch Ups
- Probation reviews

It is important to note that not all individuals strive to progress, which is acceptable, but all colleagues need to conduct continuous development to keep knowledge and skills up to date. Career goals should be discussed and pathways explored, whether internal or external, with support given on how this can be achieved. This could be through webinars and external course funding or role shadowing and mentorships (Fraser-Thill and Gopal, 2023).

Annual appraisals are a key juncture in reviewing the previous year, discussing successes and implementing improvement opportunities. This can contribute to planning goals around the Company objectives and personal opportunities for growth. They can involve potentially difficult conversations, which links back to the importance of having regular catch ups so the colleague is forewarned of performance concerns (Prokhorenko, No Date).



The focus needs to shift from only discussing development during the annual appraisal, as this can limit positive outcomes and not allow for regular, productive discussion. CPD is about being continuous in your development so needs to be mapped out throughout the year, not just saved for a single time, as this can lead to employees being disengaged and the Company losing key talent (Machell, 2023).

Understanding your workforce is key to making succession plans as you can gain insight into their skillset, improvement areas and career aspirations. Some positions require in-depth knowledge of the business or sector which can be challenging to find externally (Granat, 2019).

Formal Initiatives

When the formal improvement process is required, managers need to work closely with HR to discuss what steps have been followed to date, what improvement is required and what level of improvement has been made since concerns were first raised. This information aids HR in evaluating whether sufficient informal measures have taken place. This is key to ensuring a fair process is being followed and helps mitigate any risk moving forward as there could be the potential of challenge in the formal stage if informal actions have not been fully explored.

Case law highlights how this cause significant issues for employers.

A baker was dismissed from his role due to performance concerns, which the employer felt they had addressed sufficiently. A tribunal found that the employer did not address the concerns in an acceptable, process driven way, follow the ACAS code of conduct or take into account the baker's level of written English. The baker was awarded £15,000 in compensation (Webber, 2023).

This level of openness and cooperation is required in all interactions with HR as it is their role to safeguard the employee and employer from potential risk and/or harm that stems from a people practise. The HR role is also to provide knowledge and resources to situations that are sensitive and complex, such as medical capability. This scenario is deeply personal and has many vulnerable points for the Company if not handled correctly, such as possible discrimination or unfair treatment, both of which have detrimental impacts on the business and colleague (IMA, 2023).

As well managers working with HR, HR need to ensure that sufficient training is rolled out in a timely manner to new and existing line managers. This will give managers the initial tools to deal with underperformance informally, limiting the number of potential blockers further down the line. Senior management involved may be required if individuals are not attending mandatory training or following the processes laid out in the sessions. This relationship is crucial and should be ongoing, rather than reactive to an event, as it demonstrates the initiatives importance to the Company (Forbes Expert panel, 2021).

