

Performance management

David's story (fictional)

David's annual review has identified that he is underperforming in his role. David's manager, Mohammad, has provided David with examples of this underperformance and offered guidance on how to improve performance and capability. With no signs of improvement at David's periodic performance evaluation, Mohammad implements a focused program of workplace performance management. David considers the process to be unfair micro-management and accuses Mohammad of bullying.

Mohammad has been careful not to criticise David's character when discussing his work, and has ensured that his feedback isn't vague or exaggerated. Mohammad has maintained emotional control when managing David's performance, and although he has at times been frustrated with David, Mohammad has avoided shouting at or belittling David in any way. Mohammad has been careful to ensure that feedback has been provided constructively and with a view to improving David's performance, and the deliverables for their workplace. Mohammad has provided David with the opportunity to have a support person present for all discussions where performance concerns have been raised.

While David is uncomfortable with the scrutiny on his work and practice, Mohammad's actions represent management action undertaken in a reasonable manner, and are not an example of bullying.

What is performance management?

Performance management describes a process of maximising the value that employees create. It aims to maintain and improve employees' performance in line with an organisation's objectives. It's not a single activity, but rather a group of practices that should be approached holistically.



There's no standard definition of performance management, but it describes activities that:

- **establish objectives** for individuals and teams to see their part in the organisation's mission and strategy
- **improve performance** among employees, teams and, ultimately, organisations, and
- **hold people to account** for their performance by linking it to reward, career progression and termination of contracts.

At its best, performance management centres on two-way discussion and regular, open and constructive feedback on progress towards objectives. It brings together many principles that enable good people management practice, including learning and development, performance measurement and organisational development.

Performance management is usually backed up by formal processes, including recording objectives, periodic performance reviews and improvement plans for underperformance, but it is broader than these things. While policies and processes can

be important, the main focus should be regular performance discussions that help people perform.

What isn't performance management?



Any conduct that amounts to bullying and harassment isn't a component of performance management. The definition of bullying found in the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) specifically excludes 'reasonable management action carried out in a reasonable manner'. This exclusion, or clarification, reflects the wider understanding that, alongside the rights of employees to not be bullied at work, employers also have a legitimate authority to direct employees and to control their work.



! What to do if you are undergoing a performance management process

Ask questions if you don't understand any aspect of your performance management – it's important to have things explained in a way that is clear.

Ask for a support person – you can ask for a support person to be present with you at all meetings relating to your performance management. The support person is not an advocate, but can provide you with emotional support and assistance.

Keep records of all correspondence and documents relevant to your performance management. At meetings, take notes of all the matters that are discussed.

What to do if you are suspected of poor performance management

Managers have a right to set and hold employees to performance standards, even if employees perceive that they are being micro-managed or unreasonably targeted. However, managers need to ensure they've been objectively sound in their decisions, consistent between employees, and have documented the process adequately.

- ! The best practice principles when performance managing an employee are:
- clear performance standards and minimum key performance indicators, linked to the position description for the role
 - implementing formal performance improvement plans in line with those standards
 - having policies which clearly highlight behaviours that are not acceptable
 - providing formal warnings for breaching workplace policies, noting which behaviours have breached the policies, and
 - preparing written records of all performance management meetings and sharing them with the employee for comment.

Where an individual is suspected of poor performance management, having clear processes and an ability to justify actions will assist in addressing the complaint. Managers should ensure that all team leaders responsible for performance management programs are skilled and confident at staying on the right side of 'reasonable'.

Support

The Parliamentary Workplace Support Service (PWSS) is available to provide you with support if you are undergoing a performance management process within a Commonwealth Parliamentary workplace. The Department of Finance's Ministerial and Parliamentary Services (MaPS) team provide human resource advice to parliamentarians and their employees – the MaPS helpdesk can be reached on (02) 6215 3333.



www.PWSS.gov.au



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