Riding the Performance Management Rollercoaster

One topic that consistently draws strong interest among conference participants is best practices and innovation in performance management (PM). At the HR People + Strategy annual conference in April, Perspectives Editor Anna Tavis hosted a keynote panel on the main stage, leading a vibrant, thought-provoking discussion of how this area is evolving and what factors are driving significant change.

With this installment of Perspectives, we bring to you a slice of that energy and experience, with the lead perspective laying out the ways performance management is being reinvented. Panelists each share a synopsis of their own experience and how their companies are experimenting and adapting the process.

The panel members, which included Deborah Becker of Eli Lilly, Jennifer Beihl of GE, and Jeffrey Orlando of Deloitte, each share their company experiences as well as viewpoints on the subject. Contributions from Julie Gravallese, Priscila Metzgar, and Dan Ward of MITRE and Holly Engler, Joe Kutter, and Don Moretti of Sears Holdings round out these perspectives.

If you believe performance management should be improved or even entirely overhauled at your company, or you just want to learn more about what other companies are pioneering at theirs, then this Perspectives is for you. After reading the lead Perspectives and commentaries that follow, you can contact the authors to ask a question or share how you are approaching this issue in your company. Or, contact Anna to find out more about what factors are shaping the future of PM and what other changes we can expect to see in the near future.

POINT

When the Performance Management Bubble Burst

By Anna A. Tavis

When the full story of the ongoing performance management transformation is finally told, the years 2014 and 2015 will go down in history as the time when the annual performance appraisal bubble finally burst. After decades of increasingly loud signals of discontent and mounting evidence that the legacy process was not delivering on its intended value, a few pioneering companies broke out of the mold and were able to face the urgency for change. Adobe, Medtronic, Juniper Networks, and Kelly Services, to name just the first few, made news with their radical departure from the heavily administrative annual employee performance evaluation exercise. The traditional annual performance review finally met its end.

Dropping performance ratings and replacing the once-per-year appraisal process with regular "check-ins" became business's battle cry for change. The first "rateless" performance management cases unsettled the behemoth of HR bureaucracy, built on top of a single rating. From then on, the monolith process that used to be known as performance management split into multiple manager–employee conversations, often blending informal touch points with "shadow" ratings and talent calibrations on the backend.

Every one of these pioneering companies would admit that it was not about the ratings for them to begin with. Every part of the legacy performance system had to undergo a review. With the rateless idea being novel and benchmarking scarce, the original science was called upon to help review the underlying assumptions about employee motivation, engagement, and overall work experience.

The new language of progress, mastery, and purpose emerged to replace appraisal reports. "Check-ins" and "pay for contribution" became the preferred vocabulary of the day, leading the reevaluation of the entire performance system to start with purpose and goals and to back into the larger systems for talent and rewards. As the new growth mindset toward managing and assessing performance began to gradually replace the ratings fetish, ditching ratings became the trigger event that got everyone's attention.

The Media Factor

The change might have taken its measured evolutionary course, were it not for the media. The performance management revolution owes its meteoric ascendance to gaining status as the hottest business news item partly due to the enormous amount of media attention it received.

Take Adobe's story that set pace for the trend worldwide. It all started with the *Economic Times of India* getting an interview with Donna Morris, then Adobe's chief people and places officer, who admitted that "the performance review was an antiquated, painful, and unproductive HR process that had outlived its time." Her revelation made the front pages in India, with the headline, "Adobe Set to Scrap Performance Review." Furthermore, the news got worldwide coverage before it was vetted with Adobe's CEO, and Donna's peers. Luckily, the organization was ready for the change and got behind the new performance management agenda. Hundreds more interviews and thousands more citations followed, marking the end of the "quiet" phase in the performance revolution.

Media for Months to Come

From there, performance management became the hot topic to capture the headlines of every important business publication in the United States and beyond. *Harvard Business Review* covered "the performance revolution" extensively with Deloitte's milestone story, "Reinventing Performance Management," co-authored by Ashley Goodall and Marcus Buckingham. *Strategy+Business* featured David Rock's eye-catching feature, "Kill Your Performance Ratings." *The New York Times* followed suit with the headlines such as, "10 Reasons Performance Reviews Do Not Work," and *Forbes* joined in with its own, "Let's Kill Performance Reviews." In 2015, the *Washington Post*, called PM the "corporate Kabuki" and *Vanity Fair* went as far as to blame Microsoft's PM for the company's sliding market performance.

What the Media Got Wrong

The media helped bring attention to the issue, but it did not always ask the right questions and did not have the answers to bring to the table to help get the right decisions made. If you were wondering why the complex issues of measuring, incentivizing, and rewarding employee performance came down to the simple question of ratings, and ratings only, it has to do with the choices that the media made for us.

Performance appraisals have always been everyone's dreaded workplace experience, which is why the headlines got public attention in the first place. We brought the story of "ratings" back from the media. Some lessons need to be learned here. The power of (social) media needs to be faced up to even if lived behind the tallest corporate firewalls. Now is the time for HR to reclaim performance back again from the legacy of the past and from the media hype of the present. The actual story of performance management transformation still needs to be told in full, as we are settling in with a distinctive new pattern for managing performance in the 21st century.

The Next Practice and the Best Practice

As HR professionals, we have learned a great deal from walking the path of performance management transformation in just these last few years. There seem to be two distinct directions to take when joining the performance transformation movement:

- The innovator path has opened up to many more companies than ever before. These bold companies broke away from the past early and set themselves up to discover solutions aligned with their own unique purpose (Adobe, Juniper, Gap, and the companies represented in the Perspectives that follow: GE, Deloitte, Eli Lilly, Sears, and MITRE). Facing the unknown, the innovators turned to science, analytics, and technology to look for guidance in designing their singular future.
- The second cohort of companies has been more circumspect. These companies have been looking for more evidence and more compelling practices around them before starting on their own change journey.

Both approaches are legitimate, both ultimately lead to desired change. The difference has been in the role that the HR function has played. The innovators boldly took on strategic leadership roles in their businesses. In the second scenario, the HR function gained more internal confidence but remained to be the "partner" to the business it has been up until then.

Looking ahead, it has become even clearer that the future of HR will be more with the innovators and pathfinders among us. Reinventing performance management is the first step in giving HR its strategic mission it is beginning to embrace. It will most likely take a few more rounds of these types of "revolutions" to move the function solidly to the new role of organizational innovators and talent leaders in their own businesses.

Where Do We Go From Here?

By mid–2016, the new practice has matured enough to be learned from and applied in organizations looking for more guidance. The new norms have been settling in, presenting an achievable standard for those catching up on the trend.

Despite the attention it initially has gotten, the "ratingless" process now is one of the options to follow, but definitely is not the universal rule on how to do performance management going forward.

With or without ratings, most companies already now follow much shorter evaluation cycles, decentralize goal setting, and determine quantitative and qualitative measurement of "contribution," "impact," and "value." Managers are expected to play the coaching role and own key decisions on employee performance standing, rewards, and development needs.

The performance management revolution started as a trend launched around 2011 by a few bold detractors. It reached its peak in 2014 and 2015, and now it is a global phenomenon, ushering in a massive shift in organizational cultures and challenging HR functions to step up to innovator roles in moving their business forward through people.

As the cases of GE, Deloitte, Eli Lilly. MITRE, and Sears Holdings presented here show, each company's innovation scenario is a solution that could be learned from and inspired by, but it could not be imitated.

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COUNTERPOINT

GE: Staying True to Its DNA

By Jennifer Beihl, Janice Semper, and Valerie Van den Keybus

At GE, evolution and change have been part of our DNA for 130 years. Today, GE's transforming itself as the leading digital industrial company. By pairing digital technology with deep expertise in building powerful machines—from jet engines to gas turbines to health care imaging equipment—GE is transforming industry with software-defined machines and solutions that are connected, responsive, and predictive.

As part of this transformation, we recognized the need to infuse new ways of working in a company that had developed an intrinsic bias toward complexity and process perfection, when in fact the world and our employees were expecting us to act more simply and nimbly. We responded in three ways:

- We introduced FastWorks, our version of a stronger and more entrepreneurial focus on our customers and competency in experimentation working with Eric Ries of *Lean Startup* and other Silicon Valley advisors, married with the work of thought leaders in the company.
- We took a strong position that the go-forward leadership and performance expectations are very different from our long-held and often-tweaked values and introduced a new set of aspirational GE Beliefs to guide us.
- We then reexamined at our performance management approach, which did not support or help build these new behaviors described by GE Beliefs and FastWorks.

> Performance development focuses on real-time conversations—facilitated and supported by a simple, digital app.

The New Approach

In 2014, we introduced performance development, a more personalized, real-time, and flexible approach to performance and development. It emphasizes coaching and continuous dialogue (touch points) between manager and employee, instead of heavy, once-a-year evaluations. "The world isn't really on an annual cycle anymore for anything," said Susan Peters, GE's senior vice president of human resources.

The approach reflects the mindset and behaviors that are driving GE's culture forward:

- Strengthening our muscle in sharing real-time, contextual feedback with both our manager and colleagues to increase self-awareness about behaviors that support our effectiveness and impact and that minimize the same
- Becoming much more connected and dialoging early and often with our customers to understand what work we need to prioritize to get to outcomes important to them
- Completing a simple annual summary narrative about the employee's impact and behaviors which is co-created by the manager and employee together

Replacing a backward-looking yearly assessment on a long form, performance development focuses on real-time conversations—facilitated and supported by a simple, digital app that functions as a notebook to capture key comments, serves as an aid to alignment and memory, and simplifies the year-end process.

Finally, we are testing a no ratings approach to find alternative ways to motivate and build performance, as a subset pilot of the overall performance development approach.

Where Are We?

We are about two years into the performance development journey. Through a phased approach of testing and learning (FastWorks), we started by intensively dialoguing with our customer groups (employees, managers and senior leaders) to understand their most important needs, then testing components of the approach with several dozen employees to validate (or invalidate) our assumptions. We transitioned around 6,000 employees to a "wing to wing" approach developed based on those learnings. Since the beginning of 2015, we have continued to scale and increase adoption amongst larger populations. We have tested, learned about the impact, and iterated along the way to increase that impact. We will continue to do so.

We have learned that when employees and managers actively engage in performance development behaviors, it has significant positive impact on the outcomes that are important to them individually and us collectively as an evolving organization. And we know from the data we have collected that there are some who are still trying to make sense of it. It is where we are now focusing our efforts and testing new ways to accelerate adoption that will in turn accelerate our ability to deliver on the future for GE—the digital industrial.

Advice

- Validate assumptions early with small tests. If something does not work for 10 customers, it won't work for 200,000.
- Calibrate for a marathon. Changing mindset and behavior to evolve a company culture does not happen overnight. But it is very possible. And

absolutely amazing to see when the "spark" ignites.

Jennifer Beihl, Janice Semper, and **Valerie Van den Keybus** are members of the GE team leading the company's culture change efforts, with performance development as a key aspect of that initiative. The team can be reached at jennifer.beihl@ge.com

It All Adds Up to Change at Deloitte

By Jeff Orlando

We have been able to motivate change on performance management at Deloitte due to two primary factors. First, based on a 2013 study we conducted, we discovered that we spent close to two million hours on performance management just in the United States. We determined this investment not in line with the value the process created. We knew we could do better.

The second is what we learned about ourselves. Starting with Gallup's seminal research on engagement and performance, we identified 60 Deloitte teams that our most senior leaders said they'd like to have more of (nearly 1,300 employees). We asked them six survey questions. We contrasted their survey responses with the organization's average of a control group of nearly 2,000 individuals. Our study showed the same results as Gallup's: When people believe they are playing to their strengths, performance soars. These factors—getting more yield from our time investment and finding ways to bring out our people's strengths to drive greater organizational performance—were the foundation of our change.

Piloting Our Way to Rollout

The entirety of Deloitte's U.S. practice is now "live" in our new model. We have had a deliberate build-up where we have learned a lot along the way, and incorporated design changes—keeping what worked and altering what aspects needed to be revised. Our process has three goals: fuel, see, and recognize performance.

To fuel performance, we relied on our own research and designed the "check-in," a future-focused conversation about work. Here, team members and leaders meet one on one to discuss real-time feedback and future expectations. It is how they align on priorities for what's coming next, and they do that with a strengths lens. They discuss how the individual will deliver on these priorities given their unique skills and strengths. These happen, on average, every other week. In busy periods, they may occur more often. This lets us match the activities of PM to the cadence of the business.

The performance snapshot is the primary tool that lets us "see performance" via four quick questions. It is a vehicle for the team leader to capture his or her assessment about each team member's performance. Snapshots are completed at the end of a project, phase, or at least quarterly. By the end of the year, there are numerous snapshots completed for each person. The design of these questions is research based and intentional. We've built questions that ask evaluators to predict their own intended future actions vs. attempting to rate a skill and bringing in concerns about rater bias.

> Every people decision that our system leads to is data-informed, but not data-driven.

To recognize performance, we combine the quantitative inputs from performance snapshots with the input and decisions of our leaders. The quantitative inputs are the "starting position" for our recognition processes—be they promotions, merit increases, or managing low performance. The key is they are the start. Every people decision that our system leads to is data-informed, but not data-driven—not data driven. Our leaders carefully make decisions, not a computer model or algorithm.

Advice

PM is one of any organization's clearest and loudest communications channels—it articulates what is valued and what is not, what it means to succeed, and what it means to fail. And at a base level, it puts employees' concerns on stability and career front and center, which it is why it is hard work. Three pieces of advice:

- The business and HR/talent teams need to carry this together. As your project expands its population, expand HR and line representation to support the weight of the change.
- Every process decision should be informed (but not driven) by data. This gets us out of the opinion business and into sound decision-making processes.
- Create initial goodwill with employees by removing burdensome process elements and replacing them with positive ones that serve both their and the organization's interests.

Final Thought

I've come to realize that one of the big advantages of our model is it is nimble. It doesn't lock into a stale organizational hierarchy. It follows the teams and the work they lead—process and rigidity do not. This helps with speed and flexibility—something that every organization today is working to embed in their operations and culture.

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How Eli Lilly Fixed a Broken Performance Management System

By Deborah Becker

Many companies talk about how employees dread the performance management process, but many are nervous about changing both the processes and behaviors necessary to create a different environment. Eli Lilly and Company decided to listen and make a global change in a very short period of time.

Both supervisors and employees at Lilly expressed dissatisfaction with the current performance management process. Supervisors felt the company's guidance on meeting a performance distribution did not enable them to accurately assess their employees. Employees focused more on the label associated with the rating and less on the conversation and feedback for improvement. Negative impact on employee engagement was actually demonstrated through our employee survey data. After ratings and year-end compensation decisions were delivered, employee engagement stayed the same for the highest rated employees, and went down for all other individuals. It took three months for engagement levels to recover.

With data in hand, the CEO and his executive team were highly supportive of making a significant change and commissioned a team to quickly deliver a new solution. The team was led by a highly experienced senior director accustomed to global roll-outs, a director skilled in change management, and several consultants, both in and outside the United States. All project members devoted themselves full time to making the changes. This helped with overall design and change management required to ensure all business areas and geographies could adjust their approach. Once the design was determined, it enabled a quick implementation timeline, and all changes were globally effected within eight months. In addition to the core team, extended members were added as necessary. One of the key areas of focus was compensation. The compensation programs were modified to align to the elimination of ratings, allowing supervisors more discretion to make the best decisions.

Lilly's intent in making such a big shift in the performance management approach was to align employees' work more closely with organizational goals, to improve the quality of coaching and feedback discussions between supervisors and employees, and to foster continuous improvement.

You can't just change a process without also changing behaviors and expect a difference. Therefore, Lilly developed mandatory performance management

(myPM), compensation, and coaching training for employees and supervisors—even the CEO participated. Coaching at Lilly is defined as a "trusting, collaborative relationship that helps an individual improve performance at work and achieve his/her full potential." Coaching should be a two-way conversation that includes active participation between employee and supervisor. Coaching aims to help employees develop insights, achieve work goals, and perform at their best.

After completing two cycles, both employees and supervisors agree performance management is no longer an event. It has shifted to ongoing conversations throughout the year, with a focus on learning and growth. The goal is to help all employees increase their performance and achieve their goals. At the end of the year, supervisors assess each employee as to whether or not they sufficiently met expectations.

In January, supervisors make compensation decisions based on an employee's performance and contributions, both for the year and over time, and they no longer focus on specific labels for an individual.

Advice

Companies thinking about making a change should have strong CEO and senior leadership support for the program and be able to leverage them as message leaders. This sets the tone for the organization and helps with organizational change management. Consider which is better for your organization: a wholesale change versus a pilot program. For Lilly, a highly complex, matrixed environment, implementing globally allowed all supervisors and employees to operate in a similar manner. In addition, the compensation changes necessary to align with the new approach can occur across the organization versus keeping two systems running.

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MITRE: Rethinking Performance Management

By Julie Gravallese, Priscila Metzgar, and Dan Ward

Over the years, MITRE managers and employees expressed frustration with the company's performance management system. MITRE surveys showed employees wanted more involvement from people who knew their work best; they wanted to better understand what was expected of them; and they wanted more meaningful feedback with increased focus on professional development. MITRE leadership knew it was important to address those concerns and, at the same time, strengthen our culture of collaboration and teamwork.

What MITRE Changed

We migrated from a traditional performance management approach to a process of providing continual feedback, with a focus on developmental coaching. We eliminated the traditional performance management ranking/rating processes. We designed a process that went from "pay for performance" to a "pay for value" that compares each individual against a market value of their work, not against colleagues. We identified three factors—roles, results, and behaviors—that we feel provide consistent feedback (across the enterprise) matched to year-end compensation.

Introducing MITRE CLEAR Conversations

Combining employee feedback with industry best practices, MITRE introduced its new approach, CLEAR Conversations, which replaced a performance and development (P&D) management system that primarily focused on weighty year-end documentation followed by a ranking process.

CLEAR is an acronym for the employee experience: communicate, learn, evolve, achieve, and results. It reflects state-of-the-art thinking on how to provide feedback and coaching between managers and employees. It also emphasizes individual growth and development.

CLEAR Conversations has three components: expectations, feedback, and development:

- **Expectations** is employees setting expectations and aligning them with both their direct supervisor and work leader/s to ensure clarity around roles, results, behaviors.
- **Feedback** stresses the importance of continuous feedback and conversations throughout the year. It includes both the review and compensation conversations. It also shows the connection between continuous feedback and the year-end review.
- **Development** looks for opportunities to enhance employees' current roles as well as their career aspirations and helps them grow.

These components are linked by conversations throughout the year that reflect on performance, offer more transparency through continuous feedback, and support development opportunities.

Key MITRE Differentiator

To emphasize the growth and development aspect of CLEAR Conversations, MITRE also introduced Careers in Motion, to illustrate that people can move in various directions to achieve their career aspirations.

Careers are personal and dynamic. One person's career path is not necessarily another's. Employees are coached to look for opportunities that excite them. It is up to each employee to take charge of his or her career and pursue the journey that is right for him or her. MITRE's culture, flexible workforce, and highly matrixed environment encourages people to seek out these roles and managers to support employees as they pursue their interests.

CLEAR Conversations Implementation and Rollout to All Employees

A team that included business managers and directors across MITRE, as well as HR specialists and business partners, designed and implemented this new process. Though HR assumed the "project management" role, it was frequently emphasized that this is a business process, not an HR program. We used a cascading communications approach to ensure managers owned the process. This further emphasized the new approach was done as a corporation and was not just yet another process imposed by HR.

Educational materials, change management, and communication collateral were put in place. The HR business partners and generalists were available to provide guidance, and this strengthened the partnership between business and HR. During the first year, focus groups and pilot groups provided input to provide feedback on how the process is working. The process was recently tweaked for a more user friendly experience and encourage employee buy-in.

For those embarking on a new performance management process, it's critical to research best practices that align with your organization's unique organizational characteristics and goals. MITRE spent months looking at organizations working in this direction and started to benchmark them. We learned what was working—and what wasn't.

Moving Forward

More time must pass to understand full results of this process, but the team, leaders and employees all agree that changes in performance management were necessary and that CLEAR Conversations is on the right path to addressing those issues that specifically affect MITRE.

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Sears Holdings Datafies and Democratizes Ratingless Performance Management

By Holly Engler, Joe Kutter, and Don Moretti

Triggers for Change

Faced with financial performance challenges and a rapidly changing retail environment, the leadership team at Sears Holdings decided it was time to make a cultural shift. With the introduction of a new set of cultural beliefs and mission statement, we knew that we needed to, at a minimum, change the words in our performance process to align appropriately with the behaviors we were expecting from individuals. Additional research in neuroscience quickly became the catalyst for realizing the change that needed to happen in order to fulfill our mission and drive greater performance and accountability of our associates.

This frequent and individual goal-setting technique allows associates agility in the organization and progress of their work throughout the year as business needs change.

Introducing Performance Enablement

Prior to August 2014, Sears Holdings conducted a traditional performance management (PM) process; an annual and mid-year review, complete with manager-generated performance ratings, and annual goal setting. In the new Performance Enablement approach, salaried associates kick off each new fiscal year by writing Individual Priorities. These priorities represent an associate's broader key initiatives for the year, and are directly aligned to transparent business unit and company priorities. Individual associates then utilize the objectives and key results (OKRs) methodology, a thought framework used by Intel, IBM, Google, and other organizations, to set individual objectives on a quarterly cadence.

This frequent and individual goal-setting technique allows associates agility in the organization and progress of their work throughout the year as business needs change. Throughout the year, associates are enabled with a home grown feedback tool called SoundBoard, which allows individuals to give and source feedback at any time from their manager or leadership, peers, internal customers, colleagues, and partners. Feedback is aggregated in easy to use dashboards for individuals and managers to identify real-time trends in *how* they are achieving their objectives.

At the start of each quarter, associates and managers conduct a check-in. The check-in is an associate-driven conversation that facilitates quality discussions around what the associate was working on, how it went, and what is next with regards to quarterly objectives, growth, and career development. Together, these tools and their frequency allow for stronger alignment of individual objectives, more frequent conversations rooted in a growth mindset, and a more robust perspective of associate behaviors and opportunities for adding more value.

Creating 10 Times the Data

The Sears Holdings talent management team designed these tools and processes with both our associates—and data—in mind. We consciously constructed OKRs, SoundBoard, and check-ins in a way that at least 10 times the data (compared to a single annual performance rating) could be extracted in an effort to know our talent as well as we know our customer base. We now house over 100,000 pieces of individual feedback that provide us with insight into how well our teams embrace feedback, the strength of their networks internally, and individual/team strengths and opportunities as relates to our leadership capability model.

The data have shown that associates who use these tools regularly, compared to those who don't or who use them inconsistently, are 10.5 to 21 percent more likely to improve their performance or potential to move up in the organization. We have also found that those who use the tools are less likely to turn over. This is meaningful data for understanding our talent needs in the organization.

Advice to Those Embarking on the Journey

- **You can't over communicate.** A move away from the traditional PM process is far more than a simple process change. It is a change in the way we think about our own work, a change in the way managers address performance with their associates/teams, and a new mindset and culture for the organization. Communicate early and often to ensure that your teams understand the reason for the change and how to effectively manage the new process. Videos, infographics, and other bite-sized learning can be effective in communicating your message.
- **There is no "one-size-fits-all" solution.** Many organizations have now implemented a ratingless PM platform. There are some common themes among all of their approaches, including feedback in some form (some use a digital platform, others facilitate via verbal communication), more frequent conversations, and stronger goal alignment. No two organizations have facilitated this change in the same way. It is important that the approach you are implementing is conducive to your culture and your environment. In fact, some organizations aren't ready for a change of this magnitude quite yet. However, more frequent conversations can be layered on to a traditional PM approach to begin shifting to a growth mindset and illustrating more frequency in the PM process. Some organizations have facilitated OKRs using excel spreadsheets to allow their associates the opportunity to think about their goals in a more agile way. You can start small and build to the mindset needed to make the shift.
- **Don't underestimate the change management required.** It took us a full 12 months of undivided effort to launch our new approach. You will likely face challenges with your own HR and legal teams early on. Moving to a ratingless PM platform requires consistent change management, even after deployment including continuous education of individuals and managers on how to manage in the new world, consistent training on how to properly facilitate feedback and agile goal setting, and frequent communication illustrating the advantages of the new approach.

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