

4. Humanising Appraisal - From Performance Appraisal to Performance Management

By Tony Burkin

Often performance appraisal and performance management are terms used interchangeably. To the uninformed it's often cited as a case of semantics. In reality nothing could be further from the truth.

To confuse performance appraisal and performance management is to miss an opportunity to dramatically contribute to the inner workplace lives of teachers.

The table highlights some of the more important differences...

Performance Appraisal	Performance Management
- Retrospective - focuses on the past – on what has been.	- Future orientated - focuses on the present and the future – on what might be.
- More about evaluating and assessing performance (appraising performance). Can feel like a test.	- More about learning - creating stretch, growth and improvement pathways (managing performance).
- Tends to be more rigid and inflexible – people have to adapt to the approach. One size fits all.	- More flexible and personal – the approach is adapted for each individual. More personalised for each teacher.
- More hierarchical – top down orientation.	- More partnership – based on mutuality – ako, whanaungatanga and pono.
- Conversations tend to be more feedback and feed-forward.	- Conversations are more dialogue and reflective
- Typically done once or twice a year.	- Typically, never far from my thinking - worked on throughout the year.
- More about aligning people to meet the goals of the organisation.	- More about meeting the growth needs of individuals.
- Encapsulates more of a managerial approach.	- Encapsulates more of a leadership approach.

Performance management draws us to the future. It's not about proving competency and jumping through hoops - more about next steps in a process of continual improvement and refinement. Most teachers see this as a more decent – more humane - way of thinking.

In thinking about managing performance – whether it's managing our own performance or the performances of others – fundamental questions need to be answered. Is it accountability we desire? Is it growth and development? Is it a combination of both and if so, what's the desired ratio?

In his book **Unmistakable Impact: A Partnership Approach to Dramatically Improving Instruction** (<http://us.corwin.com/en-us/nam/unmistakable-impact/book235617>), Jim Knight reminds us how improving teaching practice is a human interaction. An area Knight touches on is *humanity*.

Wikipedia refers to *dehumanisation* as the process of treating “*other persons as if they lack mental capacities that we enjoy as human beings. Here, every act or thought that treats a person as less than human is an act of dehumanization.*”

Through dehumanisation inferiority is asserted over others through subtle or overt acts or statements by organisations, external bodies, or by individuals. Because people are not trusted they have to prove they can be. Voices may not be heard, choices are removed, a select few do the thinking for others, and compliance and conformity are valued with pressure asserted when these are missing in action. Those asking genuine questions may be labeled resisters; those providing honest feedback to their leaders’ risk being judged dangerous and although all of these characteristics may not be simultaneously present, a ‘*being done to*’ sensation is strong.

To humanise is to act in partnership. Others’ values are recognised, peoples’ voices are heard, and those listening go beyond listening for agreement and disagreement to listening to genuinely understand. People are provided choices and our workplaces are platforms for improving ourselves, improving our practice, and significantly improving outcomes for others.

To act in humane ways means we are honest with ourselves, and others, and we take into account others’ contexts. People are trusted until they prove they can’t be trusted. Contributing in humane ways, we see ourselves as learners, more so than teachers, and we contribute to the learning of colleagues with professional honesty because at the heart of what we do, is the moral imperative of improving outcomes for our learners and maintaining the status of our profession.

When we show these definitions to teachers and ask them which one reflects more accurately their experiences of appraisal (and teaching as inquiry) the vast majority identify elements of the dehumanising process as being more closely attuned to their realities.

A strategy we use to humanise learning when we teach students is *differentiation*. This too is the domain of effective performance management. When we think about how best to manage our performance and the performance of others into the future, we are drawn to thinking about how best to differentiate that process for those involved. This also shifts our focus away from thinking about *designing the system* to thinking about getting the approach right for the individual.

The diagram below allows us to reframe our thinking in this way.

On the vertical axis is our decency quotient (see **Guilty or Not Guilty?**) and on the horizontal axis the level of performance at which we are able to consistently perform (novice, proficient and masterful).

Thinking in this way we can think loosely of nine different teacher/leader profiles.

P R O F E S S I O N A L I S M	High	Earnest Underperformer	Solid Citizen	Superstar
	Moderate	Unreliable Underperformer	Unreliable Journeyman	Unreliable Whiz
	Low	Underperforming Amateur	Amateur Journeyman	Gifted Amateur
		Novice	Proficient	Mastery
		Level of Performance Consistently Demonstrated		

The **earnest underperformer** for example is highly motivated to grow, improve and to stretch but is in possession of low levels of ability, knowledge and skill. This could be a teacher new to the profession or an experienced teacher struggling temporarily with a new teaching approach. Their moral compass is working well.

The **superstar** possesses high knowledge, ability and skill and is committed to maintaining and stretching themselves further for the sake of providing better learning experiences for their learners. Their moral compass is working too, and they consistently demonstrate good to great teaching practice.

The **underperforming amateur** brings a myriad of problems. Their moral compass is defective. They tend to have a poor attitude and might bring a more selfish orientation. For example they may say, “*What I’m doing works fine*”, but what they’re really saying is, “*What I’m doing works fine for me.*” They will tend to design their workplace for their personal needs without always factoring in how they could change to bring about better outcomes for their learners. The underperforming amateur has gaps in their practice, and thinking, and they make it difficult for others to engage with them around those gaps.

The **gifted amateur** performs well in the classroom/learning space but they bring attitudinal problems. Their moral compass has defects. They may not transition at an agreed upon time when in a shared learning space and subsequently make life difficult for colleagues. They may not meet deadlines. They may produce poor reports riddled with errors and expect others to correct them. But their teaching practice is consistently good to great.

All four teachers need to be managed in different ways. So too the other five. A problem with appraisal is how teachers feel everyone is treated very similarly; everyone has to prove themselves. Using a performance management approach this problem disappears.

The opening paragraph of this article posed a number of questions. Is it accountability you're after? Growth and development? A combination of both and in what ratio?

In truth we need accountability and growth and every conceivable ratio of both to meet the performance needs of our nine profiled teachers.

Thinking less about the *system* and more about the approach taken with each teacher comes with challenges. One challenge sits with leaders who need skills, abilities and knowledge around how to differentiate their conversations and approaches with each teacher (an example of a conversation with a *solid citizen* is provided in ***Using Conversation to Differentiate Teacher Support***). Ironically, this is the same challenge teachers have when thinking about differentiating in their learning spaces for learners.

As we know, when we get it right for our learners we can create magic. The same applies for our teachers.