

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT ISSUES

STRESS CONFERENCE 2013 WORKSHOP
SESSION

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STUC RESEARCH PROJECT CONCLUSIONS

Human Resource Management [HRM] depicts PM as a *'harmonious process for improving organisational effectiveness through the alignment of individual employees with organisational objectives.'*

Texts continually emphasise the *mutual interests of employers and employees and how the process relies on agreement between parties and consensus.*

Appraisals involve a form of ranking and rating of employees and evaluating performance according to categories.

It developed into an annual ritual of meetings between managers and managed, and was more or less effective according to style, efficiency and competency

It has now become more tied in with organisation-wide targets and making individuals fit the mould.

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STUC RESEARCH PROJECT CONCLUSIONS 2

PM has come to be criticised on the basis that it compromises the line manager's role as counsellor and supporter with that of judge and appraiser.

It forces managers to identify fixed percentages of the workforce as under-performers, irrespective of their actual performance.

The project argues that the evolution of PM has become more systematic and integrated and happened amidst a sea change of the political economy of work and employment through the adoption of a Neo-Liberal agenda, which in turn has strengthened managerial function.

What has emerged into the financial and telecoms industries is a system that is dominated by a top-down target driven culture, commencing roughly at the time of the 2007-08 collapse and recession.

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STUC RESEARCH PROJECT CONCLUSIONS 3

The crisis and recession intensified micro-management of effort and performance, and were accompanied by systematic evaluations of behaviours and attitudes, criteria which are far more subjective

The major bite in PM now lies not so much in the measurements, monitoring and evaluations, but in the disciplinary purposes to which they are closely linked.

Various named Performance Improvement Plans [PIPs] with the corrective and punitive action that are implied, have become a huge source of widespread job insecurity and high levels of stress-related illness and associated absence.

The sinister practice of 'car park conversations' which drive people out of the company are the worst example of inhumane treatment.

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STUC RESEARCH PROJECT CONCLUSIONS 4

Two quotes have been selected as representative of many which indicate the prevalence of the difficulties facing employees arising from Performance Management.

- The biggest subject that any of my members talk to me about is this constant monitoring, constant process, constant pressure. I could go out into the street and flag down any guy in a BT van and ask him what is his biggest problem and I will guarantee he will say to me the tracker or performance management – one of the two of them. Performance Management, in my opinion, is at the very heart of the problems that we have got in the workplace and which take the form of the rise in mental ill-health. (*Telecoms, CWU Regional Officer*)
- I could take you into any call centre in the finance sector and for that matter probably any call centre that deals with what is called the mass market and ask anyone working there, 'What is your biggest problem?'. They are almost certain to say, 'Targets, constant pressure, Performance Management, never any let up, fear'. (*Insurance A, Senior Rep*)

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STUC RESEARCH PROJECT CONCLUSIONS 5

Perhaps one of the gurus of Human Resource Management demonstrated an unwitting prescience when he wrote in 1987.

- Performance management has a poor record of success, and the temptation is to engage in a spiral of control in an attempt to extract more effort and ever higher performance from employees through policies and practices that may succeed only in further de-motivating and which are, thereby, ultimately self-defeating. (Guest, 1987)

However, the final word might best go to a long serving national officer of the CWU who identified the root cause of the intensified pressure upon workers as lying in the progressive transformation of employee management systems.

- There was a creeping process of change which involved a continuous ratcheting up of the pressure on workers. The first step was the replacement of personnel management with human resource management and the parallel shift from quality management to total quality management. Then performance management was added on TQM, after which total quality was forgotten and the emphasis was focused exclusively on performance. As the years have advanced the noose has been progressively tightened round workers' necks. (CWU, Regional Officer)

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