



***2013 Annual Conference Report***  
***Sick Workplaces – Sick Workers***

## **Workshop Report WS10 – Performance Management issues in the workplace**

The Saturday morning session had included a presentation by Professor Phil Taylor, from Strathclyde University, Glasgow, based on research in Scotland's finance and associated sectors. The report can be accessed at the following link.

**Performance Management and the New Workforce Tyranny – Professor Phil Taylor,  
University of Strathclyde, Glasgow.**

<http://www.stuc.org.uk/files/Document%20download/Workplace%20tyranny/STUC%20Performance%20Management%20Final%20Edit.pdf>

### **The Workshop session**

Delegates introduced themselves around the table and gave brief pictures of their experiences and knowledge of PM in their workplaces. Not all staff were subject to PM in some workplaces which created friction and jealousy between sectors; some had had experience of the Bell Curve effects; there was a variety of different intensities of PM; in some case there was mandatory recording with no opt out; several reported inconsistency of approach; it was felt in some cases that corrupt practices were known; poor managerial training and application was reported in some cases; severe cuts in public spending meant any likely PM related pay increases were non-existent. Some found the management responses very subjective. A POA delegate reported moves in the Civil Service to have a 'one size fits all' approach with a common system and procedure which didn't necessarily actually fit all aspects of the varying services.

**Aim** – the workshop objective was to examine how Performance Management has developed in various work sectors; how it is applied; what levels of consultation and worker involvement there have been in its development and how it is used as an aggressive management tool against groups of workers and the effects upon them.

It is hoped to produce a detailed checklist on how to ensure agreement on acceptable processes; proper development with consultation and fair and just application of any agreed procedures put in place.

We began with a short presentation on Performance Management – including a brief review of Professor Taylor's research and looking to apply this to our own direct experiences.

<p><b>STUC RESEARCH PROJECT CONCLUSIONS</b></p> <p>Human Resource Management [HRM] B depicts PM as a <i>'harmonious process for improving organisational effectiveness through the alignment of individual employees with organisational objectives.'</i></p> <p>Texts continually emphasise the <i>mutual interests of employers and employees and how the process relies on agreement between parties and consensus.</i></p> <p>Appraisals involve a form of ranking and rating of employees and evaluating performance according to categories.</p> <p>It developed into an annual ritual of meetings between managers and managed, and was more or less effective according to style, efficiency and competency</p> <p><i>It has now become more tied in with organisation-wide targets and making individuals fit the mould.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">2</p>	<p><b>STUC RESEARCH PROJECT CONCLUSIONS 2</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p>It forces managers to identify fixed percentages of the workforce as under-performers, irrespective of their actual performance.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">3</p>
<p><b>STUC RESEARCH PROJECT CONCLUSIONS 2</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p>It forces managers to identify fixed percentages of the workforce as under-performers, irrespective of their actual performance.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">3</p>	<p><b>STUC RESEARCH PROJECT CONCLUSIONS 3</b></p> <p>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</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The sinister practice of 'car park conversations' which drive people out of the company are the worst example of inhumane treatment.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">4</p>
<p><b>STUC RESEARCH PROJECT CONCLUSIONS 4</b></p> <p><i>Two quotes have been selected as representative of many which indicate the prevalence of the difficulties facing employees arising from Performance Management.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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. (<i>Telecoms, CWU Regional Officer</i>)</li> <li>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'. (<i>Insurance A, Senior Rep</i>)</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">5</p>	<p><b>STUC RESEARCH PROJECT CONCLUSIONS 5</b></p> <p>Perhaps one of the gurus of Human Resource Management demonstrated an unwitting prescience when he wrote in 1987.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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)</li> </ul> <p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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)</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">6</p>

### Activity 1

- In groups, consider how performance targets and reviews have come to pass in your work sector.
- Create lists of the good and the bad things that have emerged in the introduction, and development of PM.

Positive Factors of Performance Management	Negative Factors of Performance Management
Some opportunities occasionally afforded to workers to give some opinions	Targets and Reviews have come to be used solely as management tools to fit management's own agenda
Self-Appraisal – sometimes effective and useful	Poorly used tick-box exercises
Professional Development Programmes help staff with employment needs, training requirements etc.	Workers often not involved in any discussion about purpose, processes, or set up
Good team-working towards commonly recognised and accepted goals	Worker opinions/views mostly not taken into account
Capability/Competency hearings – should involve effective review of position, training need and application	Constant low level pressures
Widely consulted in a meaningful way and implemented with regular collectively achieved reviews	Poor/almost non-existent consultation
Clear criteria of what is reasonably expected to be achieved	Lack of resource to enable meaningful effective CPD to develop alongside PM requirements or findings
Clear communications	Often scored on tasks/roles which are ill-fitted to workers
Consistent approaches from all parties	Often only used when suiting management needs; sometimes allowed to be given only token attention
Effective Equality and Diversity proofing	Eyes opened to the Leaner aspects of work and the effects – common sense often put out of the window through imposed one size fits all targets
Annual Audits of PM processes jointly by Union/Management group	Cutting corners to achieve unrealistic targets and outcomes
Adequate time allotted to achieve targets and appropriate adjustment where necessary	Poor levels of management; Micro-management, subjective approaches; bullying and harassment; 'uneducated' approaches
Individual budgeting of identified required training requirements	Application of process across management structures
Mentoring provided	External influences looking at performance outside the immediate business and trying to draw conclusions
NOT connected to pay or bonus payments	Inadequate training of managers
Appeals processes open and fair	Doing more work for less

Ability to be accompanied to review meetings where necessary	Management tool used to move people out
Appraisals will happen	Working at higher levels than salary rewards
Achievers will be rewarded and recognised	Focus on the business rather than the individual
Aids promotion opportunities	Increases in stress and anxiety
Raises your profile and practice	Promotes poverty
Support mechanisms to help 'weaker' employees	Lowers morale
Informs training needs	Divisive within work teams and promotes cronyism
<i>New system introduced Cheshire East – linked to objectives, outcomes and behaviours and ultimately to pay</i>	
Staff feeling valued where properly applied	No automatic pay rises
Staff receiving regular increments	No audit process and staff put under great pressures
	Rigid format and equality issues to be resolved
	Inconsistency of approach applies additional pressures and is unacceptable
<i>Greater Manchester Police Force Appraisal Policy</i>	
New appraisal policy introduced 1993	Had poor standards of one-to-one sessions
	Inconsistent application and use
Dropped following 2009-11 discussions	Cutbacks in funding meant that no money was attached to the process and staff felt disinterested and therefore there was no incentive to move forward
Replaced with independent appraisal review and not used for performance pay	
Appraisals not used as evidence for disciplinary hearings	

The workshop spent some time discussing these outcomes before moving on to look at an activity designed to identify advices for employees and Reps to enable them to respond to Performance Management interviews

**Activity 2** – Create a checklist for employees/stewards/reps to advise them on responses to Performance Management reviews and procedures

Stewards and Representatives	Members
Reps should be trained and confident in the processes and systems in use	Always insist on a revisit/check of previous year's outcomes, and note whether any concerns raised by either side were addressed

Sample surveys of members to ascertain how PM is progressing	Give your own responses and feedback, comment on process and its effect and impact on your work – speak your mind, and don't just sit and take criticism – feedback should be positive in the main
Reps should know where to source relevant information, advice and guidance for members	There should be no surprises or unexpected issues raised from management
Familiarity with and understanding of appeals processes	There should be no use of hearsay 'evidence' – factual evidence based information only is acceptable
Making members aware of pitfalls to watch out for	Enable confidence and empowerment for members to challenge inappropriate comments and decisions
Who exactly is being rewarded by PM?	Assurance that employees know and understand their rights and entitlements
Keeping it on the Agenda through JNC's	Where there is recognised poor performance, set a clear action plan showing what support is required, and will be provided; confirm joint work with mentoring as necessary to bridge the gap and secure improvement
Encourage members to maintain records of all aspects of PM, especially differences of view	Full understanding on both sides of reasons why there is some slippage of standards
TU attendance at and involvement in Management training on PM	Make challenges through evidence
Clear time frames for processes	Examine what has been asked for in previous review and why it has not achieved full success
Templates available for all employees	Consult with work colleagues from same environment/sector and examine whether there are any discrepancies in grading for staff doing the same or similar jobs
Unachievable targets should be removed from PM processes and results	Insist that managers provide clear evidence to support their position where there are discrepancies
Annual reviews of process	Provide clear relevant evidence to demonstrate that standards have been achieved or where systems have failed to support the proposed progress

This link will take you to a video-recording of Professor Phil Taylor's presentation:-  
<http://youtu.be/GjZocUzabkc> - it is 53 minutes long. Thank you to Philip Lewis of UNISON  
Camden for filming and posting it

Further work is to be done on this topic next year.

ID December 2013