



# Improving Performance Consulting

## | A few thoughts

By **Tom Haak**

Generally, good people want to become better. It is not so easy to give relevant feedback to people who are already very good at what they are doing. Recently, performance management has got a somewhat negative connotation. Many organisations are revamping their performance management process. Earlier we argued that performance consulting (helping people to become better) is an enormous opportunity for HR to increase its impact

Some thoughts on how you can improve performance consulting.

### 1. Ensure Regular and Granular Feedback

A long time ago one of my friends worked as a product manager in the pharmaceutical industry. One of her tasks was managing, training and coaching the salesforce. The methods in the company where she worked were very rigid. Every three months, the salesforce focused on one of the drugs the company sold. The cycle started with extensive training. Everyone had to learn the arguments why the drug of the quarter was so good, and the sales script was rehearsed over and over again.

Then the salespeople would visit the doctors in their practices and in the hospitals. The minimum number of visits: seven per day. The product manager would join each of the salespersons at least two days per month. On such a day, the product manager would prepare the seven visits with the salesperson and join him or her during the visits. After each visit, the salesperson would get detailed feedback. Did you follow the script? Why did you never mention



argument number five? Why did you not ask the doctor if he would be willing to prescribe the medicine? During the three months, they were able to relate to turnover in the regions to the specific salespersons.

A tough but transparent system. Unfortunately, there are not many professions where regular feedback is provided in such a structured and disciplined way.

### 2. Use Various Sources for Feedback

The quality and the value of feedback increases when different sources are used. Generally, the bosses

of people are not the best people to give feedback, as their observations of concrete behaviour of their employees tend to be limited. Peers who work in the same team can be very valuable sources. Clients of course, and other people with whom people work closely together.

Structured 360 reviews have become very common in many organisations. There are also technology solutions that can help to get a better insight into the behaviour of people. In football, for example, players are often equipped, during training, with wearables that can track their motions on the files. In the workplace, the behaviour of employees can be tracked in various ways (through their smartphone, badge, smart wifi etc.).

There are HR solution providers that can help employees to gather feedback from people whose input they value (as [Impraise](#), [Intuo](#) and [TruQu](#)).

An interesting tool is [Rescuetime](#). Rescuetime tracks your inline behaviour, and gives you tips on how to increase your productivity.

It becomes interesting if you are able to connect employees and their behaviours to actual performance. For many professions, this is still difficult, but there where performance is clearly defined (call centers, individual sales, programming) it then becomes possible to determine behavioural patterns that are leading to success.

### 3. Use the People Who Can Give Good Feedback

Some people are better at giving feedback than others. It is probably better to make use of the capabilities of these people, then to train all people to give better feedback. In his book 'Work Rules' Laszlo Bock describes (in the Chapter 'Don't trust your gut') that some people at Google are a lot better than others in predicting if a candidate is fit for hiring. These people are consequently more involved in the hiring process, and the weighting of their opinion increases.

### 4. Use People Analytics to Determine the Behaviours of Top Performers

With the technology and the computer power of today, people analytics allows us to look at the correlation between behaviours and (business) performance a lot quicker and easier than in the past. In the past the consultants would go around and conduct '[critical incidents interviews](#)'; what were the specific behaviours of employees that led to success (or failure) in specific situations. Clever people analytics can give better and more reliable (unbiased) results.

### 5. Make Training Specific

When there is a better idea which behaviours increase the chance of success, these behaviours can be trained. It is beyond the scope of this article to go into the effectivity of training methods, but it is safe to say that a lot of training programs are too generic and too superficial to lead to sustainable behavioural change.

Performance consulting is an important trend. It is an area where the HR profession can add a lot of value. We will need more professional performance consultants in the workplace to help good people to become better and to increase productivity and business results.



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