

Working with Humans

Piers Bishop



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The advertisement features a black header with the CMO Inspired Conference logo on the left, which consists of a green speech bubble containing the letters 'CMO'. To the right of the logo, the text reads 'INSPIRED CONFERENCE' in large white letters, followed by '25 OCTOBER | DE VERE BEAUMONT ESTATE | OLD WINDSOR UK' in smaller white letters. Below the header is a photograph of a large, white, classical-style building with a fountain in the foreground. At the bottom of the advertisement is a collage of images showing conference attendees, a speaker at a podium, and a presentation slide. Below the collage, the text 'Join Over 100 Chief Marketing Officers & Digital Innovators' is written in green.

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About the author

Piers Bishop



I was very lucky in my first job: it provided endless learning opportunities, regular tests of knowledge and skills, constant necessity to improvise and create, and endless contact with an ‘interesting’ bunch of highly-skilled characters. I didn’t realise it at the time, but it was set up as near-perfectly as any job could be to provide motivation and satisfaction to the employees (in every respect except the salary – I was working for BBC radio – and one other thing which I’ll come to in a moment).

Now that developments in psychology and neuroscience have started to elucidate the connections between human needs, experience, hormones, brain cells, emotions and behaviour, we can begin to see how the unusual working environment of a radio studio fitted the diverse needs of the staff at a fundamental level. This explains why that job was so satisfying – and why you could have worked in those studios with a broken leg and felt no pain.

One thing was painful, though – the staff felt, almost without exception, that they were doing their work *despite* the management structures that should have been supporting them. Perhaps the ‘creative’ types would not have enjoyed any kind of management approach, but there was a *chasm* between the studio teams and the Personnel Department, as it was then called.

For the last 20 years I have been working with individuals, groups and companies that need to change. As a consultant in human behaviour and director of Performance Review Pro, working in businesses of all sizes on problems with communication and motivation, I want to help managers understand what is upsetting their staff and getting in the way of intelligence and performance. Information is the key to this – the right kind of information, used in the right way.

That's what we aim to provide with Performance Review Pro, an online system which unpacks the multiple ways in which the culture and environment of the workplace interact with the intricacies of human nature, and then shows managers how to help make things work better.

Aside from Performance Review Pro I am also a member of the Engage for Success 'guru' group, though I am not yet able to levitate unaided; I have an MA in psychotherapy and was part of the working party that defined the National Occupational Standards for cognitive-behavioural therapy; and I founded the mental health charity Resolution, which provides specialist psychological trauma services for veterans who cannot get satisfactory symptom relief elsewhere.



“In the day to day world no intelligence is more important than the interpersonal.”

Daniel Goleman Emotional Intelligence.



Introduction:

What is this ebook about?

Across the globe there are millions of businesses doing many different things – making stuff, designing things, charging huge fees for talking about this and that... Despite their differences one thing unites them: at some level, whether they have one employee or tens of thousands, human beings work there in teams and groups – collaborating (or not) to deliver the products and services for the end clients.

Every single thing that is designed, made, done, said or handled – well or badly – is done by people. Every piece of communication – in most businesses every sale – depends on a working connection between two human beings. So, if we are the constants in the world of commerce – wouldn't it be handy to have a manual for how to work effectively with us/them? Because let's face it we can be a tricky bunch to handle!



“Bringing our understanding of motivation into the 21st-century is more than an essential move for business it's an affirmation of our humanity.”

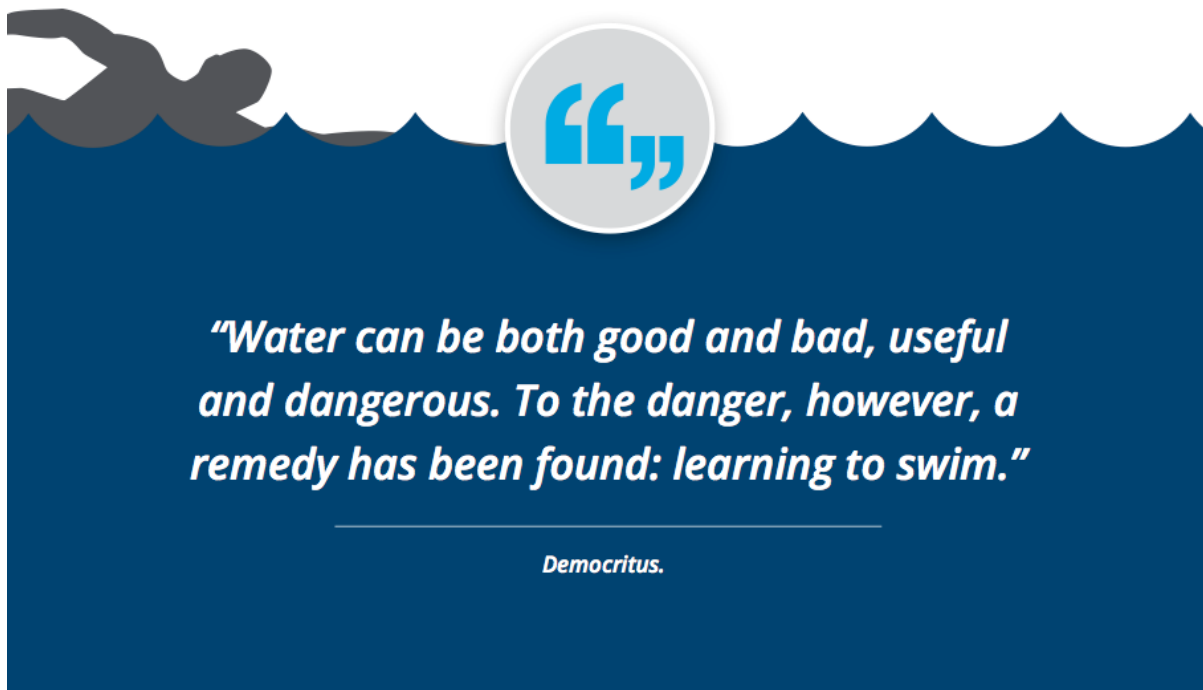
Daniel Pink. Drive, the surprising truth about what motivates us.

We humans vary in size, shape, eye colour etc. But we are all the same inside, give or take the odd dictator or serial killer. We come from the same source, and under the hood we are wired to function the same way. So here's the challenge: how do you get a bunch of humans to work together effectively to deliver whatever task is at hand? Common approaches to this problem include talent management, employee engagement or satisfaction surveys, training in management or leadership skills – all of which can help. However, there is a key understanding that makes any of these much more useful.

We tend to approach people from the outside, observing their behaviour and then trying to coach, train, nudge, cajole or bribe them to do something else. What a difference it could make if we understood people from the inside, from knowing what they need to work well. And that is what this manual is for. It falls roughly in two parts: the first is a guide to understanding people in the workplace, and then part two, the Leadership Toolkit, is a practical guide to working with these human beings to help them develop new behaviour that will work better.

This guide comes from the makers of Performance Review Pro, which does the hard work of diagnosing and prioritising the problems caused when human nature and workplace routines and culture collide. Combine the outputs from Performance Review Pro with the leadership and management tools contained in this book and you have everything you need to support your team to deliver great results.

So, to understanding the human being. Who are we?



1 The modern human – and its inheritance



We like to think we're a pretty well-evolved species – and for much of the time we are. We can add up, negotiate, and turn up at work most days, even when there's an important game on television. We generally don't beat our husbands, wives, dogs or managers. We like making things work, sorting out problems and improving the way we live. We co-operate fairly well and like to be part of a team if the conditions are right. A thoroughly modern species in every way, with a huge, sophisticated and very capable brain, human beings are the ideal workers for your company. Except...



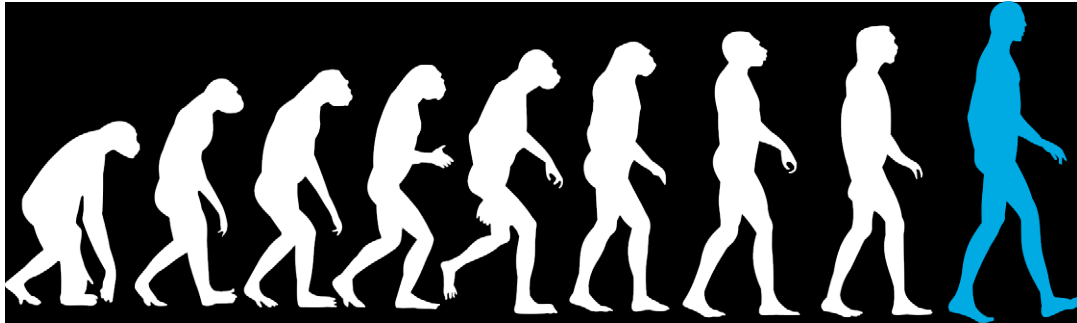
Inside our modern brain, hidden for most of the time, lurks something much older: we still carry the brain of a more primitive primate inside our shiny modern one. When things get tough the old systems take over, so when we say someone has gone ape, that's a pretty accurate description of what's happening. We have learnt to live with this ancient system, and we can control it to some degree, but it has its own needs and will kick off if they aren't met. Everyone has a point where they get upset, no matter how civilised they try to be.

Worse still, inside the ape brain lurks something even older – at the centre of our heads you find the amygdala, which is the same piece of tissue you find in the skull of a lizard or a snake. It's tiny compared with the modern brain, and it doesn't have much to say about spreadsheets, but it is very powerful. Its job is to make sure you pass on your DNA to the next generation. It acts rather crudely – its four main options are fight, flight, feed and reproduce (the four Fs, as a colleague rather succinctly put it) – so don't expect any logic from someone who feels threatened, is hungry, or has spotted an opportunity to mate.



So, while we have clawed our way up the evolutionary tree over millions of years, it's easy enough to slide back down it. You could say every one of us contains a philosopher, a chimpanzee and a reptile, and that how we are at any moment depends on which of them is in charge. This is a simplification of course, but if you start watching human behaviour closely you will see it in action every day, unless you live in a very boring place where nothing much happens. Conversely, if you watch chimpanzees closely you will see many characteristics of human behaviour, in simplified form. If you have never been to a primate reserve or rescue centre I urge you to go – unless you feel you get enough of that sort of thing at work already...

2 The implications for our behaviour



Intelligence is our crowning glory, the unique ability of the modern brain. However, it goes right out of the window as soon as people become wound up and their old brains take over. As they become less intelligent they are likely to do things that will not work for you, your team or your customers. As well getting dimmer, we also become less collaborative, creative and productive. There are also physical signs: muscle tension, flushed face, faster breathing and heart rate and raised blood pressure. Think city-centre bar on a Saturday night.



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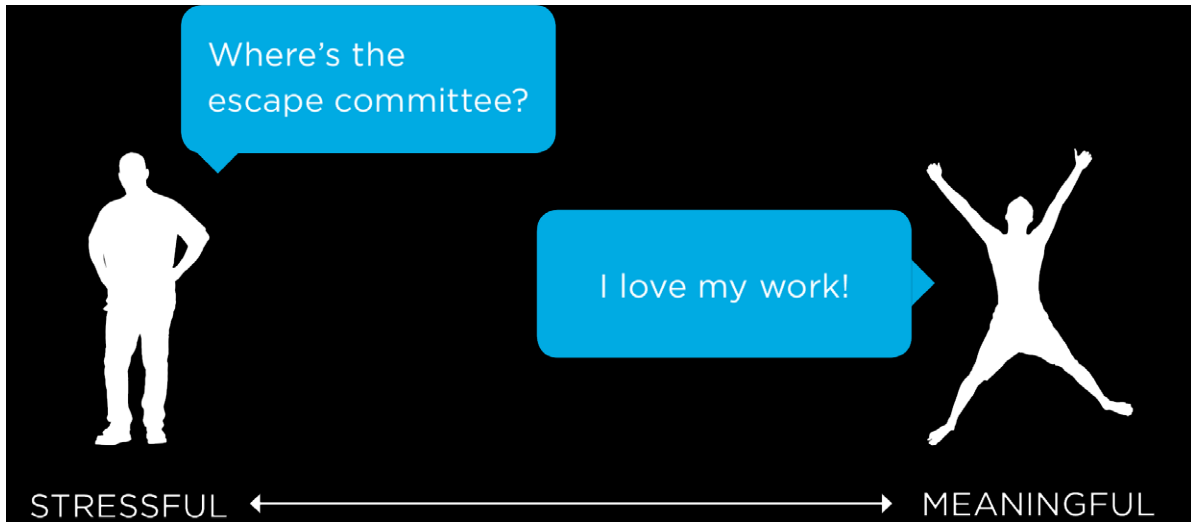


The older brains don't generally go looking for trouble, they only put up a fight when they feel there's trouble about. At work this mostly happens when something compromises their basic needs. As these are not particularly complicated, we might as well learn to accommodate them in the interests of performance. It costs next to nothing to do this, at least compared with the cost of ignoring how the human is built. Remember we're talking about *emotional* needs, meaning they operate at the level of neuronal and hormonal systems in the old, pre-verbal, emotional areas of the brain.



There is a direct connection between how we feel and how we function. Anyone who was ever 'sent to Coventry', or isolated by the group as a punishment, will know how painful it becomes after a while – and while we think there's a difference between that and physical pain, there isn't – status anxiety is felt in the same area of the brain that perceives the pain of physical injury. However, if you can provide a workplace culture and environment where the brain and body feel they are safe and their emotional needs are met, the old brain systems will calm down and the more intelligent bits of the head will be free to do their best work.

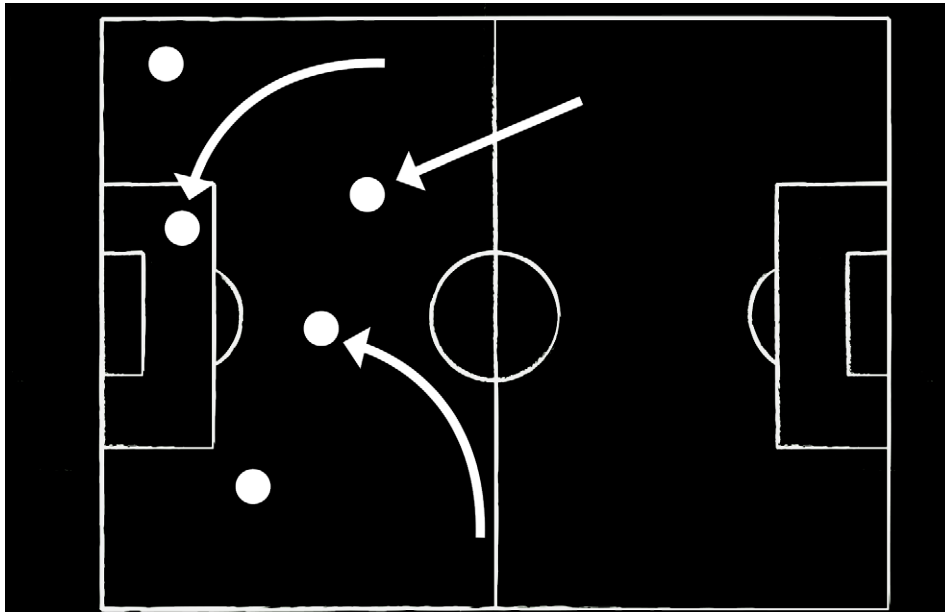
Now, you may want your team to be excited at work – and we wouldn't want work to be dull and boring. But it's important to distinguish between useful excitement and stress. Some companies run at a high energy level, with staff genuinely excited about their work. However, many more have high stress levels, with arguments, silos, high sickness rates and unexplained long-term illnesses. So how come some companies manage stress well and others don't?



It turns out there's an optimal level of stimulus at work – too little and people get bored; as you crank up the pressure they get interested, engaged or even excited about work, provided the other conditions are right. Go too far and they get fatigued, and either give up or get angry and oppositional. The most productive zone is in-between, and this is where sustainable performance and stable teams are found.

There's also a rhythm to the day, which determines when we are able to concentrate, focus and think straight and when we can't. You will probably have noticed about four points in the day when you can't really work very well, and there's a good reason why this happens. As with everything, we have a choice of trying to carry on regardless or to accommodate human nature – and there's only one sustainable choice.

3 Making the team a *team*



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Geese gaggle, crows form Parliaments (why is that surprising) and cats – well – they do their own thing. Little scamps. But we are a social species and the basic unit of human life is not the individual but the group. A functioning group can do *anything*, but most groups are hamstrung by something or other: communication failures, inadequate resources, inappropriate expectations, pointless hierarchy, etc. The usual result is that the group splits into smaller groups that *do* work – but usually for their own ends, creating friction and minor competitions that don't generate value for the customer.

Climbing walls, trust falls, bread-making classes and so on don't usually help – unless the other conditions for a natural team to emerge are already in place, in which case you won't need them anyway. Businesses spend huge amounts on the 'away-day' activities, but they have little or no effect performance at work, and can even turn out to make a team *less* cohesive.

The odd thing is, we humans are very good at forming groups, all by ourselves. We do it naturally if the conditions are right, automatically joining together to do things that meet our joint needs. We can't help it – in fact we actually *need* to get together with others and solve problems. That's why we play games together at weekends, and why we have progressed so much over the last ten thousand years (apart from the damage to the planet). If you ask the right questions – and follow up on the answers – you can get the conditions right so your teams will unify and work together, just as they do in their leisure hours.



“Businesses in the U.K. and U.S. combined are losing an estimated \$37 billion every year to ‘employee misunderstanding’”

International Data Corporation 2008

Something else happens in these natural groups – leadership, which costs so much to nurture, arises automatically. It isn't fixed in one individual (or doesn't last if it is), but gets shared around according to who has the skills needed in the moment. There's an implication in there for the workplace, and it's interesting to see ideas like Holocracy and Natural Teams starting to emerge inside some very large corporations. One thing we can predict with confidence, though – these 'new' structures will suffer problems of their own if they are implemented without understanding the underlying mechanisms of the human being, just as surely as old-style formal hierarchies do.

Whatever structures you choose, it is *possible* for your teams to unify and work together, just as they do in their leisure hours, but it depends on asking the right questions – and following up on the answers. Get it right, and productivity and quality will increase and life will get easier!



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4 What would good look like?



Sometimes you can see why people are unhappy at work, but not always. Even people who look fine might be running below their optimum level of performance, if you but knew it. The trouble is, how do you know who is in this position, what has caused it, and what can be done to help? It's the old problem of the unknown unknowns – but how do you know if you have these – isn't that an unknown too?

Well, no: unless you are completely sure that every single member of your staff is happy, energised, engaged, productive, loyal, team-spirited and so on, it is a certainty that there are things going on you don't know about, and which are dragging your people – and your productivity – down. Clearly you need to know about these things, as knowledge is power.... But what would a sustainable, high-satisfaction, high performance workplace look like? There are many possible ways to describe the necessary characteristics but here's one simple, robust starting point:

- Everyone would have a clear cognitive connection with their work, the company aims, the customers' need for the products and the roles and understanding of their team-mates.
- They would have a full suite of knowledge, skills and other resources needed to do their role as part of the team, so there was no anticipatory anxiety about their work-related behaviours and they felt competent.
- They would be in a functional social and emotional context where they felt a secure connection with the company and the group and were ok about their place in it, so they actually wanted to come into work.
- They would be secure, calm and energised, and would feel work was meaningful.

Looking back to that first job I can now see why it worked so well – conditions were, more or less, exactly like those I just described. We knew what we were doing, we had the resources, we had a good time, we got things done and we loved it.



“A Mercer survey of 30,000 workers worldwide, showed that between 28% and 56% of wanted to leave their jobs”

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5 The multiple effects of fixing the workplace

As we know, behaviour starts to change as people get wound up, and reason is replaced by something older. The results can be unpredictable – some people withdraw, others become aggressive. Some talk less, others more. Some become more focussed on the task in hand, even if it's not working, while others go round in circles. They say every poker player has a 'tell', a little sign that gives away their state of mind, and so it is for us – we all have a set of behaviours, some minor, others disastrous, that we display as tension goes up.

Apart from these personal signs, there are also general consequences of an unhealthy degree of stress. Most people become more selfish – that's not a criticism, just a reflection of the way we are wired. At the same time our attention becomes more focussed – usually on the thing that is causing the stress. Most of us stop learning, and instead keep repeating a behaviour which we already know hasn't worked, apparently unable to see what is obvious to everyone else.

Any other behaviour that is stress-related, like going out for a cigarette break, is likely to increase, so we could expect a happier staff to take fewer smoking breaks, and to find it easier to get off nicotine altogether. Staff in a workplace that 'works' at a human level will also take fewer days off sick, and spend less time sabotaging your attempts to manage them. And Massive Monday will become less of a problem – the staff you really need, the most capable ones, will be less likely to leave, because they like being with you...

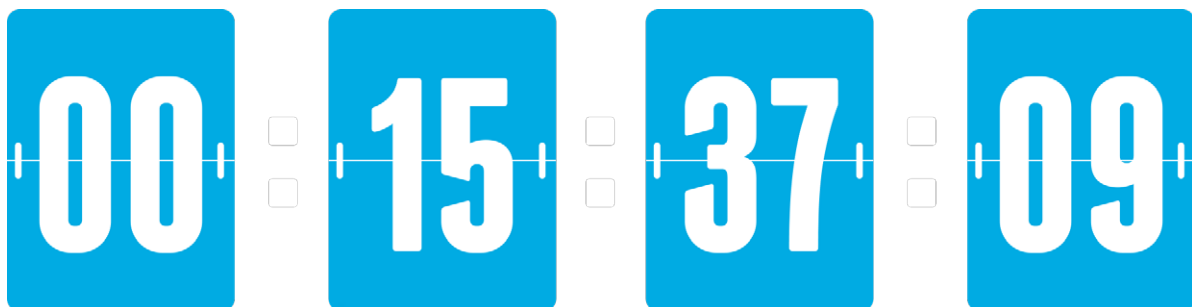


6 I want one of those...



Good, but here's the thing: managers want improved individual and team performance, but it isn't easy to get a grip on the underlying problems – they aren't usually visible and we don't normally have the language to understand them. So employees often get the blame for problems that are actually caused by something else, and which could be fixed if their roots were understood.

Managers are also in a catch-22 – the problems keep them busy so they don't have time to hold all the conversations they need to be properly aware of the undercurrents causing the problems in their workplace. But if they had a tool that picked up on the warning signs – the unseen causes of upset and inefficiency – and turned these things into a plan for improvement, a plan that the employees concerned would sense was a good idea, their lives would be quite different. And all the energy currently lost in sorting out the unfathomable could be used in real leadership activity.



So how do you start? Well, improvement has to start with information. (*Change* often starts without it, but that's another story.) You can't teach people something new, or improve the framework they are working in, without knowing what's up: what is upsetting them, what is missing, what don't they know or understand, and so on. You have to cover the whole spectrum of possibilities at the cognitive, behavioural and emotional levels to be certain you have done all you can to help your people work better.

And you have to do it without winding people up with endless questionnaires, exercises or psychometric tests. You'll need a tool that gets all the information you need – including the unknown unknowns – to cut out unwanted chimp or lizard attacks and set your people free to focus, collaborate and get things done. Use this information right and your team will want to work well – they'll have intrinsic motivation, also known as innate motivation – the very best kind of motivation because it comes from the inside. No-one has to push, bribe or blackmail the team to perform, they just get on and do it.

This normally only happens when people are playing football (as long as it's going well), fishing for huge sea monsters (as long as they don't all turn out to be ones that get away) or washing the new car (if you're that kind of person).

Companies that haven't worked out how to make work innately motivating often try to apply **external** motivation to staff – carrots and sticks, in other words. These are an attempt to compensate for an underlying problem, and they don't last. In the end the team get used to them – and the original problem won't have gone away – so the effect fades.

But intrinsic motivation makes tasks seem effortless – time flies by and people feel good. Can that really happen at work? It surely can if the conditions are right.

A circular icon containing a stylized blue quote symbol consisting of two opening and two closing quotation marks.

“Carrots and sticks can promote bad behaviour, create addiction, and encourage short-term thinking at the expense of the long view”

Daniel Pink. Drive, the surprising truth about what motivates us.



Part two: The Leadership Toolkit

7 Beginning the process of change



However you have gone about collecting information on which to begin your changes, you will then need to have frameworks for implementing the discussions that follow. In the following chapters you will find a set of specialised tools that have been carefully developed for working with people. Some may be similar to things you've seen elsewhere, but this is the first time this collection of tools has been put together in one place, and we hope you'll find it useful.

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We have made it as straightforward as we can – no technical language or obscure psychological constructs involved – but some of the ideas might take a little thinking about, re-reading a number of times and then carefully rehearsing with colleagues or friends before using them for real. Straightforward is not the same as simple.

In the following pages you'll find:

- Setting them up to succeed – the 4C model for intelligent performance
- The ABC of interviews – getting it in the right order
- Talking about change so it happens – taking an idea for a walk
- The language of understanding – the right words make all the difference
- Let's blame the scapegoats – holding a no-blame conversation
- That didn't work – defusing difficult situations
- More reading and references – for those nights you just can't get to sleep

One more thing. Take great care when attempting to influence other people. The more you absorb and practice using the ideas, techniques and so on in this ebook, the more advantage you will have in negotiations with other people. Use it wisely (Luke), and **never, ever**, attempt to persuade **anyone** to do **anything** unless it will lead, in the end, to their underlying needs being met better.



“More than eight in ten HR professionals cite identifying and addressing underlying tensions more effectively before things start going wrong.”

Leadership and the management of conflict at work, CIPD, 2008.

8 Setting them up to succeed



Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, three sets of conditions have to be met for it to work well. This applies whether you are having a social conversation or doing brain surgery.

We don't talk about these things much, so when things go wrong we tend not to understand why. So here are three vital questions to ask your people, and yourself:

1. Are they completely clear about what they are doing? This is all about communication and language – see chapter 11, *The language of understanding*. It is astonishing how often people are expected to get on with jobs that are inadequately defined, in language they don't really understand, for reasons they don't get, for a customer they feel no connection to. This is not very motivating. So, in brief, your staff need to understand clearly and accurately who they are working for and why – what difference will it make to the customers' lives. They need to have a clear picture of what their own team is supposed to be doing, and to feel that the rest of the team have the same picture. And they need to be certain of their own expected performance because it has been defined in concrete language – work will not generate motivation otherwise. We'll come on to this in more detail in a moment.
2. Do they have what they need to do it? This is more straightforward – but even in the best organised workplaces there will be times when people just do not have the knowledge, skills or resources they need in order to work well, at least for some of the time, and especially when roles or job specs are changing. Performance Review Pro will diagnose these resource gaps for you automatically and regularly, keeping your team's capability where it should be.
3. Do they want to be there? This gets you to the sixty-four thousand dollar question: *Why* do people want to do some things and not others? Why do they put 100% into some activities but then just mark time? It's very rarely anything to do with money, it's about much subtler human emotional systems, and to get to the bottom of this you need to understand intrinsic motivation. If you can arrange for your workplace to meet the innate needs of your people they will want to be there. Arrange for the work to work properly for them and they will want to do it – and will do it well. The next page explains more about how to get to the bottom of your team's motivation gaps.

Simply asking those three questions isn't quite enough – you need more detail before setting up the discussions that lead to change. So at Performance Review Pro we unpack those questions into a bigger model – the 4C model for Intelligent Performance. It looks like this – four main areas, each with a number of sub-domains:



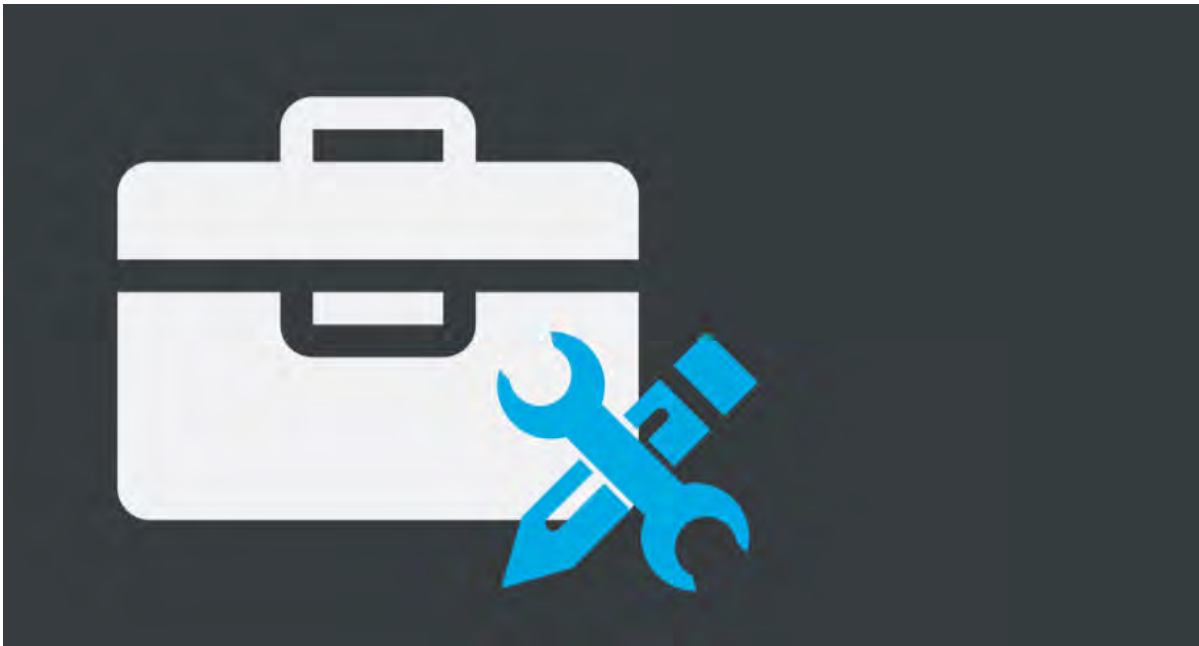
4C model for intelligent performance © Performance Review Pro 2014

The **Cognitive** domain looks at how clearly staff understand what the company aims are, what their own performance is supposed to look like, how well they think the same picture is shared by the team and how well the group co-operates. **Capability** questions are about whether staff have the knowledge, skills and resources to achieve their specified performance, and whether they feel competent as a result. The **Connection** area looks at social factors, vital matters if you want your staff to stay with you, perform well, and be healthy, and the **Confidence** group reveals more vital information about the nature of your company's culture and environment, as experienced by each staff member.

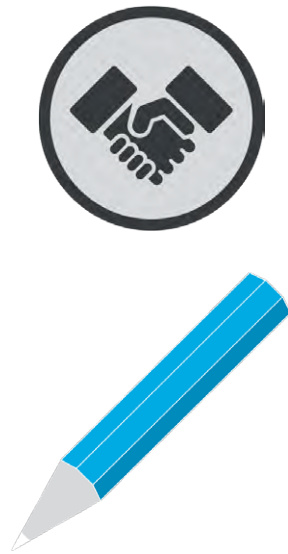
You can ask people questions about how well your workplace provides all these factors, and many intuitive managers do, though probably without rationalising what they are doing or consciously dividing their discussions into these areas. But it would be a more productive use of scarce management time, we suggest, to use a system like Performance Review Pro to keep an eye on all these parameters across the whole team, so you can devote your time to managing the areas that need improvement.

Our system asks questions about how well things are going in these 16 domains, plus diagnostic sub-questions in the areas that don't score so well, so when managers sit down to have a discussion, either as part of a formal review or a regular catch-up, they already know what is working and where people need help. Having clear, relevant information allows them to get straight to what needs doing, and gives the employee confidence that the manager knows and cares about their working life. You can sign up to try it absolutely free, [here](#).

Of course, we hope the manager will hold those discussions within the frameworks laid out in the following chapters – whether it's a formal appraisal, an ad-hoc interview or a chance meeting by the water cooler, every intervention goes better when it's run in a way that works with the nature of the people you're talking to.



9 The ABC of conversations



In any conversation – especially reviews and appraisals – it can be hard to review the last year without causing upset. It's often difficult to know what to put in as goals for this year, especially after some years of limited progress. And as time goes by the staff's enthusiasm for achieving those goals falls off as well. The same can apply in everyday conversations, and we know how many managers would love a framework that makes them easier. Try doing it in this order:

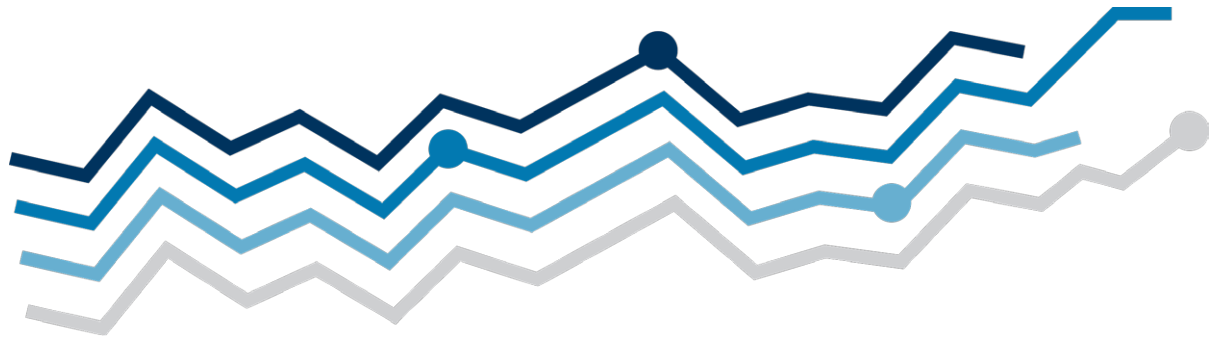
- a) **Something that works.** Wherever possible start by talking about something that has gone well. This raises serotonin levels, making both parties feel better. A positive mood improves rapport, raises intelligence and improves communication, and increases the chance of getting an agreement over what to do next.
- b) **What could be better?** Now to the issue(s) at hand. You may have to go over stuff that didn't quite work, but you risk generating a soup of emotions – embarrassment, resentment at having been left exposed, feelings of guilt or stupidity and so on. This risks souring the next phase when you'll need to collaborate to set useful goals. However, in a few pages you'll find a framework for holding a no-blame conversation – practise this hard because it gives you the best chance to get something useful out of the process. Then look at the section on reframing – turning disappointments into opportunities changes the atmosphere and increases the chance of useful change.

- c) **Build the future.** People are most likely to co-operate fully and change for the better if they feel that you really know what's getting in the way of success and care about sorting that out. So knowledge – careful consideration of comprehensive data – is vital here. If you can home straight in on the places where improvement is most needed and will bring the best results, your team member will sense that you know how to help – that you are acting as a leader, in other words, and will want to join in. Having read *Setting them up to succeed* you can use that as a basis for discussion, but it will be quicker and easier to let Performance Review Pro ask the questions and deliver you the most important goals on a plate. These are the things that really matter, so you'll automatically get an easier buy-in for them.

If you have used Performance Review Pro to set the priorities for your conversation, you'll have a head start – just doing the questionnaire will already have the team thinking about how things could be better. But to help you make sure the ideas go in, you can plug this framework into the bigger idea in the next chapter – *Talking about change so it happens*. This will help you walk new ideas into someone's head so they take root. But make sure they're good ideas.



10 Talking about change so it happens



I hope by the time you are beginning the conversations you already know about what is in the way of intelligent performance in your staff. It doesn't matter how you find this out, as long as you get beneath the surface to the concerns that cause emotional arousal and so reduce intelligence. One easy way to do this is to [sign up for Performance Review Pro](#) and paste in the team emails (that really is all it takes to get started, and you can try it free of charge).

Either way, you have the reports and you can see at a glance who is where and what the opportunities are – so it's time to start talking. There is a natural sequence to a learning conversation that goes well. It introduces the idea at the right time in the right way, allows for exploration and answering of questions, then seals the deal in a way that leads to action. There are also countless ways to get it wrong. So here's a six-step guide to walking a new idea into someone's head:

1. Start by building **rapport** with the other person to get them at ease. If you want you can try matching posture, movements and tone of voice – but practice first and do it subtly or it may backfire and people may feel you are trying to manipulate them. Whatever the purpose of your meeting, don't mention it until the ice is broken, shoulders have relaxed and breathing has returned to normal. Until then, talk about subjects which will generate good feeling. This is where you talk about something that works (see previous chapter).
2. When, and only when, you have broken the ice and conversation is running well, you can talk about what could be better. You need the best possible **information** about how they see the issue(s), and you need to have it in terms that make sense to them. Then you'll be working from *their* picture, not yours, in other words, and real communication can take place. This also means asking open questions and unpacking any fuzzy or abstract replies.

3. Now it's possible to build the future and set some **goals**. These need to be framed **Positively** ('do this, rather than 'don't do that'), be **Achievable** in practice by the person you are talking to, and be **Needs-related** so they will generate motivation (see *Setting them up to succeed*). If, like me, you are male and have trouble remembering more than one thing at a time, you'll welcome an acronym at this point: think **PAN**.
4. Now you need to make it happen – start by **accessing the resources** that they'll need to get going. How can they achieve the new goals, in other words – what have they done before that was similar and worked well? Who have they seen learning and growing as a result of a similar intervention at work? Wake up these memories and they will feel more confident and optimistic about the new objectives. Also reassure them that all the necessary knowledge, skills and practical resources will be available.
5. Now get practical and **agree the strategy** for the change. How, exactly, in practice, will they use their skills and resources to achieve these new goals? What training and support will they need, how will the changes be brought in, when, where, and so on. Get as full a list as you can so there is little or no uncertainty left to cause fear.
6. Now it's time to **rehearse** these changes. Ask 'what do you think it'll be like, being able to...' – and any other questions that will get them imagining a future that works better. If they can build a real picture of it and feel the benefit, there's much more chance of change starting – and sticking.

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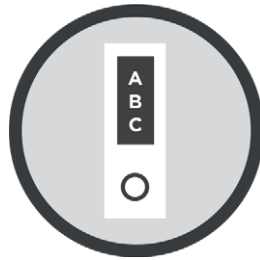
The image shows a pyramid of nine colored blocks representing business solutions. From top to bottom, the blocks are: Management (green), Time Management (orange), Problem solving (red), Self-Confidence (grey), Effectiveness (light green), Project Management (dark green), Goal setting (maroon), Motivation (yellow), and Coaching (pink).

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11 The language of understanding



While you're doing all the things we've discussed so far, there are a few more wrinkles to bear in mind. It might help to rehearse doing all these techniques separately, then put them together, rather than try to do it all at once.

It really is important to watch your language, just as they said back in school – because plain old everyday words contain unseen traps.

Unless you really *know* that someone is talking nonsense, you tend to assume you know what they mean. But actually the *meaning* in two people's heads is never exactly the same, and it is often significantly different even when people are sure they have agreed.

In the work context this is a major cause of all kinds of errors, demoralising people without their knowing why. And it is completely unseen, because everyone thinks they're talking the same language.

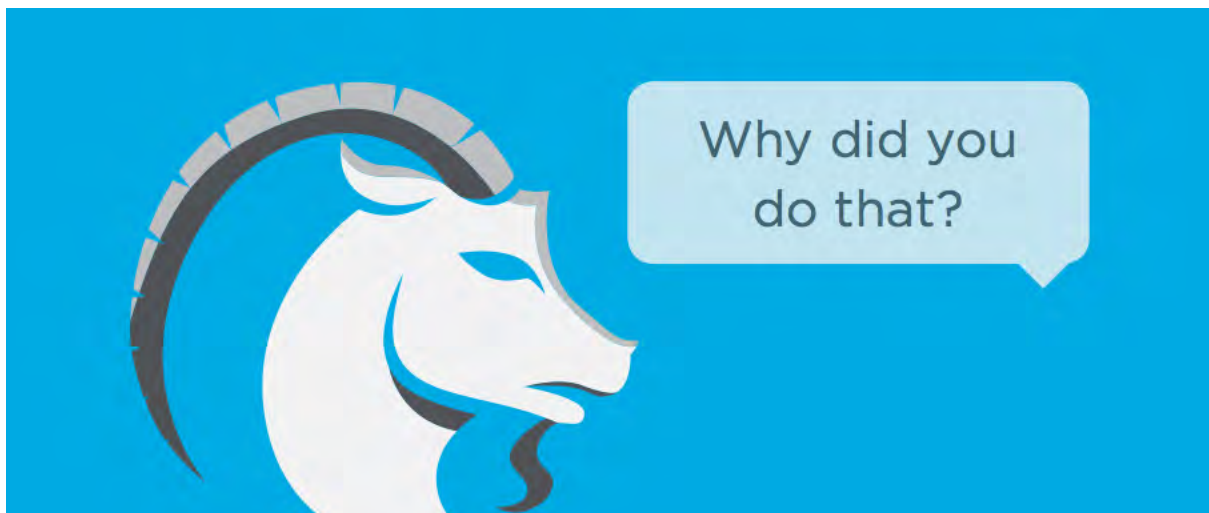
So please bear these principles in mind – in fact, practise using them before you even start holding the development conversations:

Four absolute rules when using words:

- When you talk to someone about work, the aim is to arrive at the same understanding, so you have the same picture in your head as they have and there will be no unmet expectations or nasty surprises. Don't just tell them what to do – check back, asking them to describe their picture of the work so you can see whether it is the same as yours. Ask supplementary questions to be absolutely sure there is no gap between your understanding and theirs.
- At the same time watch out – some words **never** have a common meaning, and are bound to cause problems. All abstract nouns – words that refer to ideas, not real things – are in this category and must be unpacked, talking over what exactly they mean in real terms, before the result of using them can be predicted. It is never enough to assume that someone else has the same mental picture of what 'values' means, for example – try getting two people to write down what they think it means and compare the results. Now do this for every abstract word in all your company operating documents, and think about the potential for confusion....
- Look beyond the individual's own job description – everyone needs to know *why* they are doing their tasks, how it meets the needs of the company, their colleagues and the end user or customer, so that the work has meaning and purpose.
- Almost everyone works best when they feel they are part of a group, something bigger than themselves, and that feeling of group membership comes about when people share intentions, experience and ideas. So when sharing ideas make sure that everyone in the group has the same picture – it will reduce errors and improve group cohesion.

If it's not obvious why you might want to do this, just pull up any government circular on education or health and ask yourself how many of the words in there have an absolutely certain, concrete meaning. People have to interpret this stuff and deliver practical services – no wonder there are occasional errors....

12 I blame the scapegoats



How often do you see someone trying to change the past – saying to a junior “Why did you do that?” or “What did you think was going to happen?” You can see why people might *want* to say these things, especially when they have been inconvenienced, but the thing that went wrong *has already happened*, and much as we wish it hadn’t, it will not change.

What *does* have to change is the way the person concerned behaves in the future. This means they will have to learn something new – but the necessary learning will not happen if they are upset. The more emotional people are, the less intelligent they become – so learning a more successful kind of behaviour depends on their feeling reasonably calm, even when something has gone wrong.

A no-blame culture is one of the best ways to reduce upset and defensiveness, and improve the chance of people learning when things go wrong. Many workplaces think they have a no-blame culture – the one sure way to create one is to change, from the ground up, the way ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ are understood.

This means doing something fundamental with language:

Three things to avoid:

- Avoid ‘right’, ‘wrong’, ‘good’ and ‘bad’. Why these words? Because these emotionally loaded words attack the individual they are aimed at rather than their behaviour, generating resentment and reducing intelligence. If you want to change behaviour, stick to ‘what works’ and ‘what needs to work better’, and keep the person out of it – at the beginning at least.
- Avoid saying ‘you’ in a negative context: “you caused...” Saying ‘you’ like this is a verbal finger-wag, sending blame towards the recipient and generating unhelpful emotion that will cloud their thought, create resentment and prevent learning.
- Avoid asking ‘why didn’t...’ as it will make people feel stupid and reduce their confidence, a key resource they will need when building their improved behaviour for the future.

Three things to practise regularly:

- Find some good in the situation where you can – if possible talk about something that *worked* to start the conversation. This generates some positive feelings, raises confidence and lets people know that this is going to be a serious attempt to improve the future, not a blame-fest about the past.
- Be very careful about how you bring personalities into the situation. Ask ‘what did not work so well’, leaving ‘you’ out of it at the start. Then ask ‘what could we do to get it working better’ *if* you genuinely intend to do this as a team effort, or ‘what could be done to make it work better’ if they are in fact going to be on their own.
- Don’t blame, but do give credit: let *them* suggest better ways of working whenever possible, and give credit when they have suggested something that could work. Make sure it sticks by getting them to rehearse the idea in their head, and then be sure to witness the new behaviour at work and thank them for the improvement.

Of course there will always be times when nothing worked, or where there is no way to prevent emotion shutting down thought because it has already happened. For some ideas about how to help in these cases see overleaf (as we used to say when books were made from trees).

13 That didn't work, then...




Ok. So you got there too late to head the problem off at the pass – someone's already cross and the situation is unpleasant. Maybe you'd like to talk about it but there's no way that's going to be useful – as Dave Grossman says in *On Killing*, you might as well try and argue with your dog.

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The advertisement features a woman with short dark hair, wearing a grey blazer over a blue shirt, smiling and resting her chin on her hand. To the left of the woman is the text 'Struggling to get interviews?' in bold, followed by 'Professional CV consulting & writing assistance from leading job experts in the UK.' Below this text is an orange button with the text 'Visit site' and a white hand cursor icon pointing at it.

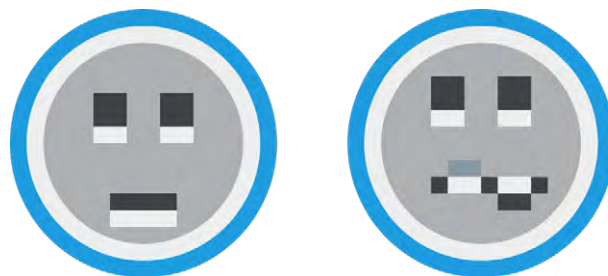
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So what to do? Here are some steps, with the principles they rest on. Sometimes it's best to let things wait a while, so unless you are a trained negotiator with extensive life insurance, use them with caution.

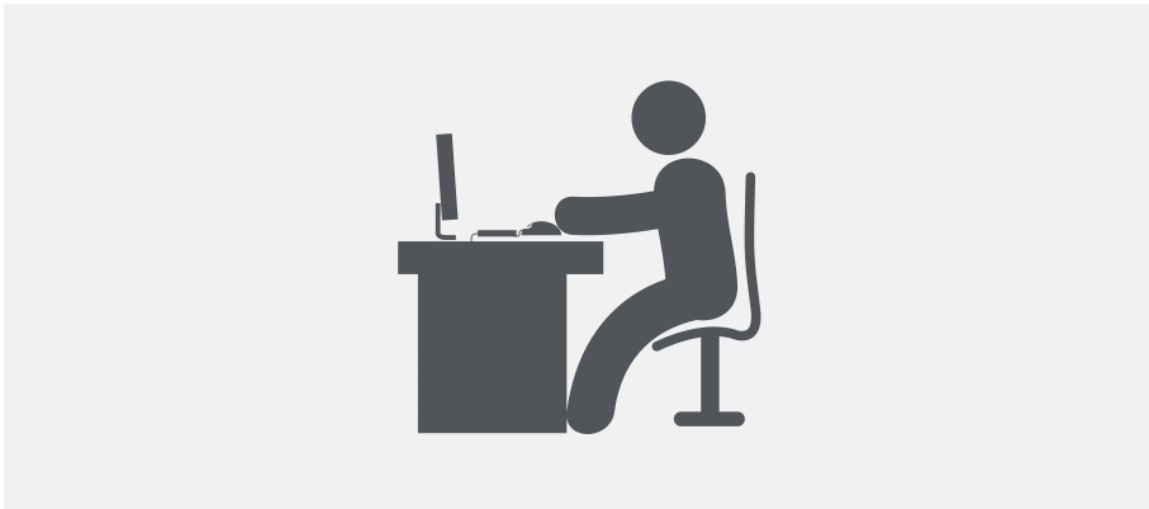
1. Beware – emotion is contagious. Keep a grip on how you are thinking and feeling, and be prepared to get out of the situation if you feel you are getting wound up by it. No-one will be served by you getting too involved emotionally, and you don't want to end up with *two* idiots in the room.
2. Read the emotion. Remember, when people are cross their thinking closes down into a much simpler mode, similar in all probability to the earlier primates we are related to such as the chimpanzees. So, while the causes of the difficulty might be down to a long and complex historic situation, the present emotion will be fairly simple and probably a shade of anger.
3. Build rapport. As in chapter 10, *Talking about change so it happens*, the first step is not to start talking about the problem, but to make a connection with another human being. Angry people are tense, active and loud – speaking calmly, quietly and rationally is the best way of saying “I'm not interested in you” to the upset person. Of course, you don't want to escalate the situation either, so I recommend going part-way to where the other person is – be active and interested but not competitive or threatening, and talk about something else until you feel they are making eye contact and a normal rhythm of conversation has begun.
4. “Hear” the cause of the upset. When you are talking about your own problems to someone close to you, how do you know that they have heard you? Usually you can tell from their eyes, the shape of their mouth, the way they hold their head, or the tone of their voice. It's not a result of their saying “Ok, I know what you mean” but a number of other, non-verbal signals. So think – if you were angry and upset about something, how would you expect people who care about you to look? That's what is needed to show you can “hear”.
5. Reflect what you hear, so they know you are in communication with them. Bear in mind what emotion is present and how they must be feeling. So if someone says “I can't believe you have put me on weekends again” and you know they were hoping to go fishing, you might start by saying “I know this is really frustrating...” rather than “It's in your contract...” because hearing their emotion is the first step in getting it to reduce. Remember, you are agreeing with the emotion, not the underlying complaint.



6. Start to reframe. Reframing moves the conversation from 'we are here and I'm angry' to 'this is frustrating and I'm looking forward to something better'. So when the emotion has been heard and the other person is starting to look a little less battle-ready, you can start to orientate the conversation towards the future: "It's frustrating for all of us that we don't have a full-time weekend crew, and it'll all work so much more smoothly when we have the new staff in place". Note the order of events here: 1) reflect the underlying emotion; 2) link it to the future with "and" if possible rather than "but"; 3) paint a picture of how the difficulty is to be resolved. Of course, you do then have to follow up and do what you've said you will, but that could be more productive than having angry staff...
7. Close. The combination of hearing the emotion and reframing will calm the situation down, but now the emotion is reduced you have an opportunity to cement some ideas. Summarise the situation as you see it, checking back periodically to ensure there is agreement. Do this without setting anyone off again (see Chapter 12, *I blame the scapegoats*): "So there was a problem with the rota" (Not: "You had a problem with the rota") and there were some tense moments with Fred" (Not: "And you had a row with Fred"), "And that was frustrating, of course" (Not: "And you flew off the handle"). "And now the suggestion is that (fill in the positive reframe you have constructed)" And next time you see the person concerned (make it soon), go back and re-cover the same ground so they know you have heard and remember the difficulty and that you want to do something about it.



14 Next steps



Maybe you can see why some of the difficulties are arising at your workplace, and what you can do with some of the people, practices and resources to get things on a better track. However you decide to go about this, remember one thing: the underlying mechanisms and needs of the human being are non-negotiable – you can argue with them but you can't win.

An advertisement for 'e-Learning for Kids'. It features a central image of a smiling teacher leaning over a laptop to help two young children. To the right, there are two smaller circular images: one showing three children looking at a book, and another showing children at a computer workstation. The background is yellow with orange and white decorative swirls. In the top left corner is the 'e-learning for kids' logo, which consists of a grid of colored squares. In the bottom right, there is a green oval containing a list of achievements. At the bottom of the advertisement, there is a paragraph of text about the organization.

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About e-Learning for Kids Established in 2004, e-Learning for Kids is a global nonprofit foundation dedicated to fun and free learning on the Internet for children ages 5 - 12 with courses in math, science, language arts, computers, health and environmental skills. Since 2005, more than 15 million children in over 190 countries have benefitted from eLessons provided by EFK! An all-volunteer staff consists of education and e-learning experts and business professionals from around the world committed to making difference. eLearning for Kids is actively seeking funding, volunteers, sponsors and courseware developers; get involved! For more information, please visit www.e-learningforkids.org.



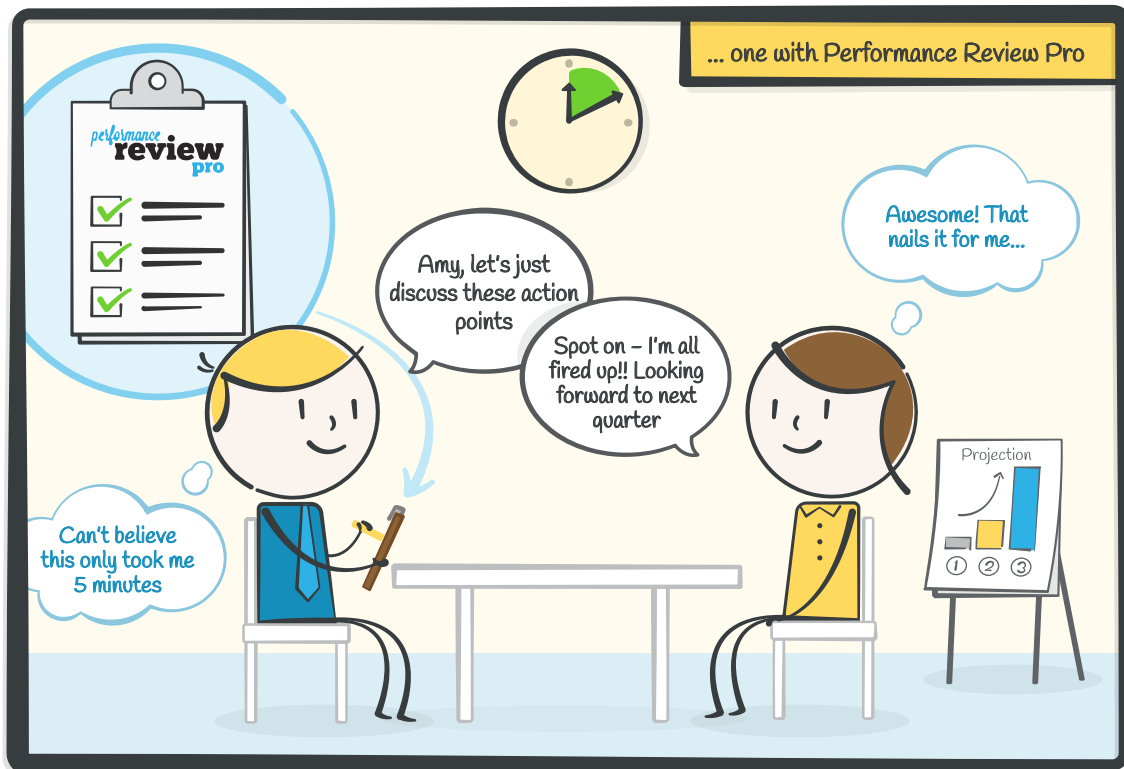
Companies tend to want everything at once – raised output and efficiency, staff wellbeing, better job satisfaction and staff retention. Sometimes those seem to be incompatible but they're not – in the long run. You can get extra performance out of someone for a while with carrots and sticks, but if you want a sustainable situation where people learn and develop, produce more and stay with the company instead of taking their knowledge elsewhere, you have to meet the underlying needs. And before you can do that, you need to know where the problems are and what needs to change.

There's a huge range of tools intended to measure different aspects of your people's motivation, satisfaction, wellbeing, engagement and so on. They all have their place, but if you like the idea that intelligent performance is available naturally in human groups if you can only provide the culture and environment where it can thrive, you might want to try Performance Review Pro. It looks round the working lives of a workforce, detecting the things that may be impacting on intelligence, collaboration, creativity and performance, freeing you to crank up the satisfaction – and productivity.

It is based round a very clever psychological survey which looks at all the vital domains of your teams' working lives to find out where there is scope for improvement. Every area it asks about has the potential to wind people up (and maybe make them go ape), or to help them perform well. Performance Review Pro then prioritises its findings as goals for improvement, which your managers can use in annual reviews, as the foundation of development discussions, or informally as part of day-to-day management interaction.

It is not a test of your employees, and no-one has anything to fear from using it (unless they think ignorance is a useful state of mind). It's a way for you jointly to find out how to improve working life and free up capacity. It's very simple to use – you just pop in the emails of your team and hit the button and the system does the rest. It gives managers a comprehensive dashboard of graphics showing who needs what to work better, and a schedule of areas to work on with each person. If you'd like to find out how well your existing arrangements do that, Performance Review Pro is here to help.

There are some free resources at <http://www.performancereviewpro.com/performance-review-template/> including a performance review template that you can use with your people to implement the findings from Performance Review Pro – you can use the same format for other development processes or interviews as well.



Performance Review Pro is a short cut for managers to the most effective personal development plans and information that will quickly boost employee motivation, performance and results.

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15 Insomnia?

Some ideas for further reading.

Drive – the surprising truth about what motivates us

Money is not the ultimate motivator – in fact the reverse – it can make pleasurable tasks seem dull and lifeless. Daniel Pink explains why.

Flow, the psychology of happiness

Fascinating book by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a leader in the field of positive psychology: why are some activities inherently self-motivating – could you achieve that at work?

Emotional Intelligence

Ok, an oldie, but read this rather than *Venus and Mars* – Daniel Goleman's book contains some things you need to know, as does

The observing self

These days it's Mindful this and Mindful that – Mindfulness is everywhere. Go back to the source with Arthur Deikman rather than wading through the later stuff

Dealing with Difficult People

There are a thousand books on this topic – Roberta Cava's is readable and has some good plans for managing problem personalities

The Essential Difference

Professor Simon Baron-Cohen writes well on the differences between male, female and autistic thinking styles

The Worst is Over

Actually this is written for ambulance personnel but you should read it: Judith Acosta's book runs through the principles of communicating to people in trouble in a vivid way – one day you might need exactly the kind of language it contains, but you can adapt it to the workplace meanwhile

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