

Five Myths of Managing Up ...

Or, How to Deliver a
Manager Assessment as
Part of Your Performance
Review — and Survive!

White Paper



review**sn**ap

Introduction

The days are gone when someone took a job, followed a predictable path of career development and worked in a world in which all employee performance communication flowed from the top down.

With today's highly transitional workforce — as employees increasingly expect to be mobile across an organization and not just *vertically* within it — and as studies of workplace psychology continue to prove the positive impact of looking at performance from every angle, manager assessments have become a crucial best-practice ingredient for successful organizations. In fact, two of the five key trends cited by Bersin & Associates in its study, *Modern-day Career Management*, directly reflect the importance of manager assessments: Career management must be a collaborative effort among “employee, manager, HR and the company,” and training of line managers is critical to an organization's success.¹

Yet manager assessments have failed to find their way into many performance review plans. The reasons for that lapse are many, and this paper directly dispels five of the most common myths that are preventing more companies from including manager assessments in their arsenal of powerful performance management tools:

- 1 My manager doesn't care
- 2 Honest feedback about my manager will come back to haunt me
- 3 My review of my manager will just sit in his or her desk drawer
- 4 I'm only a cog in the machine; my thoughts don't matter
- 5 My direct reports and I talk all the time

Myth 1 — My Manager Doesn't Care

This myth is often perpetrated by a belief among direct reports that their managers are not open to feedback. Employees often believe this even after they have read the memo from HR saying, “As part of this year's performance appraisal process, employees will be asked to evaluate their managers.”

Employees also often have misconceptions about 360 performance management and their role in that process. They often don't understand that managers need authentic feedback from the people who report to them. And honestly, why should they believe that, anyway?

¹ Lamoureux, Kim. *Modern-day Career Management: Paving the Path for Success*. Bersin & Associates. 2009. To purchase the report, visit <http://www.bersin.com/Practice/Detail.aspx?id=10388>

How to overcome the myth and survive manager assessments

Beyond being advised of *what* the process is for manager assessments, employees need to know *why* the process exists. It may seem like a no-brainer, but it doesn't hurt to also let employees know how they directly benefit from manager assessments. Duh.

Employees will be far more engaged with the process if they understand why it's in their best interests to tell their managers how they want to be "managed." Employees need to understand that their managers play a central role in the company's overall performance management process, and as part of that, it's a best practice for any employee to believe they should let their manager know:

- What they expect from him or her
- How they prefer to receive coaching and direction
- How much oversight they need
- How they can best be challenged

That's the kind of stuff a good manager will care about knowing.

On the other side of the coin, as corny as it sounds, one strategy for winning the hearts and minds of employees toward manager assessments is to ensure that managers demonstrate "a sincere desire to understand the unique motivational triggers of each of their employees."²

The bottom line here is that by collaboratively participating in an exchange of feedback, employees are improving their chances for a successful and supportive working relationship with their manager, which in turn benefits the manager. Bingo. Another reason for managers to care about getting authentic feedback.

Myth 2 — Honest Feedback About My Manager Will Come Back to Haunt Me

Let's face it. In all but the most incredibly altruistic corporate cultures, most employees have a sense of complicity (or at least shared responsibility) that exists between managers and supervisors that does not occur between the employees and their managers. In other words, even the most transparent of corporate cultures present a challenge to truly open communication.

A direct outcropping of this myth is the belief that manager assessments will be used as a reflection of the employee's own attitudes and perceptions of the organization and could, in fact, affect the employee's relationship with the manager and position within the company.

2. *Reviewsnap. From Dread to Moving Ahead — Take the Pain Out of Performance Management. 2012. <http://www.reviewsnap.com/white-papers.cfm?id=e66a6f0c-1372-636c-ddc3-271410e38b6f>*

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Employees may also believe that managers stonewall information from their supervisors out of self-preservation, which further hampers the employee's chances of having any input that will bolster their own performance.

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The most effective solution to dispelling this myth is one of those easier-said-than-done things: Communicate from the top down a spirit of transparency and openness around performance management.

It's also crucial to better communicate how managers themselves "manage up" in a best-practice system for performance reviews; everyone has the responsibility of giving honest feedback to the person who's one link up the feeding chain.

Each employee should appreciate that his or her individual voice is one of several sources of feedback that together create a realistic picture of a manager's performance. In turn, the manager knows that this sort of multi-perspective view of their work ensures fair and accurate performance reviews.

"An employee must take the initiative in his or her career, but there are other stakeholders who have great influence over it," says Kim Lamoureux, of Bersin & Associates. "A good manager will create opportunities and remove barriers."³

One way to ensure those barriers are removed is to follow manager assessments with specific action plans that flow directly from performance reviews. The Reviewsnap Learning Content Integration module, for example, allows organizations to identify and create practical, accessible and individualized development plans. These plans structure and automate the bridge between performance assessments and targeted learning.

Myth 3 — My Review of My Manager Will Just Sit in His or Her Desk Drawer

Do your employees have any good reason to believe their feedback will do anything more than collect dust in their manager's desk drawer? Do they understand the kind of attention that a top-performing organization pays to manager assessments — up and down the ladder? Probably not, if they believe Myth 3.

³ Lamoureux, Kim. *Modern-day Career Management: Paving the Path for Success*. Bersin & Associates. 2009. To purchase the report, visit <http://www.bersin.com/Practice/Detail.aspx?id=10388>

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They also probably don't understand the nature of an integrated talent development and performance management system. A best-practice system will include 360 assessments that solicit feedback from peers, subordinates, managers and project leads. Self-assessments and direct-manager assessments are also options.

How to overcome the myth and survive manager assessments

One way to bust the myth that says "my input ain't going anywhere" requires your organization to communicate how manager assessments relate to talent mobility and why managers need to "cascade performance management upward."

Talent mobility is best achieved when an organization applies these features or results of manager assessments:

- Transparent discussions up and down the ladder about skills and potential, as well as organizational needs
- Candid discussions between managers and employees about the manager's performance as well as the performance of direct reports
- Moving managers and their direct reports seamlessly from one job to the next, vertically and horizontally, and across business, function and geographic lines
- Talent decisions based on an alignment of each person's capabilities and aspirations⁴

It's also important for employees to understand that performance management best practices make manager assessments part of an ongoing and cyclical process: Their input is required to keep that process moving forward.

Myth 4 — I'm Only a Cog in the Machine; My Thoughts Don't Matter

Employees often don't understand the role they play in training their own managers. Why should they? It's not exactly the way American business has operated in the past. Welcome to Myth 4.

For similar reasons, employees often feel their input is disregarded, and they will be suspect of manager assessments when they don't see any changes as a result of their previous feedback to managers.

⁴ Lamoureux, Kim. *Modern-day Career Management: Paving the Path for Success*. Bersin & Associates. 2009. To purchase the report, visit <http://www.bersin.com/Practice/Detail.aspx?id=10388>

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We may be sounding like a broken record, but again, communication is the best tool for disproving a manager-assessment myth — and for preventing them from gaining traction in the first place.

Here, the solution to engaging employees and making them feel “listened to” is to instill the idea that everyone is part of a best-practice, total performance management process.

A more open approach to communication among all of the stakeholders in the review process will help your organization make better-informed decisions about talent — which in turn will benefit the employees involved and increase their buy-in of manager assessments.

Part of the communication plan should impress on employees that managers are “the front line of influencing employee satisfaction and engagement” and that valid and actionable manager assessments are part of that process. The most effective managers demonstrate a sincere desire to understand the unique motivational triggers of each of their employees and to regularly tailor job characteristics and rewards to best fit individual needs.⁵

Finally, it’s hard for an employee to know if their input is welcomed, because the directive to provide information came from HR — not from the manager. Again, communication can help: In a perfect situation, the manager would initiate the request for that feedback.

Myth 5 — My Direct Reports and I Talk All the Time

Really? You talk all the time? About what? Performance assessments, goals and development plans? No? You may be talking, but you’re sure not engaging in performance assessments in any valid meaning of the term.

Welcome to Myth 5.

Lack of a plan for communication that is centered specifically on defining performance goals and establishing formal performance management is the key reason that managers often confuse “conversation” with talent management. Another crucial failure, obviously, is that the organization has no integrated performance management system in place.

⁵ Reviewsnap. Put Your Money Where the Motivation Is — Compensation Strategies to Retain Your Best People. 2012. <http://www.reviewsnap.com/news/motivateemployees.cfm>

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Managers need to inherently and effectively understand the difference between water cooler conversations and their assessments from direct reports. It's true that a manager's supervisor is primarily responsible for the manager's development. But again, a 360-degree feedback process garners a full spectrum of performance insight that the old-fashioned model does not. The bottom line: Develop a culture-wide appreciation for the power of discussing performance assessments in the "right environment" and at the appropriate time.

Conclusion

In today's world of intense talent mobility both vertically and across an organization, manager assessments and "managing up" have become talent management best practices. Feedback from direct reports to their managers, combined with feedback from others, will help managers develop and improve their leadership skills — which ultimately benefits their direct reports and the organization as a whole.

Managing up essentially is all about the relationship that direct reports have with their managers. It's about authentic communication that flows freely from the top of the organization down and that occurs between employees and their managers.

It's the right thing in a world of mobility and increasing emphasis on obtaining fair and accurate performance reviews that involve everyone touched by someone else's work.

To see the benefits of manager assessments, it's crucial to answer the most common myths surrounding them. Accurate and meaningful communication that includes explaining how employees benefit from the manager assessments they perform is critical to overcoming those myths. So is ensuring that the action items from manager assessments are followed up on, with action items that employees can see.

The bottom line: Employees who are engaged and effectively participate in manager assessments realize they not only improve the performance of their managers but improve their potential as well.

About Reviewsnap

In times like these, growth is *earned* by companies that align their people behind shared goals. If you are working to get everyone on the same page, Reviewsnap is with you. More than performance management software, we offer true partnership through genuine customer service and support. And unlike those other guys who care more about shareholders than customers, we can't sleep at night unless you can. We are all together now. We are your performance management partner. We are Reviewsnap. Visit us on the Web at www.reviewsnap.com.



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