

Performance Management in Education

By adopting corporate and government models, administrators can tie appraisal to school goals and staff development.

The traditional process of teacher evaluation is incorporated in a procedure that I can only describe as "walking past and peering in," culminating in an annual meeting for performance appraisal. In corporations and government agencies, human resource managers recognize that annual performance appraisals are not enough (Harper 1986). An *appraisal* is, after all, a judgment about performance, not an attempt to improve it.

The current corporate emphasis on performance management (PM) is more than a change in wording (Rausch 1985). It signifies that improving employee performance and helping people to develop is a primary function of management. As such, it is a continuing process, not something that happens once a year.

This shift in emphasis needs to be applied to education as well. Performance management is complex, difficult, and time-consuming, but it is crucial to an institution's success, and understanding the PM concept may help educators. The following is an outline of a ten-step model of performance management from corporate and government practices.

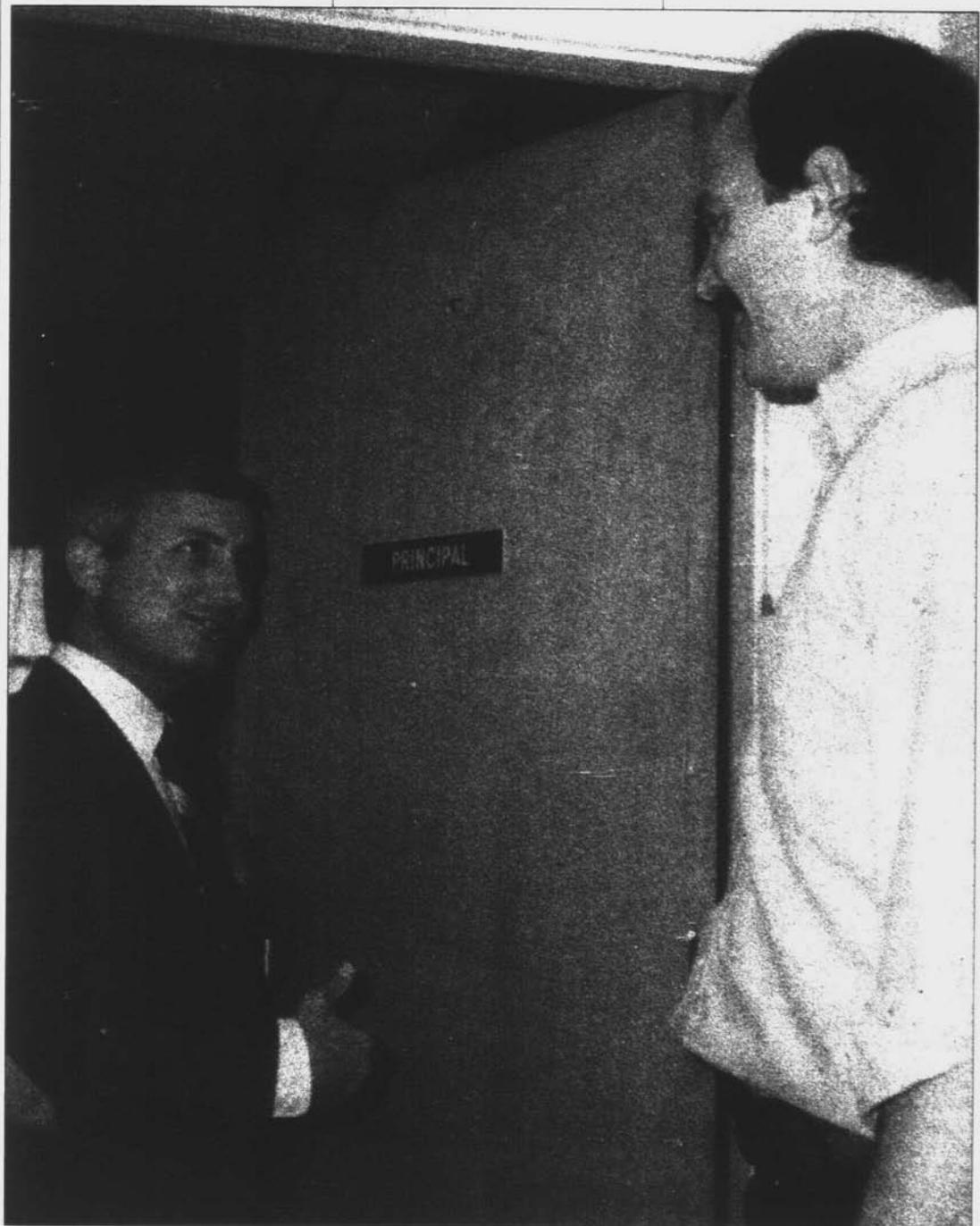
Step One: Build and Maintain Rapport

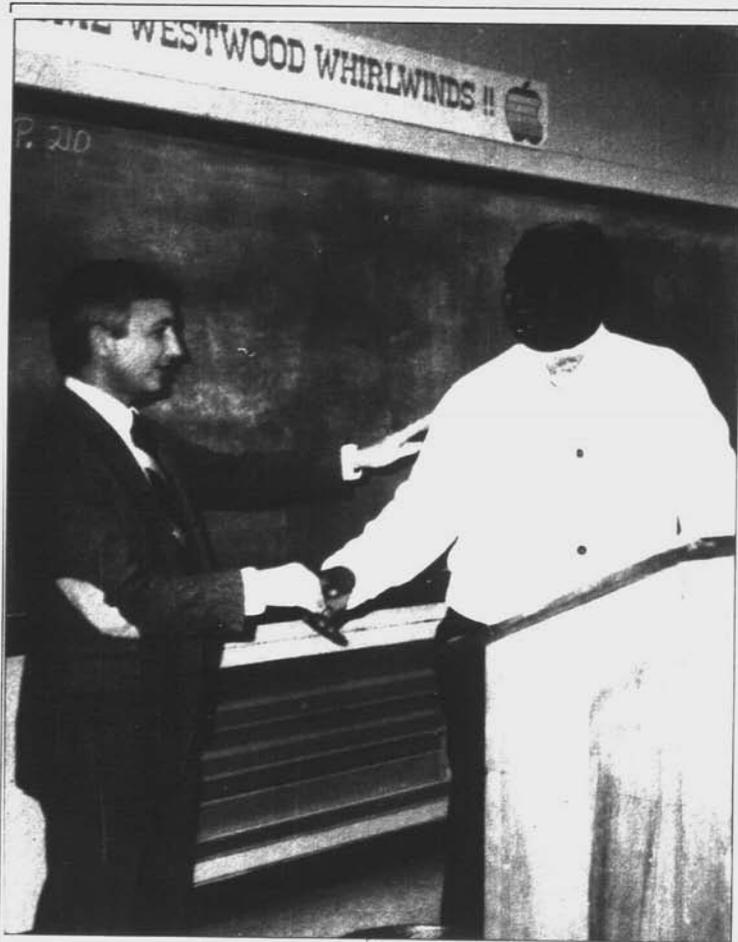
Performance management is based on communication and personal relationships. In the same way other interpersonal relationships that produce human growth, such as parenting or therapy, depend upon the quality of involvement between the people, PM begins and ends with an emphasis on rapport. Managers or supervisors who

want to facilitate permanent growth and development among their employees and associates must work constantly to improve and maintain the quality of their rapport with those whom they supervise.

Like other such relationships, the qualities of empathy, honesty, and esteem need to be consistent. Employees' acceptance of feedback, trust in another's judgment, and willingness to try to improve all fluctuate with the quality of rapport within the relationship. All other aspects of the PM process depend, at least in part, on consistency of rapport.

Performance management is, therefore, a personal process, not a list of teaching behaviors on an observation form, in an interview, or on a form that summarizes the process, no matter how well it adheres to legal guide-





lines. The literature on performance appraisal makes it clear that failure can almost always be traced to the supervisor's lack of interest or skill in building and maintaining rapport. Teachers, more than any other group, recognize the importance of personal involvement, and they, too, require it for growth and development.

Step Two: Focus on Performance

Like other tasks, teaching cannot be evaluated accurately unless those involved agree on what is to be evaluated. Because teaching is so complex, what is and what is not part of the job must be agreed upon.

First to be eliminated from consideration are those elements that have little or nothing to do with perform-

ance. A teacher's personal traits, beliefs, and habits outside the classroom are not a central part of the job. The teacher's commitment to one professional issue or his or her willingness to participate in extracurricular activities ought not be part of an evaluation. How much a teacher cares about students is difficult to estimate unless it is directly tied to classroom behavior, and, hence, it ought to be omitted from performance management. Even the particular teaching method a teacher prefers may be optional.

Validly observable classroom behaviors that can be reliably identified and described by more than one trained observer are the essential focus. Vague values may be comforting to talk about, but they are extremely difficult to define, document, or relate to desired pupil outcomes.

Step Three: Identify Key Results Areas

Classroom performance, even considered alone, is still so complex and multifaceted that it is impossible to evaluate all behaviors that teachers exhibit. The focus must be narrowed to those areas of classroom performance that are accepted as critical to the learning outcomes desired. If achievement in basic skills is desired, for example, then teacher performance critical to producing that outcome should be the focus.

Progress in educational research and performance appraisal has led, in recent years, to establishing assessment models that incorporate key results areas. In North Carolina, for example, the Department of Public Instruction developed a system that identifies eight key results areas, most of them performance-based. They are management of instructional time, management of student behavior, instructional presentation, instructional monitoring of student performance, instructional feedback, facilitating instruction, interacting within the educational environment, and performing noninstructional duties. Only the last has no direct connection to a teacher's classroom behavior (Holdzkom 1985).

“Performance management agrees with the national motel chain whose commercials promise ‘No surprises,’ particularly unpleasant ones.”

Table 1
Performance Levels for Hypothetical Teacher

Key Results Area	Weight	Rank	Total Points
1. Classroom management	5	x 4	= 20
2. Program planning	5	x 3	= 15
3. Management of instructional time	5	x 3	= 15
4. Instructional presentation	5	x 3	= 15
5. Learning evaluation	5	x 3	= 15
6. Remediation and enrichment	5	x 4	= 20
Total Score for Key Results Area			100
<i>Objectives</i>			
1. Orientation to testing	20	x 3	= 60
2. Parent contacts	20	x 4	= 80
3. Classroom monitoring	30	x 3	= 90
			230
Total Score for Period			330

“At the beginning of the year, supervisors confer with each teacher to establish the weights to apply in each case. . . . When the conference ends, both teacher and supervisor know what key results areas the teacher will emphasize during this year, the degree of emphasis, and what behaviors will illustrate effective performance.”

Each of these key results areas is further elaborated, in the North Carolina system, with behavioral anchors to help observers recognize the behavior. Key results areas are helpful if the descriptions clarify what the behavior looks like and what its absence or opposite signifies. In management of student behavior, for example, the North Carolina system offers five behavioral anchors. One of them specifies: Teacher has established a set of rules and procedures that govern the handling of routine administrative matters.

Step Four: Weight the Key Results Areas

No teacher can be equally competent in all results areas; therefore, no system of performance management should aim for complete standardization. Every teacher will have areas of strength and preference.

After key results areas are specified and behavioral descriptions written at district level, supervisors can use the PM system with individual teachers. At the beginning of the year, supervisors confer with each teacher to establish the weights to apply in each case. We hope, of course, that every teacher will perform satisfactorily in all key results areas, and that different teachers will have valid reasons to emphasize one or more areas over the others. The conference establishes agreement between supervisor and teacher to address those areas differently.

One way to set weights, as in the example in Table 1, is to begin with a total of 100 points and assign, say, from 20–40 to the key results areas. When the conference ends, both teacher and supervisor know what key results areas the teacher will emphasize during this year, the degree of emphasis, and what behaviors will illustrate effective performance.

Using the North Carolina system, a teacher might agree that each of the eight key results areas will receive an equal weighting of five points. Another teacher, eager to emphasize management of instructional time, might assign 20 points to that area and distribute the remaining 20 points over the other seven areas. The weighting of the key results potentially could be different for every teacher in a school. It is a personalized process insofar as teachers influence the importance attached to key results areas. Individual schools or districts can, of course, further customize the process by developing the number of key results areas they prefer. There is no magic number.

Step Five: Jointly Determine Specific Objectives

Traditional methods of evaluation use a common form for every teacher. Performance management emphasizes each teacher's uniqueness while recognizing the need to support school system goals. In the fifth step of the PM process, teacher and supervisor create pertinent objectives designed to en-

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courage the teacher's growth and development and to reinforce school goals and objectives.

From three to five objectives could be developed for a year, with specific standards that permit teacher and supervisor to agree when the objectives have or have not been met. The objectives can grow out of the key results areas or from other professional activities that are important to a particular teacher's development. Then, the 60 to 80 points remaining from the 100 are assigned to those objectives.

The first-of-year conference between teacher and supervisor might, for example, result in the following objectives and weighting:

- Improve orientation to mathematics testing so that students are instructed in the purpose, importance, and uses of a test each time one is given. (20 points)

- Improve contact with parents. Contact the parents of each of my 20 advisees during the first two months of school. (20 points)

- Change the way my students are monitored during independent practice times, so that I can spend those times walking about the classroom and intervening frequently with individual students or work in an area (e.g., at the lectern), which permits me to be in constant touch with the level of activity of my students. (30 points)

Step Six: Assess Performance Levels

Once key results areas and objectives have been identified and weighted, a method of assessing performance levels must be established at the school or district level. In the North Carolina system, six levels of performance are possible: superior, well above standard, above standard, at standard, below standard, and unsatisfactory. In Washington, D.C., the model for performance management developed by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) for use with its own employees has five levels of perform-





ance: outstanding, above expectations, satisfactory, minimally satisfactory, and unsatisfactory (DHHS 1985). These levels of performance carry the following numerical equivalents:

Outstanding	4
Above Expectations	3
Satisfactory	2
Minimally Satisfactory	1
Unsatisfactory	0

In a school system, supervisors can use numerical rankings to establish performance levels for each teacher in each key results area and objective. Step Nine describes how to identify and communicate these performance levels to the teacher.

Step Seven: Monitor Performance

When the teacher and the supervisor are clear about the requirements of the job, have agreed upon the weighting of the key results, and have established and weighted individual objectives, the supervisor is responsible for gathering data so that recurring performance patterns can be identified and described accurately and objec-

tively. While there are literally dozens of ways to do this, none of the methods exclude the necessity for frequent classroom visits.

Performance management requires that the supervisor and the teacher agree on the level of performance the teacher attains in both key results and objectives. "Walking by and peering in" will not do it. However, many states and districts have approved research-based observation and data-collection methods (Florida Performance Measurement System 1983). These instruments, together with mature understanding of classroom life, can provide a great deal of useful data that will inform teachers' and supervisors' judgments about the teacher's performance and identify areas for improvement.

Step Eight: Progress Reviews

Performance management agrees with the national motel chain whose commercials promise "No surprises," particularly unpleasant ones. PM makes the same promise and can achieve it

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by regular and frequent feedback about a teacher's performance. Just as a rocket to the moon requires constant monitoring and corrective adjustments to hit its target, teachers need frequent feedback about their performance to achieve their goals.

Waiting until the end of the process to point out the need for adjustments is not only inadvisable, it is futile. At that point, past performance is being discussed, and nothing, absolutely nothing, can improve past performance. This is the greatest weakness of annual performance appraisals. One can evaluate teaching performance in retrospect, but cannot improve it. Performance management aims at improvement as well as evaluation.

Regular and frequent feedback to teachers need be neither formal nor lengthy. Brief visits with precise comments about observations, and rapport-building encouragement may be all that is required.

Step Nine: The Performance Management Interview

An effective performance management interview does not occur spontaneously; it must be carefully planned. The data from classroom observations have to be analyzed, synthesized, and evaluated. Performance patterns and trends must be identified and tentative judgments made by the supervisor about which key results areas and which objectives have been met and which have not. Lefton (1977) recommends grouping key results areas and objectives into three categories: those that the supervisor believes have been met, those that have not been met, and those about which the supervisor is uncertain. Keeping supervisory conclusions tentative is very important, since well-designed interviews feature teacher self-evaluation and negotiation with the supervisor as central components.

In addition, the supervisor should make tentative judgments about the reasons key results areas and objectives were or were not met. Did success or failure result from management or organizational shortcomings instead of the teacher's? Were the results caused by outside influences, such as health or family issues? Were the conclusions influenced by the supervisor's bias? Were results due to the teacher's technical skill?

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Once the supervisor sets the stage by these evaluations and tentative judgments, he or she should prepare psychologically for the interview. Performance management interviews usually require substantial time, a great deal of mental energy, careful concentration on communication skills, and, too frequently, the willingness to face unpleasant confrontations. All of these factors exact psychological costs. If the supervisor recognizes and prepares for this expenditure, the interview will be more effective.

The teacher, too, should prepare. In the PM process, he or she has the opportunity to review, in advance, the materials that are the basis for the supervisor's judgments and can prepare a self-evaluation. The teacher also needs to know, sufficiently in advance, the date of the interview.

The interview itself goes through several phases. To continue building rapport, the supervisor solicits and listens to the teacher's comments with empathy and understanding. It is crucial, however, that the supervisor let the teacher know areas of agreement and disagreement. The supervisor then explains his or her judgment on

performance levels in key results areas and objectives, reviewing one item at a time. The supervisor stops after each item to be certain that the teacher understands the evaluation to that point.

In the case portrayed in Table 1, the teacher and supervisor opted, during Steps Two through Five, to assign five points each to all six of the key results areas in this hypothetical system. The three objectives were assigned a total of 70 points. The ranking assigned to each key result area and objective reflects the supervisor's judgment of this teacher's performance based on observations, work samples, questionnaires, and other legitimate data. In this case, the teacher was judged to be outstanding (4) in two key results areas and one objective, and to have performed above expectations (3) in four key results areas and two objectives.

To reach the teacher's "standing" for the year, the performance level is multiplied by the weight, and all the points totalled. The teacher in Table 1 has a total of 330 points. Standing for the period under consideration is determined by comparing this figure to a pre-established district range, so the teacher knows where he or she stands. In this case, the teacher exceeds expectations for the period or year:

0-99	Unsatisfactory
100-199	Minimally Satisfactory
200-299	Fully Satisfactory
300-360	Exceeds Expectations
361-400	Outstanding

In the last phase of the management interview when the final rating is discussed, the supervisor may have to explain why inflated ratings are destructive, and why it is unlikely that every teacher could receive an outstanding rating every year. The supervisor expresses respect and regard for the teacher as a person, acknowledging the contribution he or she has made to the students and the school. Agreements and disagreements are summarized. Next steps are clarified, and follow-up is discussed.

Step Ten: Follow-up

Performance management does not stop with the management interview, but moves on to performance improvement. Preferably in a later conference, new objectives are set and weights assigned to both the objec-

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tives and the key results areas as they were at the beginning of the process. The teacher’s strengths are identified and built upon, and both teacher and supervisor make mutual commitments to reach specific improvement.

This is not the end of the process; it is only another beginning. After a teacher’s performance improvement needs have been identified, coaching and counseling, feedback and reinforcement, become even more important. The supervisor’s commitment to helping the teacher improve may have to be redoubled. The final step thus becomes the first.

A Continuing Process

There is, of course, much more to the process of improving teacher performance through PM than this brief outline allows. Indeed, PM is a difficult, continuing process, as corporate and government experience corroborates. It is, nonetheless, an important improvement in a century-long effort to improve evaluation techniques and teacher performance. Even with PM,

improved performance cannot be guaranteed. Without it, however, improved performance is almost impossible. □

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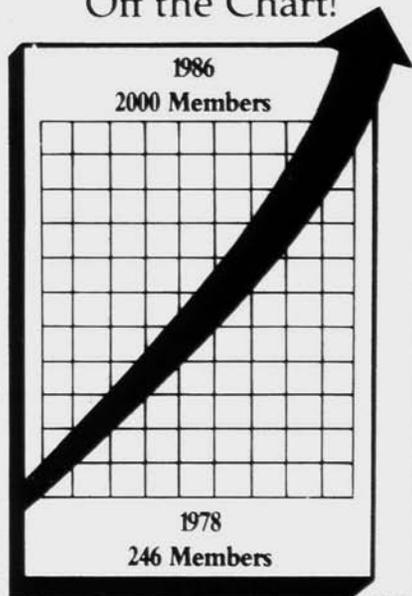
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