

PETER SCOTT CONSULTING

Briefing Note December 2022

How to enhance your Top Team's Performance - Part 2 Techniques to get the best out of your Top Team

In last month's Briefing Note <https://www.peterscottconsult.co.uk/briefings/Nov2022.pdf> I looked at how to identify your objectives for your Top Team, and those aspects of your Top Team's performance which will need to be enhanced if you are to achieve your objectives.

Having done that, the next step will be to agree with team members how their performance will need to be changed / improved to meet your objectives. However, changing the way people work and how their performance is to be managed is often the most difficult task.

Why is this? Sometimes it can be because:

- There is a fear of change on the part of people in an organisation and so leaders needs to work hard to allay these fears.
- There can be complacency on the part of some people – *"We don't need to change"*. However the world is changing around them and those who do not adapt to change, risk being left behind.
- Partnerships can be difficult organisations to manage, particularly if there is a lack of knowledge and skills within a firm as to how to manage a process of change

Where to start?

For the future, it is important to understand that your Top Team will want to know:

1. In which areas their performance will be measured and what will be their performance goals in each of those areas?
2. How their performance rates against those goals?

1. In which areas will their performance be measured and what will be their performance goals?

Consider those areas in which your Top Team's performance may need to be measured, together with their performance goals. For example:

Do all members of your Top Team currently have clear and agreed JOB DESCRIPTIONS and how do they view their roles and the performance which is required of them?

Here is an example of the requirements for the role of a Head of Department as agreed by one law firm (it is actually a good job description for a HoD)

Acts as an entrepreneur, strategically building a profitable and sustainable business (being accountable to the Partners for his / her part of the firm's business). Specifically taking full responsibility for:

- *People & operations: Building a team of motivated and highly competent people, and ensuring they are supported by efficient processes and IT so that excellent client service is delivered as consistently, efficiently, and profitably as possible.*
- *Marketing, BD & selling: Raising the public profile and image of the firm, developing services suited to client needs, implementing a focused BD plan, managing a sales pipeline and cross-selling to the firm's clients.*
- *Financial, risk & compliance: achieving agreed financial objectives and other KPIs, complying with regulations, and managing risks.*

Doing all of the above in a way that is aligned to achieving the firm's business plan and that puts the broader interests of the whole firm first.

Does each member of your Top Team have an AGREED PLAN for their team to, for example:

- Manage necessary change within the team?
- Develop their people?
- Grow the team strategically?
- Develop the team's clients?
- Build the team's financial strength?
- Manage risk and compliance?
- Build and protect the team's (and so the firm's) reputation?

How do your Top Team prioritise their work?

It is important that they differentiate between **urgent and important tasks** because an urgent task may not be important.

“Being ruthlessly focused means you have the ability to cancel out noise [i.e. something that seems so much more important than the actual task] and focus on what is important. It’s a strength in itself to be able to say something is not critical” - James Caan (of Dragon’s Den fame)

	URGENT	Not urgent
IMPORTANT	Urgent and important	Important but not urgent
Not important	Urgent but not important	Not urgent and not important

2. Both you and your Top Team will also want to know how their performance rates against the goals set and agreed

This should involve **obtaining** and **giving** feedback. However, in many law firms there are differing views on how best to **obtain** feedback on how the performance of people rates against their agreed goals. Here are some of the options available:

- Feedback only from those you report to?
- Feedback from your peer group (e.g. your partners) on a confidential basis?
- Feedback from those who report to you on a confidential basis?
- Feedback from all of the above on a confidential basis? i.e. 360° (all round) feedback

Why is peer / colleague review provided on a confidential basis, now often regarded as a preferred method to achieve the most objective and honest form of feedback?

Ask yourselves who is better placed than your peers / colleagues to provide feedback to build on peoples’ strengths, and to reinforce what they are already doing well and to identify what they could do better?

What is the effectiveness of the different ways of **giving** feedback? For example:

- ‘Downward only’ once a year? (The typical ‘appraisal’ which is often ‘one way only’ and too judgmental)

- on – going / informal? (The everyday process of giving feedback which if done well can often be the most effective form of giving feedback)
- Collaborative Performance Development Reviews? (Which can, if managed well, be very effective in improving performance and behaviour – see below).

Collaborative Performance Development Reviews

- Everyone needs to be ‘on-side’ if Collaborative Performance Development Reviews are to be successful
- Collaborative PDRs are a process by which a business works with its people to **together** plan, monitor and review their work objectives and overall contribution to the business
- They are a continuous process of setting objectives, assessing progress and providing on-going feedback and support (such as training, coaching, mentoring etc) to help everyone meet their objectives and career goals
- **Collaborative PDRs are NOT an annual form-filling exercise** but a process to help improve the performance and behaviour of everyone and as a result, the competitiveness of a Firm.

Characteristics of a ‘healthy’ PDR programme?

- Needs to be fair, transparent, and consistent
- Should be practical and easy to understand
- Should define and align each individual’s objectives with your Firm’s strategy and values, so everyone knows where they stand
- There should be realistic and achievable criteria to provide a touchstone for each individual’s development and which can serve as a basis for objective assessment
- There should not be a single ‘mould’, so PDRs should recognise the varying motivations and forms of contributions that different people can make, and then play to their strengths
- Monitoring and providing feedback should be a **collaborative** process whereby both reviewers and those being reviewed contribute by **two-way** communication
- The process should recognise that the main source of motivation for most professional people is their desire to achieve and to develop personally
- High performance should be **recognised** to reinforce positive behaviour, for example by:
 - acknowledging and saying ‘*thank you*’
 - celebrating successes
 - giving public recognition

PDRs should ideally also:

- Provide an accurate picture of an individual's performance and contribution to the Firm across a broad range of criteria
- Include positive feedback for a job well done and constructive feedback when improvement is needed, and a plan for how to improve performance
- Support decision-making about promotions and reward

The agreed follow-up to support development should then help to improve performance and behaviour, using training, coaching, mentoring etc as appropriate.

Setting and agreeing objectives

The outcome of each review meeting should be to **identify key development priorities**:

- Key strengths to build on and any areas where development may be needed
- Any support needed
- Individuals should be responsible for implementing their agreed objectives and development plans
- The reviewer (and others where appropriate) should be responsible for:
 - Offering a **support programme** to meet the needs of individuals
 - Periodically reviewing with individuals their progress in implementing their agreed objectives

How to get the best out of your Top Team?

To help maximise the full potential of your Top Team will require **investment** in them, and this is likely to involve you in ...

- Providing leadership and vision – see below
- Instilling values
- Empowering
- Supporting
- Tapping into and nurturing their ideas (you may not always know best!)
- Giving feedback and tackling difficult conversations
- Dealing with conflict and destructive politics
- Mentoring
- Coaching

- Training

Above all, ensure you have the **leadership** required to get the best out of your Top Team.

That is Leadership which is:

- Challenging and visionary
- Inspirational
- Has developed the agility to adapt its plans as new opportunities and threats emerge
- Recognises the need to change and has a determination to implement change, but also knows the partners and understands what can be realistically achieved
- Can build consensus that change is necessary and allows the partners to 'take ownership' of the changes

What is your plan to get the best out of your Top Team?

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