People management skills

Key concepts and terms

- *Competency*
- *Competency-based interview*
- *Criteria-referenced interview*
- *Open-ended question*
- *Person specification*

LEARNING OUTCOMES

On completing this chapter you should be able to define these key concepts. You should also understand:

- How to conduct a selection interview
- How to conduct a performance review meeting (an appraisal interview)
- How to ensure that people learn and develop
- How to make an effective presentation
- How to manage projects
- How to manage poor performance
- How to conduct a discipline meeting

Introduction

This chapter covers a number of the key people management skills used by managers and HR specialists.

How to conduct a selection interview

One of the most important people management tasks carried out by managers and HR specialists is to conduct a selection interview. The aim of such interviews is to provide answers to three fundamental questions:

- Can the individual do the job? Is the person capable of doing the work to the standard required?
- Will the individual do the job? Is the person well motivated?
- How is the individual likely to fit into the team? Will I and other team members be able to work well with this person?

Form of the selection interview

A selection interview should take the form of a conversation with a purpose. It is a conversation because candidates should be given the opportunity to talk freely about themselves and their careers. But the conversation has to be planned, directed and controlled to achieve your aims in the time available.

Your task as an interviewer is to draw candidates out to ensure that you get the information you want. Candidates should be encouraged to do most of the talking – one of the besetting sins of poor interviewers is that they talk too much. But you have to plan the structure of the interview to achieve its purpose and decide in advance the questions you need to ask – questions which will give you what you need to make an accurate assessment.

A selection interview has three sections:

- Beginning. At the start of the interview candidates are put at their ease. They need to be encouraged to talk freely in response to questions.
- Middle. This is where interviewers find out what they need to know about candidates to establish the extent to which they meet the requirements of the job as set out in a person or job specification. This indicates what experience, qualifications and competencies (characteristics of a person that result in effective job performance) are required. This part should take at least 80 per cent of the time, leaving, say, 5 per cent at the beginning and 15 per cent at the end.
- End. At the end of the interview candidates are given the opportunity to ask about the job and the company. More details about the job can be given to promising candidates who are told what the next step will be.

Preparing for the interview

Your first step in preparing for an interview is to familiarize or re-familiarize yourself with the person specification and candidate's CV, application form or letter. General questions should be prepared which will be put to all candidates, as well as specific questions for individuals about their career or qualifications.

Structuring the interview

The best approach is one that is criteria referenced, using competencies as the criteria (this is often called a competency-based interview). The competencies required should be set out in the person specification and the interviewer 'targets' these key criteria, having decided on what questions should be asked to draw out from candidates information about their competencies (knowledge, skills capabilities and personal qualities) which can be compared with the criteria to assess the extent to which candidates meet the specification.

Planning the interview

A biographical approach is probably the most popular because it is simple to use and logical. The interview can be sequenced chronologically, starting with the first job or even before that at school and, if appropriate, college or university. The succeeding jobs, if any, are then dealt with in turn, ending with the present job on which most time is spent if the candidate has been in it for a reasonable time. But using the chronological method for someone who has had a number of jobs can mean spending too much time on the earlier jobs, leaving insufficient time for the most important recent experiences. To overcome this problem, an alternative biographical approach is to start with the present job, which is discussed in some depth. The interviewer then works backwards, job by job, but only concentrating on particularly interesting or relevant experience in earlier jobs.

Interviewing techniques – asking questions

The interviewer's job is to draw the candidate out, at the same time ensuring that the information required is obtained. To this end it is desirable to ask a number of open-ended questions – questions which cannot be answered by yes or no and which promote a full response. But a good interviewer will have an armoury of other types of questions to be asked when appropriate, such as:

- Probing questions which ask for further details and explanations to ensure that the interviewer is getting all the facts.
- Closed questions which aim to clarify a point of fact and therefore require a single answer.

- Hypothetical questions to test how candidates would approach a typical problem.
- Behavioural event questions to get candidates to tell the interviewer how they would behave in situations which have been identified as critical to successful job performance.
- Capability questions to establish what candidates know, the skills they possess and use and their competencies – what they are capable of doing. These questions can be open, probing or closed but they will always be focused as precisely as possible on the contents of the person specification referring to knowledge, skills and competences.
- Continuity questions to keep the flow going in an interview and encourage candidates to enlarge on what they said, within limits.
- Playback questions to test understanding of what candidates have said by putting to them a statement of what it appears they have told the interviewer and asking them if they agree or disagree with the interviewer's version.

Avoid any questions that could be construed as being biased on the grounds of sex, sexual orientation, race, disability or age.

Ten useful questions

- What are the most important aspects of your present job?
- What do you think have been your most notable achievements in your career to date?
- What sort of problems have you successfully solved recently in your job?
- What have you learned from your present job?
- What has been your experience in…?
- What do you know about…?
- What particularly interests you in this job and why?
- Now you have heard more about the job, would you please tell me which aspects of your experience are most relevant?
- What do you think you can bring to this job?
- Is there anything else about your career which hasn't come out yet in this interview but you think I ought to hear?

Dos and don'ts of selection interviewing

TABLE 17.1 Dos and don'ts of selection interviewing

Do	Don't
• Plan the interview. • Give yourself sufficient time. • Use a structured interview approach wherever possible. • Create the right atmosphere. • Establish an easy and informal relationship – start with open questions. • Encourage the candidate to talk. • Cover the ground as planned, ensuring that you complete a prepared agenda and maintain continuity. • Analyse the candidate's career to reveal strengths, weaknesses and patterns of interest. • Make use of open questions which invite people to talk. • Ensure that questions are clear and unambiguous. • Get examples and instances of the successful application of knowledge, skills and the effective use of capabilities. • Make judgements on the basis of the factual information you have obtained about candidates' experience and attributes in relation to the person specification. • Keep control over the content and timing of the interview.	• Start the interview unprepared. • Plunge too quickly into demanding (probe) questions. • Ask multiple or leading questions. • Pay too much attention to isolated strengths or weaknesses. • Allow candidates to gloss over important facts. • Talk too much or allow candidates to ramble on. • Allow your prejudices to get the better of your capacity to make objective judgements. • Fall into the halo effect trap, ie drawing conclusions about a person on the basis of one or two good points, leading to the neglect of negative indicators. Or into the horns trap – focusing too much on one or two weak points. • Ask questions or make remarks that could be construed as in any way discriminatory. • Attempt too many interviews in a row.

How to conduct a performance review meeting

Performance review or appraisal meetings are a key part of a performance management system. Although performance management is a continuous process, it is still necessary to have a formal review once or twice yearly. This provides a focal point for the consideration of key performance and development issues. The performance review meeting is the means through which the five primary performance management elements of agreement, measurement, feedback, positive reinforcement and dialogue can be put to good use. It leads to the completion of the performance management cycle by informing performance and development agreements. It involves some form of assessment, often ratings. The term 'performance review' is better than 'performance appraisal' as the latter implies that the interview is just about telling people how well or badly they are doing. Performance review meetings are much more positive.

Purpose of the meeting

In a sense, a performance review meeting is a stock-taking exercise answering the questions 'Where have we got to?' and 'How did we get here?' But there is more to it than that. It is not just an historical affair, dwelling on the past and taking the form of a post mortem. The true purpose of the review is to answer the question 'Where do we go from here?' which means looking forward to what needs to be done by people to achieve the overall purpose of their jobs, to meet new challenges, to make even better use of their skills, knowledge and abilities and to develop their skills and competencies to further their career and increase their employability, within and outside the organization.

Conducting a constructive meeting

A constructive review meeting is most likely to take place if the manager or team leader:

- encourages individuals to do most of the talking; the aim should be to conduct the meeting as a dialogue rather than using it to make 'top down' pronouncements on what the manager thinks;
- listens actively to what the other person says;
- allows scope for reflection and analysis;
- provides feedback which analyses performance, not personality – concentrating on what individuals have done and achieved, not the sort of people they are;
- keeps the whole period under review, not concentrating on isolated or recent events;

- adopts a 'no surprises' approach – performance problems should have been identified and dealt with at the time they occurred;
- recognizes achievements and reinforces strengths;
- discusses any work or performance problems, how they have arisen and what can be done about them;
- ends the meeting positively with any necessary agreed action plans (learning and development and performance improvement).

How to ensure that people learn and develop

Ensuring that people learn and develop is an important responsibility of managers or team leaders, who need skilled, knowledgeable and competent people in their department or team. To improve the performance of their team members they must not only ensure that individuals learn the basic skills they need but also that they develop those skills to enable them to perform even better when faced with new demands and challenges. The HR or learning and development department also has the important responsibility of advising and helping line managers carry out their employee development role but additionally is likely to be responsible for the delivery of training.

Most learning happens at the place of work, although it can be supplemented by such activities as e-learning (the delivery of learning opportunities and support via computer, networked and web-based technology) and formal 'off-the-job' training courses. It is up to managers and team leaders to ensure that favourable conditions for learning on the job exist generally in their area. They may do this through coaching or mentoring or straightforward instruction as described in Chapter 3.

Line managers can also help people to develop through performance management. The performance planning part of the process involves agreement between the manager and the individual on what the latter needs to do to achieve objectives, raise standards, improve performance and develop the required competencies. It also establishes priorities – the key aspects of the job to which attention has to be given.

How to make an effective presentation

The three keys to delivering an effective presentation are:

- thorough preparation;
- good delivery;
- overcoming nervousness.

Thorough preparation

Allow yourself ample time for preparation. You will probably need at least 10 times as much as the duration of your talk. The main stages are:

1 Make yourself informed. Collect and assemble all the facts and arguments you can get hold of.

2 Decide what to say. Define the main messages you want to get across. Limit the number to three or four – few people can absorb more than this number of new ideas at any one time. Select the facts, arguments and examples that support your message.

3 Structure your talk into the classic beginning, middle and end:

   – Start thinking about the middle first, with your main messages and the supporting facts, arguments and illustrations.
   – Arrange your points so that a cumulative impact and a logical flow of ideas are achieved.
   – Then turn to the opening of your talk. Your objectives should be to create attention, arouse interest and inspire confidence. Give your audience a trailer to what you are going to say. Underline the objective of your presentation – what they will get out of it.
   – Finally, think about how you are going to close your talk. First and last impressions are very important. End on a high note.

4 Think carefully about length. Never talk for more than 40 minutes at a time. Twenty or 30 minutes is better.

5 Aim to keep the audience's attention throughout. Prepare interim summaries which reinforce what you are saying and, above all, hammer home your key points at intervals throughout your talk.

6 Ensure continuity. You should build your argument progressively until you come to a positive and convincing conclusion. Provide signposts, interim summaries and bridging sections which lead your audience naturally from one point to the next.

7 Prepare your notes. In the first place, write out your introductory and concluding remarks in full and set out in some detail the main text of your talk. It is not usually necessary to write everything down. You should then boil down your text to the key headings to which you will refer in your talk. Your aim should be to avoid reading your speech if you possibly can as this can remove any life from what you have to say. So as not to be pinned down behind a lectern, it is better to write your summarized points on lined index cards to which you can refer easily as you go along.

8 Prepare and use visual aids. As your audience will only absorb one-third of what you say, if that, reinforce your message with visual aids. Appeal to more than one sense at a time. PowerPoint slides provide good back-up, but don't overdo them and keep them simple. Too many

visuals can be distracting (use no more than 15 or so in a half-hour presentation) and too many words or an over-elaborate presentation will divert, bore and confuse your audience. As a rule of thumb, try not to put more than five or six bullet points on a slide. Ideally each point should contain no more than 10 words. Audiences dislike having to read a lot of small print on an over-busy slide. Breaking this rule is sometimes unavoidable when it is essential to convey a certain amount of information on the slide. If this is inevitable, go through the points very carefully and wherever possible issue the slide as a handout in advance. Use diagrams and charts wherever possible to break up the flow of words and illustrate points. If you want the members of your audience to read something fairly elaborate, distribute the material as a handout and take them through it

9 Rehearse. Rehearsal is vital. It instils confidence, helps you to get your timing right, and enables you to polish your opening and closing remarks and coordinate your talk and visual aids. Rehearse the talk to yourself several times and note how long each section takes. Get used to expanding on your notes without waffling. Practise giving your talk out loud – standing up, if that is the way you are going to present it. Get someone to hear you and provide constructive criticism. It may be hard to take but it could do you a world of good. But remember the Zen saying: 'Practise the performance, then forget the practice when you perform.'

10 Check arrangements in the room. Ensure that your projector works and you know how to operate it. Check also on focus and visibility. Before you begin your talk, check that your notes and visual aids are in the right order and to hand.

Good delivery

To deliver a presentation effectively the following approaches should be used:

- Talk audibly and check that you can be heard at the back. Your task is to project your voice. It's easier when there is a microphone, but even then you have to think about getting your words across.
- Vary the pace (not too fast, not too slow), pitch and emphasis of your delivery. Use pauses to make a point.
- Try to be conversational and as informal as the occasion requires (but not too casual).
- Convey that you truly believe in what you are saying. Audiences respond well to enthusiasm.
- Avoid a stilted delivery. That is why you must not read your talk. If you are your natural self, people are more likely to be on your side. They will forgive the occasional pause to find the right word.

- Light relief is a good thing but don't drag in irrelevant jokes or, indeed, make jokes at all if you are no good at telling them. You do not have to tell jokes.
- Use short words and sentences.
- Keep your eyes on the audience, moving from person to person to demonstrate that you are addressing them all, and also to gauge their reactions to what you are saying. Worry a little if they look at their watches. Worry even more if they shake their watches to find out if they have stopped.
- If you can manage without elaborate notes (your slides or a few cards may be sufficient), come out from behind the desk or lectern and get close to your audience. It is best to stand up so that you can project what you say more effectively unless it is a smallish meeting round a table.
- Use hands for gesture and emphasis in moderation (don't put them in your pocket – if you have one).
- Don't fidget.
- Stand naturally and upright.
- You can move around the platform a little to add variety – you don't want to look as if you are clutching the lectern for much-needed support. But avoid pacing up and down like a caged tiger.

Overcoming nervousness

Some nervousness is a good thing. It makes you prepare, makes you think and makes the adrenaline flow, thus raising performance. But excessive nervousness ruins your effectiveness and must be controlled.

The common reasons for excessive nervousness are: fear of failure, fear of looking foolish, fear of breakdown, a sense of inferiority and dread of the isolation of the speaker. To overcome nervousness you should:

- Practise. Take every opportunity you can get to speak in public. The more you do it, the more confident you will become. Solicit constructive criticism and act on it.
- Know your subject. Get the facts, examples and illustrations which you need to put across.
- Know your audience. Who is going to be there? What are they expecting to hear? What will they want to get out of listening to you?
- Know your objective. Make sure that you know what you want to achieve. Visualize, if you can, each member of your audience going away having learned something new which they are going to put to practical use.

- Prepare. If you know that you have prepared carefully, you will be much more confident on the day.
- Rehearse. This is an essential method of overcoming nervousness.

How to manage projects

HR professionals are involved in project management when they lead or take part in the introduction of a new HR system or process such as job evaluation, performance management or performance-related pay or, on a wider scale, when they are involved in an organization development programme. Project management is the planning, supervision and control of any activity or set of activities which leads to a defined outcome at a predetermined time and in accordance with specified performance or quality standards at a budgeted cost. It is concerned with deliverables – getting things done as required or promised. While delivering results on time is important, it is equally important to deliver them to meet the specification and within the projected cost.

Project management involves action planning – deciding what work is to be done, why the work needs to be done, who will do the work, how much it will cost, when the work has to be completed (totally or stage by stage) and where the work will be carried out. The three main project management activities are project planning, setting up the project and project control.

Project planning

Project planning starts with a definition of the objectives of the project, which is presented as a business case. This means answering three basic questions: (1) Why is this project needed? (2) What benefits are expected from the project? (3) How much will it cost? The answers to these questions should be quantified. The requirement could be spelt out in such terms as new systems, processes or facilities to meet defined business needs, new plant required for new products or to improve productivity or quality. The benefits are expressed as revenues generated, productivity, quality or performance improvements, added value, costs saved and return on investment.

Project planning involves deciding what resources are required – money and people. This is an investment process and investment appraisal techniques are used to ensure that the company's criteria on return on investment are satisfied. Cost–benefit analysis may be used to assess the degree to which the benefits justify the costs, time and number of people required by the project. This may mean identifying opportunity costs, which establish if a greater benefit would be obtained by investing the money or deploying the people on other projects or activities.

A performance specification is required which indicates what the expected outcome of the project is – how it should perform – and describes how it will operate. This leads to a project plan, which sets out:

- the major operations in sequence – the main stages of the project;
- a breakdown where appropriate of each major operation into a sequence of subsidiary tasks;
- an analysis of the interrelationships and interdependencies of major and subsidiary tasks;
- an estimate of the time required to complete each major operation or stage;
- a procurement plan to obtain the necessary materials, systems and equipment;
- a workforce resource plan which defines how many people will be allocated to the project with different skills at each stage and who is to be responsible for controlling the project as a whole and each of the major stages or operations.

Setting up the project

Setting up the project involves:

- obtaining and allocating resources;
- selecting and briefing the project management team;
- finalizing the project programme – defining each stage;
- defining and establishing control systems and reporting procedures (format and timing of progress reports);
- identifying key dates, stage by stage, for the project (milestones) and providing for milestone meetings to review progress and decide on any actions required.

Controlling the project

The three most important things to control are:

- time – achievement of project plan as programme;
- quality – achievement of project specifications;
- cost – containment of costs within budget.

Project control is based on progress reports showing what is being achieved against the plan. The planned completion date, actual achievement and forecast completion date for each stage or operation are provided. The likelihood of delays, overruns or bottlenecks is thus established so that corrective action can be taken in good time. Control can be achieved by the use of Gantt or bar charts and by reference to network plans or critical path analyses.

How to manage poor performance

The three major aspects of poor performance that need to be managed are absenteeism, poor timekeeping and incompetence (underperformers).

Absenteeism

A frequent people problem you probably have to face is that of dealing with absenteeism. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development established that absence levels in 2009 averaged 7.4 days per year per person. Your own organization should have figures which indicate average absence levels. If the levels in your department are below the average for the organization or, in the absence of that information, below the national average, you should not be complacent – you should continue to monitor the absence of individuals to find out whose absence levels are above the average and why. If your department's absence figures are significantly higher than the norm, you may have to take more direct action such as discussing with individuals whose absence rates are high the reasons for their absences, especially when these have been self-certificated. You may have to deal with recurrent short-term (one or two days) absence or longer-term sickness absence

Recurrent short-term absence

Dealing with people who are repeatedly absent for short periods can be difficult to handle. This is because it may be hard to determine when occasional absence becomes a problem or whether it is justifiable, perhaps on medical grounds.

So what do you do about it? Many organizations provide guidelines to managers on the 'trigger points' for action (the amount of absence which needs to be investigated), perhaps based on analyses of the incidence of short-term absence and the level at which it is regarded as acceptable (in some organizations software exists to generate analyses and data which can be made available direct to managers through a self-service system). If guidelines do not exist, managers should be able to obtain advice from an HR specialist, if one is available. In the absence of either of these sources of help and in particularly difficult cases, it may be advisable to recommend to higher management that advice is obtained from an employment law expert.

But this sort of guidance may not be available and you may have to make up your own mind on when to do something and what to do. A day off every other month may not be too serious – although if it happens regularly on a Monday (after weekends in Prague, Barcelona, etc?) or a Friday (before such weekends?), you may feel like having a word with the individual, not as a warning but just to let them know that you are aware of what is going on. There may be a medical or other acceptable explanation. Return-to-work interviews can provide valuable information. You see the individual and find out why the time was taken off, giving them ample opportunity to explain the absence.

After an unauthorized absence, you can conduct an informal return-to-work interview, simply asking why the absence took place and indicating, if appropriate, that the reasons given are insufficient and that similar behaviour should not be repeated. In persistent cases of absenteeism you should hold an absence review meeting. Although this would be more comprehensive than a return-to-work interview, it should not at this stage be presented as part of a disciplinary process. The meeting should be positive and constructive. If absence results from a health problem, you can find out what the employee is doing about it and if necessary suggest that their doctor should be consulted. Or absences may be caused by problems facing a parent or a carer. In such cases you should be sympathetic but you can reasonably discuss with the individual what steps can be taken to reduce the problem or you might be able to agree on flexible working if that can be arranged. The aim is to get the employee to discuss as openly as possible any factors affecting their attendance and to agree any constructive steps.

If after holding an attendance review meeting and, it is to be hoped, agreeing the steps necessary to reduce absenteeism, short-term absence persists without a satisfactory explanation, then another meeting can be held which emphasizes the employee's responsibility for attending work. Depending on the circumstances (each case should be dealt with on its merits), at this meeting you can link any positive support with an indication that following the provision of support you expect absence levels to improve over a defined timescale (an improvement period). If this does not happen, the individual can expect more formal disciplinary action.

To summarize, the steps you can take are to:

- study any organizational guidelines on the 'trigger points' for action (the amount of absence which needs to be investigated);
- analyse data on absence levels and discuss with individuals whose absence rates are high the reasons for their absences, especially when these have been self-certificated;
- conduct return-to-work interviews to find out why the time was taken off, giving the employee ample opportunity to explain the absence;
- in persistent cases of absenteeism, hold an absence review meeting in which an agreement is reached on how to improve absence levels over a defined timescale (an improvement period). Indicate that if this does not happen, the individual can expect more formal disciplinary action.

Dealing with long-term absence

Dealing with long-term absence can be difficult. The aim should be to facilitate the employee's return to work at the earliest reasonable point while

recognizing that in extreme cases the person may not be able to come back. In that case they can fairly be dismissed for lack of capability as long as:

- the employee has been consulted at all stages;
- contact has been maintained with the employee – this is something you can usefully do as long as you do not appear to be pressing them to return to work before they are ready;
- appropriate medical advice has been sought from the employee's own doctor; but the employee's consent is needed and employees have the right to see the report, and it may be desirable to obtain a second opinion;
- all reasonable options for alternative employment have been reviewed as well as any other means of facilitating a return to work.

The decision to dismiss should only be taken if these conditions are satisfied. It is a tricky one and you should seek advice before taking it.

Handling poor timekeeping

If you are faced with persistent lateness, the first step is to issue an informal warning to the individual concerned. If this has little effect, you may be forced to invoke the disciplinary procedure. If timekeeping does not improve, this could go through the successive stages of a recorded oral warning, a written warning and a final written warning. If the final warning does not work, disciplinary action would have to be taken; in serious cases this would mean dismissal.

Note that this raises the difficult question of time limits when you give a final warning that timekeeping must improve by a certain date: the improvement period. If it does improve by that date, and the slate is wiped clean, it might be assumed that the disciplinary procedure starts again from scratch if timekeeping deteriorates again. But it is in the nature of things that some people cannot sustain efforts to get to work on time for long, and deterioration often occurs. In these circumstances, do you have to keep on going through the warning cycles time after time? The answer ought to be no, and the best approach is to avoid stating a finite end date to a final warning period which implies a 'wipe the slate clean' approach. Instead, the warning should simply say that timekeeping performance will be reviewed on a stated date. If it has not improved, disciplinary action can be taken. If it has, no action will be taken, but the employee is warned that further deterioration will make them liable to disciplinary action which may well speed up the normal procedure, perhaps by only using the final warning stage and by reducing the elapsed time between the warning and the review date. There will come a time if poor timekeeping persists when you can say 'Enough is enough' and initiate disciplinary action.

Dealing with underperformers

You may have someone who is underperforming in your team. If so, what can you do about it? Essentially, you have to spot that there is a problem, understand the cause of the problem, decide on a remedy and make the remedy work.

Poor performance can be the fault of the individual but it could arise because of poor leadership or problems in the system of work. In the case of an individual, the reason may be that they fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Could not do it – ability.
- Did not know how to do it – skill.
- Would not do it – attitude.
- Did not fully understand what was expected of them.

Inadequate leadership from managers can be a cause of poor performance by individuals. It is the manager's responsibility to specify the results expected and the levels of skill and competence required. As likely as not, when people do not understand what they have to do, it is their manager who is to blame.

Performance can also be affected by the system of work. If this is badly planned and organized or does not function well, individuals cannot be blamed for the poor performance that results. This is the fault of management and they must put it right.

If inadequate individual performance cannot be attributed to poor leadership or the system of work, the following are the seven steps you can take to deal with underperformers:

- Identify the areas of underperformance – be specific.
- Establish the causes of poor performance.
- Agree on the action required.
- Ensure that the necessary support (coaching, training, extra resources, etc) is provided to ensure the action is successful.
- Monitor progress and provide feedback.
- Provide additional guidance as required.
- As a last resort, invoke the capability or disciplinary procedure, starting with an informal warning.

How to conduct a discipline meeting

If you have good reason to believe that disciplinary action is necessary, you need to take the following steps when planning and conducting a disciplinary interview:

- Get all the facts in advance, including statements from people involved.

- In writing, invite the employee to the meeting, explaining why it is being held and that they have the right to have someone present at the meeting on their behalf.
- Ensure that the employee has reasonable notice (ideally at least two days).
- Plan how you will conduct the meeting.
- Line up another member of management to attend the meeting with you to take notes (these can be important if there is an appeal) and generally provide support.
- Start the interview by stating the complaint to the employee and referring to the evidence.
- Give the employee plenty of time to respond and state their case.
- Take a break as required to consider the points raised and to relieve any pressure arising in the meeting.
- Consider what action is appropriate, if any. Actions should be staged, starting with a recorded oral warning, followed, if the problem continues, by a first written warning, then a final written warning and lastly, if the earlier stages have been exhausted, disciplinary action, which would be dismissal in serious cases.
- Deliver the decision, explaining why it has been taken and confirm it in writing.

KEY LEARNING POINTS

Selection interviewing

The aim of a selection interview is to provide answers to three fundamental questions: (1) Can the individual do the job? (2) Will the individual do the job? (3) How is the individual likely to fit into the team?

A selection interview should take the form of a conversation with a purpose. It has three sections:

- Beginning. At the start of the interview, candidates are put at their ease.
- Middle. This is where interviewers find out what they need to know about candidates to establish the extent to which they meet the requirements of the job as set out in a person or job specification.
- End. At the end of the interview, candidates are given the opportunity to ask about the job and the company. More details about the job can be given to promising candidates who are told what the next step will be.

Your first step in preparing for an interview is to familiarize or re-familiarize yourself with the person specification and candidate's CV, application form or letter.

The best approach to structuring the interview is one that is criteria and target based, using competencies as the criteria (this is often called a competency-based interview).

A biographical approach is probably the most popular because it is simple to use and appears to be logical.

The interviewer's job is to draw the candidate out, at the same time ensuring that the information required is obtained. To this end it is desirable to ask a number of open-ended questions – questions which cannot be answered by yes or no and which promote a full response. But a good interviewer will have an armoury of other types of questions to be asked when appropriate – probing, hypothetical, behaviour event and continuity.

Performance review meetings

The performance review meeting is the means through which the five primary performance management elements of agreement, measurement, feedback, positive reinforcement and dialogue can be put to good use.

A performance review meeting is a stock-taking exercise answering the questions 'Where have we got to?' and 'How did we get here?'

A constructive review meeting is most likely to take place if the manager or team leader encourages individuals to do most of the talking and listens actively to what they say, allows scope for reflection and analysis, provides feedback, analyses performance, not personality, keeps the whole period under review, adopts a 'no surprises' approach, recognizes achievements and reinforces strengths, discusses any work or performance problems, how they have arisen and what can be done about them, and ends the meeting positively with any necessary agreed action plans (learning and development and performance improvement).

How to ensure that people learn and develop

To improve the performance of their team members, managers must not only ensure that individuals learn the basic skills they need but also that they develop those skills to enable them to perform even better when faced with new demands and challenges.

The HR or learning and development department also has the important responsibility of advising and helping line managers carry out their employee development role but additionally is likely to be responsible for the delivery of training.

Presentations

The three keys to delivering an effective presentation are thorough preparation, good delivery and overcoming nervousness.

Project management

Project management is the planning, supervision and control of any activity or set of activities which leads to a defined outcome at a predetermined time and in accordance with specified performance or quality standards at a budgeted cost.

The three main project management activities are project planning, setting up the project and project control.

Handling absenteeism

You should continue to monitor the absence of individuals to find out whose absence levels are above average and why. If your department's absence figures are significantly higher than the norm, you may have to take more direct action such as discussing with individuals whose absence rates are high the reasons for their absences, especially when these have been self-certificated. You may have to deal with recurrent short-term (one or two days) absence or longer-term sickness absence.

Handling poor timekeeping

If you are faced with persistent lateness and your informal warnings to the individual concerned seem to have little effect, you may be forced to invoke the disciplinary procedure. If timekeeping does not improve, this could go through the successive stages of a recorded oral warning, a written warning and a final written warning. If the final warning does not work, disciplinary action would have to be taken; in serious cases this would mean dismissal.

Handling poor performance

These are the seven steps you can take to deal with underperformers:

- Identify the areas of underperformance – be specific.
- Establish the causes of poor performance.
- Agree on the action required.
- Ensure that the necessary support (coaching, training, extra resources, etc) is provided to ensure the action is successful.
- Monitor progress and provide feedback.
- Provide additional guidance as required.
- As a last resort, invoke the capability or disciplinary procedure, starting with an informal warning.

How to conduct a discipline meeting

If you have good reason to believe that disciplinary action is necessary, you need to get all the facts in advance, plan how you will conduct the meeting, line up another member of management to attend the meeting with you to take notes, start the interview by stating the complaint to the employee and referring to the evidence, give the employee plenty of time to respond and state their case, consider what action is appropriate, if any, and deliver the decision, explaining why it has been taken, and confirm it in writing.

Reference

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2009) *Survey of Absence Management*, London, CIPD

Questions

1 What are the aims of a selection interview?
2 What is the form of a selection interview?
3 What are the sections in a selection interview?
4 How should an interview be structured?
5 In what ways can interviews be planned?
6 What approach is required in asking questions?
7 What is an open question?
8 What is a closed question?
9 What are the key 'dos' in selection interviews?
10 What are the main 'don'ts' in selection interviews?
11 What is the purpose of a performance management review meeting?
12 What are the most important approaches to conducting a constructive performance management review meeting?
13 What can line managers do to help people learn and develop?
14 What are the main requirements for an effective presentation?
15 How should you prepare a presentation?
16 What are the key points to remember when delivering a presentation?
17 How can you overcome nervousness in making a presentation?
18 What is project management?
19 What is involved in project planning?
20 What is involved in setting up a project?
21 What are the three most important things to control in conducting a project?
22 How should you handle absenteeism?
23 How do you handle poor timekeeping?
24 How do you deal with poor performance?