

**UNLOCKING PERFORMANCE:**  
The missed opportunities

Threshold<sup>TM</sup>

## Unlocking performance:

### The missed opportunities

Our hypothesis is that most corporations assume that line-managers 'performance-manage' their people. By this we mean an active process of communicating with their people to help to draw out the best performance.

We sought to test the extent to which this is genuinely happening by asking for the perceptions of employees.

The survey was conducted by YouGov on behalf of Threshold, using an online interview administered members of the YouGov Plc GB panel of over 185,000 individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. An email was sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample according to the sample definition, inviting them to take part in the survey and providing a link to the survey. The responding sample is weighted to the profile of the sample definition to provide a representative reporting sample.

### The myth of performance management

The results of the survey challenge the assumption that line-managers actively communicate with their reports in order to draw out their best performance.

- Less than half of employees (44%) feel that they receive helpful feedback from [their] line manager frequently enough.
- And scarcely more than half (51%) feel that their line-manager is good at giving straight honest feedback.
- Considerably less than half (41%) feel that their line-manger gives performance feedback that is detailed and specific.
- And again considerably less than half (44%) feel that they receive regular enough feedback from [their] line manager that helps me to do my job better
- We were interested to know the extent to which employees feel that line-managers clearly describe the performance standards that [he or she] expects. Scarcely more than half of employees feel that this is the case (52%)
- And do employees know the performance standards on which their line manager is evaluating their performance? Considerably less than half feel that these standards have been communicated to them (44%)
- It also appears that most employees do not feel that under-performance is effectively tackled in their organization. Only 30% of employees agree with the statement: *Where I work under-performance is discussed openly and honestly.*
- It would appear that there is a lack of 'straight-talk' at work. When asked whether line managers are good at giving straight-talking feedback, scarcely more than a third agree (34%)

- So given the importance of honest feedback in the work place, to what extent do companies support their people with training to help them give feedback? It seems that less than a third of employees do so (32%)

Feedback and setting clear standards and expectations are key elements of performance management. Threshold contends that of equal importance are issues such as understanding and focusing on strengths and helping to overcome weaknesses. Here, the results are equally salutary.

- When asked *'If there are any obstacles to my performance, my line manager is good/ would be good at helping me to solve the problem'* only half or employees agree with the statement.
- Further more when asked: *'If I have a weakness my line manager offers/ would offer good support in helping me to address it'* less than half (49%) agree with the statement.
- Only 55% of employees believe that their line-manager genuinely understands their strengths
- And scarcely more than a third of employees (38%) feel that their line-manager encourages [them] to talk about [their] strengths.

### **Unlocking discretionary effort**

The findings maybe eye-opening for all of those corporations who assume that their line-managers actively manage performance, but a crucial question is of course whether or not these findings really matter to the bottom-line. The short answer is yes.

If performance-managed well, are employees more likely to commit additional discretionary effort to their work? The research shows that there is a clear correlation between the parameters above and discretionary effort.

We define the 'high-discretionary-effort group' as those who answer 'strongly agree' to the question: *'I feel motivated to put exceptional effort into my job, and do more than what's asked of me'*

**Performance feedback and setting and communicating standards and expectations Pt I**

	All employees	High discretionary effort
I feel I receive helpful feedback from my line manager frequently enough	45%	75%
'My line manager is good at giving straight, honest feedback'	51%	81%
My line manger gives me performance feedback that is detailed and specific	41%	73%
I feel I receive regular enough feedback from my line manager that helps me to do my job better	44%	75%
My line manager has clearly described the performance standard that he/ she currently expects of me	52%	78%

**Performance feedback and setting and communicating standards and expectations Pt II**

	All employees	High discretionary effort
In my place of work line managers are well trained in how to give honest feedback	35%	69%
My line manger clearly communicates the performance standards that he/ she uses to evaluate my performance	43%	77%
Where I work, under performance is discussed openly and honestly	30%	58%
My company supports me with helpful training in how to give honest feedback to others	32%	72%
Where I work managers tend to be good at giving straight-talking feedback	34%	70%

## Strengths and weaknesses

	All employees	High discretionary effort
I believe my line manager genuinely understands my strengths	55%	87%
My line manager encourages me to talk about my strengths	37%	81%
If I have a weakness my line manager offers/ would offer good support in helping me to address it	46%	%
If there are any obstacles to my performance, my line manager is good/ would be good at helping me to solve the problem	50%	78%

## Does training in giving feedback pay? Pt. I

	All employees	In place of work... line managers trained to give feedback*
I feel I receive helpful feedback from my line manager frequently enough	45%	97%
'My line manager is good at giving straight, honest feedback'	51%	96%
My line manger gives me performance feedback that is detailed and specific	41%	89%
I feel I receive regular enough feedback from my line manager that helps me to do my job better	44%	96%
My line manager has clearly described the performance standard that he/ she currently expects of me	52%	96%

\* % responding 'strongly agree' to 'In my place of work, line-managers are well trained in how to give honest feedback'

## Does training in giving feedback pay? Pt. I I

	All employees	In place of work... line managers trained to give feedback*
My line manger clearly communicates the performance standards that he/ she uses to evaluate my performance	43%	90%
Where I work, under performance is discussed openly and honestly	30%	82%
My company supports me with helpful training in how to give honest feedback to others	32%	83%
Where I work managers tend to be good at giving straight-talking feedback	34%	87%

\* % responding 'strongly agree' to 'In my place of work, line-managers are well trained in how to give honest feedback'

## Does training in giving feedback pay? Pt. I I I

	All employees	In place of work... line managers trained to give feedback*
I believe my line manager genuinely understands my strengths	55%	94%
My line manager encourages me to talk about my strengths	37%	87%
If I have a weakness my line manager offers/ would offer good support in helping me to address it	46%	95%
If there are any obstacles to my performance, my line manager is good/ would be good at helping me to solve the problem	50%	95%

\* % responding 'strongly agree' to 'In my place of work, line-managers are well trained in how to give honest feedback'

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