

MKA: Making Knowledge Accessible

MKA Risk Mitigation has had a big year. Features writer Wendy Taylor provided wonderful coverage of stress prevention project in the Sydney Morning Herald in June 2004.



There were speaking engagements at the National Safety Council Conference in June 2004 and at the Public Sector

Human Resources Conference in November 2004. We plan to start 2005 on a high note with the launch of our new website which will contain articles and papers on a variety of risk mitigation topics. In the current newsletter we will focus on the topic of performance management.

MKA Risk Mitigation will be closed from 24th December 2004 and will reopen on 17th January 2005.

We would like to thank everyone for their support and wish all our customers a safe happy festive season.

Performance Management

Who enjoys it?

No manager enjoys having to conduct annual performance reviews. Managers typically watch the appointed date for the annual documented discussion approaching with ambivalence. They look forward to being able to share positive feedback and recognise proficient performance. On the flip side, no manager looks forward to criticising their workers, they fear denial, anger and at worst total disengagement of the employee from the work place.

Situational Constraints and Enhancers

Performance management is about removing the obstacles to good performance and helping workers to achieve their best. It is about creating a culture of excellence. The starting point has to be an assessment of the obstacles to good performance from systemic perspective. By this we mean, starting with a list of "situational constraints and enhancers". Do workers really have everything they need to do the job? There was one case where an employee was marked for poor performance because he had failed to participate in any accredited training courses. The fact that there were no training courses for a factory cleaner seemed to be beside the point.

The next consideration is whether the performance management system is really rewarding and promoting the behaviours required in a work place. Scott Adams in Dilbert Future tells an apocryphal tale of where a call centre tried to reward employees for the number of calls that were made. The employees discovered that by calling oneself using a redial function they could hugely boost their "recognised performance." It was a great success in terms of call statistics, just offset by an increase in dissatisfied customers who could not get through to phone operators! If employees are not displaying the behaviours that management wants, is it because management is not formally including those behaviours within the performance management systems. If an employer wants to see more team behaviours, then that employer has to reward and recognise co-workers helping each other, and not just focus on individual output.

Using Empathy to Beat Denial

What if an employee does not want to hear what is being said? Could it be that management did not give the employee the full chance to put their case forward? To shift employees from "c grade" to "a grade" performance, a manager has to first identify where

Performance Management

that employee “is at” in terms of their perspectives on performance levels. If an employee does not recognise that there are areas for improvement, what are they basing this assumption on? Is it because the employee is not aware of the required standards or how their performance stacks up against general performance levels for the work place?

Empathic listening

Empathic listening and having a comprehensive understanding of how the situation looks to an employee is essential in enhancing performance. Before launching into strategies for improvement, check with the employee that they feel you have really understood their point of view.

If a manager charges in before achieving this level of rapport, then negative feedback will trigger the employee’s defensiveness, once a person is defensive then they stop listening. When you have a lot of negative feedback to give an employee, monitor their body language. If they are beginning to shift uncomfortably hold off delivering the next lot of suggestions. There is no point in deluging a worker with more negative criticism then they can cope with, because the worker’s defence mechanisms will click into place and shut out what is being said. It is important to space the negative feedback in manageable lots.

Disclaimer *The material contained herein is not intended to be a comprehensive checklist of strategies to deal with performance management issues. This newsletter provides general advice only and does not constitute a prescription for a specific workplace or circumstances; if a legal opinion is required you should consult with your solicitor. This material is reproduced with the permission of the NSW Attorney General’s Department.*

Establishing Performance Management Systems

A job analysis is an essential foundation step for creating a performance management system. If the performance management system is ever contested industrially, an employer will need to demonstrate the relevance of various performance criteria to the work actually being performed.

In his evidence for the Hunter Valley No. 1 Reinstatement Proceedings 1997 to 1998, Doctor John Shields referred to the incorporation of due process. There were three key features for “Due Process” – (1) adequate notice (2) fair hearing (3) judgement based on evidence.

Adequate notice means that objectives and standards are laid down in advance, published, widely distributed and explained. There is discussion between employers and employees about how standards were established, and how they will be implemented. Feedback is provided in a timely and frequent fashion.

Fair hearing refers to the rater’s familiarity with the workers performance, and that they observe an employee’s performance on a frequent basis. Fair hearing also refers to workers having an opportunity to express their own point of view and / or present alternative about their performance. Fair hearing also suggests that managers include adequate work place appeal mechanisms, where the perform-

ance evaluation can be reviewed by another manager.

Judgement based on evidence indicates that the manager doing the rating applies standards consistently and impartially. It also means that managers are able to explain to employees how they came to particular conclusions about the workers performance. It also means that evaluations can withstand scrutiny such as that which might be associated with legal or work place appeal.

Future Topics

- **Fatigue to Energy**
- **Stress Prevention**
- **Adventurous work places without risk**
- **Positive Mental Health at Work**
- **Goodbye Chronic Pain**
- **Mediation that Works**
- **Safety Culture Plus**
- **Real Team Building**



MKA: Risk Mitigation

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