

## Why is IPR so unpopular? (and what can we do about it?)

Peter English looks at how to conduct a more effective appraisal meeting to avoid people feeling it is a waste of time.

Over the years I've trained thousands of people in how to conduct an annual performance review. At the start of each session I ask the group two questions:

- What are the benefits of IPRs?
- What are the downsides of IPRs?

Almost without exception, the group identifies many more downsides than benefits, and expresses more negativity than optimism about the process. It's clear that for many people the annual IPR meeting consists of a perfunctory discussion of what to put in the various boxes which make up the organisation's appraisal forms. One UK survey by Investors In People found that 29% of staff view their appraisal as a waste of time.

Why is this? IPR has been part of the organisational landscape for decades and we know that there is a clear correlation between an organisation's effectiveness and how well the IPR process is working. I believe that, done well, IPR can be a powerful way of focusing effort and increasing motivation. The problem is, it often isn't done well.

What can a switched-on HR team do about this? Well, you could ensure that your appraisal training and briefing sessions focus more on the skills involved in conducting an IPR meeting, and less on the process – particularly the appraisal forms.

I recommend that an IPR training session should emphasise the following points:

### 1. Let managers and staff set the agenda.

The best appraisal conversations are ones where both parties talk about things that they really want to discuss. Encourage managers and staff to let each other know a week or so in advance of the IPR meeting what issues they want to talk about. This gives each person enough time to think about the subjects that will be discussed, (something that is especially important for introverts).

### 2. Location matters.

The default venue for most IPR meetings is the

manager's office. However, this has a couple of major disadvantages (too many distractions and a feeling of an end-of-term summons to the headteacher's office). Encourage managers to book a meeting room, or use a colleague's office. Suggest that they set the chairs at right angles – this reduces the likelihood of the conversation taking on an adversarial tone.

### 3. Promote 360-degree feedback.

This doesn't have to be an unwieldy process. It often works best when the manager simply asks the appraisee (before the meeting) who they would like feedback from as part of their IPR. The manager can then collect this feedback on behalf of the appraisee. This can be particularly helpful when the manager hasn't seen a great deal of the appraisee's work (for example, because the manager is new in post or is based in a different location).

### 4. The person, not the paperwork.

The most common problem with the IPR meeting is that it becomes a meeting which is focused mainly on getting the forms completed. Managers and staff need to hear from the HR department that the primary purpose of IPR isn't getting the forms filled in: it's to have a thoughtful, reflective conversation about performance, learning needs and career aspirations.

Peter English is an independent consultant specialising in leadership development and personal effectiveness. Peter can be contacted via his website [www.peterenglish.co.uk](http://www.peterenglish.co.uk) or [pete@peterenglish.co.uk](mailto:pete@peterenglish.co.uk)

### Reference

West, M.A., Borrill C., Dawson, J, Scully, J., Carter, M., Anelay, S., Patterson, M., Waring, J. (2002) The link between the management of employees and patient mortality in acute hospitals, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 13, 8, 1299–1310.



Peter English  
Independent  
consultant

### Are your HPMA colleagues getting eNetwork

If you or any of your colleagues have experienced problems downloading, viewing or receiving the latest issues of the electronic newsletter, please email [admin@hpma.org.uk](mailto:admin@hpma.org.uk)