



# Creating an Effective Project Team Performance Assessment Process

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**You Can't Do Things the Way You Always  
Have and Expect Different Results!**

# The Situation

A team of experts is assembled for the duration of a project creating a matrix organization

Team members are managed locally but “owned” by a distant permanent manager who is responsible for:

- Annual performance assessments
- Pay raise recommendations
- Promotions
- Disciplinary actions

The “permanent” manager does not witness their daily performance and must rely on second-hand information from the project department manager to make performance assessments.

The accuracy of this information may or may not be

- **Consistent** (Are the “significant few” vs. the “trivial many” tasks always evaluated?)
- **Objective** (Focused on *measurable* behavior and not subjective opinion?)
- **Relevant to project tasks** (Any project politics or personal prejudices involved?)
- **Timely** (Is data provided in time to make a thoughtful appraisal?)

The project team member's faith in this performance assessment process will impact his or her:

- Morale
- Motivation
- Job Satisfaction
- Productivity
- Overall value to the project



# The Business Performance Improvement Opportunity

A performance assessment system viewed as objective, fair, and credible would go a long way to improve a project team member's:

- Morale
- Motivation
- Job Satisfaction
- Productivity
- Overall value to the project



As project team members become more productive, project “success” becomes more of a reality.

The time spent in team “forming”, “storming”, and “norming” stages is greatly reduced and “performing” begins sooner.



As project success potential increases, the career path of the PM brightens.

**(Always a good thing!)**

Organizations using this process may develop a reputation for faster, more successful projects.

# What *Should* an Effective Performance Assessment Process Require?

All project job functions *should* have an objective (measurable) range of performance values understood and followed by all participants.

There *should* be ways for team members to get feedback on their performance without having to wait for managers to tell them.

It *should* become a *permanent infrastructure asset* for the company using it thus increasing their project management value to clients.

The system must also provide protection from

- “Project politics”
- Loss of past performance recognition if a new manager takes over from the previous one
- Capricious definitions of work performance levels by various members of the project’s management team
- Managers who are not reliable performance record keepers
- Management’s personal standards vs. project standards

There should be periodic meetings between employee & supervisor to discuss performance progress and plans for the next period of performance.

The periodic project performance scores should go to the permanent manager to provide the basis for annual performance assessments.

# What Implications for Use Are There For Other PMs or Projects?

The greatest implication is that project team experience with this process can allow them to achieve maximum productivity sooner on subsequent projects because the “forming and storming” stages have been reduced or (possibly) eliminated.

The PM can easily move the functional task list from one project to the next because the task-specific functions do not change:

- Project Accountants will always do accounting tasks
- Project Safety specialists will always do safety tasks
- Document Control specialists will always do doc control tasks

A new PM coming in to take over from a previous one need only review the objective (measurable) performance results to learn the quality of the staff:

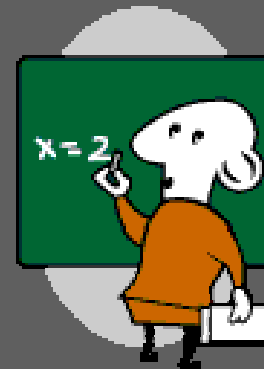
- The “rising stars” stand out regardless of social or political skills
- The “falling stars” stand out regardless of social or political skills
- The project team stays focused on project tasks and is not distracted by trying to impress the new boss

A PM who takes key project members from one project to the next shortens the staffing “learning curve” because:

- Project functions are transferable (previous slide)
- Everyone understands the “grade school” model
- As more understand it, use it, and gain confidence in it, the faster the process spreads

A major portion of the project's administrative workload goes away because it is simply the *re-application of an existing successful process*, not the invention of a new one for each project.

(The grade school teachers did not invent a new grading system each time a new class arrived. They simply inserted the new class into the old system!)



# Linking Theory to Practice

Think back to grade school when:

- The teacher told you at the beginning of the year what the grading system looked like
- You got test, homework, and class work grades back in a timely manner so you could track your progress
- You always had a good idea of how you were doing academically allowing you to:
  - Ask for “extra work” in case you were in danger of getting grounded by Mom and Dad because of low grades
  - “Cruise” through the final because your grades were already high enough to satisfy the “authorities” (Mom and Dad)

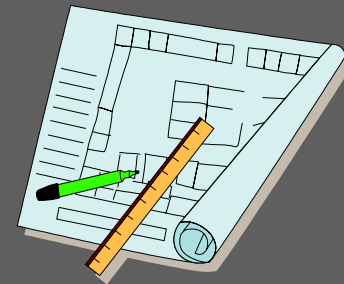
- Your permanent teacher could take a 2 month maternity leave but you were confident the substitute would follow the curriculum, the grading process, and your grades would not suffer.
- You self-managed your academic performance because you were confident that you, the teacher, and your parents shared the same definitions of what an "A", "B", "C", "D", or "F" was.
- Your final grade for the year was the average of your periodic report cards – not the most recent behavior that the teacher remembered.

# Comparing the “School Model”



The school model

The teacher told you at the beginning of the year what the grading system looked like.



The project comparison

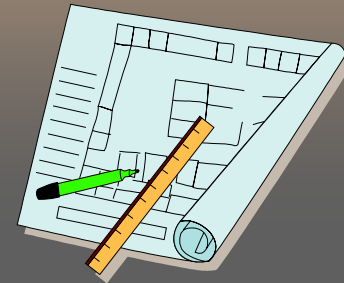
New project members go through an orientation to explain the process.



## The school model

You got test, homework, and class work grades back in a timely manner.

You always knew how you were doing academically.



## The project comparison

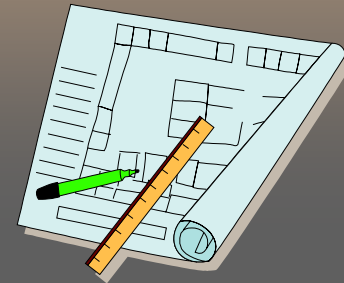
Work performance feedback systems are created to provide performance “grades” in a timely manner.

You can always tell how you are doing relative to your goals.



## The school model

Your permanent teacher could take a 2 month maternity leave but you were confident the substitute would follow the curriculum, the grading process, and your grades would not suffer.



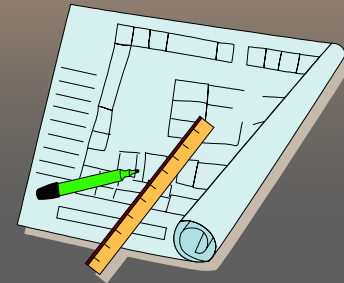
## The project comparison

Your project boss takes a 2 month maternity leave but you are confident the substitute will follow the established process and your "grades" will not suffer.



## The school model

You self-managed your academic performance because you were confident that you, the teacher, and your parents shared the same definitions of what an "A", "B", "C", "D", or "F" was.



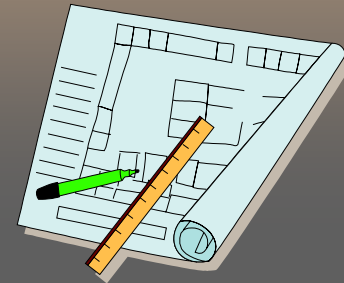
## The project comparison

You can self-manage your work performance because you are confident that you, your project boss, and your permanent boss share the same definitions of what an "A", "B", "C", "D", or "F" is.



## The school model

Your final grade for the year was the average of your periodic report cards – not the most recent behavior that the teacher remembered.



## The project comparison

Your final grade for the year is the average of your periodic “report cards” – not the most recent behavior that the project boss remembered.

# Developing the “School Model” for Use on Your Project

“Hard skills” (professional skills) are the skills that define their job function: mechanical engineer, IT specialist, administrative support, HR recruiter, etc.

“Soft skills” (project skills) are the skills that are needed to function within the project team: teamwork, community service, customer service, safety, etc.

Each position has a combination of both that must be used to justify its (the position, not the person) inclusion on the project.

Example: the mechanical engineer must use his or her hard skills (mechanical engineering) as well as demonstrate effective soft skills in teamwork, community service, client services, safety, etc.

We can graphically demonstrate this using a vertical component of hard skills that only apply to positions like this and a horizontal component of soft skills that apply equally to everyone on the project.

(Vertical)

Hard skills  
that only  
apply to  
positions  
like this:

Mech.

Engineer

(Vertical)

Hard skills  
that only  
apply to  
positions  
like this:

Admin

support



(Vertical)

Hard skills  
that only  
apply to  
positions  
like this:

IT

Specialist

(Horizontal) soft skills such as team work that apply equally to everyone on this project.

 <b>“Hard Skills”</b> are <u>within</u> functions. 	(Vertical) hard skills only performed by this function	(Vertical) hard skills only performed by this function	(Vertical) hard skills only performed by this function
	<b>Mechanical Engineer</b>	<b>Administrative Support</b>	<b>IT Specialist</b>
	Checks drawings of mechanical installations; certifies changes in equipment size; authorizes equipment expenditures up to \$100,000	Copies and distributes PM's daily reports; maintains time sheets of hourly staff; writes project weekly newsletter; updates project contact list	Solve client PC usage problems; add and update new releases of software as required; install, test, and train user on new hardware
<b>Team Work</b>	Do the things defined by the project team as “team work”.		
<b>Client Service</b>	Do the things described by the project team as “Client Service”.		



**“Soft Skills”** are across functions.



Next, we must identify the “significant few” tasks (as opposed to the “trivial many”) within the hard and soft skills of each position.

The Pareto 80/20 rule can be used here: *“What are the 20% of this position’s hard skills that will make up 80% of their project activities?”*

The “significant few” hard skills for the IT Specialist:

- Solve client PC usage problems
- Add and update new releases of software as required
- Install, test, and train users on new hardware

The “significant few” soft skills for the IT Specialist:

- “Team work” behaviors.
- “Client service” behaviors. (a few slides ahead)

Our analysis of the “significant few” hard and soft skills for each position requires consideration of **QUALITY** (how well), **QUANTITY** (how many), and **TIME** (by when) to construct measurable and meaningful performance criteria.

We will use these QQT elements to construct **performance ranges** modeled on the school concept of “A”, “B”, “C”, “D”, and “F”.

**NOTE: Tasks which do not include all three QQT elements result in performers that are simply BUSY, not PRODUCTIVE.**

# Establishing a Hard Skills Performance Range

The IT Specialist position focusing on a significant hard skill of *“solving client PC usage problems.”*



HINT: The easiest way to start using the “A”, “B”, “C”, “D”, and “F” concept is to consider the performance definition of a “C” by asking yourself, *“What is the least they can do to get by without penalty?”*

Any performance above this is better (“B” and “A”) while anything less than this (“D” and “F”) is worse.

After much consideration and discussion among members of the IT department back in the permanent location and project department heads, we decide that a "C" for hard skills would be:

*"Occasionally (80%-89% of the time\*) needs assistance to resolve unfamiliar problems. Can resolve most\* problems on her own. Most\* problems are resolved within the established time frames."*

\* We will talk about defining terms like this later in the presentation.

Progressively better and worse performance could look like this:

- "A" = Consistently (98 - 100%\*) able to resolve problems on your own and all problems resolved within the established time frames.
- "B" = Most of the time (90%-97%\*), is able able to resolve problems on your own; however some assistance is needed from other team members on difficult or complex problems. All problems are resolved within the established time frames.
- "C" = (previous slide)
- "D" = Needs to improve; assistance is needed from other team members to resolve problems which are not complex.
- "F" = Needs to develop; assistance is needed from other team members to resolve most problems; or problems are not resolved within the established time frames\*.

**QUALITY** is the variable creating the performance range in these examples by implicitly asking, *"How good are they at solving problems on their own?"*

As the percentage of unassisted problem solving increases, their scores improve and conversely.

**QUANTITY** is implied with the word "problems". This means "all problems that occur" because it is meaningless to attempt to predict the number of problems they will encounter.

**TIME** is addressed via "established time frames" implying there are departmental standards available as a reference that we all follow.

# Establishing a Soft Skills Performance Range

The IT Specialist position focusing on a significant soft skill of "*client service.*"



After much consideration and discussion among members of the IT department back in the permanent location and project department heads, we decide that a "C" for soft skills would be:

*"Evidence exists\* to show that at least 5 times this quarter the specialist provided unsolicited guidelines, tips, or tools to users that may be unfamiliar with the project's software applications; was 'solution focused' instead of 'obstacle obsessed' when replying to client questions; asked team members how the IT department can make their project work easier."*

Progressively better and worse performance could look like this:

"A" = All of "C" but more than 15 times.

"B" = All of "C" but more than 5 times but less than 15 times.

"C" = (previous slide)

"D" = All of "C" but less than 5 times.

"F" = No evidence exists that the specialist made any attempt to do this.

**QUANTITY** is the variable creating the performance range in these examples by implicitly asking, *"How many documented times have you tried to go beyond reactive problem solving and been proactive in making their jobs easier?"*

As the amount of documented events increases, their scores improve and conversely.

**QUALITY** is implied by assuming they are satisfied or delighted with the unexpected offer of help. If they were not, you would be getting complaints.

**TIME** is addressed via the activity occurring within the observation period. There is no deadline for offering unsolicited help like there is for problem solving.

Items with an asterisk (\*) are resolved using the “Monopoly Rule”.



Many people play the board game Monopoly by putting penalty assessments (road repairs, luxury tax, charitable donations, etc.) into the center of the board until someone lands on “Free Parking”.

When that happens, the player collects the cash from the center!

Although many people play it that way, **IT IS NOT IN THE RULES TO DO SO!**

However, since all players agree to play this way, all have an equal chance to benefit, and no one gets hurt, it is OK to do it!

# Collecting the Data to Support the Hard Scores

*"Occasionally (80%-89% of the time\*) needs assistance to resolve unfamiliar problems. Can resolve most\* problems on her own. Most\* problems are resolved within the established time frames."*

For hard skills documentation, we must create a problem log process that collects data on who called when, what kind of problem, how did you solve it, and by when was it solved? The history of this log must be available to the IT specialist as well as the manager so both can track progress this period in relation to the goals.

(Many IT organizations have an automated 'log generation' software program that requires specialists to fill in data fields so management can track the number and nature of 'open' or 'resolved' IT problems.)

# Collecting the Data to Support the Soft Scores

*Evidence exists\* to show that at least 5 times this quarter the specialist provided unsolicited guidelines, tips, or tools to users that may be unfamiliar with the project's software applications; was 'solution focused' instead of 'obstacle obsessed' when replying to client questions; asked team members how the IT department can make their project work easier."*

The IT department manager can do this:

- Make it known to the entire project team that the IT specialist is expected to do these things
- Remind the project team they can insure getting this kind of service if they will respond to and return periodic surveys that the IT manager will be sending out
- Share the results of these periodic surveys with the IT specialist during quarterly 'report card' meetings

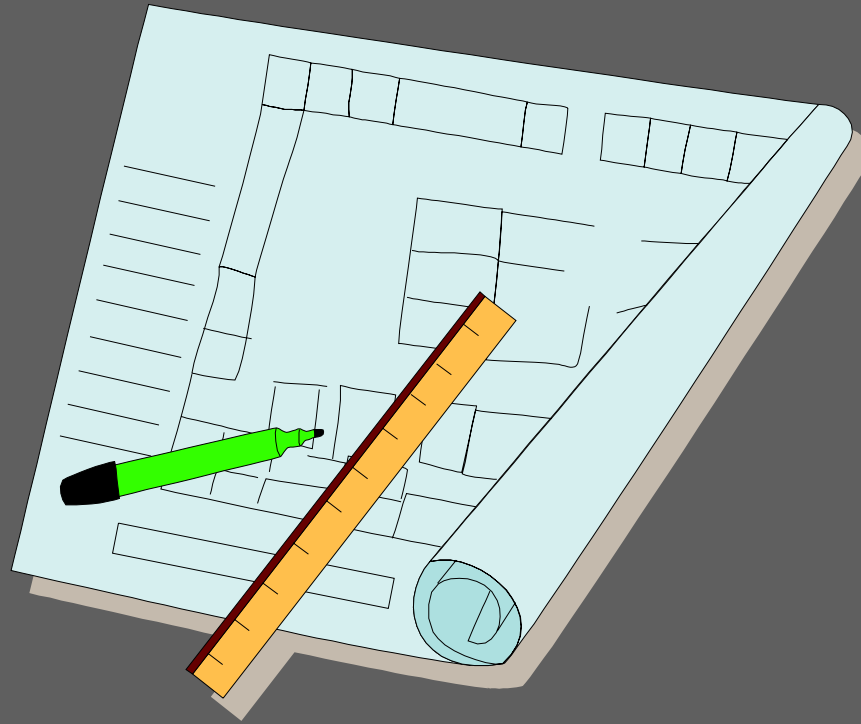
# Providing A Self-Managing Employee Feedback System

The IT department manager can encourage the IT specialist to:

- **HARD SKILLS** = Monitor the on-line problem log as issues are resolved and see how the results compare to the goals set for each quarter
- **SOFT SKILLS** = Ask project clients for whom the IT specialist has gone 'above and beyond expectations' to make it easier for them to work on the project to send a note to the IT manager reporting the good news.

NOTE: Once project members realize that a few kind words back to the IT Manager about how helpful the IT specialist has been will increase their chances of getting continued great service, they will be happy to do it!

# Applying This to the Project



If the project's IT Manager knows before the project begins that we will use a performance assessment process like this, she can:

- ⇒ Develop a defined, graded performance range for hard and soft skills for those assigned to her (the school teachers do this before the school year starts)
- ⇒ Develop a documentation process that will support the grading system (this is like the test grades, homework, and class work from school)
- ⇒ Develop a feedback method that will allow the employee to self-monitor their performance progress (like you did in grade school to avoid getting grounded)
- ⇒ Establish a periodic performance review schedule with each employee to discuss progress, set new goals, offer help, etc. (this is like the report card that you received at the end of each grading period)

Establish a periodic performance review schedule with each employee to discuss progress, set new goals, offer help, etc. (this is like the report card that you received at the end of each grading period)

Minimum questions for the first performance meeting for the year:

Dept Manager: “How much of a pay raise do you want this year?”

Employee: “All I can get!”

Dept Manager: “What kind of performance scores will you need to do that?”

Employee: “The best I can do!”

Dept Manager: “Then what are your goals for this first performance period?”

Employee: The employee states them while manager documents.

Dept Manager: “How can I help?”

Establish a periodic performance review schedule with each employee to discuss progress, set new goals, offer help, etc. (this is like the report card that you received at the end of each grading period)

How long would it take to ask and get answers to those four questions on the previous slide?

What are the chances that you would spend that much time quarterly dealing with employee performance issues anyway?

Establish a periodic performance review schedule with each employee to discuss progress, set new goals, offer help, etc. (this is like the report card that you received at the end of each grading period)

Minimum questions for all subsequent performance meetings for the year:

Dept Manager: “What were your goals for this past performance period?”

Dept Manager: “How did you do?”

Dept Manager: “How do you explain that difference (between goals and actual)?”

Dept Manager: “Now what are your goals for the next performance period?”

Dept Manager: “How can I help?”

Establish a periodic performance review schedule with each employee to discuss progress, set new goals, offer help, etc. (this is like the report card that you received at the end of each grading period)

How long would it take to ask and get answers to those five questions on the previous slide?

What are the chances that you would spend that much time quarterly dealing with employee performance issues anyway?

The project's IT Manager forwards copies of all periodic "report cards" to the employee's permanent manager to provide documentation for:

- ➔ The employee's annual performance assessment
- ➔ Any wage increases
- ➔ Any promotion recommendations
- ➔ Disciplinary actions

The “permanent” manager does not have to witness their daily performance and can confidently rely on second-hand information from the project department manager to make performance assessments

The accuracy of this information will be:

- **Consistent** (Everyone knows which “significant few” instead of the “trivial many” tasks are being evaluated!)
- **Objective** (Everyone knows they are focused on *measurable* behavior and not subjective opinion! **IF IT ISN'T DOCUMENTED, IT DIDN'T HAPPEN!**)
- **Relevant to project tasks** (Applying project politics or personal prejudices must be documented to impact their performance rating. Who is foolish enough to do this?)
- **Timely** (The data arrives periodically according to a previously agreed-upon schedule.)

The objective, measurable performance-based “report card” system provides protection for the employee from:

- “Project politics”
- Loss of past performance recognition if a new manager takes over from the previous one
- Capricious definitions of work performance levels by various members of the project’s management team
- Managers who are not reliable performance record keepers
- Management’s personal standards vs. project standards

A new PM coming in to take over from a previous one need only review the objective (measurable) performance results to learn the quality of the staff:

- The “rising stars” stand out regardless of social or political skills
- The “falling stars” stand out regardless of social or political skills
- The project team stays focused on project tasks and is not distracted by trying to impress the new boss

A PM who takes key project members from one project to the next shortens the staffing “learning curve” because:

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- As more understand it, use it, and gain confidence in it, the faster the process spreads



QUESTIONS???