



Maximising productivity

in the new normal

EBOOK



Maximising productivity in the new normal

A five-step high productivity
model to boost performance and
engagement in your organisation

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1. Introduction

'Post-Pandemic', 'Life After Lockdown', 'the New Normal', 'Better Normal'

— there is no shortage of new labels for the strange times we are living through. With so many recent articles exploring what working life will be like post lockdown, and how we should adapt, why do we at Advanced think we've got something to add with another eBook? Because beyond the labels, and the tactical plans that organisations need to make to rebuild their strength with their returning workforce, change is afoot.

Progressive organisations are busy using this opportunity to make real changes that will maximise the productivity and engagement of their workforce. And there are real actions that HR professionals, managers and employees can take right now to harness the opportunities for change thrown up by the pandemic.

Heraclitus once said,

“The only thing that is constant is change.”

This seems fitting; we are seeing the practice of great performance management evolving in front of our eyes in the most forward-thinking and opportunistic of companies.

These organisations are recognising that agile goal alignment is more critical than ever in these uncertain times.

They understand the need for new strategies to handle reward and recognition, and that a highly engaged and psychologically healthy workforce will soon be a commercial imperative, not a nebulous luxury.

Remote working is here to stay, and HR and senior leaders need to think about how to manage and motivate remote workers effectively on an ongoing basis. And yet research shows that many organisations are far from ready to face these challenges.

A recent Mind Gym Study found that:

- **Two-thirds of workers claim their manager has made things worse or had no impact on their performance during lockdown**
- **One in five don't know what is going on day-to-day in their wider team**
- **And a third of the workforce have been less productive whilst working from home during lockdown**

At Advanced we are in touch with hundreds of customers, large and small, from a huge range of industries. We're seeing organisations tackle the dynamics of managing a remote workforce and needing to save costs while being tasked with achieving more.

Some people managers are faring far better in these fraught times; managers who can handle providing 'supportive autonomy' for their employees through adult to adult relationships, where they earn, rather than demand, respect.

These managers are role models of great people management, viewing it as fundamental to the way they operate. They don't see performance management as a discreet HR-owned process which is somehow separate to their 'day job'. We have been listening to them and learning from them so that we can share their insights.

We are passionate about the value that effective performance management can bring to individuals and organisations.

We are always keen to share best practice, so we've created a Five-Step High Productivity Model which outlines the key areas that organisations need to focus on to optimise productivity and engagement post pandemic.

Five-Step High Productivity Model



Align deliverables to strategy

Agree near-term, strategically-aligned goals which drive individual and collaborative success.

Empower achievement

Equip people to perform to their full potential by having, meaningful coaching conversations.



Optimise wellbeing and engagement

Proactively monitor workplace wellbeing and engagement, and empower people to take practical action

Recognise contributions

Leverage intrinsic rewards and motivation.
Use extrinsic rewards with caution, prioritising fairness and transparency.



Reflect and revise

Build-in continuous improvement through deliberate reflection and targeted action planning.

= 33% higher productivity

We know from data in our Clear Review system that where organisations embed these five practices, their employees successfully achieve 33 per cent more of their objectives, so there's a lot to play for.

In some areas, this model will look familiar and adoption may only require a refresh of established practice.

But some areas of the model are likely to be new and will require a deliberate shift in mindset and approach to take effect. In all cases, there is a new emphasis on the importance and urgency of rethinking traditional practice to harness the opportunity. Organisations should ask themselves "if not now, then when?".

This eBook will focus on each of the five aspects of the Five-Step High Productivity Model:

- **Chapter 2** – Align deliverables to strategy
- **Chapter 3** – Empower achievement
- **Chapter 4** – Optimise wellbeing and engagement
- **Chapter 5** – Recognise contributions
- **Chapter 6** - Reflect and revise

When re-examining their traditional habits and logic, HR teams will need to reassess the role and implications of four fundamental considerations, which we summarise at the end of each chapter:

- **Process design**
- **Manager capability**
- **Technology and systems**
- **Data and analytics**

Chapter 7 will bring the Five-Step model to life with real examples of how elements of the productivity model work in organisations.

Chapter 8 will conclude this eBook by summarising the key points and setting out practical next steps.

Happy reading!

2. Aligning goals to strategy

In this chapter we focus on objective setting as a key tool to maximise employee productivity and to understand why it is more important than ever in our changing world. We also introduce Advanced's Five A's model for high performance goal-setting.

The quest by organisations to set effective goals for their staff is nothing new.

Back in 1911 Frederick Winslow Taylor (a colleague of Henry Ford) talked of setting clean and crisp objectives to measure performance in his *Principles of Scientific Management*, explaining the importance of "knowing exactly what you want men to do and then see that they do it in the best and cheapest way".

But these are particularly turbulent times and life is no longer predictable and 'scientific'. There are five reasons why effective objective setting matters more than ever.

1. Agile objective-setting equips organisations to cope with rapid and unprecedented organisational change.

We have seen the rate of organisational change accelerate over time, but the coronavirus pandemic has taken this to new extremes.

In the face of unexpected and dramatic levels of change, organisations have been forced to recognize that traditional, long-range objectives simply don't work (indeed, we would argue they never did).

In their place, progressive organisations are replacing annual, top-down goals with near-term, strategically aligned, agile goals. When employees have meaningful, motivational goals they are far more likely to deliver individual and collaborative success and contribute to higher levels of productivity across the team and business.



2. Many organisations are contracting in size as a result of Covid-19 – goals need to be reallocated to mitigate the risk of productivity decreasing.

To address the negative economic impact of the pandemic, many organisations have already had to furlough, restructure or cut staff, and they fear more is to come.

Businesses are being forced to restructure employees' priorities and share them out in a different way. Unless they take a systematic approach to strategic goal-setting there is a strong risk that productivity will decrease since there will be fewer employees remaining to share the workload.

3. When used as a business-owned performance tool, objective setting facilitates dynamic strategic planning.

The highly popular concept of OKRs (Objectives and Key Results), as outlined by John Doerr in 'Measure What Matters', advocates that objective setting is a strategic business planning tool, not an HR-led performance evaluation tool.

Where effectively implemented, we have seen OKRs enable organisations to embrace organisational restructuring and realignment in a far more fluid and dynamic way than old-school performance management practice would have supported.



4. Remote working adds an additional challenge to aligning employees with strategic priorities.

Many of us have experienced the challenges of moving to a remote working model. We have witnessed first-hand how virtual working requires a far greater, far more deliberate emphasis on communication to keep remote employees connected with strategic and departmental priorities.

It requires co-ordination, clarity and transparency. An effective objective setting approach is critical to keep a virtual workforce engaged and aligned with rapidly-shifting business priorities, and prevents employee confusion or disconnection which might cause productivity to decline.

5. The 'new normal' shines a spotlight on the need for explicit and effective collaboration between colleagues.

In today's matrix organisational structures and multi-disciplinary, agile project teams, goal success is often shared between individuals who are spread across teams, geographies, even time zones.

Remote working adds further complexity, especially for those organisations who are addressing social distancing during the phased return to the office by introducing team shift patterns.

It is clear that goal-setting practice needs to evolve to cope with an increasingly complex and collaborative working environment, where individual success and optimal productivity is often dependent on shared accountability.

The role of good technology to enable effective objective setting

Technology has an important role to play in helping organisations embrace modern objective setting. A good online system facilitates transparency, enabling employees to align their objectives to evolving business priorities.

Good performance management systems facilitate the sharing of objectives beyond an immediate work team.

Great technology opens up new possibilities, enabling collaborative goals to be communicated, co-authored and co-owned in a way that would be impossible to coordinate effectively on paper or on spreadsheets.

Many organisations that worked in an office before lockdown are now considering working remotely permanently. Global conglomerate [Siemens](#) is offering its staff the option to work two or three days a week remotely under its new permanent mobile working scheme.

It's decision was made after an employee survey was carried out, in which staff expressed they wanted greater flexibility and personalised solutions for their job.

Companies need to prepare for this 'new normal', recognising that technology can play a vital part in keeping employees connected, aligned and productive.

Introducing the Five A's model for high performance goal setting

We believe it's time to modernise the 'SMART' acronym (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound).

Whilst catchy, the trouble with 'SMART' is it only tells half the story in today's complex, rapidly evolving, agile, collaborative organisations.

For employees to be at their most productive, their objectives need to pass the Five A's Test and be Aligned, Agile, Assessable, Accountable and Aspirational.

[Gallup's](#) research shows that employee productivity increases by 56 per cent, on average, when managers are involved in helping employees align their goals with the needs of the organisation.

There are great gains to be had from raising skill levels of managers to set huge goals.

The Five A's approach to goal-setting differs from the traditional approach in a few key ways, as shown in italics:

ALIGNED means an objective aligns with, and drives, team, departmental or strategic objectives *(not dictated from above)*.

AGILE means that the objective is near-term (for example, achievable in the next one to four months).

It should be reviewed frequently to ensure it stays relevant – and it should be amended, updated, replaced or deleted as appropriate. *There should be no prizes for annual or bi-annual goals that are beautifully crafted but out of date!*

ASSESSABLE means an objective can be clearly measured so that it's clear when it's been achieved.

Goals should have two components: an 'objective', or short description, of what the individual needs to achieve, plus a few specific deliverables or 'key results', which are the measurable outcomes that define what successful achievement looks like.

Progress should be frequently reviewed, ideally every eight to twelve weeks, to monitor performance and keep the individual on track *(no waiting until a six-monthly interim performance review)*.

ACCOUNTABLE means an objective should be jointly-set and agreed by the individual and their manager.

It should be within the employee's control to achieve, and where there is shared ownership with collaborators, responsibilities should be clear and transparent.

This is different to the traditional approach which assumed objectives were all individually-owned.

ASPIRATIONAL means an objective is stretching and delivery drives high performance *(and ideally is not directly tied to reward which leads to employees 'playing it safe', which in turn reduces productivity)*.

[Take a look at our Five A's goal setting tip sheet here.](#)

Four lenses consideration

- 1. Process:** Ask yourself 'how effective is our current goal-setting process?' Is it essentially a 'tick-box' exercise to set long-term goals which soon become outdated and meaningless? If so, seize the opportunity that the 'new normal' has created to update your organisation's approach.
- 2. Manager capability:** Set expectations that managers need to check in on progress against objectives more frequently right now given the fluidity of the current situation. Provide practical tools to help them, such as goal-setting prompts and practical aids like the Five A's Test.
- 3. System:** Use an online system which enables colleagues to set and share collaborative goals and allows collaborators from across teams to stay in touch with their progress.
- 4. Data:** High performers will tend to keep goals up to date and meet regularly to discuss progress against them. Set high expectations and use data to recognise those doing it right, and to drive unwilling managers to take a more proactive role in raising performance.

In the next chapter we will look beyond setting great goals to the actual delivery of them, a subject which is highly consequential yet is often overlooked.

3. Enabling achievement with coaching conversations

In the previous chapter, we talked about the importance of aligning employees' efforts to deliver the organisation's strategy, using a Five A's approach to goal setting.

But setting high quality objectives won't, in itself, deliver improved performance and productivity. Indeed, that is one of the pitfalls of traditional performance management – it has focused too much on setting objectives at the start of the year and measuring outcomes at the end, with too little focus on taking action in the middle.

Waiting until a year-end review to discuss whether objectives have been achieved means it is too late to intervene where things haven't gone to plan. And as we all know, things rarely go according to plan!

So, to gain competitive advantage in today's world, organisations need to shift their emphasis towards supporting and empowering employees to achieve their deliverables.

Evidence and practice tells us that the best way of doing this is through regular, structured coaching conversations between managers and employees.

A [2018 study by McKinsey](#) found that implementing this practice has the single biggest impact on the effectiveness of performance management (closely followed by aligning performance goals to business priorities).

And those organisations whose managers regularly coached their staff were twice as likely to outperform their competitors.

What was interesting about the McKinsey research is that despite these benefits, only 30 per cent of companies in the study had actually embedded regular coaching conversations.

This finding was backed up by the [2019 UK Performance Management Report](#) which we commissioned last year and which found that in over half of organisations, managers are only meeting to discuss performance once or twice a year.

So what's holding organisations back?

The 2019 UK Performance Management Report shed some interesting light on this. When asked what concerns organisations had about changing their performance management, the top two cited reasons were:

- **Managers' desire or availability**
- **Managers' ability performance management**

Manager desire has always been an issue with performance management. But the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated increase in remote working has presented a burning platform for change here.

Few managers would argue that checking in with their team members regularly is unimportant at the moment, so now is the time to double-down on change management and communications to help managers to fully understand the 'why' behind coaching conversations and WIIFM (what's in it for me?).

But we also need to tackle the known issues around managers' time (availability) and their ability. To do this, we need to make it easy for managers to have regular, structured coaching conversations with their employees.

This goes beyond providing training, although that is important. Coaching does not come naturally to most people so it's vital to provide managers with in-the-moment coaching questions and prompts that they can refer to and follow during their conversations.

Questions like the examples below are simple but powerful when it comes to enabling successful achievement of objectives:

- **Are any objectives at risk of not being delivered on time?**
- **What obstacles are getting in the way?**
- **How might these be overcome? What are the options?**
- **What support can I or your colleagues provide to help you to successfully deliver these objectives?**

Giving managers this kind of structure during conversations not only increases their confidence and ability, but also maximises their time since meetings will be quicker and more focused.

Using modern technology to embed a coaching conversations culture can make the difference between success and failure.

Our recent study of 200 organisations' Covid recovery planning found that managers using dedicated performance management technology were twice as likely to have scheduled check-ins with their staff than those who either didn't use technology or were using the performance management add-on module of their core HRIS system.



To find out more about how to encourage regular coaching conversations and the role of technology, read our eBook on [Embedding a Culture of Meaningful Conversations](#). You can also take a look at our [check-in conversations prompts to help guide your check-ins](#).

Four lenses consideration

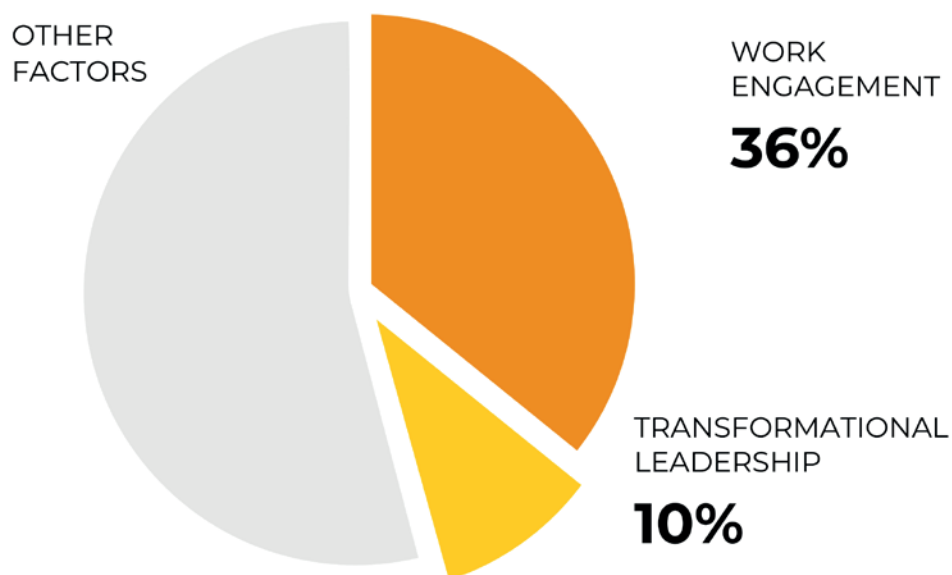
- 1. Process:** Consider the emphasis and accountability you place on year-end performance reviews versus coaching conversations throughout the year. Little and often works best.
- 2. Manager capability:** Provide managers with practical coaching prompts that they can use in-the-moment.
- 3. Technology:** Use dedicated technology that serves up coaching conversation prompts, easily enables notes and action points to be captured and which nudges employees and managers when conversations are due.
- 4. Data:** Compare conversation frequency between managers and teams and look for correlations with successful objective completion. Publicise and celebrate these correlations internally to demonstrate the 'why' to other, less willing managers.

4. Optimise wellbeing and achievement

The Covid-19 pandemic has elevated employee wellbeing to one of the top priorities for organisations. Mercer's 2020 Global Talent Trends Study found that it was the number one workforce concern among executives, yet only 29 per cent of HR leadership had a health and wellbeing strategy in place.

We shouldn't view wellbeing as merely a Covid-19 related issue though. Workplace wellbeing and engagement is critical to achieving high performance and productivity.

A meta analysis of 90 individual research studies found that Work Engagement (a scientifically validated measure of employee wellbeing and engagement), is a higher predictor of work task performance than any other factor, and three times higher than leadership.



From Christian et al. (2011). Meta analysis of 90 engagement studies with 63,813 people.

It's not just individual task performance either. Work engagement also predicts a massive 36 per cent of team performance – more than double the effect had by leadership.

But if we want to proactively leverage workplace wellbeing and engagement and gain these performance benefits, we have to solve two key problems:

- **How to measure it regularly and accurately?**
- **How to improve it?**

Measuring workplace wellbeing and engagement regularly

As mentioned above, work engagement is one of the most scientifically validated measures of wellbeing and engagement. It is defined as:

A positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind...which reflects an active state of occupational wellbeing.

(Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá & Bakker, 2002)

Previously, the best measure of work engagement was the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). However, as it has between nine and seventeen questions, it is too long to use as an ongoing, regular measure.

To address this, in 2019, we commissioned a scientific study involving thousands of employees with the aim of devising a more succinct measure of work engagement. The outcome of the study, led by workplace psychologist Ian MacRae, was a set of three validated questions that can accurately measure workplace wellbeing and engagement using three key factors – Energy, Purpose and Immersion.


By asking the three questions regularly, using technology to automate the process, we can maintain a continuous pulse of wellbeing and engagement levels of all individuals across the organisation, tracing trends and flagging areas where intervention may be needed.

Improving wellbeing and engagement

Simply measuring wellbeing and engagement will not result in increased productivity however. We need to take action to improve it. Organisations have made significant investments in wellbeing over the last few years, putting in place Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), training mental health first aiders, etc.

However, these initiatives tend to suffer from low usage rates, typically five to ten per cent.

Alongside this, companies have increased their use of engagement surveys in recent years. But a 2018 study by Forbes found that of 3,000 senior HR professionals polled, 58 per cent took no meaningful action on the back of their surveys. We need to change this.

A woman with curly hair and glasses is working at a machine in a workshop. She is wearing a denim jacket and is focused on her work. The machine has the brand name 'ADELTA' visible on it. The background is slightly blurred, showing other parts of the workshop.

A positive, fulfilling,
work-related state of
mind...which reflects
an active state of
occupational wellbeing.

Our view is that to improve wellbeing and engagement at work, we need to empower and nudge employees and managers to understand their own engagement levels and to take action themselves, shifting the expectation away from it being 'HR's job' to increase engagement.

Technology can be the enabler for this.

For example, the Clear Review system can provide employees with automated suggestion prompts on the things they personally can do to improve their levels of engagement and wellbeing, based on their answers to the three work engagement questions.

It's easy to answer the pulse survey and the data is always live, so no more completing a survey and waiting weeks for the results to filter back to individuals and teams.

Importantly, these prompts are customisable, so they can direct employees to their existing wellbeing resources. For example, if an employee scores low on the energy factor, this is a potential wellbeing flag and the system can automatically provide them with a link to their EAP system.

Similarly, the system can provide managers with suggested actions they can take to improve the wellbeing and engagement of their team members, based on their aggregated answers.

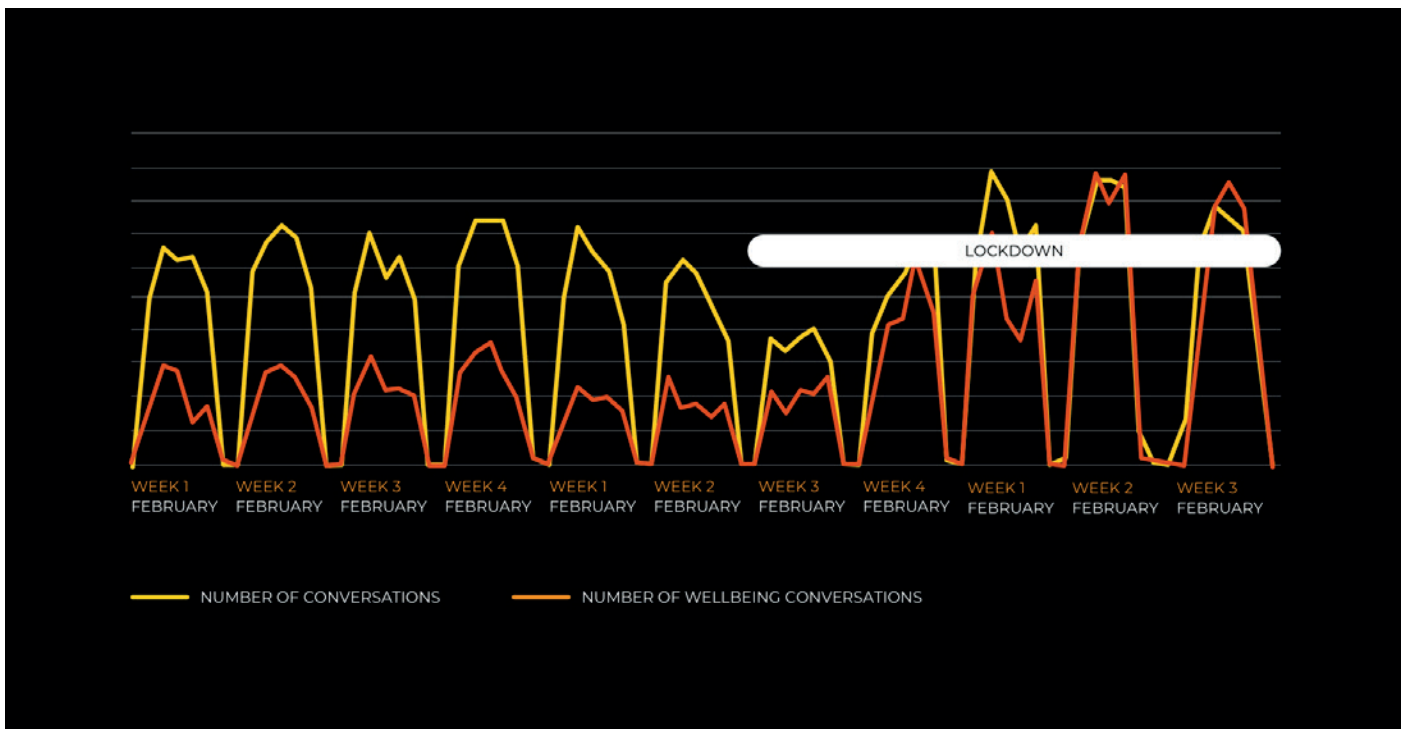
Integrating wellbeing, engagement and performance

Providing employees with the right resources at the right time is only part of the solution. To fully tackle wellbeing and engagement issues, we need to open up honest dialogue between employees and managers.

We talked in the last chapter about the power of structured coaching conversations.

When you integrate wellbeing prompts into these conversations, or make a specific wellbeing conversation template available to managers and employees, it provides the psychological safety for wellbeing issues to be surfaced and addressed. It also gives managers the confidence to discuss them.

As you can see from the graph below, customers using our software saw a significant boost in the number of wellbeing conversations taking place as many countries entered Covid-19 lockdown during March-April 2020.



Four lenses consideration

- 1. Process:** Implement a process that accurately measures workplace wellbeing and engagement levels across the organisation on an ongoing basis. We recommend using work engagement methodology.
- 2. Manager capability:** Provide managers with practical, actionable suggestions on how they can improve their team's wellbeing and engagement. Provide them with coaching prompts to help surface any wellbeing issues in check-in conversations.
- 3. Technology:** Use dedicated technology that automates the process of measuring wellbeing and engagement and provides automated suggestions for improvement.
- 4. Data:** Compare wellbeing and engagement levels between managers and teams and investigate / intervene where levels are low.

Here's a two-pager you can give your managers to encourage them to discuss employee wellbeing in their check-ins: [Why should you care about wellbeing- 2 pager.](#)

5. Recognise contributions

In an economic environment where organisations are needing to achieve more for less, employee recognition is a key weapon in our arsenal. According to [research by Deloitte](#), employee engagement, productivity and performance are 14 per cent higher in organisations that proactively foster recognition.

In traditional performance management, the most frequent approach to recognising employees has been to award pay rises, bonuses or promotions based on performance.

But these approaches are fraught with difficulties and often do more harm to motivation than good. And in an economic downturn, pay budgets can be restricted and opportunities for promotion limited, making it even more difficult to use pay and promotion as recognition tools.

Before jumping into potential solutions to this challenge, let's look at what psychology tells us about motivation. Psychologists have categorised motivation into two camps:

- **Extrinsic motivation** – behaviour that is driven by external rewards such as money, awards and promotions.
- **Intrinsic motivation** – activities that you do because you enjoy the activity itself.

Extrinsic motivators have historically taken precedence in workplaces because they appear easier to control and influence – dangle a carrot of more pay and prospects if people perform well and productivity should increase. Right? Sadly not.

[Research](#) (and bitter experience) has shown us that this rarely happens. There are two important reasons for this:

- The motivational effect of an extrinsic reward does not last long. Research has revealed that only 15 per cent of the effect of a salary increase survives longer term. So, rewards have to be given frequently in order to continue to have an effect.
- [Expectancy theory](#) (Victor Vroom) has shown that for an award to work, employees have to believe that an increase in effort will yield an increase in reward. But lack of fairness and consistency in reward decisions all too often undermines this. This is why replacing annual performance related pay with more frequent 'spot' rewards isn't a silver bullet.

Leveraging intrinsic motivators

If we can't rely on extrinsic motivators to recognise employees, we need to look to intrinsic motivators. Dan Pink's 2010 best-selling book 'Drive' set out an approach to intrinsic motivation based on three elements – Autonomy, Mastery and Purpose. The table below shows how each of these can be leveraged within performance management:

As you can see from the graph below, customers using our software saw a significant boost in the number of wellbeing conversations taking place as many countries entered Covid-19 lockdown during March-April 2020.

DRIVER	RECOMMENDED PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES
Autonomy – the desire to direct our own lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Involve employees in goal setting – make it a collaborative process between managers and employees• Allow employees autonomy in how they achieve their goals and deliverables and who they collaborate with to achieve them• Train managers to coach rather than direct
Mastery – the urge to get better at something that matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prioritise frequent, real-time feedback to recognise employees for work done well and for making progress• Encourage longer term goals to be broken down into shorter term deliverables or milestones to maintain a sense of making progress• Encourage employees to have one or two personal development goals they are working towards at any time
Purpose – the yearning to do what we do in service of something larger than ourselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that employees understand the goals of the organisation (or their part of the organisation) and are aligning their individual / team objectives to those goals• Ensure that the organisation's goals are not all about profit and financial metrics; include some purpose-related goals that employees can contribute to

Another important psychological framework for intrinsic motivation is the [Job Characteristics Model](#) which sets out a number of factors for making jobs more enriching and motivating, such as skill variety. Interestingly, this research found that feedback (along with autonomy) has a multiplying effect on these factors.

But the feedback needs to be meaningful in order to gain the motivational benefit.

More specifically, The Job Characteristics research showed that feedback needs to be clear and specific and should provide the recipient with knowledge of the results of their contribution and how it positively affects people. So, if we want to boost employee recognition through intrinsic motivation, we should double-down on embedding a culture of continuous feedback.

When considering feedback systems to embed this culture, look for systems that encourage authentic, qualitative feedback rather than winning cosmetic awards such as recognition badges and points.

A final point on recognition through feedback is the importance of putting it in writing.

A consistent theme we have heard from employees after using Clear Review is the morale boost they get when they receive and read a piece of feedback in the system.

We liken this to having someone over for dinner and a couple of days later you receive a thank you card from them in the post.

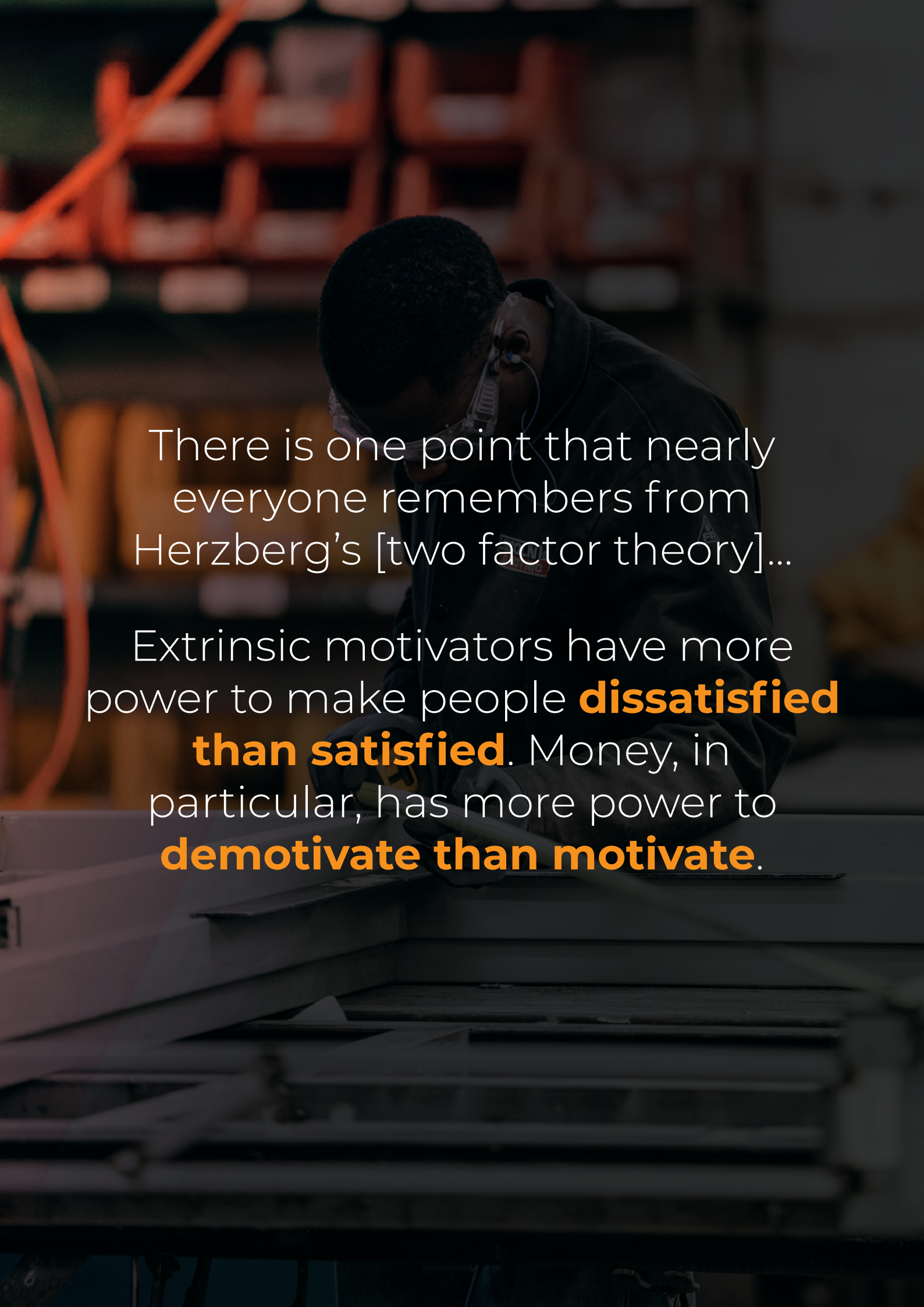
It's so much more powerful than a verbal 'thank you' because the person took the time to put it in writing and make it personal to you.

Performance related pay

We established earlier that recognising people through pay is not usually an effective form of motivation (sales commission being an exception).

However, in an economic downturn, many organisations face the situation where they cannot afford to give annual pay increases or bonuses across the board. So, they look to performance related pay as a way of still rewarding and recognising those who have contributed the most.

Whilst this is understandable, organisations should proceed with caution when going down this route. As MacRae and Furnham point out in their book [Motivation and Performance](#):

A worker in a dark jacket and safety glasses is focused on a task, possibly inspecting or working on a metal structure. The background is a blurred industrial setting with orange safety railings.

There is one point that nearly everyone remembers from Herzberg's [two factor theory]...

Extrinsic motivators have more power to make people **dissatisfied than satisfied**. Money, in particular, has more power to **demotivate than motivate**.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, we are being approached by more and more organisations looking to performance management as a way of informing pay decisions. To mitigate the potential damage that performance related pay can cause, our advice is four-fold:

1. De-couple pay conversations and ratings from ongoing check-ins and developmental coaching conversations. The two do not mix well because people are less willing to share development areas if they feel it will impact their ratings and reward.
2. Be transparent about how pay decisions are made and what specifically will be taken into account.
3. Minimise bias by using technology to compile performance data from throughout the year and serve it up to managers when making pay decisions
4. Maximise fairness and consistency. Consider using a set of targeted performance-based questions rather than relying on a single blunt rating. The answers should drive an agreed formula, allowing responses to be compared across different teams and inconsistencies to be spotted.

Our eBook '[Managing Pay with Continuous Performance Management](#)' explores these concepts in more depth.

Four lenses consideration

1. **Process:** Build techniques that encourage intrinsic motivation into your performance management processes. Double-down on feedback.
2. **Manager capability:** Train managers in how to give effective feedback and how to recognise bias when making reward decisions.
3. **Technology:** Use technology that:
 - (a) enables employees to quickly and easily exchange frequent, meaningful feedback; and
 - (b) allows a 'targeted questions' approach to be used for making performance related pay decisions.
4. **Data:** Serve up factual performance data from throughout the year to managers at the time of making reward and promotion decisions. Compare and contrast data to spot potential biases and inconsistencies.

6. Reflect and revise

In this chapter we will talk about the final stage in the Five-Step High Productivity Model – ‘Reflect and Revise’. Taking a dedicated moment for deliberate reflection, and being open to the need for revision, enables individuals and organisations to continuously learn, adapt and grow and thus optimise performance.

On the surface, the reflect stage might sound similar to the dreaded annual appraisal. After all, wasn't the appraisal all about reflecting on previous performance?

To answer this, we need to consider purpose. The primary purpose of the traditional appraisal was for managers to assess performance, in order to attribute a final rating to drive a reward decision. The result? Employees were forced to ‘talk themselves up’ and to mask their key learning moments for fear of retribution in their pay packet.

No wonder managers found it difficult to be effective performance coaches when everyone knew the primary purpose of the review discussion was to rate and rank.

Contrast this with the purpose of the ‘Reflect and Revise’ step in the model which aims to enable guided introspection so as to drive continuous improvement. It is important this is delinked from reward.

If you would like more guidance on the thorny subject of how to manage pay with continuous performance management, feel free to read our eBook dedicated to this issue.

Effective ‘Reflect and Revise’ requires us to change both our pace and our perspective. In the frenzied pace of today's organisations, it is rare we get the time to slow down and pause for breath. So, we need to deliberately carve the time out.

In terms of perspective, it is most common for us to look forwards, so it may seem counterintuitive to suggest the need to reflect backwards.

Yet at certain moments this is essential. The aim of this stage is to reflect back but action plan forward.

As individuals, this involves deliberately reflecting on past successes and challenges and really considering and absorbing the critical lessons we can learn from them.

If we take a moment to think about our own richest learning experiences, we may find they are often from events that were not 100 per cent successful.

That makes sense; we often learn more from slightly painful experiences, even if it's just to learn what not to do next time! This is vital learning – informing us of revisions we want to take charge of to optimise our future performance.

Take a moment to reflect. Have you ever worked with a colleague who frequently and actively requested feedback from colleagues, even when things didn't go to plan? Did their openness make you lose respect for them? Or did you admire their courage and high personal standards? Like elite athletes who are always pushing themselves in pursuit of marginal gains, the highest performers in organisations tend to be the hungriest for feedback and the most open to the lessons to be learned.

They role model continuous self-improvement, which enables them to become ever more effective and productive.

How 'Reflect and Revise' works in practice - performance management at the individual level:

Continuous Feedback, Reflection Conversations and Targeted Personal Development Goals.

1. Continuous Feedback – encourage employees to frequently request feedback from peers whom they have closely worked with.

Encourage them to request feedback to fit the natural rhythm of work, for instance at the end of collaborative projects or after significant 'moments' like presentations or major client meetings.

This ensures the feedback they glean is timely and more 'real' than when it is collated as part of a wide-reaching annual 360 degree feedback process where everyone is bombarded with multiple requests for feedback simultaneously.

In addition, make sure you train people across the organisation in essential soft skills to enable them to both give and receive feedback effectively.

2. Reflection Conversations – encourage employees to schedule a guided and formal 'Reflection Conversation' with their manager approximately every four to six months.

Arm the employee and manager with a series of coaching prompts to keep the discussion on track and at a high level, taking a helicopter view of past performance in order to set Targeted Personal Development Goals for the future.

According to [Gallup](#), 'simply replacing or supplementing reviews with more frequent conversations won't be enough to motivate employees. Coaching discussions need to have substance and purpose without leaving the employee feeling micromanaged'.

REFLECTION CONVERSATION – SUGGESTED PROMPTS FOR DISCUSSION:

Successes and Impact

- What were your greatest successes over the last period?
- Where and how did you have the most impact on team / business performance?

Strengths

- How did you use your key strengths to drive your performance?
- How might you be able to leverage your strengths more in future?

Challenges and Learnings

- Where things didn't go to plan, what could be done better next time?
- What have you learned?

Personal Development

- How did you personally develop over the past period? What impact did this have on team / business performance?
- What one key area do you want to focus on developing over the next period?

3. Targeted Personal Development Goals – set goals which crystallise self-improvements and actions for the next period based on these reflections. Individuals should aim to have one or two Personal Development Goals, to learn new skills or to address gaps and blind spots which may have been highlighted through feedback.

Or a Personal Development Goal to drive further development of an area of strength or passion – for instance to leverage this strength to benefit the wider team.

How 'Reflect and Revise' works in practice at the organisational level:

The Covid-19 pandemic creates an opportunity for transformative change.

At an **organisational level** we recommend HR professionals harness this opportunity, taking time to have a good hard look at their performance management process to verify whether it is delivering its intended purpose.

We suggest HR Teams follow a simple three-step model: **Reflect, Decide, Act**

- 1. Reflect** – As an HR Team, ask yourselves some searching questions about your performance management process:
 - What is its fundamental purpose – is its aim merely to document or to actually improve performance and productivity?
 - Whose needs was it designed to cater to?
 - Is it popular with employees and managers – why / why not?
 - Was it delivering its intended purpose before Covid-19? Is it fit for purpose in the 'new normal'?
 - Is there an opportunity to make changes – to repurpose or simplify?

- 2. Decide** – Make a decision whether to keep the process as is (because it works perfectly well enough), to revise it, or to fully revolutionise it.

We advise being cautious about revising the process by 'tinkering' around the edges which can frustrate managers and employees; please only choose this option if it brings discernible and material benefits for the end users (not HR!)

- 3. Act** – Make the changes and bring stakeholders and employees on the change journey with you.

Communicate the 'why' and WIIFM to show that the changes are worthwhile and the 'how' to ensure the revisions will be successfully adopted.

Four lenses consideration

1. **Process:** Take the time to reflect on the effectiveness of your existing process, then decide and act, ensuring you bring key stakeholders on the journey with you. Consider delinking reward from Reflection Conversations.

2. **Manager capability:** Encourage and train managers to adopt a constructive, coaching style during Reflection Conversations.

Constructive reflection is totally reliant on a no-blame, open-minded growth mindset where employees and managers trust each other to be honest about both their mistakes and successes. Celebrate great examples of learning behaviour to build an open, learning culture.

3. **System:** Use an online system which captures ongoing feedback, Personal Development Goals and provides coaching prompts for Reflection Conversations, all in one place.

4. **Data:** Use data to show correlation between teams with high usage of feedback and high performance to prove that a learning mindset increases performance and productivity.

7. Real world examples

We've dug into some of the statistics in the Clear Review system to see how it's been helping organisations become more productive. Our technology embeds the core elements of the continuous performance management model: goals and objectives, regular feedback and conversations.

We found that the successful completion rate of objectives increased over a 12-month period by an average of 33 per cent with customers that had a high adoption rate of Clear Review

We assessed productivity by looking at the successful achievement rate of objectives over a 12-month period, across our customer base.

We found that the successful completion rate of objectives increased over a 12-month period by an average of 33 per cent with customers that had a high adoption rate of Clear Review (and therefore put continuous performance management into practice). This tells us that we can use the successful completion rate of objectives to measure productivity.

Let's take a look at some of the ways these organisations are empowering their people to be more productive.



WESLEYAN

we are all about you

Wesleyan: Conversations, feedback, wellbeing and productivity are part of thriving at work

[Wesleyan](#) branded their Clear Review system as Thrive as they wanted this to be the ethos of their performance management. The entire programme is based on wanting people to thrive at work and as a result, thrive to be their best selves and perform. They see individual development as a way to ensure their teams are thriving. To support wellbeing, employees are having regular conversations with their line managers about their ongoing development and growth.

As a business, they've split their objectives into two areas:

- **Contribution- to ensure people are contributing to the company's overall successes**
- **'A plan for thriving'- traditionally called personal development objectives with a focus on wellbeing objectives**

Having oversight on conversations, feedback and objectives through the technology has been fundamental to ensuring Thrive's success. Outcomes of Thrive:

- **98 per cent adoption of objective-setting, all aligned to strategic deliverables**
- **Aver age of 60 per cent colleagues receiving feed back within the last four weeks**
- **Over 300 wellbeing objectives set, focusing on maintaining mental and physical health, giving back and improving work-life balance**



Amthal Fire and Security: Clarity and accountability boost motivation and productivity

After adopting Clear Review in October 2019, [Jamie Allam, CEO of Amthal Fire and Security](#) has seen many productivity and engagement boosting benefits across the organisation.

In particular, clarity around objectives has allowed employees to be more productive as they know where they stand and where they need to progress.

Reviewing objectives every month or quarter has increased the level of accountability in the organisation, making employees feel more engaged and motivated.

In Jamie's own words:

“There is an increased level of accountability because at least every quarter, or within my team once a month, we are reviewing and checking objectives and actions and what's happened against them.

We don't get side-tracked, and we are actually holding each other accountable — that goes for me as well — on the things that we say we'll do, implement and what our focuses are.”

A woman with curly hair and glasses is shown in profile, looking down at a piece of equipment, likely a microscope, in a laboratory setting. The lighting is warm and focused on her, with the background being a soft, out-of-focus grey. The text is overlaid on the image in white and orange colors.

“If you’re not working on trying to **engage and motivate** your team then your team won’t be as productive.

They’ll do what’s required of them but nothing more.

It’s really about trying to have a **highly engaged team** so that we can deliver our commitment to our customers but also more importantly to continue to grow our business.”



GERALDEVE

Gerald Eve: Supporting productivity and motivation through Continuous Performance Management

From the employee perspective, Gerald Eve wanted more developmental engagement, more clarity and transparency on goals, and more regular feedback – the latter was particularly felt by the millennial population. It was not a case of trying to ignite an already motivated and engaged work force, it was a case of doing a better job of supporting and optimising productivity and progression and giving clarity to employees – and Clear Review complemented this.

They've been focusing on these three things:

- **Culture and mentoring which empowered both managers and employees**
- **Driving a real-time feedback culture**
- **A model that was simple and did away with any of the historic and contrived aspects of performance management**

With clearer objectives and continuous feedback, Gerald Eve's employee engagement and culture has been positively impacted. Employees feel more motivated about their career development which was boosted productivity and engagement.

Gerald Eve's focus towards improving diversity, employee engagement and wellbeing was celebrated with a win at the EG Awards, with [the company winning 'Employer of the Year' \(2018\)](#).



SARRC

Southwest
Autism
Research &
Resource
Center

SARRC: Not just an HR project - buy-in from everyone to improve company culture

The Clear Review system allowed [Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center \(SARRC\)](#) to align all of their major projects to company objectives - which gave everyone greater clarity, credibility and a sense of purpose.

Giving and receiving feedback was quickly embraced by the team as their company culture already supported this. People need and want more regular feedback in order to develop and become high performers. Removing the once or twice a year process also removed a blocker for those high performers as it takes away intimidating meetings.

It was important for SARRC that these changes weren't seen as something that was owned by HR and that everyone within the organisation bought-in. SARRC involved everyone in the organisation with the process and supported it from the top.

Prompts for discussion within Clear Review help support the development of their people, for example, they added a Covid-19 prompt to check-in with their people and support their wellbeing.

Their top tip for adoption is to get that initial buy-in from everyone by taking it out of the hands of [HR and into the people's hands](#).

Summary

Now that you have read through this eBook, you'll know the important role that performance management plays in maximising productivity in the 'new normal' as well as how organisations are practically embedding the different elements of the productivity model.

Let's quickly review the key considerations from the productivity model:

- **Coaching conversations enable high achievement, however organisations must tackle the lack of time and headspace managers have and make it quick and easy for them to have these conversations.**
- **Objectives must be agile and adaptable to changing priorities. But in order to have a more productive workforce, these objective need to be clearly aligned to strategic goals and drive greater collaboration.**
- **Wellbeing and engagement needs to be measured on an ongoing basis, however measuring is only half the battle. You need to take action to improve it if you want to maximise productivity.**
- **To foster recognition, focus on leveraging intrinsic motivators and be clear and transparent about how pay decisions are made.**

Pay decisions should be decoupled from coaching conversations and check-ins.
- **Taking a moment to reflect and being open to revision can help your organisation continually learn and adapt to optimise productivity.**

Five-Step High Productivity Model



Align deliverables to strategy

Agree near-term, strategically-aligned goals which drive individual and collaborative success.

Empower achievement

Equip people to perform to their full potential by having, meaningful coaching conversations.



Optimise wellbeing and engagement

Proactively monitor workplace wellbeing and engagement, and empower people to take practical action

Recognise contributions

Leverage intrinsic rewards and motivation.
Use extrinsic rewards with caution, prioritising fairness and transparency.



Reflect and revise

Build-in continuous improvement through deliberate reflection and targeted action planning.

= 33% higher productivity

Next steps to maximise productivity

An important consideration to bear in mind, is that not all of the five steps have to be implemented simultaneously.

We know that managers are exceptionally busy and will only be able to take on a certain amount of knowledge and change at any one time. So we can think of this as a change journey that we embed over time.

To start making a change, begin by looking at your organisation through four different lenses: process, manager capability, systems and data. Evaluate your current processes and what you need to change to see an increase in productivity.

Review your processes

Review all your processes including:

- **How your organisation currently sets goals and how they align to business strategy**
- **How often progress and feedback is discussed**
- **How wellbeing and engagement is measured**
- **How you recognise achievements**
- **Is dedicated time set aside for reflection and improvement?**

Once you have this information, discuss this process with your senior leaders which incorporates elements of the productivity model we have discussed in the eBook.

What capabilities do your managers have?

In order for your processes to be effective, you need to train your managers to make it work. Here are some key areas you may want to focus on:

- **Train managers on how to have good coaching conversations by giving them prompts for discussion**
- **Give managers practical goal setting tools such as the Five As test**
- **Train managers on giving good feedback and how to reduce bias when making decisions on pay and promotions**
- **Give managers prompts and suggestions on how to talk about wellbeing in their check-ins**

Do you have the right systems and technology in place?

To make a new process stick and work, it needs to be able to integrate into the day-to-day lives of employees.

The best way to do that is by using modern technology that can drive behavioural change. Systems that help employees share feedback across the organisation, as well as have visibility on goals, will help performance management become a seamless experience.

And managers will have better quality conversations if they are provided with in-the-moment coaching prompts using technology.

Look for technology that seamlessly integrates wellbeing and engagement with performance, and which not only measures it, but also drives improvement through automated suggestions and nudges.

Use data to inform your decisions

Data is essential to get an idea of the state of play in your organisation and whether your changes and processes are helping to maximise productivity. Once you have new processes in place, data analytics can give you insight on which teams are regularly achieving objectives, how often managers are having check-ins and levels of employee wellbeing and engagement across the organisation.

This will help inform your decisions on what's working and should be further encouraged, as well as what isn't working and needs attention. Having access to this data in real-time also helps to reduce biases when making pay and succession decisions.

Using data to celebrate successes is also a great way to encourage employees to follow the new way of doing this.

Seeing results will help employees feel more motivated and enthusiastic about making those changes, which will help them feel more productive.

Are you ready for a more productive workforce?

If you are ready to take the next step in maximising productivity in your organisation, take a look at how the Clear Review system can help transform performance and engagement in your organisation for a more productive workforce. Book an online demonstration of our software, where a member of our team will take you through all the different elements of Clear Review and show you how it can help boost productivity and performance.

[Book a demo](#)

If you liked what you learnt in this eBook, sign up to our Performance Management Academy where you can take courses, access more resources and network with other like-minded HR people.

[Join the Performance Management Academy!](#)

