

Performance Management
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Discussion Guide*

The central theme of this book, as Robert Bacal sums it up in his Preface, is “that performance management is about creating relationships and ensuring effective communication. He notes, “It’s about reorienting ourselves—focusing on what organizations, managers, and employees need to succeed. It’s about looking at performance appraisal and performance management as ways to engineer success for everyone.”

That theme should run through your training: it’s about relationships and communication and working together to succeed. The purpose of this book, according to Bacal, is for managers to get “a good grasp of the whys, hows, whens, and whats of performance management” so they can “develop a way of doing it that helps everyone”—the manager, his or her employees, and the organization.

Note: *Performance Management* has been translated into Chinese.

*This discussion guide prepared by Robert Magnan, Ph.D.

Chapter 1. Performance Management: An Overview

This chapter begins by defining performance management (pp. 3-5). I would put up on the board or some other display the “key term” definition from p. 4 and discuss the components one by one:

- Ongoing
- Communication
- Process
- undertaken in partnership between employee and immediate supervisor
- establishing clear expectations and understanding about jobs
- system
- to add value for the organization
- to add value for the managers
- to add value for the employees

I would then ask the managers in the group to take a sheet of paper and rate their own performance management from 1 to 5 on each of those nine components of the definition. After allowing them a minute or two, I would then gather and post the results. If the group were small enough, I would ask all of the managers in turn for their ratings. If the group were too big for individual polling, I would ask for a show of fingers for each component and then mark the highest, the lowest, and the most common ratings.

This exercise would allow the managers to understand the extent to which performance management was a problem for each of them and for all. Sometimes you have to get their attention....

I would continue along the same lines for the section that pre sents the benefits of performance management for managers, employees, and organizations. I would simply read the bullet points from pp. 5-6 and ask for a show of hands from those who felt that way. Next, I would read the bullet points from p. 8 and how many believed that their employees might express the same complaints.

I would conclude this chapter by citing examples of organizations that had suffered because of poor performance management practices—low morale, negative publicity, grievances, lawsuits, investigations by government agencies.... It’s not difficult to find some cases that make a powerful statement about the necessity of good performance management.

Chapter 2. The Challenge of Performance Management

A good way to begin this chapter is by asking the managers why they avoid performance management. I would list their reasons on the board, to put the problems on display. (If they seem reluctant to contribute, you could phrase the question differently: “Why do you believe that some managers avoid performance management?”)

Then, we would discuss the reasons given on p. 13 and the arguments presented on pp. 13-17. If the arguments didn't touch upon all the reasons given by the managers in my group, we would discuss whether a performance management systems such as defined in Chapter 1 would overcome those remaining obstacles and how. (I would expect that some reasons might relate to the culture of the organization, interpersonal difficulties, and tradition or policies. The point would remain: despite the challenges, a good performance management system should at least improve relationships and communication.)

The next section of Chapter 2 covers the criteria for successful performance management (pp. 17-22). I would invite the managers to comment on the sections that list what organizations, managers, and employees need to succeed (pp. 17-21). I would not, however, extend the discussion to the performance management criteria listed on pp. 21-22), since it might seem overwhelming at this point.

In fact, the final section of this chapter, “When Performance Management Approaches Don't Work,” provides some motivation for managers who might feel overwhelmed by the prospect of establishing a performance management system.

Chapter 3. Performance Management as a System

This chapter begins with the concept of a system. Most managers will be familiar with this concept because of the influence of the quality movement. I would stress the importance of interaction among the components and the problems that can result from focusing on some components to the neglect of others.

The next section (pp. 26-38) outlines the components of a performance management system. Each of the components presented here is the focus of a later chapter (5, 6, 7, 9, and 10), so I would discuss any questions that the managers might have about this section, but would not go into any depth at this point.

The final section of Chapter 3 (pp. 38-40) briefly explains how performance management fits into the big picture of the organization—strategic planning and company direction, pay levels, rewards, promotions, human resource development, and budget processes. I would generate a discussion of these connections and ask if the managers could think of any more. They should come out of this discussion with a better appreciation for performance management as a system within the system and with more enthusiasm for learning how to build a good performance management system.

Chapter 4. Getting Ready: Preparing to Start the Process

I would begin this chapter with a quick poll to show the reason for this chapter and the importance of planning for performance management. I would ask the managers to raise their hands in reply to the following questions:

- Do you know your company's strategic plan? Do you know it well enough to outline it for the president of your company?
- Do you know your company's one-year operational plan? Do you know it well enough to outline it for the president of your company?
- Do you know the strategic and operational plan in place for your division or department? Do you know it well enough to outline it for the head of that division or department?
- Can you explain the strategic and operational plan in place for your own work unit in terms that all of your employees can understand and appreciate?

(I would ask the first three questions in terms of the president and a high-level manager, since many managers provide their employees with overviews that would not pass muster with the president or a high-level manager. In order to situate performance management within the "big picture," a manager needs to have a clear understanding of the elements of that picture, not just some vague ideas.)

The replies and reactions that I get for these questions would determine how I would work with the section on strategic and operational plans (pp. 42-46). I would avoid asking any manager specific questions about his or her company's plans, since that might reveal details that would be confidential ... or ignorance that might prove embarrassing. The point would be to make sure that all managers in the group understand what they should know and why, so they don't skimp on this aspect of preparation.

I would then begin the next section (pp. 46-48) by asking the managers to raise their hands in reply to the following questions:

- Do you have a job description for each of your employees?
- Do you have a copy of each job description in your office?
- Have you reviewed and updated each job description as necessary within the past year?
- Do you have the most recent performance appraisal information for all of your employees who have been evaluated?

I would not follow up on these questions. The point is for each of the managers to realize what he or she needs to do to prepare for performance management.

The rest of Chapter 5 deals with preparing and educating employees for performance management. I would ask the managers to do a little written exercise, with the following scenario.

You manage 25 employees in a company that has left performance management up to individual managers, most of whom have avoided the task and simply filled out forms for the HR department. You were promoted to your current position several months ago, after working for the company for three years in several departments. You understand the history of performance management in this

company. You also know that recent cutbacks and layoffs have hurt morale in general and, since the president had painted a rosy picture of the future of the company only last year, that employees don't trust management or managers very much. Now a consultant has convinced the president to develop a good performance management system.

I would then ask them to write out about 50-100 words in response to each of the following three questions that are most probably on your employees' minds:

- What is the purpose of performance management and why should it matter to us employees?
- How will performance management benefit us employees?
- What's your role in this performance management initiative? How are you going to approach it with us?

(I would give a single, specific scenario so that managers would not feel compelled to divulge anything about their own situations. I would base my scenario on a situation with a negative history of performance appraisals, low morale, and little trust because that would pose a greater challenge than a situation with a positive history or no history at all.)

This exercise should oblige the managers to think in practical terms, to consider performance management in terms of employee perceptions and the potential impact on 25 individuals in a specific situation. It should make the words in the book become real for them.

I would then choose three to five managers to read their answers to the first question, another three to five for the second, and three to five more for the third. Depending on the managers in my group and the environment, I might also follow up occasionally with one of the procedural questions listed on p. 49.

Finally, we would discuss the scenario that concludes the chapter (pp. 50-52). I would ask them to evaluate George:

- How well does he introduce performance management to his 18 employees? What would you do differently?
- How well does he explain the reasons and the benefits? What would you do differently?
- How well does he explain performance management in terms of company goals, unit goals, and individual goals? What would you do differently?
- How well does he explain what he will do and what he expects each employee to do? What would you do differently?
- When George invites questions at the end, what would you expect his employees to want to know?

In this way, the managers benefit from being a fly on the wall when George meets with his employees. They have the opportunity to judge his approach and preparation and to think about ways that he could have improved. Finally, they are viewing the meeting from the perspectives of the 18 employees, which should help them when each of them prepares for a similar meeting to introduce performance management.

Chapter 5. Performance Planning

Since proper planning is essential to effective performance management, I would cover the first part of this chapter (pp. 53-57) very carefully, particularly the overview of the process outlined on pp. 55-57. I would stress the four principles that should underlie the meeting:

- a relatively equal partnership between manager and employee, negotiating for success
- the employee as the job expert generating the criteria for success
- the manager as the “big picture” expert ensuring an appropriate fit
- the manager responsible for creating a climate for dialogue and teamwork in the meeting

The heart of Chapter 5 is the performance planning meeting between Neil and Sharlene (pp. 57-68). I would develop a list on the board of the dynamics involved, asking the managers to analyze what happens, what the manager does, and what the employee does. I would encourage them to comment on how the two work together.

Neil raises a few concerns and issues during this scenario. I would build upon what the author has done here by raising other concerns and issues that could have come up during this meeting and ask them how Sharlene should react.

If that exercise goes well, you might develop it through role-play. I would select several managers, one at a time, and assign them roles as the employee meeting with Sharlene:

- the cynic of the unit
- the union rep
- a new employee
- a dinosaur nearing retirement
- an employee whose performance has been mediocre
- an employee with low morale
- the worrywart of the unit

The rest of the managers would work together to suggest how Sharlene should react to the issues and concerns raised by the designated employee.

I would close this chapter by encouraging the managers to take notes on the list of dynamics on the board. I would also recommend that they customize the list to their particular situations. This should be the basis of their action plan.

Chapter 6. Ongoing Performance Communication

Ongoing communication is essential to effective performance management—yet it often is a victim of the time crunch, when the best-laid plans go awry and lose out to more urgent priorities.

I would open discussion of this chapter by asking the managers to share what they do to ensure ongoing communication about performance throughout the year. I would jot down on the board the various contributions. I would focus on five points:

- How regular is the communication?
- How extensive is it?
- Does it cover both positive and negative aspects of the performance?
- How much time and effort are involved?
- How do the employees react to this ongoing communication?

The objective of this discussion would be for the managers to become more aware of the possibilities for maintaining ongoing communication about performance and to reduce concerns that managers might have about time, effort, and the reactions of employees.

We would then discuss the opening section of the chapter (pp. 69-72) about the outcomes expected from ongoing communication of performance. Next, we would discuss the contributions on the board in terms of the eight questions on pp. 71-72. It's likely that the examples of ongoing communication would cover the first three, four, or five questions, but not go beyond. The managers would then better understand how good communication should also involve consideration of what they should do to help the employee improve and what the two of them should do together.

We would then go through the next two sections of Chapter 6, covering formal methods (pp. 72-78) and informal methods (pp. 79-80). (I would treat the two types of methods as suggesting a continuum, with formal and/or scheduled communication on one end and informal and/or spontaneous communication on the other.) For each type of communication method, I would ask the managers to share any experiences that they had with that particular method:

- What did they do?
- How did they do it?
- How did the employee react?
- What were the results in terms of changes?

In my opinion, the following section (p. 80) may be the most important for some managers, because not all managers are good at working as a team with their employees, particularly one on one with each of them. I would set up a basic role-play: a manager will approach me (the employee) to suggest meeting to talk about my performance recently. After each role-play, I would ask the other managers to comment on the manager's approach, particularly in terms of the suggestions on p. 80. I would try to do about a half-dozen versions of this role-play, to show various ways that a manager can handle this crucial interaction.

Chapter 7. Data Gathering, Observing, and Documenting

In essence, this chapter covers two questions:

- Why should managers gather data and observe?
- What should managers gather and what should they document?

The book lists answers to the first question, in terms general enough to apply to any workplace. I would simply ask the managers if they had any answers that they would add to the list.

The second question is more complicated, particularly since the answers would depend in large part on the nature of the work environment and the specifics of each employee's job description, as well as any special characteristics of an employee and his or her history.

To work with the section that covers this second question (pp. 85-91), I would choose managers and ask them to do the following:

- Briefly describe your work situation.
- Name the types of data that you would gather and what you would document for each of your employees.
- Briefly give your reasons for your choices.

This exercise would help the managers realize how the process of gathering data and documenting performance would vary greatly depending on the work situation. I would probably follow up this exercise by asking if any of them had a "special case" employee for which it would be wise to gather additional data and document other aspects of the employee's performance. We would also consider the legal risks of treating "special cases" differently.

Chapter 8. Three Approaches to Evaluating Performance

This chapter presents three types of performance evaluation systems:

- rating systems
- ranking systems
- objective-based systems

To build on the presentation of rating systems (pp. 95-101), I would do a practical exercise. I would first read the following scenario.

I am employed by a company that manufactures and distributes widgets. I work in the shipping department, where there are five of us responsible for loading crates of widgets into trucks and unloading crates that are being returned for any reason. You are my manager. Create at least five criterion statements for rating my performance, with a rating scale for each.

I would ask that the managers each take a sheet of paper and write down their statements and rating scales. Then, I would ask each manager to read one of his or her statements and explain the scale. I would put it on the board. I would gather and list about a dozen statements and scales. Then I would ask the managers to comment on each of the contributions, in terms of the following questions:

- How appropriate is the statement to the job responsibilities?
- How important is the statement in terms of performance?
- How does the statement deal with the issue of individual vs. teammates and other factors?
- How well does the scale suit the criterion statement?

We would discuss such aspects as determining which criteria are essential for this job, how to assess performance when the employee cannot control work flow, when an employee must decide among competing demands (load outgoing trucks or unload incoming trucks or sort and move crates to ensure room to work), and when an employee shares major job responsibilities with others.

Depending on the results of the discussion, I might take a few more examples for the group to analyze.

Finally, we would discuss the suggestions on pp. 101-102 for making rating systems work.

To build on the presentation of rating systems (pp. 102-104), I would expand upon this exercise to generate a discussion about using the essence of the criterion statements listed on the board as the basis for ranking. Because most managers recognize the inadequacies and inequities of ranking their employees, particularly when they consider the arguments presented in the table on p. 104, I would expect this discussion to be considerably shorter.

Finally, to build on the presentation of appraisal by objectives and standards (pp. 105-108), I would again use the criterion statements listed on the board. However, I would use a role-play. I would choose two managers, one to play the manager and the other to play the employee. I

would give them one of the statements and tell them to negotiate a way to turn that statement into an objective and to set evaluation standards for it. I would select a half-dozen or so of the statements for this exercise. Of course, after each pair has reached a decision on the objective and the standards, I would then ask the other managers in the group to comment on the result:

- How appropriate is the objective to the job responsibilities?
- How important is the objective in terms of performance?
- How does the objective deal with the issue of individual vs. teammates and other factors?
- How well do the standards suit the objective?
- What data would the manager use to evaluate the employee according to this objective?

Chapter 8 presents three types of performance evaluation systems, but the most important part of this chapter, it seems, is the opening section that presents “the dilemma of individual performance appraisal (pp. 93-95). In closing, I would return to these pages and discuss the issue of allowing for other factors when evaluating an individual’s performance. I would invite the managers to share their experiences and offer suggestions for dealing fairly with this issue.

Chapter 9. The Performance Appraisal Meeting

This chapter breaks down into three sections: principles (pp.109-112), preparation (pp. 112-114), and the meeting.

For the first section, I would focus on the six points on p. 111 that are essential to making the process work. I would ask the following questions to guide the discussion:

- How can the manager act as helper and problem solver rather than primary evaluator? What can he or she do and say?
- How can the manager involve the employee actively in the partnership? How can the manager help the employee engage in realistic self-evaluation?
- What are “appropriate interpersonal skills” that the manager could use to engage the employee in the process?
- How can the manager ensure that the employee understands what to expect in advance of the meeting?
- What other ways can the manager show that he or she considers the meeting important, in addition to not delaying or rescheduling?
- How can the manager show the employee that he or she intends performance appraisal as a means to improving, not a way of punishing?

I wouldn't expect that the managers would have a lot of specific suggestions to answer these questions. But I'd like the questions to get them thinking about the possibilities, so they're taking steps toward putting those principles into action.

For the first third of the next section, scheduling (p. 112), I would ask the managers to share experiences when a boss scheduled a meeting too tightly, delayed a meeting or showed up late, cancelled a meeting at the last moment, or allowed interruptions of an important meeting. Follow up on each example by asking how that behavior made the manager feel. This discussion should help the managers feel greater empathy for their employees and understand how they would feel if the managers were guilty of similar behavior.

The second third of this section suggests ways to prepare employees for the performance appraisal meeting (pp. 113-114). I would have the managers act out these suggestions.

I would first ask them to each take a sheet of paper and prepare notes that they could use in meeting with their employees. Then I would choose a few of them, one at a time, to go before the group and run the meeting. I would ask them to present an introduction and then to just outline briefly what they would do for the rest of the meeting. (The introduction should set the tone and style for the meeting; the outline would show their strategy.) I would invite the other managers in the group to follow up with questions that employees might ask. The manager would then answer them. I would run this role-play with at least three managers. If the setting would allow for small groups, I would break the managers into groups of four or five so that each member of every group would be able to run a mini-meeting.

The final third of this section describes how a manager should prepare for the performance appraisal meeting (p. 114). I would stress making a checklist for each employee and scheduling

five minutes or so of “quiet time” before each meeting, to review the employee’s file and focus on the meeting.

The final section (pp. 115-120) outlines a procedure for the appraisal meeting. Since this is a unique, one-on-one meeting, I would not have the managers explain what they would do or role-play a meeting. Instead, I would ask them for each phase if they could imagine any difficulties. We would then discuss any concern. By the end of this training session, the managers should know how to do appraisal meetings and feel confident about doing them.

Chapter 10. Performance Diagnosis and Improvement: The Key to Success

This chapter opens with the distinction discussed in Chapters 3 and 8, between the individual and the system (pp. 121-125). I would use a good, quick exercise to help the managers think about this distinction, which is sometimes not very sharp. I would give them one or more scenarios of poor performance and ask them to identify possible causes as “individual” or “system.”

Depending on the managers in the group and the time available, I might create several scenarios or I might simply return to the scenario presented for Chapter 8.

You manage the shipping department of a company that manufactures and distributes widgets. You have five employees who are responsible for loading crates of widgets into trucks and unloading crates that are being returned for any reason. Tom has been working in the department for two years, longer than the four others. You’ve met with Tom and discussed some problems with his performance over the last few months.

Here are some of the specifics that the two of you discussed:

- Some truckers have complained that they have to wait for Tom to start unloading their trucks. Tom explained that this is a problem when there are two or more trucks at the docks at the same time, especially if crates accumulate in the shipping area.
- Several times lately you’ve stopped by the docks and noticed only three workers; Tom and another worker were missing. Tom explained that he’s had to leave the area to show a new worker where to take widgets returned because of damage, shipping error, or an order adjustment.
- Logs show that it took an average of 10% more time the past month to load a truck. Tom explained that there were several reasons: a new hire, modifications in some of the shipping forms, and some new safety measures.

I would ask the managers to indicate for each of the causes of the performance problems whether it was individual or system. I would encourage them to examine the explanations carefully, by asking follow-up questions. They should not be suggesting possible solutions at this point, just trying to better understand the causes.

Here are some examples:

problem: delays in unloading trucks

explanation: too many trucks, too many crates

causes: system (scheduling and/or staffing) ... unless Tom tends to get flustered when the dock area becomes too busy

problem: Tom and another worker missing from dock area

explanation: need to show new worker where to take returned widgets

causes: system (lack of training) and/or individual (when busy, Tom should focus on trucks not training)

problem: more time to load a truck

explanation: a new hire, modifications in forms, new safety measures

causes: system (staffing, changes in procedures)

I would also ask the managers how they might check into these problems, to identify other possible causes. This direction leads naturally into the heart of Chapter 10, performance diagnosis/improvement.

We would go through the steps listed on p. 125 and detailed on pp. 125-131, applying them to whatever scenario(s) we had just analyzed. I would record their thoughts on the board, for later reference. Here are some questions that I would ask if we used the example of Tom in shipping:

Becoming Aware of a Performance Gap

- How would you identify other possible performance gaps, in addition to the three discussed in the appraisal meeting?
- What data would you collect?
- What employees might be able to help you identify gaps?
- What could you do to observe for yourself?

Identifying the Nature of the Gap and Its Seriousness

- What can you know about the three performance gaps discussed in the meeting? What are the circumstances for the delays in unloading trucks? What are the circumstances for Tom's absences from the dock area? What are the circumstances for taking more time to load a truck? What evidence would help you understand each of the gaps?
- How serious are the gaps? How much do the delays in unloading trucks affect us? How much do the absences affect us? How much does the increased time per truck affect us? Are any of the problems likely to become less serious if you don't take any action?

Identifying Possible Causes

- What factors in the *system* can be causing Tom's performance problems?
For the delays in unloading, Tom cited work load as a cause, because of insufficient staffing and/or poor scheduling. Are there any other possible causes in the system?
For the problem of leaving the dock area with another worker, Tom cited the need to show the new worker what to do, because of insufficient training. Are there any other possible causes in the system?
For the problem of taking more time to load a truck, Tom cited a new hire, modifications in forms, and new safety measures. Are there any other possible causes in the system?
- What *individual* factors might be causing Tom's performance problems?
For the delays in unloading, we've considered the possibility that Tom feels overwhelmed when the dock is busy. Are there any other possible individual causes?
For the problem of leaving the dock area with another worker, we've discussed that Tom should show better judgment and focus on trucks not training when the dock is busy. Are there any other possible individual causes?
For the problem of taking more time to load a truck, Tom cited factors that we've identified as systemic. Are there any possible individual causes? Does Tom have difficulty dealing with changes? Does he have an issue with safety regulations?

This discussion should open up into the next section of this chapter, diagnostic tools and questions (pp. 128-130), and then logically into developing plans to deal with the causes and monitoring the results of those plans. For each of the possible causes that we'd listed on the board, I would ask for suggestions to investigate the possibilities. We would then discuss actions that the manager could take to resolve the problem and ways to determine the results of those actions.

The final section of Chapter 10 (pp. 131-132) is crucial. We would discuss each of the principles for working with people to maximize cooperation. If time allowed, I would set up little role-plays for practice, reminding the players to focus on diagnosing, not blaming, and on the benefits of improving the performance:

- Approach Tom about discussing his performance problems and the possible causes we've considered.
- Approach Tom and his four co-workers about performance problems in shipping.

After each role-play, I would encourage the other managers to comment on the approach and to speculate how they would expect the ensuing discussion to go. A variation would be to assign other managers to play the parts of Tom and his co-workers and to ask them to react to the approach used by the manager.

The managers should come out of this exercise with a better sense how to work with employees to diagnose problems and develop potential solutions.

Chapter 11. Performance Management and Discipline

The core of this chapter is the process of progressive discipline (pp. 137-141). I would focus the discussion around the following questions:

- What is progressive discipline?
- What are the five steps of phase one? Why are these steps part of the process of progressive discipline?
- What are the five steps of phase two? What should you do if the employee refuses to cooperate in identifying consequences?
- What are the five steps of phase three?

I would then ask the managers to analyze each phase of the disciplinary process in action with John and Brian (pp. 142-148). We would focus on the dynamics involved and how the process at any point could go in other directions.

Chapter 12. Performance Management Variations

This chapter presents four variations of performance management:

- 360-degree evaluation
- bidirectional evaluation
- Effectiveness Enhancement Systems
- “using your head no system system”

For the first three variations, I would use the same approach, basically, using the following questions to guide the discussion and asking each question of several managers:

- How would you explain this type of performance evaluation to your employees?
- How well do you think that this type of evaluation would work for you in your particular situation?
- What advantages would you anticipate?
- What disadvantages would you anticipate?

Since the fourth variation, the “using your head no system system,” is really a matter of attitude, I would ask the managers what we can learn from this story. I would then follow up by encouraging them to share any stories that show how an organization could have benefited from the “using your head no system system.”

Chapter 13. Questions Managers Ask

This chapter consists of questions and answers. For each question raised and answered by the author, I would ask some questions:

- How well do you think the author has answered this question?
- What questions would you have about the answer?
- Do you face this question in your particular situation? If so, how well does the answer help you?
- What questions do you have about the answer?
- How can we answer these questions and deal with this problem?

The point that would emerge through this discussion would be that managers cannot expect an book to meet all their performance management needs. A book can provide guidance, but any performance management system requires sensitivity, people skills, analytical skills, strategy, and an ability to balance priorities.

Chapter 14. A People Process, People Techniques

This chapter returns to the central theme of this book: that performance management is about creating relationships and ensuring effective communication, not about forms or judging or categorizing employees. Performance management should be about people and about how managers work with them.

I would start with the six assumptions listed on pp. 176-177, asking the following questions and any follow-up questions generated by their answers:

- Assumption 1 is that a manager does performance management *with* employees, not *to* them. Do you agree with this assumption? Why or why not? When might the opposite of this assumption be true?
- Assumption 2 is that most of the performance management process should be done as a partnership between manager and employee. Do you agree with this assumption? Why or why not? In what situations would this assumption not hold true?
- Assumption 3 is that most employees who understand what's required of them will try their hardest to do what's required. Do you agree with this assumption? Why or why not? Have you seen or heard about any exceptions? Why did this assumption not hold true in those cases?
- Assumption 4 is that the purpose of performance management is to focus on the present and the future and not assign blame for problems in the past. Do you agree with this assumption? Why or why not? Managers and even organizations sometimes blame and punish in order to set an example. What do you think of this practice?
- Assumption 5 is that managers must identify the real causes of performance deficits, whether in the system or in the individual. Do you agree with this assumption? Why or why not? Are there situations when it would make sense to focus on expecting the individual to improve rather than trying to improve the system?
- Assumption 6 is that each employee is the expert about his or her job. Do you agree with this assumption? Why or why not? In what situations would this assumption not hold true? In each of these situations, what should the manager do?

For "Essential Interpersonal Skills" (pp. 177-181), I would ask basic questions to ensure understanding:

- What are "climate-setting skills"? What would be some examples of these skills in action?
- What does it mean to "create clarity of purpose"? What steps are demonstrated in the scenario on p. 179?
- What does it mean to "create joint responsibility" within the context of performance management?
- What does it mean to "clarify process"? Why is this important?
- What are "conflict prevention skills"? How should we understand the word "conflict" here?

The next section of this chapter (pp. 182-186) describes ways in which language can cause conflicts. For each type of problem language, I would ask the managers to give other examples,

especially examples in which the language is more subtle or the tone sends a message through neutral words. (Most of us generally avoid egregiously problematic language, but all of us slip into trouble from time to time.) For each example contributed, I would ask the other managers to hold up fingers to rate the example: from 1 for “only slightly provocative” to 5 for “likely to cause an explosion.” I wouldn’t expect consensus; in fact, the point of rating the examples would be to show how perceptions vary. I would build upon the ratings by suggesting contexts and other aspects that would increase or decrease the negative reactions.

The final section of this chapter (pp. 186-188) suggests ways to cool heated situations. For each bulleted paragraph, I would encourage the managers to share any experiences in which they or another manager did as the author recommends—or not. I would follow up by asking about the results. I would expect some cases when the recommended technique failed or when the same action resulted in greatly different consequences. We would then discuss the factors that affected the results.

Chapter 15. Performance Management in Action

This chapter consists of a case study. I would treat it like a trigger film, a video used in teaching and training to provoke thought and stimulate discussion. I would have three managers play the parts of Marie, Michael, and Sarah and I would stop the action from time to time to allow discussion. The basic questions would be the following:

- How well is the manager handling this aspect of the process?
- How well is it working with this employee?
- How else might an employee react at this point?

Discussion of “The Outcomes” (pp. 198-199) should open up to encompass a wide range of possibilities. I would stress a basic point: however specific the steps in each process of your performance management system and however well you prepare, you’re dealing with individual human natures and so you can never be sure how all your work will turn out.