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| Approach: **Focusing on Performance** |
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| The culture of any team, be it course leader, subject level or department-wide, is central to change management. You can't expect to bring people together to work to focus on strategy or improve the curriculum or student experience if there are fundamental flaws in the team's culture. In order to focus on the team's potential and to make space for innovative and new thinking it's vital that there's a 'safe' space that colleagues feel comfortable contributing to. ***Nothing undermines a team's culture and ethos faster than unacceptable behaviour or unacceptably poor performance***. It's vital that whether this is a long standing issue or a situation that has just arisen, managers are proactive in addressing these behaviours. Unacceptable behaviour and/or poor performance are like ripples on the pond - they affect everyone in the group and, in my experience, have a significant impact on student experience (both directly and indirectly). Below are some examples of ways of approaching poor performance and unacceptable behaviours. Before being a process of any kind I would always check in with a contact in Human Resources who will guide you through the conversations and process. If a situation escalates it's important that you've been in contact with HR. Moving into performance management can be very isolating (for all involved) so having the support of HR is essential.  I run a yearly networking event for Heads of Department and Subject Leads - the two most discussed requests are for insights into tackling poor performance and issues of capability. When these areas go unaddressed there's a tendency for colleagues to develop unacceptable behaviours (often to compensate for areas of under performance).  **Poor Performance**  All teams are impacted by instances of poor performance from time to time and all staff move along a continuum of performance. Though we like to think we keep personal life and work life separate there are times when the two become intertwined. As managers, we often have no idea of the home contexts of colleagues and what they're dealing with on top of their jobs - so I think it's really important to have a conversation that enables a colleague to explore how they are being affected and whether issues that are manifesting at work are as a result of issues at work, or elsewhere, or a combination of both. I've found that these conversations enable colleagues to reflect on their work in an open and honest way.  I find record keeping very useful in these instances. It provides you with an objective record so you can see if issues are one off occurrences or part of an emerging pattern. Issues with underperformance put pressure on the whole team and others will be extending themselves to support the colleague in question.  In my experience, it may be a surprise to colleagues that their current level of performance is beneath expectations. It's vital that you have this conversation early on. To address issues of poor performance the colleague needs to be aware that they are underperforming. As always this needs to be a conversation that is handled with dignity and respect. In my experience sometimes colleagues are rather overtaken by change in the work place and this conversation is an acknowledgement that they need some help. Poor performance can be a result of missed opportunities along the line, so developing a plan of training and staff development provides the colleague with an opportunity to reengage and to direct their focus towards development.  As colleagues move through different performance levels during their career I've found it's important to provide a colleague with a supportive plan to help focus issues of poor performance. I develop a plan (usually over a semester) which flags up areas where there are performance issues but also identifies (with the colleague) areas of support and development. It's not enough to say that performance is beneath expectations - what can we do as managers to help support the colleague. Thankfully, this supportive plan can result in staff addressing these performance issues but if there is no improvement, or things worsen, you have a record of support and issues to take into a potential performance management review.  Not all underperformance results in performance management or approach issues of capabilities. Sometimes a nudge in the right direction will do - but you still need to address it.    **Unacceptable behaviour**    Unfortunately, there are unacceptable behaviours and practices in all professions and workplaces at the most extreme this includes explicit racism, sexism and so forth but might also be manifest in ongoing micro-behaviours. Work needs to be a safe environment for all staff. It is really important for culture setting that you tackle instances of unacceptable behaviour when they occur.  For every member of staff who is acting in an explosive manner there are a number of staff who are intimidated by the behaviour who are not given a voice. You have to create a space to build their capability and provide opportunities. It's then about moving to a far more positive way of thinking collectively. For me, I also have to keep in mind that an opposing voice/s is not necessarily a bad thing. A healthy team environment does provide opportunities for disagreements.  An example from a previous workplace:    In this instance, the impetuous to change the academic culture came from students. I had a group of students approach me who had complained of being bullied by a member of staff. They didn't want to register a formal complaint against the member of staff as they were fearful about retributions. They were trapped in a terrible position with no course of redress. I had already seen some of the behaviours they described directly at staff meetings. I met with the person in question and talked about what's acceptable. In this instance, there were poor performance issues which the unacceptable behaviour was 'masking'. I had to be really clear and tackle unacceptable behaviours when they arose. Part of the problem was in the past the management had been too hands off and what had developed were *De facto* leaders who established themselves outside and in opposition to the management structure. In the past staff looked to these informal leaders to set the culture. I spent a lot of time understanding them and establishing myself, my authority and a culture of trust. When inappropriate behaviours cropped up I responded directly in the moment. This included inviting people to leave meetings when they were struggling to control their emotions. You have to do this in a calm and measured way. It is also important that you follow these instances up with the individuals involved to understand what had happened and what made them feel the way they did.    You have to say really clearly when inappropriate behaviour occurs that it is below the standards and expectations we have here. At SHU we have a clear code of conduct that we all abide by. To embed these expectations you have to keep at it and have a lot of keep in touch meetings as these processes take time.  Once unacceptable behaviour and poor performance are tackled it makes room for innovation and development amongst the team. I was keen to reward course leaders and found opportunities to give them variety and engage with different work. I wanted to create that excitement and needed to understand what they are interested in. We needed to move from a performance management culture to a positive development culture. This leads to an attitude where colleagues look for new opportunities to help students, sign up for opportunities and want to work collaboratively with others. |