

# Leveraging Technology to Improve Social Dynamics

Edie L. Goldberg

*E. L. Goldberg & Associates, Menlo Park, California*

Although the authors of the focal article (Pulakos, Mueller Hanson, Arad, & Moye, 2015) have provided some well-grounded guidelines on how to fix the performance management (PM) dilemma companies are facing today, in this commentary, I seek to extend their thesis to include innovating the process by leveraging new social technologies that have the opportunity to truly change the social dynamics of the entire process. Furthermore, it is critical to also consider how well the PM process is aligned with the company's formal and informal work structures. Traditional work structures were hierarchical, with employees reporting to one manager and having responsibility primarily for their own work product. Today's contemporary work structures often rely on teamwork and/or matrixed work structures in which an employee has two managers.

In the focal article, Pulakos et al. (2015) have addressed the fact that how organizations set goals (goal cascading, writing SMART goals) should be streamlined to be more efficient and appropriate to the role. However, they have not addressed the fact that the complexity of work has driven an increase in the amount of collaboration in the contemporary workplace. Organizations are becoming flatter, leaner, and more agile. At the same time, jobs are becoming more complex and more global in scope. All these factors make it more difficult for any one person to do a job in isolation from teammates. Nearly all organizations utilize teams to get work accomplished, whether they are project teams, standing committees, task forces, customer teams, product teams, or quick response teams. The importance of feedback and regular communication within and across teams is magnified by the fact that these teams are often operating both virtually and globally. Some team members may never meet each other in person, which makes it all the more essential that they are confident that they are on track with their individual deliverables that serve team goals. Thus, the sharing of goals and progress toward goals has become more important than ever.

How employees interact with others and how they share information have changed dramatically with the new technologies available today through both mobile and social applications. Tools like Yammer and

Edie L. Goldberg, E. L. Goldberg & Associates, Menlo Park, California.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Edie L. Goldberg, E. L. Goldberg & Associates, 950 Siskiyou Drive, Menlo Park, CA 94025. E-mail: [edie@elgoldberg.com](mailto:edie@elgoldberg.com)

Chatter are bringing social communication to the work environment to increase efficiency and ensure everyone is working on the most critical priorities. These tools help companies build agility because employees can gain access to feedback on company performance and thus can anticipate change because employees are more informed about changing priorities or significant events impacting the organization (e.g., new customers, mergers and acquisitions, competitor news, etc.).

Goal setting has long been recognized as a key ingredient for high performance, but today goals are often shared, and it is difficult for individuals to know how they are progressing against a goal unless their progress is posted publicly for all to see. Leveraging social technologies to establish and share goals, as well as to report on progress toward goals, helps companies execute some of the critical design elements that are required for goals to motivate performance (e.g., feedback on progress toward goals). If an employee can share progress on a goal that the team is dependent on for advancing their overall objectives, then that publically shared information may not only motivate performance toward goal accomplishment but also encourage peers to collaborate or contribute toward goal completion for the good of the entire team.

When it comes to getting feedback at work (against goals or behaviors), today's knowledge workers do not see their manager as the only true source for feedback. They are equally—if not more—passionate to know how their peers and other leaders regard their performance. Furthermore, managers may often not be colocated with all of their direct reports. Thus, peers may have much more accurate and specific information about an employee's performance than the manager does. Although Pulakos et al. (2015) have stated that “day-to-day performance involves more than managers, and effective PM behavior needs to be extended to all colleagues in one's network” (p. xx), they have not addressed how companies can ensure that feedback is sought out from all colleagues in one's network on an ongoing basis. By leveraging social technologies to create social PM, organizations can enable individuals (managers, peers, direct reports) to provide feedback and recognize each other when that recognition is most relevant, enabling spontaneity and documenting performance information in the moment rather than 6 to 9 months after the fact.

Tools that help solicit feedback or provide recognition in the moment will help advance the ideas proposed here. Social technology tools have the ability to truly innovate the way organizations establish and align goals, as well as the ability to provide feedback and recognition in a manner consistent with the needs and expectations of the workforce.

A 2012 study by McKinsey Global Institute (Chui et al., 2012) reported that two thirds of the value creation offered by social technologies lie in improving communications and collaboration within and across enterprises.

McKinsey estimated that companies using social technologies such as those involved in social PM to increase communications about goals and collaboration in the achievement of goals could see a increase in productivity by knowledge workers of 20% to 25%.

Between the changing expectations of the workforce and the fact that organizations are more matrixed and more collaborative than ever before, organizations simply need new processes to reflect today's business realities. True, technology is only a tool. Used correctly, this technology helps facilitate the many changes in PM that are necessary for the process to be more relevant to the employee today and to help drive organizational performance in a dynamic business environment that requires to-the-moment responsiveness and frequent shifting of priorities.

### References

- Chui, M., Manyika, J., Bughin, J., Dobbs, R., Roxburgh, C., Sarrazin, H., . . . Westergren, M. (2012). *The social economy: Unlocking value and productivity through social technologies*. London, UK: McKinsey Global Institute.
- Pulakos, E. D., Mueller Hanson, R., Arad, S., & Moye, N. (2015). Performance management can be fixed: An on-the-job experiential learning approach for complex behavior change. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice*, 8, 51–76.

## Seeing the Forest but Missing the Trees: The Role of Judgments in Performance Management

John P. Meriac

*University of Missouri—St. Louis*

C. Allen Gorman

*East Tennessee State University*

Therese Macan

*University of Missouri—St. Louis*

Various solutions have been proposed to “fix” performance management (PM) over the last several decades. Pulakos, Mueller Hanson, Arad, and

John P. Meriac, Department of Psychological Sciences, University of Missouri—St. Louis; C. Allen Gorman, Department of Management, East Tennessee State University; Therese Macan, Department of Psychological Sciences, University of Missouri—St. Louis.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to John P. Meriac, Department of Psychological Sciences, University of Missouri—St. Louis, 425 Stadler Hall, One University Boulevard, St. Louis, MO 63121-4499. E-mail: [meriac@umsl.edu](mailto:meriac@umsl.edu)