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Professional Growth

BEN BROWN @EDROUNDTABLES



A Roundtable Write-up
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Forward

The following material is a summary of two roundtable conversations discussing how schools are planning to run their performance management over the coming year.

It offers insights into how you might choose to carry out your performance management cycle. It is not intended to be a final solution, but to be a foundation on which to build something suitable for your school and context.

Huge thanks go to those who participated in the discussion. If you would like to benefit from similar open discussion, then visit edrt.co.uk and discover how it could help you develop your school.

The conversations took place on 6th and 14th October 2020.

The discussion was broad and covered many areas, some of which are not covered in this document for reasons of privacy.

I have tried to organise the ideas and comments into a more coherent piece than the original transcripts and hope that you enjoy reading it.

I apologise to any of those involved if I have misunderstood any of the conversation, these mistakes are mine – do not hesitate to offer clarification.

Resources referred to in the document are available for download from the edrt.co.uk digital library with a subscription.

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Management or Growth

From the outset it was clear that all the schools involved in the conversation have moved or are in the process of moving away from the idea of staff performance being managed.

Instead, the focus was very much on professional development and growth. This is seen as a positive move, beneficial for both the staff and the school.

The work of Chris Moyse at Bridgewater College Trust was cited on several occasions as being the model for the way in which performance development and professional growth was carried out.

For more background on this watch this video, which can be found on the ResearchEd YouTube channel.



Excelsior MAT have taken this idea of one size fits one and developed it further than many, applying the principles to all their staff, including site managers and other support staff. Professional growth is seen as being

something for everyone to be part of, not just those in the classroom.

They have been kind enough to share the documentation that supports this model with us, it can be found in the [digital library](#).

Professional growth policies state that it is “designed to challenge thinking, promote deep reflection, collaboration and a change for the better.” This is a big step away from traditional top down target driven performance management processes.

They, along with all the other heads at the table wanted to recognise and promote the professionalism of the staff at their schools.

In some cases, Local Authority expectations impact the ability to move fully away from data driven targets, although more leeway is being given to interpret expectations.

Where professional growth has been implemented, one significant change is that the onus is not on the teacher to prove that they deserve a pay rise with lots of evidence.

Instead, there is a culture of trust in their professionalism and desire to improve. The evidence of their work is seen in their teaching and in the conversations that are had with school leaders on the professional development that is taking place.



Research Driven

Throughout the discussion there was an emphasis on a move to research-based projects which supported both the school and the teacher.

It was recognised that research projects are a lot of work, so time and workload must be a consideration when identifying what they are and how staff can be supported in working on them.

When initially moving to this approach, lots of support and guidance is needed to ensure that the quality and depth of the projects are appropriate. Research is a skill that needs to be developed.

A balance between the goals of the staff and the needs of the school should be found. Schools will have identified priorities for school improvement and professional growth of teachers in this area is much more desirable than research without clear direction.

One school is using materials such as Tom Sherrington's Walkthroughs as a starting point for their growth. They have identified key priorities for the school and staff are given freedom to research and develop their practice within this defined area.

In some schools, the School Development Plan has become the tool for driving the direction of growth. Trying to separate the two is not easy, as the development of the school is also driven by the development of the staff.

While for others the head must decide how what individual staff want to do fits in with the school development plan.

Throughout the discussions, it was clear that, if teachers continued to meet the Teachers' Standards, pay progression was expected, regardless of the success of the research. Improve not prove was the mantra.

With Covid-19 an issue, the focus of research may change for the coming year as meeting other staff and travelling to other schools is problematic at present. One head suggested that the change in balance of teaching expectations from the government may see a focus on developing remote learning and blended learning strategies etc.





Strengths and Weaknesses

Self-reflection is a key part of the performance development process. Because staff have much more ownership over their professional development and growth, there is an expectation that they reflect on the success, strengths and areas for further growth.

The Teacher's Standards are an integral part of Professional Growth and progress is measured against each of them. They form the basis for discussion and possible goal setting.

Reflecting and understanding where you are as a teacher helps to provide a better individual focus for professional development.

This is a big step away from Pupil Progress meetings focussed on the pupils, towards teachers shaping their teaching to improve outcomes for pupils. A growth model as opposed to a deficit model.

One key question beyond the self-reflection is to identify the needs of the class that they teach, identifying what

they as teachers could do to help them make the most progress and remove the barriers the children face to becoming better learners.

Further reflection on the knowledge and skills required to make those changes leads to the development of goals and actions.

Several heads commented that this process is not designed to put teachers on the spot, but to be part of a frank conversation.

One head shared that they give the questions that form the basis of the conversation to the staff in advance of the meetings to give them the opportunity to really think about the answers, instead of thinking of something on the spot.

This leads to much more open and honest conversations, which in some schools also incorporated wellbeing and or supervision, allowing staff to talk about the challenges that they face and ask for support in achieving goals.



Triangulation & Monitoring

There were a range of different ways in which teachers were monitored regarding their progress towards self-improvement.

All heads made sure that staff were given time to read, to observe, to visit other staff and other schools.

Staff meetings are used for CPD, planning and reflection time. Conversations were not left to one a term to check on progress but were ongoing throughout the year.

Some schools developed group coaching and accountability with staff



working in teams around a focus and shared peer observations.

Others removed all formal observations, except for NQTs, unless requested by staff, the focus instead was on a professional growth plan, which embeds the practice of reflection, evaluation and coaching into everyday practice.

There was still an element of using work in books, data and some observation in most schools to enable the head and

SLT to hold staff to account for their practice, but this was scaled back.

In one school, the SDP and monitoring are shared with all staff, so that they can see how it all fits together and where their part in the big picture is.

Most schools already engaged in the research-based professional growth process arranged time for staff to share projects and present findings to other staff, usually in the summer term, which is when the appraisal or review process took place.



Appraisal

The conversation emphasised that trust is a huge part of the process of professional growth. Trust that everyone will do the job to the best of their ability, so appraisal is about getting them to where they want to be.

It was recognised that targets for the sake of being a target are a waste of time and do not motivate teachers. Appraisal was a much more positive process when teachers have ownership of their growth and much more was achieved.

The review was about what worked, what did not and what they would do next year.

Unless staff did not fully engage in the process of professional growth their pay progression was accepted.

Although, it was noted that outcomes and impact were dependant upon pay-scale, with more expected from teachers who had passed through the

threshold and were on the upper pay-scale.

Excelsior MAT report that feedback from staff after the first year of using professional growth has been excellent and they want it to continue.

Even where staff members have not attained pay progression, the system was acknowledged as fair and something that they wanted to continue and engage in (albeit more fully).

One key aspect regarding the success of this approach appears to be the development of a coaching culture, with schools reporting that this way of looking at performance or development changed the way that staff engaged with the process. If it was being done with them, it was far better than being done to them with imposed targets.





The Impact of Covid-19

Last year was severely impacted by coronavirus and there was some discussion about how different schools were approaching performance management in light of the interrupted year.

For most schools, everyone is going through pay progression where there were no issues identified prior to lockdown.

It was recognised that with staff moving from M6 to UPS there were additional consideration. Budget can be an issue for M6 to UPS changes for some schools and there also needs to a sense of fairness.

The consensus from most heads was that those going through threshold were given longer to achieve expectations and provide any materials

or work necessary to support their applications.

Another potential impact is the planning of professional growth in the future, particularly as Covid-19 is likely to be part of the landscape for significant parts of the year ahead, if not longer.

If social distance measures are in place and travelling is less likely to be possible, then appropriate research methods and observations will need to be considered when teachers discuss their goals.

For some, it is possible to simply roll professional development targets over to this year, for others less so.

In addition, the school development plan may have changed significantly in response to the epidemic.



In Summary

The conversation with the heads involved in both sessions indicated a clear move away from "Performance Management" with data driven targets among primary schools.

They want their staff to engage fully with the professional development, recognising that staff growth was a key driver in their school development and improvement.

Investing in their staff is highly likely to improve staff retention and improve well-being and outcomes for pupils.

The challenge for all teachers and school staff is to always improve and grow, to be come great. This desire comes from within and is a result of support, nurture and collaboration with like-minded professionals.

