

A Decade of Distinction

10 Years!



Looking Ahead: No More Appraisals!

Let's be honest: few workplace practices spark as much eye-rolling as the annual appraisal. For many employees, it's a stale routine—one rushed meeting, some half-hearted feedback, and a few goals that get forgotten before the ink is dry. Leaders and managers often dislike them just as much, finding the process bureaucratic and disconnected from real performance.

So why do we keep doing them?

Because, despite their flaws, appraisals meet a need we can't ignore: people want to know where they stand, how they're doing, and where they're headed. Without structure, feedback often disappears into the busyness of everyday work. The real question isn't whether appraisals are useful - it's which version or style of them actually works.

Why the Old Model Fails

I believe the once-a-year "performance review" is a relic of another era. It's too infrequent for today's agile workplaces, often biased toward what happened most recently, and rarely fuels genuine growth. At worst, it feels like judgment day - a focus on past shortcomings rather than future potential.

No wonder some companies ditched them entirely. But others found that without some form of structured reflection, alignment and accountability quickly eroded.

Tech giants such as Adobe and Deloitte moved away from annual reviews years ago, favouring continuous feedback and shorter, more regular check-ins.

What Works Now

And yet, appraisal systems refuse to die. Why? Because, at their core, they serve an essential human and organisational need: structured reflection. Without a moment to pause, discuss, and align, performance risks becoming reactive, and growth opportunities get missed. Employees often crave feedback, or feedforward, more than managers realise—what matters is how it is given.

The organisations getting it right aren't scrapping appraisals; they're reinventing them. A few patterns are emerging:

- **More frequent, less formal.** Quarterly check-ins or ongoing “mini reviews” supported by ongoing informal feedback are far more effective than a once-a-year verdict, making feedback timely and actionable.
- **Two-way conversation.** Dialogue not monologue. The best appraisals are not managers delivering verdicts - they're collaborative discussions about growth, impact, and aspirations and both parties bring reflections and questions. Self-appraisal is usually far more revealing and accurate than manager-led feedback.
- **Focus on the future.** Ratings and rankings satisfy spreadsheets but rarely inspire people or bring about change in behaviours and performance. Shifting the lens to development, skills, and opportunities changes the tone completely.
- **Culture first.** No process - however clever - can succeed without trust. If people fear a culture punishes mistakes or honesty it will backfire, they'll play safe and the whole exercise becomes empty. Psychological safety is the true foundation of meaningful reviews.

Why They Still Matter

In a world of hybrid work, shifting priorities, and rapid change, structured reflection is more vital than ever. Done well, appraisals create a rhythm of pause and perspective that day-to-day work can't. They give employees clarity, managers alignment, and organisations momentum.

Managing Strategic Talent

The new tomorrow around 'appraisal' is as much about fostering and growing strategic talent as it is personal growth. As our organisations change and recalibrate to meet future skills or knowledge gaps and further invest in the empathic aspects of customer service the genesis of this aspect of organisational development needs to start with 'the conversation' – perhaps a fitting substitute label for appraisals.

The Provocation

Appraisals are neither the magic wand HR once hoped for, nor the obsolete relic some critics claim. Their relevance today depends less on the form they take, and more on the spirit behind them. Done poorly, they breed cynicism. Done well, they create clarity, strengthen trust, and spark ambition.

Maybe it's time we stopped asking, *"Should we still be doing appraisals?"* and started asking, **"What kind of conversations do our people need to thrive?"**

The most successful style today? A lightweight, ongoing, human conversation—less about judgment, more about growth. Done right, appraisals stop being a dreaded ritual and start becoming something far more powerful: a reason to look forward.

For leaders it's about watching out for naturally occurring opportunities to share observations on performance such as at the end of a meeting or presentation. 'In the moment' feedback can land well especially where rapport has been built and you're in a relaxed environment. How much better is it to exchange reflections on performance when walking side by side, than sitting opposite one another in an office setting?

What is the practice in your organisation and how brave are you willing to be in reshaping appraisals into something worth looking forward to?

Final Word

Whilst we've used the term 'appraisal' in this article to aid understanding we believe this term has been sullied and needs a rebrand and a new label such as **'the conversation'**.

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