

SHIFTING MINDSETS AROUND PERFORMANCE CONVERSATIONS IN THE NHS



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If we want the NHS to flourish and thrive into the future, we need to ensure that the performance conversations we are having are the ones we *want* to have.

Many people in the NHS have developed a negative mindset around the idea of having a 'performance appraisal'. Why? Here are some potential contributing factors:

- The workload is incredibly high, and it often feels like there isn't a spare minute on shift. This makes our time a precious commodity and anything that takes us away from the care we could be offering our patients can seem purposeless
- Some NHS performance appraisal processes have been in use for a while, and being rather formal, don't encourage a relaxed, open and 'human' conversation
- Due to high turnover plus budget/time constraints, training for managers is limited, meaning lots of managers lack confidence and feel ill-equipped to have positive, successful appraisals
- Goal-setting exercises, on top of an already full workload, can start to feel unrealistic and tend to be completed with a 'tick box' mentality

What's the impact of a negative mindset around performance?

When we're having a conversation that we perceive as negative, our bodies usually gear up for a fight or a flight. Our hearts beat faster, our muscles tense, our cognitive ability is diminished. We can feel uncomfortable, embarrassed or angry, particularly if this is a conversation that we feel is being forced upon us.

Hence, a negative mindset around performance conversations can have a deeply damaging impact for individuals and across organisations. It can increase stress levels and encourage interpersonal conflict, and because we don't think as clearly in negative situations, we don't walk away from the conversation with an accurate view of our performance. Ultimately, of course, the negative mindset will lead to us providing poorer quality care for our patients.

It's important to remember that mindsets don't tend to correspond with reality. For example, the People teams in many NHS Trusts are doing great work supporting a positive performance culture. There are also many



resources available to help line managers have better performance conversations (and many are already skilled and able to effectively coach their team members to grow, develop and perform at their best). This negative mindset around performance appraisal doesn't need to exist.

So how can we shift mindsets and help people feel more positive about performance conversations?

We can't force mindsets to change, however hard we try, but we *can* shine a light on a refreshing new approach. By emphasising the positive outcomes of this approach, and strategically focusing on the key elements that people care about most, performance conversations start to become more appealing and mindsets start to shift.



Some example elements of a refreshing new approach:

1. *Clarify the purpose of performance conversations*
2. *Create safe platforms to involve everyone in performance culture*
3. *Theme conversations around character strengths*
4. *Harness the power of mindset-shifting questions*

If you want to learn more about these elements and how to positively impact performance culture in your trust/organisation, please click below for a free guide to Shifting Mindsets about Performance Conversations.

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