

The Mansis Update

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AS BACKGROUND ACTIVITY

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Here's a simple idea that might help senior managers and executives re-appraise how they spend their time.

Foreground and **Background** are concepts used in Psychology, Philosophy, Physiology and most currently, Computer Science. A computer operating system for example (such as Windows™) works in the **background**, behind the scenes, doing its job, designed to be unnoticed.

Our conscious activity, such as working with a computer application to write a report, perform calculations on a spread

sheet, draw pictures or run a simulation, is in the **foreground** where we have control over what's going on.

Similarly, a Performance Management System should work in the background, doing its job to ensure that the members of your organization know what's expected of them and that the work gets done. The foreground is reserved for the conscious use of your organization's key or unique technology as well as strategic planning, new product development -- i.e. figuring out what needs to be done and where your organization or team needs to go. The background ought to ensure that the decisions made in the foreground are understood and accomplished.

Unfortunately, though, without an effective performance management system in place, "background" originating problems (such as direction not clearly understood, or the job doesn't get done properly, or direction isn't followed or assignments completed) jump to the foreground. Management, including senior management and executives become trapped and pre-occupied with employee performance problems and have to divert their attention away from the foreground -- away from leading the business or using the technology which they're usually more qualified and comfortable with. Is it a wise use of human resources to have foreground specialists spending their time cleaning up background issues, for which they're typically less qualified?

Is it the wisest use of a surgeon's time ensuring that the nursing staff has been

properly trained, that the scalpels are sharp, that the patient is prepped or that the hospital taxes are paid? Likewise, should senior management run after people to make sure that their directions are followed, or that the workforce all know what's expected of them?

For decades the management training industry has tried to teach technical specialists how to deal with "background" people management issues. The success rate isn't good and maybe part of the reason is that many managers and executives are expected to learn and use skills to resolve problems which would be better resolved or prevented in the background, by means of a performance management system.

A performance management system could help your organization optimize its use of management time and skill. Management could focus on leading the enterprise and determining its course, and not spend time making sure the organization was, in fact, organized and working.

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