



# Performance And Development Conversations At The Civil Aviation Authority

## The Civil Aviation Authority

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is a public corporation established by Parliament in 1972 as an independent specialist aviation regulator.

Aviation is one of the world's fastest-growing modes of transportation, relied upon by millions of people across the globe. It connects people and economies and opens up markets.

The CAA is committed to supporting the sustainable success of air transportation by raising the standards of aviation across the globe and protecting those who choose to fly as well as those who do not. The CAA has around 1200 staff many of whom are expert in such fields as safety, the environment, legal, aircraft or technology.





## The Challenge

Employee engagement surveys had established that most employees were feeling dissatisfied by the annual performance review process. Some managers were also recognising that they didn't feel equipped to perform some of the people management requirements of their role. In response to this the CEO commissioned an internal project team to establish how performance management and development processes could be improved.

Many of the 200 line managers in the business had been promoted based on their technical expertise. This made sense for a regulator and many managers strengths and experiences were in understanding complex equipment and processes and performing very specialised tasks often in safety critical situations.

While many managers had received some people management training, they sometimes struggled with the ambiguity of people issues. The challenge was to put interactions between managers and their reports onto a more relational rather than transactional footing.

A very small element of discretionary pay had also been part of the annual performance review process. There was a sense from employees that this aspect of the pay process was not working well and getting in the way of good relationships with their managers and their own performance.

## Our solution

The solution was to equip line managers with the confidence and skills to have empathetic and motivating conversations with their reports.

The PEAR directors met with the project team on several occasions to make sure that we understood the complicated history of the annual review process. We also included HR in the design process. We carried out focus groups with key groups across the organisation.

This project team wanted a new process that focused on both Performance and Development and got away from the former annual review process. This involved being very clear about what constituted effective performance outcomes and development goals. The internal team had designed many of the templates and systems to support the new process.

We designed a solution based on some of the principles of 'Motivational Interviewing' (MI). We based the solution on those MI concepts of ambivalence, resistance, the righting reflex, change and responsibility. We included other models around behavioural change and some core coaching skills.



By combining psychological education with skills practice exercises, we were able to give managers a chance to reflect and develop their competencies around adopting the new process and using a motivational approach with their staff.

These sessions were subsequently delivered to over 200 people managers including the leadership team. Each manager had two half-day training sessions; one majoring on process, the other on people management. We co-delivered them with internal leads from the project team and a former long standing CAA employee. Each session was personally introduced and endorsed by members of the ExCo and closed by the project team.

For some line managers, this change was revolutionary, for others, a validation of their effective practice. It is fair to say that the odd one found it a little bit challenging. PEAR facilitators are skilled at working with participants from all walks of life and because they can roll with resistance, it enabled us to have some difficult and challenging conversations with technically oriented people managers.

Together we were able to work out some solutions to pre-existing problems and future proof the performance and development process at the CAA.

## The Impact

The new process, 'Performance and Development Conversations', has replaced the former annual review process.

Most line managers have embraced the new ways of working and have added this approach to their way of working with their teams. They have more relational rather than transactional interactions with their teams. Line managers own evaluations scored the training very highly. The solution was successful in equipping line managers with the confidence and skills to have empathetic and motivating conversations with their reports.

The training was evaluated internally by the CAA HR team as the most effective training programme of that year.

*“I am a manager with over 20 years’ experience and I can genuinely say that I have never attended workshops or training events that have been as effective as the ones delivered by PEAR. If you want engaging, informative and effective training delivered by a group of highly talented trainers then you need to engage with PEAR.”*

John Burton, Operations Manager. Civil Aviation Authority