



About the client

Southern Water is a key employer in the South East of England with about 1,700 people working across Kent, Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. With headquarters in Worthing, West Sussex, they also have offices in Brighton in East Sussex, Otterbourne in Hampshire, and Chatham in Kent, as well as operational sites throughout the region.

Southern Water had long recognised that Performance Management was a challenge for the business. Within the current regulatory environment, it is essential for them to drive optimum performance from their people and to this end they conducted a commercial exercise to select an experienced provider to work with them to increase employee and corporate performance.

The task

plusHR was selected to use its performance factors methodology with Southern Water to develop a new reward framework as it had become apparent that to optimise the remuneration costs of the business, Southern Water had to improve Performance Management. A project entitled "Performance Excellence" was established with the main objective to design and implement a best practice Performance Management approach, tools, engagement plan and process across the business that would contribute to the delivery of improved

organisational, functional and individual performance. The collaboration between these two key projects, and the alignment of approach was vital to the future success of Southern Water.

Working closely with the Southern Water HR and senior leadership teams, plusHR used the established performance factors methodologies to quickly understand the challenges, the culture and the desired outcomes for the wider business. A number of one to one meetings were held, stakeholder meetings, focus groups, reviewed employee opinion survey data, and external research was carried out to benchmark best practice. A network of consultants was used too, sharing examples of previous work to support the design stage of the project.

Making connections

Delivery of an effective strategy cascade and objective setting process was seen as a key success factor to the implementation of effective performance management. A process titled "Making Connections" – which aims to remind & re-educate all employees about the company goals, targets and values, and the programmes and projects that were established to deliver them – was developed. In addition, Southern Water employees were helped to establish their own aligned, relevant and robust individual personal objectives.

As an additional benefit, activities that provided opportunity for employees to understand the goals and targets of other functions – to comment on them and seek to identify areas of potential collaboration or risk – and build relationships across the organisation to break down silos were identified.

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Southern Water was provided with full facilitation packs for this four hour workshop – so that they can now be self-sufficient in delivering this process year on year and continue to reap the benefits.

Performance review

A new approach for Southern Water to manage performance was developed. Having identified the barriers to existing practice, the performance factor methodology went back to basics and implemented a process that focused on a regular conversation between manager and team members.

The documentation and process were simplified to ensure that they didn't become inhibitors to the performance discussion and through performance factors a programme of development opportunities to increase the capability and confidence of both the reviewer and reviewee was outlined.

The development interventions focused on coaching and experiential learning. A validation process was developed to ensure consistency and application of performance measurement across the organisation and alignment between individual and organisational performance, and worked to ensure that the process was aligned to future requirements to align performance with pay and bonus structures.

Chris Tate, Learning and Development Manager at Southern Water comments, *"We found real benefit in having a Consultant who we felt comfortable with and understood our needs, we had regular contact with our performance factors Consultant. Having someone creative involved in the process, someone who could come up with new and innovative ideas helped to stretch our thinking. We also benefitted from our Consultant acting as an independent and skilled facilitator to assist in the co-ordination of activities between different work streams within HR, and in other areas of the business. We are likely to call upon plusHR's support again in the move to Phase 2, entailing the up-skilling of selected managers and the provision of coaching supporting to the business."*

To support the effective implementation of these two processes, a structured project management approach was followed, working to a clear project plan, with dependencies, risks, issues and lessons learnt identified. This structured approach ensured that thorough view of the project was taken, and that the materials delivered to the client at the end of the assignment enabled them to implement and further develop Performance Management over the coming years.

What is different now?

The project is in the early stages of implementation, but already there is the ability to see some benefit within the business. The Making Connections workshops have cascaded throughout the business and employees across the board are now more aware of the company targets and values. Feedback suggests that they feel more engaged and involved in the organisation, and can see how they are able to contribute to future organisational success. The leadership team in the organisation are committed to the process, and have ensured that time is allocated within their functions to set robust and meaningful objectives, and initial reactions about the end to end process have been extremely positive, with managers keen to start using it as the next round of performance review is initiated.

Tate concludes, *"plusHR worked closely with the Southern Water team and provided invaluable advice and support which has enabled us to implement the first phase of this project successfully, within the agreed timescales and also within the allocated budget. Implementing performance factors has added value by providing additional experience and history of their work with other organisations and has helped us to identify and implement best practice. It has provided a link between the performance management work and the reward project by delivering programme management across the projects, and throughout the duration of the project we held weekly review sessions to be able to plan/implement at each stage effectively."*

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