

Subtext | Truth: lies open to all

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'PROFESSIONAL' TO 'PERFORMANCE'

By its rapid growth, by the transformation of its activities and by the churn of its staff, there is a tendency for HR to forget (and so to ignore) the rules of the game, with the result that they seem to reset the rules as and when needed.

Let's try a thought experiment: the report of a grievance investigation is passed to a grievance appeal panel. With a three-person panel, impartial appraisal is likely. Yet, the company retains its trump card. Reports to HR are 'private and confidential', meaning that the complainant is prohibited from making the panel's recommendations public. An act of censorship?

Change is also noteworthy in respect of the annual PDR whose parameters have undergone many changes. Five or so years ago, the advice to PDR trainee reviewers was (i) to work with no more than eight individuals and (ii) that the purpose of a PDR is not to facilitate the task of managing a department. How times change.

As 'line manager' (rather than a 'first among equals'), it is implicit that the head of an academic department may apply such pressure upon their charges that (in the imagination of HR) it is now a 'rare occasion where a reviewer and reviewee do not agree'. There is no basis to support the idea that disagreement is 'rare', as the current PDR format is spanking brand new. Within the current configuration of the PDR, HR advises that 'if issues cannot be resolved by your Head, you should refer the matter to your Dean, Faculty Manager or Divisional Director (as appropriate).'

Well-motivated independent 'disagreements' from colleagues with careers to build invite danger; and the pressure to comply with company lines is further heightened by the recent justification from HR of the use of outside consultants to resolve any PDR disagreements. Where trust and confidence are vital elements of collegial relations, the decision to appoint an outside consultancy on that 'rare occasion where a reviewer and reviewee do not agree' is indeed extraordinary.

Language is indeed alive. Once familiar in their use but now largely devoid of meaning are 'collegiality', 'primus inter pares', 'scholarship' and 'patet omnibus veritas'.

Contributed by Gerry Steele.
