The Mustard Seed Abandons Performance Management for Performance 'Empowerment' with emPerform

Canadian non-profit selects emPerform to automate performance reviews and support their new performance empowerment program.

Industry: Non-Profit | No. of Employees: 380

Addressing the Root Causes of Poverty in Western Canada

The Mustard Seed is a Christian non-profit organization that has been caring for men and women experiencing poverty and homelessness since 1984. The Mustard Seed provides a safe haven and support through delivering basic services, housing, wellness services, employment programs, and partners with the community to address the root causes of poverty. The Mustard Seed has offices in both Alberta and British Columbia.

Leading Performance in a Non-Profit

As with any non-profit, employee dedication drives the organization. With staff being so focused on the mission at hand, it can be challenging to ensure that performance reviews are given the time and care needed to be a meaningful process. The organization must also get creative in how they develop, empower and recognize performance. HR Business Partner, Christina Bartlett, adds, **"as a not-for-profit, we find it very difficult to reward high performance with salary increases. We have a clear pay structure and to pay outside of that is not always possible, making it even more crucial to ensure there are effective processes in place to engage performance and development on a continual basis."**

With competing priorities and multiple crucial projects and services being provided daily, the Mustard Seed, like other similar non-profits, must focus on continually nurturing employees and finding ways to recognize and engage performance beyond salary. Christina explains, **"employee engagement requires open communication, a trusting relationship between team member and team leader, and ensuring that employee excellence and performance are celebrated."**

Overview

Until 2020, The Mustard Seed battled inconsistent performance reviews that spanned over several months and required juggling multiple Word documents and tracking down sign off from different levels of managers. Traditionally, The Mustard Seed's review period spanned several months, from November to March. Christina Bartlett, Human Resources Partner, explained the situation as "...Reviews were never seen again, the results were never used, and the staff knew this, which resulted in very little incentive to complete the reviews properly." The Mustard Seed predicted that the cost of its manual review process for staff, managers and HR team was over $65,000 based on 10 hours per appraisal (planning, training, reviewing, signing, filing, scanning). They also knew that the process was riddled with bias and wasn't contributing to employee empowerment or ongoing development. In 2020, The organization made the switch to emPerform for online performance management and the start of performance empowerment at the Mustard Seed.

Creating Value in Performance Reviews at the Mustard Seed

The Mustard Seeds annual review process prior to emPerform flowed between 4 to 6 months in length. Starting in November, the previous year's review was revisited. In December, manager training would take place in-person over several weeks. By February, reviews were sent out for leaders to complete. By March "multiple follow up emails are sent" to track down completed reviews. After this, it was on to chasing down sign-offs and approvals on over 300 reviews. Then came the administrative manual work. "HR Administrators removed staples, scanned, saved electronically, printed electronic documents, and filed in individual employee files for over 300 staff," said Christina.

Overall, the entire process was not an efficient use of time. In addition, the company's existing rating scale and review questions were discouraging staff as they felt the content leaned towards finding 'mistakes' instead of celebrating progress. Finally, the review data that was collected was often skewed by bias and could not be used for decision-making.

The Mustard Seed knew it was time to find a different approach. Aside from needing a system to reduce the work-load involved with manually administering reviews, they also wanted to find a system that would accommodate their transformative approach to performance management.

"We decided we needed an entire overhaul of perfor-mance management. We renamed it Performance Empowerment and moved from a 'one-and-done process' to a 'continual performance discussion' process where communication is enabled, conversations are encouraged weekly, performance outcomes can be recorded and team members can be held accountable to their deliverables/intentions, which are revisited throughout the year," Said Christina.

The Search for a Performance "Empowerment" System

The HR team thus began their search for a new perfor-mance management system that would support their objec-tives. They knew they wanted a series of critical features in their prospective system, including:

- Space to document frequent 1:1 conversations and reference them easily
- The ability to tailor review forms and processes with open questions and answers, rather than strict competency-based ratings
- Easy goal setting with the option for continual refining/tracking of objectives
- The option for a merit-based pay system and the ability for managers to provide salary increases right in the system with director approval built-in
- Integration with the company's HRIS, Payworks®
- Aesthetically pleasing user interface and a great user experience
- Would come in under the organization's budget

The Mustard Seed's HR team connected with 3 vendors, receiving demonstrations and quotes for all. **In the end, the team selected emPerform as their system of choice.**

The Decision to Choose emPerform

For the HR team, emPerform checked off all the wishes they had outlined. Christina added that emPerform "is based in Canada and fell within our budget – with the added bonus of being the only demo that was organized and led by females!"

"We saw from the demonstration that emPerform would enable easy recording of performance discussions as they happen, creating a more frequent space for open communication and measuring employee engagement," said Christina.

The Start of Performance Management at the Mustard Seed

The Mustard Seed started its emPerform planning and implementation process in January of 2020, knowing that this was an opportunity to invest in employees for the long-term. They worked closely with a dedicated implementation consultant to plan for change and a successful launch to employees.

Not only did they decide to take on a new technology system, but they also saw it as the perfect time to **completely reinvent their approach to performance reviews** in general. An investment of time now to set up regular administrative processes will, as the HR team estimates, **save up to 4000 hours of labour down the road.**

The organization has since translated their new processes into emPerform and employees have been onboarded into the software. "We are already starting to receive positive feedback about the ease of using emPerform and the ease of documenting conversations in the journal and tag section."
performance management and succession planning efforts with our changing workforce needs."

emPerform's two-way review system allows for staff to provide feedback about their performance, documented in a consistent way, and allows for line-managers to provide their feedback in a fully visible format. Knowing that ongoing feedback will be the new norm, employees feel more inclined to engage in the review process and have a better understanding of the priorities associated with their role.

"Implementing a new system has been a great learning experience and my consultant has been fantastic. It is definitely an ongoing collaboration with emPerform and I am glad we chose a vendor who would provide such long term support."

What's Next?

The Mustard Seed is currently working on planning the rollout of emPerform Compensation Management module, which will allow them to **streamline the merit-planning process**, automate compensation approvals, and create consistency and transparency in rewards. They are also excited to get started with On-Demand forms, emPerform's ad-hoc form functionality, for project-based reviews and seasonal work assessments.

"We hope to continually enhance our appraisals to best suit employee and company needs. We also plan to fully utilize all that emPerform has to offer by building succession planning and on-demand forms." Said Sarah.

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