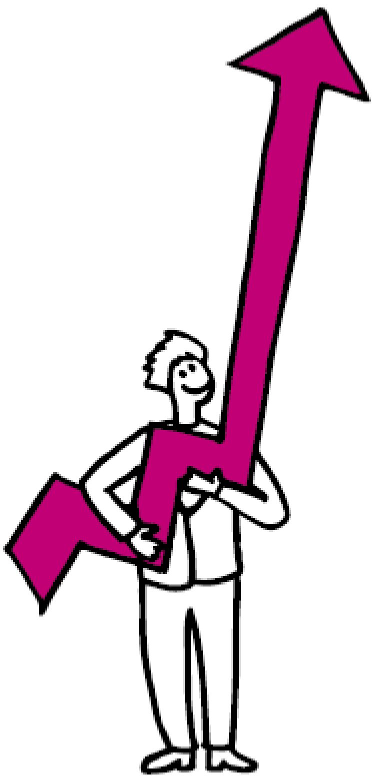
Bringing it all together

Your role in performance levelling

A guide for levelling leads, HR business partners and managers of people in the UK.



BT People

Contents

Introduction

Levelling is an important part of our approach to managing performance in BT. It helps to ensure we are consistent and fair in rating people's performance. It also allows us to check that the full range of ratings has been used appropriately and that their allocation reflects individual, team and business performance.

As a line manager (LM) of people based in the UK, a HR business partner (HRBP) or a line of business (LoB) levelling lead (LL), you have an important role to play in the levelling process. This guide includes information on what you need to do. We suggest you use it in conjunction with the "Our approach to performance" booklet for more details.

Roles and responsibilities

1. The levelling lead (LL)

A levelling lead is usually a senior manager within the business unit.
As a levelling lead you play a key part in the levelling process. You will need to:-

Before the levelling session:

- Take ownership for making sure the levelling meeting is well organised and that you have planned appropriately to cover all the aspects of levelling needed.
- Ensure Line managers attend the levelling sessions and are advised well in advance of the sort of information/data it would help they bring to the meeting.
- Ensure sufficient time has been allowed and that the meeting room is a suitable size. Make sure the room allows for confidential discussions and the display of confidential data.
- If conferencing facilities are used then ensure all participants are able to speak freely and view on-screen data in confidence.
- Ensure all the data you need is available.
- Make sure you own the end to end levelling process to deliver outcomes in line with the performance timetable.

During the levelling session:

- Chair the meeting.
- Make sure everyone understands how well the team are doing collectively, by providing a view of the latest cumulative business and team performance and metrics.
- Lead the discussion at the meeting and get a consensus decision on any performance rating changes. Manage the spreadsheet during the levelling meeting. This includes recording any changes, along with supporting evidence and comments.
- Make sure that everyone in the meeting looks objectively at what people have delivered and how they have achieved those things dismissing any personal views that are not relevant e.g. past history or hearsay, whilst also acknowledging any reasonable adjustments that may have been agreed. Encourage those in the meeting to validate and question their own judgements.

After the levelling session:

- Ensure that where a rating is changed as a result of the levelling process the reasons are recorded in the levelling spreadsheet.
- Where a LM has not attended the levelling session, make sure that you discuss any cases where a performance rating has changed as a result of the levelling process (the reasons must be recorded in the levelling spreadsheet). You should

explain the rationale for the change and provide any supporting evidence so the LM can explain these reasons to the individual. This is particularly importance if the change results in a rating of 'development needed' or 'unsatisfactory', as the LM must be able to identify and provide appropriate coaching or take any other performance intervention that may be necessary.

- Follow up with managers where any job standards need to be reset for the next quarter.
- Carry out a review of the levelling session note what worked well and what could work better next time round.

Some important dos and don'ts:

- Do not just send the LM an e-mail or a copy of the spreadsheet, be pro-active in communicating any changes.
- Do not change ePerformance without informing the LM.
- Do not let the LM find out by default when the ratings are released.
- Ordinarily changes to performance ratings will not normally be made following the levelling meeting. However there may be circumstances where a rating change needs to be made, e.g. where an individual has successfully appealed against their performance rating and it is appropriate to revert to the original rating.

Roles and responsibilities

2. The Line Manager (LM)

As a line manager in the levelling process you will need to:

Before the levelling session:

- Prepare an 'indicative rating' for each of your direct reports using the evidence from one to one meetings, along with a short summary to support the rating that has been given. The evidence doesn't need to be extensive, just enough to substantiate the rating.
- Gather evidence from other colleagues who the individual has worked with during the period being reviewed (e.g. an assignment manager).
- Encourage your people to enter an employee self review onto e-performance so that you have some input from them on how well they feel they have been doing in their role.
- Prepare fully for attending the levelling meeting.

During the levelling session:

- Discuss the performance of each individual in your team, using relevant evidence that examples both "what" and "how" the person has performed.
- Review the actions that will need to take place following the levelling session.
- Maintain the appropriate level of confidentiality surrounding an individual's personal circumstances which may have impacted on their performance.

After the levelling session:

- Make sure you understand the reason for any change, and have supporting evidence, so you can have a constructive conversation with the individual
- Once the ePerformance documents are available for release, discuss the levelled rating with the individual. Make sure you provide appropriate feedback and explanation of the reasons for the rating.
- Provide appropriate coaching and personal development support to the individual. Your HRBP (or Performance Management Specialist, PMS, in some parts of the business) will be able to help with this.

Important note:

- Ordinarily changes to performance ratings will not normally be made following the levelling meeting. However there may be circumstances where a rating change needs to be made, e.g. where an individual has appealed against their performance rating and it is appropriate to revert to the original rating.
- Please don't notify individuals of their 'indicative rating' until the levelling has been completed and the ePerformance documents are available for release.

Roles and responsibilities

3. The HR business partner (HRBP)

As a HRBP in the levelling process you will need to:

Before the levelling session:

- Coach the levelling lead and participating managers, to ensure there is a consistent and fair approach to the levelling process.
- Provide a levelling extract from e-performance to use at the levelling meetings to record any discussions and changes to ratings. If you want some help on how to download the levelling extract from e-performance then take a look at the ePerformance help page for HR.
- Provide the levelling lead with the levelling spreadsheet.

During the levelling session:

- Co-facilitate the meeting with the levelling lead and provide a reminder of the levelling principles and ratings definitions. (These can be found in the "Our approach to performance" booklet.)
- Help facilitate open and honest discussion.
- Collate the ratings, record and discussions and changes to ratings along with the levelling lead. You are responsible for ensuring there is a complete set of data - initially from the LM indicative ratings, through to the output of the levelling meeting.

After the levelling session:

- Ensure that the levelling lead keeps a formal record of the final levelling spreadsheet for future reference. This should include the rationale for any changes made to performance ratings along with supporting evidence.
- Support the LM in identifying and providing appropriate coaching or any other performance intervention that may be necessary.
- Support nominations for the Talent process.
- Work with the levelling lead to carry out a review of what worked well and what could be better for next time

Performance levelling best practice

A detailed description of our approach to levelling is available on the performance website.

Here are some tips to help you get the best out of levelling sessions:-

- Starting levelling at the top of a business unit is recommended. This helps to ensure a consistent approach to levelling is adopted by everyone involved and that there is a consistent view provided of the business context and team performance. This approach is often referred to as "top down levelling".

- Individuals should be rated against the standards agreed with their manager for the period that is being reviewed. If standards have been set correctly, the overall performance of a team/business unit should be reflected in the distribution profile of performance ratings. However, do not try and force ratings either up or down to fit a particular performance distribution curve, but challenge those ratings where the supporting evidence doesn't match what has been awarded. Any changes to an individual's performance rating must be supported by objective evidence and be able to meet any compliance and audit checks.

- Where an individual has met the standards set by their manager the rating will not be changed.

- You should differentiate performance by using the full range of performance ratings appropriately.

- The rating for an employee should be based on:-

    - Measured performance against the agreed objectives/KPIs and job standards.

    - Assessment against the BT capabilities that are relevant to their role.

    - Comparison against their peers/colleagues who are doing the same or a similar role.

    - A cumulative based assessment of performance. This means rating someone based on their performance from the start of the performance year, predominantly on the most recent quarter but reflecting performance during the overall period.

Frequently asked questions

1) I am a line manager and was unable to attend the levelling session for my people. Following the session I have been told a rating for someone in my team has been changed from 'AS' to 'DN'. I do not agree with this, what should I do?

You would have submitted the indicative rating and supporting statement to the levelling meeting, this would have been taken into account at the meeting. The change in rating may have been as a result of a peer review or job standards review across the wider team. The outcome of the levelling may then have resulted in this change, you should have been provided with an explanation and where the individual may require further development to reach the level of his or her peers. This downgrade in rating can only take place where the individual did not meet their job standards. If the individual had met the job standards during the period of review then it is not appropriate to downgrade the rating to DN and you should discuss again with your line manager.

2) I am a line manager and was unable to attend the levelling session for my people. Following a levelling session I have been told one of my DRs rating has been changed from 'AS' to 'DN'. I have received feedback from the levelling meeting but I believe the reasons given for the change cannot be substantiated and are inconsistent with my regular 1:1s with the individual.

Remember a DN rating is not punitive and indicates a development need for which the individual may well benefit from some additional coaching and support. Whilst it may be a difficult message to convey to the individual, it may also be the right message at this time. If the individual had met the job standards during the period of review then it is not appropriate to downgrade the rating to DN and you should discuss again with your line manager.

3) I have been asked to provide a rating for someone who has only been in the team for a few weeks. I don't think I can fairly judge the individual's performance for the whole quarter, what should I do?

If the individual is new to BT or the current work area, then follow the guidance shown in the Exceptions Section, 'individual new to role (learning curve)'.

If the individual has moved from another area then refer back to the previous Line Manager or Assignment Manager for feedback. In addition find out who carried out any 'handover' meetings etc when the individual was moved to your area.

Check the individual's progress against their Job Standards taking into account progress against agreed learning curve.

4) Does the output from levelling have to follow a particular rating profile?

No. There will not be a forced or predetermined distribution of performance ratings (sometimes called 'forced distribution').

Ratings will be evidenced based and levelling will consider individual performance, peer review and business performance for a particular area.

5) What is a cumulative rating?

A cumulative rating is an assessment of year to date performance based predominantly in the most recent quarter but reflecting performance during the overall period. This also applies at the end of year and you should exercise your judgement to determine the appropriate performance rating.

6) I have an individual in my team who is an Analyst, (Professional role). He has been covering a Senior Professional role and working at the Senior Professional level, his objectives have also been set at the Senior Professional level. At what level should I rate this individual?

At the performance review the individual should be assessed and rated at their substantive level, in this case Analyst (Professional role). They should not be disadvantaged and at levelling should be levelled along with their peers at Professional level. The role they are performing could be considered developmental. Consider - where they are performing very well at Senior Professional level, they may be reaching elements of stretch in their 'normalised' Professional objectives.

Find out more...

There are more frequently asked questions listed in the downloadable booklet 'Our approach to performance' and on the ePerformance guidance web pages.