

What is performance blocking behaviour?

Quite clearly, not everything that people do creates positive results. Some actions accelerate performance, some sustain performance, and some block performance.

Behaviour that accelerates performance focuses on changing the way things are done, on creating and driving a vision, on enlisting the skills, ideas and energy of people at all levels, and on improving overall effectiveness. Behaviour that sustains performance is aimed at making things run smoothly, at ensuring plans are implemented and targets are achieved, and that quality is maintained. It is centred on implementation, consistency, attention to detail, and improving efficiency.

On the other hand performance blocking behaviour, while not always intentional, does precisely what it says – block performance. It's what people do when they feel threatened, frustrated, anxious, uncertain, overlooked. It manifests itself as responsibility avoidance, conflict avoidance, or anger and aggression.

Performance blocking behaviour drains the energy of the person engaging in it, of the people who are subjected to it and, research shows, the people who witness it. It generates destructive forces that create resentment, breed cynicism, encourage damaging actions, destroy commitment, create guerrilla warfare, undermine loyalty, choke creativity, and often extinguish young talent.

Defensive-aggressive Behaviour

This is the most instantly damaging type of performance blocking behaviour. It manifests itself in angry outbursts, pointed sarcasm, dominance, intimidation, bullying and words and actions that demean others and undermine their self-

confidence. It sometimes veils itself as "joking" but the intent of the joke is to belittle some individual or group. Its effects are both powerful and long lasting. Research shows it to have a five times greater effect on mood than positive interactions. In other words one instance of the behaviour negates five positive actions. Professor Charlotte Rayner's research indicates that while about 25% of the targets of this behaviour leave their jobs, *about 20% of those who witness the behaviour also quit.*

Individuals who exhibit this behaviour in one situation often move on to the next, oblivious to the devastation created in their wake. Because they sometimes achieve results with the behaviour in the short term, they rationalise to themselves that it is justifiable. What they fail to see is the long-term enmity and resentment that they breed.

Conflict Avoidance

Although not so instantly noticeable and not so flamboyant, it has equally damaging effects. Conflict avoidance translates into an unwillingness to make decisions, to express views, or to come down on one side or the other of an issue. As well as the personal energy wasted trying to avoid contentious situations, once again there is a multiplier effect as the frustration and irritation of those people working for or with the conflict avoider spreads and grows. Instead of focusing on doing their own jobs they do nothing while they wait for decisions to be made, or they use the lack of any clear decision as an excuse for not doing what they know should be done. If the boss

won't accept accountability, nobody else is likely to. As a subordinate of a strong conflict avoider, taking initiative in these types of situations is a bit like a "do-it-yourself hangman's kit" – you get hung out to dry.

Responsibility Avoidance

It involves the expenditure of a lot of thought, time and effort to ensure that one is never pinned down, never in the spotlight, and never held accountable for any action or decision. Responsibility avoidance is a full-time job; projecting an image of being busy and involved while making sure to avoid involvement and responsibility requires a lot of skill and effort. People who assiduously avoid responsibility squander energy on a grand scale. But they also create vast waves of negativity among the people who work for and with them. They create high levels of frustration, anxiety and anger. They are the Typhoid Marys of the performance blocking behaviour world. They do nothing other than spread the infection to those with whom they come into contact.

Conflict avoidance and responsibility avoidance tend to be the reciprocals of defensive-aggressive behaviour. Robert Sutton says that "In a fear-based organisation, employees constantly look over their shoulders and constantly try to avoid the finger of blame and humiliation; even when they know how to help the organisation, they are often afraid to do it." In our work with companies, when we come across an individual or group of individuals who engage in a significant amount of conflict and/or responsibility avoidance behaviour,

we find that nine times out of ten they work for, or with, a dominating or intimidating manager.

With a little bit of effort the wasted negative energy expended in blocking behaviour can be re-channelled into performance accelerating or sustaining behaviour. Research shows blocking behaviour can destroy upwards of 25-30% of performance, so dealing with it can make a significant difference to the bottom line.

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strategy people performance

Penumbra is a strategic business consultancy. We bring clarity by using research to drive understanding and direction. We deliver success by balancing experience and innovative thinking.

Whatever your aspiration, we'll provide the tools, information and analysis to turn your strategy into operational reality, in a way that motivates your people to outperform the market.

Overview

As a strategic business consultancy, our expertise is in helping our clients executing strategies and delivering results.

We achieve this by combining a robust management planning system with a focus on people which drives alignment and commitment

We work in partnership with talented and committed leadership teams to help organisations build corporate value with a wide range of customised, cross-functional advisory programmes and services delivered from four complementary service groups:

Strategy

(Development, formulation, implementation and alignment)

Our innovative **Penumbra Balance** approach creates dynamism, drives and sustains momentum and makes strategy real for stakeholders

Organisational Development

(Behavioural issues)

We call our holistic approach **Balanced Motivation** which encompasses activities that improve performance both for the organisation and the individual

Research and Insight

Our stimulating **Clarity** approach draws on our business consulting skills to deliver a mix of business analysis and market research which

provides compelling insights for winning decisions.

Operations

The Operations practice brings all of our hands-on practical experience to bear on execution and delivery of results.

Our technology enabling approach called **Totality** facilitates business focussed services and solutions, aligned to business needs, for people, processes and tools.

Why Us?

Organisations turn to us when they:

- Want to find a new strategic direction
- Have created a strategy and now need to execute it
- Need to drive more value from existing initiatives
- Have a big issue to resolve, usually dependent on lasting employee buy-in
- Need to explore new ways to drive value
- Need a breakthrough result
- Are seeking measurable results

Our Experience

We have real world experience spanning 20 years with our clients. This includes working with:

BP, Citibank, Morgan Chase, WestLB, RBS, UBS, Bankers Trust, Kleinwort Benson, Coutts, Natwest, Intel, Nokia, Adobe, Kall-Kwik, Glaxo Smith Kline,

Dupont, Pfizer, Savills, British Council, Clifford Chance, British Airways, Gillette, Unilever, Shell, Volvo, Vauxhall, British Gas, TradeStation, MWB Business Exchange, Investors in People, University of Cambridge

On projects such as:

Strategic Planning, Strategy development and implementation, Culture change, Post-Merger Integration, Vision, Purpose and Values, Current State Analysis, Organisation Re-design, Transformational Change, Client Focus Strategies, Perception Studies, Client and Staff Engagement surveys, Global Rebranding, Know your Customer, Market Forecasting, Consumer Insight, Market Segmentation, Process optimisation, Lean/Six Sigma, Project Management, ERP Systems Roll-out, Market Research, Financial Modelling, Franchise Start-up Evaluation models, Cost Benefit Analysis, Implementation Alignment, Strategic Alignment, Complex Database development, Custom Application development, Supply Chain Optimisation

Covering diverse sectors such as:

Financial Services, Pharmaceuticals, Manufacturing, Energy, Mobile Telecoms, Travel and Tourism, Aviation, Property, Hi-tech and Business Services