The management of poor performance: an overview of the process and common failings identified.
In a recent article in the Harvard Business Review authors Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones point out that:

“People want to do good work – to feel they matter in an organisation that makes a difference. They want to work in a place that magnifies their strengths, not their weaknesses. For that, they need some autonomy and structure, and the organisation must be coherent, honest, and open”.

The report says that it is important to try to make the workplace as positive and as productive an environment as possible. In the best companies, leaders at all levels have a strong commitment to creating strong ties between the employee and the organisation. Enhancing trust, pride and camaraderie in the workplace is the central task of effective leadership.
Overview of the process

Performance management is the systematic process by which an organisation involves its employees, as individuals and members of a group, in improving organizational effectiveness in the accomplishment of agency mission and goals.

It management includes the following steps:
• planning work and setting objectives
• monitoring performance
• rewarding good performance and establishing development needs
• taking corrective action
Overview of the process

Planning means setting performance expectations and objectives in conjunction with employees. This will help them to better understand the goals of the organization, what needs to be done, why it needs to be done, how well it should be done and the important role that they play in respect of these.

Objectives and performance standards must be:

• measurable,
• understandable,
• verifiable,
• equitable,
• achievable.
Overview of the process

**Monitoring** well means consistently measuring performance and providing ongoing feedback to employees and work groups on their progress toward reaching their goals. The process involves regular progress reviews with employees where their performance is compared against their elements and standards.

**Development.** In an effective organization, employee developmental needs are evaluated and addressed. Developing in this instance means:

- increasing the capacity to perform through training,
- giving assignments that introduce new skills or higher levels of responsibility,
- improving work processes, or other methods.

**Evaluating** performance should be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis against the elements and standards in an employee's performance plan and assigning a summary rating of record.
Diagrammatic representation of the Performance Management System and its relationship with the organisation’s remuneration and disciplinary policies and procedures.

Objective Setting Cycle

Phase 1
Manager and employee meet and agree objectives and performance standards

Individual objectives

Individual Key Performance Areas

Phase 2
Manager and employee conduct 1st quarterly review

Performance Feedback Cycle

Phase 3
Manager and employee conduct 2nd quarterly review

Poor Performance

Disciplinary processes

Phase 4
Manager completes Performance Rating

Poor Performance

Development needs identified

Payment increment and share allocation

strategic objectives

Organisation structure and departmental Key Performance Areas

Development needs identified
Code of good practice: dismissal for conduct and incapacity: Schedule 8

Any person determining whether a dismissal for poor work performance is unfair should consider-

(a) whether or not the employee failed to meet a performance standard; and

(b) if the employee did not meet a required performance standard whether or not-

(i) the employee was aware, or could reasonably be expected to have been aware, of the required performance standard;

(ii) the employee was given a fair opportunity to meet the required performance standard; and

(iii) dismissal was an appropriate sanction for not meeting the required performance standard.
Some important precedents

In *Gostelow v Datakor Holdings (Pty) Ltd t/a Corporate Copilith (1993) 14 ILJ 171 (IC)* the Court found that:

- the lack of capability was not caused by the applicant’s lack of knowledge or skill
- inability to achieve his goals was related to increased workload and decreased staff complement
- employer is obliged to make an assessment when the reason for dismissal is sub-standard performance due to lack of skill in the broader sense.
- judgement regarding unacceptable performance must be objective and reasonable to be valid
- the assessment would be incomplete if no attempt was made to establish the reason for the employee’s shortcomings save where the incompetence is irremediable, or an attempt was made to assist the employee to overcome his shortcomings by advice and guidance.

In *Boss Logistics v Phopi & Others [2010] 31 ILJ 1644 (LC)* the Court found that:

- the period of time required to evaluate an employee's performance depends on the circumstances of each case
- the employer is best positioned to decide what this length of time should be
- courts and the CMMA should not to second guess the employer in this regard unless there evidence that the employer acted in bad faith or in an unfair manner toward the employee.
- the measure of instruction, counselling and guidance with an employer has to provide in order to enable an employee to meet the required standard of performance is dependent on the level of seniority of the employee.
- An employee in a managerial position ought to be able to determine for him/herself whether his/her performance is up to the mark,