

The Power of the Pack

Publicly funded organisations tend to monitor and manage internal productivity at the individual level, focusing on the output of workers rather than teams. This incentivises workers to maximise individual output and objectives and disincentivises efforts to improve collaboration and collective performance. When individual team members work as lone wolves, competing rather than collaborating, the culture sacrifices the benefits of working as a pack.

Publicly funded organisations are influenced by private sector management ideas and practices like managing individual performance. Assumptions about task specialisation and metrics to measure individual output have been transferred to publicly funded roles, even where operations differ markedly from settings where individual remuneration varies based on individual productivity, like sales, or where high volume is a core goal, like production lines or transaction processing.

People in publicly funded organisations also tend to prioritise privacy of management engagement with each worker. If performance and management are treated solely as private matters, then task allocations, performance monitoring, and feedback tend to be considered only at the individual level.

Individual performance is an important factor in a team's overall output, but so are team-level factors like effective collaboration and efficient processes. Individuals whose performance is assessed based on individual output tend to work in ways that maximise that output, even at the expense of improving total output of the team. Collaboration and process improvements take effort, and workers are less likely to invest that effort if it is not recognised or rewarded.

As well as constraining total output, individual performance management can have negative effects on the culture of a team and the experience of workers. People are less likely to seek out ways to help and support each other professionally if strong teamwork is not valued explicitly.



Expanding management practices to include team-based performance metrics and conversations, as well as individual performance management, creates a framework of incentives for both individual and collective output. This acknowledges the value of individual efforts to improve collective performance by streamlining processes or helping others to excel. It also incentivises workers to build collaboration skills.

Managers who confidently facilitate open discussion about team performance can collaborate with workers to find and implement improvements. Workers who help to design better internal processes or practices, possibly including better management practices, tend to be highly motivated to implement changes and realise benefits for the whole team.

Expanding performance metrics to include both shared and individual targets balances the incentives for workers to maximise their own output with formal recognition of the value of work to improve overall team performance. Cultures of shared and mutual accountability also tend to be more rewarding and supportive than individually competitive cultures.

Many of the complex challenges facing publicly funded organisations need coordinated effort from many people who are skilled at working together, not just individual geniuses working in isolation. Teams that think about, and manage, collective performance as a shared responsibility can achieve more than the sum of individual worker contributions. A team can bring down much bigger goals when it hunts as a pack.