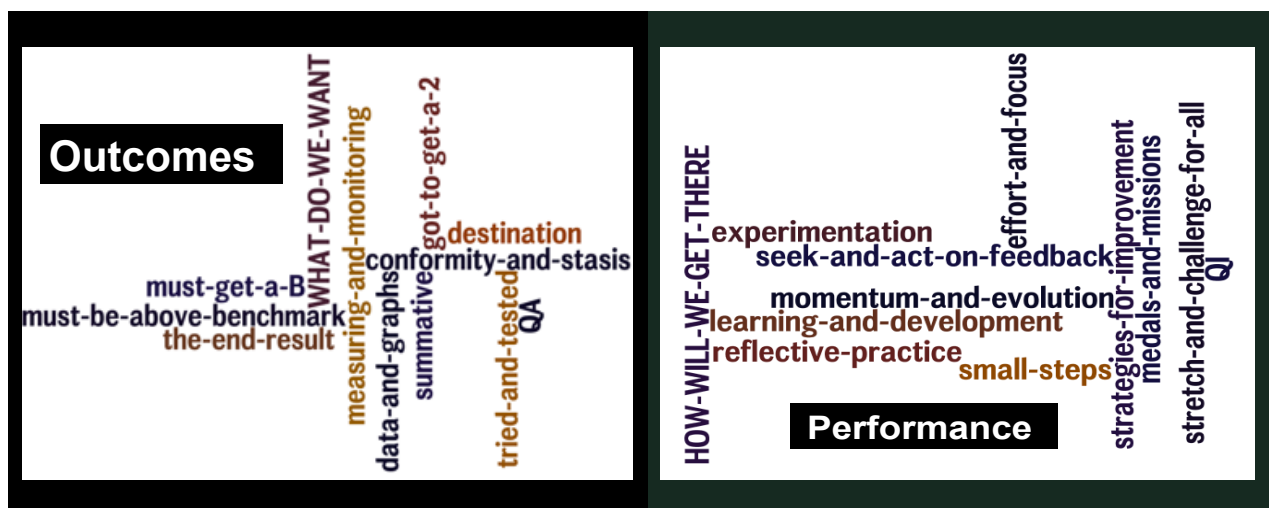


## Performance and outcomes

Twenty years of NY resolutions along the line and I've finally started having bass guitar and tennis lessons, though not at the same time. "Foot-work, body-work, racket-work," bellows my coach. At the net, as I try not to look too puffed out, he says with conviction: "performance not outcome. The shots will come if you get the stages right."

Of course in any learning or development context, it's important to have an outcome in mind and to establish milestones, targets and KPIs along the way. It's also a great idea to focus on the benefits of achieving the goal, for you and other people. The more compelling the vision, the more motivated you will be, the greater the chance of success.

However, in education and elsewhere, there can be too much emphasis on the end result: "I've got to get a 2 or else I'll be re-observed", "I must get 3BBBs", "We must reach college benchmarks or else the VP will be on my case". These demands can create fear and hinder the discovery of effective strategies to attain and sustain the desired results.



Let's be clear – having high standards and clear goals is a good thing and probably a pre-requisite for high performance. However, just as positive thinking is a good thing, looking in the mirror and saying, "I'm a tiger", or "I *will* be a millionaire" are not going to make you irresistible or deliver a lorry load of money to your bank account.

Individuals, teams and organisations work towards challenging targets and there are job descriptions, strategic goals, outcomes for learners, lesson observation grades, sales targets and other quantifiable barometers of 'success'. Important and necessary as they all are, we also need to create working environments and cultures that are founded on innovation, collaboration and continuous improvement. An imbalance towards targets over performance can lead to stress, burnout and in some instances, unethical behaviour.

## Mindset and performance

The highly acclaimed psychologist and educationalist Dr. Carol Dweck identifies two mind-sets, one conducive to learning and development and one associated with having a fixed and deterministic view of the world. Her work is 'all over' the internet and her most recent book, 'Mindset: How you can fulfill your potential' is highly acclaimed.

### Fixed Mindset

- ☐ Effort is fruitless: either you can or you can't
- ☐ Give up easily, or even better don't risk failing
- ☐ Stick to what you know
- ☐ It's all about the end result

**Deterministic view of the world**

### Growth Mindset

- ☒ Effort is the path to mastery: maybe you can if you try
- ☒ Have a go and try to learn from mistakes and feedback
- ☒ Experiment, reflect and learn
- ☒ The process matters too

**Free will and personal freedom**

## Why focus on process and performance more than outcomes?

- ✦ Sometimes, we can achieve success with flawed, limited or unsustainable methods, or not achieve a desired result by adopting sound methods. In those cases, judging performance by outcome will reinforce the wrong techniques.
- ✦ It encourages experimentation. When you're wholly focused on a specific desired result, you're less inclined to experiment, less open to serendipity and less likely to achieve an even better outcome than the one you were aiming for.
- ✦ It lets you enjoy the process more. Life is lived in the present, not the future and happiness is a process, not a place. Focusing on process will let you engage more deeply with the present and experience it more fully, which will help you learn faster and experience life more completely.
- ✦ It puts you in control. You only have partial control over whether you reach a specific external goal, but your best effort is entirely within your power. The more you focus on process over outcome, the more confident you'll become that you're on the right path to mastery.

The most effective teachers teach people, not just subjects and towards summative assessment. They understand that stretch and challenge is for all students and employ interactive, evidence based teaching methods.

The most effective managers have a range of strategies to manage day-to-day operational issues. Crucially, they also employ ways to developmentally

**'The aggregation of marginal gains':** small improvements in many different aspects of what we do, can have a huge impact on overall performance.

(Sir David Brailsford, GB Cycling Coach).

and remedially manage individuals and facilitate collaboration amongst team members.

## Learning the skills and attitude to improve performance

Teachers, support staff, managers and senior leaders can learn the skills, knowledge and attitude required to improve their own and other people's performance. The questions below can be used to kick-start a focus on performance.

### Do you

In each of the boxes below, write **Y** = (Yes, on most occasions), or **N** = (Not consistently)

- ☐ apply a solution-focused approach to challenges and situations that arise at work?
- ☐ adopt a growth mind-set in relation to work performance?
- ☐ use a variety of simple techniques to gather feedback from other people to help you reflect and improve your practice
- ☐ share best practice with other colleagues (*managers have a key role to play in this respect by allocating time and employing the mechanisms for this to happen*)?
- ☐ put setbacks into perspective, learn from them and remain mentally tough?
- ☐ regularly try new approaches, however small the change?

**Sustainable performance is a function of all these things (and more). By focusing attention and effort on each of them in turn, the outcomes will follow.**

*The following links were helpful in compiling this think-piece:*

- (1) <http://www.howtolive.com/focus-on-process-not-outcome/#ixzz2wW9IBLiM>
- (2) <http://iveybusinessjournal.com/topics/leadership/learning-goals-or-performance-goals-is-it-the-journey-or-the-destination#.UysFB9ztia4>

Please feel free to contact me at [info@bobcraig.co.uk](mailto:info@bobcraig.co.uk) if you want to comment on this article, ask for further information or have a conversation about how I may be able to help you or your organisation.

**Bob Craig**  
Learning & Development