

Resistance to new annual review feature - Utoday

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Executive Summary

This article examines institutional resistance to a new employability scoring feature introduced within the University of Twente's (UT) annual performance review system via the AFAS HR platform. The central tension concerns the addition of a 'labour potential' classification — ranging from 'stable' to 'high potential' — appended to existing performance ratings. The local union consultation body OPUT opposed the feature on grounds of subjectivity, potential misuse in workforce restructuring, and inadequate stakeholder consultation. Empirical evidence of resistance is concrete: the UT's largest service unit, the Centre for Educational Support (CES), saw all seven supervisors refuse to use the feature. HR leadership acknowledges communication gaps but defends the measure as contractually supported under the collective labour agreement (Article 6.7) and linked to strategic workforce planning and career development. The immediate resolution involved making the employability score optional rather than mandatory. The article highlights an unresolved governance dispute between HR and OPUT over the adequacy of prior consultation, with both parties offering contradictory accounts of stakeholder involvement.

Key Insights

1. The introduction of an employability score alongside traditional performance ratings triggered significant grassroots resistance, including collective refusal by supervisors in at least one major organisational unit.
2. HR leadership and union representatives offer conflicting accounts of the consultation process, reflecting a breakdown in change management communication rather than purely substantive disagreement over the tool's intent.
3. Making the employability field optional — rather than mandatory — was sufficient to resolve the immediate operational conflict for at least some resisters, suggesting the issue was partly about coercion rather than concept.

Practical Takeaways

- Embedding a strategic workforce planning metric within an individual development-focused review setting creates role conflict — employees and supervisors perceive the two purposes as incompatible within a single conversation.
- When resistance to a new HR feature reaches the point of active refusal by supervisors, reverting the feature to optional status can de-escalate conflict without fully resolving the underlying governance or trust concerns.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article draws on named, identified sources — including the OPUT chair, a departmental director, and the HR director — lending credibility and allowing multiple perspectives to be presented. The operational outcome (feature made optional) is concrete and verifiable. **Limitations:** The article is journalistic rather than analytical; it does not examine the employability classification methodology, its validity, or comparative institutional practices. The collective labour agreement clause cited (Article 6.7) is referenced but not quoted or examined in detail, leaving its actual scope ambiguous. **Biases:** The framing leans toward the resistance narrative — the OPUT chair and CES director receive more narrative space than the HR director's position, which is presented defensively. The 'dystopian' framing introduced by OPUT is reported without critical interrogation.

Organizational Practice

The University of Twente introduced an employability classification score — ranging from 'stable' to 'high potential' — as an additional field within its digitised annual performance review system (AFAS HR). This score was intended to complement the existing above/below/in-line-with-expectations performance rating and to support strategic workforce planning. Following resistance from supervisors and the union consultation body, HR made the employability field optional rather than mandatory.

Strategic Implications

The case illustrates a recurring tension in PMS design between individual development conversations and strategic workforce classification — combining both functions in a single review instrument may undermine trust in either purpose. The rollback to optional status reflects a pattern in which institutional resistance can constrain the rollout of strategic HR capabilities even when those capabilities are contractually supported. The episode also points to the sensitivity of 'potential' labelling in employment contexts, particularly where employees perceive linkage to job security or restructuring risk.

Validation Status: passed
