



CASE STUDY

# Aston Villa scores enhanced people management with Advanced's Performance & Talent

With Mel Millner, HR Director  
Aston Villa Football Club



## The challenge

The driving force of Aston Villa Football Club is to always win the next game. A key part of optimising the performance of the 200 strong workforce is considering the people behind the scenes that make the club tick.

Mel Millner was appointed as HR Director and tasked with bringing clarity, accountability, and clearer expectations to people's roles and performance, where there was a general lack of understanding on how each individual contributed to the bigger picture.

In kicking off this project, it was quickly apparent that there was no real history of performance management in the club and certainly no formal framework, so introducing a modern continuous performance management approach felt somewhat risky. Some people had previous experience of outdated appraisal models, and others had no experience of performance management whatsoever. Another consideration was the wide variety of people and roles. The make-up of the football club meant there was an unusual mix of skillsets and levels of seniority.

There was also a requirement for both HR and the wider leadership team to have more insight into performance engagement metrics across the club. With no existing framework in place for performance management, there was an inconsistency around whether performance conversations were taking place, what the quality of those discussions were and, how objectives were being set, if at all.



# Why Advanced's Performance & Talent; the solution

After an initial but extensive research phase, the HR team decided upon a non-traditional continuous performance approach, with three must-haves;

- Effective ongoing quality conversations
- Real-time feedback
- Near-term SMART objectives.

This decision was made after a few months of Mel being appointed, once she had developed a better understanding of the culture of working at Villa and what would be most beneficial for the club. Having settled on this approach, the HR team set about finding a technology partner with an aligned methodology and who would enable this new cultural shift to really take off, which is when they found Advanced.

"It was love at first sight when we saw the Advanced's Performance & Talent software. Immediately, I felt comfortable with the user-friendly look and feel of it! It was also very cost effective, which was an important factor for us as well."

The extremely intuitive and straightforward user experience meant the HR team were able to focus on the human elements of making the shift to continuous performance management, such as objective setting, development

support, and how to conduct meaningful check-in meetings, rather than spending an unnecessary amount of time on showing people how to use a clunky system. All of this contributed to the successful adoption of the new performance model.

The simplicity of the technology from a user administration perspective was also key to a quick and effective implementation and in Mel's own words;

"The system set up was extremely simple. Before we knew it, we pressed a button and we were away!"

As this was a bold new step for the club, HR needed a technology provider who they could partner with over time to help them evolve their approach and understand best-practice from other customers. The usual reactive 'contact us if you have a problem' approach was not going to cut it.

"The team was very knowledgeable and helpful during the initial sales process, and have continued that post-launch. They are hugely attentive and have even implemented many of our improvement feedback requests into their platform. Their online customer community has also been really helpful for us."



## The result

The goal behind the club's project has been achieved with Advanced's Performance & Talent. This has resulted in a huge uplift in clarity around each individual's responsibility and how their contribution is vital to the success of the Club, the team, and the results on the football pitch. Despite there being initial fears about how the new approach would be received, both the methodology and the technology have been fully embraced by managers and team members with universally positive feedback across the board.

"Since we introduced the system, people have taken it and run with it. There have been none of the usual complaints you get when rolling out clunky HR Systems."

The system itself has provided a clear and accessible framework to continually monitor and improve performance, with managers stating that it has genuinely enabled them to improve in their role as people enablers. This new level of performance focus has resulted in a source of accurate and meaningful data to draw on. Insights by division, team, manager, and individual on key performance indicators are now only a few clicks away.

Mel and the team were aware that performance management is by definition a 'work in progress', and there is always more to be done. But now they could confidently say they were on a clear path towards ever-increasing focus, engagement, and performance management excellence.





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Would you like to see how Performance & Talent could work for you?

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