

Tips for Managers: Evaluating Performance During COVID-19



Given the many challenges of COVID-19, many workplaces are rethinking how they assess employee performance. If you manage others, consider these recommendations.

Adjust expectations

We're all working in the midst of a global crisis. And it has notable impacts on physical, mental and emotional health. Many employees are working in new environments. Many have shifted to take on new roles. They may be handling childcare or eldercare. They may be dealing with new financial stressors. They may have loved ones who are high-risk, have been ill or have passed away. They may have been ill themselves.

All of these factors need to be taken into account when reviewing performance. Try to redirect your focus away from productivity. Support engagement, connectedness and well-being.

Before going ahead with performance reviews, consider your goals

Some companies are going ahead with performance reviews. Others are getting rid of them altogether. When deciding what makes the most sense for your workplace, think through your goals. Also, consider how employees might react to these kinds of assessments.

For example, are these reviews linked to pay increases or promotions that are no longer occurring? Is there a risk that they could create pressure and concern without the corresponding benefit? Or are reviews your organisation's way to ensure that employees have a clear sense of their goals and the guidance needed to work toward them? Would they help maintain a sense of normalcy and support?

Regardless of whether you end up having performance reviews, make sure that you're having regular check-ins with employees. These opportunities to connect are even more important right now.

Consider a more qualitative, conversational approach

The format of employee assessments can be adjusted in a number of ways:

- Many schools have shifted to a pass/fail model of grading. Your grading scale may need to be adjusted as well. Review the measures or metrics that you typically use. Do these rely on targets that don't make sense given the new landscape? Are the goals set for or by an employee prior to COVID-19 still appropriate? They could be revised or put on pause for now.
- Many companies are scrapping number ratings. Reviews can instead be more narrative and nuanced. They can consider changing the circumstances.
- Get employees' input. Let them submit their own thoughts about what they want to focus on and what they need help with. Do they feel good about what they've been accomplishing? Are there tools or resources that they need from management to adapt to new circumstances? What do they need to ensure that they have motivating projects and tasks on their plate?
- It's important to give any necessary feedback. But don't forget that reviews should also cover what employees have been doing well. Celebrate the qualities that are especially valuable in this moment. These include flexibility, resilience and supporting others.

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