



PERFORMANCE AND DEVELOPMENT - COVID-19 INFORMATION SHEET

INFORMATION FOR MANAGERS

COVID-19 is having a significant and varying impact on the work and key deliverables of public sector agencies and its employees.

For some, the volume of work they need to deliver has significantly intensified (e.g. front-line service delivery or critical supporting infrastructure), for others their services may have ceased all together, dropped off significantly or they are unable to deliver services in the same way due to social distancing requirements. Further, there are a large number of public sector employees who are working remotely, with teams adjusting to this new way of working.

Performance management and development practices need to be flexible and agile in response to the evolving nature of COVID-19. Agency, team and individual priorities, patterns of work, modes of communication and team dynamics will likely be impacted for a prolonged period. Managers need to help their employees navigate these changes and support team productivity.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

The principles and intent of performance management and development (PMD) do not change when the workforce is operating in increased uncertainty and ambiguity. While the application may look different, the need for regular performance conversations becomes even more critical to supporting employees and enabling productivity.

Performance management and development reviews are required at least twice a year for all employees in the South Australian Public Sector.

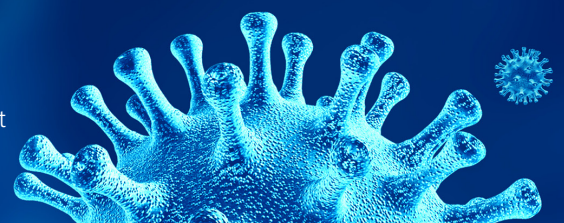
It is acknowledged that some agencies may modify their existing approach to be responsive to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. To align to your agency approach, managers should refer to the process outlined by their agency HR area.

It is imperative that managers establish regular performance conversations and check-ins with all direct reports. For those managing teams remotely, this is likely to include regular one-on-one and team conversations by phone, or regular collaboration platforms such as Microsoft Teams or Skype.

KEY CONVERSATIONAL FOCUS AREAS

Regular performance conversations are critical to supporting both employee wellbeing and productivity during this extended period of ambiguity, rapid change and disruption.

The following information provides managers with guidance on adapting performance conversations for the current context and provides a list of reflective questions for managers to consider to enable employees to perform at their best.



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1. WELLBEING AND SUPPORT

It is normal to feel worried during a time of uncertainty and rapid change. Employees are likely dealing with changes to what and how they need to deliver at work, and may be impacted by a range of evolving challenges concerning health, caring responsibilities and day-to-day living.

Performance conversations should commence with an emphasis on the employee's health and wellbeing and support strategies to adapt to new work conditions. Employees will be juggling a number of responsibilities (including health, family and finances) that may vary over the duration of the public health emergency. Managers and employees should work together to find the right balance that ensures the best outcomes for an employee and their work.

2. CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

It is important that all employees have a clear understanding of what they are expected to deliver. An ambiguous and rapidly changing environment amplifies the risk of distraction, fatigue and reduced productivity. A clear understanding of roles and expectations supports greater productivity, motivating employees to maintain and improve their performance.

It is important that managers continue to establish clear and meaningful performance objectives for their team members that are aligned to team and agency priorities. To be responsive to this context, managers should place a greater emphasis on shorter-term objectives and priorities, which are reviewed through regular performance conversations. Given the current unpredictable environment, medium to longer-term priorities may need to be reassessed and adjusted where necessary.

Further, where there have been changes to the way in which work needs to be delivered (e.g. teams working remotely) managers should work with team members to establish and communicate clear expectations as to what is expected of individuals in implementing and adapting to new ways of working.

3. FEEDBACK AND COACHING

To anticipate and be responsive to changing environments, frequent conversations and two-way feedback is vital to focus employee energy and efforts towards achieving priorities. Upwards feedback from team members is essential for managers to monitor how their employees are adapting to change, and to identify opportunities to ensure connectedness, respond to set backs and optimise resources across the team.

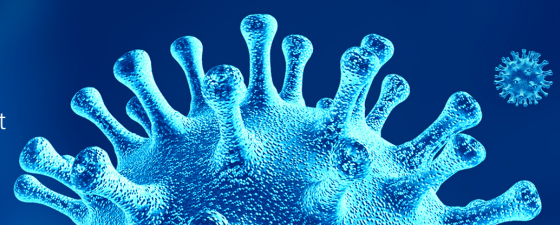
A coaching approach in performance conversations is important to empower, develop, assist and motivate employees to be their best. This is achieved through sharing expertise and perspectives, developing increased self-awareness, developing necessary capabilities, building on strengths, prioritising wellbeing, and recognising achievements.

4. DEVELOPMENT AND LEVERAGING STRENGTHS

Managers and employees need to work together to determine what development may be needed to support performance in the current environment.

Rapid changes in the work to be undertaken may provide increased opportunities for managers to leverage their employee's strengths and focus their efforts to ensure maximum impact. New ways of working may also result in employees requiring additional support and development to address any areas for improvement.

Traditional development opportunities will likely be unavailable during this period. Managers and employees are encouraged to consider learning opportunities available through self-directed learning, online training, stretch opportunities and through drawing on the experiences of others in the workplace (e.g. communities of practice and mentoring relationships).



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REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS FOR MANAGERS

1. WELLBEING AND SUPPORT

- Does the employee have any work, health and safety and/or wellbeing issues they need to talk about?
- What does the employee need more of, or less of from you as their manager to assist their wellbeing?
- Does the employee need to access different strategies or supports to balance work and family commitments during this period?
- What things are energising and/or frustrating the employee?
- If employees feel stressed or anxious about their situation, have you encouraged them to reach out to a Mental Health First Aider or access other support mechanisms such as the Mental Health Hotline (1800 632 753) or the agency Employee Assistance Program (EAP)?

2. CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

- Do employees have clarity on short-term expectations and what they need to deliver?
- Do employees understand the connection between their current work, and team and agency priorities?
- Are you providing employees with regular updates to changes that impact the work they are currently undertaking?
- Do employees need to adapt the ways they are working in response to the current environment?
- Are you providing employees with an appropriate balance of autonomy and direction to get their work done?
- Does the employee have too much, or too little to do and how are you directing effort to maximise employee contribution and impact?

3. FEEDBACK AND COACHING

- Do you need to review/amend the frequency of performance conversations with all of your direct reports?
- Have you established regular performance conversations with all of your direct reports?
- Are you celebrating the progress employees are making towards achieving objectives or adapting to new ways of working?
- What barriers or obstacles are your employees encountering and what actions are required to address?
- How are team members using their strengths to achieve individual and team objectives?

4. DEVELOPMENT AND LEVERAGING STRENGTHS

- Do you currently have employees focused on where they can individually make the biggest impact to agency and team priorities?
- How can you facilitate collaborative learning within your team by leveraging individual employee strengths?
- Are you supporting employees to invest effort and self-direction to acquire the relevant knowledge, skills and experience in the particular area requiring development?
- Are you encouraging employees to partner up and learn from others with strengths in the areas requiring development?
- Are you recognising and making learning visible within your team to increase employee engagement?

Further information and resources on performance management and development are available on the [OCPSE website](#).

