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# PIVOT, ADAPT, CHANGE

WHAT CONSTITUTES PRODUCTIVITY AND SUCCESS IS A CONSTANTLY MOVING TARGET, AND STATIC PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT MODELS ARE SIMPLY NO LONGER FIT FOR PURPOSE.

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Collectively, we asked a lot of people to step up their performance in 2020 – doctors, nurses, supermarket workers, hairdressers and more – but it’s not an exaggeration to suggest that, for most people, it was not a peak performance year. With so much disruption and uncertainty, is it even fair to measure performance in the workplace like we used to? Are performance reviews, before now usually conducted in person, even a valid tool in a COVID-19, remote-working world?

As it turns out, regular performance management theories and tools may not have been much use before the global pandemic anyway. “Over the past decade, it has become increasingly apparent that the systems used to measure performance are ineffective, broken, out of touch with people, archaic and only meeting a compliance agenda,” explains Michelle Bihary, a leadership and resilience specialist and author of *Leading Above the Line*.

In fact, according to Mercer’s ‘Global Performance Management’ studies in both 2013 and 2019, only two

per cent of companies believed that their performance management approach delivered exceptional value. Which means that, even with vaccines on the horizon and an end to the pandemic in sight, rethinking the way your business measures performance is critical for future success.

## MEASURING YOUR PERFORMANCE

### 1. PROMOTE AGILE GOALS

If there was ever a year that definitively answered the question, ‘Are annual goals helpful?’ it’s 2020. “Many organisations are largely shifting to an agile, goals-based approach to performance measurement that focuses on outcomes rather than activity and behaviours,” says Ben Wigert, Director of Research and Strategy, Workplace Management for analytics and advisory firm Gallup. “Goal setting doesn’t work if you’re not continuously sharpening and adapting goals as the work and business needs evolve.”

One US study from Gartner showed that employees with goals which have ‘high strategic alignment’ perform 22 per cent better than those whose goals are no longer relevant. Focus on shorter-term goals that can be accomplished before the business has to inevitably shift once again, and allow for goals to be agile enough to change as the business changes. Employees who have a voice in setting goals and have not just been assigned them by their manager will perform better.

“The most important rule of performance reviews is that they should not be a surprise,” Wigert warns. “Employees need to have the expectation and mindset that business needs and performance expectations will continue to evolve through the pandemic. And they need to feel empowered and trusted to find new solutions.”

### 2. FOCUS ON TEAM PERFORMANCE

One of the biggest challenges of working remotely is communication and coordination among team members, and with so many critical performance factors outside the control of a single employee, focusing on what a team can achieve – and change – together can lead to better performance outcomes.

But team performance check-ins shouldn’t devolve into blame games, which is why it’s important to formalise the process. “If it isn’t anonymous, people won’t be truthful,” explains Pia Lee, CEO of team performance platform Squadify, which uses quarterly team surveys to help teams focus on areas for development. “What we’re trying to create is a really egalitarian process that enables every team member to have a voice. What we’re seeing is that there is about a 10 per cent increase in productivity, sales and employee engagement among our clients.”

While regularly assessing team performance should be a complement to one-on-one performance management, critically examining what is working – or not working – in a team has benefits for employees and businesses alike.

“Team productivity ultimately has a greater impact on organisational success than individual employee performance,” Wigert clarifies. “Team metrics can also be easier to connect to critical business outcomes like profitability and customer satisfaction. And team rewards can ensure employees are encouraged to do what’s best for the organisation, not just themselves.”

### 3. FACILITATE ONGOING CONVERSATION

While there’s been lots of discussion about the importance of re-creating the informal ‘water-cooler moments’ in a virtual workplace, what’s often overlooked is how organic feedback has also been lost with everyone working from home. The easy ‘Good job’ or quick ‘Let me show you how to do that better’ mentoring moments are harder to come by online.

Though COVID-19 can’t be blamed for everything. According to Gallup, nearly half of all employees say they receive feedback from their manager a few times a year or less. “Goals are irrelevant if you’re not continuously coaching toward goal progress,” Wigert points out. “Weekly discussions of work priorities and how they connect to performance goals has been an effective focal point for many organisations overhauling performance management.”

Bihary confirms that consistency and constancy is key. “Amy Edmondson’s groundbreaking research and Google’s Project Aristotle clearly indicate that the number one factor in achieving high performance is psychological safety,” she says. “More human-centred approaches, less numbers, more regular feedback rather than waiting for the once or twice per year review, and more focus on positives, as well as opportunities for growth and learning are how psychological safety can become operationalised.”

The pandemic has permanently changed the world of work and businesses have asked their employees to pivot, adapt and change overnight. It’s time performance management models and strategies are able to do the same. ■