

# DCIF Project – Performance Management Tool 5: Managing the Performance of Remote Workers

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## Tags

Who is this for?

High priority:

- Direct Line Managers

What guidance does it provide?

- How to manage the needs and expectation of workers with disabilities in a remote setting

Take home points

- Providing consistent and constructive feedback, holding regular performance reviews, and setting clearly defined goals – these are all fundamental to good performance management and can be carried out effectively online, over video chat, or face-to-face.
- When conducting remote performance management, move away from measuring performance on the number of hours worked or visible presence and effort, and assess on measures such as number of goal and objective achieved, and if work is delivered on time with contribution to the organization
- The key to successfully conducting remote performance management is to implement a continuous feedback loop. Remember, performance management is an ongoing process.

# Managing the Performance of Remote Workers

Remote or hybrid working environments create unique opportunities for workers with disabilities.

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*According to a survey conducted in 2020 by the Conference Board of Canada, 74% of businesses surveyed reported that less than 10% of their workforce was remote prior to the pandemic. However, 34% of businesses surveyed now predict that 40% or more of their workforce will continue to be remote after the pandemic has subsided.<sup>1</sup>*

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For managers leading remote or hybrid teams, the essential aspects of inclusive and accessible performance management remain the same. Providing consistent and constructive feedback, holding regular performance reviews, and setting clearly defined goals – these are all fundamental to good performance management and can be carried out effectively online, over video chat, or face-to-face. Nonetheless, to deliver quality performance management to remote workers, managers must take into account several unique considerations.

## Shifts in Measuring Remote Workers' Performance

Leading remote workers may require different people management strategies as well as changes to performance assessment measures. When working in person, it is easy to fall into the habit of equating presence to performance – when we see someone at work or remember them being on site, we sometimes assume this implies productivity. In fact, “Teleworkers are more productive and less likely to take time off work.”<sup>2</sup> Employers who have already successfully deployed remote work for some time know that with proper management and guidance, remote work can provide many benefits for employers, as well as employees.<sup>2</sup>

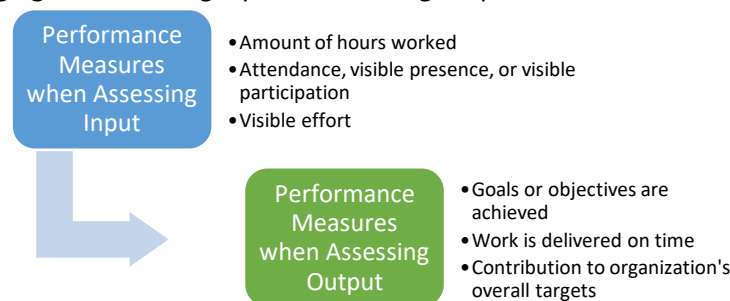
However, effective performance management of remote workers necessitates a fundamental shift away from this mindset. It requires managers to evaluate workers by outcomes, results, and contribution rather than presence. Practice has shown that most workers with flexible or remote work models respect the freedom they are given and work hard.

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*Among new remote workers in 2021 in Canada, approximately 32% reported they accomplish more work per hour.<sup>3</sup>*

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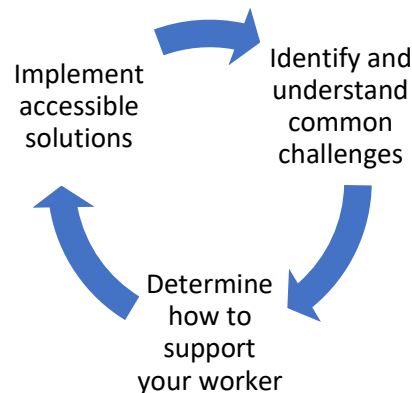
Move away from managing and assessing input to assessing output:



*If ever in doubt, always bring yourself back to the workers' bona fide occupational requirements, and the performance standards and measures developed for each of these essential duties.*

## Strategies to Effectively Manage Remote Performance<sup>4</sup>

The key to successfully conducting remote performance management is to implement a continuous feedback loop. Remember, performance management is an ongoing process.



### Intersectionality Avatars

**Taylor:** Very often, people ask me if I am a man or a woman. When they ask me this, they don't know how I grew up obsessing over my looks, and how I never fit into any gender. I was so ashamed that talking to people became a major source of anxiety for me. When I first started working as a teller here, I was getting the question at least 3 times per day. At one point, I was dreading this question to the extent that I started taking more sick days than I was allowed. When I did come to work, I was so stressed out that I made serious mistakes one after another.

Finally, my supervisor called me to his office. I was sure I was about to be sacked but instead he asked me if everything was OK, if I needed support with anything. He also added that he as well as the company wanted to offer everything possible in their power to ensure their employees' needs are supported. That's when I shared about my disability, gender dysphoria, that I had been living with ever since I could remember. He was very understanding. He set some ground rules that would be applicable to both my co-workers and clients. Since then, the anxiety has been lifted significantly and I have been able to concentrate on my work a lot more efficiently. Knowing that my employer has my back is an incredible weight off my shoulders.

First, it's important to understand common challenges faced by remote workers, from isolation to distractions to lack of face-to-face supervision. Then, managers can collaborate with their worker to identify what can be done to support them and their performance. This might look different depending on the worker – for instance, you could schedule regular, structured check-ins, provide multiple communication options, present opportunities for social interactions, and provide ongoing encouragement and emotional support. Take a look at these strategies for remote performance management:

- **Clarify roles and responsibilities:** Remote workers must be familiar with their core job requirements and the performance standards they are working towards.

- As there is less face time, ensure that your remote workers understand what is within the capacity of their role, and when to refer tasks to you, their manager
- Provide detailed descriptions and clarity when assigning new work to an employee - lack of clarity can cause stress and result in poor performance
- Be sure to double-check that a worker understands your directions, and give them the opportunity to ask questions if they require further information
- **Pay close attention to workers, but don't micromanage:** If you are managing employees remotely, you won't be able to spot changes in behaviour or performance as quickly as you would if you were in the same location.
  - Address performance concerns promptly – it is never a good idea to let performance concerns linger, and such situations rarely resolve themselves
  - Plan regular review meetings to ensure that there is regular review of performance in correspondence with the identified performance standards
  - Remember that managers can't monitor every aspect of a remote team member's work, nor should they need to – focus on performance of tasks, deadlines, and team participation
- **Celebrate performance excellence:** Look out for great performance. In a remote environment, it's not just poor performance that might be harder to observe, but great work too.
  - Find time to celebrate successes, acknowledge contributions, and provide recognition for exceptional work
- **Lead with empathy:** Working from home can bring about many different challenges for your employees. Work life balance can become blurred, leading to stress and burnout. As well, virtual settings can make it challenging for employees to feel included and connected to others, especially if accessibility is not prioritized in other ways and they cannot fully participate.
  - Start meetings by asking how your workers are doing, rather than diving into business straight away
  - If your workers choose to talk about personal things, let them digress and give more time to speak about their experiences
- **Engage in consistent and accessible communication:** Remote workers do not have the same opportunity to talk to you informally throughout the day as they would on site.
  - Send messages or schedule a short daily meeting to maintain communication with your workers
  - Foster a culture of care where you are available to provide support or answer any of the worker's questions
  - Video conferencing can be a cognitive strain on many workers, not just those with disabilities. Provide basic visuals, simple bullet points, and take breaks during long calls or conferences
  - For more information on accessible virtual communication, please visit [Communication Tool 5 - Improving Your Online Accessibility](#)
- **Don't defer disability support:** Workers receiving job coaching, who have an accommodation, or who are in the process of acquiring an accommodation may require your support.
  - Ensure accommodations are provided in a timely manner so workers have everything they need in place to work effectively
  - Ask workers whether their existing home office setups meet their needs, and if not, how you can help
  - Understand that no one is more qualified than the worker themselves to know what works or does not work for them

- For more information on determining appropriate workplace accommodations and your duty to accommodate, please visit the [Accommodation Tools \[link to accommodation tool landing page\]](#).

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Steemers, F., Erickson, R., Popiela, A., & Levanon, G. (2020). Adapting to the reimagined workplace: Human capital responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Conference Board*. <https://www.conference-board.org/topics/natural-disasters-pandemics/adapting-to-the-reimagined-workplace>
- <sup>2</sup> Wright, A. D. (2015). Study: Teleworkers more productive – even when sick. Society for Human Resource Management. <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/technology/pages/teleworkers-more-productive-even-when-sick.aspx>
- <sup>3</sup> Mehdi, T., & Morissette, R. (2021). Working from home: Productivity and preferences. *StatCan COVID-19: Data to Insights for a Better Canada*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2021001/article/00012-eng.htm>
- <sup>4</sup> Dale, G. (2021). Introducing performance management for remote teams. *My HR Toolkit*. <https://www.myhrtoolkit.com/blog/performance-management-for-remote-teams>