Shift from Annual Performance Management to Continuous Feedback

Best practices to apply out-of-industry strategies to higher education

Business Affairs Forum

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Who Should Read

Chief HR Officers

Directors of Organizational Learning

Directors of Professional Development

Shift from Annual Performance Management to Continuous Feedback

Best Practices to Apply Out-of-Industry Strategies to Higher Education

3 Ways to Use this Study

- Identify opportunities to improve quality of performance reviews
- Provide managers with strategies for effective, ongoing performance conversations
- Empower employees with tools to drive career conversations

Business Affairs Forum

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Executive Summary

Organizations Receiving a Questionable Return on Annual Reviews

It’s no secret that the majority of managers, staff, and HR leaders find limited value in the annual performance evaluation process. Managers dislike spending so much time filling out forms (and HR staff equally dislike chasing down those forms). Staff want—and would benefit from—more frequent feedback. In fact, staff who strongly agree that they receive regular feedback from their manager are five times more likely to be engaged than staff who disagree.

Reallocate Managers’ Time Toward Continuous Feedback

Given the power of regular feedback, companies in several industries have experimented with alternative approaches to performance management. In some cases, companies have gone so far as to eliminate the annual review altogether in favor of more frequent check-ins.

Few HR leaders would disagree about the importance of regular feedback, but many question how to enable it—especially in units with large spans of control. Higher education institutions may not be able to adopt other industries’ strategies wholesale, but they can and should shift their investment in performance management away from the annual review. Minimizing the time managers spend on the annual review will allow them to spend more time delivering ongoing feedback.

A Higher Education-Specific Approach

This publication includes eight best practices to shift performance management from an annual event to continuous feedback. While we conducted extensive research on approaches to continuous feedback in other industries, the solutions we recommend are custom-fit for higher education institutions.

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1 The Case for Continuous Feedback

2 Minimize Documentation Required for Annual Reviews

3 Focus on Quality, Then Quantity, of One-on-Ones

4 Fill in the Gaps Between One-on-Ones with Frequent Team Feedback

5 Democratize Feedback to Capture Multiple Perspectives

Most HR leaders will admit they are wholly unsatisfied with their organization's current approach to performance management. Despite a large investment of time and resources, managers, employees, and HR leaders alike report that they find limited value in the process.

Organizations Invest Significant Time in Annual Reviews

Estimated Time Required to Complete an Annual Review[1]

Activity	*Annual Time per Employee*
Finding relevant performance data	30 mins
Filling out annual review form	30 mins
Delivering performance review to employee	20 mins
Employee self-evaluation	15 mins
Employee peer review	15 mins
Employee receiving performance review	20 mins

Data shows most managers are dissatisfied with their organization's performance management system, and many employees feel the review isn't relevant to their work. For their part, nearly all HR leaders question the accuracy of reviews.

As organizations evaluate their investment in performance management, all too often the costs are greater than the returns.

A Disappointing ROI for Managers, Employees, and HR Leaders Alike

Management and Employees Across Industries Dissatisfied with Review Process

Managers

95%

of managers feel dissatisfied with their performance management system

Employees

65%

of employees say the review isn't relevant to their job

HR

90%

of HR leaders don't believe reviews yield accurate information

1) Health Care Industry Data.

Source: SHRM, "Is It Time to Put the Performance Review on a PIP?" 2015, https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/pages/0415-qualitative-performance-reviews.aspx; EAB interviews and analysis.

Performance management systems frequently under-emphasize a critical element: ongoing feedback. Data suggests frequent feedback has a positive impact on staff retention and organizational performance. Furthermore, the majority of staff want more regular feedback. Especially in higher education, where only 34% of faculty and staff report feeling engaged in their jobs, feedback is one way leaders can improve both staff engagement and performance.

To take advantage of the power of feedback, organizations need to shift their investment in performance management from a once-a-year event to more continuous feedback. The annual review then becomes a brief summary of the ongoing conversation that has been happening across the year. Few HR leaders in any industry would argue against this shift philosophically—implementing it is the challenge.

The Case for Regular Feedback

Higher Education Struggles with Engagement

34%
of university faculty and staff are engaged in their Jobs

41%
of universities report above-average turnover rates for staff

31%
of universities use mentoring or coaching programs to improve employee engagement

Frequent Feedback a Powerful Lever for Retention and Performance Across Industries

15%
Lower turnover rate for companies that implement regular feedback

2x
Companies that review goals monthly twice as likely to be in top quartile for performance versus companies that review goals annually

65%
of employees say they want more regular feedback

Source: "10 Reasons Your Employees Need Feedback Right Now," TallyFox, www.tallyfox.com/insight/10-reasons-your-employees-need-feedback-right-now; Brim B, Asplund J, "Driving Engagement by Focusing on Strengths," Gallup, www.gallup.com/businessjournal/124214/driving-engagement-focusing-strengths.aspx; Black O, "From Performance Misery to Performance Joy," HR Zone, www.hrzone.com/lead/change/from-performance-misery-to-performance-joy; Harter, J "Employees Want a Lot More from Their Managers," Gallup, The Engaged University, Gallup Higher Education Employee Engagement, www.gallup.com/workplace/236570/employees-lot-managers.aspx/ "Empowering Employees: The state of employee engagement and retention in higher education," Cornerstone.

Organizations across industries are interested in moving to continuous feedback, reflected by headlines about large corporations eliminating the annual review. These organizations aim to replace the one-time annual event with ongoing feedback throughout the year. To date, much of the experimentation to increase the frequency of feedback has happened at for-profit corporations.

New Experiments in Performance Management Emerging

Examples of Companies Changing Performance Review Processes

T-Mobile

"Amp up Performance Conversations to Sync up the Employee/Employer Relationship"
—*Human Capital Institute*

accenture

"Accenture Will Get Rid of Annual Performance Reviews and Rankings"
—*The Washington Post*

GAP

"The Future of Performance Management Is Not One-Size-Fits-All"
—*Forbes*

GE

"Here's Why GE Is Replacing Performance Reviews with an App"
—*Fortune*

Lilly

"Yes, You Can Eliminate the Annual Review, Improve Engagement, and Still Get Workforce Metrics"
—ERE Media

patagonia

"Hate Performance Reviews? Good News: They're Getting Shorter and Simpler"
—*Forbes*

JPMorganChase

"At JP Morgan, Your Performance Review Is Now. And Now. And Now…"
—*Bloomberg*

Deloitte.

"What If You Could Replace Performance Evaluations with Four Simple Questions?"
—*The Washington Post*

Source: ERE Media, "Yes, You Can Eliminate the Annual Review, Improve Engagement, and Still Get Workforce Metrics," 2017; Forbes, "The Future of Performance Management Is Not One-Size-Fits-All," 2016; Forbes, "Hate Performance Reviews? Good News: They're Getting Shorter and Simpler," 2017; Washington Post, "What If You Could Replace Performance Evaluations with Four Simple Questions?," 2015; Washington Post, "In Big Move, Accenture Will Get Rid of Annual Performance Reviews and Rankings," 2015; HCI, "Amped up Performance Management Conversations to Sync up the Employee / Employer Relationship, 2015; Fortune, "Here's Why GE is Replacing Performance Reviews with an pp," 2015; Bloomberg, "At JP Morgan, Your Performance Review Is Now, And Now."

EAB reviewed multiple companies' performance management updates. While each company developed its own approach to transforming performance management, early-movers consistently pursued three strategies to shift the time employees spend on annual performance management toward continuous feedback.

The first strategy to promote continuous feedback is to eliminate the annual review and ratings. Instead of eliminating the annual review altogether, HR leaders should minimize the documentation required for the review, which can help managers free up time to deliver more frequent feedback.

The second strategy is to equip managers to have more and better conversations with direct reports. Many out-of-industry organizations encourage managers to hold monthly check-ins with direct reports. Institutions should first focus on the quality of check-ins, then the quantity of them. The goal is to ensure each check-in is meaningful before mandating more of them.

The final strategy is to enable 360-degree feedback, 365 days per year. Institutions should democratize feedback to capture multiple perspectives on staff performance. Multiple sources of feedback give staff a comprehensive view of their performance and ensure they receive feedback frequently.

Distilling Out-of-Industry Changes

Tactics to Promote Continuous Feedback

Distilling Out-of-Industry Changes	*Translating Strategies into Higher Ed*
 Get Rid of the Annual Review and/or Ratings	 **Minimize Documentation** Required for Annual Reviews
 Equip Managers to Have More and Better Conversations	 **Focus on Quality, Then Quantity,** of One-on-Ones Fill in the Gaps of One-on-Ones with **Frequent Team Feedback**
 Enable 360-Degree Feedback, 365 Days/Year	 **Democratize Feedback** to Capture Multiple Perspectives

Executive Framework

Best Practices to Apply Out-of-Industry Strategies in Higher Education

We recommend a two-part framework to shift performance management from an annual event to continuous feedback. First, HR leaders must reduce the amount of time managers spend on the annual review before asking them to take on any additional feedback conversations.

Once the annual review is a more manageable time commitment, HR leaders can address the second part of the framework—helping managers reallocate the time saved toward more frequent feedback across the year. The strategies to accomplish this include improving the quality of check-in conversations, supplementing one-on-one check-ins with team coaching, and democratizing feedback to capture multiple perspectives beyond the manager's.

The remainder of this publication provides details about how to implement the eight best practices previewed below.

Reduce the Time Spent on the Annual Review

Minimize Documentation Required for Annual Reviews

1. Minimalist Annual Review
2. Ongoing Performance Tracker

Reallocate the Time Saved Toward More Frequent Feedback Across the Year

Focus on **Quality, Then Quantity,** of One-on-Ones

3. Tiered Coaching Plan
4. Picklist of Guardrails to Reinforce Ongoing Performance Conversations

Fill in the Gaps Between One-on-Ones with **Frequent Team Feedback**

5. Dashboard-Driven Conversations
6. Behavior-Based Conversation Starters

Democratize Feedback to **Capture Multiple Perspectives**

7. Employee-Driven Check-Ins
8. Crowdsourced Feedback

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5 Democratize Feedback to Capture Multiple Perspectives

In recent years, organizations across industries have worked to improve the annual review using the tactics shown at right.

These tactics make the review more accurate and objective—but not necessarily shorter. To free managers' time for year-round feedback, HR leaders need to make the review faster for managers to complete.

Three Tactics to Improve the Annual Review

Refine the review criteria

Help managers rate more accurately

Align goals throughout the organization

The first strategy for moving to continuous feedback is to minimize the documentation required for annual reviews. We estimate that managers spend at least an hour on review documentation per employee, including hunting down relevant data and completing the review itself. For managers with large spans of control, these hours add up quickly, leaving them with less time to spend in meaningful performance conversations with staff. The two best practices in this section will help leaders minimize documentation by shortening the form itself and making it easier to collect performance data throughout the year.

Review Documentation Still Taking Too Much Manager Time

Estimated Manager Time Required to Complete Annual Review Form

30

Minutes/employee spent filling out annual review form

30

Minutes/employee spent finding relevant performance data

Practices to Reduce Amount of Time Spent on Reviews

1

Reduce the length of the annual review form

2

Make it easy to collect performance data all year

Source: EAB interviews and analysis

Practice 1

Minimalist Annual Review

PRACTICE IN BRIEF

HR streamlines the annual review form by eliminating noncritical components. The goal is to enable managers to spend more time on performance conversations throughout the year than on completing paperwork for the annual review.

Rationale

For many organizations, performance management has become synonymous with the annual review. Organizations rely on the review as a tool to assess performance, coach and develop staff, and discuss future career plans. As a result, annual review forms are often much longer and more onerous than necessary. By reducing the length of the review form, HR can shift the annual performance review to a quick recap of the employee's past year and free up manager time for performance conversations throughout the year.

Implementation Options

Option 1: Build a New One-Page Performance Review from the Ground Up

HR designs a new one-page review form for all staff. The goal is to build a universal, single-page form by including only a summary of performance.

Option 2: Reduce Each Section of the Performance Review to Its Essential Elements

HR evaluates each section of the existing review form and trims each as much as possible. The goal is to dramatically reduce the length of the review without necessarily limiting the final product to a single page.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

The first option to create a minimalist annual review is to build a new, one-page performance review from the ground up. HR leaders at Virtua, a three-hospital health system in New Jersey, developed a standard one-page annual review form for staff, managers, and clinicians across the health system. HR leaders analyzed existing review forms and identified a short list of elements to include in the new form. To be included, elements had to be necessary for regulatory requirements and/or talent decisions (e.g., promotion, merit pay allocation).

To ensure the criteria fit on just one page, HR leaders at Virtua removed the less essential aspects of their previous review. HR leaders took one of three actions with these less essential elements: one, completely eliminating them; two, combining them into a single section (e.g., instead of rating staff on several individual values, managers fill out one "values" section); or three, relegating them to an attachment to the form for further detail as needed.

One-Page Review Forms Are More Doable Than You Might Think

Changes to the Virtua Health System Review Form

*Elements **Included** in Final One-Page Annual Review*

- Open-text summary of performance
- Open-text section for one behavior where employee has excelled
- Open-text section for one behavior employee can further develop
- Requirements (employee met, Yes/No)
- Overall rating
- Open-text box for development plan
- Attachments:
    - Goals for managers
    - List of department-specific competencies

*Elements **Eliminated** from Annual Review*

- Ratings for 33 individual behaviors and job duties
- Ratings for six individual values
- Nine open-text boxes
- Three separate future objectives sections
- Job description and position-specific requirements section

"Managers tell us this form is **much simpler to complete**, helps them focus on one to two **behaviors that will improve performance**, and enables them to have **targeted and focused** performance review discussions."

Chris Corwin, Vice President of Human Resources
Virtua Health System

The second option to create a minimalist annual review is to reduce each section of your existing review to its essential elements. While some leaders may decide to completely revamp their review form, others can simply refine their existing form. The goal is to dramatically reduce the length of the review without necessarily confining all criteria to a single page. The table at the right defines four possible sections of the review that HR leaders should consider simplifying: behaviors, job duties, goals, and leadership competencies.

Reducing Each Review Section to its Essential Elements

Definitions of Performance Review Criteria

Criterion	Definition	Rationale for Inclusion
Behaviors	The action an employee should take and way he or she should conduct him/herself to help the organization achieve its strategic priorities	Behavior standards allow managers to give feedback on performance and help employees understand why they didn't accomplish their goals. Standards also reinforce organizational values.
Job Duties	The tasks and responsibilities that define an employee's role	Job duties capture the baseline performance objectives staff must accomplish.
Goals	The specific, measurable objectives cascades from organization strategy that a team or individual employee is responsible for	Goals cascades from organization strategy help give staff "skin in the gram" to advance organization priorities.
Leadership Competencies	The skills necessary to be a successful leader at the organization	Leadership competencies allow organization to draw distinctions between expectations for leaders and staff and create a consistent set of non-technical expectations for all leaders.

Practice 2

Ongoing Performance Tracker

PRACTICE IN BRIEF

HR gives a standard template to managers that allows them to capture relevant information about staff performance throughout the year. The goal is to reduce the amount of time managers spend hunting for performance data at the end of the year.

Rationale

Busy managers often wait until the last minute to compile information on staff performance for annual reviews. This means each individual review takes more time than necessary to complete (and feedback may be less accurate or comprehensive). To avoid this annual time crunch, managers would ideally document feedback about staff performance throughout the year. In fact, many managers are already capturing—or at least, hearing—feedback about staff as part of their regular workflow, but their system for documenting this feedback is often one-off or haphazard. Giving managers a standard template with predefined criteria can help managers track relevant information about staff performance in a single, easy-to-access place.

Implementation Components

Component 1: Give Managers an Easy-to-Use Template to Capture Performance Feedback

HR gives managers a template pre-populated with criteria they should use to track staff performance on an ongoing basis.

Optional Component: Regularly Prompt Managers to Capture Employee Performance

Consider sending managers regular reminders to capture employee performance. Reminders should highlight natural opportunities that managers have to collect feedback about employee performance.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

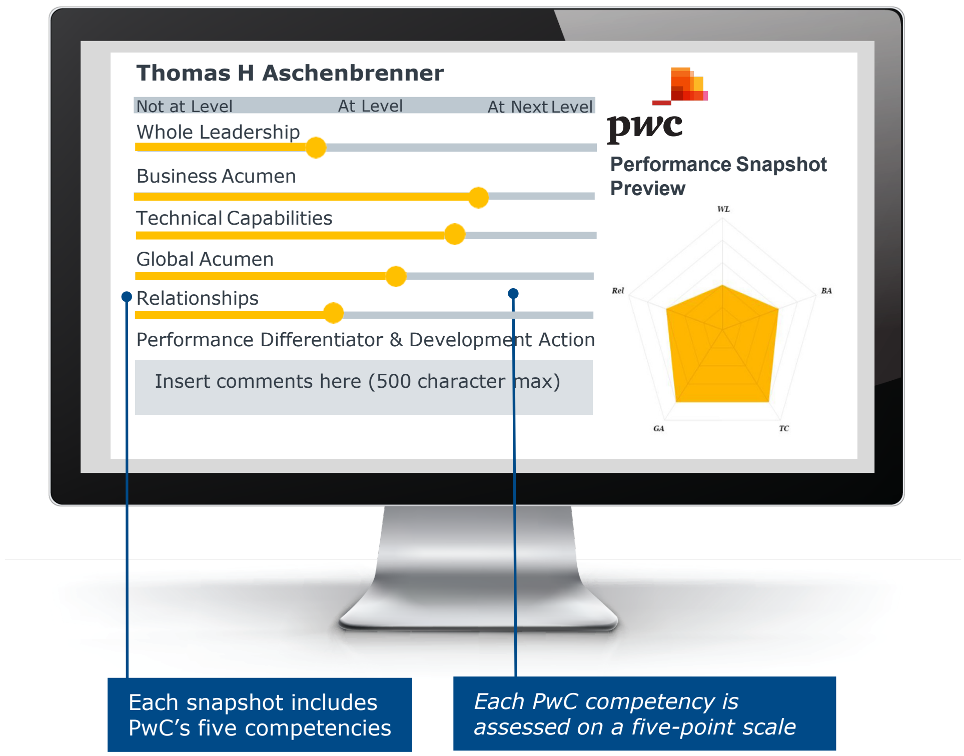
The first component of this practice is to give managers an easy-to-use template to capture performance data on their direct reports. This helps managers collect relevant performance information throughout the year. For example, PwC, a multinational professional services network with 223,000 employees, provides managers (and staff themselves) with an app that they can use to regularly record performance on five predefined competencies.

PwC supervisors assess staff progression on these five competencies on a five-point scale. They can also add a short impact statement to the employee record. Leadership recommends that all managers complete 6 to 12 performance snapshots per employee per year. Leaders use the aggregate of employees' snapshots across the year, along with performance metrics, to distribute merit pay and make promotion decisions during yearly career roundtables.

To build a useful tracker for managers, HR leaders should identify a similarly limited set of criteria—five to seven categories where specific examples of staff performance would be most useful for the annual review. For many organizations, the most suitable criteria will be organizational values or behaviors.

Clear Criteria for Tracking Performance at PwC

PwC Performance Snapshot Tool



EAB has developed an **Ongoing Performance Tracker** that you can customize for each of your administrative and student services unit managers. Managers can use the tracker to record specific examples of behaviors (positive or negative) for each of their team members throughout the year. At the end of the performance year, managers can easily access performance feedback, ultimately expediting the review process and ensuring that reviews reflect the entire feedback period. The tracker can be found in **Appendix A** of this publication.

Standardized Template Helps Managers Collate Performance Information in One Convenient Location

Excerpt of Ongoing Performance Tracker

Date	Comment	Category	Comment Type
1/15/2019	*Dominic went above and beyond to help Clara understand the new reimbursement processes for faculty travel expenses. He took the afternoon walking her through the process and answering her questions.*	Teamwork	Strength
2/11/2019	*Sample comment*	Customer Service	Development Opportunity
2/13/2019	*Sample comment*	Professionalism	Strength
3/5/2019	*Sample comment*	Innovation	Strength
3/31/2019	*Sample comment*	Communication	Development Opportunity

An optional component of this practice is to regularly remind managers to use the performance tracker throughout the year. PwC employees prompt their managers to complete "Performance Snapshots" on their behalf after they complete individual projects or consulting engagements. The typical employee receives 6 to 12 "Performance Snapshots" per year.

While some higher education teams might not have such clearly defined moments to collect feedback, there is a number of opportunities where managers are likely already hearing feedback and simply need to document it more consistently. Facilities maintenance is an example of a unit where adding standardized prompts to capture manager feedback might be especially valuable. A few of those opportunities are listed at right. We recommend reminding managers to regularly use the tracking template—but not requiring managers to use it, since some managers may prefer other methods of tracking performance.

Remind Managers to Capture Performance Information

Sample Times to Collect Manager Feedback

PwC Prompts

- After project completion
- At regular intervals, typically at the end of each consulting engagement

University Maintenance Unit Prompts

- After closing work orders
- After completing a major capitol project
- After a process improvement change or new technology implementation
- At the end of the fiscal year

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The second strategy for moving to continuous feedback is to focus on the quality, then the quantity, of one-on-one check-ins. Companies that have eliminated the annual review have repurposed that time toward more frequent feedback—typically, monthly one-on-one check-ins between managers and each of their direct reports.

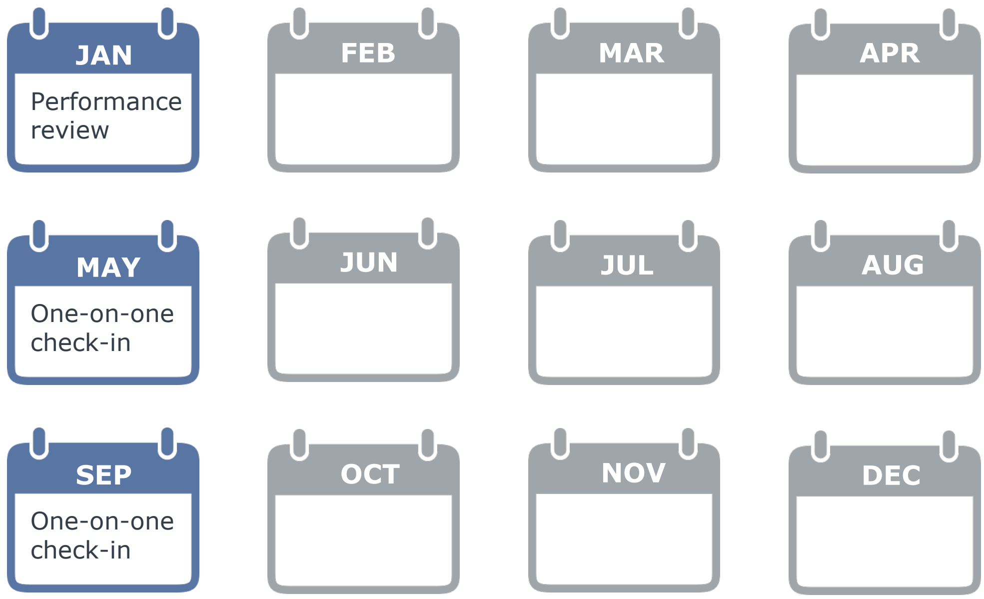
For some departments (e.g., dining services), monthly check-ins are not always feasible. If monthly check-ins are not possible, we recommend managers aim to have at least two one-on-one check-ins with employees outside of the annual review—or about one performance check-in every four months.

However, we recommend HR leaders focus on helping managers increase the quality of each individual conversation before increasing the number of annual check-ins. Low-quality check-ins are a poor use of manager and staff time.

The two best practices in this section help make high-quality, regular one-on-one coaching doable. They will help HR leaders give managers tools to have the right conversation with each employee and establish guardrails to ensure necessary conversations occur.

Finding a Feasible Check-In Cadence

Sample Minimum Cadence of One-on-One Check-Ins



Tactics to Enable Periodic One-on-One Coaching

Help managers have the right conversations with each employee → **Practice 3**: Tiered Coaching Plan

Put guardrails in place to make sure conversations happen → **Practice 4:** Picklist of Guardrails to Reinforce Ongoing Performance Conversations

Practice 3
Tiered Coaching Plan

PRACTICE IN BRIEF

HR gives managers a guide to customize check-in conversations with their direct reports based on individual employee performance. The goal is to make frequent feedback more "doable" for managers and more effective for staff.

Rationale

Managers need to share performance feedback with staff throughout the year to promote continuous development. The type of manager conversations should vary based on staff performance—a high-performer needs a different coaching conversation than a valued contributor or a low-performer. Equipping managers with the script to have the right coaching conversation with each individual employee helps ensure each conversation is as impactful as possible.

Implementation Components

Component 1: Offer a Simple Method for Managers to Tier Employees Based on Performance

HR gives managers a short list of questions that help them quickly categorize their employees based on performance. The goal is to help managers determine the most appropriate type of conversation to help each employee improve (or maintain high level of performance).

Component 2: Provide Managers with Scripting to Use During Check-In Conversations

HR provides managers with an agenda and suggested scripting tailored to an employee's performance. The scripting includes questions to prompt discussion about the employee's strengths and future performance, along with a picklist of development options to offer staff.

Optional Component: Set Minimum Expectations for How Often Managers Check In with Staff

HR encourages managers to have at least two check-in conversations in addition to the annual review. Managers with lower spans of control should have more frequent conversations than this minimum level. HR leaders should encourage check-ins but be cautious about establishing a formal policy with a minimum number of check-ins required (since enforcing such a policy would take significant effort).

The first component of this practice is to encourage managers to tier their employees based on performance. This will increase the quality of one-on-ones by helping managers have the most effective performance conversations with each employee. The questions shown here help managers quickly categorize each of their employees by performance. Importantly, managers do not need to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of employee performance. Most managers have a good sense of which of their employees are particularly high- or low-performing (and who falls in the middle).

A Quick Approach to Tiering Employees

Questions to Help Managers Tier Employees

Needs Improvement

Who on my team…

- Consistently falls short of expectations?
- Brings down performance of others?

~10%

of employees will fall into this category

Valued Contributor

Who on my team…

- Do I trust to do his or her job every day?
- Is a reliable team player?

~70%

of employees will fall into this category

Top Performer

Who on my team…

- Is a natural leader?
- Would I go to if I need to get something done well?

~20%

of employees will fall into this category

The second component of this practice is to provide managers with conversation guides tailored to employees at different performance levels. To support managers' efforts, EAB created a guide with questions to ask in each conversation. An excerpt is depicted at right. The full guide can be found in **Appendix B** of this publication.

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Give Managers Scripting for Productive Conversations

Sample Agenda for One-on-One Conversations

Agenda Item	Manager Talking Points
How is the unit performing on its goals?	• Indicate which goals are on track. • Highlight which goals are off track.
How has the team member positively impacted progress on the unit's performance goals?	• Highlight at least one specific action the employee has taken in the past six months that has positively impacted the unit's performance goals.
What specific actions could the team member take to further help the unit meet its performance goals?	• Highlight at least one action the employee could change—or push even further—to help the unit meet its performance goals.
What can you do to support the team member in taking these actions?	• Ask the employee how you can best support him or her as he or she contributes to the unit's/department's goals.
Wrap up the conversation.	• Thank the staff member for their time and discuss any next steps.

Managers can further improve the quality of each performance check-in by making sure staff leave the conversation with concrete next steps for development. Managers can use our **Picklist of Professional Growth Options** to suggest follow-up steps for middle- and top-performers. We recommend that low-performers concentrate specifically on the areas of job performance that they need to improve, rather than pursuing a new development opportunity. The complete picklist can be found in **Appendix C** of this publication.

Equip Managers with Action Items for Staff Development

Picklist of Professional Growth Options

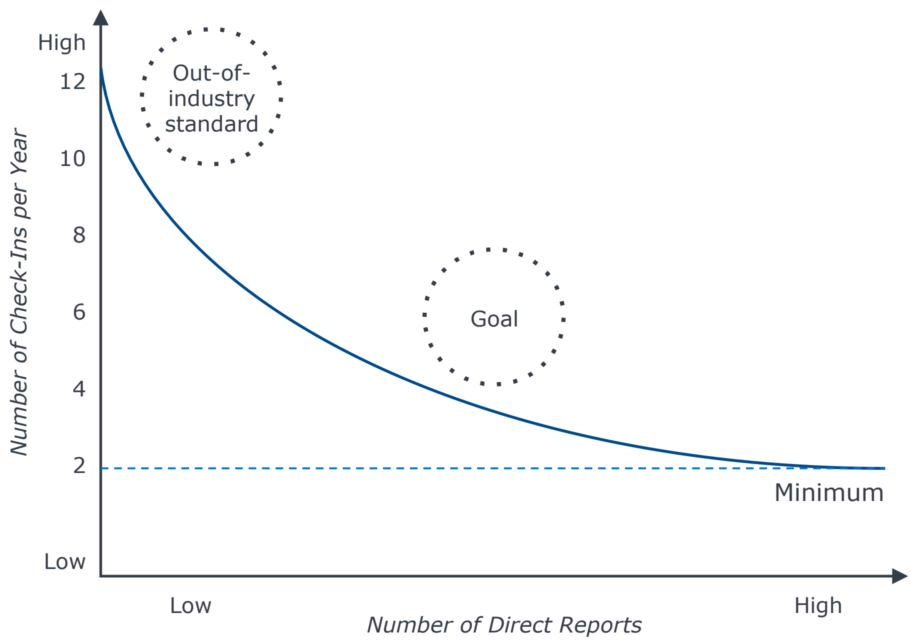
Competency	Picklist of Options
Building Relationships	❑ Invite a peer in another department team to coffee to learn more about his or her role. ❑ Serve on a cross-departmental committee or task force. ❑ Serve as a mentor for a new hire or intern/volunteer.
Communication	❑ Present a new initiative/project at a team meeting. ❑ Research a trend impacting the industry and share your findings at a team meeting. ❑ Lead a team meeting. ❑ Participate in a public speaking workshop (consider both internal and external opportunities).
Leadership	❑ Conduct an informational interview with a leader to learn more about his or her role and the experiences he or she found most helpful to develop leadership skills. ❑ Lead a training session on a particular skill or content area. ❑ Participate on a council or committee in a leadership capacity.

The final component of this practice is to set minimum expectations for how often managers should check in with staff. Many out-of-industry organizations encourage their managers to have performance conversations with staff on a monthly basis. At a minimum, we recommend managers have at least two check-in conversations outside the annual review.

Managers with lower spans of control should aim to have more frequent conversations than the minimum. We recommend that organizations encourage check-ins but be cautious about establishing a formal policy with a minimum number of check-ins required. Enforcing such a policy is likely to take significant effort and resources.

Finding the Sweet Spot for Check-In Intervals

Feasible Number of Check-Ins per Year Based on Span of Control



Practice 4

Picklist of Guardrails to Reinforce Conversations

PRACTICE IN BRIEF

HR creates formal or informal incentives to encourage managers to focus on providing performance feedback to staff regularly—not just during the annual review period. The goal is to encourage managers to offer more regular feedback to staff (without resorting to HR tracking every check-in and following up with every manager to ensure check-ins are completed).

Rationale

Busy managers often struggle to prioritize one-on-one check-ins, given multiple competing priorities. HR does not have the time or resources to rigorously track every conversation to make sure check-ins are happening—and in fact, doing so can lead to lower-quality check-ins if managers are completing them simply to "check the box." Instead, HR and senior leaders should establish guardrails to signal to managers that giving feedback to employees is a critical part of the manager role.

Implementation Components

Component 1: Evaluate and Revise Incentives to Encourage Managers to Coach Staff

HR identifies existing incentives (or disincentives) that may be impacting how much time managers spend on coaching individual staff members. HR adjusts incentives to promote high-quality, regular check-ins between managers and staff.

Component 2: Use Additional Guardrails for a Select Subset of Managers

In cases where managers have poor outcomes (e.g., low engagement) and evidence suggests they are not having regular performance check-ins, HR institutes more aggressive guardrails, such as a recurring protected time block for performance check-ins.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

HR can pursue a variety of approaches to ensure more regular feedback conversations take place outside of the annual review. These approaches are mapped on the spectrum at right. Very few organizations fall on the authoritarian end of the spectrum, largely because most HR departments don’t have the capacity to track check-ins and follow up with each manager. Moreover, such rigorous tracking can be unproductive if it fosters a “check-the-box” mentality in managers. However, as many organizations on the libertarian end of the spectrum have found, without any guardrails in place, regular feedback conversations won’t necessarily happen, given managers’ many competing priorities. The guidance in this practice is intended to help managers strike a balance between the two ends of the spectrum.

Should HR Track Manager Check-Ins?

A Spectrum of Approaches to Ensuring More Frequent Feedback

“Authoritarian” HR tracks every check-in and follows up with every manager to ensure check-ins are completed

Ideal Middle Ground: *HR requires some documentation. HR structures encourage productive conversations between managers and direct reports*

“Libertarian” HR requires documentation of just the annual review

The first component of this practice is to evaluate and revise existing incentives to encourage managers to spend more time coaching their direct reports. The table here shows three guardrails that encourage managers to prioritize feedback conversations. If managers are not already formally accountable for the engagement or retention of their teams (either through their performance review or an incentive plan), we recommend starting with this guardrail.

Executive rounding and skip-level check-ins are two additional guardrails to consider. Involving senior leaders through these tactics helps signify the importance of having performance conversations (and doesn't require HR involvement on an ongoing basis).

Focusing Managers on Performance Conversations

Universal Guardrails to Use with All Leaders

Guardrail	Impact on Check-In Quality	Impact on Check-In Quantity	Implementation Considerations
Engagement or Retention Goal in Leader Incentive Plan	↑	↑	• Effective outcomes-based goal that gives manager freedom to determine the process he or she will use to achieve the outcome • Identify a minimum threshold below which managers will receive additional direction on the process they need to follow (e.g., supplement outcomes-based goals with a process-based check-in goal)
Executive Rounding	↑↑	↑↑↑	• Effective alternative for senior leaders to reach frontline staff to check if managers are having performance conversations; more scalable than one-on-one skip-level check-ins • When rounding, executives should ask: Have you had a one-on-one performance check-in with your manager in the past 3 to 4 months? • Executives should notify managers (or their supervisors) if they find most staff have not had a conversation
Skip-Level Check-Ins	↑↑	↑↑↑	• Most effective for departments or units with lower spans of control • To maximize impact, tell managers their one-ups will be checking in with staff to make sure they are having periodic one-on-one conversations

The final component of this practice is to use additional guardrails for a select subset of managers. We recommend using the triggers shown here to determine which managers require additional guardrails.

Senior leaders may find through skip-level check-ins that managers are not having one-on-one conversations. If managers' outcomes suggest the lack of check-ins is having a negative impact, we recommend two additional guardrails.

Identifying Managers Who Need Additional Help

Triggers for Additional Guardrails for a Subset of Managers

Senior leader reports conversations aren't happening

Manager has poor outcomes (e.g., engagement, retention, manager effectiveness)

If the manager meets both criteria, put additional guardrails in place to reinforce the importance of check-ins outside of the annual review

To determine which guardrail to put in place, ask: Are conversations not happening? Or are the conversations happening, but they are low-quality? If the issue is lack of check-ins, we recommend the manager's one-up schedule a recurring protected time block on the manager's calendar. If the issue is low-quality conversations, we recommend an HR team member meet with the manager quarterly to help him/her plan out check-in conversations.

Additional Guardrails to Establish for Select Managers

Guardrails to Use with a Subset of Managers

Guardrail	Impact on Check-In Quality	Impact on Check-In Quantity	Implementation Considerations
Recurring Protected Time Block Leader's one-up proactively puts a time block on the manager's calendar for conversations with direct reports	↑	↑↑↑	• One-up should block leader's time for one-on-ones, not HR. • One-up should schedule monthly rounding or skip-level check-ins to follow up with employees to make sure the conversations happen.
People Planning Meetings with HR HR business partner meets with manager quarterly to help create a plan for messages to share in one-on-ones	↑↑↑	↑↑	• Intensive time investment; reserve this tactic for leaders with high turnover, low manager effectiveness scores, and/or low engagement. • Requires skilled business partners who are able to provide effective coaching tips to managers.

1 The Case for Continuous Feedback

2 Minimize Documentation Required for Annual Reviews

3 Focus on Quality, Then Quantity, of One-on-Ones

4 Fill in the Gaps Between One-on-Ones with Frequent Team Feedback

5 Democratize Feedback to Capture Multiple Perspectives

The third strategy for moving to continuous feedback is to supplement one-on-one conversations with staff feedback at the team level. In units with high spans of control (e.g., facilities management, dining services), many managers can't rely solely on one-on-one conversations to deliver ongoing feedback to staff. The good news is that team coaching shouldn't be additive to most managers' workloads—instead, they can use existing team huddles to provide performance feedback.

A Manageable Way to Provide Continuous Feedback

Supplement One-on-One Check-ins with Team Coaching

Illustrative Sample Performance Review Cycle with Supplemental Coaching

The two best practices in this section equip HR leaders to help managers give their teams effective feedback on two critical domains of performance—goals and behaviors—during regular team meetings.

Focusing Team Feedback on Goals and Behaviors

Two Types of Feedback to Provide in Team Meetings

Feedback on Goals Help managers provide feedback to staff on team performance	➡	**Practice 5**: Dashboard-Driven Conversations
Feedback on Behaviors Equip managers to discuss behavioral expectations in team huddles	➡	**Practice 6:** Behavior-Based Conversation Starters

Practice 5

Dashboard-Driven Conversations

PRACTICE IN BRIEF

HR provides managers with a standard template and scripting to give teams regular feedback on how they are tracking against team goals and discuss opportunities to improve. The goal is to help managers fill in the gaps between one-on-one conversations by providing team-based feedback on goals.

Rationale

Managers should take advantage of team meetings to provide more frequent feedback on team performance.

Implementation Components

Component 1: *(If Needed)* Give Managers a Template for Team-Specific Dashboards

HR shares a standard dashboard template that managers customize and frequently update to display team goals and performance. HR encourages managers to conduct team huddles around the board.

Component 2: Give Managers Scripting to Engage Staff in Conversations About Team Goals

HR gives managers scripting to have regular conversations with staff about team goals and performance. The goal is to elicit staff input and suggestions.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

The first component of this practice is to give managers a template for team-specific dashboards (if needed—some managers may already have effective dashboards in place). The best dashboards clarify the team's top priorities and help staff understand how the team is currently performing. Once an effective dashboard is in place, managers can use it to anchor conversations about team performance on goals.

Northwestern University's Facilities Management team uses Excel and PowerPoint to build their dashboards. Managers and leaders use their Facilities Management dashboard, assembled from various data sources and compiled in PowerPoint on a monthly basis, to easily monitor individual and team progress on performance goals.

Using Performance Dashboards as a Starting Point for Feedback on Goals

Northwestern University's Facilities Management Dashboard

Key Performance Indicators

KPI Description	Annual Goal	Dec-17 Goal	Actual	Trend
SD1. Service Request Closure	90%	89%	80%	-2%
SD2. Preventative Maintenance Closure	75%	60%	82%	2%
SD3. Proactivity: FM-Identified Work Orders	30%	30%	31%	3%
LO1. Common Space Program	10%	5%	6%	1%
LO2. Facilities Connect Implementation	90%	63%	53%	3%
LO3. Engagement: Sustainability Outreach	15%	5%	11%	1%
CE1. Energy Use Intensity (kBtu/SF)	-5%	-5%	-5%	0%
CE2. Recordable Injury Incident Rate	2.90	2.90	3.35	-0.30
CE3. Injury-Related Lost Workday Rate	1.34	1.34	0.56	0.00
CE4. Waste Diversion Rate	42%	42%	38%	-1%
CE5. Overtime	<5%	<5%	11%	0%
CE6. Minority and Female Enterprise Use	15%	15%	TBD	TBD
CE7. Local Business Enterprise Use	15%	15%	TBD	TBD
CE8. Evanston Resident Employment	5%	5%	1%	-1%
F1. Capital Project Cash Flow Execution	+/-2%	+/-2%	-1%	-3%
F2. FM Operating Budget Execution	+/-1%	+/-1%	5%	-2%
F3. Utility Commodity Budget Execution	+/-5%	+/-5%	-14%	4%
F4. Invoices: Number of Days to Pay	90%	90%	67%	-10%

Includes trends over time, performance targets, and action triggers

Uses icons to convey metrics trends and goal directionality

For more information on identifying and monitoring KPIs, see our study **Selecting Core Performance Metrics**.

The second component of this practice is to give managers scripting to engage staff in meaningful conversations about team goals. To help managers use their dashboards to give staff feedback on goals, EAB developed a **Unit Priority Discussion Guide**. An excerpt is shown here, and the full guide is available in **Appendix D** of this publication. The guide will help managers discuss current performance with their team, celebrate progress, invite input from staff, and surface barriers to future improvement.

Give Managers the Script to Discuss Team Goals

Unit Priority Discussion Guide

Remind Staff About Unit Priorities: 5 to 10 minutes

Key points to cover:

- ❑ *Let's turn to the whiteboard to review our top priorities.* [*i*f your unit has made progress on one of the metrics]
- ❑ *You can see our unit has made progress on one of these areas* [state the priority]. *Congratulations! We're now closer to our goal of* [state target performance].
- ❑ Then ask: *What do you think has worked well?*
- ❑ Then ask: *Why do you think we haven't reached our goal yet?* [If staff aren't able to identify on their own why your unit hasn't hit its target yet, ask:] *Do you have any ideas for other things we can do, or do better, to improve our performance in this area?*

Practice 6

Values-Based Conversation Starters

PRACTICE IN BRIEF

HR gives managers specific examples of employees who exemplify a desired behavior, and a discussion guide that helps the manager discuss the example during team meetings. The goal is for managers to reinforce behavioral expectations at the team level (i.e., between one-on-one check-ins).

Rationale

Managers can bring behavioral expectations to life during team meetings by regularly sharing stories of employees who exemplify desired behaviors. Managers reinforce desired behaviors that drive performance by discussing these stories with their teams and soliciting feedback about how to incorporate the behaviors into daily work.

Implementation Components

Component 1: Ensure Organizational Behaviors Are Actionable for Staff to Spot Specific Examples
Leaders assess organizational values to ensure the values are tied to specific behavioral standards that staff can easily understand and emulate.

Component 2: Collect and Share Employee Stories Illustrating Behaviors
Leaders provide a channel for employees to submit stories of their colleagues demonstrating the organization's behavioral standards and disseminate to the broader organization.

Component 3: Provide Managers the Tools for Values-Based Conversations with Their Teams
HR gives managers a guide to use in team meetings that includes stories of employees exemplifying organizational behaviors.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

The first component of this practice is to ensure your organization's individual values are tied to specific, actionable behaviors. We recommend using the questions listed at right to evaluate the specificity of your organization's behavioral standards.

Tie Values to Concrete Behaviors Staff Can Emulate

Questions to Evaluate Team-Specific Standards

- Are the standards **relevant to what staff are assessed on**?
- Are the standards **specific and actionable**?
- Are the standards written in a way **all staff can clearly understand**?
- Are the standards **relevant to all staff** across the organization?

At Pepperdine University, senior administration leaders developed 12 core values that connect staff responsibilities to institutional mission. Notably, leaders sought direct feedback from staff focus groups when drafting the document. Although leadership made the final call about which standards to include in the draft and how to word them, seeking staff feedback first helped ensure the values resonated with staff. All staff received copies of core values and committed to uphold them in their everyday work.

"Living Pepperdine" Standards

1. I am a proud **ambassador** of Pepperdine University and its Christian mission, and I conduct myself accordingly.
2. I **honor our students** as the heart of the institution.
3. I am **honest, authentic**, and work with **integrity**.
4. I treat everyone with **respect and dignity**.
5. I intentionally **recognize** my colleagues for their good work.
6. I **understand my role** in achieving the allure that is Pepperdine.
7. I **communicate** effectively, seeking to hear and understand, while delivering information others need.
8. I take ownership of **complaints and concerns**, resolving them to satisfaction personally or with the help of others.
9. I am proud of my **professional appearance, language, and behavior**.
10. While continuously seeking ways to **improve** the University, I value **teamwork, collaboration, and consensus** in my department and across the institution.
11. I am responsible for the quality of the environment for the University community, including promoting and **maintaining functionality, safety, and cleanliness**.
12. As we **live these standards** together, Pepperdine's truest identity is revealed.

Source: EAB Interviews and Analysis

The second component of this practice is to collect stories of employees who exemplify the desired organizational behaviors. At Pepperdine University, the Chief Business Officer writes a "Living Pepperdine" Daily Line-Up email, sharing thoughts and anecdotes about the standards in practice, as well as submitted stories that connect individual employees' work to the university values. Any employee may submit a value story to be featured in the Daily Line-Up. Staff within the Office of the Vice President for Administration review submissions, ensure the stories are aligned with a specific value, edit them as needed, and then help create the daily email. An email marketing service is then used to schedule delivery to employee inboxes at 5:30 a.m. every weekday morning.

Disseminate Stories Across the Organization

Sample Living Pepperdine Daily Line-Up Email

April 3, 2017
Daily Line-Up

STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
LP
LIVING PEPPERDINE
EST. 2016
UNCOMPROMISING QUALITY

Standard of the Day
#12 As we live these standards together, Pepperdine's truest identity is revealed.

What is Pepperdine's truest identity?

Collective identity is the shared sense of a group – individuals interacting together who agree upon their goals, even if they differ in how to achieve them. Differing personalities are celebrated – they enhance our group – because we share common core values – and in our division, in particular – our standards. And truest identity is revealed when we are ourselves 100% of the time – we don't pretend to be one thing for someone and another thing for a different group.

But how does that work for a university that is so many things? Pepperdine is an institution committed to its Christian heritage – and also committed equally to academic excellence – and we don't apologize or shy away from either in any situation. We are young students and adults; we are people of different faith backgrounds; we represent different jobs and strengths; we arrive here from many places and all walks of life.

We don't discover Pepperdine's identity, and it isn't something told to us. We develop the identity of the university as we live out its mission – WE, students, faculty, staff – WE are the identity of Pepperdine. We are authentic and genuine individuals. We recognize and celebrate our commonality and differences, and we grow in our faith and our professionalism. We interact as a group with shared core values, and we love this place. WE are Pepperdine's truest identity…

Quote of the Day

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Share a Living Pepperdine Story

Source: EAB interviews and analysis

The final component of this practice is to equip managers to have regular discussions with their teams about real-world examples of staff demonstrating desired behaviors. All supervisors at Pepperdine receive a guide to discussing the Living Pepperdine initiative with new staff. Further, supervisors read the "Living Pepperdine" email out loud every day in a "daily line-up" meeting. This practice continuously reinforces each employee's connection to the Living Pepperdine values.

One year after implementing the Living Pepperdine program, administrators surveyed employees on its impact. Respondents to the survey reported that they experienced more respectful team interactions, felt more comfortable expressing concerns, and felt an increased affinity to the institution.

Continuously Reinforce Values in Team Conversations

Living Pepperdine Daily Line-Ups

- Supervisors lead 5- to 10-minute, mission-focused team meetings daily
- Employees read "Living Pepperdine" email at Daily Line-Up meeting
- Emails illustrate standard of the day with an inspirational narrative or real-world example of employees embodying the standards

Living Pepperdine Year One Staff Survey Results

86% affirmed value of daily meetings

"It is a good positive way to start the day. It helps create the mood for the entire day."

88% have more respectful team interactions than in the past

"I am happy because it's made a huge difference. The negativity has dissipated since we have started Living Pepperdine."

82% felt more comfortable expressing concerns

"It makes a big difference. Before the program people felt like their words didn't matter. This program changed that."

92% affirmed increased affinity to the institution

"Living Pepperdine puts things into perspective. It really means something when it's relatable to us. I can live out these standards because I see my co-workers doing it as well."

Source: EAB interviews and analysis

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5 Democratize Feedback to Capture Multiple Perspectives

The final strategy for moving to continuous feedback is to democratize feedback to capture multiple perspectives on staff performance. Performance management is traditionally a top-down process with managers serving as the sole evaluators of their direct reports. With the help of new technologies, companies have started to transform this process by enabling staff to request feedback from any of their colleagues at any time. As the headlines at right suggest, performance feedback at these companies is less hierarchical and reflects multiple perspectives—which can give employees a more comprehensive, nuanced view of their performance.

The two best practices in this section provide guidance on how organizations can capture two key perspectives: one, employees' perspectives on their own performance, and two, their peers' perspectives.

New Technologies Putting Feedback at Employees' Fingertips

Example Peer Feedback Technologies Across Industries

Forbes

"How Workplace Feedback Is Changing (And How Technology Can Play a Role)"

FORTUNE

"Software to request and receive feedback from anyone, anytime"

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

"When Colleagues Can Praise Each Other at the Push of a Button"

Harvard Business Review

"Crowdsource your Performance Review"

Bloomberg

"An age in which technology enables real-time criticism of everything from restaurant meals to package deliveries"

The Washington Post

"Everyone you know will be able to rate you on the terrifying 'Yelp for people'—whether you want them to or not"

Two Groups to Engage in Feedback

Self-Perspective

Give employees the resources to meaningfully reflect on where they are and how they can improve

Practice 7:
Employee-Driven Check-Ins

Peer Perspective

Provide employees a platform to give specific, actionable feedback to one another

Practice 8:
Crowd-Sourced Feedback

Source: *Harvard Business Review*, "Crowdsource Your Performance Review," 2012; Bloomberg, "Goldman Sachs Introduces Real-Time Employee Performance Reviews," 2017, *Fortune*, "J.P. Morgan Employees Will Soon Be Able to Give Co-Workers Constant Performance Reviews," 2017, *The Wall Street Journal*, "When Colleagues Can Praise Each Other at the Push of a Button," 2017, *The Washington Post*, "Everyone You Know Will Be Able to Rate You on the Terrifying 'Yelp for People' — Whether You Want Them To or Not," 2015, *Forbes*, "How Workplace Feedback Is Changing (And How Technology Can Play A Role)," 2017; EAB interviews and analysis.

Practice 7

Employee-Driven Check-Ins

PRACTICE IN BRIEF

HR gives staff questions to prompt reflection on their performance before one-on-one check-ins with their managers. HR simultaneously encourages managers to start check-ins by asking for their staff members' perspectives. The goal is to empower staff to be active participants in conversations about their performance, rather than passive recipients of one-way feedback.

Rationale

Individual performance check-ins are typically one-way discussions led by managers. Providing staff with reflection questions in advance of check-ins allows them to meaningfully reflect on their performance and prepares them to play an active role in performance conversations.

Implementation Components

Component 1: Give Staff Reflection Questions to Consider Before Performance Check-Ins with Their Managers
HR gives staff questions to prompt reflection on their performance in advance of check-ins with a manager.

Component 2: Prepare Managers to Let Staff Co-Lead the Conversation
HR equips managers with scripting to ask for staff members' perspectives on their performance and encourages staff to play an active role in performance discussions.

Optional Component: Give Staff the Option to Proactively Schedule Check-Ins with Their Manager
To further encourage staff to own conversations about their performance, organizations can encourage staff to proactively schedule performance check-ins with managers (rather than waiting for managers to do so).

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

The first component of this practice is to give staff reflection questions to consider before performance check-ins with their manager. Before each check-in at Patagonia, an American outdoor clothing and gear company, employees complete a short set of self-reflection questions and submit answers to their managers via a mobile app.

Importantly, higher education institutions do not need apps to prompt this self-reflection. HR can share questions with staff via email and the intranet too. To support these efforts, we have developed three sets of reflection prompts, matching the three performance categories (Top Performer, Valued Contributor, Needs Improvement) introduced in Practice 3: Tiered Coaching Plan. Since most employees will fall into the Valued Contributor category, we recommend HR share this set of questions (listed at right) with all staff via email and the intranet. Managers can further customize this baseline set of questions with the relevant additions for Top Performer and Needs Improvement conversations.

Asking Employees to Reflect on Their Performance Before Each Check-In

Email Template with Self-Reflection Questions

Hello **[name]**,

I’m looking forward to touching base to discuss your performance since our last conversation. I’m writing to share a few questions in advance so you have a sense for what I’m hoping to discuss. There’s no need to write anything formally for our conversation, but I’ll look forward to hearing your thoughts!

- What achievements are you most proud of in the last several months?
- What strengths have contributed to your success?
- What challenges have you faced and how did you overcome them?
- What is one area you would like to improve on?
- What are your professional goals (short-term or long-term), and how can I support you in achieving them?

All the best,
[name]

The second component of this practice is to prepare managers to let staff co-lead check-in conversations. Give managers questions to ask their direct reports that mirror the reflection prompts shared with staff. By asking staff to share their answers to the reflection prompts, managers invite staff to make each check-in a two-way conversation.

Setting the Expectation That Employees Co-Lead Check-Ins

Prompts for Productive Check-In Conversations

Ask Staff Member:

1. What achievements are you most proud of since the last time we spoke?
2. What strengths have contributed to your success?
3. What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?
4. What is one area you would like to improve on?
5. What are your professional goals across the next few months?

Manager begins check-in asking for the employee's perspective

Reflect on these questions before your check-in:

1. What achievements are you most proud of in the last several months?
2. What strengths have contributed to your success?
3. What challenges have you faced and how did you overcome them?
4. What is one area you would like to improve on?
5. What are your professional goals, and how can I support you in achieving those goals?

Employee and manager question sets mirror each other, so the employee is ready to contribute

An optional component to this practice is to allow staff to proactively schedule check-ins with their managers. At Patagonia, employees take the lead, scheduling performance check-ins with their managers at their discretion.

Managers can facilitate this type of open-access scheduling by posting sign-up sheets with open time slots in an easily accessible location (e.g., on their office doors) for employees to self-schedule. However, we discourage organizations from leaving check-in scheduling solely to staff, as some staff will likely never sign up for a conversation while others may schedule conversations too frequently.

To guard against the first scenario, we recommend managers keep track of staff-scheduled check-ins and proactively schedule conversations with staff who have not stepped forward in several months. For the second scenario, managers may wish to suggest guidelines for how often staff should schedule check-ins (such as once per quarter) to ensure their time is not monopolized by a subset of staff.

Making Scheduling Check-ins Self-Service

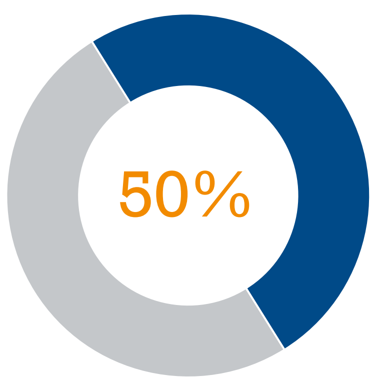
Sample Self-Service Check-in Sign-Up Sheet

Check-In Sign-Up Sheet

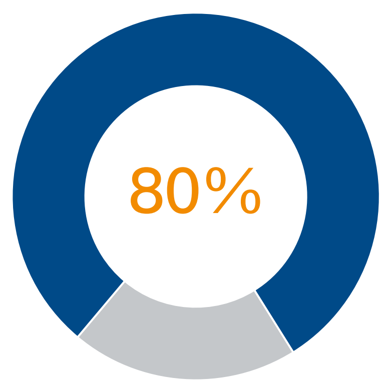
Monday

- 1:00 pm *George Zwickel*
- 1:30 pm ____________
- 3:00 pm ____________
- 3:30 pm *Ruth Peterson*

Results of Patagonia’s Self-Service Check-In Program



Percentage of Staff Who Scheduled Quarterly Check-Ins in the First Year



Percentage of Staff Who Scheduled at Least One Check-In in the First Year

Practice 8

Crowdsourced Feedback

PRACTICE IN BRIEF

HR establishes a formal method for staff to regularly request feedback from peers outside of the annual review. The goal is to capture multiple perspectives on staff performance and to give employees more regular feedback outside of (typically infrequent) conversations with their managers.

Rationale

Managers are almost always the primary (if not sole) provider of staff feedback. However, a staff member's peers also have valuable feedback to offer. Frequently, peer feedback is never collected, or solicited only once a year.

Implementation Components

Component 1: Give Staff a Formal Method to Request Peer-to-Peer Feedback
HR provides employees with a formal system to request feedback from their peers at any time (i.e., not just during the annual review). Requested feedback goes to the peer and his/her manager simultaneously.

Component 2: Establish Clear Criteria to Ensure Peer Feedback Is Specific and Actionable
HR gives staff specific prompts to use when requesting feedback to ensure their peers deliver specific, actionable feedback.

Component 3: Remind Employees to Request Feedback
HR leaders use multiple strategies to encourage staff to request feedback, since a peer feedback platform will have limited value if staff use it infrequently. This includes both selecting a user-friendly feedback tool and sending staff regular email reminders to submit feedback.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Many organizations have started providing staff with a virtual platform to recognize and thank peers. While such accolades can contribute to staff engagement, this type of feedback is rarely specific enough to help staff improve performance. Additionally, staff don’t have the opportunity to formally request recognition or feedback, which typically results in the same subset of staff receiving frequent accolades. To effectively use peer feedback to improve performance throughout the year, organizations need to give staff the ability to request specific, actionable feedback from peers.

Recognition: an Initial Step Toward Peer Feedback

Sample Peer-to Peer Recognition Platform

The first component of this practice is to give staff a formal method to request peer feedback. An effective peer feedback system has two key features. First, the system should allow staff to request feedback from peers at any time—not only during annual reviews. Second, requested feedback should go to the peer and his or her manager simultaneously (instead of the manager having to collate and share the information—which creates a delay in staff receiving feedback).

For example, Patagonia, an American outdoor clothing and gear company, gives employees an app to request feedback directly from their peers at any time.

Organizations that do not have access to software for peer feedback can consider other channels, such as email. The channel for requesting feedback isn't as important as providing a clear method for staff to request feedback from each other.

Creating Formal Mechanism for Peer Feedback Beyond the Review

Transition from Status Quo to Optimal Peer Feedback Systems

Status Quo Peer Feedback	*Optimal Peer Feedback*
Staff request peer feedback **only for the annual review** (if at all)	Staff can request feedback from peers **at any time**
Peer feedback is **provided only to the employee's manager**	Peers provide feedback **directly to the employee** (and copy the employee's manager)

The second component of this practice is to give staff specific prompts to use when requesting feedback, to ensure peers deliver specific, actionable feedback. Patagonia makes this easy for staff by embedding prompts (such as the ones shown at right) directly in their peer feedback app. HR leaders at Patagonia based their prompts on the organization's core behaviors.

You can use your organization's behaviors or other specific review criteria to create peer feedback prompts. If you are not able to embed prompts directly into software or a mobile app, you can create a simple form for staff to request feedback from peers. Staff can email the form to a peer to request feedback, copying their manager. The designated peer can email the completed form back to the staff member and their manager.

Making Peer Feedback Easy with Clear Criteria

Patagonia's Peer Feedback Platform patagonia

What is your relationship to the person requesting feedback?

- ○ I manage them
- ○ They manage me
- ● I'm their partner/peer

Which behavior(s) has this person demonstrated that add the most value? (Pick up to three or write one in below.)

- ○ Leadership: Inspires, engages, and supports others to do their best work
- ● Coaching: Helps other develop and grow so they are more successful
- ○ Decision Making: Uses good judgment to make informed, efficient, and effective decisions
- ○ Transparency: Communicates clearly, openly, and with authenticity
- ● Collaboration: Demonstrates respect for others, strengthens relationships, and fosters teamwork
- ● Action: Keeps things moving forward and rallies others to action

No App Required: Build a Feedback Form with Specific Prompts

Representative Peer Feedback Form

What behavior(s) is your feedback tied to?

Communication	Teamwork	Stewardship
○ Actively listens and understands the needs of others	○ Promotes a "we" atmosphere	○ Uses university values to drive decision-making
○ Ensures issues are communicated to the appropriate person	○ Demonstrates respect for co-workers by arriving on time	○ Uses time responsibly and productively

Give a specific example of how your peer did or did not exemplify the selected behavior(s):

Source: Patagonia, Ventura, EAB interviews and analysis.

The final component of this practice is to remind employees to request feedback from peers. We recommend two strategies to encourage peers to request feedback: one, send out regular email reminders, and two, make the feedback prompts easy to access.

Results from Patagonia suggest employees take advantage of the opportunity to request peer feedback. Within the first six months of launching their peer feedback program, half of all employees at Patagonia had used the new peer feedback tool. Staff using the tool receive a different perspective on their performance and have access to feedback throughout the year, not just when they have a formal check-in with their manager.

Reminding Employees to Request Feedback

Two Ways to Prompt Staff to Ask for Peer Feedback

1

Remind Regularly

HR and managers regularly remind employees to request feedback from their peers (via email, team huddles)

2

Hardwire into Workflow

Peer feedback prompts are available in places that are part of staff workflow (e.g., intranet, Microsoft Outlook)

Appendix A: Ongoing Performance Tracker

Overview:

This resource provides a template for managers to record feedback related to employee performance.

Instructions:

Use worksheet for managers to log feedback on individual employee performance throughout the year.

Employee: ___________________________

Miscellaneous Notes:

Categories

- Customer Service
- Teamwork
- Professionalism
- Innovation
- Communication
- Resource Stewardship

Comment Type

- Strength
- Development Opportunity

Date	Comment	Category	Comment Type

Appendix B: Performance Check-In Template

Overview:

This resource provides a framework for an individual performance check-in.

Instructions:

Use the template to create an agenda and prepare for productive performance conversations with direct reports.

Agenda Item	Manager Talking Points	Example Prompts
How is the unit performing on its goals?	• Indicate which goals are on track. • Highlight which goals are off track.	
How has the team member positively impacted progress on the unit's performance goals?	• Highlight at least one specific action the employee has taken in the past six months that has positively impacted the unit's performance goals.	• You've really made a difference by… • I'm impressed with…
What specific actions could the team member take to further help the unit meet its performance goals?	• Highlight at least one action the employee could change—or push even further—to help the unit meet its performance goals.	• One thing I'd really like to see from you is… • Next time […] happens, I'd like you to […]
What can you do to support the team member in taking these actions?	• Ask the employee how you can best support him or her as he or she contributes to the unit's/department's goals	• What's the best way for me to support you?
Wrap up the conversation.	• Thank the staff member for his or her time and discuss any next steps.	• Thanks for taking the time to talk. We'll meet again formally in six months, but please let me know if you have any questions or things you'd like to chat about before then.

Appendix C: Picklist of Growth Opportunities

Overview:

This picklist provides suggestions for employees to further develop skills and grow their careers.

Instructions:

Managers and/or employees should read over the picklist in advance of professional development conversations. Use these suggestions as prompts to identify valuable growth opportunities for individual employees.

Competency	Picklist of Options
Building Relationships	❑ Invite a peer in another department or another team to go out for coffee to learn more about his or her role. ❑ Serve on a cross-departmental committee or task force. ❑ Serve as a mentor for a new hire or intern (either through a formal mentoring program or informally).
Communication	❑ Present a new initiative/project at a team meeting. ❑ Lead a team meeting. ❑ Facilitate a book club session or Journal Club for peers. ❑ Write an article for publication (either for an internal publication such as a newsletter, or for an external publication). ❑ Participate in a public speaking workshop (consider internal opportunities but also external opportunities, such as a local Toastmasters club).
Leadership	❑ Conduct an informational interview with a leader to learn more about his or her role and the experiences he or she found most helpful to develop leadership skills. ❑ Lead a training session on a particular skill or content area for peers. ❑ Participate on a council or committee in a leadership capacity. ❑ Mentor a peer who is struggling with a skill or competency you excel at. ❑ Identify a department/unit/team improvement opportunity and initiate a process improvement project.
Analytical Thinking	❑ Identify pros and cons of possible options for a decision and present to your supervisor with a recommended course of action. ❑ Identify an improvement opportunity and conduct a root cause analysis to understand what's driving the problem. Share your results with your supervisor.
Industry Knowledge	❑ Sign up for a regular digest of higher education news (such as EAB's Daily Briefing email) to keep up with industry trends. ❑ Invite a more experienced colleague out for coffee and ask him or her to share how he or she stays up to date on industry trends. ❑ Attend a webconference on a topic relevant to your work and discuss the content with your supervisor. ❑ Ask your supervisor for recommended books or articles to read.
Customer Service	❑ Put yourself in the shoes of a typical student, faculty member, or staff member and walk through his or her typical interactions with your team. Look for improvement opportunities and share them with your supervisor. ❑ Shadow an experienced colleague on a project and share collected feedback with your team.

Appendix D: Unit Priority Discussion Guide

Overview:

This guide helps managers introduce a new dashboard to staff and regularly remind staff about team priorities.

Instructions:

Read over this Discussion Guide in advance and fill in any blanks. When you meet with staff, share the dashboard with them for reference.

PART 1

Introduce Your Dashboard to Staff: 15 minutes

Key points to cover:

- ❑ *This is our Unit Dashboard. It displays the most important goals for our unit and how we are performing on them.*
- ❑ *I determined what to include on the dashboard by* [describe how you determined which priorities to display].
- ❑ *If something isn't listed here, it doesn't mean it's not important, but these three goals should be considered higher priorities.*
- ❑ *I'm displaying this dashboard where you can see it on a regular basis. Every few weeks, we'll check in together about which priorities are on the dashboard to make sure we're all on the same page about where our unit needs to focus. You can also ask questions about why we need to focus here and what we're doing as a unit to improve in these areas.*

Then ask: *Do you have any questions so far?*

- ❑ *Let's spend a few minutes reviewing our unit's current priorities. Those are the three numbered items I listed on the whiteboard today.*
- ❑ *The first priority is* [your first priority]. *In other words,* [describe the metric or priority in your own words or in a way that will be easier for staff to understand].
- ❑ *The reason we care about this is* [explain why performance in this area is important].
- ❑ *So you can get a picture of how we're doing in this area now, I've included our current performance*, [state current performance] *compared to our goal or ideal performance, which is* [state target performance].
- ❑ *There are a few things we're already doing as a unit to improve and reach our goal. They are* [describe the initiatives already in place].

Repeat for the remaining priorities on your dashboard. After each priority, pause for any questions.

Wrap up:

- ❑ *I'll update this board on a regular basis as our priorities change—for example, if we improve in one area over time, I may replace that priority with a new one. If that happens, I'll make sure to explain the new priority.*
- ❑ *Please feel free to ask me questions about anything on this board at any time.*

Appendix D: Unit Priority Discussion Guide

PART 2

Remind Staff About Unit Priorities: 5 to 10 minutes

Have this conversation with staff about 1 to 4 weeks after introducing the dashboard. (Meeting frequency will vary based on how quickly staff can inflect a dashboard metric.)

Key points to cover:

- ❑ *Let's turn to the whiteboard to review our top priorities.*

[If your unit has made progress on one of the metrics:]

- ❑ *You can see our unit has made progress on one of these areas,* [state the priority]. *Congratulations! We're now closer to our goal of* [state target performance].
- ❑ Then ask: *What do you think has worked well?*
- ❑ Then ask: *Why do you think we haven't reached our goal yet?* [If staff aren't able to identify on their own why your unit hasn't hit its target yet, ask:] *Do you have any ideas about other things we can do, or do better, to improve our performance in this area?*

[If there have been no changes in one or more priorities since the last time you reviewed them with your staff:]

- ❑ *These haven't changed since the last time we reviewed them together. So, we'll still need to focus on these areas, which are* [review the priorities].

Then ask for each of these priorities:

- ❑ *Why do you think we've had trouble making progress?*
- ❑ *What can we do to improve the effectiveness of the things we're doing?*
- ❑ *Do you have any ideas about what we can do better?*

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