

Performance Management of Employees and Remote Working

Given the most recent Work Safely Protocols and guidance from Government, many employees are continuing to work remotely while some organisations are bringing back employees on a staggered basis if deemed necessary. And, as we come to the final weeks of 2021, many in the non-profit sector will be looking to end of year appraisals.

However, with employees working remotely, implementing and conducting performance management reviews are somewhat of a challenge as well as using the process to help develop and motivate employees. While the principles of good performance management apply regardless of an employee working remotely or being in the normal working environment, it needs to be recognised that there are additional factors and challenges that need to be considered.

An effective performance management process is one that reflects ongoing communication between the employer or manager and the employee that happens throughout the year, in support of achieving the strategic objectives of the Organisation. The communication process includes clarifying expectations, identifying and setting objectives and goals, providing ongoing feedback and evaluating performance. But this process might look and feel a bit different in a remote working setting.

There were allowances made last year when monitoring and measuring performance but a year on, performance and productivity should be measured more effectively. Employers and managers should have a better understanding of the additional pressures on employees working remotely, such as work-life balance, flexible working hours and childcare and how these impact on performance.

Performance Management impacts Employee Engagement

Employers should be reminded that an effective performance management approach positively influences employee engagement. Employees who have clarity on how their work contributes to overall organisational performance as well as the communities they are supporting contribute towards better engaged employment levels.

In the context of remote working, managers must be clear on setting employee expectations of their role and provide clarity regarding the agreed workload and priorities as well as informing them of any changes to methods of supervision and performance management.

While key performance indicators may have to be adjusted following changes to the workforce, it is important to focus on the outputs or outcomes and measure accordingly, not on the activity or time taken to do specific tasks. This is an important point in the non-profit where outcomes are ultimately the goal.

In some respects, it may take longer to complete tasks but that is not an excuse for not getting things done but is a reason to reconsider what productivity really means. It is not possible to manage every aspect of the work done by a remote team or a hybrid remote team. Instead of focusing on activity or hours worked, managers should focus on the outcomes and measure their team accordingly.

Managers should be flexible and be there to offer support and encouragement, particularly for those who may be struggling. Design and revise policies so that they too can be dynamically flexible in the

event of further change being necessitated and ensure that all Employees have appropriate equipment to perform their roles and systems that endorse collaboration.

Regular Communication

It is vital for managers to regularly check in with their remote employees. Frequent online meetings where honest, constructive information about the performance employee will aid development and improvement in performance.

Unfortunately, many managers experience difficulty when it comes to providing poor performance feedback for fear the employee will react badly to it or it will damage the working relationship. However, it is important that managers receive training on how to effectively discuss an employee's strengths and weaknesses during a performance management online meeting. Any queries or suggestions for improvement from the remote Employee should be considered and documented.

Regular communication is critical in managing performance in a remote working situation, giving opportunities to go through work plans and to understand any challenges that might be faced by employees. Frequent communication will prevent employees from feeling isolated, promote positive employee engagement and gives an opportunity to update with any changes within the organisation.

Employees also have a responsibility to communicate with managers must also be responsible for communicating effectively especially when in need of support. Employees may not always reach out, so management must encourage daily interactions and follow up with those who are withdrawn.

Managing Poor Performance

Managing poor performance remotely can be very challenging, however by following appropriate steps and developing plans to improve the issue of poor performance as they arise can ensure both the employee and organisation deal with this problem effectively. Employers must take into account the environment in which the employee is working and ensure that the employee has the appropriate equipment and workspace to do their job to the required standards. The performance review might take the form of an online meeting where shortcomings are identified.

The development of a performance improvement plan (PIP) is key part of this process. The PIP outlines gaps and concerns in the employees performance, focuses on the identification of the learning and development activities to take place and addresses these problems by setting objectives and targets.

Dates and review of this plan should be arranged also. The plan should be reviewed often and the successes or failings during the plan outlined and communicated to the employee. The PIP should have the end result of the employee improving within their role with all previous issues of performance addressed.

Conclusion

Employers should ensure that employees understand what is expected of them and how their performance is assessed and measured during remote working. Managers must consider the environment in which the employee is working and be prepared to give structured and constructive feedback when employees do not perform well.