

MONITORING AND DOCUMENTING PERFORMANCE

Monitoring and documenting employees' work efforts are critical to managing and evaluating performance.

Monitoring means consistently measuring performance and providing ongoing feedback to employees and workgroups on their progress toward reaching the standards described in Performance Plans. It gives the supervisor the opportunity to make changes to, or clarify, unrealistic or problematic performance standards and measures and to identify unacceptable performance at any time during the appraisal period (rather than waiting until the end), and be able to support element and summary rating determinations.

What is performance monitoring?

Monitoring performance is the process of observing an employee's task results and collecting information on those results during the rating period. Monitoring performance gives the supervisor the information needed to make an objective rating at the end of the appraisal period.

- A performance appraisal can be accurate and objective only if employee performance is monitored and information on performance is available.
- Monitoring performance provides the information that leads to a performance rating. The more information the supervisor gathers, the more support for the final rating.
- Frequent monitoring of performance alerts the supervisor to performance problems early in the appraisal period, and allows the opportunity for employee improvement before undesirable or unacceptable work behaviors become habits.

Selecting Monitoring Methods

Supervisors should select monitoring methods that:

- Apply to each element and standard. Plan to monitor all, not just some, elements and standards.
- Reflect the measures selected. For example, if numeric measures have been established, the supervisor will need to monitor quantitative data related to the employee's performance.
- Are realistic and practical, and allows the supervisor to monitor consistently.

- Can be achieved. For example, if a supervisor cannot observe the employee frequently, then perhaps observation is not an appropriate method. Similarly, a supervisor should not select numeric measures if numeric data are not available.
- Allow for the monitoring of performance of employees who work at remote sites, which may differ from the method(s) used to monitor employees observed on a daily basis.

After a supervisor has identified potential monitoring methods, the supervisor should communicate the methods to the employee and ask for the employee's input to ensure the process is understood and appropriate for the employee's job.

Monitoring Methods

Supervisors can monitor employees by:

- Reviewing sample work products.
- Reviewing supporting documents related to each employee's work (e.g., log sheets, critical incident reports, project tracking files). Supervisors may want to develop a tracking system as a means for reviewing the productivity of employees.
- Reviewing feedback from customers (e.g., customer surveys), coworkers, colleagues, or other supervisors or managers.
- Observing the employee's performance, including evaluating the output and products of the employee's work and conducting routine spot checks. Supervisors may want to use their daily calendar to jot down instances in which an employee is noticed doing something particularly well or doing something that needs improvement. This provides a quick and easy reference to recall specific instances of performance.
- Collecting input from the employee regarding his or her own performance (e.g., from routine one-on-one meetings with an employee or requesting verbal or written information).
- Documenting feedback meetings with employees (e.g., a summary of performance expectations and how the employee is meeting them).

Documentation

An important aspect of monitoring performance is keeping records about employees' performance. This documentation helps a supervisor remember and fairly and consistently evaluate employees' work. Effective documentation can help supervisors fairly evaluate employees because it will:

- Support a supervisor's memory and accurately reflect facts concerning performance during the year.
- Support the rating determinations.
- When needed, provide a basis for any questions or disputes that may arise.

Documentation refers to any written information concerning an employee's performance, including but not limited to:

- Official letters
- Personal notes
- Work samples
- Work logs
- Notes from observation
- Reminders marked on calendars (i.e., a form of memory jogger).

For performance management purposes, documentation refers to any written information concerning an employee's performance.

There are two types of documentation, official documentation and supervisor notes. The distinctions between the two are based on how the information is kept and what is required to share with the employee.

Official documentation is any information used for the employee's performance review or for formal performance-based actions. Official documentation:

- Must be shared with the employee. It is best to request the employee sign and date the official documentation to show that he or she has reviewed it;
- Is kept in a separate performance folder with the employee's name on it (not the Official Personnel Folder); and
- May be used in legal or adverse action disputes.

Examples of the types of information to keep in an official documentation file include:

- Support for incentive awards;
- Information concerning performance problems that are recurring or require formal constructive feedback;
- Notes concerning performance discussions;
- Employee logs or records of assignments;
- Evaluative information collected from other supervisors;
- Work products that reflect performance or behavior in both typical and atypical situations;
- Employee input-information submitted by the employee; and
- Photocopies of work products, including drafts with comments and edits.

Supervisors face several challenges when documenting performance. In order to provide fair and consistent evaluations, supervisors must remember to:

- Balance positive and negative information;
- Collect similar types of documentation (e.g., work product samples) for all employees, whether the information is retained in official documentation files or a supervisory notes file; and
- Maintain an official documentation file for all employees and not single out any one employee. A supervisor, however, may collect and maintain more performance documentation for an employee whose performance is below expectations. That documentation may also be used to support implementation of a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP).

Supervisor notes are memory joggers regarding employee performance. In accordance with the Privacy Act, supervisor notes:

- Must be maintained by the individual supervisor and be for the supervisor's own personal use;
- Must not be shown to anyone; and
- Are usually kept in a notebook or calendar that contains information on many topics; and
- Must not be kept under an official system of agency records.

Examples of the types of performance information supervisor notes include:

- Notes about employees;
- Notes describing observations, including:
 - Information related to observed performance (not judgments or inferences)
 - Brief statements that use adjectives and adverbs sparingly (e.g., Roberto's report submitted on time, Brenda's presentation encouraged participation, Tamika's spreadsheet was accurate with no errors);
 - The time, date, and place;
 - Typical and atypical performance indicators;
 - Notes on informal positive and constructive feedback discussions;
 - Isolated incidents that correspond to the performance criteria or job behaviors;
 - Notes from informal discussions or meetings; and
 - Reminders.

Year End

At the end of the rating period, the first step for a supervisor to fairly evaluate performance is to review the documentation maintained during the rating period.

Supervisors should:

- Rely on only information that is based on what the employee did – the observable and documented facts;
- Not interpret, draw conclusions, or make assumptions;
- Not use personal beliefs;
- Review the expectations for the employee's performance and identify concrete examples, both positive and negative that illustrate how well the employee has met those expectations;
- Use facts to avoid inferences; and
- Understand the circumstances surrounding the facts.

To make sure a supervisor has documented all of the elements, it is appropriate to request and collect information from others, such as:

- Detail supervisors, or team leaders, etc.
- The employee. Supervisors may ask employees to volunteer additional work products or other documentation (e.g., assignment summaries, accomplishment reports, and quarterly reports). If any expectations have not been met, the supervisor needs to have dialog with the employee to determine the reason the expectations were not met. When a supervisor is reviewing information, all factors outside the employee's control that may have impacted his or her performance should be considered. These may include unexpected changes in the workload, priorities, requirements, and/or dependence on others to meet a goal.