

WHAT HAPPENS TO PDR DURING THE COVID CRISIS?

Annual PDRs are an important part of effective people management. This guide aims to help you think about PDR during the pandemic and post-Covid period.

- How will you do PDRs for teams who are working remotely, and/or transitioning back to the workplace?
- What adaptations might you need to make to your processes and approach?
- How can you support performance at a distance?
- How can you help your people think about change?

How will you do your PDRs this year?

The principles of PDR remain the same in all circumstances: all staff who are beyond their probation period are entitled to participate in a productive personal and professional development conversation, with an appropriate person, at least once a year. The purpose of PDR is to ensure that staff know how well they are performing, and are supported and developed so that they are effective in their current role. Reviewers need to be equipped with the skills, knowledge and understanding sufficient to do this effectively and with confidence; [refresh your skills](#) here.

What might be different?

It would be reasonable to expect that your team members are feeling a degree of anxiety and uncertainty about the future. To add to people's personal concerns about their own health and wellbeing and that of loved ones, the pandemic has placed a great financial strain on the University. This means that this may not be an ideal time for you and your team members to be trying to make long-term plans, when important aspects of the future depend on factors outside of our control. In addition, colleagues may find it harder to bring their focus to an in-depth conversation on performance or personal development planning.

- For some of us this will mean that **PDRs should take a shorter view than usual**. For example, it would be reasonable to set objectives for three months, rather than a year.
- You and your team members are likely to agree longer-term objectives on the understanding that these may flex more than usual, and you may look at different scenarios.
- You and your team members will benefit from returning to the objectives for a **light-touch review sooner than you would normally** – say, after three months rather than six.
- Your PDR may be **'light touch'**: taking into account the pressures colleagues have been working under and the extensive disruption to working arrangements and patterns. Colleagues may not have a private space to have the PDR meeting with you. In this case the meeting might be briefer and less in-depth than usual, but should still cover a look back and a look ahead.
- In some cases, you may agree to postpone the PDR meeting – in this case, it is still essential that there are regular opportunities for 1:1 meetings in which you provide feedback and agree plans.

How can you maintain motivation and support performance through a 'remote' PDR?

A 'light touch' PDR still needs to take a broad look at the individual's work and at the development and support they need to be effective; enable each individual to define their own career aspirations if they wish, and to identify their contribution to the University's success by aligning their work objectives in a meaningful way to those of their team or group, their department or faculty and the University.

It is likely that you have already done some thinking about how your team's priorities and plans have changed, and how they might need to change again in future. (There are some ideas about this in our guide, "[Build your confidence in managing a team remotely](#)".) PDR should help people understand the implications of the situation for their objectives, especially if recruitment and capital project freezes have affected them.

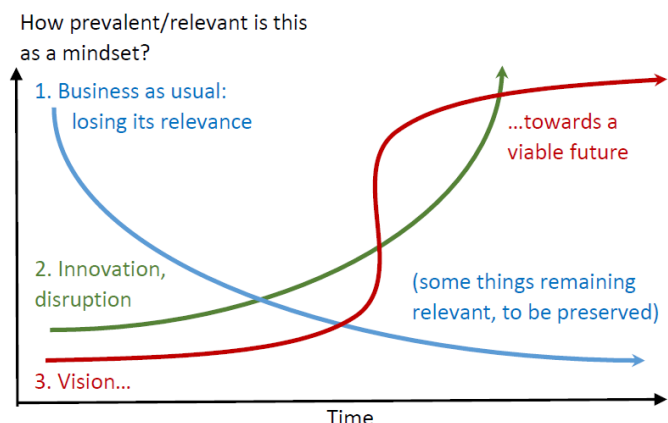
How can you help people face change and uncertainty?

These are testing times for all of us, but individuals respond very differently to change and uncertainty. There's a wealth of learning opportunities in the [POD e-learning pages](#), under 'Self-awareness', including short courses on managing change which both you and your reviewees will find helpful.

Meanwhile, you could add coaching to your skills as a manager: see [Build your confidence in managing a team remotely](#) for a coaching ABC, and think about signing up for our '[Coaching Skills for managers](#)' [online workshop](#).

And here's a simple and intuitive tool for helping yourself and your team members think about the present and future: [Bill Sharpe's Three Horizons](#). It suggests that the future can be perceived through three lenses:

- Horizon 1: Continuing Business as Usual
 - Horizon 2: Innovation, disruption
 - Horizon 3: Vision of a Viable Future
- and that this will help us to identify "which of the dominant patterns are no longer fit for purpose, how the emerging trends can shape the future, and what visionary action is needed to collectively move us towards a viable future."
[Here is a useful short video introduction.](#)



Look after yourself!

Managing a team remotely can be challenging. As well as practical considerations, you may face new challenges or concerns about your management of the team; [our guide to building your confidence in managing a team remotely](#) provides many different ways in which you can adapt and extend your skills. Here are a few tips from the guide on supporting performance at a distance:

- First of all, try to relax: the situation is unprecedented and disconcerting for everyone, so all anyone can ask of you is that you do your best. The same is true of your team.
- Keep your management 'light-touch' – this may not be an appropriate time for lengthy task lists.
- Try to use the communication method that gets the best out of them.
- Think back to your work on your team's purpose, and emphasise it and the individual's part in it. If people are feeling anxious about planning ahead this is a good way to keep them on track.

FINALLY: If you have any comments, thoughts, ideas or top tips we'd be delighted to hear from you; please contact podcomms@admin.ox.ac.uk to join our People Managers' Team on Microsoft Teams. Selected contributions will be printed in our People Managers' Network updates.