



New Dynamics

Performance and goals

Manager 1:1s: a guide to better conversations

Prepare focused check-ins, listen to context and agree actions both people can follow through.

Practical guidance · Worked examples · Printable worksheet

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Read in order for the full approach, or use the linked contents to find a section. The final worksheet gives you space to record decisions and next steps.

Prepare focused check-ins, listen to context and agree actions both people can follow through. This practical guide to manager one-to-one meetings brings together a step-by-step approach, illustrative examples, a reusable worksheet and answers to common questions. Start with the section closest to your current challenge, then use the working session to turn the guidance into a clear next action.

Agree the purpose and rhythm

A 1:1 gives an employee and manager protected time to discuss work, support and development. It should not become only a status report that could have been shared elsewhere. Agree a useful cadence and adjust it for the role, workload and employee's needs.

Explain what notes will be kept and who can access them. Keep sensitive personal or formal case information in the appropriate restricted process. Employees should understand the difference between ordinary working notes and a formal performance record.

Prepare a short shared agenda

Invite both people to add topics. Start with the employee's priorities, then discuss progress, blockers, feedback and development as relevant. Ask which decision or support would make the conversation valuable today.

Review previous commitments before adding new ones. If the manager repeatedly leaves actions unresolved, another conversation will not compensate for the missing support. Be ready to explain a delay and agree a realistic next step.

Listen before offering a solution

Ask open questions and allow time for the employee's explanation. "What is getting in the way?" often reveals more than "Why is this late?" Distinguish a request for advice from a need for a decision, resources or simply a chance to think through the problem.

Check your interpretation: "I'm hearing that the priority changed before the dependency was resolved. Have I understood that correctly?" Do not turn a short note into a broad conclusion about motivation or attitude.

Worked example: competing priorities

Illustrative scenario: an employee says three projects all have urgent deadlines. The manager initially asks for better time management. After reviewing the commitments, they discover that different leaders assigned work without agreeing capacity.

The manager takes responsibility for resolving the conflict and communicates which task moves. The employee updates the plan and flags any remaining dependency. The 1:1 ends

with one decision and two clear actions, rather than a general instruction to work faster.

Reusable conversation worksheet

- **Opening:** What needs attention most today?
- **Progress:** What has moved forward, and what evidence is useful?
- **Blockers:** Which decision, dependency or resource needs help?
- **Feedback:** What should either person continue or change?
- **Development:** What learning or practice opportunity is relevant now?
- **Commitments:** What will each person do, and by when?
- **Follow-up:** When will progress or a changed situation be revisited?

Use the prompts selectively. A rigid questionnaire can prevent the conversation from addressing the issue that matters most.

End with shared understanding

Summarise the decisions and check that both people interpret them the same way. Keep notes proportionate, factual and focused on actions. Give the employee a route to correct an inaccurate record.

Review whether the rhythm is helping. Ask if meetings are too frequent, too rushed or repeatedly cancelled. Protect development time even when operational work is busy. Use the [manager 1:1 template](#) for an editable agenda and the [employee feedback guide](#) for specific feedback language.

Put the guide into practice

Set aside a working session with the people who own this process and one or two people who experience it. Use a fictional or appropriately authorised case, so the discussion can be specific without sharing unnecessary personal information. The purpose is to leave with a usable decision or document, not just agreement that the topic matters.

Prepare the case

Prepare a fictional agenda containing a progress update, a blocker and a development question. Ask which topics need discussion and which could be shared in writing. Invite the employee's priority first. The session should test how a manager creates space for the issue that matters rather than simply completing an agenda.

Write the starting assumptions down before discussing solutions. If the group disagrees on what happened, identify the information needed to resolve that difference rather than building

a plan on an untested story.

Work through the decision

Practise responding to a blocker with questions before advice. Clarify whether the employee needs a decision, resources, feedback or help thinking through options. Summarise what you heard and check it. A manager can easily offer a solution to the wrong problem if they move too quickly from a short explanation.

Ask each participant to explain the proposed decision in their own words. Differences in interpretation often reveal an unclear criterion, a missing responsibility or an instruction that will be difficult to follow.

Test an exception

Introduce a sensitive personal issue or a concern about another colleague. Decide what belongs in ordinary notes and what needs the appropriate restricted route. Also test a manager who cannot deliver a promised action. The conversation should include an honest update and a revised commitment rather than silently dropping the topic.

Record what changes in this situation and what remains the same. An exception should lead to a clear next step, with an owner, rather than an informal workaround that nobody can explain later.

Agree the handoff

Write a short close containing the decisions, each person's action and the follow-up date. Ask the employee to check the interpretation. Keep the record focused on what is needed to continue the work, and explain any information that will be carried into a later formal review.

Finish by confirming the owner, the next action and the date when the result will be reviewed. Give the person receiving the work enough context to continue without repeating the whole discussion.

Frequently asked questions

How often should a manager hold 1:1s?

Agree a rhythm that fits the work and the employee's needs. A new starter or someone managing a difficult change may need more frequent contact than an experienced colleague with stable responsibilities. Review the cadence together. Consistency and follow-through matter more than a universal interval, and repeatedly cancelled meetings can make even a well-designed schedule ineffective.

Who should own the agenda?

Both people should be able to contribute, with room for the employee's priorities. The manager is responsible for making the conversation useful and following up support commitments, but the meeting should not become a one-way inspection. A short shared agenda helps preparation. Leave flexibility for new issues rather than treating every prompt as a mandatory question each time.

Should every 1:1 become a performance record?

Keep proportionate notes of decisions and actions, and explain their purpose and access. Not every personal disclosure or exploratory conversation belongs in a formal performance record. Follow the organisation's approved information practices for sensitive matters. If information will inform a later review, make that use clear and give the employee a way to correct inaccuracies.

Review the first cycle

Ask whether the employee leaves with clearer priorities or useful support. Check the completion of the manager's actions as well as the employee's. If meetings become repetitive status updates, change the agenda and move routine reporting elsewhere. Protect time for feedback and development before every conversation is consumed by immediate tasks.

Keep a brief record of what was tried, what participants found useful and what needs to change. Compare the result with the original problem rather than judging success only by completion. If the process created extra work without improving clarity, quality or support, simplify it and test again. Share the agreed change with the people who will use it, and name the person responsible for keeping the guidance current.

About New Dynamics

[New Dynamics](#) connects goals, feedback, recognition and reviews around the way organisations work. This guide is published by the New Dynamics Editorial Team as part of our practical library for HR leaders, managers and People teams.

Use the examples and worksheets to structure your own discussions and adapt them to your organisation. Illustrative scenarios are not customer case studies. Policy and employment guidance needs appropriate local review before adoption.

For questions about this guide, corrections or a conversation about your performance management process, email contact@new-dynamics.com. Explore the complete [guide library](#) for related resources.

Your working worksheet

Use the prompts from this guide to prepare one real conversation or decision. Keep personal or sensitive information in your organisation's approved records. This page is for your own working notes.

Opening: What needs attention most today?

Progress: What has moved forward, and what evidence is useful?

Blockers: Which decision, dependency or resource needs help?

Feedback: What should either person continue or change?

Development: What learning or practice opportunity is relevant now?

Commitments: What will each person do, and by when?

Follow-up: When will progress or a changed situation be revisited?

Discuss your next step with New Dynamics: contact@new-dynamics.com