



# New Dynamics

Policies and practice

## Performance improvement: a fair and useful plan

Clarify performance concerns, agree practical support and document a proportionate improvement process.

Practical guidance · Worked examples · Printable worksheet

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Published 15 September 2026

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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.

Clarify performance concerns, agree practical support and document a proportionate improvement process. This practical guide to performance improvement plan 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.

## **Understand the concern before naming the process**

A performance improvement plan records a specific gap, the expected standard and the support available. Start by checking whether expectations were clear, the employee had the necessary resources and the evidence reflects their actual responsibilities.

Distinguish capability, conduct, workload and a changed role. A missed deadline caused by an unowned dependency requires a different response from an established skill gap. Sensitive health or disability-related matters should follow the appropriate confidential support and local review process.

## **Explain the gap with evidence**

Describe observable work, the agreed expectation and the impact. Avoid labels such as “poor attitude” or “not committed.” Give the employee an opportunity to explain context and correct facts. Record areas of agreement and disagreement without forcing an admission.

If the process is formal, explain its status and potential consequences through the organisation’s approved procedure. Relevant local rules, representation rights, adjustments and appeal arrangements need to be checked. [Acas discipline and grievance guidance](#) is a UK reference, not a universal procedure.

## **Build a realistic improvement agreement**

Choose a small number of work-related outcomes within the employee’s influence. Define evidence, support, check-ins and a review period that fits the capability being developed. Do not use an arbitrary short deadline for work that can only be demonstrated over a longer cycle.

Specify the manager’s commitments as clearly as the employee’s. Training, access, clearer prioritisation or supervised practice may be necessary. If the agreed support is delayed, record the effect and review the plan rather than treating the original deadline as unchanged.

## Worked example: recurring reporting errors

Illustrative scenario: a coordinator's reports contain errors in a newly introduced system. The manager checks examples with the employee and discovers that the mapping instructions are incomplete.

The plan provides corrected guidance, a practice report and a review with an experienced colleague. Success is assessed against agreed accuracy checks on subsequent reports. The manager records both the employee's progress and whether the promised support was delivered. The example illustrates process design, not a prescribed disciplinary outcome.

## Improvement-plan worksheet

- **Concern and evidence:** What happened, when and against which expectation?
- **Employee context:** What explanation or correction needs consideration?
- **Required standard:** What does acceptable work look like?
- **Actions:** What will the employee practise or change?
- **Support:** What will the manager provide, and by when?
- **Check-ins:** How will progress and obstacles be reviewed?
- **Outcome review:** Who decides the next step under the approved procedure?

Keep records factual, proportionate and accessible only to the appropriate people. Provide the employee with the plan and the agreed route to raise questions.

## Review the evidence fairly

At the review point, compare work with the stated criteria. Consider changed circumstances and support delivery. Explain the conclusion and record the reasoning, including unresolved disagreement where relevant.

If improvement is sustained, agree how ordinary support will continue. If concerns remain, follow the applicable procedure and obtain appropriate advice before a consequential decision. A plan should create a real opportunity to improve; it should not document a decision already made in private.

## 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**

Use a fictional case with a specific work gap and an agreed expectation. List the evidence and ask whether the employee had the access, instructions and opportunity needed. Identify what remains uncertain. Do not begin by choosing a formal process before understanding whether the issue concerns capability, conduct or an organisational obstacle.

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**

Draft a small number of improvement outcomes and match each one to support. Check whether the employee can influence the result and whether the review period allows the skill to be demonstrated. Write the manager's actions beside the employee's so responsibility for providing help is visible.

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 delay in the promised training or a change to the employee's assigned work. Decide how the plan should be reviewed and recorded. Also consider a factual disagreement about an example. The process needs a fair route to examine the disagreement without treating a challenge as evidence of poor attitude.

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**

Prepare the next check-in with evidence against the agreed criteria and a record of support delivered. Confirm who may decide the next step under the approved procedure. Give the employee a clear explanation of the meeting's purpose and the relevant route for questions or support.

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 long should a performance improvement plan last?

Use a period that is appropriate to the work, the support required and the applicable procedure. A skill demonstrated weekly needs a different observation period from one used in a quarterly project. There is no universally fair duration. Review the plan with the relevant HR or legal adviser where needed, and account for delays in support or changes in circumstances.

### Does a plan mean dismissal has already been decided?

It should not. A plan intended to support improvement needs a real opportunity to meet clear expectations with appropriate help. If the process is formal, explain its status and possible consequences through the approved procedure. Do not present a predetermined outcome as an open development exercise. Consequential decisions require fair consideration of evidence, context and applicable requirements.

### What if the employee disagrees with the concern?

Listen to the explanation and check the facts. Record relevant disagreement accurately rather than requiring the employee to accept every statement. A disputed example may reveal missing context or an unclear expectation. Use the organisation's approved routes for review, representation or appeal where applicable. Continue to distinguish the performance question from the person's right to raise a concern.

## Review the first cycle

Assess progress against the original criteria and any documented revisions. Check whether the promised resources and feedback were delivered. Avoid moving the standard at the final meeting. Explain the conclusion and next steps clearly, and retain records through the appropriate controlled process rather than general team files.

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](mailto: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.

**Concern and evidence:** What happened, when and against which expectation?

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**Employee context:** What explanation or correction needs consideration?

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**Required standard:** What does acceptable work look like?

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**Actions:** What will the employee practise or change?

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**Support:** What will the manager provide, and by when?

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**Check-ins:** How will progress and obstacles be reviewed?

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**Outcome review:** Who decides the next step under the approved procedure?

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Discuss your next step with New Dynamics: [contact@new-dynamics.com](mailto:contact@new-dynamics.com)