# Performance Management during COVID-19 Answers to Managers’ Frequently Asked Questions

## How do I establish performance objectives and commitments that are meaningful when business goals are constantly shifting due to the pandemic?

* Establishing clear commitments and work objectives sets your employees and teams up for success. Having established commitments and work objectives enables productive performance discussions between you and your employees.
* Remember established commitments and work objectives may evolve and change throughout the performance cycle.
* Ensure that employees are aware *why* priorities might change and tie any new commitments (for executives) and work objectives (for employees) into larger context of organizational goals. Have ongoing conversations to ensure employees are aware of any shifting priorities.
* It is okay to acknowledge to yourself and to your employees that the situation is challenging.
* Communicate changes in direction and priorities to your employees and document the changes that impact employee’s work objectives and commitments to ensure they can be taken into consideration when you are conducting performance assessments.
* Ask what concrete steps you can take to support employees in meeting their commitments and work objectives.
* Don’t forget about learning and development. Engage employees in determining whether they wish to develop new or different skills to better cope with the change and uncertainty.
* Recognize all achievements and contributions, along with adaptability and resilience. Acknowledge work that has been completed, even if it needed to be delayed due to shifting priorities.

## How do I manage employees whose performance has declined since the pandemic started?

* Confirm commitments and work objectives and discuss whether they need to be modified. Ensure that commitments and objectives are [SMART](https://intranet.canada.ca/hr-rh/ptm-grt/pm-gr/pmc-dgr/smart-eng.asp) (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound) and that performance measures are clear.
* Try to understand your employees’ individual situations, motivations, and behaviours from their perspective to identify the root of the issue (e.g., lack of equipment or tools, different understanding of objectives, lack of skills or expertise for changing priorities, barriers, need for accommodations or other stressors).
* Offer additional supports (e.g., accommodations, training, coaching, mentoring, micro-missions, assignments, or mental health support (consult the [Mental health and COVID-19 for public servants: Supporting employees and teams](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/covid-19/lead-empathy.html) page) or the [Employee Assistance Program](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/employee-assistance-program.html)).
* Ask for concrete suggestions on what supports and tools they need.
* Check in regularly – not just on commitments and work objectives, but also just to see how your employees are feeling, and what support they might need from you as their manager.
* If the employee’s performance remains unsatisfactory, follow the steps for a [performance improvement plan](https://intranet.canada.ca/hr-rh/ptm-grt/pm-gr/pmc-dgr/ap-pa-eng.asp).

## **What should I keep in mind when establishing performance agreements and assessing performance for employees who are on extended** 699 leave or have part-time leave arrangements?

* For employees who are on or who have been on extended leave (699 or other extended leave), establish performance agreements when the employee returns to work and ensure the assessment is based on periods where the employee has been working.
* For employees with part-time arrangements, work objectives and performance measures should reflect the duties assigned to the employee and be appropriate for the time the employee is scheduled to work.
* Communication is key, through regular check-ins and an open dialogue. Do not wait for formal mid-year and year-end assessments to have performance discussions.
* Reassess commitments or work objectives to fit work arrangements.
* Employees should not be penalized for circumstances beyond their control.

For more information on “other paid leave (code 699)”, view the Government of Canada’s web pages on [COVID-19: Employee illness and leave](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/covid-19/employee-illness-leave.html) and [Taking and tracking other paid leave (code 699)](https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/corporate/covid-19/pay-pension-benefits/taking-tracking-other-paid-leave-code-699.html). For additional questions related to Leave 699, please contact your organizational Human Resources team.

## How do I support employees who have confided in me that their mental health is suffering due to the pandemic and it is affecting their performance?

* Listen attentively and do not judge. Everyone’s situation and coping styles are different, and it is important to understand your employees’ individual contexts.
* Check in regularly – not just on commitments and work objectives, but also just to see how your employees are feeling, and what support they might need from you as their manager.
* Allow for flexibility in working conditions while respecting collective agreements and ask for concrete suggestions on how you can support them.
* Consult the government’s page on [Mental health and COVID-19 for public servants: Supporting employees and teams](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/covid-19/lead-empathy.html) for additional tips on supporting employees and teams, and encourage the use of your departmental [Employee Assistance Program](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/employee-assistance-program.html).