



## **Growing as a Manager**

Evaluating Your Management Performance  
with Insights from Psychological and  
Organizational Research

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CQ Net is the evidence-based management (EBM) team learning platform. Learn strategies & interventions that have been supported by scientific research. This CQ Dossier is part of the Evidence-Based Management Learning Team "Growing as a Manager: How can you improve your management performance?".

## Executive summary

Managers are uniquely positioned to evaluate the performance of their employees as well as themselves. By virtue of your position, you have access to a variety of data sources that can be used to draw conclusions about employee productivity, commitment, and satisfaction; many of these data sources can also be used to draw meaningful inferences about your own leadership ability (Sadikoglu & Zehir, 2010). In addition to these number-based signs, you can also examine the more qualitative, relational elements of your organization, and use them to draw conclusions about your performance as well.

Subtle factors, such as how employees communicate with one another, or the types of words they use to describe their organization, can be utilized to draw meaningful conclusions about how effectively you are leading and motivating your employees (Anne & Grønholdt, 2001). This CQ Dossier covers recent psychological and organizational research into how managers can use data and their own observations to evaluate their own performance.

## Employee Performance

To examine the efficacy of a manager, the first logical place to look is the [performance](#) of their employees (Luthans et al, 2008). Effective managers, generally speaking, will hire and promote capable employees and match team members with tasks that are suited to their strengths. Skilled managers will be able to motivate their employees to remain productive, committed, and even creative throughout a variety of situations and challenges (Sadikoglu & Zehir, 2010). While setbacks and fluctuations are expected, overall trends should reveal which managers have the best outcomes, and therefore, which managers are the best at their jobs.

As a manager, you have access to most of the data you need to draw conclusions about your own capabilities. Examine the benchmarks that you would also use to evaluate how individual employees are doing, but take a more global focus (Lannelongue et al, 2015): are your teams productive? Are they responsive to changes in the industry? Have they delivered both long-term and short-term outcomes that are

beneficial to the company? Does your department, office, or team deliver results that are profitable or otherwise bring value to the organization? If the answer to the majority of these questions is “yes”, you have empirical evidence that you are a strong manager.

Employee performance statistics can also be used to highlight your unique struggles. For example, you may find that, compared to other managers, you perform well in situations of crisis (Boin et al, 2016). Conversely, you may find that performance is high during easier moments, but not during times of change. Follow the data and strategize accordingly. Your performance is likely to be dynamic – it interacts with the context and situation you are in. Once you identify the times when your management is most (and least) effective, you can work to become more adaptable and effective in a variety of situations.

## Absenteeism, Conflict, and Indirect Red Flags

Evaluation of your own performance as a manager should also incorporate “indirect measures” -- factors that do not indicate employee outcomes directly, but which can be used to identify looming problems (Fu & Deshpande, 2014). Employee productivity and performance are useful benchmarks, but do not neglect things that are less indicative of the immediate bottom line – for example, employee satisfaction, absenteeism, conflict, and retention (Harter et al, 2002). If there are issues with these employee-related factors, you are likely to experience bottom-line issues eventually. Thus, it’s essential that you locate potential problems before they erupt into tangible losses.

Highly capable managers cultivate organizational cultures of warmth, collaboration, and respect. If you are leading your employees in an inspiring, encouraging, and useful fashion, you will typically be rewarded with high commitment, [low absenteeism](#), and good long-term retention of employees (Deery et al 2017). Satisfied, devoted employees typically have managers whom they appreciate and feel connected to. Conversely, when management is ineffective, employees feel undervalued, miss work for illegitimate reasons, and even commit petty thefts such as stealing office supplies (Schaumberg & Flynn, 2017). While no organization has ever been upended by the theft of a pen, frequent small incidents can signal looming, larger problems.

## Relational Factors

A final means of evaluating your managerial performance is to examine how employees and colleagues describe your work and their [relationship](#) to you (Mone & London, 2018; Hassan & Hatmaker, 2014)). Examining this component will probably qualitative data – in other words, open-ended interviews, surveys, or discussions rather than number-based data and performance statistics. There is a degree of subjectivity to looking at such things; however, by looking for the recurring themes, you can still identify reliable, useful observations.

One way to collect meaningful, detailed data on your performance is by conducting panel-style interviews or meetings. In such meetings, employees should be encouraged to ask questions, offer suggestions, and share frustrations in a nonjudgmental setting (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Honest reflections and concerns should be encouraged, not punished. Keep in mind that employees will be reticent to say negative things about their co-workers and managers in even the most comfortable circumstances. If possible, you may wish to have such meetings be peer-led or facilitated by HR rather than yourself.

Surveys and suggestion boxes can also be used to examine how you are perceived by colleagues and employees. Research suggests that the more anonymous such feedback sources are, the more comfortable people are sharing negative observations and criticisms (Frank et al, 2017). It is probably preferable to administer such a questionnaire online, as this tends to encourage even greater honesty than filling out a paper form. A useful supplement to these information sources may be face-to-face discussions with select members of the staff. Questions should be focused and specific; ask for examples of frustrating moments, decisions that were ineffective, and the like (Nardi, 2018).

**Interpreting responses.** If you collect detailed, qualitative information on your management performance, you are likely to receive a large volume of information. These responses may vary significantly in usefulness. Impressions may be, at times, unfocused, contradictory, or unclearly written. To navigate this, and draw useful conclusions from the responses, try jotting down what the recurring themes are, or

summarizing the overall content of each response after you have read it (Vaughn & Turner, 2016).

After you have reviewed qualitative feedback and made notes on what people have shared with you, examine the resulting information for prevailing, common observations. Focus on ideas that appear over and over again, as well as repeated words. Do employees describe you as friendly or warm? Do they provide numerous examples of times when you ignored their concerns? Are their critiques backed up with concrete evidence, or are they vague? Do concerns have to do with your management decisions, or with broader organizational strategies?

The overall trends in the data will be more helpful than the content of individual responses is. Make sure, as well, to compare and contrast these findings with more statistically-based pieces of information. Triangulation and verification of conclusions is key – if the numerical data is consistent with survey feedback, both are probably meaningful. For example, if employee performance is on the decline, absenteeism is on the rise, and employees are telling you they do not feel “inspired”, you have a sign that a problem is present, and that it could be positively impacted by a more uplifting management style. Your conclusions won’t always be so clear-cut, but they should always be rooted in the data and your global impressions.

## Key take-aways

- Employee performance can be used as a valuable indicator of manager performance
- Effective managers have employees who perform well across a variety of time points and situations
- Manager performance can also be evaluated through indirect means, such as examining employee satisfaction, absenteeism, or even theft of supplies
- Qualitative measures of manager performance, such as interviews and surveys, can be interpreted for prevailing themes and used to back up more data-based conclusions
- Triangulation of data is key: if performance statistics, indirect measures, and interviews all point toward similar conclusions, they are likely to be correct

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