



U.S. Office of Personnel Management

# Guiding Principles for Performance Measurement – A Supervisor’s Quick Guide

The principles listed below contain some valuable lessons learned about measuring performance.

## View Performance Measurement as a Valuable Tool

People view measurement systems from at least two different perspectives. When used constructively, they see a measurement system as a helpful feedback tool that provides information to managers and employees about how well they are doing in reaching their goals and where they might have room for improvement. It also provides information on which to base awards and recognition. When not used constructively, however, the system can be perceived as a tool to . Managers and employees must trust that the measurement system is beneficial to them and the organization; otherwise, the temptation to game the numbers to avoid discipline will overwhelm them.

## Acceptance of the Performance Measurement Process Is Essential to Its Success

Involving employees in the development of the elements and standards included in the performance plan is an excellent way to clarify expectations and measurement terminology. Active employee participation in creating valid measures that accurately reflect performance decreases the possibility that employees may feel manipulated through the measurement system.

## Measure What Is Important—Not What is Easy to Measure

It is easy to count the number of days since a project began, but if that is all that you measure, is that enough information to assess performance? No, probably not. Or if, for example, a customer service team only measures the number of calls that come into the team (the easy measure) and does not attempt to measure customer satisfaction with its service (the more difficult measure), the team does not have complete information about its performance and has no idea how well it is serving its customers. In addition, because what gets measured gets done, the team will probably focus on how it can increase the number of calls it receives and ignore the quality of service it provides. As a result, organizations need to anticipate the behavioral and unintended consequences of measuring performance.

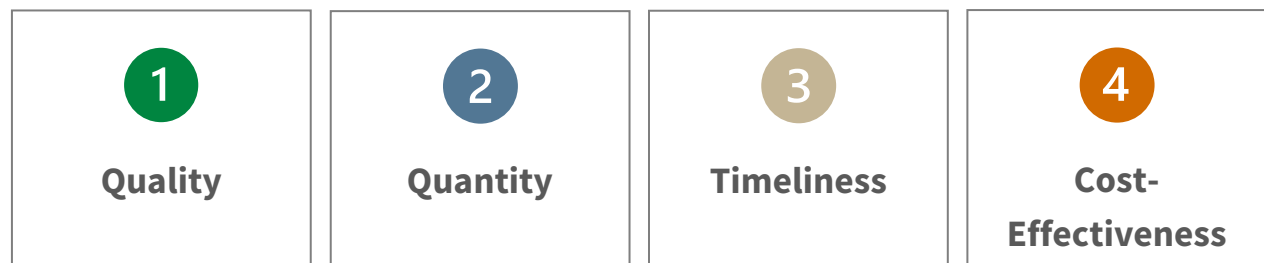
## Develop Flexible Performance Plans to Allow for Changes in Program Goals

Do not design performance plans that are set in concrete; build in flexibility so you can adjust them as program goals and work assignments change. Even though employees must work at least a minimum period of time on elements and standards before they receive performance ratings, the agency minimum appraisal period usually provides enough time during the appraisal period for changes in elements and standards. (Minimum appraisal periods usually range from 30- 120 days, depending on the agency. Check with your agency to find out the minimum appraisal period that applies to you and the processes in place for making changes during the annual cycle.)

## Rely on Multiple Measures

Don't rely on a single measure. Remember the story of the three blind men who went for a walk and came across an elephant? One felt the animal's trunk and claimed that the elephant was like a large snake. Another explored the elephant's leg and claimed that the elephant was like a big tree trunk. The third blind man touched the elephant's side and said that the elephant was like a tall, wide wall. All three of them were right, but all of them were wrong. Each one was relying on only one measure, from one perspective. If the measures had been used together, the three men would have had a more accurate picture of the elephant.

Generally, work performance measures fall into one of four categories:



Ask yourself which categories apply and then develop specific measures to include in the performance standard. In the above example of the cancer testing lab, both quantity and quality were important, so specific measures might include the number of slides reviewed per week and the rate of accuracy.

## Employees Should Perceive that Performance Measurement is Important

In many organizations, employees have been exposed to a variety of management fads that seem to appear and then fade away as the next fad takes its place. Employees need to know that management is serious and committed to measuring and improving performance, and that this is more than a “check the box” activity. This takes an investment of time. Consistency and communication are key. Spend time at the start of the performance cycle setting expectations, reviewing elements and standards, and discussing what successful performance may look like for each individual. Provide ongoing and regular feedback through the year in one-on-one situations and recognize great performance. Even use the phrase “I’d like to give you some performance feedback.” If ongoing, continuous performance management is well-integrated into your management style, employees may not even register it. At the end of the year, take the time to write personalized performance feedback as part of their overall rating. This goes a long way to helping employees feel their work was seen and considered as part of the process.

## Management Should Demonstrate that Performance is Critical to Organizational and Individual Success

Closely related to the previous principle, this principle observes that not only should employees perceive that performance measurement is important, but also management must demonstrate that performance matters. When management tolerated poor performance in the

past and employees see that the new measurement system has not changed the situation (in other words, that poor performer still comes to work and does not meaningfully contribute), employees know that performance is not important, despite the new system. On the other hand, ensure employees are formally and informally recognized and rewarded throughout the year for accomplishments and above and beyond work outcomes. Follow-through on both ends of the spectrum is key to establishing a high-performance culture.