

Performance Management Training for Federal Supervisors



This course equips federal government supervisors and training practitioners with the knowledge and tools to effectively manage employee performance and accountability. Participants will learn to navigate legal requirements, establish clear performance expectations, and address performance issues promptly.

The course emphasizes fostering a high-performance culture, recognizing and rewarding excellence, and understanding the standardized appraisal cycle. Additionally, it provides strategies for cultivating collaboration with unions and ensuring supervisory accountability. By the end of the course, learners will be prepared to enhance team productivity and align individual goals with organizational objectives.

This course will take about 60 minutes to complete.

Note: Throughout this PDF training document, transcripts for video and audio files are provided.

Introduction

1. Welcome
2. Learning Objectives

Legal Framework and Federal Performance Management Reform

3. Understanding the Legal Framework and Requirements
4. Performance Management Reform and Appraisal Cycle

Supervisor Role and Responsibilities

5. Supervisor Responsibilities
6. Employee Performance Plans and Ratings
7. Accountability
8. Labor Relations
9. Knowledge Check 1: Why Performance Management?
10. Knowledge Check 2: What is a Supervisor's Role?

Employee Performance

11. Performance Elements and Standards
12. Identifying and Addressing Poor Performance
13. Tools for Preventing and Addressing Poor Performance
14. Conduct and Discipline
15. Rewarding High Performance
16. Knowledge Check 3: What is the Difference between Performance Elements vs. Performance Standards?
17. Knowledge Check 4: What is Poor Performance?
18. Knowledge Check 5: Conduct and Discipline

Conclusion

19. Summary
20. Quiz
21. Completed

Introduction

Lesson 1 of 21 – Welcome

Welcome to performance management and accountability training for federal supervisors!

Welcome Video Transcript:

Welcome! My name is Nicole Wright, and I am the Deputy Associate Director for Executive Services and Workforce Development at the U.S. Office of Personnel Management also known as “OPM”. My team and I developed this training to be more than an annual requirement, but instead, a meaningful, practical tool for you to refer to throughout the performance cycle.

As federal supervisors, you are on the front line of mission delivery. Effective performance management isn’t just about an annual rating—it’s a continuous cycle that helps you and your team assess how their individual performance, through everyday tasks, contribute to agency goals. In this course, you will learn the five parts of the performance management cycle and the critical role you play in each phase. Finally, you will learn about fairly rating subordinates and rewarding meaningfully to strengthen a high-performance culture.

OPM’s 2025 guidance emphasizes a government-wide reform framework for building a high performance and accountability culture. Reforms include aligning appraisal timing and strengthening awards so they reflect real results, a new mandatory supervisory critical element focused on holding employees accountable, and training, such as this, for your supervisors.

A few regulatory anchors to keep in mind: your agency’s appraisal system sets the official appraisal period—generally 12 months—and includes methods for ongoing appraisal, including required progress reviews during each period. As a new supervisor, you should familiarize yourself with your agency’s policies and practices for performance management.

You will also learn what to do when performance falls below the “Fully Successful” level. This training will cover Performance Improvement Plans, also known as “PIPs” and the requirement to provide a reasonable opportunity

to demonstrate acceptable performance when an employee is unacceptable on one or more critical elements—and how to partner with HR throughout.

By the end of this training, you will be ready to set clear expectations, deliver quality feedback, document fairly, reward excellence, and take timely action when needed—all while building an engaged, high-performing team. By applying these principles, you can foster a productive and accountable work environment that aligns with organizational goals.

I'm excited for you to get started!

Lesson 2 of 21 – Learning Objectives

1. Understand legal requirements
2. Become familiar with the standardized appraisal cycle
3. Define accountability in the federal supervisory context
4. Cultivate a culture of high performance and accountability
5. Recognize the value of rewarding high performance
6. Learn about supervisory accountability
7. Establish clear performance expectations
8. Address performance issues promptly
9. Foster collaboration with the Union

Learning Objectives Audio Transcript:

Upon completion of this training, as a supervisor, you will be better equipped to successfully and effectively fulfill your role. Topics will include legal requirements, federal reform in performance management, supervisory accountability, addressing poor performance and conduct, and best practices, to name a few.

Legal Framework and Federal Performance Management Reform

Lesson 3 of 21 – Understanding the Legal Framework and Requirements

United States Code Requirements (All Agencies)

Under Chapter 43 of title 5 of the United States Code (5 U.S.C. 4302(a)), each agency must develop one or more performance appraisal systems which—

- Provide for periodic appraisals of job performance of employees
- Encourage employee participation in establishing performance standards
- Use the results of performance appraisals as a basis for training, rewarding, reassigning, promoting, reduction in grade, retaining, and removing employees who perform unacceptably

United States Code Requirements (OPM)

- Issue regulations (5 CFR Part 430) on performance management
 - Performance management processes
 - Planning, monitoring, developing, evaluating, and rewarding performance
 - Applies to various employee categories, including senior-level and scientific professionals
- Assist agencies in the development of performance appraisal systems
- Review and approve agency performance appraisal systems for compliance with applicable law, regulation, and OPM policy

Code of Federal Regulations Requirements (All Agencies)

OPM regulations require each agency performance appraisal system to provide for—

- Establishing performance standards which permit the accurate evaluation of job performance on the basis of objective criteria related to the job for each employee or position under the system

- Communicating to each employee the performance standards and the critical elements of the employee's position
- Evaluating each employee during the appraisal period on such standards
- Recognizing and rewarding employees whose performance so warrants Assisting employees in improving unacceptable performance
- Reassigning, reducing in grade, or removing employees who continue to have unacceptable performance but only after an opportunity to demonstrate acceptable performance

Understanding the Legal Framework and Requirements Audio Transcript:

Under 5 USC 4302(a), each agency's performance appraisal system must provide for the periodic appraisal of employee performance and encourage employee participation in establishing performance standards. Performance appraisal results must be used as a basis for training, recognizing, and rewarding employees whose performance warrants it, as well as a basis for reassigning or removing employees who perform unacceptably. Chapter 43 also directs the US Office of Personnel Management to 1) prescribe regulations, 2) assist agencies in the development of performance appraisal systems, and 3) review and approve agency performance appraisal systems for compliance with applicable law, regulation, and OPM policy. OPM regulations expand on the statute by prescribing more detailed requirements for agency appraisal systems. These details include ensuring that performance standards allow for assessment based on job criteria. Assisting employees in improving poor performance and taking action when poor performance does not improve.

Lesson 4 of 21 – Performance Management Reform and Appraisal Cycle

Federal Reforms Audio Transcript:

To build a high performing culture, OPM through updated policy has reformed employee performance management across the federal government to ensure effective practices are implemented to reward individual initiative, skills, performance, and hard work. In early 2025, OPM issued new performance plans for senior executive service members, as well as senior level and

scientific and professional employees, also known as senior professionals. OPM is providing enhanced government-wide standards for performance management, awards programs, and resolving poor performance for remaining positions covered under subchapter 1 of chapter 43 of Title 5. To promote and ensure consistency across government, compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements, and OPM policy, effective October 1, 2026, agencies will transition to a standardized government-wide performance appraisal cycle set on the fiscal year. This applies to all non-SES and senior professional employees.

Reforms

- Performance Appraisal Cycle
- Normalizing of Employee Performance Ratings New Supervisory Critical Element
- Supervisory Training
- Tools for Preventing and Addressing Unacceptable Job Performance

Appraisal Cycle

OPM requires all Executive agencies adopt a standardized performance appraisal cycle across the government:

- Fiscal year cycle (i.e., October 1 through September 30)
- Applies to all non-Senior Executive Service (SES) and Senior Professional (SP) employees
- Transition must comply with all relevant bargaining obligations.

View OPM's website for more information on the [Performance Management Cycle](#).

Supervisor Role and Responsibilities

Lesson 5 of 21 – Supervisor Responsibilities

Supervisor Responsibilities Audio Transcript:

Under 5 USC chapter 43 and 5 CFR, federal supervisors are responsible for establishing clear performance standards, communicating performance expectations, monitoring and appraising employee performance, and providing opportunities for improvement or addressing unacceptable performance. Supervisors must also provide reasonable notice and opportunity for an employee to respond before taking adverse actions, such as reduction in grade or removal based on performance. Additional discussion on these responsibilities will be addressed later in this session.

Establishing Performance Standards

Supervisors must define and communicate clear performance standards and expectations for their employees, ensuring these align with the agency's mission and goals.

Ongoing Performance Monitoring

Supervisors are expected to regularly monitor and evaluate employees' performance throughout the appraisal period. This includes providing feedback, examples, and addressing concerns in real-time.

Providing Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs)

When an employee's performance is unacceptable, supervisors must provide a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). This plan should define specific improvement goals and provide a reasonable time frame to achieve them.

Taking Corrective Action

If an employee fails to meet the requirements of a PIP or their performance remains unacceptable, supervisors should take disciplinary action, which may include removal from federal service.

Adhering to Due Process

Before taking any adverse action based on poor performance, supervisors must follow the due process procedures outlined in Chapter 43. This includes providing:

- A reasonable time for the employee to respond, both orally and in writing.
- A written decision from the agency.

Offering Support and Assistance

Supervisors should document the assistance, assignments, and instructions provided to an employee during a PIP to help them improve their performance.

Additionally, click on the following links to see [5 USC chapter 43](#) (opens in a new tab) and [5 CFR](#).

Lesson 5 Knowledge Check: What are Supervisor Responsibilities?

The below provides further details about each supervisor responsibility.

- Establishing Performance Standards
 - Supervisors must define and communicate clear performance standards and expectations for their employees, ensuring these align with the agency's mission and goals.
- Taking Corrective Action
 - If an employee fails to meet the requirements of a PIP or their performance remains unacceptable, supervisors can take disciplinary action, which may include removal from federal service.
- Offering Support and Assistance
 - Supervisors should document the assistance, assignments, and instructions provided to an employee during a PIP to help them improve their performance.

Lesson 6 of 21 – Employee Performance Plans and Ratings

Employee Performance Plans and Ratings

- Employee performance plans must make clear distinctions among what is required to achieve performance at the various performance levels
- Federal employee performance ratings should be normalized and reflect individual contributions to organizational results
 - Employee performance plans should align to organizational goals
 - At least one critical element should clearly align to an organizational goal or Administration priority

Employee Performance Plans and Ratings Audio Transcript:

Over the years, performance ratings have become inflated, showing no meaningful distinctions in employee performance. Going forward, close attention will be paid by leaders and subsequently you, the supervisor, to ensure normalization of ratings that truly reflects the recognition and rewarding of high performing and contributing employees. To achieve this, employee performance plans must make clear distinctions among what is required to achieve performance at the various performance levels. Clear distinctions allows you, the supervisor, or the rating official to objectively and fairly assess the employee.

Normalizing Employee Performance Ratings

- Agencies must define performance at and beyond the “fully successful” level for each performance standard
 - “Fully Successful” represents the foundation of a high-performing organization, not its ceiling
 - This rating reflects that an employee has achieved all expectations for their position and has meaningfully contributed to the agency’s success in meeting organizational goals
- Ratings above “fully successful” must reflect performance that far exceeds the position’s responsibilities
 - “Outstanding” performance signifies work that consistently and demonstrably exceeds expectations, producing results of exceptional quality, innovation, or impact

- Ensure distribution of performance ratings align with the overall performance of the agency or relevant agency sub-component (i.e., agency and/or organization goals)
 - Individual performance ratings should be commensurate with organizational performance rating(s)
 - Proportionate number of employees should be rated at the highest performance levels

Normalizing Employee Performance Ratings Audio Transcript:

Every employee is expected to meet Fully Successful standards - delivering strong, dependable results that advance their organization's mission. "Fully Successful" represents the foundation of a high performing organization, not its ceiling. "Outstanding" performance, by contrast, signifies work that consistently and demonstrably exceeds expectations, producing results of exceptional quality, innovation, or impact.

Supervisory Critical Element

- Ensures subordinates' commitment to efficient work execution
- Models self-accountability and holds subordinates accountable for high-quality results
- Recognizes, supports, and rewards excellent work from employees supervised
- Timely and efficiently addresses poor and mediocre performance of employees supervised—including seeking appropriate action up to removal from the Federal service
- Takes appropriate action when employees report concerns of illegal conduct or waste, fraud, or abuse

Supervisory Critical Element Audio Transcript:

Specific to non-executive supervisors, the addition of a mandatory critical element ensures supervisors are diligent in cultivating a high-performing culture that includes holding subordinate employees accountable. One particular focus of this critical element is the taking of action to address poor performance with efficiency. As a supervisor, you must familiarize yourself with this critical element and ensure you are performing to set the performance standards.

Supervisory Training

- OPM's regulations require the systematic development of individuals in supervisory, managerial, and executive positions
 - Includes potential internal candidates for those positions
- Supervisors and managers must complete performance management training within one year of their appointment to a supervisory position
 - Complete refresher training at least every three years thereafter
- Supervisors are required to successfully complete a supervisory course on OPM's performance management reform guidance
 - Course covers mentoring, improving performance and productivity, conducting performance appraisal, and addressing unacceptable performance

Supervisory Training Audio Transcript:

Additionally, while the requirement for supervisory training remains unchanged, that is completion of supervisory training, which includes performance management within one year of appointment to a supervisory position, high emphasis must be placed on its importance and the adherence to this requirement. As a supervisor, you must be diligent in completing this training.

Lesson 7 of 21 – Accountability

Accountability Audio Transcript:

Supervisors are the link between leadership and frontline teams. Your accountability is foundational to effective supervision and ensures smooth operations, compliance, and team morale. Key elements of accountability include responsibility, transparency, and answerability. Modeling accountability builds trust and can lead to impacting results.

Accountability Key Elements

Supervisor ownership of actions, decisions, and outcomes while ensuring alignment to laws, regulations, agency policies, and agency mission.

- Responsibility – Carry out tasks and fulfill expectations reliably
- Transparency – Open and honest communication about actions and decisions

- Answerability – Explain and justify actions, decision, and outcomes
- Consequences – Outcomes – positive or negative – that result from actions or performance

Accountability Responsibilities

- Adhering to merit system principles ([U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board | Merit System Principles](#))(opens in a new tab)
- Employee performance management
- Time and attendance integrity
- Resources stewardship (budget, property, data, etc.)

Consequences of Poor Supervisor Accountability

- Operational inefficiency
- Poor performance leading to decreased productivity
- Financial Consequences
- Legal liabilities from negligence or noncompliance
- Decreased individual and team morale
- Decline in employee trust and engagement
- Lack of trust among leaders and stakeholders
- Minimal delivery of service to the public

Lesson 7 Knowledge Check: What are areas of Supervisor's Accountability?

Consequences of Poor Supervisor Accountability Audio Transcript:

Lack of accountability can lead to serious consequences at all levels. Poor supervisor accountability doesn't just affect one area, it ripples throughout the entire organization. Building a culture of accountability is essential for long term success.

The below provides further details about each supervisor accountability.

- Responsibility
 - Carry out tasks and fulfill expectations reliably
- Answerability
 - Explain and justify actions, decision, and outcomes
- Transparency
 - Open and honest communication about actions and decisions

Lesson 8 of 21 – Labor Relations

Key Elements to Labor-Management Relations Audio Transcript:

Effective labor management relations are essential to fostering an efficient, productive, and respectful federal workplace. These relationships are built on mutual trust, open communication, and a shared commitment to mission success. At the core of effective labor management relations is the recognition of employee rights and management responsibilities under the Federal Service Labor Management Relations statute. Agencies must engage with unions in good faith, honor collective bargaining agreements, and involve labor representatives in decisions that affect working conditions. Effective labor management relations also help prevent disputes, improve morale, and support efficient operations. This includes regular communication, early engagement on workplace changes, and a problem-solving approach to conflict resolution. When labor and management work together constructively, they create a more stable and responsive environment that benefits employees, agencies, and the public they serve.

Effective labor-management relations requires:

- Understanding your agency's rights and responsibilities under the law and collective bargaining agreement (CBA)
 - Become familiar with management's rights and the requirements of each negotiated agreement.
- Understanding labor unions' rights under the law and CBA
 - Labor unions also benefit from legal protections and a duty to fairly represent their bargaining unit employees.
- Building a relationship with your labor relations specialist
 - Engage early and often with your labor relations specialist to ensure you build an understanding of a unionized workplace and how best to manage relationships with your agency's unions.

Lesson 9 of 21 - Knowledge Check 1: Why Performance Management?

Why Performance Management Audio Transcript:

Building a high-performance culture is essential to both individual and organizational success throughout the federal government. Performance management is not just an HR function. It is a strategic tool that drives individual success, team effectiveness, and organizational performance. For the organization, it aligns individual and team goals with organizational and agency goals. Alignment of activities with broader results is one of the defining features of effective performance management in high performing organizations. For supervisors, it builds a culture of accountability and trust, which is also critical to cultivating high performance organizations. As a supervisor, you play a pivotal role in advancing the agency's mission through your leadership and accountability.

Knowledge Check Question

You have learned about Performance Management responsibilities for the organization and for supervisors in the preceding slides. Test your knowledge of these responsibilities by answering the below question.

Which of the following are supervisor-level responsibilities? Please select all that apply.

- Helps manage and motivate team members
- Aligns individual and organization goals to support mission
- Improves productivity and results
- Enables constructive feedback and development
- Supports employee growth and career development
- Monitors and evaluates employee performance
- Identifies and solves performance problems early
- Establishes standards which permit the accurate evaluation of job performance
- Builds a culture of accountability and trust

Lesson 10 of 21 – Knowledge Check 2: What is a Supervisor's Role?

What is a Supervisor's Role? Audio Transcript:

The performance appraisal process includes 5 stages, all in which you, the supervisor, play the most critical role. Supervisors begin by setting clear goals and expectations that align with the agency's mission. This ensures employees understand their responsibilities and how their work contributes to the broader objectives. Throughout the performance cycle, supervisors observe and evaluate performance, providing regular constructive feedback to keep employees on track and address issues early. Supervisors are responsible for coaching employees, identifying skills gaps, and supporting professional development through training, mentoring, or stretch assignments. At the end of the cycle, supervisors assess employee performance against established standards and document evaluations fairly and accurately, ensuring transparency and accountability. Finally, supervisors helped build a high-performance culture by recognizing and rewarding strong performance through formal awards, time off, and developmental opportunities.

View OPM's website for more information on the [Performance Management Cycle](#).

Knowledge Check Question

You have learned about a supervisor's role in the preceding slides. Please answer the following question about a supervisor's role during the performance appraisal cycle.

Which of the following tasks fall under the 'Planning & Monitoring' responsibilities of a supervisor? Please select all that apply.

- Building a high-performance team
- Setting clear goals and expectations
- Coaching, identifying, and supporting development
- Observing and evaluating performance
- Giving regular feedback
- Documenting performance fairly

Employee Performance

Lesson 11 of 21 – Performance Elements and Standards

Performance Elements vs Standards Audio Transcript:

This section summarizes the difference between a performance element and a performance standard. Take a look at the examples provided for reference.

Elements vs Standards

Below summarizes the difference between a performance element and performance standard.

Aspect	Performance Element	Performance Standard
What it Defines	The duty or responsibility	The expected level of performance
Focus	What is done	How well it is done
Usage	Identifies job requirements	Measures and evaluates performance of the elements
Example	Customer Service (Inquiries)	Fully Successful – Responds to customer inquiries within 10 business days Outstanding – Responds to customer inquiries within 2 business days with 95% satisfaction

SMART Goals

SMART Goals Audio Transcript:

SMART goals are a powerful tool for setting clear actionable objectives that drive performance and accountability. By using smart goals, supervisors can provide employees with direction and clarity, support meaningful progress, and ensure alignment with organizational outcomes. This approach also makes it easier to monitor performance and provide targeted feedback throughout the appraisal cycle.

Framework for writing requirements that are clear, actionable, and achievable.

Characteristic	Example
S – Specific: The goal should be clear and unambiguous	“Increase employee engagement” is vague. “Conduct quarterly employee engagement surveys and implement two new initiatives based on feedback” is specific.
M – Measurable: Include criteria to track progress and measure the outcome	“Improve customer satisfaction scores by 10% over the next six months.”
A – Achievable: The goal should be realistic and attainable, considering available resources and constraints	Setting a goal to double revenue in one month might not be achievable but increasing it by 15% over a quarter might be.
R – Relevant: The goal should align with broader strategic objectives or organizational goals	A goal to reduce paper usage is relevant if your organization is focused on sustainability.
T – Time-bound: There should be a clear deadline or timeframe	“Launch the new onboarding program by December 1st.”

Supervisor Key Strategies

- Observe and assess employee performance regularly
- Provide timely and constructive feedback on performance
- Encourage employees to share their input and ideas
- Consider any obstacles employees may face or have overcome
- Foster a culture that rewards successful performance
- Offer coaching and assistance
- Clarify and reinforce expectations and accountabilities
- Address any performance issues promptly and effectively

Supervisor Key Strategies Audio Transcript:

As a supervisor, it is essential to understand your role in supporting employee performance effectively. Modeling the desired and expected behavior is an effective way to motivate employees to perform at their best. Here are a few strategies to enable you to be the most effective in your role.

Lesson 12 of 21 – Identifying and Addressing Poor Performance

Indicators of Poor Performance Audio Transcript:

Supervisors must remain attentive to signs of inadequate employee performance. Indicators of poor performance include substandard work or work products, neglect of responsibilities, and failure to follow established protocols and processes.

What are some Indicators of Poor Performance?

Please select all that apply.

- Inability to meet deadlines or process work promptly
- Receives positive satisfaction feedback on surveys
- Work outputs that necessitate frequent review, oversight, and correction
- Production of inaccurate or substandard work products
- Failure to adhere to established procedures and protocols when completing tasks
- Preference for routine tasks while neglecting more complex responsibilities
- Consistently delivers high quality work products

Addressing Poor Performance Audio Transcript:

As a supervisor, it is imperative you address performance issues swiftly. When addressing poor performance, supervisors must ensure ongoing open communication focused on improvement.

Addressing Poor Performance

Involves a structured approach for the process of identifying and resolving issues where an employee's work does not meet the expected standards or responsibilities.

Identify the Issue & Communicate Concerns Clearly

- Track specific incidents, dates/times, and impact
- Engage in a performance conversation; Counseling should occur promptly and frequently, rather than waiting for year-end appraisals

Initiate Performance Improvement Plan

- If counseling does not lead to improvement, a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) must be provided
- Consult with human resources and general counsel

Monitor and Document Progress & Take Action Based on Results

- Federal regulations and Union contracts outline specific procedures for addressing performance issues
- Employees who do not meet performance standards may face consequences

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

1. Delaying action or avoiding difficult conversations can exacerbate performance issues and make resolution more challenging
2. Not distinguishing between performance and conduct can lead to inappropriate responses and hinder effective management
3. Inconsistent application of standards undermines fairness and can create confusion among team members
4. Failing to document issues or the support provided can result in a lack of accountability and missed opportunities for improvement

Common Pitfalls Audio Transcript:

As a supervisor, it is imperative you address performance issues swiftly. Early, clear, and consistent action is essential. Ongoing and open communication helps to identify and address shortcomings before they become issues that require action.

Lesson 13 of 21 – Tools for Preventing and Addressing Poor Performance

Establish Clear Expectations

Performance Plans

- Should be drafted at the beginning of the appraisal period and discussed with the employee in advance

- Should set clear performance goals and expectations that align employee efforts with organizational goals, agency mission, and presidential policies and priorities
- Should permit accurate evaluation of job performance based on objective criteria

Performance Plans Audio Transcript:

Employee performance plans should be written as clearly and specifically as possible to provide a firm benchmark towards which employees must aim their performance. Plans must also permit the accurate evaluation of job performance on the basis of objective criteria.

Performance Elements

- Should be measurable, understandable, verifiable, and achievable
 - Elements inform employees of their responsibilities
 - Standards indicate the expected level of performance

Steps to Prevent Poor Performance

1. Communicate effectively regarding job performance
2. Address issues early and take necessary actions
3. Clarify how performance standards apply to specific job tasks
4. Provide feedback and examples throughout the appraisal period
5. Schedule regular performance check-ins monthly or quarterly
6. Maintain frequent communication for immediate questions or concerns

Steps to Prevent Poor Performance Audio Transcript:

Effective supervision begins with clear, consistent communication about job performance. Supervisors play a critical role in setting expectations and ensuring employees understand how performance standards apply to their specific duties. Addressing performance issues early before they escalate is essential to maintaining a productive and accountable workforce. Throughout the appraisal period, supervisors should provide regular constructive feedback using specific examples to reinforce expectations and guide improvement. This feedback should not be limited to formal reviews. Instead, it should be part of an ongoing dialogue. Scheduling monthly or quarterly performance check-ins helps keep employees aligned with goals and

provides opportunities to recognize progress or course correct as needed. In addition, maintaining open lines of communication ensures employees feel supported and can raise questions or concerns in real time. By fostering a culture of transparency, accountability, and support, supervisors can drive performance and contribute to a high functioning federal workforce.

Probationary Periods

Agencies should consider an employee's performance and conduct, needs and interests of the agency, organizational goals of the agency and Government, and then determine whether continued employment advances the efficiency of the service.

- Probationary and trial periods are used to evaluate employees' fitness and whether their continuation of employment advances the public interest.
- No later than 30 days before the end of the probationary period, agencies must certify an employee for continued employment beyond the probationary or trial period.
- Failure to make this certification will result in the employee's termination and removal from the federal service.

Probationary Periods Audio Transcript:

Federal agencies have a responsibility to ensure that every employment decision supports the efficiency of the service and aligns with the broader goals of the agency and the government. When evaluating an employee, agencies must consider both performance and conduct, as well as the needs and interests of the organization. Probationary and trial periods serve as critical evaluation windows to determine whether an employee is fit for continued federal service. These periods allow supervisors to assess whether the individual's performance and behavior advance the public interest and contribute to the agency's mission. At the conclusion of the probationary or trial period, agencies are required to make a formal certification regarding the employee's continued employment. If the supervisor cannot affirmatively certify that the employee meets the necessary standards, the individual must be separated from federal service. This process ensures that only those who demonstrate the capability and commitment to serve effectively are retained.

Performance-Based Actions

Performance Based Actions Audio Transcript:

Under 5 USC 4303, federal agencies have the authority to take action against employees whose performance is deemed unacceptable in one or more critical elements of their performance plan. This statute provides a structured fair process for holding employees accountable while offering them a genuine opportunity to improve. Before any action is taken, the employee must be given a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate acceptable performance, typically through a performance improvement plan, lasting 30 business days. The PIP outlines specific deficiencies, expectations for improvement and available support. If the employee improves during the PIP but later regresses, the agency may proceed with action without issuing a second PIP. If the employee fails to improve, steps may be taken to reassign, demote, or remove the employee from federal service. This process ensures that performance issues are addressed consistently, transparently, and in alignment with merit system principles. It is important to note that while chapter 43 is exclusively for addressing poor performance, Chapter 75, which will be addressed soon, can be used for both conduct and performance issues.

[5 U.S.C. 4303](#)[\(opens in a new tab\)](#) covers actions based on unacceptable performance:

- Allows supervisors and managers to hold employees accountable for poor performance based on unacceptable performance on one or more critical elements in their performance plans
- The employee must be given a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate acceptable performance, typically 30 business days under a performance improvement plan (PIP)
- If an employee improves his or her performance during a PIP but later returns to an unacceptable level, the supervisor or manager may not need to issue a second PIP
- If an employee does not improve his or her performance, agencies may reassign, demote, or remove the employee

Note: Additional ways to address performance, including those that do not require a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), will be addressed later in the training.

Performance Improvement Plans (PIP)

A structured plan to help employees improve. Enables supervisors to provide employees with goals, timelines, and assistance for employees to improve their unacceptable performance on a critical job element.

PIP Should Include:

- Specific performance concerns
- Clear performance goals
- Timeline for improvement
- Resources offered
- Consequences if no improvement

PIP Used When:

- Patterns of underperformance continue
- Informal feedback has not worked

Performance Improvement Plans (PIP) Audio Transcript:

A performance improvement plan or PIP is a structured tool designed to help employees address and overcome unacceptable performance in a critical job element. It provides supervisors with a formal framework to communicate expectations and support improvement efforts. The PIP outlines specific performance concerns, sets clear and measurable goals, and establishes a defined timeline for improvement. It also identifies the resources and assistance available to the employee, such as training, mentoring, or regular check-ins. Importantly, the plan communicates the consequences if performance does not improve within the designated time frame. A PIP is typically used when patterns of underperformance persist, and informal feedback has not led to meaningful change. It ensures transparency, fairness, and accountability while giving employees a genuine opportunity to succeed.

Lesson 14 of 21 – Conduct and Discipline

Employee Misconduct

Misconduct is defined as behavior that is improper or unlawful, violating established standards of conduct, agency policies, or legal regulations.

- Examples of Employee Misconduct include:
 - Absence Without Leave (AWOL)
 - Failure to Work Scheduled Hours
 - Failure to Follow Leave Request Procedures
 - Failure to Comply with Supervisory Instructions
 - Disrespectful Behavior
 - Violations of Agency Policy (e.g., misuse of government resources and violating telework requirements)
 - Undermining or intentionally delaying leadership priorities

Employee Misconduct Audio Transcript:

Employee misconduct refers to inappropriate or unlawful behavior that violates workplace rules, policies, or ethical standards. It is distinct from poor performance, which relates to an employee's failure to meet job expectations. Supervisors through consultation with and assistance from human resources and legal counsel should address misconduct promptly and fairly in accordance with agency policy regulations and applicable laws. Discipline should be applied consistently and proportionately. It is also critical that supervisors maintain documentation of all infractions.

Formal and Informal Disciplinary Actions

The primary goal of disciplinary actions, also known as adverse actions, is to hold an employee accountable for behavior detrimental to the efficiency of the service.

Formal Actions

- Reprimands
- Suspension from duty (i.e., unpaid, forced leave)
- Demotion (reduction in grade or pay)
- Termination

Informal Actions

- Verbal and written counseling
- Suspension or termination of telework privileges
- Suspension or termination of leave for fitness or wellness activities

Formal and Informal Disciplinary Actions Audio Transcript:

The primary goal of disciplinary actions, also known as adverse actions, is to hold an employee accountable for their behavior detrimental to the efficiency of service. These actions are not punitive in nature but corrective, aiming to reinforce standards of conduct and protect the integrity of the workplace. By applying measures appropriately and consistently, supervisors can address misconduct effectively while ensuring fairness and due process.

Adverse Actions

Whereas 5 U.S.C. Chapter 43 Adverse Actions are specific to performance, [5 U.S.C Chapter 75 \(opens in a new tab\)](#) Adverse Actions cover conduct and/or performance related adverse actions.

- Agencies may take adverse action under Chapter 75 procedures for unacceptable employee performance or conduct
 - Requires advance notice and an opportunity for the employee to respond
 - Agency not required to provide a performance improvement period
 - No specific standard of performance needs to be established before taking adverse action for poor performance
 - Agency must demonstrate its performance measurement is accurate and reasonable by preponderance of the evidence

[Download the document for further information on the similarities and differences of 5 CFR Parts 432 and 752 Performance-Based Actions \(under Chapters 43 and 75 of Title 5\).](#)

Adverse Actions Audio Transcript:

Under 5 USC Chapter 75, federal agencies are authorized to take adverse actions such as suspension, demotion, or removal based on unacceptable performance or misconduct. These procedures are designed to protect both

the efficiency of the service and the due process rights of employees. When proceeding under Chapter 75, agencies must provide the employee with advance written notice of the proposed action and an opportunity to respond. However, unlike performance-based actions under Chapter 43, agencies are not required to offer performance improvement plan period (PIP) before initiating action. There is also no requirement to establish a specific performance standard in advance. Instead, the agency must demonstrate that its performance expectations were reasonable and clearly communicated and that the employee failed to meet them. The burden of proof rests with the agency, which must support its decision by a preponderance of the evidence, meaning it is more likely than not that the action was justified. This framework ensures that adverse actions are both fair and grounded in sound management judgment.

Douglas Factors

Criteria used to determine appropriate disciplinary penalties for employees, especially in the cases of misconduct. Factors used to ensure penalties are fair, consistent, and legally defensible.

- Nature & seriousness of the offense
- Employee's job level and type of employment
- Past disciplinary record
- Past work record
- Ability to perform in the future
- Consistency with other penalties
- Consistency with an agency's Table of Penalties
- Notoriety
- Clarity of notice
- Potential for rehabilitation
- Mitigating circumstances
- Adequacy of alternative sanctions

Douglas Factors Audio Transcript:

The Merit Systems Protection Board has established specific criteria that supervisors must consider when taking an adverse action. Agencies can take

an adverse action for performance reasons under Chapter 75. As a supervisor, you should familiarize yourself with the Douglas factors and consult with your human resources and general counsel team as needed.

Differentiating Performance and Conduct Issues

Differentiating Performance and Conduct Issues Audio Transcript:

Understanding the distinction between performance and conduct issues is essential for effective federal workforce management. Performance issues relate to an employee's ability to meet the established expectations of their position. This includes the quality, quantity, and timeliness of their work. When an employee is trying but failing to meet job standards, it is typically addressed through performance management processes such as feedback, coaching, or performance improvement plan. In contrast, conduct issues involve behavioral problems or violations of workplace rules such as insubordination, misuse of government resources, or unprofessional behavior. These are addressed through disciplinary or adverse action procedures, often under 5 USC Chapter 75. While both can impact the efficiency of the service, the key difference lies in intent in behavior. Performance issues stem from inability, while conduct issues stem from unwillingness or misconduct. Properly identifying the nature of the issue ensures the agency applies the correct procedures and maintains fairness and accountability.

Addressing Poor Performance

Engage your human resources team for advice on how to address situations where poor performance and misconduct arise in your work unit.

The below provides further information on addressing performance and conduct issues.

- Understanding the Nature of the Issues
 - Performance issues typically involve the quality, quantity, or timeliness of work produced by an employee, whereas misconduct issues relate to violations of workplace rules, regulations or inappropriate behavior.
- Identifying the Root Cause

- Performance problems may stem from a lack of skills, knowledge, or proper resources, while misconduct often involves deliberate actions or choices that contravene established protocols and expectations.
- Appropriate Response and Remedies
 - Addressing performance issues may involve training, mentoring, or reassigning tasks, while handling misconduct might require disciplinary actions such as warnings, suspensions, or even termination, depending on the severity of the behavior.

Lesson 15 of 21 – Rewarding High Performance

Rewarding High Performance Audio Transcript:

Recognizing and rewarding high performers is crucial for maintaining motivation and encouraging excellence in any organization. The primary types of incentives for exceeding expectations and contributing to team success are:

- Annual performance awards, which are tied to measurable achievements and recognize performance over the entire performance appraisal period;
- Individual awards, which are tied to specific accomplishments and can be granted anytime during the appraisal period;
- Organizational awards, which are for contributions that highlight alignment with the organization's goals; and
- Informal praise and recognition, such as verbal acknowledgments and thank you notes, which help foster a positive work environment.
- Understanding these incentives is essential for creating a culture of appreciation in high performance.

Outstanding performance should be identified and rewarded in real time throughout the year, not just during scheduled progress reviews. Below you can learn more about the primary types of incentives for exceeding expectations and contributing to team success:

Annual Recognition for High Performance

- Tied to measurable achievements

- Covers a full performance appraisal cycle

Individual Contribution

- Monetary
- Tied to specific accomplishments
- Granted at any time during the year

Organizational

- Contribution which highlight alignment with organizational goals
- May be given to groups and teams

Informal Praise and Recognition

- Non-Monetary
- Gesture of appreciation

Annual Recognition for High Performance

Annual Recognition for High Performance Audio Transcript:

Granted, at the end of an established appraisal period, performance ratings and associated award are based on individual assessments during the appraisal period and are typically conducted at the end of the calendar year.

Quality step increases are generally effective as soon as practicable after approved, usually the next pay period, and as close as practicable to the outstanding rating of record with possible consideration of the effective date of an approved regular step increase or promotion.

The below you can find further details on the different recognition methods for high performance.

- Monetary awards calculated as a percentage of the employee's salary
 - A majority of the award pool should be awarded to the highest performers.
- Time off
 - Up to 40 hours.
- Quality Step Increases
 - Available only for “outstanding” ratings and with limited availability.

To support a high-performance workplace culture, only high performers should be rewarded with meaningful bonuses and awards.

Individual Contribution Awards

Lesson 15 - Individual Contribution Awards Audio Transcript:

Agencies and their organizations offer various awards to recognize individual contributions. These awards celebrate specific achievements and can be given at any time during the fiscal year, as long as the process is fair and within budget.

Organizations may:

- Offer awards and recognition programs tailored to individual contributions recognizing specific accomplishments with documented justification.
- Grant awards at any time during the fiscal year, provided the process is equitable and within budget

The following provides further information about different incentives available to reward individual employees for exceptional performance.

- Special Act
 - Real-time award, not connected to the performance appraisal, that recognizes a special act or service in the public interest related to official employment or a suggestion, invention, or superior accomplishment that contributes to the efficiency of Government operations.
- On the Spot Cash
 - Designed to provide quick feedback and special monetary recognition to employees who make extra efforts to perform duties or special assignments in an exemplary manner. They should be granted within a reasonable time frame after the occurrence of the special act or service.
- Time Off
 - A time-off award is time off from duty, without loss of pay or charge to leave. It is granted to a federal employee as a form of incentive or recognition for exceptional work.

Organizational and Team-Level Awards

Organizational and Team-Level Awards Audio Transcript:

Programs such as group incentives and gaining goal sharing foster collaboration, align team efforts with organizational goals and reinforce a culture of shared success.

Group Incentive Program

- Delivers awards to groups of employees who meet or exceed pre-established levels of organizational performance
- Awards may be in the form of cash payments, time-off, and/or informal recognition
- Can cover groups as large as the entire agency or as small as a work unit or team

Gainsharing and Goalsharing

- Gainsharing allows employees to share in an award based on productivity gains or savings beyond a predetermined baseline
- Gainsharing programs are self-funding vs Goalsharing which is funded through an agency's award budget

Informal Recognition

Recognizing and rewarding performance can be done in various ways, both formally and informally. Examples of Informal Recognition, include:

- Leaving a note on a colleague's desk to commend them for their excellent work.
- Offering praise in a workplace chat.
- Expressing gratitude with a simple "thank you."
- Sending a congratulatory email to acknowledge significant achievements.

Informal Recognition Audio Transcript:

For many employees, a show of appreciation, even through a simple thank you, can go a long way. Not every employee is motivated by formal recognition such as money. For many, it is about acknowledging their efforts and showing

gratitude for all they offer. Informal recognition can be just as impacting as formal recognition.

Lesson 16 of 21 – Knowledge Check 3: What is the Difference between Performance Elements vs. Performance Standards?

Performance Elements and Performance Standards Audio Transcript:

A performance element is a component of an employee's performance plan that identifies what the employee is expected to do. Performance elements can be critical, non-critical, or additional.

A critical element is a work assignment or responsibility of such importance that unacceptable performance in that element would automatically result in an overall unacceptable rating.

A non-critical element is a component of an employee's job that is important, but not essential to determining overall job performance. Unlike critical elements, unacceptable performance in a non-critical element does not automatically result in an overall unacceptable rating.

An additional element is a type of performance element that is used for developmental or recognition purposes, but does not impact the summary performance rating.

Through performance elements, agencies and supervisors hold employees accountable for work assignments and responsibilities.

Performance standards describe the level of performance required to earn a specific rating and tells an employee how well they must perform the element. Performance standards should be measurable, understandable, verifiable, and achievable. Again, it must be noted that unacceptable performance in a critical element impacts a summary rating and that it results in an automatic, unacceptable rating.

Knowledge Check Question

Your employee would like to know the definition of a Critical Element. Please identify the correct definition.

- A work assignment or responsibility of such importance that unacceptable performance in that element would automatically result in an overall “Unacceptable” rating.
- A component of an employee’s job that is important but not essential to determining overall job performance.
- A type of performance element that is used for developmental or recognition purposes.

Lesson 17 of 21 – Knowledge Check 4: What is Poor Performance?

Poor performance is a pattern of underachievement that affects job outcomes.

What is Poor Performance? Audio Transcript:

Poor performance occurs when an employee consistently fails to meet the expected standards of their role as identified through critical elements. Examples include missed deadlines and poor time management, both of which may be caused by a lack of skills or unclear expectations.

Knowledge Check Question

The following list includes Common Causes of Poor Performance and Examples of Poor Performance. Can you identify the Examples of Poor Performance? Please select all that apply.

- Missed deadlines
- Lack of skills or training
- Unclear expectations
- Low quality of work
- Low engagement or motivation
- Poor fit for the role
- Not meeting goals
- Ineffective communication or teamwork
- External factors

Lesson 18 of 21 – Knowledge Check 5: Conduct and Discipline

Question 1 of 2

What is the primary purpose of the standardized appraisal cycle in federal performance management?

- To eliminate the need for supervisor accountability.
- To increase the frequency of employee evaluations.
- To prioritize employee rewards over performance evaluation.
- To ensure consistency and fairness in evaluating employee performance.

Question 2 of 2

What is the primary purpose of a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)?

- To immediately terminate employees who fail to meet performance standards.
- To set unattainable goals to justify employee reassignment or demotion.
- To provide employees with structured goals, timelines, and resources to improve unacceptable performance.
- To evaluate an employee's fitness for continued employment during their probationary period.

Conclusion

Lesson 19 of 21 – Summary

This course focused on equipping you with the tools and knowledge needed to effectively lead, develop, and evaluate your teams. By strengthening your supervisory skills and accountability, performance management helps create a culture of continuous improvement, employee engagement, and mission success across the federal workforce. The course covered how to:

1. Cultivate a culture of high performance and accountability
2. Ensure performance appraisals are objective and job-related for fairness and compliance
3. Address poor performance promptly and provide clear expectations with regular feedback
4. Recognize high performance to boost motivation and workplace culture effectively
5. Understand management and union rights to foster collaboration and workplace harmony
6. Apply these principles to enhance your effectiveness as a federal supervisor

Course Summary Audio Transcript:

In summary, this course focused on equipping you with the tools and knowledge needed to effectively lead, develop, and evaluate your teams. This course emphasized the performance management cycle from setting clear expectations and aligning individual goals with agency mission. To providing ongoing feedback and conducting fair meaningful appraisals. You've learned how to distinguish between performance and conduct issues, addressing underperformance through structured interventions like performance improvement plans and recognizing high performance, the rewards and incentives. This course also reinforced the importance of documentation, communication, and compliance with federal regulations such as 5 CFR, Part 430, and 432. By strengthening your supervisory skills and accountability, performance management helps create a culture of continuous improvement, employee engagement, and mission success across the federal workforce. Thank you for your participation.

Lesson 20 of 21 – Quiz

Question 1 of 15

What is the primary purpose of a performance plan in the workplace?

- To ensure employees receive regular feedback and examples throughout the appraisal period.
- To set clear performance goals and expectations that align employee efforts with organizational goals and priorities.
- To evaluate employees' fitness for continued employment during probationary periods.
- To provide employees with a structured plan for improving unacceptable performance.

Question 2 of 15

Which of the following is the primary way to recognize an employee who has far exceeded expectations and contributed to organizational success over the course of an entire appraisal period?

- Rating-based performance award
- Mandatory team-building exercises
- Quarterly performance reviews
- Special act award

Question 3 of 15

What is the primary goal of disciplinary actions in the workplace?

- To improve employee morale through positive reinforcement.
- To reward employees for exceptional performance.
- To hold employees accountable for behavior detrimental to the efficiency of the service.
- To establish a competitive environment among employees.

Question 4 of 15

What is the first step in the structured process for addressing poor performance?

- Identify the issue and communicate concerns clearly.
- Initiate a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP).
- Monitor and document progress.
- Consult with human resources and general counsel.

Question 5 of 15

What is the definition of a Critical Element in performance appraisals?

- A work assignment or responsibility of such importance that unacceptable performance in that element would automatically result in an overall 'Unacceptable' rating.
- A type of performance element that is used for developmental or recognition purposes.
- A task assigned to an employee that is optional and does not impact their performance evaluation.
- A component of an employee's job that is important but not essential to determining overall job performance.

Question 6 of 15

Employee performance plans must align to _____ and define performance beyond the 'fully successful' level for each performance standard.

Question 7 of 15

The standardized performance appraisal cycle required by OPM follows the _____ cycle, which runs from October 1 through September 30.

Question 8 of 15

What is the primary purpose of a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)?

- To provide employees with additional training opportunities unrelated to their performance.
- To immediately terminate an employee for poor performance.
- To document an employee's past performance issues for future reference.
- To define specific improvement goals and provide a reasonable time frame for improvement.

Question 9 of 15

What is the best approach to address poor performance in a team setting?

- Ignore the issue and hope the employee improves on their own.
- Publicly criticize the employee to set an example for others.
- Provide clear expectations and regular feedback to the employee.
- Assign the employee additional tasks to encourage better performance.

Question 10 of 15

What is the primary purpose of the standardized appraisal cycle in federal performance management?

- To ensure employees receive promotions annually.
- To eliminate the need for individual performance reviews.
- To replace collaboration with unions in performance management.
- To provide a consistent framework for evaluating employee performance.

Question 11 of 15

Which of the following is a key element of accountability in supervisory roles?

- Delegation
- Efficiency
- Transparency
- Innovation

Question 12 of 15

What is the most effective way for federal supervisors to establish clear performance expectations for employees?

- Focus solely on the supervisor's expectations without employee input.
- Rely on annual performance reviews to communicate expectations.
- Provide general guidelines and allow employees to interpret them.
- Define specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals.

Question 13 of 15

Which of the following is a key component of the performance management cycle?

- Setting clear expectations for employees.
- Conducting weekly team-building exercises.
- Implementing a flexible work schedule.
- Providing employees with annual bonuses.

Question 14 of 15

Which of the following is an example of a SMART goal?

- Reduce paper usage in the office.
- Improve employee morale.
- Increase customer satisfaction scores by 10% within the next six months.
- Double revenue within one week.

Question 15 of 15

Which of the following tasks fall under the 'Planning & Monitoring' responsibilities of a supervisor? Please select all that apply.

- Building a high-performance team
- Setting clear goals and expectations
- Coaching, identifying, and supporting development
- Observing and evaluating performance
- Giving regular feedback
- Documenting performance fairly

Lesson 21 of 21 – Completed

Additional information and resources can be found in [OPM's Performance Management Toolkit](#).