

PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (PDP)

REFERENCE GUIDE

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WHAT IS THE PDP?

The Performance Development Program (PDP) is Michigan State University's performance appraisal program for support staff employees. Its intent is to help employees understand their roles, continue to learn, and participate in the improvement of MSU. The substance of the program is its basis of trust in employees and communication between employees and supervisors – not in program paperwork.

In developing this program, Human Resources examined the underlying reasons why the former appraisal systems were not working. This involved reconsidering traditional belief systems about performance appraisal, how employees work, and what inspires employees. As a result, the PDP more clearly emphasizes the following philosophical foundation:

- MSU employees want to work, do a good job, and take responsibility.
- MSU employees should be allowed to do the jobs they are capable of doing by removing obstacles to good work.
- Motivation to contribute and achieve requires a sense of purpose and recognition for such contributions.

The objectives of the Performance Development Program are to:

Enhance communication between an employee and supervisor. Dialogue between an employee and supervisor should be continuous and include coaching, guiding, and clarification of job responsibilities in the context of larger organizational goals.

Develop employees. An employee's development may be related to either current or future positions, and should be continuous to ensure that MSU is able to respond to its quickly changing environment.

Support continuous quality improvement throughout the organization.

The PDP process emphasizes leading and empowering employees rather than controlling and documenting. The PDP form is designed to guide communications regarding performance and development by providing an outline for important discussion points. Employees and supervisors are partners in this discussion.

WHAT THE PDP IS NOT

The PDP is not a traditional performance appraisal program that uses numeric ratings as a means of performance feedback. There is evidence that these ratings can become barriers to desired open communication, so they have been eliminated. This places a greater responsibility on both employees and supervisors to thoughtfully consider the PDP agenda items and share substantive feedback, as opposed to communicating via ratings.

The PDP also differs from traditional programs in that written communication is minimized and limited information is placed in the central personnel file. This eliminates another barrier to open communication – i.e., fear of written evaluation details being contained in the central file. However, in those situations where an employee does not meet minimum expectations, performance information will be included in the central personnel file.

GETTING STARTED

Typically, the supervisor will schedule an annual performance review discussion with the employee. If this is delayed, employees are encouraged to initiate the meeting. Employees can find out their review month by asking their supervisor or contacting Human Resources.

Both the employee and supervisor should prepare for the meeting by making notes about specific points they want to discuss for each item on the PDP agenda – e.g., accomplishments, ideas for improvement, development goals. These points should not be “news” to either the employee or supervisor since dialogue about performance should be taking place throughout the year.

USING THE PDP – WHAT YOU WILL TALK ABOUT

During the PDP meeting, you will discuss the topics listed on the PDP agenda (see the PDP form). Open, two-way communication is important. Both the employee and supervisor should be sure to ask questions to clarify points they do not completely understand.

PDP AGENDA

DISCUSS THE EMPLOYEE’S PERFORMANCE ON PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES/PRIORITIES IN THE PAST YEAR.

During the annual PDP discussion, the employee’s effectiveness in performing his/her responsibilities and addressing priorities should be thoroughly discussed. Then, the responsibilities /priorities should be updated as needed for the coming year, or confirmed as unchanged. Job responsibilities and priorities may also change throughout the year, and should be discussed as they change.

Employees may request a written summary of their responsibilities and priorities. These may be provided in a variety of formats such as annual planning documents, position description, posting text, etc. Since employees are most familiar with their jobs, another alternative is to have the employee prepare a draft summary of responsibilities. This information does not need to be entered on the PDP form.

DISCUSS THE EMPLOYEE’S STRENGTHS/AREAS FOR GROWTH IN BEHAVIORAL COMPETENCIES.

This discussion point focuses on how an employee does the job rather than on what the job responsibilities are. Behavioral competencies are included on the back of the PDP form and serve as initiators for discussion. They include organizational success factors and individual behaviors that are important to effective work performance. These competencies apply to all jobs, though the manner in which they apply will vary by job. Discussing how the various competencies can be displayed in different jobs can be an important part of the discussion and may help employees and supervisors broaden their view of jobs at all levels.

DISCUSS BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE WORK PERFORMANCE AND JOB SATISFACTION.

Employees know their jobs better than anyone and consequently are in the best position to identify barriers that limit their ability to perform effectively. Employees should describe these barriers (e.g., resources, systems, or processes surrounding their work) to their supervisors along with possible ways of eliminating them.

Employees can also identify their satisfaction in performing various duties, which provides an opportunity to explore options for matching assignments to particular employee strengths and areas of interest.

DISCUSS POSSIBLE WORK PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS.

Increasing service demands have necessitated greater and greater employee effort. In many cases, however, the best way to respond to increasing demands is to completely rethink the process by which a service is delivered. Once again, since employees are closest to the work and those being served, they are the best source of ideas on how processes can be improved. Questions to answer in discussing process improvements include:

- Who is being served by the process and what do they want?
- How can the process be improved?
- Can steps be simplified or consolidated?

- Can work that does not add value to the unit mission be eliminated?
- Can people be more broadly trained to provide more effective service?
- Is there redundant work occurring – e.g., excessive levels of review?

DISCUSS THE EMPLOYEE’S DEVELOPMENT (OVER THE PAST YEAR, FUTURE DEVELOPMENT NEEDS FOR THE CURRENT JOB, AND LONG-TERM CAREER GOALS AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS TO ACHIEVE THEM).

Employees must continually improve existing skills and develop new ones to ensure continued effectiveness. In this part of the discussion, employees and supervisors can define a specific course of action to:

- enhance current skills,
- develop new skills,
- broaden knowledge, or
- improve a deficient area.

Development is a joint responsibility of employees and supervisors. Supervisors have the greatest responsibility to assist with development when it is required for an employee’s current position. Employees are primarily responsible for development that advances their careers.

The career development portion of this discussion provides an important opportunity for the supervisor to give an honest assessment of the employee’s preparedness for desired career growth, as well as development the supervisor believes would help the employee in attaining his/her goals. Considering the limited promotional opportunities currently available, supervisors may want to discuss alternative career routes. If additional career planning support is needed, the supervisor can refer the employee to Human Resources (3-3720) for more information about various resources available on campus.

Financial support for credit and noncredit educational programs is available to most employees through the Educational Assistance Program. For more information on this program, contact Human Resource Development at 5-0183.

DISCUSS WHETHER THE EMPLOYEE CONTINUES TO GROW TO MEET FUTURE NEEDS AND DEMANDS OF A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT.

This agenda item relates directly to the employee development item above, and is intended to address specifically the adequacy of the employee’s development and response to changing work demands. Clear feedback on this question is crucial to both the employee’s and MSU’s success. Failure to meet this challenge can result in skill obsolescence and organizational mediocrity. This discussion might focus on:

- What growth the employee has accomplished and how that has supported the unit’s needs.
- The unit’s long-term plans and how the employee will need to contribute to these goals, along with related development needs.
- How well the employee responds to change.

DISCUSS THE EMPLOYEE’S FEEDBACK/CONSTRUCTIVE SUGGESTIONS FOR THE SUPERVISOR.

It is important for the employee to have an opportunity to give feedback about the guidance and support provided by the supervisor and to make constructive suggestions that will enable the employee to do a better job. It is also a chance for an employee to share positive comments about the supervisor’s support that have been helpful.

DISCUSS ANYTHING ELSE THE EMPLOYEE OR SUPERVISOR WOULD LIKE TO ADDRESS.

Too often supervisors and employees have little time together to talk about many work-related matters, concerns, or interests. This item provides an opportunity to bring up issues needing discussion but for which time has not been available.

EMPLOYEE/SUPERVISOR COMMENTS

Space is provided for both employees and supervisors to make written comments. These may be complimentary remarks, notes of special accomplishments, areas where improvement is needed, or other evaluative statements. Additional comments may be documented on the PDP II form.

Supervisors are encouraged to recognize high levels of performance in the comments section, the PDP II, or through more formal letters of recognition.

DETERMINING WHETHER EMPLOYEES MEET OR EXCEED EXPECTATIONS

Supervisors are to indicate whether, overall, the employee meets or exceeds the minimum expectations of his/her current position. This assessment should take into consideration total performance. Weaknesses in a few aspects of a job may or may not result in an employee not meeting expectations. It will depend on the significance of the factor to the job and the magnitude of the deficiency. To discuss specific situations, call the Compensation Office at 3-3720.

Most employees will meet expectations; some, however, will not. For employees who do not meet minimum expectations, a more formal and detailed Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) is needed, as well as follow-up discussions and another review within 90 days of the PDP discussion date. This special process is intended to provide clear information on required improvements and determine the support that will be provided to assist the employee to improve. PIP forms are available through Human Resources. For assistance, call Human Resources at 3-3720.

Performance development discussions and Performance Improvement Plans are not replacements for the disciplinary process, which requires different types of documentation and counseling.

UPON COMPLETION OF THE PDP DISCUSSION

Upon completion of the PDP discussion, the department should send the signed original form to Human Resources. Periodically, Human Resources will send follow-up overdue reports to departments to ensure that all employees are having performance/development discussions. Since there is very little evaluative content in the PDP form, departments are, as in the past, encouraged to call employing departments for reference information when hiring.

APPRAISAL SCHEDULE

Performance development discussions for regular employees are completed before the end of the probationary period and on an annual basis, unless more frequent reviews are deemed necessary by the department. Typically, annual performance development discussions are scheduled for an employee's anniversary month. Departments may change the evaluation month by contacting Human Resources (3-3720) if alternate timing allows a more effective performance development discussion.

ACCESSING PDP FORMS

PDP forms that are due the following month are accessible in the Reminder of Dates section under the Manager Self Service tab in the Enterprise Business System (EBS). Performance Improvement Plan forms will also be accessible in the Reminder of Dates section when an employee does not meet minimum expectations on the PDP.

ALTERNATIVE AND CUSTOMIZED PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Many different administrative styles, work styles, and types of work exist within MSU's numerous departments. Some departments may choose to develop an alternative performance development program customized to their particular needs. Such programs are to be approved by Human Resources. If alternative approaches are approved, the form(s) should be attached to the PDP form when submitted to Human Resources.

SUPERVISOR'S ROLE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The PDP process is conducted by an employee's immediate supervisor, who usually has primary responsibility for the employee's hiring, development, assignment of work, etc. If such a supervisory relationship does not exist, the department administrator should assign the responsibility for the PDP process to the administrator/supervisor who is most knowledgeable about the employee's job duties and performance.

In cases where a person works for a group of individuals, one person should be designated as the official supervisor. That person should obtain input from the others for whom the employee provides support and should then conduct the performance development discussion. In some cases, an employee may have more than one supervisor and discussion because he/she works in two distinct positions.

In cases where a lead worker (i.e., someone who coordinates and monitors work but does not have the authority to hire or evaluate) has been designated, the supervisor may use the lead worker's input regarding the employee's work performance, but the lead worker is not part of the PDP discussion.

It is a supervisor's responsibility to follow the PDP process by conducting timely and thoughtful performance development discussions. Annual decisions on supervisors'/ administrators' merit pay will take this responsibility into account.

DOCUMENTATION/ REASONS FOR PERSONNEL ACTIONS

Paperwork reduction is one of the advantages of the PDP, but it is still important that the department maintain some documentation. In cases where an employee does not meet minimum expectations, it is very important that a Performance Improvement Plan form be completed and related documentation retained.

An employee may request a written summary of his/her responsibilities and priorities. This summary does not have to be redone every year if it does not change.

Although the PDP does not require that the content of the PDP discussion be written, some supervisors and employees may choose to confirm key points in writing. Typically, these documents will be retained in the department.

Departments are reminded that they are to have concrete reasons for taking various personnel actions such as hiring, promoting, and awarding merit pay. When making differential judgments about employees/candidates, departments should be prepared to share the job-related reasons for making those decisions.

WHERE TO GO FOR ASSISTANCE

Representatives of Human Resources are available to meet with staff and supervisors at the department level to explain the PDP or to answer specific questions.

An employee with concerns about his/her experience in a PDP discussion should first try to discuss them with his/her supervisor. If they cannot be resolved, they may be discussed with the department administrator. If assistance is needed, contact Human Resources at 3-3720.

CLOSING – AN INVITATION TO FULLY PARTICIPATE IN MSU'S PDP

The Performance Development Program represents a significant change in traditional performance appraisal philosophy. We hope that this guide helps you understand why MSU has made this change and how you can participate in it. The PDP, along with other university programs, can assist in achieving the direction set in the university's mission. Your active participation will contribute to the important responsibility of managing staff performance as well as to your own personal growth and development.