

# MyPerformance Guide to Assessing Employee Performance

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## Introduction

The MyPerformance Guide series focuses on different aspects of the MyPerformance conversation. Most of the guides are written for both supervisors and employees; this guide is a little different. As a supervisor you have many accountabilities. In this guide, we will set out strategies and best practices for one in particular: assessing employee performance. If you are not a supervisor, this guide will help you understand how your performance will be assessed, and what areas you can focus on to improve your own performance.

There are two important aspects to employee performance assessment: assessing current performance and encouraging future higher performance.

First, as an employer we must know whether employees are achieving expectations. Is the quantity and quality of work being done acceptable? Is workplace behaviour consistent with the Public Service Values and the Standards of Conduct, and are the necessary competencies being demonstrated?

It is important to base performance assessments on observable behaviors. This guide provides guidance regarding how to have a conversation around assessing performance that is objective and meaningful at the same time. It will also educate supervisors and employees on how to be aware of common evaluation biases that may get in the way of effectively assessing performance. It supports supervisors and employees on how to provide and receive feedback.

Secondly, it's important to encourage performance going forward. We aren't only concerned with grading an employee's past performance; we want to set the stage for greater future success for the individual and the organization. As a supervisor creating the conditions for higher performance means offering useful feedback and supporting your employees in learning from their past performance. Identify strengths, celebrate achievements and growth, and provide support for improving work performance, as well as supporting leadership and career development.

Don't forget: MyPerformance is an approach designed to engage employees in their performance, and the final review phase is about more than assessing performance. It's also about employee recognition and celebrating achievements. For more about how to recognize your employees, check out the [MyPerformance Guide to Employee Recognition](#).

## Best Practices in Performance Management

### – Focus on the Future

Experts agree – the best way to foster high performance in your employees is to focus on the future. Take the time for frequent, less formal conversations. Help your employee use past events to learn what to do, keep doing, what to stop doing, and what to do differently. Coach your employees by asking powerful questions about upcoming work, possible roadblocks and plans to overcome them. Make sure your employee understands the PURPOSE behind the work, has the SKILLS AND ABILITIES to be successful, and is EMPOWERED to make the decisions that will come up. These conversations will support the review phase as you talk about progress and achievements.

## What is Coaching? And What are Powerful Questions?

In the context of the supervisor-employee relationship, coaching is one tool supervisors can use to help bring out an employee's strengths, and build stronger performance. It's at the opposite end of the spectrum from giving direction – with coaching, the supervisor believes the employee is capable of what is needed, and uses powerful questions to help the employee get there. Coaching is not appropriate for all conversations and situations, but it can have an incredible impact when used at the right times. You can learn more about coaching through the Learning Centre courses *Coaching Approach to Conversation* and *Fierce Conversations*.

Powerful questions are one of the keys to coaching. They are concise, and open, and they encourage the employee to look at things from a different perspective – to consider new options, examine the possibilities, and make good decisions. Throughout this guide, and the others in this series, you will find examples of powerful questions you can use in your conversations.

## Why Do We Assess Employee Performance?

Employee performance assessment is critical for a variety of reasons. As an organization, and one that serves the citizens of British Columbia, we need to ensure that we are delivering on our goals as an organization. Every one has a role to play in achieving those goals. Assessing employee performance is one of the ways that we remain accountable to the public for our work. Further, performance assessment can help us identify potential successors for critical positions, and identify gaps. Assessing performance can help us identify leadership talent and potential. It provides a way to determine who is eligible for Pacific Leaders scholarship funds, and where efforts must be made to improve performance.

As an employee, have you ever been unsure how you were doing? Have you made some assumptions about what your supervisor was thinking? Wondered whether your supervisor sees your strengths and potential, or worried that your supervisor might be indifferent to your performance? Maybe you would have appreciated hearing where your contributions were noticed and what areas for improvement would be of greatest benefit for your career or the organization. Feedback is critical.

The performance assessment aspect of MyPerformance is one of many ways employees get that feedback. Remember, by the time the review phase comes along at the end of the performance cycle, there should be no surprises, especially negative ones. Supervisors should communicate clearly and frequently throughout the year.

### More than just a Report Card please!

In *Thanks for the Feedback*, Douglas Stone and Sheila Hein identify three kinds of feedback:

1. Evaluation – tells us how we’re doing;
2. Coaching – tells us how we can improve; and
3. Appreciation – tells us what we’re doing well at.

This guide focuses mainly on evaluation (we’re calling it assessment in this guide), but employees need all three types to be successful and engaged. Check out other guides in this series to learn more about coaching and appreciation.

### It’s not just about being Average

*“Fixing weaknesses never made anyone exceptional” – How to be Exceptional*

It can be easy to see an employee doing a good job and leave well enough alone – why mess with what’s working? Yes, if you have an employee whose performance isn’t meeting expectations, it’s important to work with that employee to bring their performance in line with what’s expected. But why stop there?

Every employee has strengths they bring to the job – strengths they could polish into outstanding contributions with support from you, the supervisor.

Imagine a conversation with your current supervisor where you’re told all of the things you do really well, what the impact of those things are on the organization. Together you discuss how you could be even better at those things and use them more often in your work. Imagine talking about the things you’re doing well and not just the areas where you need to improve. How would you feel after that conversation? And if you did polish those strengths and find more ways to leverage them in your work, how would your opinion of your day to day work change?

As a supervisor yourself, imagine the impact you could have on your employees by taking this approach if you haven’t already.

## Part 1: How Do We Assess Performance?

In the BC Public Service, we use the MyPerformance descriptive rating scale, an online tool designed by employees from across the public service, to recognize the important differences in the contributions that employees make. The descriptive scale is there to start conversations and to help employees and supervisors describe the contributions the employee makes throughout the year. In general terms, the scale outlines four levels of performance, with descriptors available to acknowledge the importance of the different ways employees contribute.

In the [MyPerformance Guide to Goal Setting](#) we cover how to create strong goals at the beginning of the year. Principle 7 from that guide is “Track, Adjust, and Acknowledge Progress toward Goals.” When it’s time to assess performance, use the measures from the beginning of the year to determine how your employee’s actual performance compares to the goals set out. When you’re doing so, make sure the goals have been adjusted for any factors outside the employee’s control. See the textbox on Managing Expectations for an example.

### When a Project is Shelved

Sometimes projects are cancelled, or the scope changes or accountabilities shift. The performance of the employee could be high, but the outcomes may not be reflective of the employee’s individual performance. In these cases it’s more important than ever to look at the contributions of the employee – without the satisfaction of watching their work move forward, they need to be acknowledged for their good work.

Also remind your employee that today’s shelved project might be tomorrow’s top priority, or elements of the work may be useful somewhere else. Being aware of the currents of the organization and how to take advantage of opportunities is an important skill you can pass on to your employee.

## How Do I Know How My Employee Is Doing?

The word supervision means oversight. Supervision implies that you are watching the work your employee is doing and know how well they're performing. The reality is that we are a workforce of trusted professionals. Many of us work independently, even virtually, but the outcomes of our work still need to be measured and evaluated. As part of the process of establishing goals, setting performance measures and assessing against them, it helps to gather feedback from a variety of sources.

In addition to talking to your employee, tracking measureable work, and reviewing concrete deliverables, let your employee know that you will be talking to other employees, internal and external clients, employees who report to your employee. Ask questions like:

- ▶ Where do you see <employee> exceling?
- ▶ What's one thing <employee> could do to become even more effective?
- ▶ How do you find working with <employee>?
- ▶ Tell me about a typical experience you've had working with <employee>?

Pay the most attention to answers that surprise you. Find out more. Ask them what they mean or what it looked like when they use certain words like "good", "awesome", "welcoming" or "customer service oriented". It could be an exception, or it could be that your impression of your employee's performance isn't accurate - only digging deeper will tell you.

This kind of informal survey can help you get a well-rounded picture of how your employee is doing. While you're at it, don't be afraid to ask those questions about yourself, too. We all have blind spots where other people can see the opportunities to grow that we are missing and research has shown that leaders asking for feedback builds employee engagement. It's worth it! You can also encourage your employees to do the same for their own development.

## The Tricky Thing about Self-Assessment

MyPerformance Profile includes the option for employees to self-assess. It can be very helpful for employees to do provide a self-assessment, but self-assessment by it's very nature is not without it's own challenges due to human psychology.

Research has shown that underperformers consistently over-estimate their performance, while high performers consistently under-estimate it. Part of the psychology of high performers is to be self-aware of areas of improvement. That's one of the many reasons it's so important as a supervisor to be clear about what success looks like and to have plenty of objective examples to draw on in the conversation.

For example, you might believe that "effective communication skills" means the ability to write clear, grammatically correct documents appropriate to the audience with a minimum of editing support. You might be really focused on creating the documents that your work unit will use to communicate to a broad audience.

Your employee may interpret "effective communication skills" as the ability to interact effectively with her colleagues. She might see that her verbal communication skills, which she uses regularly to smooth over misunderstandings and share critical information, are an asset. They are; but to you, they may not be the critical success factor in a position where writing is the primary focus.

It may help to review the [MyPerformance Guide to Goal Setting](#) for more information about creating clarity at the outset.

## What Goes Into The Performance Assessment? - The WHAT and the HOW

When the Deputy Minister's Council on the Public Service laid out their five overarching principles for the MyPerformance model, one of the principles was that how employees conduct themselves (the values and competencies they demonstrate) are as important as what they achieve (the deliverables or work goals). We see it like this:



## The BC Public Service Values

As in the graphic, HOW you do your job is as important as WHAT you accomplish. In the BC Public Service that is defined by how you demonstrate the values, which along with your business results makes up your overall rating – that is, whether you are exceeding, achieving, developing, or not performing. All of the descriptors for each level demonstrate the values, though possibly in very different ways.

On the next page are the values, descriptions, and a few sample behaviours for each value – there are many others possible! It's important to have a conversation about how you demonstrate the Values in your work. For example, how one employee demonstrates passion may be very different from how another employee does, particularly when you have both introverted and extroverted employees.

### How can I have a conversation about the Values and the Rating Scale?

Coaching is as much about listening as it is about asking questions.

You might choose to start a conversation about the values during any of the three phases with one or more of these questions:

1. What's important to you about these values?
2. Where do these values show up in your work?
3. Which of these values is most challenging for you?
4. Where do they most align with your personal values?
5. Which value, if you chose it as your focus, could most affect your performance?

Value	Description	Example Behaviours
Courage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Take thoughtful risks in generating and implementing ideas.</li> <li>▶ Be biased toward action.</li> <li>▶ Apply imagination.</li> <li>▶ Empower others to take initiative even in uncertain times.</li> <li>▶ Look beyond the process to see the possible.</li> <li>▶ Pursue a vision for the future.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Taking on a challenging project outside your comfort zone</li> <li>▶ Addressing performance issues or concerns with employees or colleagues</li> <li>▶ Initiating or making suggestions for change</li> <li>▶ Speaking up even when your opinion may not be popular</li> </ul>
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Builds trust by respecting the contributions of others.</li> <li>▶ Encourages new ideas.</li> <li>▶ Contributes to larger goals and positive engagement.</li> <li>▶ Depends on supporting others and sharing information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Participating in team meetings and discussions by asking relevant questions</li> <li>▶ Actively listening to team members' ideas</li> <li>▶ Acknowledging team member contributions</li> <li>▶ Arriving on time ready and able to contribute</li> <li>▶ Communicating openly</li> <li>▶ Seeking opportunities to work with others</li> <li>▶ Putting the needs of the team ahead of your own</li> </ul>
Passion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Taking pride in their work in service to the public.</li> <li>▶ Seeing ideas and people succeed.</li> <li>▶ Being a model of motivation and a positive influence for others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Taking the initiative to complete a task, lead a project, or meet a need</li> <li>▶ Speaking positively about your work and the public service</li> <li>▶ Expressing enthusiasm by sharing ideas and participating in dialogue</li> <li>▶ Recognizing, rewarding, and acknowledging success</li> </ul>
Curiosity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Seek better ways to achieve goals.</li> <li>▶ Pursue opportunities to learn and develop.</li> <li>▶ Welcome ideas from others.</li> <li>▶ Be willing to learn from failure as well as success.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Seeing learning opportunities, including mentorship</li> <li>▶ Seeking information and solutions</li> <li>▶ Actively working to understand others' points of view and perspectives</li> <li>▶ Offering up new and innovative ideas with an interest in having others improve on them</li> </ul>
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Setting clear goals and measuring success.</li> <li>▶ Staying focussed on the outcomes government is trying to achieve.</li> <li>▶ Taking responsibility for decisions and completing tasks.</li> <li>▶ Being consistently proactive in decisions.</li> <li>▶ Showing the persistence and tenacity to overcome obstacles.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Delivering on commitments</li> <li>▶ Being proactive and communicating clearly about your ability to meet commitments and deadlines</li> <li>▶ Understanding how your accountabilities link with those of your colleagues</li> <li>▶ Taking responsibility for decisions</li> <li>▶ Establishing goals with milestones and performance measures that clearly identify success</li> </ul>



## What's Your Employee's Role in the Organization?

Talking about the values leads nicely into a discussion of your employee's role in the organization. On a branch, divisional, ministry, even Public Service-wide scale, we each have a role to play in supporting the larger organization we're all a part of. Encourage your employee to see the linkages between their work and work being done in other areas – as parts of a greater whole, we can improve broader outcomes by keeping our eyes on the forest as well as our individual trees.

## Competencies – The Way You Do The Things You Do

Competencies are in our job descriptions and we use them in hiring – but competencies are more than that. Simply put, competencies are the often skill-based behaviours that we must exhibit in order to be successful in our work – and that includes the **Aboriginal Relations Competencies**. But how do we determine if an employee is demonstrating the necessary competencies?

1. Start at the beginning. Check the job description. Are the competencies listed still the most critical for success in the position? Are the right levels listed? Does the employee have opportunities to demonstrate them? Discuss which competencies are the most important, why, and how they can be demonstrated in that particular job. Keep it reasonable – 3-5 is more than enough to focus on each year.
2. Support your employee. Are they able to demonstrate those competencies? Is development required in order to meet expectations? What would that look like? Would coaching, mentoring, or a course help?
3. Provide frequent constructive feedback. When you notice the employee demonstrating one of the key competencies, mention it. If you notice an opportunity for the employee to demonstrate one, point it out. Also point out times when your employee demonstrates other competencies. If something doesn't go well, help your employee identify how to prevent the same outcome next time. Recognize the successes too.
4. Look for patterns. It's not enough to demonstrate a competency (or value) once, or even a few times. The key is consistency – when faced with a situation where one of the key competencies would be appropriate to demonstrate, does the employee consistently and successfully do so? This is where it may be helpful to seek feedback from other sources.

## You Can Try Something Like This...

In order to help make things clearer for you and your employee, you could use a table like this one:

PLANNING			FOCUSING		REVIEW		
Competency to be demonstrated	What it looks like in this job	How will success be determined	Employee comments	Supervisor comments	Employee results	Other feedback	Supervisor results
<p>Teamwork and Cooperation (level 4 – Encourages Others)</p> <p>EXAMPLE: project team lead</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Looking for opportunities to gain perspectives from all project team members and stakeholders</li> <li>▶ Supporting and recognizing their success</li> <li>▶ Delegating tasks where possible</li> <li>▶ Keeping project team apprised of critical info</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Feedback from team members and stakeholders</li> <li>▶ Reaching project milestones</li> <li>▶ Number of tasks delegated and completed</li> <li>▶ Number of delays/issues caused by communication problems</li> </ul>	<p>Going pretty well so far. It's taken me some time to figure out what information is helpful to who – I think that's now been solved by sitting down as a group and mapping out who needs what. The project is on schedule, and as we build trust I'm getting better at delegating effectively.</p>	<p>Good work! That communications matrix your team created will be a template for future projects. Now that you have team communications in hand, focusing more on stakeholder communications will help when it's time for implementation. Glad to hear you're building the trust you need.</p>	<p>We met our deadlines and budget (adjusted due to staffing issues). The plan called for 73% of tasks to be delegated – I'm proud to say we arrived at 78%. The other 5% were developmental activities wanted by team members. We had three delays caused by comm. breakdowns, early on that I was able to prevent later.</p>	<p>“Joe asked each of us for our perspective and made us feel like it was valuable. At first he was reluctant to let us make decisions, but over time as we built trust that improved. It was a good experience.” “Joe reached out to us as stakeholders and helped us feel part of the process. The team members we interacted with were well informed and did great work!”</p>	<p>You overcame some early challenges to make this project a success. You celebrated the hard work of the team members, gave them the information they needed, and cooperated well with key stakeholders- which significantly sped up the implementation. You showed this competency at the required level and I'm proud of all your hard work!</p>

## The Importance of the Conversation

There are a lot of reasons why MyPerformance is all about the conversation, and why it's so important for employees and supervisors to talk before selecting a rating.

## Managing Expectations

### As a Supervisor

The best way to guarantee an awkward conversation is by not managing expectations. If an employee comes into an end of year discussion expecting a higher rating than you're able to give them, likely neither of you will enjoy the discussion. It may even harm your supervisory relationship or disengage the employee if expectations and assessments are not clearly articulated. You can reduce these negative impacts on performance with an ongoing conversation throughout the year that builds clarity and trust. Talk early, talk often. At the beginning of the year, ask your employee where they want to be rated at the end of the year. Exceeds Expectations? Achieves? Which descriptor best resembles how she wants to be seen, or is the best fit with her values? Discuss what that would look like in their current role. How could they get there? What would it take? Agree on a plan, and check in frequently about how it's going. When you get to the end of the year, there will be no surprises. Your employee may not agree, but they will understand why you have chosen the rating you did.

For example:

John recently completed a project, and he knows he delivered it early, under budget, and with some additional features that weren't expected. It's the end of the performance cycle, and John rates himself as Exceeding Expectations.

That project took about 20% of John's time for the year. The rest of his work was completed as expected, though some routine pieces were

dropped during critical phases of his big project. John's supervisor, Alice, is really proud of John's work on that project, and she spends some time with John celebrating his achievement, talking about the values competencies he demonstrated, and the lessons he learned. She asks John "how would the outcomes on this day to day work have been different if you'd applied your project management skills in this area?"

Now John is thinking about how he can bring his performance in all areas of his work up to the level of the work he did on his project. John and Alice lay out a plan for the coming year that will help John leverage his strengths more effectively, and address some of the challenges he had this year.

Alice explains that she's giving John a rating of Achieving Expectations for this year, and will be detailing in the comments all of the excellent work she saw John do on the project. She tells him she's sure that if he follows the plan they've laid out, he will be Exceeding Expectations next year.

### For All of Us

It may be tempting to ignore feedback you disagree with, and certainly it might not all be correct or helpful. Before you push it out of mind, though, why not test it out? If appropriate, perhaps ground truth with trusted colleagues and be open to what they offer. It might help you identify a blind spot that's been holding you back without your knowledge. Studies have shown that underperformers tend to see their performance as higher than it is, while over-achievers tend to view theirs as lower. Having an accurate view of your own performance will help you develop in the right areas.

If after talking with your supervisor you still do not agree, you can use self-rating and comments to explain what you believe is the best choice, and why. You can also contact AskMyHR for additional guidance.

## The Rating Scale

The Descriptive Rating Scale is divided into two pieces; the ratings and the descriptors. Start with the ratings, then look at the descriptors. It's important to note that in the BC Public Service we rate on the results of job performance (your goals) and how you achieve those goals (your competencies and values).

### The Ratings

What each of these performance ratings looks like will be different depending on the job, the individual, and the work unit. That's why it's so important to have clear conversations at the beginning of the year and lay out what the goals and expectations are, and what success will look like.

#### EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS

is exceeding expectations of job performance and is demonstrating exceptional corporate values.

#### ACHIEVING EXPECTATIONS

is meeting expectations of job performance and is demonstrating solid corporate values.

#### DEVELOPING

is not currently achieving all expectations but has the potential and the motivation to do so, and is developing an understanding of corporate values

#### NOT PERFORMING

is not meeting expectations

## The Descriptors

For each rating, there are a number of possible descriptors. They are intended to be equal but different; for example, a Subject Matter Expert and a Proven Leader approach their work very differently, but what they bring to the work place is equally needed and important. It's okay if a supervisor and employee don't select the same descriptor; that can be the start of a great conversation. If you come to an agreement that's fantastic, but it is okay to sign off with different descriptors too.

### Why Descriptors? Simply put, even if we reach the same destination, How We get there might be very different

Two employees sit at desks side by side, share a job description, and accomplish roughly the same amount of work. But they do that very differently. Jessica is the person you go to when you have a question; she knows the applicable policies, legislation, and history so well she can save you hours of research with a two minute conversation. Tom is the glue that holds the team together - when things get tense, he finds a way to keep everyone communicating and he's excellent at clearing up misunderstandings.

Under a standard three or four point scale, they would probably both receive the same assessment. Under the descriptive rating scale, Jessica might be seen as Achieving Expectations - Subject Matter Expert, while Tom is Achieving Expectations - Valued Team Player. Both achieving the expectations laid out for them, and bringing different skills and values to the work.

**EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS:** is exceeding expectations of job performance and is demonstrating exceptional corporate values

**CONNECTOR:**

- ▶ works collaboratively to enable success
- ▶ is excellent at supporting others and sharing information
- ▶ maintains a clear focus on creating positive outcomes, encourages new ideas and is consistently proactive

**CULTURE MOTIVATOR:**

- ▶ is a model of motivation and positive influence for others
- ▶ serves as a valued mentor or advisor
- ▶ contributes to strategic goals and positive engagement

**EXCEPTIONAL CONTRIBUTOR:**

- ▶ takes thoughtful risks, sets clear and often stretch goals and is accountable for results
- ▶ seeks out opportunities to learn and take on more responsibility
- ▶ consistently demonstrates the potential and desire to take on new and more challenging work

**FIRST-CLASS LEADER:**

- ▶ is an inspiring leader who contributes to the development of others
- ▶ serves as a role model within the organization who takes pride in the achievements of their team
- ▶ builds trust and places organizational objectives ahead of personal goals

**INNOVATIVE EXPERT:**

- ▶ demonstrates a dedication to expanding expertise
- ▶ finds innovative ways to connect and apply that expertise
- ▶ seeks better ways to achieve goals, applies creativity and pursues a vision for the future

**ACHIEVES EXPECTATIONS:** is meeting expectations of job performance and is demonstrating solid corporate values

**ACCOMPLISHED CONTRIBUTOR:**

- ▶ can be counted on to do their job
- ▶ has mastered the duties associated with the position
- ▶ is a strong contributor who may go above and beyond in some areas

**PROVEN LEADER:**

- ▶ demonstrates a level of leadership that is an asset to the organization
- ▶ may exhibit strengths in demonstrating the corporate values of courage and/or accountability in achieving their work goals
- ▶ is a capable leader who is achieving expectations both as a supervisor and as an employee

**SUBJECT MATTER EXPERT:**

- ▶ is a “go to” person on this topic(s) within the organization and maintains expertise in a particular field
- ▶ can be counted on to deliver context, relevant information and recommendations
- ▶ may exhibit strengths in demonstrating the corporate values of curiosity and/or accountability

**VALUED MENTOR:**

- ▶ is vital to knowledge and/or culture transfer and maintenance in the organization
- ▶ may exhibit strengths in demonstrating the corporate values of team work and/or service in achieving their work goals
- ▶ demonstrates both the skill and desire to share his or her work attitude and expertise with others

**VALUED TEAM PLAYER:**

- ▶ is a key contributor to team outcomes and a positive and engaged work place
- ▶ is a model of motivation, positive outcomes and shares knowledge
- ▶ may exhibit strengths in demonstrating the corporate values of passion and/or team work

**DEVELOPING:** is not currently achieving all expectations but has the potential and the motivation to do so, and is developing an understanding of corporate values

**GROWING:**

▶ has demonstrated a commitment to improvement and is putting in the effort required

**NEW TO POSITION:**

▶ is still in the probationary period or has been in the position for too short a time to accurately evaluate performance

**MISMATCHED TALENT:**

▶ is not currently meeting all expectations but has potential and desire to be more engaged and productive in a different position

**NOT PERFORMING:** is not meeting expectations

**NOT PERFORMING:**

▶ needs significant improvements in either the corporate values or job performance, or both  
▶ does not demonstrate adequate motivation to improve

### Coaching Questions for Using the Descriptive Rating Scale

1. Which one do you think best describes your performance today?
2. How does this compare to where you were at the beginning of the year?
3. What did you do to get here?
4. What was your greatest learning in the process? What will you hold as your focus going forward?
5. How will you celebrate your achievements?

### Why Only One?

A common question regarding the descriptive rating scale is why do we only get to select one? Most people have characteristics of all of them to greater or lesser degree. Why can't I select two? Or three?

The Employee Design Team who created the Descriptive Rating Scale talked about this a lot. Ultimately, there were a few reasons why it was decided to allow for only one descriptor to be selected, including:

- ▶ Keep it simple! Employees during the consultations clearly said the old tool was too complicated, with too many buttons and things. The design team wanted to keep that feedback firmly in mind, which also made it easier for the technical team to deliver.
- ▶ It's all about the conversation! Selecting more radio buttons on a website doesn't enrich the conversation. The conversation is the important part, and the quality of the comments.

So what do you do when you really want to have more than one? Have a conversation, and use the comments box. It may be that through a conversation, you'll decide that one of the descriptors edges the others out. Either way, you can use the comments field to talk about where the other descriptors apply as well.

### Bell Curve? No Way!

Each employee should be rated according to the clearly communicated and agreed to expectations for their job. There is no Bell curve expected – in fact, as we continue to find innovative ways to improve engagement, productivity and performance across the public service, we hope and expect to see ever greater numbers of employees Achieving and Exceeding Expectations.

### **Achieving really is an achievement!**

It can be tempting to think that Achieving Expectations is a given, a mediocre middle ground. This is not the case. The BC Public Service supports a high standard of achieving expectations. The intention of the rating scale is that we set challenging goals, and meeting them really IS an achievement! Exceeding Expectations is intended for when those goals have been exceeded by a significant extent – when exceeding expectations is not an occasional, but a consistent occurrence. We need to avoid metaphors here and get very concrete specific with language around assessment.

Use the comments box to talk about the many ways you've gone above and beyond and be proud of your achievements!

## **Developing Mismatched Talent**

An employee rated as a mismatched talent, or who has self-rated as mismatched talent, has a lot to offer the BC Public Service – the current role just isn't a good fit. This can happen for a lot of reasons, including organizational shifts, changing role expectations, or taking on a job that ends up not being quite right.

An easy example might a very extroverted, service-oriented clerk assigned through a reorganization to work in a file room with very little interaction. The employee might have the records management expertise for the position, but feel disengaged, and may not be meeting expectations. It could also be a high performing employee who accepts a new position and finds that the work isn't the great fit they were hoping for.

So... now what?

Although it might be nice, choosing Mismatched Talent in MyPerformance Profile won't automatically send a team of human resource experts parachuting in to save the day. And really, they're not needed. There are many resources available to help figure out the best course of action.

How do I do it?

1. Conversation! Whether you are an employee who feels mismatched or the supervisor of an employee you believe is mismatched, the first step is talking about it. Some questions to consider together include:
  - ▶ What expectations aren't being met?
  - ▶ What are the employee's strengths and interests?
  - ▶ What about the current role doesn't play to those strengths?
  - ▶ How can the role be adapted to draw more on those strengths?
  - ▶ If the role can't be adapted, or can't be adapted enough, where could the employee use those strengths?
  - ▶ What resources are available to help make that happen?
2. Get help. Take a look at MyHR, especially the Job Store and Job Opportunities. The BC Public Service Agency, your Strategic Human Resources team and Homewood Human Solutions, our extended benefits provider, may all have tools, information, or other ways of assisting as well.
3. Take action. Create a plan for moving forward. Identify possible barriers, and how they can be overcome. See the [MyPerformance Guide to Goal Setting](#) for more help.



## What If an Employee Isn't Meeting Expectations?

If you have an employee who isn't meeting expectations, either in their work or in their workplace behaviour, you can call on the same supports that are available from the section on Mismatched Talent. The most important thing is not to wait, or to ignore the problem and hope it goes away. Doing that will only make things worse for you, for the employee, and for the rest of the team. Even if it's a problem that's existed for a long time, the sooner you start the sooner things will improve. If you need support, consider accessing Performance Coaching Services' coaching for enhancing the performance of direct reports.

The first step will be having a conversation with the employee.

The key topics include:

- ▶ What are the expectations for the position? Are they consistent with the employee's classification, job description, and work done by similar employees, and are these expectations clearly articulated? Does the employee understand them?
- ▶ Does the employee have the necessary skills and resources? What is lacking, or could be provided to support success?
- ▶ How will you measure improvement? What is the time frame?

You may not get to everything in one conversation, especially if the performance problem is long standing. The employee may need time to think. As you discuss each issue, put it in writing. Create a shared performance plan outlining what the employee must accomplish, when it must be done, how it will be done, what support you and others will provide, and how success will be measured and celebrated. This document can be attached to the employee's MyPerformance Profile. Meet regularly – depending on the situation, it may be necessary to meet once a week or more.

There are many supports available to you. In addition to Performance Coaching Services, there are Human Resources Advisors and other specialists in the BC Public Service Agency. Access the supports you need.

## Part 2 – Unconscious Bias: How the 'Fast Brain' Impacts Employee Performance Assessment

We are bombarded with information all day, every day. The way your socks feel on your toes, the smell of the coffee on your desk, the writing on every piece of paper you can see. Millions of pieces of information. So much information, in fact, that we can't possibly think about each piece as it comes in. That's where the 'fast brain' enters the picture. It sorts that information for us, drawing some pieces of information to our attention and dropping others. Knowing about the "fast brain" matters when it comes to fairly assessing performance because it introduces unconscious bias – which is not the same as prejudice or discrimination.

Unconscious bias is the natural, unavoidable result of experience, and in most cases it's harmless. If you have a tendency to order chocolate cake for dessert whenever you go out, you might have a bias in favour of chocolate cake over apple pie. We all have biases; the key is identifying what they are, and how they're affecting our decision making. The faster we're moving, the more likely we are to rely on the fast brain to make decisions for us. The first step is to slow down.

### Don't believe you're missing things?

Test yourself! Watch this Youtube video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ahg6qcgoay4>



## Types of Bias

There are many types of unconscious biases that can affect how we perceive performance, including:

- ▶ Homophily – our tendency to like things that are similar to us. For example, we will tend to prefer employees who work in a style similar to how we do – even if their results aren't any better.
- ▶ Confirmation bias – our tendency to notice events or results that confirm what we already believe or suspect. If you have two new employees starting and you believe one of them will outperform the other, you're likely to notice things that show you're right.
- ▶ Pattern recognition – we tend to place too much emphasis on recent events, on particularly memorable events, and on the outcomes of similar, unrelated events.

Together, this means, for example, that we are more likely to notice leadership potential in employees who are similar to leaders we are already familiar with.

## So How Do We Reduce Bias in Performance Assessments?

The fast brain exists because we need it. When the car in front of us slams its brakes on, we don't have time to think about what those red brake lights mean – we need to act FAST! We can't get rid of it, but we can learn to reduce its impact on areas where it's not needed – such as employee performance management. Many of the actions from earlier in this guide will also support this, but here are some specific suggestions aimed at bypassing the fast brain:

1. Identify. Know your biases and unconscious beliefs! Do you believe that age brings wisdom, that university grads are smarter, or that all young people are adept with technology? Know what your fast brain is thinking, and watch for its effects.

2. Record. Some supervisors keep notes in a notebook or OneNote to jog their memory between conversations, others have Outlook folders to store emails that contain kudos or work examples. Some use the comments sections on their employees' profiles to make frequent updates. Whatever you choose, any of these can help you remember examples of work that your fast brain might forget. Pay particular attention to examples that don't fit your opinion of someone's performance.
3. Pause. Stopping to think for just two minutes can take a decision away from the fast brain and give it to the frontal cortex – the part of the brain responsible for executive function. That means better decisions less likely to be swayed by unconscious bias.
4. Ask. If something doesn't seem right to you, if you're not sure, be curious. Go back to the employee or to the people who are providing feedback, and ask more questions.
5. Check. Is your assessment based on fact, or opinion? Think about HOW you know. Was the employee late for one meeting, or several? Why?
6. Calibrate. There are a number of ways you can ensure your picture of your employees' performance is accurate. Discuss it with your supervisor, and with your colleagues. Get a sense of how other employees doing similar work are performing. Pay particular opinion to feedback that doesn't match your opinions.

## Conclusion

Assessing your employee's performance is a critical part of giving your employee and the organization the feedback that helps create the highest levels of performance. By offering each employee the right mix of assessment, coaching and appreciation, we can build performance, trust and relationships that will benefit you, your employees and the BC Public Service.

For more information, visit:

**MyHR**

BC Public Service Agency

810 Blanshard Street

Victoria, B.C.

V8W 2H2



Where ideas work