

The Ultimate Guide to

1:1s

Learn how manager-employees relationships can benefit from better, more productive 1:1s.



Table of Contents

1	Introduction	03
2	The Value of 1:1s	04
3	How 1:1s Fit Into Performance Management	07
4	How to Make Sure Employees Get the Most Out of 1:1s	09
5	Measuring Success of 1:1s as an HR Leader	10
6	How Frequently to Hold 1:1s	12
7	How to Launch a 1:1 Program	13
8	Conclusion	14

Learn more about 1:1s

Email hello@reflektive.com or request a demo at www.reflektive.com/demo

1

Introduction

In the modern workplace, employees are a company's most valuable asset – and biggest expense. Finding ways to optimize their performance should be considered worth the investment. However, employee performance is largely dependent on effective management. Once employees are onboarded, it is up to their manager to coach that employee to their fullest potential.

Some managers will say 1:1s are a waste of time. Often, ineffective 1:1s are a result of managers not knowing what their direct reports are working on, or being unsure of what the purpose of the meeting is. Common mistakes include treating the meeting as a status update – something better accomplished via email – or managers using the meeting to speak rather than listening to questions and comments from the direct report.

A 1:1 is defined as a meeting between a manager and their direct report, typically ranging from once per week to once per month, and with

a duration of 30 to 60 minutes. The meeting is held in private and although structure varies greatly depending on individual needs, this is seen as a safe place for the employee to ask questions, discuss relationships with co-workers and express concerns. For those in the C-suite, it's important that these meetings take place consistently across the organization, so concerns about the company's direction can bubble up to where it can be addressed by leaders.

As Andreessen Horowitz founder Ben Horowitz wrote in "A Good Place to Work," a good organization is one where "people can focus on their work and have confidence that if they get their work done, good things will happen for both the company and them personally." This e-book will explain the crucial components of an effective 1:1 meeting and how this simple management process can drive motivation throughout an organization.

2

The Value of 1:1s

Effective 1:1s provide a great deal of value to employees, managers, and your company. Each person in your organization relies on feedback in order to improve. Annual reviews often fail to provide the feedback needed to enhance performance, and have been proven largely ineffective, with many large organizations removing them entirely.

With the annual review's popularity in decline, the weekly or frequent 1:1 has become more important than ever. Every member of the organization experiences value over time from the regular 1:1. Even workers who enjoy

lots of autonomy still need feedback. Sure, they rely on their own creativity for problem-solving, but the barriers they face will come from inside the organization in the form of red tape or access to another team needed for collaboration.

The structure of 1:1s allows employees to get a closer look at the challenges they are facing. The manager need not correct the employee's course of action, but come in as a partner and a coach helping to pave the way to success. It is useful to have a trusted advisor act as a coach as employees progress in their career.



Employees who have productive 1:1s with their managers are over 6X more likely to feel like their voice is valued, than those who don't.*

(*based on Reflektive survey of 1000+ US workers)

A weekly 1:1 is also one of the few avenues where employees can feel safe discussing career development with their manager. If the employee hopes to receive a promotion, it is helpful to break out the skills needed to move to the next level, and invest time in the weekly 1:1 into developing those skills and assessing relevant opportunities for growth.

Employees should have access weekly to discuss their personal objectives and see where those intersect with those of the company. A huge piece in motivation and employee engagement is knowing you're contributing to the company's success.

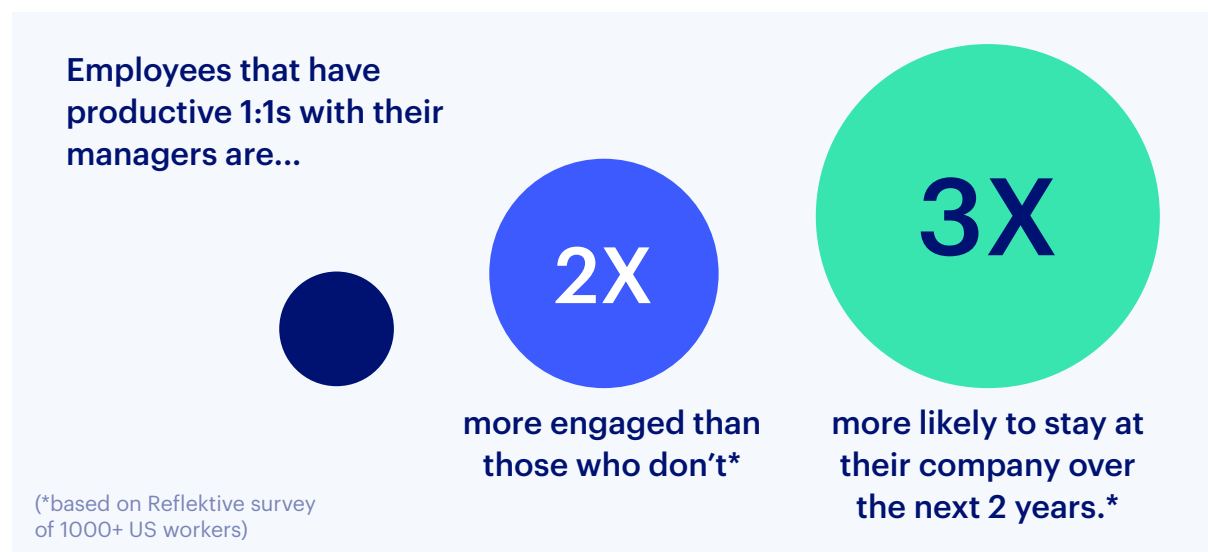
Managers

Managers are responsible for key deliverables. A manager is only as successful as their team. It is up to the manager to be a coach and help encourage their team to achieve the greatest results.

Often managers are busy working on their own deliverables and their day-to-day management responsibilities slip. By structuring a weekly 1:1, it's ensured that they take the time to manage and help nurture their team.

1:1s also give managers an opportunity to coach employees and develop an authentic and meaningful connection. Alternatively, in group settings, team members have to compete for airtime. The 1:1 meeting enables each team member to be heard and have concerns and needs addressed. When employees feel valued, they become empowered, bringing the manager closer to her own results.

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The Company

No other line item costs a company as much as its employees' salaries. Replacing, rather than retaining, these employees costs even more. The key factors that drive attrition are when employees don't know a company's vision, transparency is lacking or if employees don't know if they are making a difference. These are all basic components that leaders assume are being communicated company-wide, but so often teams or entire departments feel left in the dark, and thus become unmotivated.

1:1s are an effective way to ensure that information and knowledge are trickling down throughout the organization. On the flipside, leaders should also be aware of the information bubbling up. Sometimes, gossip or rumors in the lower ranks can inform the company on new opportunities or threats.

Our research shows that regular, productive 1:1 meetings between employees and managers is paramount to success.

3

How 1:1s Fit Into Performance Management

Manager-driven performance management is being embraced by forward-thinking organizations. The 1:1 is a key driver of quality manager interactions with direct reports, and fits into a larger scale of innovative performance management.

Performance Evaluations

Traditional performance reviews are stressful for managers because of both the time they consume and the potential of having to initiate difficult conversations with employees. There is a lot of research that has proven these annual reviews are not effective in optimizing employee performance.

For employees, there is the element of surprise – “If I was not meeting expectations for the past six months, why are you only telling me now?” If 1:1s are a habit, even if you chose to continue running performance reviews or a regular structured check-in concurrently, these conversations or insights will not come as a surprise or be as painful.

Managers will have set expectations for how difficult topics are approached, and will have a relationship with employees that allows them to share results of their evaluation.

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for how difficult topics are approached, and can lean on their relationship with employees that allows them to share results of their evaluation. By using a real-time feedback tool, information gleaned from 1:1s can be captured and stored for the review. In the case a company runs quarterly check-ins instead of performance reviews, the same theme applies – 1:1s make these performance evaluations easier.

Goal Management

If goal management is a focus of your performance management, whether with S.M.A.R.T. goals, OKRs, or other goal methodologies, 1:1s serve as a natural springboard for goal-focused conversations around specific areas which are hindering your employees achieving their objectives. But, do not make the mistake of using 1:1s for status update conversations. Your goal management software should track and visualize employee progress on goals. In the 1:1, managers should discuss any discrepancies in progress – does the employee need a bigger challenge, or are they struggling? How can the manager reinforce the lessons the employee is learning through experience?

4

How to Make Sure Employees Get the Most Out of 1:1s

It is up to managers to initiate and follow through on scheduling 1:1s. However, the employee should lead the meeting. This way, the employee can bring up pressing issues and frustrations that do not make sense to send as a formal email or fit into other types of communications.

For managers, good results will come by way of employees airing their concerns and asking questions. Understandably, what's on the agenda can be hard for managers to predict and prepare for, unless there is some structure. The most productive 1:1s are intentional and thoughtfully planned conversations. Otherwise, employees and managers might run into an awkward situation where nobody has anything to say and important issues stay unresolved. While managers should be ready for a free-form meeting, it's important to provide some sense of structure, thoughtful preparation, as well as a few questions to keep the conversation going should you not have enough to talk about.

Off-the-wall (and sometimes brilliant) ideas may be shared, too. For managers thinking ahead on how to develop leadership skills in their reports, they should collaborate with the employee to set an agenda in advance. This way, the employee can get practice running a meeting and develop a new skill, and the manager can prepare to address any difficult or challenging topics and add the most value. Perhaps an employee is reserved about sharing – some employees will fear asking questions makes them seem weak. As he or she is developing trust, managers should also have a backup plan for how to use the 1:1 time effectively. Consider a “fire drill” you are currently facing. Invite the employee to think through possible courses of action. This allows the employee to get an understanding of the issues on the manager's level, and leaders also get some out-of-the-box ideas on how to address this challenge.

5

Measuring Success of 1:1s as an HR Leader

It's all well and good to put 1:1s in the hands of your managers, step back and let them lead. So, what's an HR leader to do to ensure success? HR can help provide the structure needed to make 1:1s productive. Selecting technology that is accessible to managers enables them to keep the feedback to reports flowing. Develop a system that recognizes and rewards managers who are consistently meeting with their reports. Consider the goal of 1:1s: More engaged employees who are motivated and plan to stay with the company. If these goals are being met, perhaps it is less

important how often managers do 1:1s, where, what they talk about, and so on. The process is distributed and run in a way that works for individuals. Managers don't need to turn in any paperwork that would weigh down the process.

A commonly used measure of engagement is the eNPS score, or employee Net Promoter Score, which asks: On a scale of 0 to 10 with 10 being "extremely likely," what is the likelihood you would recommend working at [your company] to a family member, friend or colleague?

An example of the eNPS score scale, used to measure employee engagement:

ENGAGEMENT

What is the likelihood you would recommend working at Reflektive to a family member, friend or colleague?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Unlikely Extremely Likely

↓ Next Question

This eNPS score will allow companies to see, with a pre-determine cadence, how engaged employees are. It can be done before and after implementing 1:1s to see the change in engagement. Another way to measure success are through 360 reviews. Isolate reviews given by direct reports to managers to check for outliers. This way, you can target training on how to get the most out of 1:1s to managers who may need it most.

6

How Frequently to Hold 1:1s

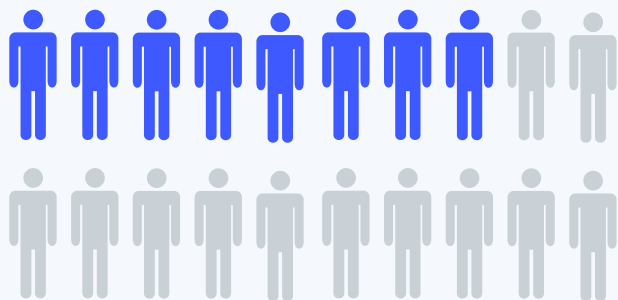
Research shows there is a correlation between how frequently employees need feedback and how many direct reports their manager has. So, if you have just one direct report, you may find yourself talking through issues frequently anyway, and monthly 1:1 is sufficient. Alternatively, a manager with ten or more direct reports needs to talk to each of them individually, more frequently. The most popular format for 1:1s is weekly, for 30 minutes, but we've also seen managers do 60-minute 1:1s (especially when it's between a department head and mid-level

managers). Of course, it's important to pick a frequency and length that you'll follow through with and that matches your schedule. Once 1:1s begin getting canceled or postponed, they'll start getting devalued, and you'll find neither party prepares or expects much from the process, reducing the impact.

The most popular format for 1:1s is weekly 30-minute syncs, or 60 minutes between a department head and mid-level manager.

39%

of employees who have productive 1:1s meet with their managers on a weekly basis*



(*based on Reflektive survey of 1000+ US workers)

7

How to Launch a 1:1 Program

When employees benefit from 1:1s, the company benefits. To effectively launch 1:1s, identify how consistent 1:1s fit into the mission and objectives of the company. If the company is hiring rapidly and needs to maintain culture as it grows, discuss how 1:1s help achieve that goal. If the industry is thinning and the company needs to double down on innovation, 1:1s will support the spread of ideas. Your company's objective should be clearly communicated when you roll out 1:1s. Secondly, communicate the value to the individual. 1:1s are not just an extra task to complete. They serve to help employees to take more control of their career development. They give employees the feedback and coaching they need to succeed. Lastly, ensure employees know that the process is for them. Managers and employees should collaborate to set the schedule and frequency, and employees have a right to speak up if their needs are not being met in 1:1s. Be clear that managing up is an option and continuous feedback is a priority for the organization.

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Similarly, managers need to know the value of 1:1s, and how they fit into the overall objectives of the company. Engagement and employee motivation drive retention, and consequently productivity and profitability. Make this top-of-mind for managers, and show them how an eNPS score or other measure can indicate the motivation levels of their team. Depending on the experience and skill set of your managers, provide a structure for 1:1s. This might be a recommended set of tools for scheduling, preparing for and tracking these meetings. You can supply a template with conversation topics if managers are leading 1:1s for the first time. If some managers have more experience, pair them with less-experienced managers so they can act as mentors.

8

Conclusion

In a good organization, successes will be recognized, failures will be great coaching opportunities, and the employee will continue to gain responsibility, develop new skills, bring value and see a clear path for career advancement. In a bad organization, the employee's best efforts will be ignored. Having a culture of productive 1:1s can help you retain your best employees and set them up for ongoing success.

Want to learn more about Reflektive?

Email hello@reflektive.com
or request a demo at
www.reflektive.com/demo