



**EVERYTHING
YOU NEED
TO KNOW
ABOUT
HOLDING
1:1S**

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Introduction

Performance management has always been a critical component of running a successful business. However, being forced to work remotely as [distributed teams](#) has shown any crack that could previously have been covered up with in-office company culture. Processes have been stripped bare for everyone to see. Regardless of how you were running things before, the wellbeing of your people has become of sole importance. Follow this with their productivity and progression, and the world is looking to you as their manager to lead.

No matter what change brings, if you consistently link in with your people, you'll override the chaos and keep thriving. What better way to do this than with the classic 1:1. Consider them a priority when it comes to staying in touch with your team and now is the time to embrace carrying out these processes digitally.

In our post-pandemic workplaces, you will have people wishing to switch to more flexible working weeks, so managing your distributed team is here to stay. One of the main reasons why 1:1s are an integral part of performance management present, and future can be summed up by co-founder of a16z and author Ben Horowitz, "...one-on-ones provide an excellent mechanism for information and ideas to flow up the organisation and should be part of your design."

The need to be embedded in your structure, so let's look at why.



What are the benefits?

Alignment

This is one of our favourite words because it's what our product brings to a business, and we strive for every day as a company. Holding 1:1s is a great way to achieve this. Everyone should have their individual goals. These need to align with team goals as well as the overarching company goals. This naturally syncs productivity. It also helps people align on expectations. By checking in through 1:1 conversations, it supports managing them. This way everyone knows where they stand and not only helps them stay on track but on the right track.

Strengthening Relationships

You can send all the emails and have all the team meetings you want, but they cannot replace what a 1:1 can do for the relationship between you and your employee. Every dynamic will be different, but it's imperative you get to know yours with each person you need to lead. 1:1s give you a chance to do this and to build trust which every relationship needs. It also allows you to get to know them personally, and professionally, which helps you in being able to motivate and inspire them. This enables you to become a better leader.



Sharing Feedback

We can't stress enough how vital continuous feedback is, and this is the prime opportunity to give and receive it whether it's positive such as praise, constructive or indeed sensitive in nature. They are all relevant and all happen. You might already collect some feedback in various ways, such as through group meetings, or perhaps some people are good at bringing things to your attention. But 1:1s allow for this dual exchange to be a regular occurrence which everyone needs to thrive in their work.

Removing Obstacles

If 1:1s become a consistent part of your company operations, you'll eliminate blocks to everyone's success. As a leader, you will be better informed, therefore make better decisions. You'll also be in a position to spot potential pitfalls and intervene earlier to support your peoples' progression. This saves you time, money and conflict as well as promotes productivity.

Reaching Targets

These conversations support regular linking-in on goal-setting and goal-achieving. They help everyone stay on the same page and assist you as a leader in seeing what your people need to reach their targets and their potential.



Preparation

It might seem easier to turn up at the meeting and discuss whatever topics need your attention at the time. But like any effective process, planning is essential if you want it to be successful. What does preparation look like for holding your 1:1? We follow the rule of the 3 C's here; collaboration, connectivity and confidentiality. Let's start with the first one.

Collaboration

We'd recommend having a jointly shared agenda that you can both add to in advance of the meeting. What should be on this agenda? Set out recommended talking points. This is a chance to bring structure and focus to the meeting. We'll explore this further in a later section, but for now, the main message is, there should be a dual contribution to this document and no surprises on the day of the meeting. Our software allows you to host your 1:1 collaborative agenda and 1:1 schedule so whether you choose to use this or another method, ensure you set up a system that supports these.

Connectivity

As most of you know, successful remote working comes with a need for an adequate tech setup. Ensure you have proper lighting for your video call - and it should be a video where possible. As you don't have the luxury of an in-person meeting, this best supports you in picking up on the non-verbals of how the individual is feeling and it's especially important when delivering sensitive information. To achieve optimum flow in this area, usually means having a fast connection but if you feel an audio call would work better because someone has poor internet, then do. Whatever brings ease and connection to the conversation, do that.



Confidentiality

Most importantly, you both need privacy. Set yourself up as best you can for this. It might seem like nothing to you if someone walks into your room while on the call, but this can throw the person you are speaking to and leave them feeling vulnerable. These conversations need to both feel - and be - safe, secure and confidential.



Top Tip:

To ensure you give yourself the best chance possible to prepare, block out time in your calendar in advance of the scheduled 1:1 meeting. This way, you'll never get caught for time, risk running late, or turn up partially ready due to back to back meetings.

Interested in using [Frankli](#) 1:1's to host your collaborative agenda and 1:1 schedule?



Holding 1:1s

When it comes to having the meeting, there are certain elements you need to remember and actions to take. Various question-types exist and depend on the nature of your session, but we'll examine this further later. For now, let's start with what all of them have in common; what you need to do to lead them.

Set The Tone

This might seem odd when there are two people in different locations on a video call. But it's imperative whether being held online or offline. It's up to you to create the right environment. For example, ask a few casual lead-in questions unrelated to work to break through the initial tension that can come with these types of conversation. Put the person at ease. It's the only way you'll both get the best from the meeting.

Be Informed

Do your homework and be prepared for this meeting. It's one way of showing your people that you take them and this conversation seriously. It will also help you delve deeper with the discussion rather than skimming on the surface of basic updates you should already know about. If you have the knowledge available to you before going in, then take it, and you'll be able to ask the right questions and get the best out of the session.



Think Bigger Picture

1:1s are an opportunity for you to go beyond the tactical and operational. Ensure your conversation goes wider than that. It should have plenty of blue-sky thinking. These meetings are a chance for you to connect your people's day to day activities and their bigger picture with the overarching company goals. Seize it.

Actively Listen

There is no point in asking questions if you don't listen to the answers. [Actively listening](#) allows the space for you to gain deep insight. It also supports trust-building and lets the individual know you value their contribution. Everyone wants their voice to be heard; this is an opportunity to provide the platform to do it.

Strike A Balance

With all of these conversations, find the equilibrium between the personal and professional. The person should not feel like it's an interview but also that you are taking it seriously. The same goes for the line of questioning. Find the balance between their individual developmental needs and achieving their goals.

Often 1:1s can be wrongly associated with constructive criticism. It might be an opportunity to focus on improvement, but it can also be a chance to give praise and recognition. Celebrating wins in real-time is important. That's why giving peer-to-peer praise and manager to employee praise is a feature of our software.



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Show Respect

This might sound obvious, but in the hustle and bustle of daily operations, small acts can be overlooked, which can be hugely damaging. Showing respect can be achieved in the simplest of ways. For example, showing up on time, having read your documents in advance, not running overtime with the meeting and not interjecting while the other person is speaking. These are more ways to make your people feel valued.

Ensure Clarity

Similar to the shared agenda, what was discussed and takeaways from the meeting need to be documented. Don't leave anything with a loose end or in any way unclear. Both of you need to have agreed on the notes, and the action plan before the discussion can end.

Encourage and Support

1:1s allow for you to show leadership. Encourage your people to find solutions to challenges they are facing or if required, support them in finding them and working through them. That's what you are there for, to [coach](#) your people.



Be Consistent

These meetings mean little if you are not consistent across the board, and if they aren't regular. Only you can make sure this doesn't happen. People need to see and experience you being fair and equal to all, and consistency is a way to show this. The process will also fall apart if it isn't a stable and frequent one. If you and your people continuously collaborate on an agenda and stick to agreed talking points, the 1:1 process will not only become a consistent one but you'll contribute to a company culture of consistency.

Never Cancel

It's unrealistic to expect anyone to make every meeting because life happens. If something comes up that is unavoidable, rescheduling 1:1s is ok from time to time. However, cancelling is a firm no. Avoid it at all costs, as it sends the wrong message regarding the value you place on time with the individual and their progression.

Even when it comes to rescheduling, don't do it to the same person twice. Think of how they would feel belonging to a team of people who all had their scheduled 1:1s on time but they are still waiting for theirs. Every move you make as a manager, and your relationship with each person, is always part of a bigger picture so make time to see things from their bigger picture before making a rescheduling decision.



Top Tip:

A useful approach we use and works well is having a monthly 1:1 with your people focused solely on their development needs and career aspirations. Split the operational priorities from ongoing progress against goals and make them separate meetings. In doing so, we ensure our focus is clear for everyone going into the meeting and nothing gets missed.



Questions

"If you don't ask the right questions, you don't get the right answers. A question asked in the right way often points to its own answer. Asking questions is the ABC of diagnosis. Only the inquiring mind solves problems." — Edward Hodnett

The big question is, what types of questions do I ask? Firstly ask yourself why you are holding the meeting? Is it a general check-in, a focused discussion on career progression or are you concerned about the progress being made on a specific goal? All 1:1 meetings should have a clearly defined purpose. Whatever the answer, it will guide you in knowing what kinds of questions you need to ask and the information you need to gather before the meeting can come to a close.

Different talking points require different questions. Although we believe in a consistent management approach, this shouldn't be confused with your delivery. Depending on the person you are holding the 1:1 with, it will likely have to change. Some people might respond well to swift, direct Q&A, while another might need a little more time and space to gather and deliver their thoughts. If you know your people, you'll know how best to approach and respond. We've outlined some examples below of the considerations required to get the insight you need.



Employee Led Conversations

The clue is in the name. This is for when you need to know what's happening for the individual, what needs addressing or expressing. It's the opportunity to find out something that needs to come from them, that you may not have much prior knowledge. It can be general or focused on something specific but is about how they are getting on.

An example of a question here would be:

"What's the most important thing we need to discuss today?"
"What obstacles are you encountering right now?"

Performance Review Outcomes

If you haven't made the move already, we'd highly recommend your [performance reviews](#) become a [quarterly](#) event. The end of year review fails to meet the needs of the modern workforce and doesn't belong in today's optimum performance management processes. This talking point is an opportunity to follow up on an outcome of a recent performance review. It's about moving the conversation to the next stage and the next steps. It's important your people feel supported in this.

For example:

"Looking forward, what are some priorities we are going to work on?"
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Manager Led Conversations

Feedback is a two-way system, and if it isn't, no one will reap the benefits. The same way your people need to know what they are doing well and areas to improve, you need this too as their manager. These questions are about how your people find their current level of support, to know what's working, what isn't and what you can do to become a better leader.

An example of a question in this area is:

"How could I do a better job communicating with you?"
"What would you like to see change, if anything, about these discussions?"

Career-Focused Conversations

Knowing where your people are headed is a key factor in company productivity. If you have someone sitting in a department with an entirely different professional trajectory in mind that is not supported in their current role, you risk losing them. And this could be one of your best people. If you know what their goals and aspirations are in the long term, you can support greater alignment within their work to help them get there. Part of being a leader is leading people in the right direction.

A question here could be:

"A year from now, what do you want to have accomplished?"
"What is one aspect of your job you would like more help or coaching with?"



Job Satisfaction

Do your people like their job? What parts of it do they like the most? Do you even know? You need to because a high level of employee satisfaction is imperative for retaining your people. It's an area you need to stay on top of so you can get the best out of them and create a better work environment. If you don't like your job, you aren't going to give it your full attention.

Ask a question like:

"Can you give examples of when you enjoyed working here the most?"

"What's an area of your work you want to improve? How can we work together on that?"

Team and Company

Sometimes you need to know how the team is getting on. Other times, it's the company. Questions in this area go beyond the individual's performance and you as a manager. Instead, they are geared towards feedback on interaction and performance in these wider areas.

For example:

"How would you describe how work is shared among team members?"

"How would you rate our communication as a team?"



Work-Life Balance

This is a key ingredient of wellbeing. It has always been important, but we've seen it come into the spotlight and be at the forefront of our conversations this year. People desire work-life balance. And it's not entirely up to them to find it, you as their leader can support it.

If you have a company culture that expects everyone to do regular overtime, work weekends and has a staffing shortage, you're making it extremely difficult for them to strike this balance. Questions here give you an idea of how balanced your people feel this aspect of their life is and how you can help them.

For example:

"What's one thing we could change about work for you that would improve your personal life?"

"What makes you excited and motivated to work on a particular project?"

Goal Ownership

No surprises here, this is all about goals. Setting them is one thing and achieving another, but what about the crucial area in between? This is why we favour [Objectives and Key Results \(OKRs\)](#) as our goal-setting framework over [Key Performance Indicators \(KPIs\)](#) as an example. It's vital you check-in to ensure people are on track and supported in hitting their targets.

An example here would be:

"In terms of the objective and the key results, are they still relevant?"

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As you can see, there is much more to the question process than a regular catchup of where things are. You need to know where you people are at, then their work. Asking the right questions gives you the chance to do that. And these meetings don't have to be hours long. We recommend 30 to 45 minutes per month. If the questions are well selected, and you know the knowledge you are seeking, then this should be a lean and clean process.



Top Tip:

Ask yourself in advance of the 1:1, do the questions I plan on asking match the focus of the meeting? To help you with this and to get the desired information, we've compiled a talking point template which covers each meeting type with more example questions. You can download it [here](#).



After The Meeting

What happens next? This part is as crucial as the meeting itself. If not carried out sufficiently, it can be damaging to relations, morale and company culture. For example, imagine a time when you had a great session with your manager and left feeling enthusiastic about what happens next, but nothing ever happened. This is the scenario you want to avoid. Here are the steps we would suggest taking.

Share Documents - After the meeting, follow on from the shared agenda process. Have a shared document that recaps on the priorities discussed and the actionable steps agreed. This gives an early intervention opportunity to untangle any knots, clear up any confusion and set progress in motion.

Carry Forward - Sometimes, everything will be achieved from the last meeting, but sometimes it will not. Ensure you carry forward anything that wasn't done. Let nothing slip through the cracks because if it was on the list, it's important - even if it may not be for you, it might be for them. On that note, make sure the next meeting is scheduled as part of this process.

Be Accountable - This goes both ways. 1:1s are places where you both need to take responsibility for your actions but also hold each other accountable. You can create a culture of accountability through the 1:1 process.



Keep Them Informed - There should be no major let downs. Not everything people want from their work might happen; there will always be external factors at play. But you can ensure you never let them down by including them in this process and keeping them informed. Lack of follow-up, even if there is nothing to update them on, breeds speculation and the questioning of your authenticity. Don't make space for that. Keep in touch.

Get Feedback - Every meeting you have with every person is an opportunity for growth. Make sure you get [continuous feedback](#) from your people on the 1:1 process. It's the only way it will improve.



Top Tip:

Have a system that works. For example, [Frankli's 1:1 workflow](#) has automated follow-ups, supports detailed note-taking and ensures action points are captured and assigned accordingly. Whether our software, another or a manual system, these are elements you need to run a successful 1:1 process. Make sure your chosen system is a solid one.



Conclusion

There was a time earlier this year when many businesses had to support their people working from home suddenly. Many of these new processes may be ongoing in their development, but they aren't going anywhere. Working as part of a distributed team is no longer an ad hoc necessity brought on by the pandemic, it's a way of working that is with your people and us for the long-term. Getting your digital performance management right ensures you and your team are cohesive and consistent. Most crucially, your 1:1s keeps you and your people connected, solid and strong regardless of external circumstances.

When it comes to your performance management process, there are two parallel lanes in constant development. There is the professional, tangible, structural lane with planned questions, information, and process. Then there is the personal, the intangible, which holds what is fluid like feelings and culture. They are equally important, and you need both. They work in tandem. As a people leader, you need to be aware of them, your influence over them and responsibility to nurture them.

1:1s are an example of where you can develop both, in this case in your meetings. An effective 1:1 process is one where you have buy-in because people believe in it. It's one that runs smoothly because people understand how it works, and it's one that has the desired impact because everyone reaps the benefits.



We created [Frankli](#) to support you in supporting your people with this. We take the spadework out of your hands and put it online. Better still, we engage your people in a transparent and easy to use process. It's a platform where people want to be because it feels good, where work gets done and breeds a sense of accomplishment. Successful 1:1s should run like clockwork but also make your people feel valued, motivated, encouraged and supported.



At Frankli, we're on a mission to help businesses optimise their performance management process. We bring simplicity and transparency to your people's experience through goal-setting, real-time feedback, 1:1s, pulse surveys and review cycles.

If you'd like to know how we can do this for you, get in touch with [Noel](#) or [Ronan](#) today.

