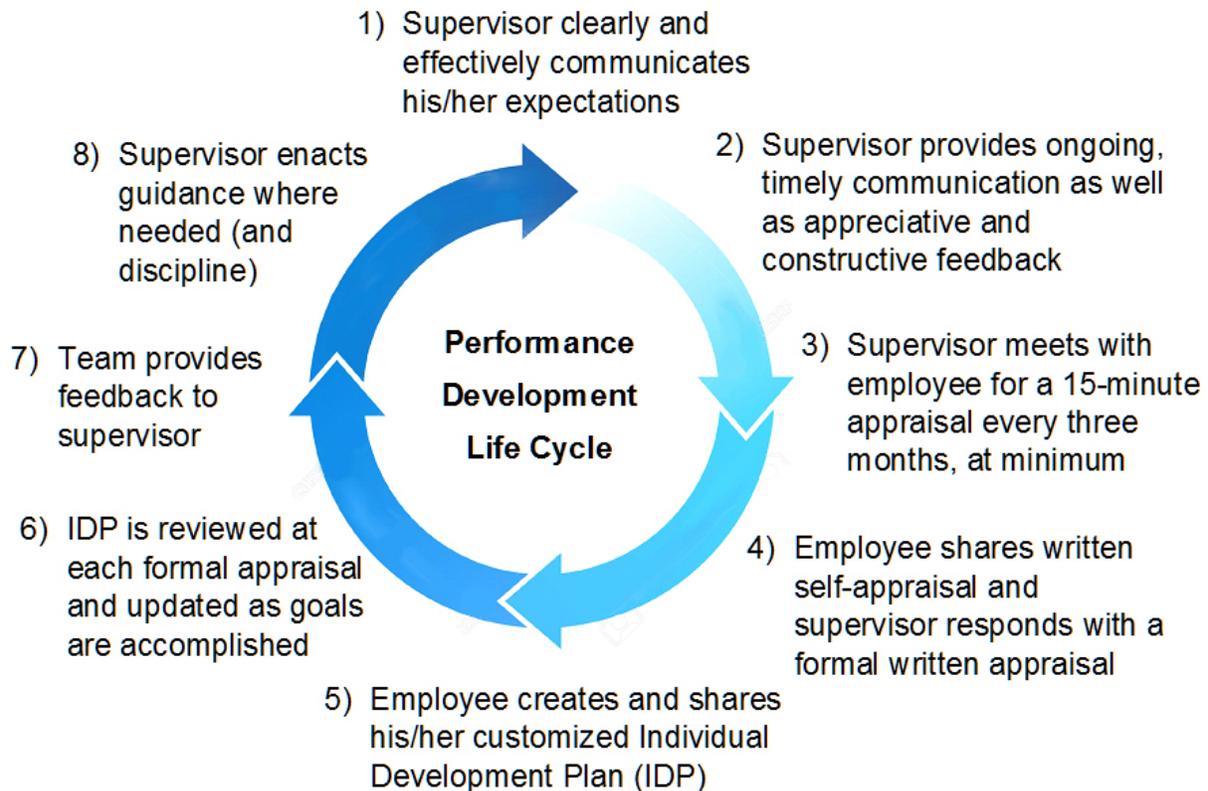


DEVELOPING INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE: THE EIGHT STEPS

One can view an individual's professional development as having a life cycle. The cycle begins when a person starts working – and continues as long as the employee remains with an organization. In high performing organizations, people are aware of this life cycle and commit to ensuring that everyone is engaged in it.



The life cycle has these steps:

1. The first step is for supervisors¹ to clearly communicate and share their expectations with their employees directly, in person. There are different levels of expectations, including those of the company overall, those of an individual supervisor, and those of the employee. It is the supervisor's job to communicate expectations effectively, in person, on an ongoing basis. Since expectations can change, it is vital that the supervisor communicates them often and checks frequently to make sure the expectations are clear. At the same time, the supervisor should invite the employee to also talk about his or her expectations and help clarify any areas where those expectations cannot be met.

¹ In this context, a supervisor is anyone who manages or supervises another person.

2. The second step is to provide ongoing, timely communication and feedback about what the employee is doing well, and what areas need development. The supervisor should not wait for a formal appraisal to provide this feedback, but provide it on an ongoing basis. Depending on the quality of the employee's performance and the nature of the assignment, it may be necessary to change the employee's responsibilities and expectations. The supervisor needs to communicate this clearly.
3. At minimum, every three months, the manager or supervisor needs to meet with each employee for a 15-minute appraisal of what the employee is doing well and where development is needed. In most cases, a written appraisal is not needed at this time. However, if the employee is not showing the expected performance, the supervisor has the option of providing the employee with a written record detailing the areas of strength and the areas that need development.
4. On the cycle appropriate for the employee's role and level of experience, the employee needs to receive a formal, written appraisal. This should occur in a timely manner. The process begins with the employee completing a self-appraisal and sharing it with his or her supervisor. The supervisor responds with a written appraisal that identifies the employee's specific strengths and areas where the employee needs development.
5. Based on the appraisal, the employee needs to create an Individual Development Plan (IDP). It is important that the employee consider this to be his or her own IDP – not the organization's. The IDP should include the specific competencies the employee wishes to develop, along with specific strategies for doing so, including on-the-job learning, training and coaching. The employee needs to share the IDP with his supervisor and talk about his desired experience and development activities. But the employee should not expect that it will always be possible for the supervisor to meet those goals.
6. As employees successfully accomplish specific development steps and add new ones, they need to revise their IDPs. This typically occurs on an annual basis, but may occur less often. People also need to revise their IDPs as their professional goals evolve. It's a good idea to review the IDP with each formal appraisal.
7. At regular intervals, managers and supervisors need to receive input about how they are doing. Part of this occurs via their appraisals from their boss. But managers and supervisors should also facilitate regular, informal discussions with the people they supervise about what they're doing well and what they could do better. The more regular that this upward feedback occurs, the more readily will employees dispel their fears and view it as a positive part of the process.
8. In cases where the employee is not satisfactorily improving in areas that have been identified as areas of concern, the manager or supervisor should provide appropriate feedback, guidance and assistance to the employee. In some instances, an employee's performance or conduct may warrant progressive discipline.

Note: When employees change managers or supervisors, they need to meet with their new boss and share their IDPs. At the same time, the new manager or supervisor needs to communicate the expectations (see Step 1 in the cycle).

This life cycle is significant because it shifts the focus away from formal performance appraisals toward regular, frequent, informal meetings to discuss how things are going. For many businesses, this has proven to be a more effective way of developing people and assuring performance issues are dealt with in a timely manner.

The important thing to stress is that no one stops developing. It is a life-long pursuit, and those who are actively attuned and engaged in their professional development find deep satisfaction and fulfillment in it.