

**Electronic Supplementary Material for
Mertens, S., & Schollaert, E. (2023). Performance feedback during a pandemic –
(Social) distancing from feedback? A qualitative study. *Journal of Personnel Psychology*.
<https://doi.org/10.1027/1866-5888/a000317>**

Information on data collection and data analysis transparency.

As stated in the Methods section, grounded theory is used as a qualitative research strategy. This implies that data collection and data analysis are closely interrelated, mutually influencing each other. Initially, we saw the pandemic and the accompanying teleworking measures as a chance to investigate if and how HR managers reacted to the changing teleworking context and, if applicable, how they adapted their PM and feedback practices to this context. Together with three Master's students, we started interviewing Flemish HR managers. All interviewers were outsiders to the organizations and there was no previously existing relationship with the HR managers. The main researchers attended the Master's students' first interviews, after which the students received feedback on their interviewing skills.

After the first few interviews, the most prominent topics were discussed by all interviewers during a meeting. We found that the shape of the PM system – and whether it was rather formally or informally organized – was an important subject of the interviews. HR managers told extensively about their organization's approach and which practices were predominately disrupted when the pandemic first started. In particular, formal conversations – the periodical appraisals – were said to be postponed and ultimately canceled. Since HR managers themselves made a clear distinction between the different PM practices (appraisals, team meetings, informal check-ins,...) and the extent to which these were disrupted when the pandemic started, we decided to shift our focus to that topic, as evidenced by the altered interview questions (see below). Specifically, we asked the HR managers about the specific implementation of their PM system, such as details on feedback frequency, to what extent conversations are scheduled, and

whether 360° feedback is used.

All interviewers coded the transcripts in three steps: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The Master's students and the main researchers did this independently, after which the results were compared to each other. There were no major disagreements among the interviewers. In the first step of the coding process, the quotes in the transcripts were labeled by means of so-called codes. These codes simply reflected what participants mentioned in the interviews. For instance, several HR managers indicated their personal opinion on the topics of PM and feedback stated whether they thought feedback was valuable. These parts of the transcripts were coded as "opinion on feedback." Other examples of codes are the different PM practices. The interviewees often described different PM and feedback practices, which we labeled accordingly. For instance, statements such as, "*We have one formal conversation a year, which takes place in February,*" were coded as "formal appraisal." In this first step, employees' well-being was also mentioned several times; this was one of the main concerns of the HR managers. We coded these parts of the interviews as such.

In the next step, which is called axial coding, we aimed to organize the codes from step 1. In doing this, we develop more abstract categories that are based on the existing codes. For instance, we were able to group those codes that describe the different PM and feedback practices into two categories: rather formally installed and rather informally organized. Moreover, the well-being-related concerns of the HR managers were also grouped into one category, which was called "well-being employees." The different codes indicating how HR managers experienced the disruption to their PM system were also grouped. We divided them into two broad categories: 1) "severely disrupted" and 2) "rapid adaptation." The first category consisted of codes like "postponed" and "canceled," while the latter was characterized by codes such as "(digital) alternatives" and "business as usual."

During the selective coding stage, we connected the previously developed categories of

codes. First, the HR managers did not explicitly link employees' well-being to feedback and PM practices. As this study is interested in PM practices during crises (in this case, the COVID-19 pandemic), we did not include the "well-being" category in subsequent steps of the analysis. In the transcripts, the "formal PM practices" category is often accompanied by codes reflecting the "severely disrupted" category. For instance, almost all HR managers who stated that their organization's PM system was centered around the annual appraisal also indicated that they felt that the appraisals were neglected, as they were often postponed and ultimately canceled. However, a similar link is found in the transcripts of interviews with HR managers who indicated their organization only makes use of informal feedback. Those transcripts are characterized by codes like "risk of neglecting informal feedback," "less social contact/interactions," and "formalized."

When coding the transcripts, however, there were some difficulties regarding the categorization of the organizations according to the formal/informal dichotomy. A number of organizations did not exclusively apply one or the other; they were rather situated at the center of the formal/informal spectrum. In addition, these HR managers did not indicate that they felt a severe "disruption" when the pandemic started. Therefore, we examined the transcripts once again. Rather than aiming to divide the organizations into two categories (mostly formal versus mostly informal), we now added a third category: both formal and informal. After repeating the coding process, we saw that these HR managers mainly used expressions like "business as usual" and "the same, but digitally."

After the extensive coding process – which was an iterative process in and of itself – we contacted several HR professionals to conduct a member check. During our conversations with these nine practitioners, we summarized our findings and asked them if they are recognizable. Most agreed. However, the practitioners added that, according to them, teleworking and digitalization are important topics in the debate. They argue that when teleworking and working

with digital tools are normalized in organizations, these organizations will be more resilient in rapidly-changing contexts (like the Covid-19 pandemic and sudden teleworking measures).

Initial interview questions

1. Were your organization's PM practices impacted by the pandemic and teleworking measures? If so, how?
 - a. How did you handle the sudden teleworking measures?
 - b. How do feedback and evaluation of employees take place now, during the COVID-19 pandemic and while employees work from home?
2. According to you, what were the main challenges and opportunities with regard to feedback and evaluation while teleworking?
3. How did you experience these sudden changes?
 - a. Do you feel as if this affects your employees/supervisors?

Final interview questions

1. What does your PM cycle look like?
2. How do feedback and evaluation of employees usually take place?
 - a. How frequently do both (feedback & evaluation) occur?
 - b. Does feedback usually happen in writing or digitally?
 - c. Are employees only evaluated by their manager, or also by their colleagues or external parties such as clients? If so, how?
3. How do feedback and evaluation of employees take place now, during the COVID-19 pandemic and while employees work from home?
 - a. Have you adjusted feedback and evaluation accordingly?
 - b. Is more or less feedback being provided now?
 - c. Are digital communication tools/technology being used? If so, how?
 - d. Do you feel as if this affects your employees? How do you measure this?
 - e. Do you support supervisors and employees during the process of feedback and evaluation? If so, how?
4. What are the main challenges and opportunities with regard to feedback and evaluation while teleworking?