iCOACH 1ST

A BUYER'S GUIDE TO

PERFORMANCE

MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS

Ten Features You Need and Three to Avoid

The Ideal Vehicle for Employee Engagement, Retention and Empowerment

If you've picked up this guide, you're most likely on the hunt for a great new performance management software solution.

You've maybe even got a short-list of options, and you're probably wondering how to separate hype from reality and pick the most powerful fit for your company.

It's true. There ARE a lot of options out there for performance management software (or combinations of software). Most claim to offer coaching and feedback features to drive employee engagement and enablement. But they are not all the same, and it can be confusing to weigh the options.

So how can you find the most modern, effective solution for your needs, and sort what matters from marketing fluff?

We've assembled this Buyer's Guide to assist you in prioritizing and evaluating performance management features and choose a platform that will truly make a difference in your company.

In this guide you will find ten feature areas you can use as a criteria to weigh your options, and three types of solutions you probably want to be leery of.

Read on to learn more!

1 Goal Setting

The first thing you want to look for in your performance management platform is a way to clearly establish individual goals that are aligned to your business imperatives and values. Your employees should never be left guessing about what success looks like in your company, or forced to infer what they should be focusing on.

The solution you choose, needs to have a clear, agile structure for goal setting, including the option to easily cascade goals from either an individual (for instance, manager) or the organization/department. But don't just stop here, as these features are merely the "price of entry" for any solution. Truly innovative platforms include the ability for managers, and designated coaches, to provide targeted, ongoing feedback against specific goals, anywhere, anytime, from a variety of devices, including mobile phones and email (i.e. Outlook plug-in). Similarly, goal owners should be able to provide updates to their goals and have managers / coaches review these updates immediately after their completion to offer encouragement, any needed comments or feedback, and, if appropriate, a "soft" assessment/ratings to help quantify the individual's progress against his or her objectives in real-time.

2 Structured Coaching

Of course, goal-setting alone is not sufficient. You must choose a performance management solution that provides structure for helping employees to actually achieve those goals, along with their personal aspirations for growth or succession planning. Studies show that managers who coach are more connected to the organization, and employees who are coached feel more valued and supported. They perform at higher levels and are more likely to stay with your company

To be effective, coaching must happen on a multilateral platform that allows consistent communication and empowers employees to participate in the process. Look for solutions with conversational templates that can assist managers in offering, effective, consistent coaching. Because employees learn and develop in different ways, you should prioritize tools that leverage adult learning theory to offer a variety of coaching styles, including video, written feedback, quick feedback, comprehensive assessments, meeting notes, and other formal and informal coaching styles.

Finally, you will want to choose a solution that emphasizes quantifiable actions and follow-up—making it easy for employees to understand their progress and for you to centralize and track that progress on an individual, team or organizational level. Look for solutions that centralize and log historical data, and offer strong analytics and reporting.

3 Spontaneous, Always-on Feedback

Feedback is critical for both growth and motivation—so you will want to find a performance management system with advanced capabilities in offering "always-on" feedback. Your platform should make it easy for employees to give and receive a stream of constructive and encouraging communication in real time across your organization.

Your solution should allow for spontaneous positive feedback, when behavior occurs, and you should have the options to make it manager-to-employee, peer-to-peer, or anyone-to-anyone, depending on your culture.

Important features to look for in a feedback solution are:

- the ability to set feedback as a one-way comment or a bi-directional feedback dialog

- the ability to both offer and to proactively request feedback

- the ability to set feedback as private or viewable by the managerial chain—depending on your culture and team dynamics

Lastly, you will want to choose a solution that collects and centralizes information about feedback, in order to provide more collaborative insights across your organization, and better measure and manage your culture.

4 Integrated Training and Connected Learning

All too often, performance management platforms approach training by simply bolting on a series of videos and quizzes to their platform, or focusing only on checking the box for mandatory training such as sexual harassment policies.

Look for a solution that actually integrates and aligns employee training with your goal-setting, coaching and feedback activities, so that all these aspects of employee development are in communication and sync. Look for solutions that allow you to:

- Set developmental goals by employee or team

- Assign microtraining to address specific or acute needs in digestible segments

- Incorporate self-directed training to retain high-potentials

- Gather feedback and ratings from learners on the quality of the modules

- Create leaderboards and social integration for training

Finally, learning doesn't end when a training module is complete. Be sure to look for a solution that includes post-training follow-up and tasks for long term information retention.

5 Social Communication & Recognition

Recognition is a human need. We all want to connect, feel like we are being effective in our work, and have our effort acknowledged. So you want to be sure your performance management solution has a recognition component. Studies also show that recognition can have added effectiveness when it is social, or shared with peers, so look for solutions that have that option.

A good solution will offer a team communication and collaboration space where social recognition can take place on an ongoing basis. These features can also be used for other communications and posts, such as sharing best practices and other key information/learnings.

As with coaching and constructive feedback, you should have the ability to capture and consolidate recognition activity and gain insights across your organization, for the purposes of more informed culture management.

Finally, your recognition program should be able to tie in to existing incentive or rewards programs to ensure that rewards go to those who earn them.

6 Metrics, Surveys and Assessments

Modern performance management solutions need to be attuned to employee needs and development, but also solidly based in metrics and data. The solution you choose must have strong, centralized and consolidated analytics that allow you to build an accurate picture of what is happening organically in your company.

Your platform should also allow you to reach out and gather data on demand! This might for the purposes of benchmarking or for tracking behavior and progress on an individual, team, or organizational level. Choose a solution with integrated survey and assessment functionality so data is native to the platform and will flow into your reporting and analysis, rather than being tacked on as an afterthought from a third party tool.

Features you should be looking for include:

- pulse surveys you can send periodically to some or all employees

- ability to associate surveys with events such as completion of learning modules or feedback

- fully-customizable employee engagement and culture surveys

- employee self assessments

- 360˚ feedback
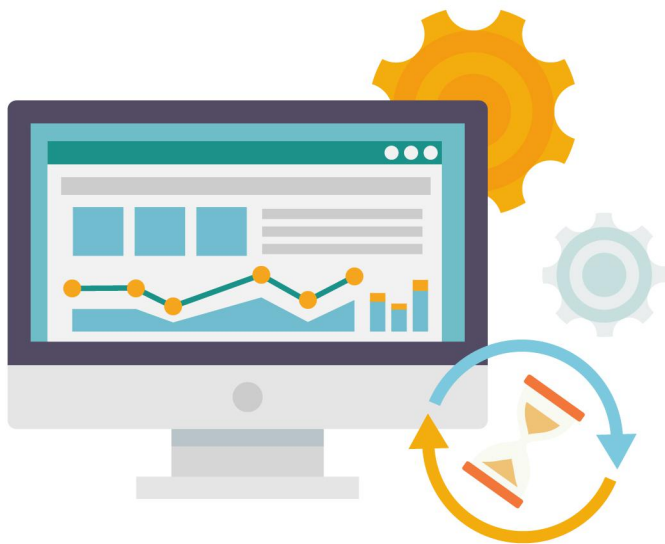
7 Performance Reviews

Performance reviews have become problematic in recent years, largely because some solutions divorce employee assessment from employee coaching, feedback, and behavior measurement tools.

Many more modern companies are using feedback and coaching to migrate traditional annual reviews to a more "always on" model for goal-setting and achievement. But not all performance management software platforms have caught up.

Be sure to choose a platform that introduces more objectivity into your performance management ecosystem, by marrying performance reviews with feedback and coaching—capturing information both continuously and from many sources.

If you are still conducting periodic or annual reviews, your solution should offer metrics that give you both a real-time and an "over time" view of employee progress. This will help managers to recall the whole arc of an employee's development over that time.

Relying on objective information-gathering tied to an "always-on" performance ecosystem will ensure a more objective, fair and balanced view of employees proficiencies, wants and needs, and potential for further growth—no matter what frequency or form you choose for your assessments.

8 Cloud/Fully-functional Mobile App

You should immediately cross off your list ANY solution that does not offer cloud capability and complete, native mobile functionality for performance management—both for employees and managers.

Today's global workforce is social and mobile, and it is imperative to the success of a platform to meet employees where they are. This means solutions must be available from the office to the factory floor to the field, and be flexible and constantly accessible in order to capture behavior, praise and feedback when and where it occurs.
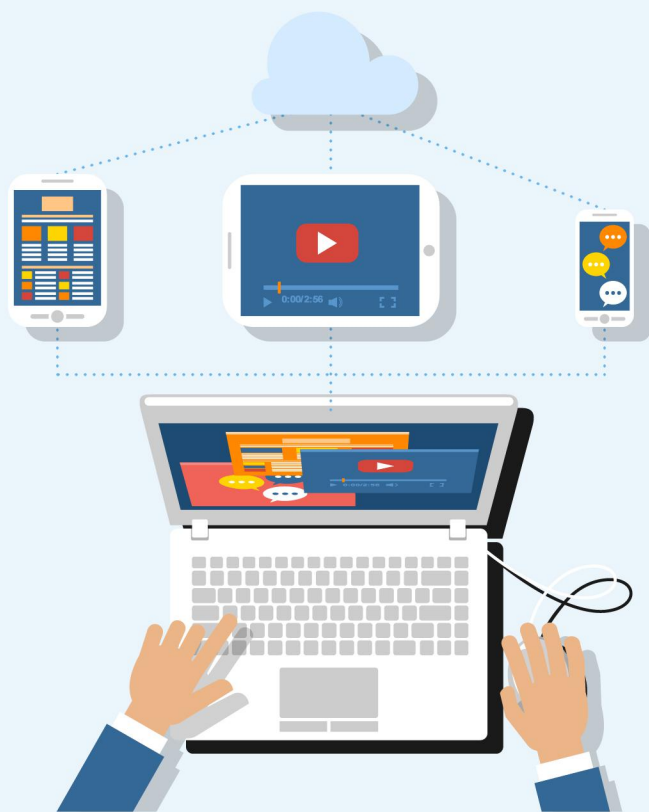
A native mobile app—available on all platforms and smart devices—allows for feedback on the fly, mobile learning, coaching, communication, and collaboration. Mobile accessibility is really the only way to ensure wide adoption across your organization.

Cloud and mobile are table stakes for performance management platforms, so be sure the solution you choose is fully-functional in both of these areas, and not simply lip service or a vanity app that does not connect or feed data back into the performance management infrastructure.

9 User Experience/Gamification

We've focused a lot in this guide on methodology, functionality and data gathering, but it is also critical that you rigorously demo a solution to ensure it has an intuitive UI, and is fun, user friendly, and modern.

You will want to look for apps that have familiarity to your employees and align with how they use other social apps.

Gamification is another quality that increases adoption and makes performance management more interesting and fun for employees. So be on the lookout for leaderboards, badges, and other gamification elements that can help employees chart and track their progress against goals and learning objectives.

We strongly recommend that you demo proposed solutions not just with decision-makers in your company, but by pulling in employees from different areas of the organization and soliciting their input on the platform. Incorporate that feedback into your decision-making.

10 Simple and Full Configurability

Some performance management systems can seem overwhelming at first, or have feature sets that you may not need yet. Be sure that the solution you choose is one that can be easily configured by your own team, and doesn't require expensive change orders to modify.

Look for a platform with a simple, intuitive admin module. Stay clear of solutions that force you to accept functions that might confuse employees or require you to explain why you are not using all features.

Finally, look for a platform that works and plays nicely with others—both ingesting and outputting information from other sources. Look for one that integrates smoothly into your entire HRIS and enterprise tech stack—including your email and notifications systems such as Outlook.

Now that we've spent time telling you what to look for in your solution, let's highlight a few red flags to look out for (and hopefully avoid) while you are shopping.

1 Monolithic HCM tools

Beware of massive HCM all-in-one tools where performance management and coaching is an afterthought, or one more checkbox in an endless list of buzzwords.

All too often these solutions will simply add on or relabel features and call them "coaching", rather than thinking about feedback and adult learning in a holistic and thoughtful way.
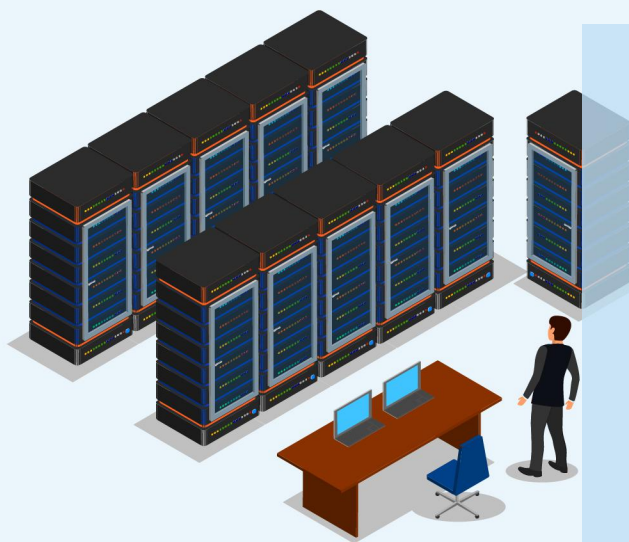
Don't let technology drive your limitations here. It is important to have a comprehensive solution in the area of performance management but there are swim lanes and proficiencies that must be considered.

If a solution wants you to manage payroll or benefits with the same platform you are using to manage people and performance, it is most likely a jack-of-all-trades and a master of none.

2 Overfocusing on Gifts and Rewards

Recognition is a human need, but you do not want to focus the whole of your performance management process around rewards or other transactional reinforcement techniques.

Rewards are useful as an accompaniment to comprehensive and balanced feedback, but if you focus solely on gift cards or perks, you will take the focus away from work and development.

Your solution must be able to address learning, growth and areas of improvement. Rewards and perks do not substitute for real feedback and are ripe for misuse if they are not accompanied by a comprehensive performance management solution.

3 Single silo solutions

Just as you should be wary of HCM tools that try to do TOO many things, you should also beware of niche apps that do only one thing.

It's important to cluster functions that need to integrate together—such as feedback, recognition, coaching and training—into the same ecosystem. Stacking together stand-alone apps for each function will introduce additional points of failure into your system.

Likewise, leaning on a single solution without the synergy of end-to-end performance management will not close the loop for employee growth or engagement.

Locating your performance management capabilities to a single platform will allow them to link together, share data and enhance reporting.

Not every company will gravitate to the same solution for employee performance management, but we hope this guide has provided you with a comprehensive look at how to evaluate and assess a solution foryour organization. Please don't hesitate to reach out to our team with further questions!

Are you ready to look at a solution that meets all of these criteria and can support your transformation to continuous, cloud-based performance management?

Be sure to demo iCoach!