

THE EMPLOYEES' INSIGHT OF THE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL SYSTEM: A REVIEW

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KeyWords

Performance Appraisal; Performance Appraisal System; Employees' Perception

ABSTRACT

Performance appraisal system is the method you use to evaluate employee performance and analyze performance trends. It sets a standard for the performance appraisal process while allowing some flexibility depending on the role. Performance appraisal is a disputed management practice. With so much controversy in it, appraisal is continually used in the public sector around the world as an instrument to oversee the performance of its personnel (Vallance, 1999). In spite of the controversy, performance appraisal remains to be a standard practice in the public sector for the reason that personnel agencies find it useful in advocating public accountability. Public sector organization may be considered as a business relying on its human resources. The quality of its human resources as a business determines the existence and buildup of the organization (Tyson, 2006). Authors have contended that, to have an effective human resource system for organizations the use of an appraisal system which is reliable and accurate is needed (Armstrong, 2003; Bohlander & Snell, 2004; Desler, 2008).

INTRODUCTION

THIS paper tries to highpoint the literature reviews related to the following topics: Performance Appraisal System, Purpose of the Performance Appraisal System, Errors in the Performance Appraisal, and Perceptions about Performance Appraisal. Moreover, to highlight concepts and studies related to the above-mentioned topics, the literature review will be presented in the following order: Topic one on the Performance Appraisal System gives the definitions, processes and arguments about performance appraisal; Topic two on the Purpose of the Performance Appraisal System elucidates the use and purpose of appraisal system in every organization particularly in public sector organization; Topic three on the Errors in the Performance Appraisal System presents the errors and biases commonly committed in the conduct of the appraisal process; and Topic four on the Perceptions about Performance Appraisal demonstrates the various perceptions regarding the application of the appraisal process.

Through the years, different literatures have discussed about the definitions, processes, and arguments of the term "performance appraisal". Authors Murphy and Cleveland (1991) and Cardy and Dobbins (1994) came up with the traditional definition of performance appraisal as a formal process of employee monitoring.

In the present paper, the term performance appraisal is defined as the systematic evaluation of the performance of employees and the understanding of the abilities of a person for further growth and development. The term performance appraisal has been described in other terms such as, performance management, performance evaluation, performance review, and performance assessment. The meaning of the term performance appraisal is universally understood compared to the other terms above-mentioned, though the other terms have their own individual meanings on a variety of settings (Vallance, 1999).

DeNisi (2000) defines performance appraisal as —the systems whereby an organization assign some —score to indicate the level of performance of a target person or group.

Fletcher (2001) defines performance appraisal more broadly as activities through which organizations seek to assess employees and develop their competence, enhance performance and distribute rewards. The focus was on performance ratings and other limited and measured-focused issues, but more recently has broadened and currently addressed social and motivational aspects of ap-

praisal. Fletcher's definition reflects this shift in focus.

Mondy et al. (2002) defines performance appraisal as a system of review and evaluation of an individual's (or team) performance and the process of appraising performance (who appraises and how is it done) within organizations. The emphasis on the organizations signals a further evolution in the nature of performance appraisal.

Jackson and Schuler (2003) describe it as evaluating performance based on the judgments and opinions of subordinates, peers, supervisor, other managers and even workers themselves, while, Bohlander and Snell (2007) sees performance appraisal as an annual regular undertaking developed to assist employees in understanding their roles, objectives, expectations and performance success conducted by a supervisor to a subordinate.

Along the same line, Desler (2008) gives meaning to performance appraisal as any procedure that involves setting of work standards, assessing the employees' actual performance relative to those standards, and providing feedback to employees with the aim of motivating him or her to eliminate performance deficiencies or to continue to perform above average.

Vance (2006) explains that performance appraisal is intended to engage, align, and coalesce individual and group effort to continually improve overall organizational mission accomplishment. He stated that, it provides a basis for identifying and correcting disparities in performance. Thus, it is according to him, performance appraisal is activities oriented. He added that it also may provide the basis for other personnel actions which typically include: (1) performance pay, (2) training and career development, (3) promotion and placement, (4) recognition and rewards, (5) disciplinary actions, and (6) identifying selection criteria. Its success depends primarily on the (1) system and measures (criteria), (2) culture, and (3) the perceived attitudes and needs of participants— i.e., their degree of —engagement with their jobs.

Abu-Doleh and Weir (2007) describes performance appraisal or performance evaluation as a systematic and periodic process that assesses an individual employee's job performance and productivity in relation to certain pre-established criteria and organizational objectives.

Without question, authors are of the same opinion that performance appraisal is a process of evaluating the performance of an individual (Bohlander & Snell, 2007; Cardy & Dobbins, 1994; Desler, 2008; Murphy & Cleveland, 1991; Vallance, 1999).

Performance appraisal system pertains to the whole process and procedures governing the performance appraisal in the entire organization as well (Jawahar, 2007). It is the primary human resource management function of an organization (Dulebohn & Ferris, 1999). The significance of performance appraisal in an organization is upheld by organizational researchers, for instance, (Bohlander & Snell, 2007; Desler, 2008; Gomez-Mejia, et al., 2010).

A distinction between a good and a poor performer at work is necessary for an organization to run effectively (Ilgen & Feldman, 1983). According to Muczyk and Gable (1987) the high degree of success or failure of any organization depends on how performance is managed within it. It would be impossible for an organization to achieve its goals, for instance, giving best employees a sizable pay increase, spot individuals ready for promotion, justifiable grounds for termination of poor performer, and undertaking successful human resource planning, if managers do not give prime concern to make better the performance appraisal of the organization. As to date, it is argued that every performance appraisal system created by organizations contains deficiencies hindering it from successfully attaining its goals in the organization.

An effective performance appraisal requires considerable time and effort of managers and gathering of information and receiving employees' feedback. Some managers do not take the task seriously or do not have the skills needed to do a good job of evaluating performance and providing feedback (Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, & Cardy, 2010). For instance, some employees do not calmly accept the feedback, and others may become frustrated with an ineffective performance appraisal system and end-up believing that the system is unfair and does not matter (Jackson & Schuler, 2006).

There exists a strong desire for a frequent performance feedback and evaluation by employees, though there are many difficulties and disapproval against performance appraisal systems. For example, employees prefer an appraisal of more than once in a year. There are many good points of conducting a frequent appraisal, but Gomez-Mejia, et al. (2010) observe that informal appraisal, including feedback and discussion with workers, should occur on a continuous basis.

On the other hand, Grubb (2007) views performance appraisal as a deficient process because it is costly, widespread and counterproductive activity. Performance appraisal according to him is a useless activity even though it is administered with the intention to oversee and make better the performance of individual employees and to improve overall efficiency, effectiveness and productivity of an organization.

Grubb (1999) mentions that supervisors and employees seem to dislike performance appraisal, as they probably know that it is just a game of make believe but still it goes on as a practice. Some are of the opinion that performance appraisal should not be practiced anymore even if it is a process to know how they perform individually, how they can improve their work performance and contribute to the performance of the organization. The practice of performance appraisal is constantly resisted as a hopeless method of attempting to improve performance because it is erroneous and degrading. This argument is supported by Gomez-Mejia, et al. (2010) maintaining that, a performance not measured accurately and feedback that is poorly given; its costs may exceed its potential benefits in conducting the appraisal.

Arguably, performance appraisal has aroused more controversy than most human resource management practices. Although regarded by its advocates as a pivotal tool to a successful human resource strategy, its critics on the other hand, view it as unnecessary and potentially destructive to workplace harmony (Vallance, 1999). Performance appraisal is used despite evidence that it is counterproductive. Gomez-Mejia et al. (2010) observed that some people perceived that performance appraisal should be eliminated as a practice in organizations because of the problems and errors in evaluating performance. Bohlander and Snell (2007) posits that, some argue that performance appraisal discourages teamwork because it frequently focuses on individual achievement and produc-

es a self-focus rather than team focus. Yet, performance appraisal practices in the public sector remains rooted in the personnel agencies around the world because it created the impression that governments are concerned about the performance of their employees and that they are keen to detect poor performance and reward excellence. Vallance (1999) maintains that the symbolic benefits of appraisal should not be underestimated.

Gomez-Mejia, et al. (2010) elucidates performance appraisal as the identification, measurement, and management of human performance in organizations. Gomez-Mejia, et al. (2010) discussed that the first step in the performance appraisal process is identifying what is to be measured. It means determining what areas of work the manager should be examining when measuring performance. According to them, the appraisal system should focus on performance that affects organizational success rather than performance-irrelevant characteristics such as race, age, or sex.

In the identification process, the appropriate dimensions, an aspect of performance that determines effective job performance, must be decided by an organization. Such dimensions involving, quality of work done, quantity of work performed, and interpersonal effectiveness must be considered in identifying the 19 performances to be measured. The mechanism by which performance dimension is identified is through job-analysis process (Gomez-Mejia, Balkin et al. 2010).

The second step in the appraisal process is measurement. Gomez-Mejia, et al. (2010) considers measurement as the centerpiece of the appraisal system as it gives rise to making managerial judgments of how —good|| or —bad|| an employee performance is. Measurement must be consistent throughout the organization or must be aligned with the organization's business strategy and organizational culture (Jackson & Schuler, 2006). Jackson and Schuler (2006) argue that effective performance measurement and feedback enhances employee motivation and productivity, facilitates strategic planning and change, and ensures legal compliance and fair treatment.

The last step in the appraisal process as presented in the model of Gomez-Mejia, et al. (2010) and the most important goal of any appraisal system is management. To achieve higher level of performance, managers must provide workers with feedback and coach them. Appraisal must take a future-oriented view of what workers can do to achieve their potential in the organization. According to them, appraisal should be more than a past-oriented activity that criticizes or praises workers for their performance in the preceding year.

Desler (2011) states that, effective appraisal begins long before the actual appraisal. He put into detail the steps in appraising performance as follows: First, is to make sure that employee's job and performance criteria are defined. Defining the job means making sure that the superior and subordinate agree on his or her duties and job standards and on the appraisal method that will be used. Secondly, appraising 20 performance means comparing the subordinate's actual performance to the standards which involve the rating form. Finally, an effective appraisal requires a feedback system, where superior discusses with the subordinate on his or her performance and progress, and make plans for any development required.

To have a fair appraisal, Desler (2011) suggests the following practices in an organization that would help in administering a fair performance appraisal. Performance review on duties and standards must be based from a job analysis; Performance review must be based on observable job behaviors or objective performance data; Performance expectations must be made clear ahead of time; Standardized performance review procedure must be used for all employees; Frequent opportunities to observe the employee's job performance must be given to the raters; Organizations must use either multiple raters or have the rater's supervisor evaluate the appraisal results; Organizations must include an appeal mechanism on the appraisal; Organizations must document the appraisal review process and results; The conduct of the reviews and the use of the results must be made known to the employees ahead of time; Employees must provide inputs on the assessment given to him or her; There must be an indication on the appraisal on what the employees need to do to improve; Supervisors who will be doing the appraisal must be trained thoroughly.

Desler (2011) argues that, it is better to have an appraisal which has problems than to have no appraisal at all, contrary to what Grubb (1999) has stated in the earlier literature that appraisal should be discontinued as a practice in the organization because it is flawed and demeaning method of improving performance. The problems in a performance appraisal can be remedied by actually minimizing them. Desler (2011) suggest that five (5) things should be done to have an effective appraisal. First, he suggested that potential appraisal problems should be learned and understood. Knowing the problem and anticipating it would help in avoiding it in the process of appraising. Second, it would be proper to choose an appropriate appraisal tool or a combination of tools to use. Third, he suggested that a proper recording of an employee's performance for the year in appraisal is a must. Hence, he suggested that a diary of employee's performance is proper. Fourth, there must be an agreement to improve unsatisfactory performance of employees. And fifth, the process of appraisal must be rendered fairly every time.

Purposes

The universal application of the use of performance appraisal in an organization is necessary to capitalize on its human resource (Prowse, P. & J. Prowse, 2009). Performance appraisal is conducted for two basic purposes: administrative and developmental (Cleveland, J. N., Murphy, K. R., Williams, R. E. (1989); Gomez-Mejia, L. R., Balkin, D. B., & Cardy, R. L. (2010); Youngcourt, S. S., P. I. Leiva, et al. (2007)). Top-down and control-oriented style of performance management was the conventional purpose of appraisal (Vance et al., 2006).

Appraisal is for administrative purpose when an individual's performance is evaluated as basis for his or her promotion, pay increase, transfer or reassignment, and termination. Performance appraisal on this objective must be carried out in such a manner as to tell the difference between individuals or assess individuals against a measuring system.

On the other hand, appraisal is for developmental purposes when evaluation is done for soliciting information to further individual's improvement in his or her performance or as a basis for improving the function of the organization as to recruiting, selecting, placing, and training of its employees. Decisions for administrative purpose need information on what happened, while decisions for

developmental purpose need information on how the outcome occurred (Gomez-Mejia et al., 2010; Youngcourt et. al., 2007).

Youngcourt et al. (2007) contends that a decision on the purpose of appraisal is helpful in determining what is to be appraised. In the government setting, a well- 23 developed and systematic employee's performance appraisal and maintenance system can serve in many ways (CSC, 2007). It can be a tool to discover civil servants' weaknesses, stimulate them to continue improving themselves, and assist the organization in assigning work in accordance with their abilities.

Desler (2011) gives four reasons to appraise subordinate's performance. First, from a practical point of view, most employers still base pay and promotional decisions on the employee's appraisal. Second, the appraisal lets the boss and subordinate develop a plan for correcting any deficiencies, and to reinforce the things the subordinate does right. Third, appraisals should serve a useful career planning purpose. They provide an opportunity to review the employee's career plans in light of his or her exhibited strengths and weaknesses. Fourth, appraisals play an integral role in the employer's performance management process.

In addition, Grubb (2007) states that there are at least four reasons offered in support of performance appraisal: first, it promotes the organizational efficiency and effectiveness; second, it enhances individual employee's performance and satisfaction; third, it simplifies administrative proceedings; and lastly, it ensures that management retains control of its employees' behaviors and attitudes.

Stated in another way, Grubb (2007) expressed that, performance appraisal is done because at first, it fits direct approach to management. Secondly, people are suited into the system. He argued that, employees are organized to fit into the —production machine. Employees are viewed as an accessory to the organizational structure and machinery of producing goods and services. Additionally, performance appraisal is 24 needed to control performance. Performance appraisal is present because management has to set a performance standard for its employees.

Moreover, performance appraisal exists in organizations because every organization does it (Ikramullah et al., 2012). It has been a tradition and a scientific management (Vallance, 1999). Lastly, performance appraisal is there because people have been conditioned to believe it works. If people are confident that an appraisal system is working effectively, it motivates them to perform better for the reason that people themselves trust that a good result at the end of the evaluation process will provide them with good rewards or incentives. Thus, performance appraisal is the best way to manage people.

Chiang, F. F. T. and T. A. Birtch (2010) pointed out that, the employees' behaviors are driven by the purpose of a performance appraisal. Appraisal is used for many purposes, specifically, it is done for documentation, administration, subordinate expression, and development. Authors have acknowledged appraisal's important role in employee coaching, communication, evaluation, and development (Desler, 2008; McEvoy, 1990).

The development of the performance appraisal has included communication development as its purpose. It can be used to communicate performance gaps relative to expectations, clarify job objectives, and guide training and development plans aimed at increasing the skills and capabilities of human capital (Cardy and Dobbins, 1994). The present-day focus of appraisal is determining the strengths and weaknesses of employees, creating targeted skills supply strategies, and assessing training needs (Chiang, F. F. T. & T. A. Birtch, 2010).

The same is true in the civil service and the local government units' implementation of the performance appraisal in the Philippines. Performance Appraisal has become a structured formal intercourse between a subordinate and supervisor, where the work performance of the subordinate is to be taken into consideration, with a view to identifying weaknesses and strengths as well as opportunities for improvement and skills development. Appraisal results are used to determine reward outcomes. That is, the appraisal results are used to identify the better performing employees who should get the productivity bonuses and promotion. 26 Simultaneously appraisal results are also used to identify the poorer performers who may require some form of counseling, or in extreme cases, demotion, dropping from the rolls, and dismissal of from service. Performance Appraisal is a part of career development (CSC Memorandum Circular No. 13, s. 1999).

The policy of the civil service in the Philippines as to the uses of the performance ratings are specifically stated as follows; First, as promotion of performance-based security of tenure. Security of tenure of those holding permanent appointments is not absolute but is based on performance. Employees who obtained unsatisfactory ratings for two rating periods and poor rating for one evaluation period may be dropped from the rolls. Second, as an eligibility or qualification for performance-based awards and incentives. Grant of incentives like the productivity incentive bonus is based on the final ratings of employees as approved by the Performance Evaluation Review Committee (PERC) of every agency. The PERC also validates the Outstanding Performance and may recommend the concerned employee for performance-based awards. Lastly, as basis for personnel actions. Performance ratings are used as basis for promotion, training and scholarship grants and other personnel actions. Only employees with Outstanding and Very Satisfactory Performance are considered for the above-mentioned personnel actions (CSC MC No. 13, s. 1999).

Errors

Moreover, subordinates relying on performance keep all parties working as a unit. The members of the organization, including the leader, adopt a supportive attitude in which they share one another 's needs, values, aspirations, goals, and expectations. Performance appraisals are generally not very popular in organizations. Ironically, they are valuable tools for maintaining and improving performance. At the organizational level, some appraisal systems are outdated and cumbersome and seem to measure only that which can be qualified. On the personal level, some managers resent the time 29 consumed by appraisal and feel uncomfortable sitting in judgment upon another person (Kolb et al., 1995).

There are at least three reasons why managers are reluctant to conduct evaluation of performance. First, they are generally uncomfortable discussing performance weaknesses with subordinates. Second, many employees tend to become defensive when their weaknesses are pointed out. Instead of accepting feedback as constructive and a basis for improving performance, employees chal-

lenge the evaluation by criticizing the manager of redirecting the blame on someone else. Finally, employees tend to have inflated assessment of their own performance.

Berr (1985) claims that, when performance and potential are good, when superior and subordinate have an open relationship, when promotions or salary increases are abundant, and when there is plenty of time for preparation and discussion, performance appraisal is easy to do.

The difficulties managers and subordinates experience in the appraisal interview may be traced to the quality of their relationship, to the manner and skill with which the interview is conducted, and to the appraisal system itself, that is, the objectives the organization has for it, the administrative system in which it is embedded, and the forms and procedures that make up the system.

Perception

The main aim of performance appraisal system is evaluating personnel fairly. But, because people operate these systems, total objectiveness cannot be guaranteed. Many 30 managers fail to comply with these systems in the organization and employees perceive that their managers are not concerned about them and do not appreciate their work.

Perceptions are affected by the object being perceived. One of the basic characteristics of human perception is selective organization. Perception is selective or in other words, only some of the characteristics of an object or event affect a given individual while others are ignored or are of no effect (Reitz, 1977). Perceptions are organized in that individual stimuli are perceived to be related to each other in recognizable or familiar pattern. Youngcourt et al., (2007) contends that employees' perception about their performance appraisal system forms part of a larger examination of the effectiveness of the appraisal system of the organization.

In a study about employees' perception of a PAS, finding shows that the perception is affected by subjectivity and influenced by some major errors. It shows that the results have a serious managerial implication for training, motivation and provision of resources for effective performance appraisal (Boachie-Mensah and Seidu, 2012).

Along the same line, a study on the perceptions of civil servants regarding various purposes of the performance appraisal system in the two public sector departments in Pakistan obtained variety of results with regards to performance appraisal's purpose. Respondents from the civil service had diverse responses as to their performance appraisal system. The study found out that there is high degree of perception from the civil servants that the performance appraisal system of the organization is not used to record their performance accurately (Ikramullah, Shah, Khan, ul Hassan, and Zaman's, 2012).

The finding of the study showed that, respondents who were civil service employees were not fully aware of the purpose by which performance appraisal is conducted in their organization, except that there is a high response when asked about appraisal's purpose of supporting promotion of employees. Moreover, the civil servants' perception about the role of the performance appraisal system is not clear, particularly with their performance feedback and appraisal rating feedback. Additionally, the performance evaluation reports were not prepared regularly at the end of each year to record employees' performance; therefore, the discrepancy ultimately affects promotion discussions of civil servants (Ikramullah, et al., 2012).

Meyer et al. (1997) posits that perception of fairness exemplifies organizations' commitment to its employees. Often, managers perceive performance appraisals as a yearly event. In reality Kolb and associates (1995) stress that appraisal is a process that begins long before the appraisal interview and consists of reviewing legal requirement; translating organizational goal into individual objective or requirements; setting clear expectations for job performance and communicate both training and coaching that they require to meet the expectations; supplying adequate supervision, feedback, and coaching throughout the years; acknowledging employee accomplishments and diagnosing employee's relative strength and weaknesses and presenting all of these objectively during the appraisal interview to establish performance goals and development, plan with the employee, which include an action plan for improved performance or further education and the efficient future use to the employees' abilities.

It was noted that in the eyes of civil servants in Pakistan, PAS is not performing optimally and unable to achieve the desired results (Ikramullah, et al., 2012). However, 32 in the Philippines, it was observed that most of the employees in the public sector get either a Very Satisfactory or Outstanding performance rating. Ironically, the public perceives the civil servants as generally incompetent and inefficient in the country (Berman, 2011).

CONCLUSION

Hence, performance appraisal is needed for a more responsive way of evaluating the quality employees. An emphasis on an appraisal system that effectively examines and evaluates work behavior of its employee in relation to the standards set by organization, proper documentation of the results of the evaluation, and using it for feedback purposes is a must to have an effective human resource system for organizations, especially with the public sector.

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