New Developments in Performance Management

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INTRODUCTION
The primary purpose of appraising and coaching employees is to instill in them the desire for continuous improvement. Yet the outcome of many performance appraisals is frequently a decrease rather than an increase in performance. Among the reasons for this decrease is the belief by employees that they are being evaluated on the wrong things, by the wrong person; that is, the person who is evaluating them lacks objectivity, and hence is not “fair.” Moreover, the feedback that is given to them is not seen as timely or constructive. Thus, it is not surprising that a performance appraisal often leads to legal challenges for the appraisers and the organization that employs them.

Within the recent past, there has been a shift from the traditional annual performance appraisal by one’s boss to performance management, with coaching as the cornerstone. As suggested by the chief executive officer (CEO) of Mattel Inc., “People can’t and won’t do much for you if no one in the organization knows what’s going on, what you expect of them, and what the future holds. And talking to them once a quarter isn’t enough—you have to repeat messages of direction, inspiration, and comfort daily, in a variety of forms.” To believe that an annual appraisal, or even a quarterly one, is likely to lead to an increase in an employee’s performance is as naïve in organizational settings as it is in the field of athletics. The negative reaction to your child’s swim coach—who refuses to offer constructive feedback except at the middle and again at the end of the swim season—should be no different than the reaction to a boss who has a similar philosophy in the workplace.

Coaches have to appraise each individual on the team. Who should get more time on the ice? Who should appear where in the batting lineup? Who should be cut from the tennis team? The principles of appraising others apply to one’s self, as well as to appraisals of one’s subordinates, peers and boss. The primary differences between the traditional top-down performance appraisal versus performance management are the time interval, namely discrete (i.e., annually) versus continuous, and the use of constructive feedback or coaching tips from sources other than one’s boss.

Research within the past decade suggests ways organizations can overcome problems with the traditional performance appraisal. Five issues are addressed: (1) legal pitfalls; (2) the appraisal instrument; (3) who should appraise and coach the employee; (4) objectivity and fairness; and (5) the coaching process itself.

LEGAL ISSUES
Human resource management came under legal scrutiny in 1964 with the passage of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act in the United States (U.S.). This act makes it illegal to allow sex, age, race, religion, or ethnicity to influence decisions regarding the recruiting, training, upgrading, compensating, demoting, or terminating of an employee. Legal issues are increasingly problematic for organizations as people are becoming more aware of their legal rights. In fact, there has been a 100% increase in the number of
employment discrimination cases filed since 1995, and these cases have usually involved complaints regarding a performance appraisal. Legal confrontations regarding performance appraisals have led to the discovery of ways to minimize them. Organizations are most likely to win court challenges when: (1) the appraisal instrument is based on a written job analysis; (2) it is behavioral; (3) there is a written manual for appraising and then coaching an employee; (4) reliability and validity of the appraisal decisions have been documented; (5) the results of an appraisal have been reviewed with the employee; and (6) organizations can show that appraising and coaching of employees is “fair.”

THE APPRAISAL INSTRUMENT

The appraisal instrument is the foundation for appraising and coaching employees. It is the basis for making administrative decisions in a uniform and consistent way. As noted earlier, a primary reason for the frequent failure of a performance appraisal to bring about a positive change in a person’s behavior is that many employees view the instrument as measuring the “wrong things.” Designing the “right” performance appraisal instrument improves both the accuracy of the instrument and employee perceptions of fairness. The most frequently used instruments for assessing employees are bottom-line measures, trait-based scales, and behavioral scales.

Bottom-line measures often take the form of management by objectives (MBO). This approach emphasizes issues such as: Were X, Y, and Z goals attained? Were they attained on time? Was the quality satisfactory? The relevance of such questions is difficult to attack, as they appear to be objective. The probability that two or more appraisers will independently reach the same conclusion regarding a person’s performance is relatively high. For example, the person either did or did not decrease costs by 14%.

Nevertheless, MBO leaves much to be desired when used as the primary basis for coaching an employee, or for making administrative decisions. As Donald Petersen, a former CEO of Ford Motor Company has noted, the emphasis on goal attainment is ironically a weakness of MBO. When receiving a “good” appraisal is contingent on goal attainment, ingenious ways are often found by employees to make easy goals appear difficult to administrative decision makers. Moreover, a focus on bottom-line measures is of little help in planning for and receiving training and development opportunities. They tell the “score,” but not what can be done to improve it. Dissatisfaction with this aspect of MBO can erode the employees’ belief in the fairness of the appraisal process.

In short, the limitations of economic or bottom-line measures for appraisal purposes are at least five-fold. First, cost-related measures are often affected by factors beyond a person’s control (e.g., lack of resources, situational constraints). Hence people can be promoted or penalized undeservedly. To the extent that situational factors constrain performance outcomes, the focus needs to be on the person’s behavior, or their motivation level decreases dramatically. Second, bottom-line measures often do not take into account factors for which the person should be held accountable (e.g., team playing skills, creating seamless boundaries within the organization). Credit needs to be given to an individual for excelling on important non-quantitative aspects of his or her job. Third, bottom-line measures can foster a results-at-all-costs mentality, which in turn can lead to unethical, if not illegal, activity. Fourth, bottom-line measures yield little or no information on what the person must continue doing, start doing, stop doing, or do differently to impact the bottom-line positively. Telling a middle manager, for example, that there is a cost overrun is of little value. What the manager needs to know, and what an effective coach needs to explain to the manager, are ways to work effectively within budget. Finally, comprehensive bottom-line measures do not exist for the individual employee in most jobs.

Trait-based scales are often used to assess attitudinal and personality variables.
such as commitment, creativity, loyalty, and initiative. However, unless traits are defined behaviorally, they are too vague, subjective, and ambiguous. The appraisal reflects little more than the caprice of the appraiser. As is the case with bottom-line measures, trait-based assessments provide little insight into what the employee should start, stop or consider doing differently. For this reason, the courts usually take a dim view of these types of appraisal instruments. The solution is to measure and coach a person on observable behaviors required to implement an organization’s strategy, which in turn increases the bottom-line.

Behaviorally based scales reduce ambiguity by setting common expectations that make explicit what the person should start or stop doing. These types of measures account for more job complexity, relate directly to what the employee does, and minimize irrelevant factors that are not under the control of the individual. Behavioral criteria, developed from a job analysis, make clear what one must do to be productive, and what one must do to implement the strategy. As Colin Powell has argued, plans do not accomplish anything; strategy is only as good as its execution. All the great ideas and visions in the world are worthless, argued Powell, if they cannot be implemented effectively and efficiently. Behavioral measures specify ways to execute an organization’s strategic plan.

The steps to follow in developing an effective appraisal plan for coaching purposes are six-fold. Employees must be assessed and coached on behaviors that are: (1) observable; (2) under their control; and (3) critical to the implementation of the organization’s strategy. Too often, the results of months of strategic planning are the strategic document disappearing into a desk-drawer to be subsequently ignored for the remainder of the fiscal year. Of particular importance for perceptions of fairness is that (4) appraisal accuracy increases when both the coach and employee are informed ahead of time about what is to be observed. This foresight focuses the attention of both parties on pertinent behaviors, and it facilitates recall when making administrative and developmental decisions.

In developing a behaviorally based appraisal instrument, (5) longer, objective, descriptive behavioral statements on the appraisal instrument are more effective than short phrases in increasing the appraiser’s accuracy. Finally, (6) keeping a written record during appraisal periods of the specific behaviors that were observed improves the appraiser’s recall, and hence contributes to an objective appraisal and working process.

Behavioral observation scales facilitate performance feedback, identification of training needs, and setting of specific performance goals. Behavioral measures tied to the organization’s strategy correlate significantly with cost-related measures such as revenue, repeat business, and customer satisfaction. Hence, they serve as a diagnostic instrument.

**Diagnostic Instrument**

Whether it is in the fields of medicine or golf, coaches benefit from having a diagnostic instrument to assist them in determining what a person is doing well, and spotting what the person can do to enhance his or her knowledge, skills or ability. A diagnostic instrument also facilitates self-management. In medicine, a diagnostic instrument enables people to know what to eat and what not to eat, in order to maximize their quality of life, and minimize the probability of sundry diseases ranging from heart disease to cancer. It sensitizes people to early warning signs as to when a medical doctor should be consulted. In golf, a diagnostic instrument allows one to check one’s grip of the club, or placement of one’s feet to hit the ball long and straight. It facilitates discussion with a golf coach as to what one needs to do to improve one’s score.

In organizational settings, an effective diagnostic instrument is one that focuses on those areas that move the strategy from rhetoric to action steps. Hence, the importance of the appraisal instrument as a diagnostic tool for coaching and developing an employee, and to an employee’s own self-
management. This diagnostic instrument should ensure that people are coaching themselves, and that they are coaching others on the “right things.”

**Perceptions of Fairness**

Employee acceptance is critical to the implementation and on-going use of appraisals. Trust (perceptions of whether people adhere to the organization’s rules when making appraisals, whether the appraisals are accurate, or whether the appraisals reflect favoritism), as well as employee perceptions of situational constraints on their performance, predicts their motivational level.

Hostility toward performance appraisals and the coaching process often occurs when people believe that they are being evaluated on the “wrong things,” or on indices over which they have little control. This hostility is minimized to the extent that people can see that they are being assessed on the very behaviors that enable the successful implementation of the organization’s strategic plan.

Another reason for employee hostility toward appraisals is improper weighting of the criteria. This has led to the concept of a “balanced scorecard” that provides a framework for coaching employees on the ways they can contribute meaningfully to the organization’s strategy. For example, at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC), equal weight is now given to each of three criteria, namely: client, people, and firm. This is done to shift an overemphasis by some partners on the client, at the expense of coaching staff on ways to assist the client, as well as to ensure that what is done for the client and staff is not done at the expense of what is in the overall interest of PWC as an organization.

The attitudes of coaches as well as the people who are being coached is positive if the appraisal instrument facilitates assessments that are: (1) perceived as factual, objective and unbiased; (2) explicitly related to the organization’s strategy; (3) developmental, in that the assessment specifies what the employee must start doing, stop doing, continue doing, or do differently to improve performance; and (4) conducive to setting specific high goals for doing so.

**Sources of Appraisal: Who Should Coach?**

An appraisal instrument, no matter how carefully developed, is only as good as the people who use it. Hence the question: Who is the ideal coach? Is the answer the boss? What about one’s peers or subordinates? How about people coaching themselves?

**360-Degree Feedback**

Anyone who has children is aware that how they interact with their grandparents is not necessarily how they interact with their parents, babysitters, or siblings. Moreover, how they behave on the playground is unlikely to yield clues as to how they behave in the classroom, let alone in the home. The answer to “Who is my child?” is “All of the above.” For similar reasoning, feedback from multiple sources, often termed 360-degree or multisource feedback, is blossoming in the workplace.

A perception of an employee’s performance varies among subordinates, peers, and supervisors. How an employee interacts with the boss is not necessarily an indicator of how that employee interacts with peers or subordinates. Multisource feedback takes into account the fact that different populations (e.g., peers, subordinates) have different opportunities to observe different aspects of a person’s performance. It thus provides an integrated, holistic view of an employee, offsetting the biases of an appraisal from only a single vantage point (e.g., the boss). Moreover, 360-degree feedback is consistent with organizational values for teamwork. Upwards of 90% of Fortune 1000 firms now collect assessments of an employee from multiple sources.

360-Degree feedback is being used in many large companies, such as DuPont, General Electric Co. (GE), Motorola Inc., Procter & Gamble Co. and United Parcel Service of
America Inc. (UPS). For example, a 360-degree feedback program exists at AT&T Corp.’s business products division. Any manager supervising three or more people has to go through an evaluation every year and must share the results with his or her supervisors, as well as with the employees below the manager. Several senior managers, at AT&T, Nestle’s and General Motors Corp., have openly admitted that they have been surprised by the upward feedback within a 360-degree evaluation. The managers were unaware of the inaccurate perceptions of some of their actions, and the uncertainty amongst employees regarding issues the managers thought they had communicated.

However, agreement among multiple sources of an appraisal should not be expected. Each source often observes an employee in different contexts, with supervisor–peer ratings typically exhibiting the greatest agreement, and subordinate–self ratings showing the least agreement. Hence, multisource appraisal instruments are often designed to assess those aspects of the job that a specific population (e.g., subordinates) is most likely to observe on an ongoing basis. In short, a person’s appraisal often differs across populations (supervisor vs. subordinates) because of the actual differences in the behaviors that are observed in different contexts.

Thus, multisource appraisals are taken into account at JP Morgan Chase when determining developmental goals (teamwork), and/or making an administrative decision (e.g., promotion). Among the strengths and limitations of each source of an appraisal are the following:

**The Boss**

The boss often has a limited opportunity to observe his or her subordinates. Thus, a boss appraisal usually does not provide a complete picture of an employee’s performance. Consequently, supervisory appraisals frequently fail to improve a person’s performance and may lead to employee hostility. Such questions as: “On what basis are you able to evaluate me?” undermine the credibility of the boss. The employee views the appraisal as unfair. The boss should be held accountable primarily for collecting data for appraising an individual from multiple sources, and then making the final administrative and developmental decisions based on these multiple sources of information.

**Subordinates**

Anonymous feedback from subordinates, often called upward feedback, can lead to positive changes in the behavior of supervisors. Leaders who receive feedback from subordinates that is more negative than their self-evaluation show the greatest level of subsequent improvement. These positive behavior changes have been shown to be sustainable over time. This is especially true for managers who have high self-efficacy, namely, the belief that “I can change.” Upward appraisals are used in such companies as Pratt and Whitney and AT&T.

**Peers**

Anonymous peer ratings are among the best predictors of both training success and performance in subsequent jobs. This is because peers often have more job-relevant information than other sources, due to their opportunity to closely observe and compare themselves against others on task-relevant abilities.

Peer appraisals are increasingly popular in self-managing teams. Allowing people who comprise the teams to be responsible for appraising and coaching one another increases interpersonal effectiveness, group cohesion, openness of communication, employee motivation, and group satisfaction.

**Self-Appraisals**

Self-appraisals, not surprisingly, are less accurate than appraisals from other sources. Self-appraisals have the lowest agreement with other rating sources (peers and super-
visors), and the lowest ability to predict the person’s subsequent performance. An intriguing finding is that those whose self-appraisal is aligned with the appraisals they receive from others are usually high performers. This is because they score high on “self-awareness” of their abilities. Moreover, employees whose self-evaluations are in agreement with evaluations from their subordinates have been found to be more promotable than those whose self-ratings are inflated.

Overall, multisource feedback provides a comprehensive way of appraising employees. It improves the accuracy of appraisals through the multiple viewpoints that are obtained, and it increases perceptions of fairness by ensuring that a biased source (e.g., one’s boss) is not over-represented in the appraisal process.

**TRAINING APPRAISERS/COACHES**

**Appraisal Accuracy**

Appraisals are more often a reflection of the appraiser’s overall biases than they are of the performance of an employee. Appraisers from different populations (e.g., supervisors vs. subordinates) attach different weights to the same aspects of performance that they observe as a result of their different perspectives in the organization. A massive study involving over 4000 managers with appraisals from at least two supervisors, two peers, two subordinates plus self-appraisals indicated that the idiosyncrasies of an appraiser affect the appraisals given to an employee.

The U.S. Army showed that one’s knowledge and ability explained only a very small part of an appraisal from one’s supervisor and peers. The supervisor’s positive regard for a subordinate resulted in both positive leniency and halo errors, and little inclination to punish poor performance. Other studies have found that the perceived similarity of the subordinate by the supervisor inflates appraisals in the private and public sectors. This is especially true with regard to perceived similarities regarding extraversion, conscientiousness and emotional stability.

Interestingly, in this new millennium, people who smoke are rated lower than non-smokers on professional comportment, working with others, and dependability. Smokers are viewed as wasting valuable production time as a result of leaving for designated smoking areas.

Evaluations are also adversely affected by gender. Men are typically evaluated as more effective than women. That this finding reflects sex discrimination is suggested by the fact that even when the males and females demonstrate the same leadership behavior, women are devalued when the appraisers are male. A subsequent review of leadership perceptions in the military revealed preferential ratings for men in training groups, primarily where there was a “token” woman; this was not found in groups where there were several women. This suggests that token status exacerbates negative evaluations of women, because the token female receives considerable attention, which increases the pressure on her to perform well.

Another study also points to the importance of gender proportion as a factor affecting rating accuracy. The respondents, only 27 of whom were female, reported that men possess the motivation and leadership qualities necessary for effective performance, whereas women possess feminine attitudes that impair their performance. Yet, there were no performance differences between men and women on any objective measure. In still another study, the performance of women was rated higher than that of men when the women constituted a higher proportion than the men. Gender proportion appears to influence the performance evaluations of women. Increasing the representation of women in mixed groups increases positive appraisals of them.

To minimize bias and increase the accuracy and objectivity of coaches, training programs should allow them to evaluate actors presented on videotape, receive feedback as to rating accuracy, and to practice, practice,
practice. Such training minimizes rating errors including leniency, halo, and similar-to-me biases. This training should teach coaches: (1) the relevant performance criteria for evaluating people; (2) the relevant job behaviors to observe; and (3) and ways to effectively minimize errors in judgment when using the appraisal instrument.

Feedback and Goal-Setting

In many instances, feedback decreases rather than increases performance. Therefore, training coaches in how to provide feedback and set goals is critical to an effective coaching process. For feedback to bring about a positive change in behavior, a coach must: (1) focus on the behavior rather than the person; (2) be selective as to the “critical few” so as not to overwhelm the person; and (3) focus on the desired behavior rather than the undesired, as well as ways to demonstrate it. Sensitivity and tact in giving feedback is critical for bringing about a change in behavior. Thus, (4) honesty should not be confused with hurtfulness.

Feedback in the absence of goal setting has little or no effect on behavior, because feedback in itself is only information; its effect on action depends on how the recipient understands it, and what decisions are made with respect to it. For feedback to improve behavior, (5) specific high goals must be set, and the individual must be committed to meeting those goals, because goal setting affects choice, effort and persistence.

Organizational Justice

Few things demoralize a person faster than feelings of jealousy, perceptions of favoritism, or beliefs that someone else is getting a “better deal.” Not only does a coach need to be fair; the coach must be seen as fair. At least four factors contribute to perceptions of fairness of a coach, namely, distributive justice, procedural justice, interactional justice and the concept of voice.

The following questions are usually asked by employees regarding distributive justice: What was distributed to whom? Who has the corner office, received the coveted assignment, or was promoted or let go? Although the answers to these questions certainly affect perceptions of justice, often more important to employees are answers to questions regarding procedural justice.

Perceptions of procedural justice are affected by answers to the question: Are there procedures, processes, or systems for deciding “who gets what?” If the answer is no, mistrust throughout the workforce is likely to be high. If the answer is yes, subsequent questions asked by employees include the following: Are the procedures representative of the thinking of the unit or that of a “chosen few?” Are they applied consistently? Are the procedures ethical? Is there an appeal system that people can use without fear of retribution? Do I have a champion? People become highly concerned with answers to procedural justice questions when they receive a poor appraisal.

Interactional justice refers to the interactions between the coach and the subordinate. To the extent that the logic of the coach is understood, and the coach is perceived as someone wanting to truly help the person improve performance, feelings of trust and respect are usually high, even if the employee disagrees with the coach’s appraisal.

Voice refers to the extent that people believe that their views are taken into account before an appraisal is made. People are likely to support a decision that they did not initially advocate if they have “voice,” if their answer is yes to the question: “Was I heard?”

A “due process appraisal” includes giving an employee adequate notice of the appraisal (e.g., explaining standards in advance, seeking self-appraisals, giving feedback on an ongoing basis), fair hearing (adequate observations of the person’s performance, granting the person an opportunity to explain self-evaluations) and judgment based on evidence (e.g., consistent application of standards, an opportunity to appeal). Employees whose voice has been heard usually feel that the appraisal system is fair and accurate. “Due
process’ increases an employee’s motivation to improve performance, as well as satisfaction with the appraisal system as a whole. In summary, training programs, in addition to focusing on ways to increase appraisal accuracy, should stress the principles of organizational justice so that the performance management process in general, and the coach in particular, are seen as fair.

Regardless of the care that is taken in developing the appraisal instrument and the training that is given to a coach, appraisal accuracy can be affected adversely by the organization’s politics. In a study of an Oregon newsprint facility and a Seattle bank, self-confidence in conducting accurate appraisals was high. In the newsprint facility, however, the performance appraisal did not affect an employee’s status in any way, regardless of whether the appraisal was positive or negative; moreover, the appraisers anticipated neither positive nor negative outcomes for themselves for conducting accurate and timely appraisals. Performance appraisal was viewed by everyone as a “nonevent.” In the bank, appraisers feared the organizational consequences of “making waves.” The outcome that they expected, as a result of recording behaviors to document an unfavorable appraisal, was a decrease in the probability of they, themselves, being promoted. An organizational culture that fosters high self-confidence and low positive outcome expectancies causes resentment. In these two companies, people who believed that they could make accurate appraisals stopped doing so.

For performance management to be taken seriously, people must see the relationship between the coaching provided and desirable outcomes. They must see a positive relationship between the coaching process and other human resource systems, including staffing and training, as well as the effective implementation of the team’s, division’s or organization’s strategic plan.

When the outcome expectancies of conducting appraisals are neutral or negative, when there is no perceived relationship between the performance appraisal one receives and subsequent positive or negative outcomes, the entire process is seen as meaningless. Therefore, a coach should be formally evaluated on the accuracy and comprehensiveness of appraisals of others, as well as on the extent to which organizational justice principles are followed, and specific high goals are set.

ONGOING COACHING

In the past five years, there has been a shift in emphasis within the private and public sectors from performance appraisal to performance management, from being a performance appraiser to becoming a performance coach. The shift is from a discrete activity to one that is performed on an ongoing process. The shift is from being primarily an evaluator to becoming a developer of people.

Cyclical year-round performance management (i.e., feedback, analyzing results, setting goals) effectively increases organizational performance. Executive coaching in a public-sector municipal agency increased employee productivity dramatically. This is because coaches can be powerful catalysts for bringing about relatively permanent improvements in employees’ behavior when they challenge employees on a daily basis, and when they instill in them the confidence that they can expand their abilities to attain desired goals. The CEO of Hewlett-Packard was recently quoted as saying “along the way, you must remind people of how far they’ve come already and how much closer they are to achieving the goal.”

Outcome Expectancy/Self-Efficacy

A drawback to setting specific high goals is that people may obtain tangible evidence that they did not attain them. They learn that they have failed despite their effort and persistence. Through multiple setbacks or even one severe one, they give up. To help people overcome their sense of helplessness, to instill optimism in the face of failure, coaches
need to focus on two key concepts: outcome expectations and self-efficacy.

A primary role of a coach is to help people see the relationship between what they do and the outcome that they can expect. Motorola is known for having an employee development system that combines performance appraisals, succession planning, and individual career planning into a single, continuous system, so that employees know what they have done, where they are going, and how exactly they need to improve. There is a sense of what one is striving for, and goals are set about how to get there. In addition, conversations take place about how well one has accomplished one’s goals in the past, and the progress of their current goals. Employees benefit from being able to understand their frequent (quarterly) appraisals in terms of their own career development, as well their role in meeting organizational performance targets.

The response “I don’t get it” is symptomatic of a lack of understanding of outcome expectancies. Thus, the job of the golf pro is to help the player see the relationship between where the left foot is placed and where the ball goes after being struck by the club. The job of the sales director is to help the salesperson see the relationship between how the sales-call was made and the amount of revenue that was generated. This is not a profound concept, yet it is one that many coaches in organizational settings overlook. The use of the empathy box described earlier in Organizational Dynamics (see Latham, 2003) is a helpful tool for clarifying anticipated outcomes.

A second step to instilling a “can-do” mindset in an employee is for the coach to focus on the person’s self-efficacy, namely, the conviction that “I can cause,” “I can bring about,” “I can make happen.” Since self-efficacy is task specific, a person may have high self-efficacy in one area—such as bringing in new business, and low self-efficacy in another, such as managing staff.

Task-specific self-efficacy can be increased through: (1) enactive mastery, that is, sequenc-
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


**Legal Issues**


**The Appraisal Instrument**


**Sources of Appraisals and 360-Degree Feedback**


**Motivating Appraisers and Performance Management**

Training Appraisers


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