

Performance Appraisal: The Educator Learns from Business and Industry

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Performance appraisal in education, as in other fields, should involve the individual—first in defining his or her duties and responsibilities, then in setting standards for judging performance, and finally in self-appraisal.

EDUCATION is becoming increasingly large and complex. School administrators, of necessity, must become more knowledgeable about and skillful in management. Because of the need to search for new methods and procedures, some methods that were originally developed for managing large business and industrial organizations are being adapted for use in education.

Shetty¹ made a statement, in a recent educational journal, that performance eval-

¹ Y. K. Shetty and Howard M. Carlisle. "Application of Management by Objectives in a University Setting: An Exploratory Study of Faculty Reactions." *Educational Administration Quarterly* 10: 65; Spring 1974.

uation in institutions of higher education is one of the most important yet one of the least effectively handled aspects of administration. His comment led this writer to look at performance appraisal practices in business and industry to see what could be learned from them.

Help from Literature and Research

It has been estimated that more than three-fourths of the companies in the U.S. have performance appraisal programs.² Drucker³ states, however, that while many have a performance appraisal program, few actually use it, and of those who do, very

² Winston Oberg. "Make Performance Appraisal Relevant." *Harvard Business Review* 50: 61; January-February 1972.

³ Peter F. Drucker. *The Effective Executive*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967. p. 83.

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few follow with an appraisal interview to discuss the rating.

McGregor⁴ suggested that it is very important to make clear what the duties and responsibilities of the job are. A person should be given an opportunity to participate in the establishment of his or her goals, and later to appraise how well he or she has accomplished these goals. Kay and Meyer concluded, on the basis of a study at General Electric, that there was significant improvement in job performance when goals and deadlines were mutually established by the manager and his or her subordinate. They also studied the appraisal interviews of 92 managers and measured employees' performance twelve weeks after the interview to see what effect the appraisal interview had on subsequent performance. They concluded that the managers' attempts to help employees to improve their performance by pointing out areas in which they needed improvement were likely to be perceived as threatening to their self-esteem and to result in defensive behavior. "The greater the threat, the less favorable the attitude toward

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the appraisal and the less the subsequent constructive improvement in job performance realized."⁵

Bassett,⁶ also at General Electric, studied

⁴ Douglas McGregor. "An Uneasy Look at Performance Appraisal." *Harvard Business Review* 35: 90; May-June 1957.

⁵ Emanuel Kay and Herbert H. Meyer. "Effects of Threat in a Performance Appraisal Interview." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 49: 311; October 1965.

⁶ Glenn A. Bassett and Herbert H. Meyer. "Performance Appraisal Based on Self-Review." *Personnel Psychology* 21: 421-30; Winter 1968.

the difference between the effects of a traditional performance appraisal developed by the manager and the self-appraisal approach. He found that the self-appraisal approach resulted in less defensiveness on the part of the person being appraised, and that managers seemed to prefer it. Furthermore, employees who participated in self-appraisal appeared to be less likely to be rated by their supervisors as falling below expectations.

Uses of Performance Appraisal

Since performance appraisal usually requires only a comparatively small amount of time, its importance can easily be overlooked. The appraisal may be an important factor in deciding whether one is promoted or receives a merit increase. Furniss⁷ reminds us that colleges and universities that have declining enrollments or cutbacks in funding may be forced to reduce faculty. Appraisals may then be used in deciding whom to retain.

Yet perhaps one of the most important functions of the performance appraisal is to let employees know how their performance is viewed. Pigors⁸ states that employees are entitled to know and their supervisors are responsible for giving them this information. Heckmann⁹ says that most employees want to know where they stand in an organization, whether they are performing at an acceptable level, and what their strengths and weaknesses are. The areas in which an employee is found to be weak can be focused on in supervision or used in planning for employee development. A survey of areas in which a number of employees receive low ratings may indicate areas in which an in-service training program is needed.

⁷ W. Todd Furniss. "Retrenchment, Layoff, and Termination." *Educational Record* 55: 159; Summer 1974.

⁸ Paul Pigors and Charles A. Myers. *Personnel Administration: A Point of View and Method*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1959. p. 232.

⁹ I. L. Heckmann and S. G. Huneryager. *Human Relations in Management*. Cincinnati: South-Western Publishing Co., 1960. pp. 583-84.

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Opposition to Performance Appraisals

There has been criticism of the use of performance appraisal. Pajer¹⁰ says, "The supervisor often maintains it's impossible, the employee that it's unfair, and management, in general, that it's useless." It requires skill seldom recognized. Few supervisors are taught how to interview, and fewer still are taught how to do an appraisal interview. Some supervisors find evaluating an unpleasant task because it is hard to criticize without making people who find it difficult to hear and accept criticism feel defensive.

Some feel that doing performance appraisal is in conflict with the role of the supervisor. McGregor¹¹ writes that unless it is done with unusual skill, it becomes danger-

ously close to violation of the integrity of the individual's personality. Managers, he says, are uncomfortable when they are placed in the role of "playing God." He further states that because of the respect for the value of the individual, one may be distressed when given responsibility for judging the personal worth of another person. It is this writer's opinion, however, that in doing a performance appraisal, one is not passing judgment on the "personal worth" of an individual, but rather on his or her "job performance." It is quite possible to conclude that an individual is performing poorly on the job but still respect him or her highly as a person. It could be, for example, that the performance is poor because of health reasons or because work is being done outside of his or her field of expertise, neither of which reflects personal worth.

Some oppose performance appraisal saying it is based too much on personality traits and too little on job performance. It can be argued, however, that the manner

¹⁰ Robert G. Pajer, "A Systems Approach to Results Oriented Performance Evaluation," *Personnel Administration/Public Personnel Review* 35: 42; December 1972.

¹¹ McGregor, *op. cit.*

in which one relates to co-workers, supervisors, and to the agency is important and therefore should be considered.

Relevance for Educators

Teachers and professors have been engaging in performance appraisal of their students by means of some type of grading system for years. Grading has evoked considerable thought, study, and research. But it appears from a review of the literature that far less attention has been given to the performance appraisal of the educators themselves, even though it may result in important outcomes. Gage¹² points out that appraisals may serve as the basis for decisions on academic rank, tenure, and salary, as well as being the basis for self improvement, and being used as criteria for research on teaching.

On the basis of what has been learned from a review of business and industrial practices and from personal administrative experience, this writer suggests the following approach to the appraisal of performance:

1. Early in the academic year, discuss with the supervisee how each views his or her role, making sure there is a common understanding of the applicable duties and responsibilities.

2. Discuss what each views as appropriate standards for performance and how these will be measured.

3. Plan for a preliminary performance rating before the official rating is to be done, at least the first year. The supervisee will feel less threatened and the supervisor will feel more comfortable since it is not an official rating. Hopefully this will set a positive tone for future performance appraisals that will help to minimize defensiveness.

4. At the preliminary performance appraisal time, give a copy of the rating instrument to the supervisee with the suggestion that he or she do a self-rating. Meanwhile rate him or her independently.

¹² N. L. Gage. "The Appraisal of College Teaching." *The Journal of Higher Education* 32: 17-22; January 1961.

5. Discuss the rating, beginning with strengths so as not to evoke defensiveness.

6. Ask the supervisee in what areas he or she thinks improvement in work would be most advantageous. If he or she does not mention an area in which it is felt that improvement is needed, suggest that it might be useful to try to improve in this area also.

7. Establish a time for the official performance appraisal.

8. Conduct the official performance appraisal in the same manner as the preliminary one (steps 4, 5, and 6).

If an employee appears to be performing inadequately, do not wait even until the preliminary appraisal time to discuss it. Clarify the areas in which expectations are not being met and what needs to be done to meet them. Likewise, when an employee is doing well in general, or has done a particular task well, tell him or her so immediately. Praise of performance is an excellent stimulus for further good performance.

Most supervisors and administrators in education, as well as in other fields, engage in some type of performance appraisal. Suggested here is an approach not only applicable to educators but to others as well. It calls for involving the individual—first in defining his or her duties and responsibilities, then in setting standards for judging performance, and finally in self-appraisal.

Because of the important implications a performance appraisal may have in determining such factors as salary, promotion, tenure, and termination, surely it behooves all who engage in it to strive to improve their techniques. As Oberg¹³ states, "By improving the probability that good performance will be recognized and poor performance corrected, a sound appraisal system can contribute both to morale and organizational performance. Moreover, the alternative to a bad appraisal need not be no program at all, as some critics have suggested. It can be and it ought to be a better appraisal program." □

¹³ Winston Oberg, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

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