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Enabling more objective performance appraisals: A training program model of pinpointing

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Abstract

Enabling objective performance appraisals have been the aim of many organizations including years of research in performance management. As today's business environments become more complex and are ongoing rapid change, it is very important for managers not to ignore the attention and the time they should allocate to their subordinates' performance observations. The current study exemplifies an important methodology "pinpointing" implemented for the sales managers working in a pharmaceutical industry as part of a training program.

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1. Introduction

Performance appraisals are critical for organizations especially considering recruitment & selection, training, motivation, compensation & benefits (Lee, 1985) and most importantly, overall organizational performance. And from an organizational viewpoint, appraisal system is said to measure and improve performance, and then help in allocating such resources as pay and promotions. Related with this, appraisal scores and how they are being distributed are important system outcomes. From a personal viewpoint, the appraisal system is a mechanism that provides him or her feedback, this way leading to rewards and certain related outcomes for performance. This not only relates to enabling higher organizational and personal performance, but also might form the foundation for employee satisfaction as

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well (Waldman, Bass, & Einstein, 1987). According to Dorfman, Stephan, Loveland (1986), performance appraisals serve two purposes: Administrative and developmental. Administrative function is what we also outlined above: Salary increases, promotions, terminations and other administrative decisions. Developmental functions include specific job feedback, assistance, and counseling to improve future job performance. For the developmental function, supervisors are expected to play a problem solving/supportive role for stimulating employee growth and development.

However, Catano, Darr, and Campbell (2007) argue that employees usually express dissatisfaction with both the outcomes and the process of the appraisal systems. Apart from the difficulties faced regarding giving and receiving objective performance feedback, the process sometimes even becomes tedious. Bowman (1999; as cited in Catano, et al., 2007) defines performance appraisal as something “given by someone who doesn’t want to give it to someone who doesn’t want to get it.” Having both organizational, personal (including mental and emotional) and also legal ramifications, a sound performance appraisal system is argued to be objective, based on job analysis, and also based on behaviors that should relate to specific functions that are controllable by the ratee and that the results should be communicated to the employee (Malos, 1998; as cited in Catano et al., 2007). Secondly, they should be perceived as fair (Catano et al., 2007). Procedural fairness is improved when employees participate in all aspects of the process, there is consistency in all processes, assessments are free of supervisor bias, and there is a formal channel for the employees to challenge their evaluations (Gilliland & Langdon, 1998; as cited in Catano et al., 2007).

However institutionalized and structured an organization can be, the performance appraisal process still cannot be without certain subjective drawbacks (Smith, 1986) such as rater bias measures (Davis & Mount, 1984). Among those measures, leniency, central tendency, halo, and contrast errors have been frequently listed (Smith, 1986; Hyde & Smith, 1982). And usually, it has also been found that supervisors are generally more considerate and supportive toward employees who perform well than toward those who perform poorly (Bass, 1981; Greene, 1979; Herold, 1977; as cited in Dorfman et al., 1986).

To overcome those types of errors and biases, training programs have been known to be influential for a long time (Prather, 1970; Davis & Mount, 1984). Among those programs, many focused on raters’ trainings. Usually, the training programs were evaluated on the following categories:

- Training content
- Training method
- Trainer him or herself
- Training focus (behavioral or attitudinal)

And the evaluation of the training’s effectiveness was referred to Kirkpatrick’s (1987; cf. O’Donnell, 1990) four-level hierarchy defined as:

- **Reaction.** The reaction of the trainee to the training program and the trainer is evaluated by how much the participants liked the program.
- **Learning.** Principles, facts, and techniques learned by the trainees are assessed.
- **Behavior.** The extent to which behavior or job performance has improved is analyzed.
- **Results.** The extent to which there are organizational consequences that result from training is evaluated (Donnell, 1990).

Usually, the training programs have been proved to be quite useful in enabling better rater performance since earliest research (Allinson, 1977; O’Donnell, 1990; Clarke, 1998; Woehr, 1994).

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