

MANAGING INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE – THE APPRAISAL SYSTEM

TOWARDS RESULTS

The mechanism which translates corporate objectives into action at the level of the unit and the individual is an appraisal system designed to incorporate the direction and objective setting, measuring and feedback, reward and recognition principles of performance management.

Traditional appraisal systems lack focus on organisational objectives. In failing to emphasise goal setting, assessment and skill development elements of performance management they contribute little to organisational success and learning.

Many public service organisations have had, or still maintain, performance appraisal systems that rely on assessing the personality characteristics of employees. Such systems depend heavily on subjective judgement rather than observable evidence. Many of the Annual Confidential Report systems still employed in public service organisations today are based on ratings of personality traits. They allow no control over the biases of the appraiser. As these systems tend to appraise such characteristics as loyalty, dependability and reliability, all valued components of the human character, they strike strong emotional chords in the person being appraised if the judgement is negative. In some systems, especially those that are not open and where the appraiser is never aware of the contents of the appraisal report submitted, they can give rise to much acrimony.

An example of an over-subjective scale in an outdated Annual Confidential Report system is given below.

Work application	<i>indifferent and lazy</i>	<i>tendency towards laziness</i>	<i>average</i>	<i>diligent</i>	<i>puts effort into work</i>
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Modern appraisal systems increasingly seek to incorporate objective-setting, measurement of results, and potential for performance improvement through additional resourcing or training. Appraisals are therefore increasingly designed around a series of goals which have been set for a particular employee.

FOUR APPROACHES TO FINDING A BALANCE

However, there is a risk that the reaction against assessing personality characteristics has swung the pendulum too far in the other direction. There is a balance to be struck between assessing personal characteristics and assessing by results. The appraisal system should set specific individual targets for employees against which their achievements will be measured, but basing performance assessment only on results achieved can encourage overly competitive short-term behaviours. This may detract from the effective working of the organisation as a whole. Useful behaviours, such as lateral thinking, monitoring, environmental scanning and mentoring, that work to maintain underlying systems and long-term organisational health and viability, may go unrecognised and unrewarded.

This problem of finding a balance between assessing by results and assessing personal characteristics is overcome in public service organisations in four ways explained below.

1. Including behaviour-based generic tasks, performance indicators and standards in the annual appraisal

In such systems the employee is appraised on individual tasks achieved *and* whether he/she has met the desired performance level for generic tasks and standards. Such an approach can allow incorporation of desired organisational behaviours such as team co-operation and customer service.

For example, the following tasks, indicators and standards might be included in all appraisals of employees in a central public service agency which provides a service to other ministries and departments such as a central personnel office. These generic tasks and standards would accompany the individual targets against which the employee's performance is to be measured.

Key Task	Performance Indicator	Performance Standard
Participate in urgent priority tasks of the unit	Response to management request for re-prioritisation	100% response to priority requests
Respond to all client organisation enquiries	Timeliness and accuracy of responses	All complaints to be responded to within 2 days No complaints to be received relating to accuracy of information given

2. Developing value statements for the organisation and including consideration of this in the annual appraisal

Such statements express the corporate values and desired employee behaviours, they are *the way we do things around here*. In such systems the employee is appraised on results achieved *and* the degree to which they have adhered to these values. For example, Champy³ suggests the following values which can be adapted for particular public service organisations.

Is the employee willing to:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• perform up to the highest measure of competence, always?• take initiatives and risks?• adapt to change?• work co-operatively as a team?• judge and be judged, reward and be rewarded on the basis of performance?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• be open, especially with information, knowledge and news of problems?• trust and be trustworthy?• respect others and self?• answer for own actions, accept responsibility?• make decisions?
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3. Including assessment of whether the code of conduct has been adhered to in the annual appraisal

This can be a way of ensuring behavioural standards are being addressed without undertaking potentially resource-intensive competency development exercises. This approach was followed in the Performance Management System for the Lesotho Civil Service.

³ Reengineering Management: the Mandate for New Leadership, James Champy, 1995, HarperBusiness, HarperCollins, New York

Performance Management and the Code of Conduct

The performance management system encourages focus on work achievements rather than conduct. However, it is expected that all civil servants will meet the requirements of the Code of Conduct embodied in Part 2 of the Public Service Bill of 1994. A copy of the code is appended to this Guideline.

Performance Management System for the Lesotho Civil Service

4. Developing and including a set of desired core competencies in the appraisal

Competencies are the *defined skills, knowledge experience and behaviours required for successful performance in particular classes or types of jobs.*

Competencies describe what an individual is bringing to their job. Core competencies are the *common attributes, type, level and quantity of skills and behaviours that employees are expected to demonstrate so that the organisation may meet its future objectives.*

Competencies are increasingly being used in appraisal systems to establish one core set of required attributes for all employees. In such systems the employer is appraised on results achieved *and* whether they are demonstrating that they possess the core competencies.

In developing their Annual Performance Review System, the Government of Mauritius chose the areas Providing Service, Job Knowledge, Working with Others, Managing Work and General Conduct as areas in which all public servants were expected to show competence, in addition to the requirement that they meet individual task targets. To encourage supervisors and managers and professional/technical staff to attain higher standards, the areas of Managing Resources and Professionalism were included in their core competencies. Senior Managers were also rated on Leadership. The annual appraisal was based on assessment of how well each employee had performed in relation to each area of competence, how well they had achieved key tasks and whether they had made additional contributions.

To allow assessment in relation to core competencies, the appraisal form provided examples of observable behaviours which demonstrated the required level of competence.

The Government of Montserrat in the West Indies includes a set of competencies in its appraisal system to guide decisions relating to development and potential. An example of some of these competencies applicable to senior management is given below:

Adaptability – copes with consistently high pressure; maintains confidence in a prolonged crisis.

Initiative – applies innovative thought consistently; seeks opportunities to create and develop initiatives.

Analytical Ability – interprets and analyses for ministers and senior management, often at short notice, the oral and written views of others.

Judgement – applies to the most complex issues; gives on-the-spot judgements and reconciles or chooses between conflicting advice from other senior sources.

Inter-personal Skills – cultivates and makes effective use of high level and influential contacts, providing access to decision-makers, and uses public relations effectively to pursue objectives.

Communication Skills – makes convincing presentation of important/complex ideas at the highest level at home and overseas.

SUMMARY

While the major thrust of effective performance management systems is towards the setting of objectives and the measuring and achieving of results, many systems now successfully incorporate multi-dimensional performance criteria. The major dimension remains task achievement, while assessment against behaviour-based performance measures, value statements, codes of conduct or core competencies can provide reference points which give direction in how people are expected to behave to ensure the long-term success of the organisation.

The assessment of additional contributions can provide a useful means of identifying outstanding performance and encouraging a culture of continuous improvement.

In summary, performance appraisal systems for the public service will provide scales for measuring three areas of performance:

- performance in meeting personal targets;
- performance in adhering to behaviour-based criteria;

- performance in making additional contributions to the organisation.

Examples of observable behaviours for two of the core competencies selected by the Government of Mauritius.

Providing Service

- responds sensitively and courteously to needs of public and other departments;
- responds within time standards of unit;
- complies to all safety standards when providing service.

Professionalism

- applies technical knowledge and experience to meeting division objectives;
- contributes to the improvement of professional standards in Government;
- adheres to all relevant professional standards;
- shares knowledge gained through training programmes with colleagues.