

Who Appraises

Possible appraisers include the immediate supervisor, coworkers, self, subordinates, customers or clients, and outsiders. The immediate supervisor most commonly conducts formal performance appraisals. Although supervisors are thought to have the best vantage point from which to observe an employee's work, in some agricultural organizations, the official supervisor has broad geographic responsibility and may not even know what, no less how, his charges are doing.

Peer or coworker appraisal is common in some professions and management ranks. Coworkers often have a view of an individual's performance through their daily interactions. Informal appraisal by peers is an extremely powerful dynamic in crews working on a group incentive pay basis. Coworkers are often understandably reluctant, however, to officially judge their peers for management's purposes. Job security and intra-organizational trust can help to overcome such reluctance.

Self-appraisal is still relatively uncommon in formal systems, though it offers several advantages. Obviously, the appraisee has good access to his own work performance. Knowing ahead of time that they will have to assess their own work helps employees to focus on (and seek clarification of) what is expected of them. People who have reviewed their own performance, whether or not with the aid of a structured form, are more prepared to participate actively in appraisal interviews. The anxiety and defensiveness that often plague these sessions can be replaced by a sense of information exchange and joint problem solving. Studies have demonstrated a relationship between the use of self-appraisal and actual performance improvement subsequent to appraisal interviews.

On the other hand, most people do want to have an external check on their own perceptions. Employees with a low need for independence and autonomy are more likely to prefer the traditional supervisory appraisal. Self appraisals and those performed by a supervisor can be effectively combined to obtain the advantages of both. Both the appraiser and the appraisee can complete the same rating form one week before a scheduled appraisal interview, at which both meet to discuss their reviews, starting with the employee.

Performance appraisal by subordinates would clearly only apply to supervisory and management personnel. It has been noted as a stimulus to teamwork and a good reality check for the brave. Again, job security, trust, and/or anonymity are prerequisites to the use of subordinate appraisal. If the appraisers fear reprisal for accurate but unflattering observations, there is little point in even attempting to pursue this approach.

The views of customers, clients, and other outsiders are sometimes pertinent to the appraisal of an individual employee's work, particularly if the customer

relationship is of long duration or close involvement. These views are perhaps best incorporated into formal supervisory appraisals.

When to Appraise

Among the factors to consider when deciding on the timing of performance appraisal are the newness of the employee to the organization, the size of the organization, and the nature of the work performed. Official appraisals can be made at the end of a project, at some set frequency (once or twice per year seems most common), or at random. (For the record, random performance appraisals have given appraisals a bad name in many quarters.)

"Too many businesses and supervisors use official performance evaluations to avoid the responsibility of maintaining effective communication with their employees. This may sound old-fashioned, but part of being a good supervisor is maintaining a day-to-day relationship in which employees get information about their worth, successes, and shortcomings on an ongoing basis, and in which they receive encouragement, support, and challenges. A system of formal written evaluations often subverts this kind of communication. Good personal working relationships cannot be reduced to formulas and procedures."



Meaningful performance appraisals ought to occur very often, perhaps even daily or weekly. The once-per-year interview goes best when it is the ceremony at which the content of ongoing communication is reviewed. Ideally, there are no surprises in this session. A major problem in traditional appraisal processes is that many foremen and crew leaders figure that completing their periodic form and perfunctory delivery to employees absolves them from responsibility for good day-to-day communication.

What to Measure

There are three basic measurement options, and they are not equally useful: (1) traits—such as friendliness, strength, and mechanical skill, (2) results—such as new contracts written, calf mortality, acreage of trees pruned, and annual maintenance expense, and (3) observable behaviors—such as shears sheep, greets customers, learns content of related jobs, and fixes machines.

Although trait measures are often used in evaluation, they are seldom valid as measures of performance and do not serve performance appraisal purposes very well. The real question in evaluation is whether good performance occurred, regardless of ability.

The question is whether good performance has occurred.