

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.