

REVERSE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

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It is common knowledge that managers and owners of business typically conduct performance appraisals on a formal and periodic basis, to assess an employee's job performance and ability to meet organisational goals. Such evaluations allow supervisors to give feedback opinions on how well subordinates meet expectations and to offer specific recommendations on what subordinates can do to improve their performance. In modern management practice, the concept of a reverse appraisal enables employees to evaluate the effectiveness of their managers too. While the process of performance evaluation of employees provides supervisors with the tools to evaluate a subordinate's performance and to create a mutual understanding of individual needs, work objectives, and standards of acceptable performance, likewise it is only equitable that subordinates should also be equipped to suggest ways for managers/supervisors to improve their performance and help develop their managerial potential. In one sentence this new idea of Reverse Performance Evaluation refers to a process that allows subordinates to rate their supervisors.

Normally, the inherently complex and diverse set of activities that constitute management functions pose special challenges to any organisation for evaluating managerial performance. Since management functions also involve facilitating a productive work environment for the subordinates and help them develop to their full potential, it is only logical to presume that most knowledgeable sources of information to determine effectiveness of each supervisor should involve the people who are being supervised, the subordinates themselves. In fact feedback obtained from employees helps improve managerial behaviour and leadership skills. Reverse performance appraisals are typically used as part of participatory management practices and employee empowerment programmes. Supervisors should be evaluated on criteria that relate to how they interact with the employees they supervise. The entire idea of a reverse evaluation is to ensure that managers and supervisors are held accountable for their work, decisions and actions.

The feedback from employees about their perception of the managerial effectiveness could be on the following lines:

- 1) Do the employees receive adequate direction from their bosses?
- 2) Do the subordinates receive the support in the form of provision of right tools and resources they need to do their jobs properly and effectively?
- 3) Does the employee feel that he/ she is being challenged in his/ her position?
- 4) Does the employee feel that his/ her talent is being properly utilised in the current assignment?
- 5) How well does the Manager or Supervisor communicate?
- 6) Was the guidance received well enough in the form of written training materials for changed job requirement when new products were introduced or when jobs were switched?
- 7) How regular is the supervisor's attendance?
- 8) Is the supervisor accessible and available in the specific work area at times when the subordinates need his/ her guidance and advice?
- 9) How approachable the supervisor is regarding occupational or even some relevant personal problems faced by the employees?
- 10) Does the supervisor treat everyone fairly and equally or does he/ she indulge in favouritism to certain staff members?
- 11) Does the Manager/ Supervisor treat his subordinates with the same respect that he/ she demands they give him/ her?
- 12) Is the supervisor's leadership style democratic ("let us do it") and motivational or autocratic ("do as I say") and discouraging?

Before inviting the feedback the employees should be made to seriously understand that this feedback is essential for implementation of better management practices. The employees are given this opportunity to get involved in this

process of appraisal because of the fact that the company respects and trusts them enough to believe they will do a good job. They have to be made to know that the process is not just another routine formal procedure and the results of this evaluation will be taken seriously. They have to appreciate their rights and responsibilities that are part of this process.

THE PROCESS

The reverse appraisal process is not complex. The goal is to get honest and accurate feedback from employees about how well managers and supervisors are performing. Following are the steps in the process:

Step 1: The first step is to prepare guidelines that should specify what the exercise is looking for and how the information will be collected and used.

Step 2: A questionnaire or evaluation form that asks pointed questions, on the lines suggested in the previous paragraphs, is needed to be designed that allows the supervisees to indicate their supervisor's strengths and weaknesses with regard to the specific industry they belong to. The respondent employees are made to rate their supervisors in respect of each question on a numeral scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being 'poor' and 5 being 'outstanding.' The evaluation form may also be so designed to leave a space at its end for suggestions and subjective elaboration on comments.

Step 3: The department distributes to its employees blank forms tailor-made for them to be completed in all respects. A deadline is fixed for completing them. The responses are to be written and sealed in an envelope to preserve their confidentiality and delivered back via a locked drop box installed in the office for the purpose.

Step 4: Each evaluation questionnaire is read and the findings are combined. One or two negative reviews may represent reaction of an angry or unhappy employee, but if there are several reviews of similar nature, it may be indicative of a trend.

ANONYMITY

In a rather small close-knit organisation where employees and their supervisors work in close proximity the former might not be at ease providing critical feedback about any supervisor. Employees may be afraid of retaliation, or many simply are uncomfortable delivering feedback to their bosses. Introduction of a formal process of reverse performance evaluation forces the issue and makes it obligatory on the part of employees to rate these seniors. Employees are to be impressed upon that the purpose of obtaining their views is to help improve the level of supervision they receive. And there is this requirement for the feedback to be anonymous. This will make the observations truly fair and honest and not just an instance of making a complaint about things the employees may not be happy about, without sufficient reason. The employees are directed to complete the form without putting any identifying marks on it so that the information can remain totally confidential.

USE OF THE FEEDBACK

In accordance with the subordinates' evaluations a performance review of each of manager/ supervisor is conducted and results discussed with him/ her along with other available measurements of their performance like goals and objectives achieved. Finally, like any other typical employee performance review, the person's areas of strength and weakness are identified to help the person to set new goals for improving performance in key areas. It is important not to cloud overall judgement about a manager/ supervisor's performance on the basis of a small number of negative performance evaluations. At the same time if a definite pattern is discernible in the feedbacks it may be indicative of areas of legitimate scope of improvement of skills.

It is much easier to judge the contribution and performance of an individual operative than evaluating managerial performance. Individual contributions mostly have tangible, attributable results. On the other hand, managerial performance is largely reflected in how the team perceives the managers. In a reverse appraisal, employees can evaluate the effectiveness of their managers. Such a formal review process derived from meaningful feedback from the employees about their interactions with their bosses is of immense help in any organisation in improving overall operational performance and efficiency.