

FIA

SOLUTIONS

360 Degree Performance Evaluations Show Promise in Government

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Just about every personnel journal that you pick up these days has some article about the implementation of a 360 degree performance evaluation process. In the event that you have not read about the 360 evaluation process, this is a process where the work performance of an individual is evaluated by the employees' supervisors, peers, subordinates, customers, and others who may have familiarity with the quality of the employee's work. It is an evaluation of an individual's performance from all relevant directions.

The advantages of the such an evaluation is that it avoids the problems that have been associated with supervisor only evaluations. That is; it avoids the problems of subjectivity of only one person's opinion about the employee's performance.

Most 360 degree evaluations have been developed with the objective of performance improvement or development of the individual's capabilities. Private sector organizations have used them to improve a manager's supervisory skills by making them more sensitive to the effect of their management styles on the performance of their work unit. So far, such a process has shown good success. More recently, with the organization of work units into teams, the concept has been used to

improve the operation of teams by having team members rate the performance of their team mates. Typically, 360 degree evaluations have been conducted anonymously, so that the employee is unaware of how each team member or co-worker rated the individual. This protects the employee from retribution from a poor rating and assures the process is conducted in as fair and unbiased a manner as possible.

Only recently have 360 degree evaluations been conducted for purposes of pay determination. We have installed several of these in the last several months and have achieved success. In this newsletter, we report on the design of one of those systems. In this case, a City had not had a functioning performance evaluation system for a number of years. Prior to our involvement, they had in place the typical evaluation process whereby the performance criteria were a list of personal traits such as dependability, initiative, courtesy and so forth. The system had fallen into disuse because the system was too subjective, supervisors were unable or unwilling to distinguish good performance from bad performance, and finally, that employees were never sure what they had to do to improve their scores. It was typical to hear complaints that the poor scores (if they occurred at all) were because the "supervisor doesn't like me", or "my performance was good until a couple of days before the evaluation

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when my boss and I got into an argument". In short, the system was a waste of time and did not serve to improve performance.

With this as a basis, we organized four focus groups of employees to identify the key characteristics of an improved system. There was one group of managers and three groups of employees. The suggestions for a new system were similar among the four groups. They wanted a system that was related to the individual's job description, they wanted the more difficult work responsibilities to receive more importance in the scoring system and they wanted to have others besides their supervisors making the rating.

The system we designed accomplished each of these objectives. Each employee's job description was used as the basis of the evaluation. This combined the job description and the performance evaluation and forced a review of job duties each year. More difficult work tasks received a weight from 1 to 3; 3 being the most difficult or higher skilled responsibilities. Then, three categories of individuals were involved in the evaluation process. The employee conducted a self evaluation, 3-5 peers, colleagues, co-workers or subordinates anonymously evaluated the employee's performance on the same job description, using a scale from one (in need of improvement) to five (superior). Supervisors summarized the co-workers' scores and narrative comments and then conducted an evaluation of the employee's performance as well.

Total performance scores were derived from the combination and weighting of the three scores, as follows: Self 25%, co-workers 25% and supervisors 50%. These weighted scores were multiplied by

the skill level of each task. These scores were then divided by the total possible score that could be achieved if the individual performed at a 5 level on all the responsibilities. This produced a total percentage performance score. A scale was produced to relate the individual's performance score to a pay increase percentage, which took into account the employee's place in the salary range.

This process has been well received by the supervisors and the employees alike. They said the system is more objective and gives them an opportunity to identify the tasks they need to work on to improve their performance scores. Employee self evaluations were more stringent than either their peers or their supervisor's evaluations. Peer evaluations were more generous, and supervisors were generally in the middle of the employee's and their peers. process is directly related to the work performed, the skills required, and straight forward. It succeeded in overcoming the difficulties of their former system.

Recent Assignments

City of Cumberland, Maryland:

We are currently developing a 360 degree evaluation process for clerical administrative jobs, as well as department heads.

City of Bismarck, North Dakota:

We have completed a 360 degree, skill based performance evaluation process.

City of Kirkland, Washington:

We completed a 360 degree performance evaluation process which included service quality input by citizens.