Performance Appraisal- A Human Resource Management Tool for Enhanced Performance in the Nigerian Civil Service

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Abstract
This paper attempt to investigate and explain the complex nature of performance appraisal with particular reference to employees of the civil service. Experiences all over the world have shown that performance appraisal data can determine employees' rewards and are also used as predictors in human resources planning, recruitment and selection process. It also explore how, performance management, appraisal has the potential to reverse past trends so that it is viewed less as a threat and a waste. Recommendation of the paper is that performance appraisal should be enhanced to a digital driven performance system that allow effective and efficient service delivery in the civil service.

Key words: Performance, appraisal, civil service, Human Resource Management

Introduction

Employees' performance appraisal is the heart of employee utilization, productivity, commitment, motivation and growth. Many employees have become dissatisfied in organizations because of the fact that the need for clear cut purposes of staff appraisal was not identified and provided for as an indispensable tool of management's control. Gold (1999:214) shares similar view when he posited that:

> *of all the activities in the Human Resources Management, Performance Appraisal is arguably the most contentious and least popular among those who are involved. Administrators do not seem to like doing it, employees see no point in it, and personnel and human resources managers as guardians of an organization's appraisal policy and procedures, have to stand by and watch their work fall into disrepute.*

Today, a lot has been said about performance appraisal and reward systems in organizations. Those employees that receive high ratings and large bonuses naturally feel such systems are just and good enough, whereas those who receive low ratings and less money feel otherwise. In reaction to criticism and accusations of bias, administrators most frequently ask how they can make the practice better. How can they get more reliable information on which to evaluate employee's appraisal process; administering an appraisal plan; highlight of various performance techniques; identifying some common appraisal problems of employees; and how proper appraisal can enhance increased productivity are the major issues addressed in this paper.

Methodology

This study was based on extensive literature review using secondary data- articles journals books, good public actions, analysis of the APER forms and outcome of unstructured interview conducted with officials of federal civil commission which is the agency saddled with the responsibility of appraising civil servants in Nigeria.

Conceptual exploration

Several definitions of performance appraisal abound. But suffice it for us to adopt the all encompassing and illuminating definition given by DEcenzo and Robins. (1989:358) as our main guide and frame-work of analysis in this paper.

Performance appraisal is viewed as designed for three purposes. First, it can be used as a basis for reward for actions. Decisions as to who gets salary increase, promotion and other rewards are determined by their performance evaluation. Secondly, these appraisals can be used for identifying areas where development efforts are needed. Management needs to spot those individuals who have specific skills or knowledge deficiencies. Performance appraisal is a tool for identifying those deficiencies. Thirdly, it can be used as a weapon, against which selection devices and development programmes are related. Thus, developing a valid, reliable and bias-free performance appraisal system can establish a satisfactory standard.

Unfortunately, environmental factors like inadequate work facilities, poor working conditions,, lack of cooperation in the departments affect the performance of employees. The above factors should be eliminated by the supervisor and what is expected of the employees should be effectively communicated to them.

Quite a good number of studies have shown that no organization can operate successfully without the existence of systematic appraisal. A good performance appraisal is one that helps an employee to know his/her stand in the organization. Performance is the degree of accomplishment of the tasks that makes an individual's job. It is often confused with effort which refers to energy expended. However, performance is measured in terms of results and combination of three factors namely effort, ability and direction which makes the quality of performance.

The ailment that has bedeviled the Nigerian civil service is the issue of god-fatherism (man-know-man). The element of patronage relationship can hardly standardized any meaningful attempts at objective evaluation of performance. These factors have led to nepotism in different aspects of the civil service in Nigeria. Therefore the Nigerian manager fails to follow the standard practice that appraisal should focus purely on the level of performance of the employee on the job rather than on his patronage and ethnic origin. In Nigerian civil service, the allocation of positions/posts is based on quotas or the federal character principle which has negated the merit system in administration. One is recruited based on state of origin. An effective appraisal system should be devoid of any traces of bias or hostility. To colleagues of the appraised as well as his appraiser's boss. Ubeku (1984) is of the view that rationality is achieved if every individual worker is made to realize the target that he is expected to meet and the time limit and then appraise him or his performance without bias.

The aim behind performance appraisal is not merely to find out what someone's performance is worth, but equally to find ways of making it worth one. Effective performance appraisal involves confrontation. It requires facing up to disagreement of conflict. Many supervisors in Nigeria have trouble managing confrontation. Some managers do not even try to manage it, they simply quench any view that is not their own. Effective performance appraisal takes time because it has to be done in 10 to 15 minutes. So many impatient supervisors do slapdash appraisals that may do more harm than good.

Effective performance appraisal requires skills, and many appraisals are messed up by appraisers who know little or nothing about appraising. In every organization, some managers do a good job of appraising the performance of their subordinates, discussing the evaluation with them as means of helping them to improve their work and their chances for promotion. Often, there is no uniformity among divisions and departments in the civil service. Therefore, the organisation desires to appraise management performance and identify individuals who show greatest potential for higher managerial positions. For instance, performance appraisal is not confined to management positions only, it is used by many firms in evaluating the performance of non-supervisory employees (Pigor &

Myers, 1983:77). Indeed, performance appraisal systems vary considerably'. There has been disagreement over the most effective approach in stimulating improved managerial performance. This controversy reflects different human resources concepts of management.

From the foregoing, the objectives of appraisal could be identified. The main purpose of performance appraisal is to improve the overall efficiency of the civil service by trying to get the best of individuals working for it within this conception therefore, performance appraisal schemes are used for some specific purposes. The purpose for performance review, given in a survey by Long (1986) are to:
- assess training and development needs
- help improve current performance
- review past performance
- assess future potential and promotability
- assist career planning decisions
- set performance objectives
- assess increases or new levels in salary.

In several organisations, appraisal occurs at stipulated periods and involves a discussion or interview between a manager and an employee. The discussions are intended to: (i) make administrative decisions in respect of pay, promotions and careers, work responsibilities; and (ii) improve performance by discussing the developmental needs, identifying training opportunities and the planning of actions. In both categories of intention, judgment is expected to be made. Category one requires a manager to make a decision regarding the worth of an employee both in the present and in the future, and this may result in some distress. Several years ago, McGregor (1957:89) observed that the main cause of failure in performance appraisal was that managers were blunt in making judgments regarding the value of employees. Levinson (1970:127) opined that managers experienced the appraisal of others as a cruel and attacking behaviour against employees which led to the feeling of guilt about being critical of employees. The above scenario presents appraisal as characterized by tension which has never been resolved and is likely to continue for some time to come.

The Performance Appraisal Process
An effective performance evaluation process has a precise definition of excellent performance, uses measurements of performance and provides feedback to employees about their performance (Newell and Scarborough 2002). According to Decenze and Robbin (1989:361), appraisal process begins with, the establishment of performance standards. These should have evolved out of job analysis and the job description. The performance standard should also be clear and objective enough to be understood and measured. There must be a clarification of the expected. Actual performance can be measured against them. The same scholar went further to mention that once performance standards are established, it is necessary to communicate these expectations. It should not be part of the employee's job to guess what is expected of him. It is unfortunate that too many jobs have vague performance standards. The problem is compounded when these standards are not communicated in a two-way style. Communication only takes place when the transference of information has taken place and has been received and understood by subordinates. Therefore, feedback is necessary from the subordinate to the manager. Satisfactory feedback ensures that the information Communicated by the manager has been received and understood in the *way* it was intended. This leads us to the issue of appraisal process chart as indicated below.

Appraisal Process Chart

1. Establish	Performance	Standard
2. Communicate	Performance	Expectation to employee
3. Measure	Actual	Performance
4. Compare	Actual	Performance with standard
5. Discuss	The	Appraisal with the employee
6. If necessary	Initiate	Corrective action

Source: Deceazo and Robbins, (1 989:362)

The third step in the appraisal process is the measurement of performance. To determine what actual performance is, it is necessary to acquire information about it. The civil service should be concerned with how it is measured. However, to measure actual performance, certain information are used by managers and some common sources of information are personal observation, statistical report, oral reports and written reports. Each of these has its strengths and weaknesses. A combination of them increases both the number of input sources and the probability of receiving reliable information. What we measure is probably more critical to the evaluation process than how we measure since the selection of wrong information can result in serious dysfunctional consequences. And what we measure determines, to a great extent, what people in the organisation will attempt to excel at when we tell an employee that he! she will be evaluated on criterion X and appraise her performance based on criterion Y, we can expect to do a good job to decline The fourth step in the appraisal process is the comparison of actual performance with standards The attempt in these step is to note deviation between standard performance and actual performance The final step in appraisal process is the initiation of corrective action when necessary Corrective action can be of two types-one is immediate and deals predominately with symptoms The other is basic and delves into causes Immediate corrective action is often described as "putting out fires" whereas basic corrective action gets to the source deviation and seeks to adjust the difference permanently.

Administering Appraisal Plan

Typically, performance appraisal is viewed as ultimately a responsibility of line management, to be met with the assistance, of the human resources managers and his/her staff. When subordinates trust the supervisors to conduct fair and unbiased appraisals, their satisfaction with the system increases dramatically (Dolan and Moran 1995) Almost any plan will be worthless if it lacks the support of management, or if supervisors are poorly trained in systematic appraisal, or unconvinced of its value or equally if discussion of result with employees is badly handled, or if appraisals are not honestly used for the purpose intended These and other difficulties often prevent the successful operation of a systematic programme. However, these may be avoided if the human resources management helps in taking the following steps:

(i) Secures full agreement of line management on the need for a formal performance appraisal plan and on the purposes for which it will be used A choice has to be made among several types of appraisal

(ii) Study plan of other organizations and existing literature on the subject to develop a plan best suited to the needs of the particular organisation; complicated plans should be avoided.

(iii) Enlist the cooperation of supervisors drawing up the appraisal forms, including discussion on the approach to the used and uniform descriptions or instructions to be followed,

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(iv) Secure careful training of the supervisors, in order to get unbiased, uniform appraisals of the employees.

(v) Achieve link and staff coordination and mutual checking of the employee performance appraisal, in order to get consistency and uniformity within amongst departments.

(vi) Arrange for periodic discussion of performance appraisals by the supervisor with each subordinate. Good points should be stressed, difficulties pointed out, and better performance encouraged. All employees have the right to know from their supervisor how they are getting along, and a good supervisor will 1et them know more frequently than at the formal appraisal review. The appraisal discussion should be in the nature of progress review with an opportunity of employees to respond as they feel differently about their job performance.

Performance Appraisal Techniques

According to Akping (2001) administrators have a duty to develop, implement, monitor and modify measures of performance. There are many methods of performance appraisal. There is no general method appropriate for all purposes. The problem of management is to determine what kind of performance appraisal method is adequate, given the purpose to be served. Some of these methods include: trait checklist, graphic rating scale, forced choice, essay appraisal, critical incident appraisal, pair comparison, management by objective etc.

(a)   Trait Checklist: Here the rater uses a list of behavioural descriptions and checks off behaviours that apply to the employee. Once the check list is complete, it is usually evaluated by the staff of human resources department, not by the manager doing the check list. Therefore the rater does not usually evaluate the employee's performance. He/she merely records it. An analyst in the human resources department then scores the checklist. The physical evaluation can be returned to the rating manager for discussion with the subordinate. Example of traits, according to Luthans and Martinko (1975) that frequently appear on such forms are neatness, ingenuity, initiative, ability to follow instruction promptly, and ability to get along with co-workers.

(b). **Graphic Rating Scale:** This is the most popular method of appraisal. Its used for assessing factors such as quantity and quality of work, job knowledge, cooperation, loyalty, dependability, attendance, honesty, integrity, attitudes and initiative However, this method is most valid when abstract traits like loyalty and integrity are avoided, unless they can be defined in more specific behavioural terms. The assessor goes down the list of factors and notes points along the scale that best describe the employees. This is noted alongside the traditional method.

(c) *Forced Choice:* This is a process whereby the supervisor evaluates an employee's performance on the basis of the categories or traits listed under the method, but the supervisor is forced to make a Yes or No judgment. In this check list, the rater has choice between two or more statements, all of which may be favourable or unfavourable. The appraisal is to identify which statement is most descriptive of the individual being evaluated.

(d) *Essay Appraisal:* This is the simplest appraisal method where the rater writes a narrative description of an employee's strength, weaknesses, past performance, potential and suggestion for improvement.

(e) *Critical Incident Appraisal:* Here the rater's attention is focused on those critical beravuours that makes the difference between doing a job effectively and doing it efficiently. They write down little

anecdotes that describe what the employee did that was especially effective or ineffective. The strength of the critical incidents on a given employee provides a rich set of the examples from which the employee can be shown which of his/her behaviours are desirable and which one calls for improvement.

(f) *Paired Comparison:* According to Carrel and Kuzmits (1982:250) paired comparison is where each employee is being given a positive comparison and a certain percentage of the total positive evaluation.

(g) *Management by Objective:* According to Humble (1979:36), management by objective has induced a more to result oriented approach to assessment stemming from the basic axiom that managerial effectiveness is the extent to which he achieves the output requirement of his position.

Problems of Performance Appraisal
Performance appraisal anywhere in the world is bedeviled by a host of problems. However, the seriousness of the problems varies from one country to another depending on such things as leniency error, similarity error, low appraisal motion, on-going feedback and Halo error. As Agba (2018) argues, knowing these errors and taking conceited steps to avoid or minimize them is a pertinent tool in managing, controlling and improving performance of staff and organisation. He further noted that there errors can be minimized by means of relevant training and basing appraisals of staff on documented facts devoid of biasness.

(i) *Leniency Error:* Every evaluator has his/her own value system which acts as a standard against which appraisals are made. Relative to the true value of the actual performance an individual exhibits, some evaluator marks high and others low. When evaluators are positively lenient in their appraisal, an individual performance becomes overstated, that is rated higher than it should. Similarly, a negative leniency error under state performance, giving the individual a lower rating.

(ii) *Similarity Error:* When evaluators rate people in the same way that the evaluators perceive themselves, they are making a similar error. Based on the perception that evaluators have for themselves, they project those perceptions on to others. For example, the evaluator who perceives himself or herself as aggressive, highlights aggressiveness. Those who demonstrate this characteristic tend to benefit, while others are penalised.

(iii) *Low Appraisal Motions:* What are the consequences of the appraisal? Humble and Beatly (1987:270), viewed that if the evaluator knows that a poor appraisal could significantly hurt the employee's future particularly opportunities for promotions or salary increases, the evaluator may be reluctant to give a realistic appraisal. There is evidence that it is more difficult to obtain accurate appraisals when important rewards depend on the result. It is argued that performance appraisals when used as the determinants for rewards may be viewed as analogous to the proverbial forward pass in football.

(iv) *On-Going Feedback:* If all individual in an organisation were appraised by the same person, there would be no problem. Although if there will be an error factor it would be applied equally to everyone. The difficulty arises when we have different raters with different leniency errors making judgments. Assume a situation where both Ruffy and Murphy are performing the same job for a different supervisor, but they have absolute identical job performance. If Ruffy's supervisor tends to

err towards positive leniency while Murphy's supervisor errs towards negative leniency we might be confronted with two dramatically different evaluations.

(v) *Halo Error:* The Halo Effect or Error is a tendency to rate high or low on all factors due to the impression of a high or low rating on some specific factors (Murphy and Auhalt: 1992). For example, if an employee tends to be conscientious and dependable, we might become biased towards that individual to the extent that we will rate him/her high on many desirable attributes. People who design teaching appraisal form for students to fill out in evaluating the effectiveness of their instructors/lecturers each semester must confront the Halo Effect. Students tend to rate a faculty member as outstanding on all criteria when they are particularly appreciative of a few things he! she does in a classroom. Employees like to know how they are doing. The "annual review" where the management shares the subordinate's evaluations with them may become a problem. In some cases, it is a problem merely because managers back out of such reviews. This is particularly likely if the appraisal is negative. But the annual review is additionally troublesome if the manager "saves up" performance and related information and unloads it during appraisal review. This creates an extremely trying experience for both evaluator and employee. In such instances, it is not surprising that they may attempt to avoid confronting comfortable issues which even if confronted, may not be denied or rationalized by the subordinate. The solution lies in having the manager share with the subordinate, both expectations and disappointments on a day-to-day basis. By providing the employee with frequent opportunities to discuss performance before the reward or punishment, consequences occur and there will be no surprises at the time of the annual formal review.

Discussion

From the above, it is obvious that there is a serious pressure on organisations to evolve performance control approach to appraisal. Evidently, organisations desiring to develop appraisal bearing in mind some development focus will certainly need to challenge such assumptions but also accommodate them. This might lead to the emergence of some sophisticated models that employ multiple techniques that may bring satisfaction to several users. Referring back to our earlier discussion on problems of appraisal, it is clear that they originate mainly from the manner systems are established as a means of assessing employees by their superiors for different purposes, such as performance improvement, pay, promotion, etc. [in the past, so many techniques have been made available to organisations. Most of these techniques go with validity and reliability scores suggesting objectivity. But then, employees are entitled to their opinion on how better they are doing at work and what they expect as reward. Thus, whatever techniques of appraisal are employed, self-appraisal and self-rating cannot be ignored. In a situation, where stress is laid on evaluation and performance control, one should expect some discrepancies between self-appraisal and superior-appraisal. Such discrepancies would suggest that self-appraisal in a situation of evaluation and control is highly ineffective. However, Campbell and Lee (1988:307) cautioned that the above pessimistic view do not necessarily mean that self-appraisals cannot be employed as significant developmental and motivational technique for individuals.

The main trust of our argument is that employees are opportune to know their own performance and get sufficient information to measure their strengths and weaknesses and also knowing the future goals while working. Under this arrangement, it is expected that the organisation will derive maximum benefits in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and above all better standard of operations (Tesser et al: 2002). When employees are given opportunity to appraise themselves for development purposes, it is a reflection of an acceptance of the value of such a process for individuals in the organisation. The much to which employees can appraise themselves objectively, is a function of how ready they are to seek and accept feedback from their work behaviour and the environment

they find themselves. Navancevich (2004) opined that productivity in organisations can be enhanced if employees can learn to appraise themselves and will accept it as part of their own development, rather than see it as a manipulation of human resources management. According to Sogini (2001), Self-evaluations have met with skepticism by organisations because the self-interest of the employees could outweigh an objective evaluation. However, self-appraisal for development thrives in an environment that encourages and facilitates such a process. Those employees who have gained a positive experience from self-appraisal and are willing to share such experience with others should be encouraged to do so. Yammarino and Atwater (199740) agreeing with the above argument have provided a model of possible Human Resources Management (HRM) outcomes based on the range of agreements between self-other ratings, as shown below.

Self-other agreement and HRM table

Type	Ratings	HRM outcomes
Over-estimate	Self-ratings greater than other ratings	Very negative
In agreement/good	High self-ratings similar to other high ratings	Very positive
In agreement/poor	Low self-ratings similar to other ratings	Negative
Under estimate	Self-ratings less than other ratings	mixed

Source: Yammarino and Atwater, 1997 p. 40.

Limited, evidence of the impact of Multi-Source Feedback (MSF) abound. This is evident in findings of the study of Reilly et al (1996) regarding the impact of upward appraisal on management performance. The study revealed that there is a considerable improvement where managers commenced from a low or moderate rating and feedback process was sustained over-time. The impact was less on managers who already had high performance ratings. The study found that the process created an awareness and provided a powerful message to managers that performance would be evaluated and improvement was expected. Handy et al (1996:14) in his study of organisations employing 360° feedback found that while some were comfortable with its application and agree that it was an encouragement for personal growth and development, there were also some inherent drawbacks.

Conclusion

The paper highlights the efficacy of performance appraisal for enhancement of productivity in an organisation. Appraisal has a unique place in organization that have adopted human resources management technique in the management of people. Performance appraisal constitutes a vital link between performance and the reward processes in the human resources management circle. Appraisal, and most especially performance management techniques can be regarded as a method of bringing the organisation and individuals together. This facilitates a flow of information between the managers and their subordinates in the workplace. Appraisal creates the enabling environment for the desired feedback from the workers to their superiors in respect of work issues and processes. However, there is a need for the free flow of information within the appraisal circle. For this to be effectively carried out there has to be a change in values and attitudes of our concept of appraisal — fragmented and separable part of the work. In this paper, we have argued that organisations will need to focus on creating a learning and developing culture. This no doubt will make employees to accept appraisal as a way of tying the satisfaction to their needs and their development to the organisational goals and objectives.

Recommendations

In the light of the above discussion, the following recommendations are proffered:

i. A digital driven performance system should be enhanced in order to promote effective and efficient service delivery in the civil service.
ii. Performance appraisal would help any organisation to win employees' confidence and mutual trust. It is therefore, advisable for management to continue to use performance appraisal as a management control tool;
iii. Management must identify which evaluation technique employees react positively to. On the part of the supervisors, they need proper orientation on how to carry out evaluation process so that employees wilt accept it; and
iv. Evaluation process aims at bringing out the best of employees. It is therefore, desirable that employees are well motivated using the integrated motivational approaches.

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