Chapter 8

Appraisals: Paper Chase

Or

Motivational Discussion?

Guidance Note For Students

The activities that follow are designed to be used with *An Introduction to HRM: An Integrated Approach.* Read chapter eight, which provides both the answers in easy to follow sections and guidance on other areas of the book that can help you with your studies.

Learning Outcomes

After reading and completing the activities in this chapter you should be able to:

1. **Critically evaluate the purpose of appraisals in organisations.**

2. **Discuss and comment on what areas of AKS should be appraised.**

3. **Understand and be able to avoid the pitfalls organisations can encounter when using appraisals.**

4. **Appreciate the role of HR trained professionals in developing appraisals within organisations.**

5. **Design a practical appraisal system based on AKS.(individual or group activity)**

6. **Appraisal self-evaluation of confidence and competence.**

7. **Role-play an appraisal and provide critical evaluations appraisal interviews. (Group activity).**

==*Can You Tell Me All The Answers Please?*==

In common with the vast majority of students, you want to do really well in your study programme. There are grades to attain and employers to impress…

You may like to believe that there are perfect answers that can give you perfect grades. Indeed, if this were an elementary mathematics handbook you would be correct. However, with people simple sums do not always produce neat solutions.

So, can I reassure you that I do not have all the answers to everything, and neither does anyone else! What I would encourage you to do is engage in discussions with your fellow students, read different writers ideas and listen to your lecturers. Your lecturers have invested many hours, years in doing what you are setting out to do so they are excellent guides to help you succeed. Learn to think for yourself and integrate ideas across disciplines and subject areas. Think outside the boxes.

==HRM In Action:== *What Is The Purpose Of Appraisals?*

For the research below I used the case study methodology as described by (Yin, 1994) The case study is particularly helpful for HR investigations because the work can focus on a specific are of area within the organisation. There are, of course, many other useful research methods, ==(for research methods in HR see chapter 11)==. The following studies focused on employee attitudes regarding appraisals and why they can become disaffected by imposed appraisal procedures.

The two short case studies below illustrate some of the problems managers I have interviewed encountered in the design and implementation of appraisals. Essentially, they are both concerned with what an appraisal should be used for in organisations. The names of individuals and organisations have been removed to respect/ protect their anonymity.

Two Appraisals: Which Do I Use?

The first attempt...

A manager from a major international company told me that his organisation had had two completely different appraisal systems in one year. The first appraisal method was internally designed and focused on identifying each employee' s areas of strength and weakness. Interestingly, the manager reported that after the employees' weaknesses were identified there were no prearranged provisions for follow up personal development and training. This left some staff feeling de-motivated because they had been told of weaknesses in their knowledge and skills base, but not given support to improve their performance. He thought that the appraisal procedure had consequently disaffected employees. It was also reported that there had been some negative criticisms by appraisal interviewers that had diminished some employee's confidence and even lead to a diminution of competence The managers interviewed observed that the appraisal process was a costly investment of employee time and resources. It was really not worthwhile if the outcome was a reduction in performance and poorer management/ employee relationships. It was commented that managers didn't need an appraisal procedure to be rude and or de-motivate their teams. A simple insult could be just as effective for that 'purpose' as the appraisals had been!

The second attempt…

An external consultancy firm was brought in to introduce an alternative appraisal method, which the company adopted. This system required every employee to sit a set of tests on areas such as literacy and analytical skills. The consultancy advice, which followed, recommended that employees focus

on building upon their areas of strength. Again, no specific follow-up training programme as to how people could develop their 'strengths' was put in place.

There was evidence of contradictory messages with the two approaches. In the first appraisal method the company sought out areas of weakness for the employee to address, while the second encouraged people to concentrate on their areas of strength. Employees reported feeling confused about what was expected of them. The managers I interviewed questioned which of these approaches might be the most beneficial, focusing on weaknesses or focusing on building strengths? They regarded the lack of training support and development as a key omission.

Discussion questions

1. Why do you think the appraisal procedures were unsuccessful?
2. The managers appeared to have no clear understanding of the appraisal's objectives. Why would this make it more likely to fail?
3. Why is it important to put a follow-up training and development budget /package in place before commencing appraisal interviews?
4. Why do you think appraisal interviewers should receive training?

HRM In Action: *Surprise, Your Job Has Changed!*

This HRM in action is derived from small research study I conducted into appraisals outcomes. The names of persons and organisations have been removed. A manager, who was working in computer software development, within a major 'city' business, told me of his concerns regarding a conflict of work priorities. During an appraisal he was advised that his job role was to be changed. This was a complete surprise and occurred without any prior discussion or consultation. The new role meant that in addition to his current responsibilities for software design development, he would also have a general management responsibility. His concern was that the software design and management roles were very different and if the design function was the priority then he should be given the time to concentrate on it. Although he

accepted the need for people to have multiple roles, he did not think the appraisal was the best place to announce a change of job function. Furthermore, there was no supporting training or mentoring to help him achieve the new dual role.

Discussion questions

1. What are the potential difficulties with announcing unexpected changes at an appraisal interview?
2. Why it important to allow the interviewee the opportunity to express their career development preferences rather than to impose changes?
3. Discuss in what ways a mentor can be useful in post appraisal, management development?

Practicing HRM *Designing An AKS Appraisal For A Lecturer*

Many of the postgraduate/ undergraduate students I've worked with particularly enjoy this 'role reversal' exercise. Designing an AKS appraisal form for a lecturer, from a student's perspective. I have found it very interesting to review the differences between what the consumers think is important and what the providers select.

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think different stakeholders may have differing priorities?
- If there are differences, is anyone's selection more important?
- Do you think employers should also include those criteria that are selected by their stakeholders?
- What is the purpose of appraisal?
- Who do you think *benefits most* from appraisal?
- Who do your think *should benefit most* from an appraisal?

Guidance Note For Students

This exercise provides you with a practical opportunity to critically evaluate the appraisal procedure. You may find that the priorities selected depend upon what stakeholder groups' value. It is useful to recognise that appraisal is, by its nature, subject to the priorities most valued by the selectors.

Exercise : *Confidence, Competence*

Read the descriptors for the confidence, competence model. Think about a specific work situation you are, or have been involved in, to answer the self-assessment questionnaire. The context of your answers can also be based on a course of study you are currently following. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. Instead use them to reflect upon the extent to which you feel confident/ competent to undertake the work you are involved in.

If you are working in a team it may be useful to have a discussion about your results with your colleagues. Please do not be judgemental. The aim is to *encourage* others in developing self-confidence and competence.

Your responses to each item are measured as: (1) strongly disagree; (2) moderately disagree; (3) slightly disagree; (4) neither agree nor disagree; (5) slightly agree; (6) moderately agree; (7) strongly agree.

1. I am always confident that I will be successful in whatever work I do.

        1   2   3   4   5   6   7

2. I am very good at the work I am currently involved in.

        1   2   3   4   5   6   7

3. If someone is finding their work difficult I am usually able to help them.

        1   2   3   4   5   6   7

4. I have received a lot of personal support to help me improve my work performance.

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7

5. It is rarely the case that someone finds I have made a significant error in the work I am responsible for.

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7

6. I have to check my work several times to correct earlier mistakes.

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7

7. I do not think I am naturally very good at the work I am currently required to do.

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7

8. I enjoy working on my own more than working with other people.

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7

9. I felt more confident doing my previous job/ course.

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7

10. The work I have been given is too difficult.

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Guidance Note For Students

There are no right or wrong answers for a self-evaluation questionnaire. It simply provides you with a snapshot of how you currently see yourself. Is it accurate? Providing you answer the questions as honestly as you can then the questionnaire can provide you with an indication of your current self-image. However, humans are much more complex than any set of evaluation questions. Remember, self perception is just that. It does not necessarily mean that other people see you in the same way.

Group Activity: *Role-play An Appraisal Interview*

It is now time to try to convert critical evaluation and personal reflections into a real appraisal format. This exercise provides an experience of appraisal

design and the opportunity to critically evaluate the key factors involved in appraisal implementation.

Using the AKS framework, design an appraisal for:
 A management student on your course,
Or
An HR associate in your organisation
Or
Your own job

Chapter Summary

As with so many aspects of HR, appraisals may be interpreted differently by individual organisations. However, this is in harmony with a view of HR as a situation specific service. Although appraisals may be used for all kinds of supervisory reasons the key issue should be whether employee/ worker/ volunteer motivation is greater or lessened by the appraisal process. If appraisal is designed as a motivating and developmental process, it can be a useful aid to employee development. However, appraisals that aspire to achieve too many objectives can do more harm than good to motivation levels. Commentary that may sound like constructive criticism to the interviewer may be interpreted as negative feedback by the interviewee. Hence, appraisals with many/ conflicting objectives are likely to fail. Therefore an appraisal that is linked to rewards, pay and promotion is less likely to achieve developmental aims as interviewees contend for the most favourable package. Issues such as discipline and pay should not be dealt with in appraisals. Instead, separate and specific meetings should be arranged to deal with such matters.

Guidance Note For Students

The references are a useful guide to seek out other sources for background reading and ideas for your course work. Universities and colleges expect you to read more than just the set text. Although HRM An Integrated Approach provides a complete course for you, it is important to recognise that there are many other opinions, ideas on HR and management in general. In your assignments and activities you will be expected to refer to a range of literature. Go to you Learning Resources Centre and read/ view academic literature and expand your knowledge of HR and Management.

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Personal Notes On Chapter 8

Notes for seminars

---Notes for revision/ reminders