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ELGAR GUIDES TO TEACHING

# Teaching Human Resource Management

An Experiential Approach










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## 7. Performance appraisal/management and giving feedback

The new employees are hired, and they are working hard ... but how effectively are they working? Perhaps one of the most important and difficult tasks of a manager is to give employees feedback on their performance. Much has been said about the fear of giving feedback, and this explains why it is delayed, undertaken poorly, or avoided completely. Appraising performance requires great skill and can be used with a variety of approaches, some of which are the subject of the exercises which follow.

### Performance Appraisal on the Hotseat

Edmund Chow

AUDIENCE	  
GROUP SIZE	10-30
DELIVERY	
HOMEWORK	
TIME	
TRUST	

### PURPOSE

At the end of the exercise, participants will be able to:

1. critique the effectiveness of an appraisal system
2. suggest a set of criteria for performance evaluation
3. construct measurable performance indicators.

### TIME

60 minutes.

## RESOURCES/SET-UP

1. If conducted in a lecture hall with fixed furniture, please have an additional 4-5 chairs to be placed in front of the class for improvisation.
2. One copy of Appendix 1 – to be given to one volunteer (“Sue”/“Shawn”)
3. Three copies of Appendix 2 – to be given to three volunteers (Board Members)
4. Symbolic items of clothing (e.g. scarves, hats).

## ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

*Note:* The “Activity Sequence” column in the table below is the script for Instructors to Students. It is not meant to be highly prescriptive, which is why the “Rationale” column explains to the instructor (not student) why certain activities are scaffolded in such a way, and instructors can adapt according to their contexts.

Duration	Activity Sequence (Instructions to Students)	Rationale (for Instructors only)
2 min	<p><u>Drama Contract</u></p> <p>We are going to explore the topic of performance appraisal in some depth by conducting an improvisation.</p> <p>Before we do so, I would like to set up a boundary so that it becomes a safe space for all of us. Whatever happens in this space is permissible for explorations, so I would like to seek your consensus to keep this safe by not taking this exploration out of this room, that we do not discuss this by naming names, or that we do not confuse the real person with playing the fictional role. This fictional context is really a piece of drama and is not the real world. If you agree to keep this safe for everyone, please raise your hand. (<i>Wait for response.</i>) Thank you.</p>	<p>The purpose of the “drama contract” is to set up a safe space for creative explorations, especially in role playing – so participants do not confuse the role they are playing and themselves.</p>
10 min	<p><u>Setting up the Improvisation (Pre-Activity)</u></p> <p>So, we are going to do a little improvisation, an activity that will help us think through the concepts related to performance appraisal.</p>	<p>This sets up the activity by “pitting” three</p>

I will need four volunteers.

(Wait for volunteers: A, B, C, D.

A will be given Appendix 1 and the others Appendix 2 to read, but they have to do so outside the room behind closed doors.)

A, you will be an employee. (Preferably choose one volunteer who's a minority to play A. But do not make that explicit.)

B, C, D, you will sit on the Management Review Board. Further instructions will be given later. Please wait outside and read the instructions – and I will call you back when we are ready. (After students A, B, C, D leave the room, facilitator speaks to the class:)

You are members of an Investigation Committee. Here's the context.

A has not been given a promotion to be our Department Head: A lodges a complaint and is seeking to file a lawsuit against the company for unfairness and discrimination. S/he has hired you all to sit on this Independent Investigations Committee and to find reasons to support the legal cause against the management decision for not recommending him/her for promotion. All you would need to do is to listen to his/her interview with the Management Review Board, and try to find a case for him/her. Make notes if you have to.

Do you have any questions?

10 min

#### The Improvisation (Activity)

(Facilitator invites students A, B, C, D back to the room. B, C, D will sit in a row and will play the role of a panel. Across B, C, D on the other side, A sits facing them as well as facing the class.)

Let's give A a fictitious name, for example, "Sue"/"Shawn" (or any name that is preferably not identical to anyone else in the room).

against one, and then a large group against 3.

The tension in the activity (e.g. suspense, expectations, arbitrariness of rules – which will be explored as the activity deepens) is intentional to maximize fun in the classroom, with engaged learning that is purposeful.

The rationale for this improvisation is to maintain a high level of fun and suspense.

(Facilitator gives a scarf or a hat to A to wear. Facilitator then symbolically wears another object to symbolize a new role, as HR Director. This helps to separate fiction from reality, and acts as a safe boundary.)

(Facilitator in the role of HR Director speaks to Student A who's playing the employee.) "Sue/Shawn, you have just been notified by our board of directors (pointing to B, C, D) that we have not recommended you for the position of Department Head. We know you have been upset and have asked for a third-party Investigation Committee to examine this proceeding (point to the rest of the class). We also know that if this does not go well, you will seek a legal lawsuit against our company. We do want to make this as amicable as possible. You think we have been unfair to you, so we have obliged your request to ask as many questions as possible to make your case heard. Our management at this stage will only respond with "Yes," or "No." They will not justify their answers, but you can probe further. They will only answer "Yes" or "No" to your probes. Would you like to proceed? You will have only seven minutes for this."

(Repeat cycle, until dramatic tension arises: The activity should lead to A's frustration or disappointment in the role of employee. Ideally, the activity would highlight the unfairness of Management's decision.)

10 min

#### Investigation Committee

Sue/Shawn, your time is up. Thank you for your questions. (Tell Sue/Shawn to remove the symbolic scarf or hat.)

(Facilitator removes his/her own symbolic item of clothing, and distances the role of HR Director to being the Facilitator.)

We are now going to ask the Investigation Committee to have one minute to buzz with your partner or the person next to you and discuss

The rationale is to give the class a more purposeful way to solve a problem and find a case against the company. This may lead to frustration

if there was truly a case to be made against the company, if there was truly unfairness in their decision making.

(Wait for 1 minute.)

(Facilitator can annotate and write keywords on the whiteboard as the Investigation Committee decides what the criteria was.)

(For example:

Class: *It seems that the management is very clear on their decisions, but it is unclear what criteria they are using to evaluate and appraise Sue/Shawn. They said "Yes" to these questions, but I cannot see the connection or correlation. It appears that this is a case where there's a lack of transparency on their performance indicators.*)

(Facilitator) "Is there anyone else in the room who agrees with this observation? Or is there anyone who disagrees with this opinion?"

(After each suggestion from the class as the Investigation Committee, the Facilitator summarizes arguments from students and writes keywords on the whiteboard, for example, "lack of transparency," "unclear criteria." This will allow other students to agree or disagree when arguing a case against the company in Sue's/Shawn's legal defence.)

5 min

#### Critique of Appraisal System

As an Independent Investigation Committee, what did we find out about the Management Board's decision not to promote Sue/Shawn?

(Look at whiteboard) For example:

- inconsistency on performance indicators
- lack of transparency on how s/he is being evaluated

Is this justified?

Is this a case of gender discrimination?

because the company's rules seem so arbitrary – which is a point for learning about HR performance appraisals. The second rationale is for students to come up with convincing arguments and trying to make connections between what they saw and heard earlier.

The rationale is for students to find fault with the existing framework and justify reasons. The ridiculousness of the "rules" in the improvised activity serves to

Do you have a convincing case?

Get 1 or 2 students to make a case.

As you can tell, this activity demonstrated an ineffective appraisal system in Sue's/Shawn's company. It may seem implausible, but what if I told you that the Management had a different set of criteria and rules? What do you think they might be?

Get students and role-players to guess what criteria were used.

Finally, reveal the rules of the game (Appendix 2): They were tasked to say "No," "No," and "Yes" in that order, regardless of the type of question asked. On the surface, there is no apparent robust criteria to discriminate Sue/Shawn, yet some organizations have other invisible rules and systems in operation. This is where we would need to probe deeper into HR policies in terms of execution and implementation.

10 min

#### Suggesting Criteria (Pair work)

As you can see, having a robust appraisal system is important. We made it arbitrary and ridiculous because I wanted to impress upon you how these things – if not considered – can indeed lead to a lawsuit.

Now, to continue with our lesson on performance appraisals, let's decide what criteria you would suggest if you were in the HR position creating a new appraisal system.

Turn to the person sitting beside you. Discuss and decide what performance factors or dimensions a more effective appraisal system might look like. For the benefit of this exercise, focus on the four most important factors.

Some examples:

- (i) Interpersonal Relationship
- (ii) Personal (Motivation/Goal Setting)
- (iii) Financial Planning/Budgeting

highlight the importance of having a robust system for performance evaluation.

The rationale here is to use cognition to critique and make suggestions on what processes need to be in place to have a robust performance appraisal system.

- (iv) Performance Deliverables (Quality/Quantity)
- (v) Communication/Presentation Delivery.

Once you have finalized the four, choose one and discuss how to measure/score in that dimension.

1. What four criteria would you use that are most important in an appraisal system?
2. Is there a priority or order of preference?
3. How would you weight the four criteria? 25% each?
4. Why/What reasons would you give for your weighting?

For example, if you have chosen “performance deliverables” as one of the four dimensions, list a few behaviors or outcomes that can be observed and measured (e.g. delivering more than five customer projects per month consistently).

10 min

#### Measuring Performance (Plenary)

*(Invite one or two students to explain what their four dimensions are, and how they could measure one of them. Discuss with the class if these are effective or not.)*

Discussion Questions:

1. What evidence must the employee produce to demonstrate this level of competency?
2. How can/should the data be collected?
3. What are the possible biases in the data collection?
4. Does the laboriousness/ease in producing this piece of evidence justify the end result?
5. What might be excluded from the sample/data?

This helps to consolidate all the learning that has taken place. It also opens up further discussions on what is most important, and how HR needs to measure it.

3 min

#### Takeaways

What are some of the key lessons you have gained from today's activity?

This serves as a closure for the lesson.

## DISCUSSION/DEBRIEF

### Critique of Appraisal System

1. Is there inconsistency on performance indicators?
2. Is there a lack of transparency on how Sue/Shawn is being evaluated?
3. Are their decisions justified?
4. Is this a case of (e.g. minority discrimination)? [*Note: The facilitator is supposed to have chosen a minority person to play Sue/Shawn. Through Sue's/Shawn's improvised dialogue, it is likely that s/he will raise that issue. If not, insert a comment that is relevant from the improvisation.*]
5. Do you have a convincing case (i.e. evidence)?

### Suggesting Criteria

6. What four criteria would you use that are most important in an appraisal system?
7. Is there a priority or order of preference?
8. How would you weight the four criteria? Twenty-five percent each?
9. Why/What reasons would you give for your weighting?

### Measuring Performance

10. What evidence must the employee produce to demonstrate this level of competency?
11. How can/should the data be collected?
12. What are the possible biases in the data collection?
13. Does the laboriousness/ease (means) in producing this piece of evidence justify the end result?
14. What might be excluded from the sample/data?

## APPENDIX 1

**Role**

You have been with this company, Alpine Technologies, for seven years and have, in your opinion, been performing very well.

**Context**

An internal vacancy for the post of Department Head is made available and you have applied for it. Your colleagues all believe you have the skills and qualities of a Department Head.

However, the Board of Directors has rejected your application for reasons unknown to you.

You are extremely unhappy with the management's decision and seek to appeal your case.

In fact, a colleague of yours hinted that management is discriminating against you – and that you should hire an Independent Investigation Committee (IIC) to observe your proceedings.

You have agreed.

The IIC will make a case against the company and file a lawsuit on your behalf, if they have the evidence.

As such, it is important for you to ask the right questions to find out why the Management Review Board (MRB) had been unfair to you.

You demand an answer from them.

**Task**

You can only ask questions that demand "Yes" or "No" from the MRB.

They have been told explicitly not to explain or justify themselves.

You are given a total of seven minutes to meet up with the MRB.

## APPENDIX 2

**Role**

You are part of the Management Review Board (MRB), with two other colleagues.

**Context**

One of your staff members (for example Sue/Shawn) has been with this company for seven years.

An internal posting for Department Head was made available and this staff member had applied for it.

However, the Board of Directors has rejected this application for reasons unknown to that staff member.

This staff member is extremely unhappy with the management's decision and seeks to appeal the case, thinking that it is a case of discrimination.

The staff member had hired an Independent Investigation Committee (IIC) to observe the proceedings. If the IIC find any evidence of discrimination, they will make a case against the company and file a lawsuit.

You are given a total of seven minutes to meet up with your staff.

**Task with Secret Rule/Game**

You will be asked many questions. Your secret rule is to answer "No," "No," and "Yes" in that order. **You only give an affirmative answer for every third question.** No explanations needed. (The reason for this is that even though there is no apparent robust criteria to discriminate Sue/Shawn, there is nonetheless an arbitrary invisible system in operation, which in this case is the 'rule of the affirmative 3' (which is coined in the context of this activity). This will allow the class, later, to find a case against the management. Also, in the context of the improvisation, it is meant to facilitate A's level of frustration and tension so that the drama can take off naturally.)

For example, s/he may ask something like:

1. "Is it because I am not generating enough profits?" – NO
2. "Is it because I was late for work last week?" – NO
3. "Is it because my team did not agree with the management's decision for the last project?" – YES






4. "Is it because I am a minority?" – NO
5. "Is it because I did not clinch the deal last week?" – NO
6. "Is it because I am a woman/man?" – YES

S/he will ask as many questions as possible, but you will collectively answer "Yes" to every third question.

The rest of the class (IIC) are supposed to find the criteria and evidence for MRB's discrimination against your staff.

## Performance Evaluation Exercise/Role Play

*Julie Palmer*

AUDIENCE	
GROUP SIZE	10-30, >30
DELIVERY	
HOMEWORK	
TIME	
TRUST	

### PURPOSE

To familiarize students with the types of problems that can occur before, during, and after the administration of performance evaluations

### TIME

One hour for out-of-class preparation. Approximately 45–60 minutes will be needed for in-class time.

### RESOURCES/SET-UP

Copies of the case, below; additional slides/handouts/published resources on different types of performance appraisals and the manner in which they are conducted.

### ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Have participants read the case ahead of time, preferably after covering the course material on managing employee performance. Participants should