A Brief Review of Performance Appraisal Practices and its Implementation at Government Offices in Pakistan

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Abstract
The purpose of this article is to compare the performance appraisal practices undertaken in the government offices in Pakistan with various methods of performance appraisal methods discussed in the contemporary academic research. This is a review article in which a literature review of various methods of performance appraisal is presented. Afterwards, the standard performance evaluation report (PER) for Pakistani government officers of Basic Pay Scale - 17 (officer cadre) are examined step by step under the macrocosm of the literature review. It is satisfactory to know that government offices in Pakistan are applying some of the contemporary performance appraisal methods like Adjective Rating Scale, Management By Objectives, and Narrative Method in a traditional way which reminds of the British colonial legacy. Recommendations and implications for government offices in Pakistan are suggested for further improvement.

Key words: Adjective Rating Scale, Management By Objective, Narrative Method, Performance Appraisal, Performance Evaluation Report

Introduction
The Performance Appraisal process finds its roots in the controlling function of Management whereby a manager assures whether his employees are performing up to the desired level of the organization or not. As far as Performance Appraisal is concerned, it is now widely acclaimed as a core function of Human Resource Management by both academicians and practitioners. At the research side, a considerable amount of literature has been accumulated through research which has established a very good theoretical base for learning the key aspects of
Performance Appraisal, and which has also offered room for further scholastic research on the area. For a thorough and scrupulous understanding of the construct of performance appraisal, we suggest to read some relevant papers for a preliminary understanding on the concept like Arvey and Murphy (1998), Fletcher (2001), Fletcher and Perry (2001), Latham and Mann (2006), Murphy and Cleveland (1995), and Smither (1998).

Various Methods of Performance Appraisal

Performance appraisal is essential for organizations in numerous ways like it serves as a relatively more objective basis for judging the merit or worth of employees for promotion, transfer or termination of employees and helps in distinguishing between efficient and inefficient workers (Cleveland, Murphy & Williams, 1989). In recent history, we have witnessed evolution in the methods adopted for Performance Appraisal, as simpler methods have been transformed into more complex ones with the passage of time. For instance, some of the simpler methods include the Narrative Essay Method (Smith, Hornsby & Shirmeyer, 1996), while the relatively advance methods include Critical Incident Method (Smith, Hornsby & Shirmeyer, 1996), Adjective Rating Scale or Graphic Rating Scale (Cascio & Bernardin, 1981), Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale (Smith, Hornsby & Shirmeyer, 1996), and Management By Objectives which is simply abbreviated as MBO. By its mechanism, the Performance Appraisal can be broadly divided into two types, viz. the conventional Top-Down Appraisal, and the 360-degree appraisal. In the conventional Top-Down Appraisal system, an employee is evaluated by his/her immediate supervisor (it is the standard practice in the organizations of Pakistan), whereas in the more recent 360-degree appraisal, an employee is not only evaluated by his supervisor, but also by his peers, subordinates, customers and even suppliers.

Performance Appraisal in Government Offices of Pakistan

Up till now, it was mainly a refresher of the text book version of performance appraisal, but the real impetus behind writing this article is to make this concept more ‘life-like’, which is mostly ignored by the faculty while teaching this topic here at universities in Pakistan. In Pakistan, performance appraisal is referred popularly by terms ACR and PER. Here, it is pertinent to elucidate the difference between the Annual Confidential Report (ACR) and Performance Evaluation Report (PER). Strictly speaking, and considering some of the government departments here in Pakistan, ACR is the name given to the report prepared by undertaking the performance appraisal of the staff below the Basic Pay scale - 17, while the PER is the report prepared by carrying out the performance appraisal of the officers of the pay scale of Basic Pay Scale - 17 and above. In the private sector, performance appraisal is known by various names ranging from Performance Appraisal Report to Employee Assessment System.

The Performance Evaluation Report (PER)

In order to compare the different aspects of the concept at hand with real life examples in Pakistan for better comprehension, let us examine the Performance Evaluation Report (PER) prepared for the evaluation of the government officers of the Basic Pay Scale – 17 (officer cadre).

The first part of this report consists of the bio data of the officer being reported upon which includes the name, personnel number, date of birth, date of entry in service, academic qualifications, training received during the evaluation period, and the period served etc. In the second part of the report, the officer being reported upon writes his Job Description and secondly, a brief account of performance on the job during the period supported by statistical data where possible, the targets given and actual performance against such targets. If examined closely, the second point relates to the concept of Management By Objectives (MBO), a method of performance appraisal in
which the actual performance of an employee is compared with the targets achieved by the concerned employee and which were agreed at the start. It is a very useful method of evaluating performance and is not only simple in assessment but also very effective. So, the PER used by the Government of Pakistan incorporates the method of MBO in it. In the third part of the report, some key competencies valued by the Government of Pakistan (the employer / organization) are listed which includes Intelligence, Confidence and Will Power, Acceptance of Responsibility, Reliability under pressure, and Financial Responsibility etc., followed by the grading anchors of ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’, and ‘D’ are provided for each competency where ‘A’ stands for ‘Very Good’ and ‘D’ stands for ‘Below Average’. In this way, another key method of Adjective Rating Scale (ARS) is also employed in this report. The fourth part consists of soliciting some comments of the Reporting Officer about the targets achieved by the concerned officer, his/her integrity, special aptitude, recommendations for future training, overall grading, and fitness for promotion. But the most important point in this part is the ‘Pen Picture’ of the officer being reported which enables the Reporting Officer to narrate the strengths and weaknesses and other attributes of the officer being reported upon. This practice is similar to the Narrative Method of performance appraisal named earlier. The fifth and the sixth parts of the report are concerned with the remarks of the countersigning and second countersigning officer respectively. The format of the above report can be viewed at: http://www.savings.gov.pk/Forms/PER_17-18.pdf

Conclusion & Recommendations

What we learn by the step-by-step inspection of the above report is that the text book concepts of performance appraisal are to a considerable extent adequately practiced in the government departments of Pakistan, which is a very encouraging sighting. But there is room for further enhancement in this respect. The term “Annual Confidential Report” is a remnant of the legacy of the British rule over Pakistan, and performance appraisal in modern corporations is no longer dealt as a strictly “confidential” process. Its openness has enhanced its transparency, and which should also be practiced in the government offices in Pakistan. 360-degree appraisal systems cannot be directly implemented in the government offices in Pakistan, as the current organizational culture in these offices may not be able to yield its fruits. Government officers in Pakistan are required to be adequately trained in the contemporary performance appraisals like Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scales and Management By Objectives. However, it is satisfactory to know that government offices in Pakistan are applying some of the contemporary performance appraisal methods in a more “traditional” way, which was inherited from the British era.
References


