

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**Effectiveness and Perception of
Performance Appraisals
In Law Enforcement**

**An Administrative Research Paper
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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness and perception of performance appraisals is relevant to contemporary law enforcement as agencies are facing an increased level of public scrutiny, coupled with the increasing challenges and expectations within the profession. Many law enforcement agencies have implemented performance appraisal systems, but the viewpoint of many personnel within believe they are ineffective and/or unfair. Performance expectations are often perceived different between command staff and their subordinates. These perceptions have presented challenges to law enforcement managers for many years. These challenges are increasing today as the law enforcement profession includes three different generations of personnel.

The purpose of this research is to evaluate different perspectives of the performance appraisal systems used by law enforcement agencies across the state of Texas. The research will demonstrate that only a small percentage of appraisal systems are effective and most are perceived in a negative way. Many agencies have failed to satisfy the needs of everybody involved in the appraisal process. Research for this study was conducted through the review of an abundance of articles, internet sites, periodicals, journals, and personal interviews addressing performance appraisals. Additionally, a survey of 89 participants, representing 64 law enforcement agencies, was also distributed and analyzed. This research revealed that almost half of law enforcement personnel, both supervisory and non-supervisory, believe the appraisal system used within their agency is ineffective. Furthermore, the research has revealed that most personnel of all ranks perceive the appraisal process, as a whole, in a negative manner.

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INTRODUCTION

Performance appraisals in the field of law enforcement are deemed by many law enforcement administrators as a vital component of employee performance. Whereas many police agencies use some method of evaluating their employees, some agencies have no methods of measuring performance. Establishing an appraisal system that is positively perceived and effective is critical for the process to be successful. The issue to be examined considers whether or not the law enforcement profession benefits from having a documented performance appraisal system in place. For purposes of this research, the terms “appraisal” and “evaluation” have the same meaning.

Performance appraisals have been used in the business world for many decades. Research estimates that over 90% of all large organizations in the United States employ some form of systematic employee appraisal and review (Locker & Teel, 1988). Performance management and appraisal is critical because employees need to know the areas where they are having success as well as the areas where they should improve to meet performance standards and career enhancement goals. The effectiveness and perception of the appraisal system is relevant to law enforcement as, oftentimes, they are the basis for pay increases, promotion, and other incentives. If an agency does not set goals and merely rewards the employee for performing on an acceptable level, they are doing themselves a disservice. This may lead to a lack of professional development and problems with morale.

The purpose of this research is to examine appraisal systems abroad and their effectiveness within the law enforcement organization. The research will also measure the perception levels of personnel within these organizations on all different levels to

include both sworn and civilian personnel. The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not the effectiveness and perceptions among personnel are indicators of certain characteristics of the established appraisal system. The research will also suggest if clear performance measures can promote an individual within an organization to develop professionally, it improves the organization as a whole. However, it must be examined more in depth as to the reasons why appraisal systems are either effective or ineffective. The employee's assignment and major job responsibilities must also be considered when measuring the perception of the entire process from start to finish.

The intended method of inquiry includes the review of an abundance of articles, internet sites, periodicals, journals, and personal interviews addressing performance appraisal instruments and the process in its entirety. A written survey will be given to police organizations represented at the Leadership Command College at the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas. The survey will also be distributed to different law enforcement agency representatives by means of the Texas Municipal League website. The information received from the literary research will show different methods and perceptions of performance appraisals. The written survey is expected to show that most surveyed law enforcement agencies have an established performance appraisal system.

The intended anticipated findings of the research will reveal that a majority of law enforcement personnel, both supervisory and non-supervisory, believe the appraisal system used within their agency is ineffective. Furthermore, it is expected that currently implemented appraisal systems are perceived in a negative way. The findings of the

research will suggest that many law enforcement agencies need to re-evaluate their performance appraisal instrument and maybe their entire system as a whole. Doing so will assist law enforcement agencies in enhancing the performance amongst their employees. Furthermore, its effectiveness can increase morale and promote favorable perception.

The field of law enforcement will be influenced by the conclusions of this research as it pertains to the measurement of an employee's performance and that of the entire agency. Nonetheless, it affects the community they serve and the reputation of law enforcement in general. Although law enforcement may have to change the way in which they evaluate personnel, the profession will benefit by setting performance standards and goals to be measured through an effective appraisal system to benefit all. If personnel are positively challenged in the area of performance, it will provide them with an opportunity to develop into leaders, enhance morale, provide training, and meet the expectations of supervisors. The public will have more faith in the officers and support staff serving their community, and the public will regain lost confidence in the law enforcement profession.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

An abundance of research material exists that addresses performance appraisal systems and the evaluation instrument itself. The focus of this research is to first validate the author's stated theory that if police organizations are to effectively evaluate their employees performance in a way that is well perceived, they must evaluate and make changes to their appraisal systems to effectively and fairly promote enhanced performance amongst employees. The overall goal of performance management is to

ensure that the organization and all of its subsystems are working together in an optimum fashion to achieve the results desired by the organization (McNamara, 2008). Police leaders must clearly define their goals and objectives of their appraisal system. The use of an effective appraisal system has helped police leaders build agile organizations that anticipate challenges, build capacity, and consistently deliver high quality police services (O'Connell & Straub, 2007). A manager's responsibility for evaluating employees is all the more challenging and complex (Silverstein, 2007).

Materials reviewed during this research indicated performance reviews can be a powerful tool for motivating personnel to higher performance levels. If properly used, it could improve relationships between managers and employees (Messmer, 2007). While managers and subordinates may not agree on what constitutes an effective appraisal, the subordinate's acceptance of the appraisal increased when managers and subordinates shared an understanding of its purpose and the role of each party (Locher & Teel, 1988). Most appraisal systems are established at the command level with little or no input from the lower ranks. Managers believe the appraisal process is effective as a tool to facilitate employee development and as a communications tool, while subordinates viewed it as ineffective (Longenecker & Goff, 1992). Given the importance of employee development and effective manager/subordinate communications, it is often asked as to why law enforcement agencies conduct formal performance appraisals. The literature on performance appraisals generally suggested that the appraisal process can increase employee motivation and productivity. The appraisal process can provide a solid basis for wage and salary administration. It also facilitates discussions concerning employee growth and development as well as provides

managers with a useful communication tool for employee goal setting and performance planning. Nonetheless, the appraisal process provides data for human resource decisions (Mohrman, Resnick-West, & Lawler, 1989).

A key component to performance management is the appraisal system being utilized. A shared perception must exist in regards to the purposes and functions of the process among managers and subordinates. A shared belief that the appraisal instrument is useful to them on an individual basis is equally important. Thus, an effective appraisal system is one that satisfies the needs of the parties involved in the process. One of the best things an agency can do to encourage their employees to meet or exceed expectations (both theirs and the agency's) is to actively involve them in the performance appraisal process by seeking their input, ideas, and feedback about how the system should work (Gibson, 2004). This provides a sense of ownership and responsibility for their performance within the organization. In addition to employee involvement and for a system to be effective, managers must have not only the skills necessary to conduct effective appraisals but also the willingness to do so (Longenecker, 1989). Coupling these foundational steps together helps establish the appraisal system as being effective and positively recognized by those personnel being evaluated.

Performance appraisal instruments in use today vary from agency to agency. Some agencies have adopted appraisal instruments in use by another, while others have developed theirs from the ground up. It is difficult for an agency to adopt another agency's appraisal instrument without making changes specific to the organization's culture. It is important that performance appraisal instruments yield significant benefits

to the individual as well as the organization. By doing so, several key benefits can result: job satisfaction, development, rewards, recognition, and improved performance. It is imperative that the employee's job description is updated and is used as the performance measures/expectations basis for the appraisal instrument. The instrument must also include documented development objectives and action steps to support the accomplishment of the required competencies over the next performance period. This would include training, on the job development, and continuous learning. A superior evaluation instrument will also incorporate employee competencies that are general in nature, such as communication, customer service, initiative, teamwork, and technical capability.

Longenecker and Goff (1992) suggested that previous research showed "a technically sound appraisal system and procedure is no guarantee that the process will be effective" (p. 2). Many police agencies have a difficult time finding an appraisal system that will be accepted by personnel on all levels of the organization. Only a small percentage of appraisals are actually effective and accomplish the intended goals (Longenecker, Gioia, & Sims, 1987). Agencies that have successfully implemented an effective appraisal system see evident improvement department-wide, including increased productivity, better employee morale, promotion in rank, higher retention rates, and remarkable levels of competency. There are many reasons why performance appraisal systems fail and are ineffective. King (1984) gave some common reasons why many appraisal systems fail, including that they are designed by "experts" without input from managers who will use them. He also believes they are cumbersome, with complicated forms to fill out and file, and they are simplistic in

describing the complex communication needed to do a job in a phrase. Appraisal systems are implemented by the executive fiat without the training or explanation required. Finally, appraisal systems are offered as a panacea by performance designers.

METHODOLOGY

The research question will examine appraisal systems used by contemporary law enforcement agencies and their effectiveness to the law enforcement profession. Equally important, the research question will examine the perception of appraisal systems and the evaluation instruments used. It is the researcher's hypothesis that this research will emphasize the value of implementing or re-evaluating performance appraisal systems and instruments being used in the majority of law enforcement agencies. This research will suggest the value of a well-designed appraisal system that is both effective and well-perceived.

The method of inquiry will include a review of articles, internet sites, periodicals, and journals addressing the issue of performance appraisal systems. Personal interviews will be conducted for further inquiry and will include command staff, first-line supervisors, and non-supervisory personnel. In addition, a two-page written survey serving as a questionnaire to gather specific data beneficial to this research will be used. The survey consists of 24 questions to determine various aspects of performance appraisal systems to include effectiveness and perception. The survey instrument was distributed to 19 participants of the Leadership Command College Module II, of which 19 questionnaires were returned. All of the participants surveyed during Module II hold a sworn supervisory position within their agency. The researcher will conduct additional

surveys to Texas law enforcement personnel, both sworn and unsworn, to provide a better analysis of the research issue at hand. These additional surveys will be administered by telephone interviews and electronic mail (e-mail) dissemination to agencies represented on the Texas Municipal League website. Through an analysis of questionnaires, it will be possible to determine the effectiveness and perception of performance appraisal systems being presently used by law enforcement agencies across the State. A total of 84 sworn law enforcement officers and five non-sworn personnel from 64 different law enforcement agencies in Texas were represented in the survey. The majority of the surveys (58) were obtained via electronic mail. Twenty-seven surveys were collected in person. Additionally, four surveys were collected during telephone interviews. The sworn personnel represented both non-supervisory and supervisory ranks from Patrol Officer to Chief of Police. The non-sworn personnel who responded represented both supervisory and non-supervisory positions within their respective agency.

FINDINGS

An analysis of the information gathered in the survey has supported the researcher's prediction that performance appraisal systems perception is relatively low. In fact, the results were surprisingly low among command staff and upper management. The researcher's prediction that performance appraisal systems are more ineffective than effective resulted in an equal number of participants supporting both positions.

Participants were asked if their agency uses a written performance evaluation instrument. A total of 83 participants representing 60 law enforcement agencies represented in the survey indicated they are currently using a written appraisal

instrument. Six participants representing four agencies indicated they do not currently have an appraisal system in place. Out of these four agencies, only one is currently considering implementing a performance evaluation instrument whereas the others have no plans for implementation. The participant was instructed not to complete the remainder of the survey instrument if their agency does not use a written performance evaluation instrument.

Participants were asked if their agency has an established mission and/or vision statement. Ninety-four percent indicated their agency has an established mission and/or vision statement. Six percent stated their agency does not have either or both statements. When asked if their agency has established core values, 82% stated their agency has established core values. The participants were also asked if their agency has established departmental goals. Eighty percent stated their agency has established department goals. The participants were asked if their agency's performance appraisal instrument incorporates their department's mission, vision, core values, and/or goals. Sixty-three percent stated their appraisal instrument incorporates their mission, vision, and/or goals.

Participants were asked if they feel the performance appraisal instrument and process used by their agency is fair. Surprisingly, 69% believe the instrument and process to be fair. Only 31% of the participants feel their current appraisal instrument or process is not fair. When asked if they feel the performance evaluation instrument used by their agency is effective or ineffective, 49% of the participants believe their evaluation instrument is effective. On the other hand, 51% of the participants think their existing evaluation instrument is ineffective. The participant was asked if they feel that

management and subordinates differ in their perceptions of appraisal effectiveness.

Seventy-one percent of the participants believe management and subordinates differ in their perceptions.

Participants were asked if they felt their agency's performance appraisal instrument fairly lets the subordinate know where he or she stands. Sixty-seven percent felt the appraisal instrument gives the subordinate a fair standing. On the other hand, 33% of the participants believed the appraisal instrument does not fairly let the subordinate know where he or she stands. When asked if they believe the performance appraisal instrument used by their agency facilitates subordinate development, 55% believed the instrument facilitates subordinate development. A little less than half of the participants felt the appraisal instrument does not facilitate subordinate development. The participants were asked if they believed the performance appraisal instrument improves subordinate motivation and performance. Only 42% of the participants felt the instrument improves motivation and performance. The majority of participants felt the appraisal instrument does not improve subordinate motivation and performance.

The next question asked the participant if their performance appraisal rating is linked to pay. Forty-nine percent of the participants indicated salary is affected based on the performance rating. However, 51% of the participants indicated their performance rating has no effect on salary.

Participants were asked if they believe the performance appraisal instrument used by their agency accurately established and clarified work goals and objectives as defined in the employee's job description. Sixty-two percent of the participants believed

the performance appraisal instrument accurately establishes and clarifies work goals and objectives as defined in the employee's job description.

The participant was asked if the performance appraisal process facilitates manager and subordinate communication. Seventy-three percent of the participants believed the appraisal process does, indeed, facilitate manager and subordinate communication. When asked if the performance appraisal process improved the manager and subordinate working relationship, 49% of the participants believed it improves the relationship.

Participants were asked if the performance appraisal instrument allows employee input about their job. Seventy-three percent believed the instrument allows job input. When asked if the appraisal instrument allows the employee to self-evaluate themselves, only 36% of the participants stated self-evaluation is allowed.

The participants were asked if the performance appraisal in use sets performance goals for the next evaluation period. Seventy-eight percent of the participants indicated performance goals are established. When asked if they felt a fair performance appraisal system is beneficial in the field of law enforcement, an overwhelming 94% of the participants supported its benefit.

Participants were asked to rate how they felt the performance appraisal system in their agency is perceived as a whole. Fifty-seven percent of the participants believed the perception of their appraisal system in use by their agency is perceived in a negative way.

The frequency of performance appraisals vary based on the participants responses. Seventy-two percent of the participants' performance appraisals are

administered on a yearly basis. Seventeen percent are administered every six months. Six percent are administered quarterly, while only four percent are administered on a monthly basis. One percent of the participants indicated performance appraisals are administered as needed or on a random basis. Eighty-nine participants indicated performance is evaluated by their immediate supervisor. Six percent indicated the Chief administrator evaluates their performance. Three percent of the participants stated their division commander completes the evaluation process. The remaining percentage of participants indicated the evaluator varies within their agency.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

Performance appraisal systems are being utilized in many law enforcement agencies across the state of Texas. Some agencies have eliminated the use of performance appraisals within their agency for several reasons. The main disadvantage with lacking an appraisal system is that measuring performance among employees can be challenging. However, a fair and consistent performance appraisal system can have its benefits. The appraisal instrument and the process as a whole must be perceived in a positive manner in order for it to be effective. This is very critical for the success of any performance appraisal system, regardless of agency size or structure. The perception of these systems abroad can increase significantly if personnel at all levels of the organization are allowed input into the system and instrument itself. This gives the employee a sense of ownership, which goes a long ways in supporting the overall effectiveness of the performance appraisal system. With the increasing amount of turnover in law enforcement agencies today, employees can be afforded the opportunity

of giving their input if the performance appraisal system is re-evaluated on a regular basis.

The issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not the law enforcement profession benefits from having a documented performance appraisal system in place. The researcher agrees with the majority of the participants' responses that a fair performance appraisal system is beneficial in the field of law enforcement. Fairness has many effects on the appraisal system as a whole. Without fairness, most employees will not feel that the performance appraisal process is valuable. The process must begin with a trusting relationship between the employee and their supervisors. This trust can begin with supervisors focusing on promoting development instead of simply evaluating them. The author believes that by improving communication of expectations and developing a coaching relationship/setting the performance appraisal system would be seen as valuable to the employer and employee. Continuous coaching of the employee by the evaluator helps eliminate surprises at evaluation sittings. It is not uncommon for an employee to think they are performing at an acceptable performance level or above. However, often times the employee receives an unfavorable evaluation in specific performance areas or as a whole and were never coached or told of their deficiencies during the performance period. Law enforcement administrators and supervisors must improve communications among personnel in order for the law enforcement profession to benefit from performance appraisals.

The purpose of this research was to examine appraisal systems abroad and their effectiveness and perception within the law enforcement profession. This has a direct effect on whether performance appraisals have any benefit in the law enforcement

arena. The researcher focused on whether or not the effectiveness and perceptions among personnel are indicators of certain characteristics of the established appraisal system. The research showed that slightly more than half of the participants think the performance appraisal system currently being used in their agency is ineffective. Prior to the research being conducted, the researcher thought the percentage of effectiveness would be lower. The research indicated the overall perception of performance appraisals is lower than it should be. Law enforcement professionals should have a much higher perception as the profession is constantly changing while facing increased scrutiny by the public. One would think that improved performance demands would be a huge benefit in today's society. However, it is difficult to measure performance improvements or deficiencies with the dominating negative perception of appraisal systems being used. Law enforcement agencies must implement their department's mission, vision, core values, and goals into their performance appraisal process. This, coupled with improved communications and employee input, can improve the perception and effectiveness of performance appraisals in an ever-changing profession.

The researcher hypothesized the value of properly implementing or re-evaluating performance appraisal systems and instruments used in the majority of today's law enforcement agencies affects the effectiveness and perception of such. The researcher concluded from the findings that performance appraisal systems are, overall, ineffective and perceived negatively, which supports the researcher's hypothesis. The reason the findings supported the hypothesis is probably due to the lack of communication between law enforcement administrators and employees at lower ranks. Another contributing

factor is the lack of input from all levels of personnel; most processes are decided only at the command staff level.

Limitations that might have hindered this study resulted because those who completed the survey may have been a high performer compared to a low performer who may have received an unsatisfactory appraisal. Another limitation is in the lack of continuous assessment and communication of strengths and weaknesses prior to the performance evaluation. Many of the participants in the survey were mid-management or command staff, which may have contributed to the effectiveness rate being higher than anticipated. This is, in part, possibly because mid-management and command staff may be more loyal to the performance appraisal system in place to support the chief administrator or government management.

The study of performance appraisal systems is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because societal norms assess performance on a regular basis, but the communication and consistency among agencies is lacking. This supports the researcher's point of view that most agencies do not adequately incorporate their organization's cultural foundation within their appraisal system. This further supports the researcher's hypothesis that performance appraisal systems in contemporary law enforcement are ineffective. Employees as well as employers stand to benefit by the results of this research by developing a performance appraisal that will communicate strengths and weaknesses and offer coaching opportunities to improve employee performance.

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APPENDIX

***** Performance Appraisal (Evaluation) Survey *****

Research is being performed on whether your law enforcement agency uses performance appraisals (evaluations) and if so, different aspects to the appraisal (evaluation) instrument / process. Please complete the following survey and return to Sgt. Dennis Kelley in person or via e-mail at dkelley@alamoheightstx.gov or via fax at (210) 822-7111. Your participation is greatly appreciated and is being used for an Administrative Research Paper for the Leadership Command College at the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas (LEMIT).

Name of Agency _____

Rank / Title _____

Total personnel: Sworn _____ Civilian _____

1) Does your agency use a written performance evaluation instrument?

YES NO

2) If you answered “NO” to question #1, is your agency currently considering implementing a performance evaluation instrument? YES NO

3) If you answered “YES” to question #1, please answer the following questions:

- a) Does your agency have an established mission and/or vision statement?
 YES NO
- b) Does your agency have established core values? YES NO
- c) Does your agency have established departmental goals? YES NO
- d) Does your agency’s performance appraisal instrument incorporate your Department’s mission, vision, core values and/or goals? YES NO
- e) Do you feel that the performance appraisal instrument / process used by your agency is fair?
 YES NO
- f) Do you feel that the performance evaluation instrument used by your agency is effective or ineffective?
 EFFECTIVE INEFFECTIVE
- g) Do you feel that management and subordinates differ in their perceptions of appraisal effectiveness?
 YES NO
- h) In your opinion, does your agency’s performance appraisal instrument fairly let the subordinate know where they stand? YES NO

- i) In your opinion, does the performance appraisal instrument facilitate subordinate development?
 YES NO
- j) In your opinion, does the performance appraisal instrument improve subordinate motivation and performance? YES NO
- k) Does the performance appraisal link pay to subordinate performance?
 YES NO
- l) Does the performance appraisal instrument accurately establish and clarify work goals and objectives as defined in the subordinate's job description?
 YES NO
- m) Does the performance appraisal facilitate manager / subordinate communication?
 YES NO
- n) Does the performance appraisal process improve the manager / subordinate working relationship?
 YES NO
- o) Does the performance appraisal instrument allow employee input about their job?
 YES NO
- p) Does your appraisal instrument set performance goals for the next evaluation period? YES NO
- q) Does your appraisal instrument allow the employee to self-evaluate themselves?
 YES NO
- r) Do you feel that a fair performance appraisal system is beneficial in the field of law enforcement?
 YES NO
- s) Overall, on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest), how do you feel the performance appraisal system in your agency is perceived? (circle)
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- t) How often are written performance appraisals administered in your agency?
 Monthly Quarterly Every 6 months Once a year
 Other _____
- u) Which personnel are given written performance appraisals? (check all that apply)
 SWORN PERSONNEL NON-SWORN PERSONNEL
- v) Who evaluates the employee's (subordinate) performance?
 IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR DIVISION COMMANDER
 CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR OTHER _____