

The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas

Employee Performance Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

Employee performance evaluation is an important personnel management issue for many organizations. Performance evaluations are often used for pay, promotional and retention decisions. Such an important function should be handled in a fair and objective manner. The purpose of this research was to examine the employee performance evaluation process utilized by the Saginaw Police Department and make any appropriate recommendations for updating the system.

A review of the current system revealed that the police department uses the generic city appraisal form - currently used by all divisions within city government. It is not job specific to policing making an accurate appraisal difficult. It was further discovered that supervisors do not receive training in performance evaluation and the evaluations are not used when making personnel decisions (promotions, pay, etc). To get a broader perspective on police performance evaluations a survey of fifty local law enforcement agencies was conducted. Follow-up interviews were also completed. It was discovered that most agencies use a police specific evaluation form and that the results of appraisals are used in personnel decisions. In addition, a majority of agencies surveyed indicated that supervisor training, in conducting evaluations, was necessary. Maintaining accurate records throughout the appraisal period was also identified as important.

It is concluded that the employee performance evaluation system at the Saginaw Police Department needs to be updated. A system that is police specific should be developed. Additionally, supervisors should receive training in performance evaluation and the results of appraisals should be used in personnel actions.

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Introduction:

The performance evaluations used by the City of Saginaw are the same for every department in the city. It is not possible to measure the productivity of each department by using the same form. Productivity for a police officer is very difficult to measure. Commonly, when supervisors evaluate subordinates, the supervisor will not accurately record the true feelings that they may have for an individual officer. Supervisors within the Saginaw Police Department do not receive training in completing evaluations. Therefore an officer is not given a true evaluation of his or her performance. Then, if the officer starts having problems and disciplinary action is needed, it becomes a problem to discipline an officer when their evaluation is not a correct reflection of their actual performance. The city currently does not use evaluations to determine if officers pay increases should be based on his or her performance rating. Also, the police department does not use the performance rating of an officer in the promotion process.

The purpose of this research is to examine the following issues:

1. What is the best and most accurate way to measure the productivity of a police officer?
2. Is training needed for the supervisor?
3. If training is needed for the supervisor what kind of training is needed?
4. Should officers pay increases be based on his or her performance?
5. Should officer's performance rating be used in the promotional process?

To examine this issue a number of methods will be used. A survey of police departments that are approximately the same size as the Saginaw Police Department will be conducted. Interviews with supervisors from the Saginaw Police Department, along with supervisors

from other police departments will be conducted. In addition, information from books, journals, magazines, and other publications will be utilized.

This research will be used to review the current performance evaluations of the Saginaw Police Department and suggest or implement updates and revisions to the current performance evaluation process that is being used. It is hypothesized that the current system needs to be updated and should be used in pay determination and promotional processes.

The Saginaw Police Department will benefit from this research by having an updated procedure that will enhance and improve the current process. Thereby better measuring the performance and productivity of the Saginaw Police officers. Saginaw supervisors will be better trained in accurately recording the true performance of individual officers. Hopefully the research will reveal if performance evaluations should be used to determine merit pay raises for officers. In addition, it will determine whether a performance evaluation should be considered in the promotion process. If the research indicates that performance evaluations should be used in the promotional process and to determine salary increases, then the ultimate goal will be to implement such a program.

Review of literature:

Performance evaluations are relatively new in history although the reason why they are done is as old as the Sumerians (Lefton, Buzzotta, Sherberg, & Karraker, 1977). Performance appraisal experts have long argued that a tool intended to serve a development purpose cannot simultaneously serve a pay-determination purpose. Especially when the appraisal for each purpose happens at a different time of the year, and of course, in separate sessions (Patten, 1982).

Performance appraisals or evaluation are the process of identifying, measuring and developing human performance in organizations. An effective appraisal system must not only accurately measure current performance levels, but also should contain mechanisms for reinforcing strengths, identifying deficiencies and feeding such information back to ratees in order that they may improve future performance. (Baird, Beatty, & Schneier, 1982).

Today, companies and agencies use appraisals primarily for assessing the on-the-job behavior (or alleged "traits") governing how an individual perform work tasks. The appraisal is a lever that is used to improve performance, coach employees on how to do better, and take action regarding people who have reached plateaus or declined in performance. The appraisal, when used in an optimal way, provides a database for fostering desirable outcomes, which one hopes are of a positive nature. The performance appraisal can be used at any time, especially when it may prove useful to encourage employees or to give them recognition for a job well done. The appraisal thus becomes a supplement to formal on-the-job training and is used to articulate and highlight what the manager perceives in the behavior of subordinates (Patten, 1982).

There is another facet of the idea of having separate systems. It is conventional wisdom among many performance appraisal experts that agencies should establish and maintain two entirely different performance appraisal systems: one geared to making pay decisions and one designed to yield information about employee development. The pay decision system has its roots in the hoary idea of merit rating for merit increases (Patten, 1982).

As a framework for review we consider three levels of activity in the organization: (1) the lower level that is the input level, at which most initial hiring occurs, especially that of

hourly and non-exempt nature; (2) the middle level of the organization; (3) the higher level of professional and technical activity (Finkle, & Jones, 1970).

The principal step in developing an assessment program is the selection of the procedures and techniques to be used, the development of job descriptions and the training of supervisors. This refers to any activity that can be systematically noted and interpreted within the general framework and rationale of the program in a way that will contribute significantly enough to justify its inclusion (Finkle, & Jones 1970). There is a need for personnel evaluators to be sensitive to the possible role of errors in their judgment of workers. Personnel evaluators need to stick to the behavioral evidence as much as possible and to control the natural temptation to go beyond the information given in their search and meaning (Landry, Zedeck, & Cleveland, 1982).

Adequate descriptions serve two vital purposes. First, they provide definition, parameters, and a feel for the role positions play within the general organization. Second, they serve as benchmarks for measuring performance (Wendover, 1991). Training supervisors in the process of conducting performance evaluations is essential for a system to effectively operate. Research has demonstrated that training can improve the accuracy and reliability of rating and reduce errors, such as the leniency error and halo effect. It is also important to train supervisors on the rationale for the system and on the specific procedures for carrying out the actual evaluation interview. Training should stress that the supervisors should not be concerned with ranking employees, but rather with assessing individuals based on their job related performance. It should be emphasized that supervisor's rating are to be based on actual job performance and not on an overall impression of the person. (Buenik, 1993). Experienced managers who are deficient as appraisers may need coaching by their

organizational superiors or help offered through formal training programs focusing upon, methods for setting and measuring objectives, and means for developing employees through on the job work assignments (Patten, 1982).

Decision-making and problem solving are important components of many jobs. If the terms are interpreted broadly, then there is indeed, a very large literature devoted to modeling problem-solving and decision-making behavior (Campbell, 1970). Evaluations are a critical factor for any organization seeking to improve productivity and to provide objective and meaningful feedback to employees. Appraisals provide supervisors with the tools to evaluate and motivate the effectiveness of their employees. Through the proper use of these evaluations, supervisors can identify employee needs (such as training, personnel assignment), establish goals and objectives and maintain accountability to the public. (Cruz, 1994).

It is common to go about our day-to-day activities privately appraising the behavior of others and ourselves. The motivation behind these appraisals seems to be part of our fundamental need to understand, predict, and control our individual worlds. Day to day appraisals of ourselves and others may also be a source of esteem through social comparison. They may also provide data that can be used later to obtain extrinsic rewards (Weick, 1979).

A good performance rating includes more than just a supervisor's opinion. It should be based on facts, too. In the consideration of quality, what is his or her absence and lateness record? Can the supervisors cite actual incidents where he or she may have had to discipline him or her, or speak to him or her about the quality of their work? Answering these questions makes a rating less opinionated and consequently more valid and

worthwhile. (Bittle, 1980). The main objective of the performance evaluation is to remain objective in the standards of the appraisal. The more objective the performance standards are, the less likely it is that factors other than task performance will influence judgments about performance. (Naylor, Pritchard, & Ilgen, 1980).

Another method of reducing rater error is for the supervisors to keep an up-to-date journal on each of their employees. This documentation is viewed as mandatory to an effective appraisal process. Journal information can be used both to improve objectivity and to protect the supervisor against claims of bias. It is recommended that the supervisor set aside a specific time each week to update the journal. Supervisors should be required to keep employee journals (Alton, 1998).

Methodology:

The purpose of this research is to examine the following issues.

1. What is the best and most accurate way to measure the productivity of a police officer?
2. Is training needed for supervisors?
3. If training is needed for the supervisor what kind of training is needed?
4. Should officer pay increases be based on his or her performance?
5. Should officer's performance rating be used in the promotional process?

The author believes that the overall results of the research will show that an overwhelming majority of police departments use some form or fashion of a performance evaluation to base salary and promotional decisions on. These evaluations might be used solely as a basis for the decisions made, or might be used in conjunction with other testing. The important point is

that the performance evaluations are indeed used for decisions that will affect an individual officer's career.

To examine this issue a survey of fifty local law enforcement agencies was conducted. The data collection instrument was a direct-mailed questionnaire (see Appendix A).

Respondents included twenty-six municipal police departments, two county police agencies, two university police agencies and one rapid transit police department; twenty-nine agencies did not respond. These agencies ranked in size from one officer to several hundred officers.

In addition to answering the survey questions, those surveyed were also asked to send a copy of the latest performance evaluations used by their departments. A total of thirty-one agencies responded (N=31), a 62% response rate. Also personal and phone interviews with Saginaw Police supervisors and supervisors from neighboring agencies were conducted and the various responses recorded and tabulated.

Findings:

The current City of Saginaw employee evaluation is a two-page document that is not policing-specific and is used by all departments within the city. The employee is scored subjectively under rating of satisfactory and unsatisfactory. Moreover, an overall rating is included based upon the following evaluative criteria: 1) definitely unsatisfactory; 2) standard but making progress; 3) average; and, 4) above average. The remainder of the document allows for written comments. Simply stated, the evaluation in its entirety is subjective. Immediate supervisors typically complete performance evaluations. The evaluation is next discussed with the employee, then forwarded to the employee's division commander for final approval.

The results of the survey showed that twenty-four of the agencies responding agreed that officer's pay increases should be based on performance with seven agencies believing that an officer's pay increase should not be based on performance. The survey also showed that all of the agencies surveyed agreed that an officer's performance rating should be used in the promotional process. All the agencies surveyed had different ideas on what kind of training is needed for supervisors.

The results of interviews with supervisors within the Saginaw Police Department suggested that 1) training in the evaluation process would be helpful; 2) a more objective criteria should be implemented; and, 3) that this criteria should be specific to police officers.

Discussion/conclusions:

Law enforcement is a dynamic constantly changing profession, considerably different from most other fields. Measuring the work output or performance of a police officer can be a difficult task at the very least. The City of Saginaw uses the same performance evaluation citywide. In the author's opinion, the city's current method is flawed. It is used to measure the performance of police officers as well as public work employees, water and sewer personnel and the administrative staff. From an internal perspective are we measuring what we say we are measuring? Compounding the issue is the subjectivity of performance evaluations themselves. Moreover, training is generally minimal in this area. The City of Saginaw does not currently use performance evaluations as a basis for pay increases or promotions. It would seem that a shift in this direction would necessitate change.

The findings indicated that accurate records need to be maintained and that some sort of an evaluation process should be completed. Further, that training is needed for supervisors.

Research, however, did not provide information as to what type of training. Moreover, responses indicated that officers pay increases and promotions should be based on their rating in the performance evaluation process.

In a more general sense, the results of this research indicate that a fair, open and honest performance evaluation should be conducted on each employee. The completed evaluation should be maintained and considered for pay increases and in the promotional process. As previously noted, research included literary review of books, papers, journals, and periodicals and archival data was used to examine past evaluations. Literary review supports the author's hypothesis. It is apparent that the current evaluation system used by the City of Saginaw is in fact, flawed and that revision and improvement is needed. Not only is the process outdated, it does not allow for an accurate measure of an officers performance based on tasks specific to policing.

In conclusion, research indicated that good, complete, and accurate records should be kept on each employee, so the supervisor does not have to rely on memory. Supervisor's should be fair, open minded, and objective when they are evaluating subordinates. The supervisors should report what their records indicate, they should be objective and give an officer the evaluation that they deserve. This will then help the officer improve in the areas that are needed. Giving a false evaluation does not help the officer, and in fact it hurts the officer. The research indicates that an improved performance evaluation process in turn would benefit the City of Saginaw as well as provide a design model for other departments within the city. The research findings will be presented to the Chief of Police for his review and consideration for implementing the needed changes.

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APPENDIX A

404 S. Saginaw Blvd.
Saginaw Texas
76179

Saginaw Police Department

February 15, 2002

Any street
Anywhere, Texas?

Dear Chief

My name is Mickey Wortham I am a Captain for the Saginaw Police Department. I am currently attending the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute. Part of the requirements for graduating from the institute is a research paper. I am doing my research paper on performance evaluations. If you could answer the questions I have listed below and send me a copy of your current evaluation form it would help greatly with my research.

1. Should officer pay increases be based on his or her performance? Yes___ No___
2. Should an officer performance rating be used in the promotional process? Yes___ No___
3. What kind of training is needed for supervisors to better-evaluate subordinates.

Sincerely,

Mickey Wortham
Captain, Saginaw Police