

Performance Management Paper

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Performance management systems generally include two components: (1) a performance review or appraisal component; and (2) a development component (Pulakos, 2004, p. 1). These two components, at their core, help assess and define good employee performance and help develop employee potential (Goler, Gale, & Grant, 2017). When done correctly, an effective performance management system can result several benefits including enhanced productivity for both the employee and the organization, alignment of employee behavior to the organization's mission, values and goals, and creation of an organizational culture of open communication (Pulakos, 2004, p. 1).

However, for a variety of reasons, performance management systems are all too commonly not done correctly and, therefore, not effective (Pulakos, 2004, p. 1). Specifically, 56% of employees reported not receiving feedback on how to improve while 59% of employees reported the time commitment required for the process was not worthwhile (Wilkie, 2015, p. 11). Further 95% of managers were not satisfied with the system (p. 11). Most telling, 90% of human resource professionals did not believe the systems resulted in accurate employee reviews (Meinert, 2015, p. 42). A striking description of the dissatisfaction with such systems was given by a manager at Adobe who described the review process as a "soul crushing experience" (p. 37).

Due to these systemic problems, many see performance management systems and their related review processes as the "Achilles' heel of human resources" (Pulakos, 2004, p. 1). These issues have led a growing number of companies to eliminate traditional performance reviews (Wright, 2016, p. 16). However, completely eliminating the reviews correspondingly eliminates the documentation and metrics relied upon for decision making and development thus opening an organization to greater risk of employment litigation (Zagarino, 2016, p. 8).

To avoid creating a black box for decision making, rather than eliminating reviews altogether, several companies such as Adobe and Facebook are changing how those reviews are done (Goler, Gale, & Grant, 2017, p. 18). One of the changes by such organizations is the elimination of rating, grading, or ranking of employees which too often creates defensiveness (p. 18). Instead, organizations are restructuring reviews to more qualitative measures focused on open feedback and development (18).

Like Adobe and Facebook, Marquette University is changing its performance review process to move away from traditional performance reviews with ratings (Marquette University, 2021). As part of this shift, Marquette is piloting a new review form, attached as Appendix A, to be used as part of the revamped performance review process (Marquette University, 2021). As set forth in the instructions and other documentation accompanying the form, the intended purpose of the form is to focus on employee development and support (Marquette University, 2021). As part of this announced focus, one of the most notable changes on the new review form is the absence of performance ratings or scores. As set forth in the Frequently Asked Questions documentation for the new form, ratings were deliberately left off the form because such ratings were not seen as advancing the development goals of the review process (Marquette University, 2021). Marquette's view is supported by research that inclusion of ratings for a development/support focused review is at best not helpful and at worst a hindrance and distraction to achieving the goals of the process (Pulakos, 2004, p. 14). Including rating or ranking can easily focus the employee's attention solely on the grade/rating given rather than on the development feedback offered (p. 14).

The new Marquette form itself consists of three primary sections: (1) a three-part table to be completed by both the employee and the supervisor; (2) overall narrative summary to be

completed by the supervisor; and (3) an optional employee comment section (Marquette University, 2021). The forms first section, the three-part table, consists of: (1) one column for listing up to six primary goals or position responsibilities; (2) one column for self-evaluation by the employee of their outcomes and accomplishments for each listed primary goal/position responsibility; and (3) one column for the supervisor's review of employee's strengths and development areas for each listed primary goal/position responsibility (Marquette University, 2021). The last portion of the table includes space for the employee and supervisor to describe how the employee has demonstrated the mission and values of Marquette University during the prior year (Marquette University, 2021).

The form completion process starts with the employee who fills in the first two columns of the table by listing their goals/position responsibilities and assessing their outcomes and accomplishments in each of the listed areas (Maquette University, 2021). After employee completion, the employee emails the form to their supervisor (Maquette University, 2021). The supervisor then completes their portion of the table as well as part 2 of the form, the overall narrative summary (Maquette University, 2021). The employee and supervisor then meet to discuss the review (Maquette University, 2021).

As part of this review process, I have five recommendations for using the new form. My first recommendation is for human resources (HR) provide additional guidance and instruction on the listing of goals/position responsibilities so that they are based on and align with the employee's position description and organizational goals. Part of implementing a successful performance management system is ensuring the review criteria, in this case the listed goals/position responsibilities, align with an organization's other HR systems (Pulakos, 2004, p. 22). In other words, the goals/position responsibilities being evaluated as part of the review

process should be the same as those used for recruiting, position descriptions, and training (p. 22).

My second recommendation would be to include as part of the supervisor-employee review discussion a forward-looking component by starting the conversations for goal setting and development planning for the upcoming year. As explained in the Frequently Asked Questions, an additional new goal setting form will be rolled out after the completed review forms are submitted (Marquette University, 2021). While a retrospective of the past year is a distinct, critical component of a performance management system, for maximum effectiveness as a development and support tool, the review also should include a forward-looking component (Pulakos, 2004, pp. 14-15). Inclusion of development planning and goal setting for the upcoming year will assist in ensuring role clarity and an understanding of the expectations for the new year (p. 1). An additional benefit of this recommendation is that the employees will likely have a more favorable perception of the review and their supervisor due to the inclusion of development as a component of the review (Boswell & Boudreau, 2000, pp. 287-288). Further, this more favorable view of the process and the supervisor has been shown to persist regardless of the actual review outcome or whether the employee viewed the process and review as fair (p. 294).

The importance of the employee's perceptions of the review process referenced above cannot be understated. While the organization may intend for review process to be for development and support, depending on a variety of factors, including how the process is implemented, employees may or may not see the process as intended (Farndale & Kelliher, 2013, p. 881). An employee's perception of the purpose is more important in determining the employee's attitude and behaviors in connection with not only the review process but also with

their position in the organization (Youngcourt, Leiva, & Jones, 2007, pp. 317-318). The inclusion of both a retroactive review and future goal setting and planning will help ensure the participant's perception of the purpose of the review process both matches reality and implements the organization's intended purpose (Youngcourt, Leiva, & Jones, 2007, p. 337).

My third recommendation is that, as part of completing the portion of the table requesting how the employee demonstrated of the mission and values of Marquette University, HR and the supervisor should help translate the overall mission and values of Marquette University into tangible goals and expectations for the employee. The university's mission and values, like most organization's mission and value, are broad general concepts rather than specific tangible actions (Marquette University, 2014). These broad general concepts need to be translated and refined into specific expectations and goals for each level of the organization (Pulakos, 2004, p. 5). Without such translation, it is often difficult to see a direct connection between how an employee's actions and behaviors contribute to and affect the overall organization's goals and values (pp. 5-6).

My fourth recommendation is to use technology to assist with more frequent check-ins and feedback between the supervisor and the employee (Wilkie, 2016, p. 7). The instructions for completion of the new review form explain to supervisors that they should have been providing feedback throughout the year (Maquette University, 2021). However, providing such guidance to supervisors at the end of the year is not that helpful in promoting continuous employee-supervisor conversations. Engaging in continuous conversations and feedback throughout the year is one of the most crucial elements for a successful performance review process (Pulakos, 2004, p. 7). To assist supervisors and employees with meeting this element, HR should implement technologies that promote real-time, continuous feedback (Wilkie, 2016, p. 7).

My fifth and final recommendation is for HR to offer training to supervisors on the performance review process and how to conduct such reviews. The role of the supervisor has continued to expand as the field of HR management has grown in breadth and complexity and training is needed to maintain supervisor competencies (Farndale & Kelliher, 2013, p. 881). How the supervisor carries out the review process will significantly affect the employee's perceptions of the review and the review process (p. 889). These perceptions of the review and review process in turn have a significant effect on the employee's commitment to the organization (p. 889). Specifically, while supervisors play a pivotal role in the review process, many managers are unskilled at how to provide constructive feedback and have an honest two-way conversation (Pulakos, 2004, p. 1). Training will assist in bridging this gap (Farndale & Kelliher, 2013, p. 891).

The goal of the above recommendations for use of the new form is to assist in the creation of an effective performance review system. One of the best indicators of the effectiveness of the review process and experience is the employee's reactions to the process (Cawley, Keeping, & Levy, 1998, pp. 615-616). Using the employee's reaction to the process as the basis for assessment, I believe the new form will assist in providing an effective, meaningful review experience for both the supervisor and the employee.

Specifically, as noted in the recommendations above, employees will view the new review form's clear focus on development and support more favorably (Boswell & Boudreau, 2000, pp. 287-288). The absence of ratings or ranking of the employee will allow the review conversation to remain focused on the employee's development and support (Pulakos, 2004, p. 14). The employee's participation in the process through the completion of the goals/position responsibilities and self-assessment portions of the review form expressly allow for employee

input as part of the review. Inclusion of employee input increases the employee's acceptance of the process and encourages communication between the employee and supervisor (p. 8). Additionally, having the self-assessment portion be a list of the employee's accomplishments and outcomes rather than a self-assessment of performance standards helps avoid the potential for defensiveness during the employee-supervisor discussion (p. 8). Another factor that will promote meaningful conversations between the supervisor and employee and promote employee development is the form's use of narrative assessments (p. 15). Lastly, the new review form is being pilot tested this year (Marquette University, 2021). This pilot test period will allow future adjustments to the form based on user experience and feedback, thus increasing the likelihood of its successful implementation (Pulakos, 2004, p. 26).

However, the use of the new review form by itself will not automatically lead to a meaningful, successful review experience. The form and tools used for the review are rarely the key to or the hinderance to an effective performance review process (Pulakos, 2004, p. 1). Rather one of the strongest factors in determining the success or failure of creating a meaningful review process is the existing relationship between the employee and supervisor (Pichler, 2012, p. 725). This relationship factor has a greater impact on the process than either the actual outcome of the review or the employee's participation in the process (p. 724). If the employee-supervisor have a good relationship and trust, the employee's reaction to and perception of the review process will be more favorable (p. 726).

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APPENDIX A

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Name Performance Year Start/End  
 Title Supervisor  
 Department/College

*Instructions: The annual performance review process is an opportunity for employees and their managers to reflect on the work and accomplishments of the past year, provide feedback, and discuss successes and areas for improvement. The information provided should reflect not only the content of the work (the “what”) but also how it was accomplished.*

**Employee: Complete Goals/Job Responsibilities and Self Evaluation Columns. Save to your computer and email to your supervisor.  
 Supervisor: Complete the Supervisor Review and Overall Summary Sections.**

Goals/Job Responsibilities List in priority or % of time order	SELF Evaluation Outcomes and accomplishments	Supervisor Review Include assessment of strengths and areas for development

**Please describe what you have done to demonstrate Marquette's mission and values this year?**

**Overall Summary - Supervisor**

*By typing my name or signing below, I acknowledge that I have discussed this review with my employee:*

Supervisor

Date

**Supervisor: Save to your computer and email to your employee for signature.**

**Employee comments (optional)**

*By typing my name or signing below, I acknowledge receipt of this review:*

Employee

Date

**Employee: Save to your computer and email to your supervisor.**

**\*Attention Supervisors – Please forward completed and signed forms to Human Resources at [humanresources@marquette.edu](mailto:humanresources@marquette.edu)\***