Conducting a Performance Appraisal

In recent years, the focus of performance appraisals has shifted away from evaluation and the strict appraisal of performance towards a more forward-looking approach. This centres upon improving performance and developing the appraisee by means of a well-prepared, honest and open discussion.

Performance appraisal usually revolves around a face-to-face discussion during which one employee's work is discussed, reviewed and appraised by another, using an agreed and understood framework.

Peers can appraise each other, and upward appraisal by subordinate to superior is increasingly becoming accepted as a development method. Even customers and other stakeholders can be involved, if a 360-degree appraisal scheme is used. Most usually, however, line managers conduct appraisals of their staff, and the present benchmark is based upon such an approach.

Ideally, appraisal should be a continuing and ongoing process drawn together by formal meetings at regular intervals that, usually, take place every six or twelve months.

The discussion at a formal appraisal interview should focus on:
- Behaviours and outcomes
- Issues and problems
- Constructive development to improve the appraisee's motivation, growth and performance.

It is usual to talk about previously agreed objectives, and how well these have been met, and to explore and agree appropriate objectives for the next period, together with any development needs arising. The interview should not include any discussion that involves personality or subjective criticisms.

The appraisal process requires thorough preparation on the part of both appraiser and appraisee. The appraiser needs to be aware of discriminatory legislation and to have the skill and tact to avoid offence, or a drift into personal attacks. The appraiser also needs to be sensitive to, and address, any doubts, fears or anxieties that the appraisee may have, before the full appraisal discussion is broached.

Appraisees should:
- Have a clear picture of what is expected of them
- Be able to discuss priorities
- Gain a platform to remove confusion when overload occurs
- Receive feedback on their performance
- Be heard and respected
- Be offered constructive guidance on attaining agreed goals
- Receive help in constructing personal development plans and targets
- Take ownership of their performance.
- Appraisers should use the appraisal discussion as an opportunity to:
• Learn at first hand about the way the job-holder works and performs
• Get a better understanding of the job-holder's potential and needs
• Motivate the job-holder
• Develop a consistent approach to guidance and encouragement
• Tackle problems more effectively
• Improve the communication process.

A Skills Benchmarking tool on this subject is available to members within the Institute's Online CPD scheme. This tool presents a series of questions that enables you to evaluate and obtain feedback on your ability in this area.

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