Study on methods for evaluating employees performance in the context of digitization

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Abstract. *This paper highlights the main elements of a doctoral research regarding the efficiency of workers evaluation process in the workplace. Based on the global competition, organizations are in continuous quality improvement of their processes to stay competitive. The focus is on motivating and constantly offering constructive feedback to the employees by evaluating them on the following criteria: job description requirements, operational objectives and behavioral objectives. The aim of this study is to confirm that in the context of digitization, both evaluation based on objectives and 360-degree evaluation have its advantages and disadvantages and to analyze the impact of it in organization's performance. Since this process is divided in two parts (mid-year review and final review), an interesting research question would be how useful is to offer feedback to employees at the middle of the evaluation period and its impact on the final review. The first part of the paper will focus on defining the evaluation process and its scope, pursue by an analysis of 360-degree evaluation, evaluation based on objectives, and the evaluation process in the digital era. It would be a challenge to discover the inclination of organizations for different types of evaluations as well as perception differences between employees and employers. Many researches consider that one of the used methods implemented in companies is the evaluation based on objectives. A larger documentation on this subject would delimit the types of evaluations to help companies to easily choose the type that fits its culture. For this purpose, we will perform an outline on the existing literature by analyzing authors' opinions on this subject and identifying advantages and disadvantages of the two types of evaluation specified above.*

Keywords: employee performance, performance evaluation methods, evaluation based on objectives, 360-degree evaluation, digitization.

Introduction

Based on today's market competitiveness, organizations are in continuous improvement of their human resources (HR) processes to achieve business excellence, one of the most critical being employee performance evaluation, which includes assessing current performance, identifying high and low performers, and providing feedback to employees (Stone et al., 2015).

An efficient employee evaluation process is recognized as crucial because it can promote the institutional development of the organization and the personal development of employees (Foerster-Pastor & Golowko, 2018; Grigoroudis & Zopounidis, 2012; Mathis & Jackson, 2007). As suggested by McGregor (1972), there are many reasons why companies choose an evaluation process: promotion, salary improvement or fire, feedback to the employees about their work efficiency and is a base for managers to explore their leading performance (Kampkötter, 2017; Prieto & Pérez-Santana, 2014; Goler et al., 2016). In Figure 1 we will illustrate different types of evaluation in the workplace.

Figure 1. Types of employee evaluation

Source: elaborated by the authors based on the information provided by Grigoroudis & Zopounidis (2012)

Many authors consider that one of the used methods implemented in companies is the first one specified above, the supervisory rating of subordinates. Though, a negative comment from the manager on employee's work may induct anxiety to him and make the manager feel uncomfortable (Messmer, 2004). Thus, in Silverstein's (2007) opinion, the most challenging part of this process is communicating poor performance.

There are a few standard criteria of evaluation: competencies, initiative, teamwork, soft skills, ethics, and team spirit (Gardner, 2008). As observed by Mathis & Jackson (2007), each of it can be measured in different ways: category rating methods, objective methods, comparative methods and narrative methods. Furthermore, based on research, the employee's evaluation should be directionally linked to organization's strategy, as explained in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Performance management's association with organization's strategy and results

Source: elaborated by the authors based on the information provided by Mathis & Jackson (2007)

In digital era, technologies considerably influenced the field of Human Resources (HR), and technology evolution will dramatically impact the field in various way, nowadays companies applying e-HR practices as: e-recruiting, e-selection, e-learning, e-performance management (Stone et al., 2015; Schwarzmüller et al., 2018; Gürbüz & Albayrak, 2014; Li et al., 2012).

Literature review

360-degree evaluation

As observed by Kleiman (2001), performance's evaluation – the way it's handled and its impact on employee's career path – has always sensed up a red flag against the worker: receiving feedback and being criticized only by one person, usually the manager, may induce a subjective point of view. In Figure 3 we will try to illustrate its overtone. A '360-degree feedback' evaluation system creates an inclusive and impartial review of employee performance, directly affecting perceived fairness equity, and 'organizational justice' (Karkoulia et al., 2016).

Figure 3. Overtone of 360-degree evaluation

Source: elaborated by the authors based on the research of Sellam, 2017

While most authors recognize the value or relevance of using multiple sources of assessment rather than including only the point of view of the immediate supervisor, several studies show that the negative reactions associated with 360 degree assessment are often the result of a poorly conducted process, by human resources managers who are poorly trained or lack the necessary skill during evaluation (Tosti & Addison, 2009; Carson, 2006; DeNisi & Kluger, 2000).

Furthermore, authors claim that performance feedback boosts job satisfaction and motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and the career path is influenced by receiving feedback on performance. Though, there are multiple reasons why organizations should adopt 360-degrees feedback (Hoffman, 1995) but Toegel & Conger (2003) suggest that instead using 360-degree evaluation for multiple purposes that could affect process efficacy in delivering fair and constructive feedback, is better to develop a tool only for performance evaluation feedback, designed around quantitative feedback in measuring performance outcomes.

Evaluation based on objectives

The evaluation based on objectives is part of the management by objectives and it was conceptualized in 1954. In Figure 4 we will illustrate the MBO Process by Kumar, (2011).

Figure 4. MBO Process

Source: elaborated by the authors based on the research of Kumar, (2011)

As reported by Cappelli & Conyon (2017), this technique is successfully used by companies as managers are reinforced to set objectives and performance requirements in the beginning of each appraisal cycle. Moreover, Rodgers & Hunter (1991) made a remark regarding MBO programs: if the implementation is accurate and the management agrees, this type of management had a general positive impact on productivity, especially when objective performance standards are mutually agreed by managers and subordinates (McConkie, 1979).

Thus, critics are not an exception on this process. In his book “Out of the Crisis”, Deming (2000) considers that organizations should leave out objectives and encourage more leadership. Shipton et al. (2006) argue that this evaluation method is concerned more with aligning employee and organizational objectives than with exposing employees to new and different perspectives.

Performance evaluation and employee’s career path

It seems that there is a relationship between manager’s feedback and the employee career’s path, Long et al. (2003) observed two issues regarding the performance evaluation process: a superficial performance review could lead the worker to frustration and perceived managers bias, anxiety and malpractice of the evaluation can affect their relationship with the manager (Bol, 2011; Angelovski et al. 2016).

Adaptability and accomplishment are not mandatory, but suitable knowledge management and decision-making (Abubakar et al., 2019). To optimize an organization’s knowledge economy, there are many practices that should be taken into consideration: human resource practices, technology, innovation, continuous improvement, culture (du Plessis, 2007).

Therefore, to obtain performance in an organization, some measurable objectives must be achieved in order to obtain employee’s engagement beyond the organization. It seems that financial benefits, vertical promotions and continuous learning are mandatory for performance of both parts (Salas et al., 2017). As noted by Mousavizadeh et al. (2015), effective, rational creation and knowledge in an organization is crucial to its success. Leading a team takes more than spreading tasks and deadlines.

Performance evaluation in digital era

Innovation and human resources management play an increasingly important role in digitalization implementation and development in companies, thus leading to sustainable competitiveness in a changing environment (A. Maier et al., 2014; D. Maier et al., 2013; de Jong & Den Hartog, 2007; Sanders et al., 2018).

In digital era, when business processes become more and more digitized, companies face multiple challenges in terms of data security and confidentiality. So, to address risks associated with cybersecurity, companies increasingly resort to management systems for information security, a framework for protecting companies against many types of information security attacks (Olaru et al., 2017; Kiehne & Olaru, 2017).

Digital transformation represents also a challenge for employees, with new styles of leadership and organizational framework and new requirements for learning and adopting new skills and competencies to actively contribute to the demanding innovation-driven business environment (Grab et al., 2019). The digital competencies of the employees and the many and various technologies used in the organizations will continue to develop and change, providing organizations opportunities for radical organizational change, including the way the digital employees performance could be evaluated (Colbert et al., 2016; Marquardt et al., 2018).

The use of new digital technologies in employees' performance evaluation could increase the decision-making process, richness of the communication, and give employees the opportunity to clarify the nature of performance feedback (Stone et al., 2015; Horváth & Szabó, 2019).

Methodology

As this paper is an outcome of an early PhD research, the chosen method was examining other similar researches in the literature of the evaluation based on objectives, 360-degree evaluation and performance evaluation in general. This will help us to have an overall view on: the efficiency of performance evaluation, the meaning of final obtained qualification, the importance of mid-year review, the impact of the evaluation on organization's goals and on worker's career path and perception differences between the evaluated and the evaluator. All things considered, the paper establishes the advantages and disadvantages of every type of evaluation chosen by an organization, as well as useful recommendations for organizations to choose the type it fits.

Results and discussions

This study adds a contribution to a better view of the employee's evaluation performance, by showing its risks in terms of advantages and disadvantages.

To observe the efficiency of performance evaluation in organizations, we will examine some opinions on two employee's evaluation process type, respectively 360-degree employees' evaluation and employees' evaluation based on objectives, in order to identify the main advantages and disadvantages for every of it.

Table 1. Advantages and disadvantages of 360-degree employees' evaluation

No.	Source of research	Authors' opinion on advantages	Authors' opinion on disadvantages
1.	Chicu & Nedelcu, 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time investment leads to a valuable evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time consuming Superficiality Too many entities implied

2.	Mabey & Martin, 2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process development • The quality of management development • Policy infrastructure around career management • Feedback improve leadership capability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subjectivity • Evaluation based on human relationships • Feedback affect organization performance
3.	Pfau & Kay, 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving effective appraisals • Training offered for participants in a 360-degree program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of professionalism • Lack of people management knowledge • Uncertainty • Conflict among team member
4.	Ghorpade, 2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privacy is respected • Effectiveness assurance • Importance of validity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncontrolled confidentiality • Non-guarantee validity • Non-guarantee effectiveness
5.	Novac, 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement consequences if needed • Maintain the ideas of improvement after final review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interrupted continuous learning • Lack of motivation after the final review
6.	Macaleer & Shannon, 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of who's in charge of every responsibility • Understanding of who is to stand the associated costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety between employees • Lack of communication
7.	Asumeng, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-awareness • Public consciousness perspective • Being responsive • Give attention to the expectations and standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavior changes (due to negative feedback)
8.	Hogan & Hogan, 2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpersonal competence • Initiating, building and maintaining relationships with different people • Managerial skills • Predictor of performance effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of manager • Lack of trust in anonymity
9.	Tyson & Ward, 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates focused, sustained behavior change and/or skill development • Increased organization effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible decrease of organization effectiveness
10.	Fox & Klein, 1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted anonymously • Unawareness of how each team member or coworker has rated • Conducted fairly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of confidentiality • Retribution for the poor ratings
11.	Aguinis, et al., 2011		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depends upon the culture of the organization or country
12.	Shipper et al., 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some cultures view feedback as an opportunity to improve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some cultures view feedback as criticism

Source: Authors' own research.

Beside all the advantages of this type of evaluation, self-awareness is considered a challenging activity, as well as the fact that the evaluator is responsible of the future of the

evaluated. Though, as we can observe in Table no.1, there is a lack of digitalization of the process. In the existent literature, latest focus is on electronic performance management systems, moreover of how automated and digitalized performance measurement may impact the efficiency of evaluation (Stone et al., 2015). Researchers considers that digitally transforming organizations need to adopt another strategy regarding their performance management systems, by changing their domain of interest on quantitatively results instead of traditional manner: never-ending working hours, overtime, pre-defined behavior. This way, the organization will show empathy on innovative work performance (Curzi, Fabbri, Scapolan, & Boscolo, 2019).

Table 2. Advantages and disadvantages of employees' evaluation based on objectives

No.	Source of research	Authors' opinion on advantages	Authors' opinion on disadvantages
1.	Grigoroudis & Zopounidis, 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quantitative measure of appraisal aiming Reliability between job output and the defined standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of clarity in employee's objectives
2.	Locke & Latham, 1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenging activity Not impossible activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asking too much from the employee Settle objectives out of interest area Piece of puzzle in the game effect It may be too easy
3.	Messmer, 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees stretch their abilities Make sure goals are realistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of individuality Lack of appreciation Risk of unrealistic goals
4.	Locke & Latham, 1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share feedback on the progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of constant feedback
5.	Locke & Latham, 1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of smaller and less complex goals instead of one and too complex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overgrown complexity of objectives
6.	Durst et al. 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Act on identified management shortfalls Improve employee retention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of management shortfalls improvement
7.	Luecke, 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stimulating employees by acceding to their creativity Source of innovation in the company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The evaluation process not keeping up with innovation Lack of digital tools
8.	Islami et al. 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees' development, motivation and evaluation Self-awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of work performance Less communication The employee receives less counseling Worker's potential not sufficiently exploited
9.	Milost, 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals striving to achieve their own goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only organization's objectives are taking into consideration Lack of equilibrium between employee and employer
10.	Clausen et al. 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People's preference for three or four performance evaluations per year Face to face meetings with managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of continuous feedback Lack of clarity in objectives Achievement hard to be obtained
11	Curzi, et. al., 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees perceive performance appraisal as a practice intended to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus the individuals' attention on the achievement of pre-set short-term

		promote innovative work behavior	performance goals, • Employees tends to direct efforts toward the fine-tuning of work methods they have already tried in the past rather than exploring radically new ways of doing work.
12	Locke & Latham, 2002	• Performance (productivity, cost improvement etc.) • Satisfaction with performance and rewards • Willingness to commit to new challenges • Moderators: goal commitment, goal importance, self-efficacy, feedback, task complexity • Conscious motivation affects performance and job satisfaction	• Goal conflict> the organization's goal and the goal of the individual manager are sometimes in conflict • Learning and Performance Goals: learning goals can be superior to performance goals on tasks that are complex for people • Goals and Risk: higher risk strategies sometimes lead to worse performance outcomes than lower risk ones
13	McConkie, 1979	• A high degree of subordinate involvement during goal setting • Enough goal flexibility to enable changes as goals and circumstances warrant • The evaluation process becomes a part of the next planning phase, for in it goals and objectives are reviewed and reset	• There are many factors - psychological forces, past work experiences, present working climate, and scores of others - which so forcefully impact upon the individuals in the organization that their behaviors may be difficult to mold into the MBO evaluation form

Source: Authors' own research.

In Table no.2 we can observe the advantages and the disadvantages of the evaluation based on objectives as a research based on the existing literature. The evaluation based on objectives is considered more traditional than the 360-degree evaluation, because of the subjective opinion of the manager, who mostly establish the objectives of the employee. The bi-annual meeting is formal and lately, researchers observed that formality doesn't serve to a bigger understandability or transparency (Curzi et al., 2019). Moreover, formality fails to communicate what is decisive for the organization as they are too busy with the bureaucratic steps, tools and procedures of small meaning to employees and managers (Pulakos et al., 2015; Cappelli & Tavis, 2016).

Table 3. Differences between the two types of employees' evaluation

Classification	Research criteria	360-degree evaluation	Evaluation based on objectives
Advantages	Effectiveness assurance	x	
	Anonymity	x	
	Self-awareness	x	x
	Share constant feedback		x
	Objectives are realistic		x
	Challenging activity	x	
	Source of innovation in the company	x	
	Accedes to employee's creativity		x
	Creates focused, sustained behavior change and/or skill development	x	
	Constant face-to-face meetings with manager		x

	Promote innovative work behavior		x
	In relation with performance, satisfaction with performance and rewards, willingness to commit to new challenges and goals, self-efficacy feedback		x
	Conscious motivation affects performance and job satisfaction		x
	A high degree of subordinate involvement during goal setting		x
	Enough goal flexibility to enable changes as goals and circumstances warrant		x
	The evaluation process becomes a part of the next planning phase, for in it goals and objectives are reviewed and reset		x
	Some cultures view feedback as an opportunity to improve	x	
Disadvantages	Subjectivity		x
	Lack of people management knowledge	x	
	Lack of trust in confidentiality	x	
	Conflict among team members	x	
	Overgrown complexity of objectives		x
	Lack of technology usage		x
	Superficiality	x	
	Lack of clarity in objectives		x
	Lack of constant feedback		x
	Lack of individuality in objectives		x
	Focus the individuals' attention on the achievement of pre-set short-term performance goals,		x
	Employees focus on routine work		x
	Goal conflict between organization, managers and individual		x
	Focus on performance goals instead of learning goals		x
	Focus on goals with lower risk		x
	Many individual behavioral factors difficult to mold into the MBO evaluation form		x
	Depends upon the culture of the organization or country	x	x
	Some cultures view feedback as criticism	x	x

Source: Authors' own research.

In Table no.3 we identified some basic criteria of comparison, to distinguish below in Figure no.5 which of the types of evaluation has many disadvantages. Results showed that the evaluation based on objectives involves many difficulties than the 360-degree, such as: subjectivity, overgrown complexity of objectives, lack of technology usage, lack of clarity in objectives, lack of constant feedback and not least lack of individuality in objectives. Thus, this doesn't mean that one is worse than the other, but that every organization should choose its goals and perspectives first and implement the type that it fits. For instance, an organization which wants to include innovation in their culture should focus more on a 360-degree evaluation where the spotlight is the creativity of employees. Based on research, performance appraisal based on

new competences developed by the worker has a potent effect than the result-oriented (Curzi et al., 2019).

Figure 5. Comparison between employees' evaluation types

Source: elaborated by the authors based on their research

Conclusion

The authors of this paper conclude that each type of performance evaluation is useful if it is correctly implemented and can be successfully used to empower the organization's values. Based on other authors' researches, currently performing at work is more important than finishing daily tasks.

Regarding our analysis, we tried to make a parallel between different types of evaluation performance as well as identified some strategic risks that may overcome. Even though the evaluation process is individual, and it follows employee's own objectives related to their job description, there is a relevant link between individual's objectives and organization's performance.

There are still many parts of the evaluation process that must be improved, starting with confidentiality, lack of interest, lack of motivation and not last not understanding very well what the employer's looking for in your job. The relationship between the manager and the employee matters in the final review, thus employee's commitment is decisive for the company.

Digitalization and continuous improvement are crucial needs of implementation by organizations to stay competitive. Even though automatization and robotization are the new trends for simplifying processes, gaining time, improving efficiency and performance, encouraging innovation, making communication between departments easier and not last improving working conditions, the focus is still on people and customers. Investing in employees not only by offering them financial benefits but helping them to grow in a company is essential to achieve business excellence.

Living digitalized times and because this subject is still a challenge for human resource departments, it is certain that in the following years we will take part of a total change of evaluations, most probably innovation-based.

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