

Should Academic Institutions In Nigeria Use The 360-Degree Feedback System For Employee Appraisal?

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Abstract

A performance appraisal system is significant to original work performance as it determines the success or failure of the institution's human asset. The aim of this article is to introduce the feedback appraisal procedure as a way to improve the competencies, skills, and behaviors of a single employee, staff, manager, or group of individuals. The advantages of the feedback performance appraisal system for public institutions like universities in Nigeria are given. The focus of the article is to introduce the use of a multi-metric staff appraisal in universities especially, and identify factors for realizing effective performance appraisal and management. In this paper it is argued that a performance appraisal system like the feedback is the only noticeable metric way by which an institution like a university can sensitively gauge, measure, and know the level of performance of its diverse staff. This paper seeks to bring to employees an awareness of a very unique type of performance management system that is based on psychological factors like personal development, self-motivation, constructive criticism, and wholistic feedback. This paper explains the need for human resource units and administrations to open up to an appraisal process that culturally aligns well with the diverse work environment of universities and other public institutions if they are to achieve the intended human resource benefits given in this paper.

Keywords: Performance, Appraisal, Staff, Lecturers, Universities, Psychological, 360, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Okafor (2005) asserts that unlike many nations such as the USA, UK, and New Zealand, student feedback form an essential part of the management of human assets or resources in higher education institutions. Okafor reports that the Nigerian lecturers viewed student's feedback as subjectively scary given the sometimes tense relationship between students and their instructors (Nakpodia, 2003; Yamoah, (2011). It is a historical alliance marked with interchangeable heated, distant, suspicious, or dishonest relationships.

In general, a good number of Nigerian public institutions like universities continue to practice the 1960's staff appraisal system which usually utilize a from the top down approach. Under ordinary circumstances, a professional staff or lecturer receives an annual performance appraisal from his or her boss. A performance appraisal is generally the process of measuring, developing, and enhancing the work performance of staff (Akinyele, 2010).

Within the university work environment, a staff member receives a written performance appraisal annually which provides a one-way opinion on performance and could be used for personnel and administrative purposes like promotion, demotion, pay raise, and even dismissal. A staff member is usually given an official form containing a self-assessment page for the staff or lecturer to complete, which is in turn sent to the respective division or departmental heads who state their view about the staff. The completed form then goes to the selection and promotions committee where it is reappraised and followed with recommended action.

The performance appraisal approach (Nurse, 2005; Segal, 2000) is mechanical in formant as it

contains specified behaviors and standards in a handbook that the staff member must follow in terms of actionable tasks. Some of the tasks include teaching, professional publications, and committee work. Performance appraisals have behavioral benefits like enhanced motivation in regards to acting as an incentive to become more efficient and effective in one's work as well as showing weaknesses that could be corrected through training.

Within the Nigerian context, performance appraisal, especially for lecturers, could prove counterproductive as important resources to carry out adequate teaching, research, or publication, as well as community service, remain operationally nil. Specifically, these challenges include financial constraints and inadequate technology. Yet one's boss and the institution's authority use these same inconveniences as criteria for performance appraisal. The objectivity of the performance appraisal has been called into question (Nurse, 2005) as a result of the authoritarian and punitive pattern in its approach, as well other elements like favoritism-minded, and control driven process. The performance appraisal procedure is also known to be lacking longitudinal details in terms of behavioral history as it is marked with first impression mistakes and it is criticism-focused and narrow in terms of collaborative assessment. In this paper academic institutions or public organizations are challenged to move away from the longstanding top down approach style of performance appraisal.

Beginning in the 1980's, (Chaudron, 2010) the idea of doing away with an authoritarian style of employee evaluation was replaced with strategy that honors an employee's autonomy or empowerment in their course of receiving management feedback on his or her work.

A process now known as performance management involves a procedure in which the boss, supervisor, or manager and employee establish initial goals and objectives, and make plans to achieve them. It is a management style that receives feedback from more than one source (Smither & Walker, 2004) and from those who knew the worker or instructor best, which could include students, subordinates, bosses, supervisors, peers, and themselves. The collective feedback from all the circle that knew the worker became termed as "feedback" and the information was usually collected through numerical surveys and open-ended questionnaires. Performance feedback is a strategic way of measuring, evaluating, and influencing employee activities in the past, presently, and in the future (Mello, 2011). Specifically, the 360-feedback system is a process that involves an employee, a lecturer, or the manager receiving feedback about his or her competencies, activities, and performances. Mello (2010, p.439) stated that "organizations need broader measures of employee performance to ensure performance deficiencies are addressed in a timely manner...employees behaviors are being channeled in the appropriate direction toward performance of objectives that are consisted with the work unit...and employees are provided with appropriate and specific feedback".

2. 360 DEGREE ADVANTAGES

The use of the feedback system serves important purposes and has advantages in a public setting like a university as it helps identify an employee's weakness and strengths and helps facilitate appropriate development. It helps the employee or staff member understand how he or she is viewed by others; it enhances and improves communication following the identification of certain problems; and it helps determine appropriate rewards and compensations, in the form of promotions, wages, merit pay bonuses, and retention. It is particularly helpful for management as it helps identify specific training needed to correct an employee's deficiencies and it is certainly helpful in raising an employee's motivation.

Contemporary performance evaluation methods like the 360-degree feedback system move away from the traditional way in which an employee is being assessed by one person (e.g., one's Head of Department or immediate Supervisor). It is simple to understand how the 360-degree feedback could be used as one's personal and developmental roadmap to plan one's career path. The fact that the 360-degree feedback system is all-encompassing, detailed, and focused, it allows the person being evaluated to chat an all-round corrective measure for him or herself. From the point of psychology this type of performance feedback could be highly intuitive, subjective, and open to personal bias or halo effect, whereby a rater lets one negative or positive characteristic of the person influence his total rating of the employee. However, with

proper construction of the 360-degree feedback system its benefits remain profound.

What is interesting about this feedback tool is that it is team oriented, involves a multi-rater (e.g., peers, students, secretaries, clerks, subordinates, managers, customers or clients, and oneself) approach, and involves feedback from anonymous persons. At the end of semester the Nigerian university instructors could find students' evaluating their work or teaching (alone in the classroom) freely and anonymously commenting on their overall observation of the professor. While some of the comments could be very touching or even hurtful it makes one better as the feedback is coming from those who really know the person at the center of the evaluation (Tyson & Ward, 2004). It could result from peer's or supervisor's direct report and one's beneficiaries such as one's immediate students. This multi-level approach provides a complete reliable, richer, and open picture of feedback.

3. 360 DERE LIMITATIONS

The 360-degree feedback does have some shortcomings as it could be time-consuming in terms of administration, and it could be costly as it requires addressing many characteristics of an employee. Some employees might view this system as a threatening evaluative tool as it could lead to personal attacks. The main problem comes when the 360-degree feedback system is not well designed and implemented, resulting in feelings of distrust and uncertainty between employees and among co-managers or heads of various departments. To limit some these noted worries an organization such a university could decide whose feedback to seek and management should understand that only raters whose ratings are beneficial and do not constitute personal bias or envy or have religious, punitive, or political motives would have a better, more positive outlook on the system. It is always good to include as many raters as possible as it broadens the scope of data and using anonymous raters could be a better source of valid, honest feedback (Chaudron, 2010).

4. OPERATING THE 360 DEGREE

In terms of operation and designing a 360-degree feedback it should be inclusive in scope, easy to understand, and not too difficult for raters. It should be the type of appraisal that could be completed online in 20 to 25 minutes; consist of 20 to 25 behavioral items covering a broad range of instructional or leadership competencies; accommodate an unrestricted number of rater categories and up to 35 raters; contain academic grading of effectiveness (A to D); permit a "grade point" interpretation of every item and item cluster; allow for a global summary of essential strengths and key limitations; and permit all-embracing, sketchy comments as they help provide added depth of understanding. As a powerful means (Rowson, 1998) for bosses and employees to get information on work performance the 360-degree feedback's multiple-perspective and approach could help enhance self-awareness by revealing what supervisors, peers, subordinates, and customers see as an individual's strengths and development challenges. The 360-degree system helps employers avoid biases and discrimination (complaints of unfair treatment) especially when the feedback system is shared by multiple raters (Atkins & Wood, 2002; Carlson, 1998), thereby helping shifting all responsibility from one individual as in the performance appraisal system.

The feedback system will need academic leadership's support in order for it to fully evidence excellent practices and results. It could gradually result in a more collegiate environment on campuses as well as sustained outcomes and well-defined changes in the university educational system in Nigeria. The longstanding, lamentable nature of Nigerian higher institutions in regard to student-instructors or administrators-lecturers relations could be reduced and help enhance the overall health of our universities. The feedback system could assist lecturers and other staff members to work beyond self-interest and focus more on matters of institutional interest.

5. Conclusion

For the purpose of the future understanding of this system, lecturers will learn to apply their knowledge,

skills, expertise, and experiences to help better their institutions. The system could slowly bring in a collective culture in academic leadership among lecturers and bring in meaningful, fundamental, and important progressive changes to higher education.

The 360-degree feedback system is certainly expensive to manage as it requires the skills of a consultant to develop and monitor the data but as a cutting-edge approach within the human resources management, universities should create a workable, collaborative, and cooperative spirit if the 360-degree feedback system is to be fully embraced in these periods of the 21st century educational system.

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