Self versus Superior Assessment of Social Science Research Employees

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Self-assessment of performance was compared to superior's assessment on a sample of 60 personnel research workers. It was hypothesized that norms of self-acceptance and relatively low defensiveness will characterize members of this sample as a result of their educational background in Psychology and related areas. Therefore the previously noted leniency effect in self-assessment will not be expressed. The subjects and their superiors (N = 10) rated the subjects performance on a thirty-item behaviorally based scale as well as on a global performance assessment item. No significant differences between superiors' and subordinates' ratings were found for any of the scale items. The results also suggest that subordinates' ratings were significantly more highly correlated with the importance they attributed to the performance items than superiors' ratings. There were also noted differences between superiors and subordinates in the relationships between the assessment of various performance areas and the global performance assessment. The results are discussed in terms of the need for exploring the characteristics of self-assessment in unique samples and the possible advantages of incorporating self-assessment into personnel evaluation systems.

KEY WORDS: performance evaluation; job assessment; superiors' versus subordinates' performance ratings; value of self-assessment.

INTRODUCTION

The issues of self-assessing personal characteristics and job behavior have attracted the attention of researchers both from theoretical and practical viewpoints (Levine, 1980; Thornton, 1980; Ash, 1980; Primoff, 1980; Meyer, 1980; Bandura, 1977; Heneman, 1980). Attempts were made to examine the psychological processes associated with the task of self-assessment as well as to test the psychometric properties that characterize it, in particular vis-à-vis assessments by others. The potential use of self-assessment in the organizational setting was discussed mainly with regard to the areas of personnel selection, testing, and performance appraisal. In the con-

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text of performance appraisal, self-assessment is regarded as an additional source of information to the traditional appraisal by superior. The superior and the subordinate rate the subordinate's performance independently on a standard scale and then meet to discuss their evaluations and to reach an agreement on setting goals for future performance. The incorporation of self-assessment into performance appraisal systems was advocated by McGregor (1957, 1959) as a part of his general participative approach to management. It was later demonstrated that self-assessment combined with goal-setting may reduce defensiveness in the performance appraisal interview and lead to improved performance on the job (Bassett & Meyer, 1968; Meyer et al., 1965).

The incorporation of self-assessment into the firm's performance appraisal system bares some meaningful implications for the structure of employee rights on the one hand, and for his responsibilities on the other. Allowing the employee to take part in the formal process of his own assessment constitutes a dramatic positive change in his or her rights. Performance assessment has been viewed by advocates of "scientific management" as a formal control mechanism, operated by management, to ensure high productivity and better personnel utilization for the benefit of the employer. Integrating an element of self-assessment into the system turns it into a joint effort in which the employee has the right to express views, defend his positions, and practically affect administrative consequences concerning promotions, compensations, career development, and personal reputation.

Incorporating self-assessment with the evaluation process presents the employee with additional responsibilities as well as rights. With introduction of self-assessment, the employee is expected to serve the organizational goal of improving productivity by collaborating with management and contributing his input to the assessment of his own performance. He is expected to rise above any self-serving considerations and provide honest information, which may not always further his image. Furthermore, in joining the assessment process, the employee takes upon himself the responsibility to act on the conclusions emerging from such assessment in terms of improving performance and setting new performance goals.

Beyond immediate implications for employee responsibilities and rights, the introduction of such a system may be expected to have long-range effects on the foundations of employee-employer relationships. The combination of self-ratings and superior assessment as described above opens a new channel of constructive communication between employer and employee which may reduce the inherent conflict between the two. Consequently, the employee-employer collaboration could lead to an increased sense of maturity on the part of the employee, who will become increasingly aware of both his responsibilities and his rights. Both his contribution to the firm and his job satisfaction may be enhanced as a result. Furthermore, in a recently published article Longenecker, Sims, and Gioia (1987) point to the politics of employee appraisal, suggesting that superiors are frequently inclined to deliberately inflate or deflate subordinates' ratings in order to avoid conflict with employees or as a means of concealed punishment. It is suggested that a collaborative system in which self-assessment is incorporated could enhance constructive communications and mutual understanding and consequently reduce the politics involved in the process, thereby better guaranteeing both organizational interests and employee rights.

It is important to note that using self-assessment is not conceived in this paper as a manipulative tool to assist management in maintaining control over the employee.