Short Communication

Overcoming Personal Biases: A key for Effective Performance Appraisal

Nawroz Bibi Zeenat Shah[1], Sobia Idrees[2] & Misbah Zafar[3]
1.Aga Khan Health Services Program (AKHSP) center, Gilgit Baltistan,
2.College of Nursing, Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Medical University (PIMS), Islamabad.
3.SaidaWaheed FMH College of Nursing, Lahore
Corresponding Author Email: sobia_idrees@ymail.com

Abstract

Performance appraisal is a very challenging task for a manger that needs expertise along with commitment to fulfill the process in a fair and transparent manner. There are some standards, which are very essential for motivation of the staff and organizational growth. Performance appraisal does not only mean evaluating the performance of a staff but it provides a platform to overcome the deficiencies and set plan for the staff with mutual understanding. The most neglected part of performance appraisal process is setting SMART goals for the staff by a manager with mutual understanding. Many factors hinder the process of appraisal that include; organizational culture, predetermined budgetary constraints, capability of manger/supervisor and lack of training opportunities by human resource department. These factors may lead to dissatisfaction among staff and in the long run develops a mindset with negative image for the entire process. Maslow's needs theory should be kept in mind to evaluate the performance of a staff as all human have common needs but with different desires to satisfy their hierarchy of needs.

Key Words

Performance appraisal, Maslow's theory, appraisal challenges, personal bias, Appraisal strategies/methods

Case Scenario

A hard-working and efficient nurse was working as a mid-level manager at a tertiary care hospital; had not received her performance appraisal report for the year instead of sending reminders to her upper level manager. It was important for monthly basis increment to be added in monthly paid hours. She had suffered a lot for not getting her timely performance appraisal along with other managerial staff. After a long time, finally nurse got her appraisal from manager however, there was no discussion or meeting had done between them. It had not only discouraged the nurse to work in the same efficient way as she did before but also left a bad impression of appraisal for her. Consequently, the term appraisal ended up with a very negative image among the staff of the entire organization.

Issue/Problem Statement

The above scenario provokes nurse manager to think upon several dimensions of the performance appraisal in the organization including; capabilities of manager, the set standards, methods, processes used in the organization. All the dimensions certainly have an effect on motivational level of the clinical nurses. The purpose of this paper is to discover the underlying factors about performance appraisal, which affect both managerial and individual level by incorporating theory of Maslow's Hierarchy of need.

Introduction

Performance appraisal means evaluating an employee's current and/or past performance relative to his or her performance standards (Desslar, 2011). According to the definition, setting performance standards is the most important component of appraisal process. Besides that, based on the standards the manager can easily provide feedback, which will eventually motivate the staff to overcome their deficiencies and build on their strengths.

Another scholar defined performance appraisal as, a periodic formal evaluation of how well personal have performed their duties during a specific time period (Tomey, 2009). Assigning duties in the form of job description is the task of a manager, which is fulfilled in coordination with human resource department. If the manager discusses the duties to be done with the employee then it will be easy to perform the duties after being aware about his/her employee's limitations and strengths.

The main purpose of performance appraisal in any organization is believed to bring improvement in organization functions, influence decision making for promotion and identify training and developmental needs of the employees (Vasset, 2012). Moreover, performance appraisal also provides basis to increase financial incentives, plan career for the employees and consequently develop performance of individuals in line with achieving organizational goals (Desslar, 2011). Thus, the appraisal system seems to be fruitful for both organization and the employees if the processes are carried out in a realistic manner.

Therefore, at times the linkage between appraisal rating and motivation among staff is thought to be durable to achieve organizational goals.

Performance appraisals are done in every organization using variety of methods and standards. The most commonly used traditional method of appraisal is; the evaluation of performances by using job descriptions against the set goals and objectives. Job descriptions do not include the specific goals rather few set of responsibilities to be fulfilled by the staff. Nurses' job descriptions are based on their technical skills and can only be assessed when the manager or supervisor is directly monitoring them. Another most important but most neglected way of appraisal is based on the set objectives. It is neglected because most of the time mutual agreement and understanding is missing as it is mentioned in the above-mentioned scenario. Setting SMART (simple, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely) goal is an art of the manager (Tomey,2009).

Factors Affecting Performance Appraisal

There are number of potential factors which affect the process of performance appraisal. Sometimes, the manager could not follow the organizational standards for performance evaluation due to some personal characteristics, educational background and capabilities to judge the performance. Similarly, some authors stated that, judgments are influenced by manager's personal characteristics (Sullivan, 2009). Another factor could be the forced distribution method, which was predetermined in the organization because of budgetary constraints. There is a potential danger to the morale and motivation of the staff because employees are placed to the preset percentage for creating a required curve for pay raise despite their untiring work throughout the year. As one researcher reported the findings of a survey conducted on employers as, the biggest complaints (44%) was damages morale (Desslar, 2011). Besides damaging morale, it was also reported that there were more chances of bias in the rating if the performance appraisal was linked with pay raises.

Furthermore, in the above mentioned scenario the manager was not capable to provide either negative or positive feedback to the employee. Research also highlighted the importance of timely performance appraisal for the employees. Likewise, it was reported that delayed performance appraisal is associated with lack of motivation (Nikpeyma, 2013). Reward and positive reinforcement play an important role in getting staff connected with the organization. Reward and recognition tool should be used more frequently to satisfy the staff (McEwen, 2011).

Another big challenge in the organization is lack of training and monitoring for performance appraisal for the managers by the human resource department. If the process of appraisal is realistic and fair then it can automatically boost up the morale of staff and consequently enhance motivation towards work. Despite all, the mind set of employees about their performance as an excellent and demand for high rating for monetary rewards has affected the process of appraisal in organizations. Every one desire to reach to the highest level of satisfaction if the most wanted needs met. It depends on the individual to prioritize his/her needs as per his/her perception and most of us perceive the basic needs to be met as monetary incentives. Thus striving for the higher rates for the sake of money becomes a mindset among the employees and challenge for the organization particularly where the resources are limited.

Analysis of the scenario by Application of Theory

According to the individuals' attitude and their desire for basic needs to be fulfilled, Maslow's Hierarchy of needs theory is best applicable to the problem. Maslow stated that people are motivated by a desire to satisfy a hierarchy of needs. The basic motivator to the employee will be the money to satisfy their basic needs. Nowadays people are facing economic challenges; therefore, they tend to remain on the bottom level of the hierarchy. In an affluent society, physiological needs are not the most common motivators (Tomey, 2009). In developing countries, the basic needs are not being met with the minimal salary; then a nurse manger cannot expect to satisfy her staff by giving 10% salary increase or by using forced scoring method. Similarly that salary increase may not serve as motivator for the staff/employees.

Another basic need of human includes safety and security; provision of job related safety and security has a major role in motivating the staff and improving their performance. If nurses are working in an organization where job security is uncertain, it also acts as a demotivator for the employees. Moreover, work environment provides physical and emotional safety to the nurses, if the nurse manger shows bias and discrimination in appraisal then emotional safety is in danger; resulting in demotivation and dissatisfaction among staff. However, there is still hope for good because according to Maslow's theory every human has its fullest potential to strive for better opportunities. Until the basic needs are met, the individual does not pursue personal growth need to develop his or her fullest potential as human being (Sullivan, 2009).

The third need of human is social love and belonging. In the context of management, if the nurses/staff play roles as a cohesive group, it may give threat to the management team. In the above scenario, the negative image of appraisal system was found in the entire organization because of the inability of one manager who was the main stakeholder. This may create a threat to entire system of the appraisal in the organization. In the other way the same staff may feel isolated because of biasness and unrealistic evaluation leading to poor performance and decreased motivation.

Same will happen with the needs as self-esteem, feeling of guilt due to poor rating may influence the future behavior of the staff. As the staff was a hard worker; lack of recognition and appreciation may lead to low self-esteem and poor confidence.

The final stage is self-actualization where the human feel satisfied and sense of accomplishment comes. However in the above scenario the staff was striving for the basic need in the form of financial incentives, reaching to this stage seems impossible. The nurse manager needs to identify strategies to deal with the staff's needs as per Maslow's Hierarchy of human need.

Strategies to Resolve the Problem

By reviewing the above scenario, the problems mentioned were; inability of the manager to follow the organizational standards, the processes of performance appraisal and the mindset of the employee. Strategies to deal with each problem will require multidimensional approach.

First and foremost, there is a dire need to identify the factors behind the inability of that manager to follow organizational standards. Lack of training seems to be one of the factors, which resulted in defective appraisals. Likewise, another author reported that, the absence of the trained managers is the greatest weakness of the employee appraisal system in hospitals (Nikpeyma, 2013). Similarly, key to performing successful appraisals is in-service training; this is crucial for both the manager who evaluates the performance and the staff whose performance is being evaluated (Henrikson, 2011). Therefore, if the system and standards are in placed; the mangers should also be trained to strictly follow the standards to conduct a successful appraisal.

Another strategy to deal with the problem in process is continues monitoring and supervision by human resource department for following the standards of the organization. The human resource team should also be responsible for training supervisors to improve their appraisal skills, for monitoring the appraisal system's effectiveness, and for ensuring the compliance (Desslar, 2011). It may justify that there should be a strong supportive supervisory team to monitor the appraisal process to ensure compliance with organizational standards.

Secondly, the issue in the scenario was the use of forced distribution scale which led the manager to tick a box and finish his job once a year without any supporting evidence and discussion with the employee. The best practice to make the appraisal authentic is to document performance by the direct supervisor of the employee. That documentation may be negative or positive comments about the employee but it must be directly observed and measured by the manager during the year. The documentation of performance appraisal has a number of positive outcomes for the manager and the employees of the organization: it increases the chances of accuracy, decrease the error of leniency or recency, and reduce the legal charges (Stonehouse, 2013). Besides, if a manager discuss performance appraisal report with the employee by using the authentic evidence as notes signed by both, may improve trust building relationship between them.

Last, another issue was the mind set of employees, which seems to have a negative impact as demotivation on manager and employee herself. No matter how bad the employees perform over the year; however, at the end of the year, the mindset of the employees is that they will rate themselves as above average. "Your employees will almost certainly come to the performance review with their self-appraisals in mind, and this will usually be higher than your rating" (Desslar, 2011). The strategy to deal with this mindset might be the documented evidence of their performance throughout the year. Another mind set tends to be the relating the appraisal with salary increment rather being goal oriented. Researcher revealed that nurses only work for making good money she has nothing to do with any goal (Nikpeyma,2013). Another strategy could be that the objectives should be set by mutual agreement and discussion between the manager and employee to give ownership to the employee. Besides that accomplishments will serve as motivator to the employee resulting in satisfaction and contribution to the organizational growth. "Jointly set goals will promote ownership and partnership working. Setting attainable goals that are also challenging will lead to greater job satisfaction and quality care" (Stonehouse, 2013). It is believed that by using

©Advance Educational Institute & Research Centre – 2015
International Journal of Endorsing Health Science Research

www.aeirc-edu.com
Volume 3 Issue 4, Dec 2015

Print: ISSN 2307-3748
Online: ISSN 2310-3841

combined methods of appraisal the managers can deal with the problems in a better and constructive way rather using one taking the appraisal as formality that leads to demotivation and poor performances ahead.

Conclusion

To conclude it is stated that almost all organization have the performance appraisal system and there might be many problems and errors in the system and processes. The reality for the nurse mangers is that they have to deal with the problems in planned, effective, and positive way. Furthermore, the performance appraisal have both negative and positive impacts on the organizations, managers and employees but the nurse manager needs to explore the gaps and work on those gaps to fill in for the future. This will be applicable, if the nurse manger has the autonomy and capability of facing the challenge of dealing with a certain mind set of human. The capabilities can be instilled through trainings but the autonomy should be received through personal and professional efforts. Moreover, setting standards for the performance appraisal in an organization can be easy but complying with those standards is much challenging as it was evident in the mentioned scenario. It depends on the nurse manager that how she can use standards to develop or to destroy the morale of employees.

Acknowledgements

Conflict of Interest

We do not have any kind of conflict of interest in this paper.

References

- Desslar, G. Human Resource Management. 12th ed. Prentice Hall: Boston; 2011
- Tomey, A. M. Guide to Nursing Management and Leadership. 8th ed. Mosby Elsevier: Canada; 2009
- Vasset, F., Murnburg, E., &Furunes. Dyadic Relationship and Exchanges in Performance Appraisals. Nursing Science. 2012; 103 (32): 4-9
- Sullivan, J. E., & Decker, P. J. Effective Leadership and Management in Nursing. 7th ed. Pearson: New Jersey; 2009
- Nikpeyma, N., Saeedi, Z. A., Azargashb, E., &Majd, H. A. Problems of Clinical Nurse Performance Appraisal System: A Qualitative Study. Asian Nursing Research. 2013.
- McEwen, M., & Wills, E. Theoretical Basis for Nursing. 3rd ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2011
- Henrikson, M. Mistakes Managers Make. Nursing for Women's Health. 2011; *15* (6), 539-544
- Stonehouse, D. Appraisal and its benefits for the support worker. British Journal of Health care Assistants. 2013; 7 (5): 240-249