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Team Evaluation: Solutions for Hotel Management and Productivity

Leslie E. Cummings
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, null@unlv.nevada.edu

Mark R. Edwards
Arizona State University, null@asu.edu

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Abstract

Employee performance appraisal systems are controversial, especially when accomplished by a single rater. The authors, who have had experience with team evaluation systems, present evidence from that experience for over- coming obstacles to moving to a "less-biased" system of rating employees.

Team Evaluation: Solutions for Hotel Management and Productivity

by
Leslie E. Cummings
Assistant Professor
College of Hotel Administration
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
and
Mark R. Edwards
Associate Professor, Director of Creativity Institute
College of Engineering
Arizona State University, Tempe

Employee performance appraisal systems are controversial, especially when accomplished by a single rater. The authors, who have had experience with team evaluation systems, present evidence from that experience for overcoming obstacles to moving to a "less-biased" system of rating employees.

The accuracy and fairness of employee performance appraisal systems have been under fire both inside and outside of hotel management organizations. With the increasing complexity of hotel management systems and matrix organizations, problems associated with accurate and fair performance appraisal may be expected to become more significant in the immediate future unless action is taken to improve these systems.

Traditional single supervisory performance appraisal systems are not considered accurate or valid.[1] Present performance measures often do not correlate highly with actual performance and, consequently, are often unfair. Single supervisory ratings represent a possible prejudiced view by a single individual who may have inadequate opportunity to make useful performance observations of a subordinate. A supervisor may not have an incentive to provide objective and fair performance ratings when a high rating would possibly mean a promotion for the subordinate contributing most to the department.

Each person has an individual perspective of the world. Such differences between individual raters are shown when ratings are compared. Research clearly points out the extreme variations between individual raters when they are observing the same performance.[2] Further, additional research demonstrates that rater training programs often do not achieve what they are designed to do — improve rater accuracy.[3]

What can a hotel management organization do when it is commonly known that some supervisors are biased, some have the incentive to be other than objective, others support "cronyism," and research demonstrates rater training programs do not reduce bias or improve

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rater accuracy?

A solid answer is emerging: team evaluation. Capturing and integrating the perceptions of multiple raters serves to counteract such appraisal pitfalls as objectivity, bias, and leniency which are suspect in a single rater system, providing a more accurate evaluation of an individual's actual performance.

Although numerous managerial and legal analyses for performance appraisal systems recommend the use of multiple raters, no published examples have been identified which describe a multiple rater appraisal system within a hotel/motel organization. Attitudes are now changing, but as recently as 1977, in a thorough study of the corporate approach to performance appraisal within 293 United States firms, no clear examples of the use of multiple raters were reported.[4]

Single Rater Systems Create Problems

Traditional single rater appraisal systems create more problems than they solve. Single rater appraisals force supervisors into a judge role that undermines their more constructive performance-coaching role. Recent research on single rater appraisals has concluded that rating judgments are more a function of the supervisor's personal biases than the objective reflection of the performer's true work behavior.[5]

Legal cases such as *Baxter v. Savannah Sugar Refining Corp.* (1972) indicate the courts are concerned with the "subjective recommendation of the employee's supervisor which may be a ready mechanism for discrimination which may be concealed from management."[6] The courts have also indicated that single rater appraisal provides no safeguards within the appraisal process to avert discriminatory practices. Single rater appraisals provide no means for validating raters, and on that basis alone, they may be indefensible.

Change Is Resisted

Given widespread acknowledgement that single rater appraisal systems are heavily biased and inaccurate, it is surprising that hotel management and other industries have not developed team evaluation systems. Some reasons for resisting change may include the following:

- Supervisors do not like to conduct traditional single rater appraisals. Multiple appraisals would seem to exacerbate the problem by requiring more people to perform evaluations.
- The current single rater system takes too much time. Multiple raters would logically increase the time commitment.
- A system would have to be determined to designate additional raters.
- Someone would have to design a new system.
- Employees would not accept a new system because they are accustomed to a single rating from the supervisor.

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TE*MS Upgrades Information

Team Evaulation and Management System, TE*MS, is designed to provide significant improvement over conventional single rater appraisal systems. The team evaluation process provides a highly reliable multiple rater consensus of job performance that enhances the quality of information available for each supervisory merit judgment within the management system. It does not replace supervisory evaluation judgments, but rather upgrades the accuracy of information available to managers and provides a quality control check on their judgments. TE*MS includes the following advantages:

- More participants—managers and employees—view the process as being fair.
- The performance measurement time cost is reduced to less than two hours total for each participant.
- It is fast and relatively simple to implement without excessive use of supervisory time, documentation, or training.[7]
- Quantified information is used as a basis for providing feedback for management, performers, appraisers, and the organization.[8]
- Participative management permits participation in the determination of evaluation criteria and the selection of evaluation team members.[9]
- Two evaluation teams are selected with confidence that each will provide the same result.
- Objectivity in comparing relative performance is improved since a reliability index is calculated for each team evaluation consensus.[10]
- Control of leniency, halo, timing, and other rater biases is improved.[11]
- Talent identification and succession planning is enhanced.[12]
- The system meets or exceeds equal employment opportunity standards for cultural fairness, equity, and comparability and generates the needed documentation.[13]

These elements are designed into the TE*MS process as a result of the critical analysis obtained from over 60 team evaluation programs in all types of American industry.

System Introduces Innovations

TE*MS provides improved measurement due primarily to three innovations: multiple raters, direct comparisons, and rater feedback. Multiple raters provide a means of reducing bias through the simple combination of different perspectives. Americans have long recognized the value of having nine Supreme Court justices rather than just one because no matter how well trained, people may retain personal bias. Research has indicated that with the technology associated with TE*MS, only three to six raters (instead of nine) are necessary. Raters beyond six provide very little new information and have a negligible impact on the Team Evaluation Consensus.

The multiple raters can be chosen by the performer. Critics are quick to express their belief that a performer can therefore manipulate the

process by choosing "friendly" raters. If that were true, one could argue that the TE*MS process is in fact subjective. Therefore, performers are offered an opportunity to choose two evaluation teams, one composed of "friendly" raters, the other of "harsh" raters. Assuming the two evaluation teams have approximately equal visibility to the performer, experience has shown the two evaluation team results to be the same in most cases. Hence, participants lose the argument that the process is not objective.

TE*MS takes a highly complex rating or ranking decision process and simplifies that process with direct comparison, representing the most simple decision process available to people. Considerable inaccuracy occurs when people make ranking decisions because ranking is actually a very, very, long series of simple choice decisions that positions each person compared to all others; the dichotomous choice process provides far more accuracy. The ratings from multiple individuals are combined to form a Team Evaluation Consensus, TEC, which is developed by a goal-programming solution that minimizes rater inconsistency. A computerized summary report presents a scaled ranking of all performers for each criterion and for overall performance.

The third innovation is that every rater receives feedback about his or her rating behavior. Each rater who rates eight to 12 people may make 400 direct comparison rating judgments. Experience has shown that over 90 percent of those rating judgments for first-time team evaluation users will be within 20 percent of the TEC results. Any rater whose judgments are beyond a 20 percent difference from TEC receives feedback about the degree and the direction of his or her inconsistent rating judgment.

Raters who systematically under- or over-evaluate individuals or groups such as women, short people, or friends are clearly identified. When every rater has advance knowledge that he or she will receive feedback about inconsistent ratings, the intent for raters becomes fairness and objectivity. Inaccurate or biased raters can be treated by exception and be supported with special rater training targeted to the nature of their rating error.

Rater analysis and other statistical safeguards such as the degree of consensus by each TEC for each criterion provide mechanisms to examine the precision with which every TEC is made.

Feedback Is Important

The flow chart shown in Figure 1 represents the activities associated with implementing TE*MS. The two most important elements seem to be communicating the process early and allowing constructive and critical feedback at each stage of the process. Systematic procedures have been developed to facilitate employee evaluation of each activity.

Six user surveys provide the design, implementation, and evaluation components for TE*MS. Each takes from 10 to 20 minutes, with the exception of the actual performance ratings which take an average of less than 90 minutes. Therefore, the time costs associated with TE*MS development and use can be expected to be less than three hours. Extra time, of course, will be necessary for supervisory feed-

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Figure 1

TE*MS
TEAM EVALUATION & MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

├─── I. CRITERIA DEVELOPMENT ───┤	├─── II. ASSOCIATE RATINGS ───┤	├─ III. ASSOCIATE & MANAGEMENT FEEDBACK ─┤

Identify Jobs For Performance Appraisal	Performance Criteria & Definitions Survey (All Associates)	Associates Rate Criteria	Prepare Comparisons	Train Raters	Process Ratings	Rater Feedback (Merit Level)	Review MS Objectives	Use Team Performance Information For Management Decisions
		Associates Select Rating Team		Conduct Ratings Using Comparisons		Analyze Safeguards Rater Feedback	Set New Objectives	

2 WEEKS	3 WEEKS	2 WEEKS	3 WEEKS	2 WEEKS	3 WEEKS	2 WEEKS

back and analyzing the performance feedback. However, the system design in use has been field-tested in numerous organizations and found to be highly time efficient.

- **Diagnosis.** The first survey allows hotel employees to recommend performance appraisal system features they believe would be helpful. At the same time, they are asked to indicate the degree to which they are satisfied with the current appraisal system and to express their belief regarding the appropriateness of participative or team appraisal.

- **Criteria Development.** Piggy-backed with the diagnosis survey, a separate page criteria development survey asks employees to identify job-related criteria associated with effective performance and associated with advancement within the hotel organization. A seed list of typical criteria with definitions is provided to assist employees in identifying criteria. They are asked to elaborate on criteria definitions and offer new criteria they believe account for effective organizational and individual performance.

- **Criteria Rating.** The criteria developed in the prior survey are condensed into 20 to 30 separate criteria with definitions using the language developed offered by hotel employees. These criteria are rated in order of importance by job holders and supervisors in terms of the importance of each criterion for effective job performance.

- **Select Evaluation Team.** Combined with the criteria rating process are evaluation team selection instructions. Hotel employees are allowed to select three to six associates as members of their evaluation team. Their supervisor is automatically a member of their evaluation team.

- **Performance Ratings.** Shortly after rating criteria and selecting an evaluation team, employees who are selected as raters are asked to participate as evaluation team members by rating the merit and promotability of those they supervise, plus those who selected them as evaluation team members. Experience has shown that the average number of people a rater rates is between six and eight. Even raters who have as many people to rate as 18 to 25 take less than two hours to complete the process.

- **TE*MS Effectiveness.** Employees receive the team evaluation results with explanations that assist in interpreting meaning. They then have an opportunity to critically evaluate each TE*MS element and recommend modifications and improvements to the merit identification process.

The TE*MS development, implementation, and evaluation surveys assure participative management in the design and use of the merit process. These surveys also assure content validity since the hotel employees themselves develop the criteria upon which they will be evaluated. The TE*MS effectiveness survey provides a mechanism for evaluation and recommendations for changes that can improve

the merit process.

Reliability Measures Are Provided

Human resource decisions require the ranking of two or more people. Organizations are, by necessity, zero-one systems where rewards distribution can be expected to be unequal. Hence, hotel management has an important responsibility to insure that the most deserving receive the highest rewards. Otherwise, mediocrity will overwhelm motivation and dampen customer service and productivity.

Team evaluation results are expressed in precise scaled rankings. The scaled rank order insures that the positioning of each person relative to others is clearly identified. A reliability measure is provided for the TEC result for each person on each criterion. Where the team evaluation reliability is in question, the supervisor's judgment has more weight on the merit decision.

A ranking within a criterion called "Customer Service" is shown in Figure 2. There are four benchmarks: Outstanding, Commendable, Competent, and Adequate. The results are also available in the Team Evaluation Summary Report (Figure 3) which provides ranks and scores on each criterion and on the overall evaluation. The summary report can be used as a valuable substitute for a skills and abilities inventory. When a training program for communications, for example, requires the assistance of other than training department personnel, high performers on communications skills may be selected from the summary report. Similarly, when a promotional opportunity occurs, management may develop a profile of relative skills needed in the job and trace the profiles of multiple performers who possibly have the skills and abilities associated with the job opportunity.

Each person also receives a performance profile which provides a representation of the performer compared to others in the performance group. The performance group may be a department, a division, or the entire organization. The performance profile represents the degree to which a performer achieves the highest score in the group or the relative position of each performer between the highest and the lowest performer within the group.

The composite score represents an unweighted summary of the job-related performance criteria associated with effective performance (merit) within the organization. This provides an excellent measure of promotability.

Different divisions such as food service, reservations, or operations may have separate criteria. Usually three or four core criteria are used to improve across-group comparability and provide enhanced opportunity for promotion to other groups such as from food service to marketing, or from customer services to operations.

Employees Are Ranked

TE*MS makes it possible to identify the relative positioning of employees as a single group, no matter where they are located. To accomplish this, it is not necessary for every rater to know every ratee. It is sufficient either for several raters to be able to compare a few

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Figure 2

Ranking within a Criterion

Customer Service

TE*MS   December, 1983
Sales Representatives

CRITERION   CRITERION 1 — Customer Service
                   PERFORMANCE SCORES IN SCORE ORDER

	1.	Haig	95
	2.	Laurie Broen	93
	3.	Mezo	90
BENCHMARKS	4.	OUTSTANDING	88
	5.	Satz	86
	6.	Bleke	81
	7.	Candel	76
RANK	8.	Donald	76
	9.	Motto	72
	10.	Adams	70
	11.	Treat	69
	12.	COMMENDABLE	68
	13.	H. Beck	67
DECISION	14.	Fellows	65
ALTERNATIVES	15.	Creak	64
(APPRAISED	16.	Lange	63
PERSONNEL)	17.	Potter	62
	18.	Cruthers	60
	19.	White	58
SCORE	20.	Grasp	58
	21.	Unsel	57
	22.	Saed	56
	23.	Redo	55
	24.	Delbest	55
	25.	Trake	54
	26.	COMPETENT	52
	27.	Shoeman	51
	28.	Mais	50
	29.	Vail	48
	30.	Prair	46
	31.	Psad	45
	32.	Depart	42
	33.	Velen	40
	34.	Sanders	40
	35.	B. Beck	39
	36.	Romano	37
	37.	Taker	36
	38.	Winer	35
	42.	ADEQUATE	28

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Figure 3

DECISION ALTERNATIVES   TE*MS Summary Report

Provides ranks and scores on each criterion and on overall evaluation CRITERION

TE*MS Summary — Hotel Administration — November, 1983

NAME	CUSTOMER SERVICE		PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY		COMMUNICATION SKILLS		TEAM MEMBER		ORGANIZE-PLANNING		HUMAN RELATION SKILLS		REPRESENTS HOTEL		COMPOSITE SCORE	
	R	S	R	S	R	S	R	S	R	S	R	S	R	S	R	S
OUTSTANDING	4	88	5	86	6	89	7	85	3	88	8	84	6	89	5	87
COMMENDABLE	12	68	13	77	15	72	16	64	13	69	19	60	16	76	16	69
COMPETENT	26	52	30	50	34	62	30	48	29	50	29	47	36	48	32	51
ADEQUATE	42	28	44	24	44	28	44	26	43	22	45	18	46	12	45	23
Adams	10	70	14	76	12	75	15	65	17	66	16	64	13	79	14	71
B. Beck	35	39	37	37	29	64	27	51	30	49	31	45	29	58	35	49
H. Beck	13	67	18	69	23	67	17	63	14	68	14	68	11	81	17	69
S. Brown	45	20	41	28	35	60	38	41	22	46	30	46	30	56	41	42
L. Brown	2	93	1	94	7	88	4	89	10	74	5	87	8	85	4	87
Cruthers	18	60	24	62	26	65	19	60	28	50	27	50	20	71	26	59
Candel	7	76	7	84	9	82	9	81	12	71	15	66	14	78	9	77
Creap	15	64	10	80	19	69	13	69	18	65	22	58	7	87	15	70
Delbest	24	55	21	64	17	70	26	53	27	50	23	57	25	63	27	58
Depart	32	42	42	26	30	64	25	53	31	48	32	44	37	46	38	46
Donald	8	76	19	68	20	69	22	58	23	55	12	72	24	64	20	66
Fellows	14	65	8	83	5	91	18	62	19	63	17	63	12	81	12	73
Grasp	20	58	27	58	24	66	29	49	33	44	18	62	19	73	28	58
Hanns	39	33	31	48	27	65	35	42	35	40	38	52	22	53	40	44
Hondle	46	13	39	32	33	62	45	20	38	35	44	20	38	43	44	32
Huage	1	95	3	90	1	97	1	93	2	90	2	93	1	97	1	94
Lange	16	63	17	70	11	78	14	67	21	59	6	86	3	93	11	74
Mais	28	50	25	60	21	69	31	47	16	66	26	52	15	77	25	60
Mezo	3	90	2	91	3	93	2	92	1	94	1	95	4	92	2	92
Motto	9	72	12	78	10	80	11	75	6	81	7	85	17	75	8	78
Potter	17	62	29	52	39	54	36	42	37	37	35	40	34	50	36	48

R = Rank
S = Score

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people in different locations or to use common benchmarks in the ratings.

Benchmarks are performance standards or "behavioral anchors" and must be clearly understood so that all raters can effectively compare the benchmarks with other ratees. Each benchmark is defined so that all raters understand the meaning of the benchmark. For example:

- **Outstanding.** Consistently exceeds the performance required for the job.
- **Commendable.** Consistently performs satisfactorily and frequently exceeds the performance requirements for the job.

Benchmarks are easy to use and provide natural and identifiable separations among groups of employees. For example, "Mr. Outstanding" provides the floor of the top performance group. Therefore, the lowest high performer would be rated equal to or just slightly better than "Mr. Outstanding."

A group with all high performers may have no one rated below a certain benchmark. However, TE*MS still provides identification of relative performance by providing a numerical rank position for each person within the talent group.

TE*MS users have found employees' performance is skewed toward high performance with distribution like 12, 45, 37, 51 among the five talent groups from top to bottom, respectively. Most organizations discover that TE*MS results in more distinctions among performers than with a single supervisory rating system.

When employees are compared to benchmarks and linking raters are able to rate performers in various locations, a "calibration" effect occurs that assures that the relative distribution of performers is fairly represented. When a promotional opportunity occurs, management can make confident and accurate decisions regarding promotion between organizations at various locations rather than simply knowing the best performers in each facility.

This improves the identification of highly qualified candidates, reduces bias due to low or high visibility jobs, and may eliminate the need to go outside of the organization to fill key positions.

Highly Reliable Results Can Be Expected

No performance appraisal system can guarantee full compliance with current legislation. However, using TE*MS, when appropriate job-related performance criteria are selected by employees who will be appraised and those same performers select their own evaluation team, a highly reliable result follows. An optional consensus judgment will be developed from each evaluation team so that no better solution will exist.

An organization using TE*MS can expect over 90 percent agreement among all raters on evaluation teams. When merit decisions are based on the objective and reliable team evaluation results as an enhancement to the manager's own assessment of performance results, a valid and defensible basis exists for making decisions about

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people in the organization based on their job performance, as the law requires.

Some Disadvantages Do Exist

User surveys from TE*MS applications indicate team evaluation is preferred to single supervisory appraisal by over 80 percent of all participants. However, the process has some difficult-to-overcome drawbacks.

Team evaluation requires change. Very few employees have ever used a team evaluation system, and skepticism can undermine the team evaluation process if up-front training is not provided. Further, the process is still relatively difficult to explain as employees attempt to tell others about the process. They may become frustrated until they have actually used it. Therefore, the first use of team evaluation may be best applied in hotel settings as a training tool so that employees can experience the process without the threat that it will influence their merit rating.

Management may view team evaluation as a threat because not only does participation reduce autocratic power, but the rater analysis process makes management accountable for evaluation decisions. Predictably, some managers who are not viewed as fair or accurate decision-makers are not selected as raters and would rate only the people they directly supervise—which can cause embarrassment for them. Further, the identification of systematic rating shocks and upsets some organizational members.

Team evaluation results in a wider distribution of performance levels because it minimizes leniency bias. With the traditional appraisal process, employees could discount the low ratings they received by questioning the validity of their boss's judgment. However, the team evaluation is highly credible because hotel employees chose "credible" employees as raters. Constructive performance feedback becomes critical with TE*MS.

TE*MS also changes the set of winners and losers. While most employees stay fairly close to their relative positions with team evaluation compared to traditional single supervisory appraisals, three differences have been noted:

- Some highly visible top performers drop to lower performance levels when their peers, rather than just their boss, rate them. These performers may be characterized as having "lots of show, but little go."
- Some mediocre performers who have been sheltered by lenient supervisors in spite of their non-performance are clearly identified as non-performers and flop lower into the distribution with team evaluation. Performance coddling is still possible through the management system, but the team evaluation process identifies sheltered mediocrity where it exists.
- Some low visibility performers move up in the distribution. These may be "quiet contributors" or employees who contribute to team or employee development — which was reflected in a lessening of their own performance score with traditional ratings.

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- Some lesser-known performers move up in the distribution where they can equalize visibility. These may be women or other protected class employees who have less representation than others within the higher levels of the organization.

Supervisor Still Has Input

Team evaluation provides a highly reliable participative merit result. Most organizations use the team evaluation information to enhance the quality of information available to immediate supervisors. Essentially, the team evaluation results provide a quality control check to insure the quality of information available to each manager for merit decisions and to assure fair merit appraisals.

The TE*MS process does not take the supervisor out of the responsibility for performance evaluation. Supervisors have 20 percent input to the team evaluation, with five raters, and 100 percent input to the management system result. Therefore, supervisors have retained control of merit appraisal.

The typical concern for most first-time TE*MS observers is that the team evaluation will be more lenient than the supervisor's judgment. Actually, just the opposite happens in actual practice. Most organizations have found the team evaluation result to be lower than the manager's own rating. Therefore, nine out of 10 changes from the team evaluation result move a performer into a higher talent group. However, most organizations have found the team evaluation result to be congruent with the management system result after the process has been used for several years.

TE*MS separates performance measurement from performance planning and provides important solutions for merit appraisal for hotel administrators. The supervisor is relieved of the sole responsibility for performance evaluation since the team provides highly reliable information about merit. Hence, the supervisor can be more effective in the coaching role of performance planning. TE*MS also:

- Improves objectivity and fairness in merit determination.
- Allows participative management in the decision process that affects employees the most — merit and promotability.
- Allows performers to choose their own evaluation team, including their supervisor.
- Provides a focused, time-efficient, standardized merit appraisal process that generates useful performance feedback to employee and performance information for critical human resource decisions such as compensation and promotability.
- Provides the information and documentation to assist validation of the merit appraisal process as well as to validate individual raters.
- Identifies rater and ratee training needs and allows for subsequent evaluation of training effectiveness.

TE*MS solves a major problem for hotel administrators: the iden-

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tification of those most deserving of organizational rewards. It is an efficient means of identifying merit and promotability of hotel employees. Employees participate in the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of the merit appraisal process. Once team evaluation has been used to identify merit levels, hotel organizations can be far more effective in the important management tasks of performance planning, objective setting, and career development. As hotel employees recognize that their access to organizational rewards is indeed based on performance and teamwork, motivation and productivity increase.

Footnotes

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