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Performance Evaluation and Promotion Criteria: Perceptions of Faculty Evaluation in Promotion Decisions

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Performance Evaluation and Promotion Criteria: Perceptions of Faculty Evaluation in Promotion Decisions

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Performance evaluation and promotion of faculty can be difficult in higher education. The evaluation of faculty performance often creates confusion as the criteria for promotion are often poorly understood. Disagreements over effective, equitable performance evaluation tools and possible biases of how faculty may get promoted have been a concern in many institutions, possibly creating legal liabilities that underlines the need for designing promotion criteria that are effective and easily understood by administrators and faculty. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the perceptions of faculty promotion practices and processes used in higher education institutions in the Midwest region of the US to identify equitable and effective performance measuring tools and promotion criteria that could be used to evaluate faculty in higher education. The survey instrument included five main categories of faculty performance evaluation: (1) teaching effectiveness and instruction, (2) student advising, (3) research and scholarship, (4) professional development, and (5) service to the profession and community. The instrument was pilot tested with faculty at various state and private universities and colleges to identify the most important promotional criteria in faculty performance evaluation as perceived by faculty. Recommendations are made to assist administrators and supervisors at American higher educational institutions to evaluate and award faculty promotions more effectively and consistently in the future.

INTRODUCTION

Performance evaluation and promotion of faculty can be difficult in higher educational institutions. The evaluation of faculty could be confusing as the criteria for promotion are often poorly understood.

Disagreements over effective, equitable performance evaluation tools and possible biases of how faculty may get promoted have been a concern in higher education which may also lead to legal liabilities. To minimize these concerns, it is important that institutions design promotion criteria that are effective and easily understood both by administrators and faculty.

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the perceptions of faculty promotion practices and processes used in various higher educational institutions in the Midwest region of the US by surveying faculty to identify equitable and effective performance measures and promotion criteria in US higher education.

LITERATURE

Performance Appraisal

Performance appraisal is the process of maintaining and improving employee job performance. This is a crucial component of managing people to assure accomplishing the goals of the organization effectively. In my experience as supervisor of complex operations, we used a variety of performance assessment tools, coaching, and counseling as well as providing continuous feedback to assure that employees understood their expectations and were able to perform the job requirements in a timely fashion across different cultures and environments (Konyu-Fogel, 2012).

Organizations in general pay close attention to performance management appraisals because the contribution of each employee is necessary to achieve the organizational objectives successfully. Human

resource professionals are required to address individual performance factors as well as differences in employee expectations, values, norms, attitudes, and behaviors of a diverse workforce. The following are important factors that may influence performance management practices in organizations:

- Differences among employees relative to personal goals and interests
- Differences in individual motivational factors, such as values, beliefs, and attitudes
- Differences in job productivity standards as perceived by employees based on their expectations and norms and management practices
- Differences in management attitudes, administrative priorities, and institutional practices
- Differences in methods and expectations of employee engagement
- Differences in performance appraisal systems based on organizational culture and environments

Organizational factors play a significant role in assessing employee performance. It is important to avoid stereotyping or personal bias in evaluating performance issues. In higher education, institutional practices may conflict with the performance standards and supervisory appraisal practices of the various academic disciplines and departments which could make the performance assessment inconsistent and less effective for employees. Studies show that to develop effective performance assessment criteria, it is necessary to develop a performance measure system that is consistent, equitable, and fair across different job categories and all departments (Becker & Gerhart, 1996). The focus in performance management must be on identifying the standards and criteria to be used in the evaluation process and providing clear guidelines of the appraisal practices.

Performance Management Process

Figure 1 shows the elements of a typical performance management system and how these are related to each other (Konyu-Fogel, 2012). As shown in Figure 1, the performance management system is an on-going process that must start with first making clear statements on the organizational goals and values based on which performance management standards must be set to govern and direct acceptable employee performance and behavior on the job. Next, there must be a constant monitoring of employee performance with formal performance appraisal feedback and evaluation measures that ultimately should demonstrate the achievement of the stated business results by leading to organizational effectiveness and increasing employee growth.

Each phase of the performance management system is closely connected to the other parts and the relationship between each component is a dynamic relation implying that when one part changes, the other parts also must change simultaneously. Managers and supervisors must pay close attention to setting clear performance goals and appropriate job standards for employees with consideration for difference in country and cultural environments. In addition, it is important to understand that performance management is a continuous process and to achieve the desired results, employee standards must be assessed and measured with appropriate assessment tools and feedback mechanisms. Supervisors must be responsible for assuring a continuous and seamless operation of each phase of the performance management system.



FIGURE 1. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (KONYU-FOGEL, 2012)

Planning and Implementing Performance Appraisals

Performance management in all organizations, including higher educational institutions, must address strategic alignment to organizational goals linked closely to individual goals. This must be developed by the mission and goal setting process.

Waldman and Kennett (1990) note that successful organizations incorporate organizational learning and knowledge management in their performance management practices to assure organizational capabilities for building a sustainable competitive advantage.

A critical factor in performance management is fairness in performance evaluation and the level of employee trust in the manager's standards and assessment process. It is important to conduct a fair performance appraisal that is free of bias or favoritism.

Sources of Performance Appraisal Input

Generally, it is good management practice to use as many inputs as possible from multiple sources to evaluate employees and their job performance. In addition to the employee's immediate supervisor, peers, customers, suppliers, and subordinates may provide different perspectives on the employee's performance.

By using multiple sources of evaluations, the performance appraisal may be improved in reliability and accuracy (Mathis, Jackson, & Valentine, 2014). A common practice often used for developmental purposes is the 360-degree feedback which facilitates evaluative inputs from a variety of individuals who have job relevant interactions or the opportunity to observe the employee's work and job performance. The 360-degree feedback evaluation is one of the best practices to conduct comprehensive performance appraisals. Figure 2 shows the various sources of performance appraisal inputs that could be used to evaluate employee performance.

As shown in Figure 2, the 360 evaluation includes multiple sources including self-evaluation by the employee, supervisors, subordinates (direct reports, staff members, administrative assistants), co-workers, colleagues, peers, and customers (Konyu-Fogel, 2012). In higher education, the customers consist of primarily the students and their parents but it also includes various academic departments, campus constituents, community partners, the public, and other stakeholders.

The evaluation by supervisors should provide an accurate assessment of the employee's strengths and weaknesses and the specific accomplishments of tasks on the job. There is evidence that self-evaluation by employees generally increases employee satisfaction (Anthony, Kacmar, & Perrewe, 2002). Peer evaluation inputs might not be useful when coworkers have a tendency to overrate their peers for the sake of keeping group harmony or maintaining their membership in the group.



FIGURE 2. SOURCES OF PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL INPUTS (KONYU-FOGEL, 2012)

Best Practices in Performance Evaluation

Performance evaluators must assess the performance of the employee according to the stated performance standards and criteria. Employees must have a clear understanding of the standards and procedures of the evaluation (Waldman & Kenett, 1990). In addition to the immediate supervisor, the employee may be asked to conduct a self-assessment. Other evaluators may include subordinates, peers, customers, local host country employees and supervisors, with whom the employee is in close contact on the job. The following are common errors that may occur in performance appraisals (Dressler, 2013, page 303):

- **Contrast Error** - An employee's evaluation is biased either upward or downward because of comparison with another employee just previously being evaluated.
- **Similar-to-Me Error**: An error in which an appraiser inflates the evaluation of an employee because of a mutual personal connection.

- *Halo Effect*: This error is caused by the rater's general impression of specific qualities of the employee being evaluated.
- *Error of Central Tendency*: A rating error in which all employees are rated about average.
- *Leniency or Strictness Error*: A rating error in which the appraiser tends to give all employees either unusually high or unusually low ratings.
- *Recency Error*: A rating error in which the appraisal is based largely on an employee's most recent rating.

Dessler (2013) notes that to avoid and minimize errors in performance appraisals, the performance measures and standards should be clear, the appraisal process should be objective and fair, and employees should understand the basis on which they are being evaluated. Similarly, Weaver and Treviono (2001) note organizations must assure that employees perceive fair and equitable evaluation practices both in content and process of the performance evaluation.

Teaching Effectiveness

Faculty end-of-semester student course evaluations are many times the primary determinant of the faculty members demonstrated effective teaching ability and are used in determining faculty promotion. Medina (2011) states that "critics of giving end-of-semester student evaluations significant weight in measuring faculty performance say that the feedback is unscientific, that students as customers are not always right, and that increasing incentives for faculty to win over students could inadvertently lead to grade inflation" (Medina, 2011, p. 15). The increased accountability in higher education may be fueling the need to solicit student feedback more frequently. According to Davis (2009), the current emphasis on assessment and student-learning outcomes may be a contributor in helping create a culture of self-reflection and improvement. Faculty who do administer mid-semester course evaluations enables them to improve in order to obtain better evaluations by the end of the course.

Fairweather (2002a) found that portfolios including student assessment, peer reviews, and longitudinal tracking of student progress provide accuracy when evaluating faculty performance. With an increased emphasis in scholarly work, in addition to maintaining the responsibilities for exemplary teaching and advising with hefty teaching loads, faculty teaching and advising may be negatively impacted (Malachowski, 2010). According to Snell, Mekies, and Tesar (2001) faculty classroom performance should be measured and student course evaluations should be used as part of the faculty promotion process. Park (1996) notes that good teaching requires that faculty communicate their knowledge via active learning to diverse populations, and continue to gain knowledge in their subject area through professional development opportunities and research.

Academic Research

According Shen (1998):

There is a desire on the part of faculty in all three types of institutions that a shift is needed from the current more research-oriented promotion criteria to the desired more teaching-oriented ones. On the one hand, research appears to be the common core of current promotion criteria for all groups of faculty members. On the other hand, teaching is the common core of desired promotion criteria for all groups of faculty members. The general trend here is that there seems to be a desire on the part of faculty for a shift of emphasis from research to teaching for promotion purposes (p. 32).

Based on this, faculty will continue to be confronted with increased expectations for scholarly work. Fairweather (2002b & 1996) and Boyer (1990) found that there is a perceived lack of emphasis on teaching and believes teaching should be considered a form of scholarship. Boyer (1990) contends that institutions should reward faculty with the type of scholarship that is supportive of institution's mission so if teaching is your mission, then the institution should stress teaching scholarship for faculty promotions. He also notes that institutions should go back to their origins and reward faculty for teaching, applying knowledge, integration, and research. If an institutions primary mission is teaching, then teaching should be the primary promotion criteria and faculty should not be held back because they were not involved in the same kind of work as research faculty.

Fairweather (2002a) does not believe in one size fits all models. Fairweather suggests that strict criterion many times restricts promotions due to rigid requirements. Instead he recommends identifying the major and teaching-oriented journals in each department and utilize them to evaluate research productivity. According to a survey of 130 university deans, only 6.2% said that teaching was the most important aspect of being a college professor (Crawford, Burns, & McNamara, 2012). This study also found that critical to a promotion was published journal articles while book publication, grants, and service were not critical to successful faculty promotion.

Evaluating Service

Service is usually a requirement for promotion. A central part of faculty service is committee work. O'Meara (2002) criticized institutions for rewarding faculty publications more than teaching or service. Similarly to Boyer (1990), Colbeck (1998) believes that service should be considered a form of scholarship. Institutions value faculty members giving back to the community. Consulting may be considered as a service. Whether faculty is engaged in consulting at another institution or a private sector entity, it demonstrates the knowledge of the individual consulting and gives the individual as well as the institution credibility.

According to the literature, females and faculty of color seem to perform more institutional service than their male and white counterparts (O'Rourke, 2008; Porter, 2007; Park, 1996). Proposed reason for this may be because of institutional pressures to have faculty of color and females represented on committees to ensure diversity and secondly disproportionate service may be more of a preference for females and faculty of color who desire to be more involved in service than their male and white counterparts (Porter, 2007).

Faculty promotion decisions should be fair, consistent, equitable, and timely to ensure to reduce any legal liability. To prevent disparate impact of women and minorities, institutional promotion criteria should not be interpreted too restrictive or inflexible. For example, many female and minority faculty may have substantial institutional committee loads so sensitivity to these service requirements of women and minority faculty should be taken into account.

Faculty Scholarship & Professional Development

Faculty scholarship can be viewed as a wide range of activities but the focus is on those activities that reflect professional growth. Faculty need to demonstrate that they can keep growing professionally in their respected fields. In order for faculty to become more effective, Sorcinelli and Austin (1992) stress the need for faculty professional development to be part of the faculty performance criteria.

Contributions to Student Growth & Development

Contributions to student growth and development may include co-authoring a publication with a student (Fairweather, 2002a), advising (academic and career), mentoring, creating and advising student

clubs, offering teaching associate opportunities, providing letters or recommendation, etc. According to Baker and Griffin (2010), faculty advisors hold unique positions in which they are able to guide students in developing overall educational and career plans.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The pilot-study survey will be administered to Inter-Faculty Organization members in Minnesota State Colleges and Universities and faculty in various disciplines and academic departments in other state and private universities and colleges in the Midwest region in the U.S.

Instrument

The survey instrument was developed partly based on the questionnaire used in Centra (1977). It differs from Centra's study in including five main categories of faculty performance evaluation measures: (1) teaching effectiveness and instruction, (2) student advising, sponsoring student clubs, contribution to student growth, (3) research and scholarship, (4) professional development and growth, and (5) consulting, service to the profession, campus, and community (see Appendix A for the survey instrument).

Data Collection

The instrument will be administered in a pilot study in January and February of 2014 with faculty from multiple disciplines and departments at state and private universities and colleges in the Midwest. The survey instrument will be revised based upon the findings of the pilot study and then administered to the faculty attending the 2014 Midwest Business Administration Association International Conference in March in Chicago, Illinois, to the Inter-Faculty Organization members in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities and to faculty in various disciplines and academic departments in other state and private universities and colleges in the Midwest region in the U.S.

Data Analysis

The results of the pilot test will be used to identify the most important promotional criteria of faculty performance evaluation as perceived by faculty. Data generated will be analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS®) software. Each criterion in the survey has a five-point scale: not available, not a factor, minor factor, major factor, and extremely critical factor. The average response for each criterion will be computed and an analysis of variance and canonical discriminant function analysis will be used to investigate response differences.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

According to Diamond (1993), Chief Academic Officers are vital players in the faculty evaluation and promotion process; they are thought to ensure the integrity and fairness of the process, and they help promote the morale and growth of the faculty. According to O'Meara(2005b), there are various external, cultural, and leadership forces as barriers in effective faculty performance evaluations including: "(1) the political nature of faculty evaluation, (2) excessive paperwork for faculty evaluation, (3) insufficient training for department chairs and deans, (4) faculty concerns about unrealistic expectations that they excel in all areas at the same time, and (5) unevenness in applying new criteria and standards within and across units" (O'Meara, 2005b, p. 86).

Departmental disagreements, conflicts or splits over promotion can reduce faculty satisfaction and productivity and signal confusion over the department's direction. To avoid this confusion, departments could provide more senior faculty mentoring of junior faculty as well as open discussions from senior faculty and department administrators on what the department values and rewards (Hearn & Anderson, 2002).

The primary constituents of institutions are the faculty (Smart, Feldman, & Ethington, 2000). Faculty is an essential part of institutions as they are responsible for curricula, teaching, new knowledge, and participating in institutional governance (Rhoades, 2000; Turner & Myers, 1999). The five promotional criteria outlined in this paper that faculty promotions may use are not nor should they be equally weighted. Faculty in general are expected to do service, teaching, and research (Park, 1996). The key factor in faculty promotion decisions should be based on institutional priorities and fair and equitable standards clearly stated in the faculty evaluation policies and applied consistently in the performance evaluation and promotion process.

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APPENDIX A

Survey of Departmental Practices in Evaluating Faculty Performance

Listed below are the general criteria and evaluation evidence that might be taken into account in evaluating faculty members for promotion, salary increase, or tenure. We would like you to give your best judgment about:

- A. how important each general criterion or evaluation element is in personnel judgments currently being made about faculty members within the department (**Column A**).
- B. how important you think each general criterion or evaluation element should be. That is, given the goals of your department and institution, how much weight ought to be placed on each factor? (**Column B**).

Respond as follows:

1 = Not a factor	3 = Major factor	0 = Not available or applicable
2 = Minor factor	4 = Extremely critical factor	

	A		B					
	Current use and importance in personnel recommendations				Importance each should have in personnel recommendations			
	<i>(Circle one response in each row)</i>				<i>(Circle one response in each row)</i>			
I. Demonstrated ability to teach effectively	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Elements of Evaluation:								
▪ Student assessments of teaching effectiveness	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
▪ Peer evaluations and reviews	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
▪ Demonstrating the nature and quality of assignments	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
▪ Developing and updating curriculum and course content	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
▪ Incorporating pedagogical approaches	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
▪ Providing timely feedback to students	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
▪ Others	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4

Comment on the above criteria or elements of evaluation:

II. Scholarly or creative achievement or research	1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
Elements of Evaluation:									

▪ Publications in professional journals	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
▪ Works in progress	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
▪ Applying for, writing, receiving, and reporting on grants	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
▪ Presenting at professional meetings	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
▪ Research projects	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
▪ Books or book contributions	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
▪ Editorial or advisory roles for professional publications	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
▪ Others	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4

Comment on the above criteria or elements of evaluation:

Respond as follows:

1 = Not a factor	3 = Major factor	0 = Not available or applicable
2 = Minor factor	4 = Extremely critical factor	

	A Current use and importance in personnel recommendations <i>(Circle one response in each row)</i>					B Importance each should have in personnel recommendations <i>(Circle one response in each row)</i>				
III. Evidence of continuing preparation and study	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
Elements of Evaluation:	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Remaining current in one's discipline	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Participating in seminars, workshops, and continuing education courses	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Attending professional meetings and conferences	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Structured study and courses	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Participation in the accreditation process	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Others	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	

Comment on the above criteria or elements of evaluation:

IV. Contributions to student growth and		
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development	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
Elements of Evaluation:										
▪ Providing academic and/or career advising	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Participating in and supervising student-based research or creative activity	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Serving or advising student clubs, organizations or societies	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Student mentoring	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Others	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	

Comment on the above criteria or elements of evaluation:

Respond as follows:

1 = Not a factor	3 = Major factor	0 = Not available or applicable
2 = Minor factor	4 = Extremely critical factor	

	A Current use and importance in personnel recommendations <i>(Circle one response in each row)</i>					B Importance each should have in personnel recommendations <i>(Circle one response in each row)</i>				
	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
V. Service to the community and University										
Elements of Evaluation:										
▪ Service on committees	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Mentoring colleagues	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Performing leadership roles	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Participating in accreditation, program review, and assessment	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Fostering alumni relations and promoting University advancement	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Recruiting and retaining students	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Serving on external professional bodies	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Consultation with government or business organizations	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Developing and supporting community, national, or international partnerships	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	
▪ Others	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	

Comment on the above criteria or elements of evaluation:

Optional information:

Name: Title or Rank:

Department:

Address:

University:

Highest degree offered by the department:

Number of full-time faculty members in the department:

Check here if you would like a copy of the final results.