Power, Politics and Personality

Conducting Fair Individual Performance Appraisals- Challenges

The one attribute that almost all performance appraisal systems have in common is that they focus on the "person" and not on the "situation"- it would be neither accurate nor fair to evaluate these pairs of colleagues on the same criteria using the same scale and the same reference points:

- Two call center employees sitting in adjacent work spaces assigned different geographic regions or different populations of potential customers

- An attorney may be working on a single highly complicated case while his office mate is working on multiple routine matters

- An employee who is selling a hot new product while her colleague is selling a far less compelling item at a similar price point

In a performance appraisal system that only evaluates employees — not situations — the organization may take longer to realize that the problem is its IT infrastructure, not the effort or ability of the people using the technology

"In Performance Appraisals, Make Context Count"   **"Give Credit Where It's Due"**

Conducting Fair Individual Performance Appraisals- Solutions

To reduce both "noise" and "bias" in the evaluation system and to make evaluations more accurately reflect performance, managers and organizations can:

- Add a column to each employee appraisal that asks:

    "What were the situational factors that made it easier or harder for this employee to achieve his or her goals?"

  or

    "What systems, processes, structures, circumstances or events facilitated or constrained this person's performance?"

- Provide space for the individual to comment, for his or her manager to comment, and for other 360 feedback providers to comment on both personal performance and the situational context in which it occurred

If the evaluation system takes into account that one employee had an easy product to sell and another did not, the evaluation system can begin to differentiate how much the results were due to the individual employees, and how much the results were due to the products they were selling

"In Performance Appraisals, Make Context Count"   "Give Credit Where It's Due"

Utilizing Accurate "People Analytics"- Challenges

People analytics – the fast-growing practice which companies use to analyze large amounts of data to quantify employee performance – has the potential to revolutionize the workplace

However, just as people are susceptible to making the "fundamental attribution error" whereby observers over-attribute their explanations for the causes of behavior to "the person" and under-attribute the causes of behavior to "the situation" organizations risk making what might be called "the fundamental analytic error"

It's often much more politically expedient to blame individuals when things aren't going well than to search for the underlying organizational causes of their difficulties

"The Bias Undermining Your People Analytics"

Utilizing Accurate "People Analytics"- Challenges

- If the talents or efforts of individuals get credited or blamed for performance, then performance that doesn't meet expectations does not raise tough questions about whether culture, product, strategy, incentives, or technologies might be improperly configured or misaligned

- If products are not selling, it may be very appealing to initiate an analytics project to look at salespeople's attributes instead of getting customer feedback about the company's products

- If turnover is high among entry level employees, it could much more politically palatable to analyze the personality, style, education, experience level, and referral source of the employees who leave the organization, rather than to analyze the capabilities or managerial skills of their supervisors

- No amount or kind of human capital analytics is going to save an organization in denial about disruptive changes occurring in its industry or markets

"The Bias Undermining Your People Analytics"

Utilizing Accurate "People Analytics"- Solutions

The most valuable human capital or people analytic initiatives get deployed in a scientific manner. Hypotheses, nested in an open conceptual framework, get formulated and tested and theories and hypotheses are all subject to falsification

If some associates in a law firm are performing well, while others perform poorly, it is reasonable to hypothesize that their law school grades, LSAT scores, and whether or not they clerked for a judge might help predict, and partially explain, their performance as attorneys

Before conclusions can be drawn, other competing explanations need to be considered and alternative analyses need to be conducted. Additional analysis might determine that variance in associate performance is more a function of which partners they happen to be working for, or which office they happen to be working in, rather than their grades, test scores or personalities

"The Bias Undermining Your People Analytics"

Building Adaptive and Innovative Teams - Challenges

Groupthink occurs when teams or organizations operate on autopilot and feel a general false sense of invulnerability. They wind up maintaining course without appropriately considering emerging risks, debating alternative scenarios, or exploring new courses of action

Groupthink happens because of basic social and interpersonal dynamics that include a wish for group harmony, pressures for conformity, increased commitment to ill-advised or outdated strategies, and punishment of dissenters

Once a team has reached, or appears to have reached, a consensus, it can be very hard for any individual to challenge the group's interpretation of reality or predictions about the future — or to push back on what the group plans to do (or not do) — without running the risk of being perceived as a heretic or becoming a scapegoat

These dynamics make it hard for teams to recognize or to be fully cognizant of new disruptive challenges, while also stifling the creative innovation that is necessary to proactively confront such challenges

"How Structured Debate Helps Your Team Grow"

Building Adaptive and Innovative Teams - Solutions

Structured debate can help minimize politics and combat Groupthink by enabling teams to explore potentially fraught issues in an open and rigorous manner. The team can break into subgroups and argue opposing points of view about topics such as:

"Our organization's technology, products, strategy, or business model will be obsolete within x years. Here's what will replace it, and here's what we need to do now to survive and thrive"

"Our team's design and/or organizational structure is outdated. Even if we can't start from scratch and completely redesign our team or restructure our organization, here's what we can do now to set ourselves up for greater success in the future"

"How Structured Debate Helps Your Team Grow"

Building Adaptive and Innovative Teams - Solutions

Additional structured debate topics:

"We are rewarding and punishing (or at least withholding rewards for) the wrong things in our organization. Here's how we should update our performance appraisal systems and criteria to reward those who help set the foundation for our success in the future"

"Our team's predictions for key trends, results, or performance are wrong. Here's a more likely scenario and here's what we need to debate, decide and do differently based on these updated estimates"

We are discounting or ignoring the feedback from our customers, complaints from our critics, or requests from our stakeholders. Here's what we should be taking far more seriously, and here's how we should respond

"How Structured Debate Helps Your Team Grow"

Team and Organizational Conflict Resolution- Challenges

- Conflict happens everywhere, including in the workplace. When it does, it's tempting to blame it on personalities. But more often than not, the real underlying cause of workplace strife is the situation itself, rather than the people involved. So, why do we automatically blame our coworkers? Chalk it up to psychology and organizational politics, which cause us to oversimplify and to draw incorrect or incomplete conclusions

- The real reasons for conflict are a lot harder to raise — and resolve — because they are likely to be complex, nuanced, and politically sensitive. For example, people's interests may truly be opposed; roles and levels of authority may not be correctly defined or delineated; there may be real incentives to compete rather than to collaborate; and there may be little to no accountability or transparency about what people do or say

- It's much easier for people to imagine that they'll work better together if they simply understand each other's personality (or personality type) than it is to realize that they would have to come together to, for example, request that their boss stop pitting them against one another, or to request that HR match rhetoric about collaboration with real incentives to work together

"Most Work Conflicts Aren't Due to Personality"

Team and Organizational Conflict Resolution- Solutions

So what's the right approach to approaching conflict resolution at work?

First, look at the situational dynamics that are causing or worsening conflict, which are likely to be complex and multifaceted. For example, if roles are poorly defined, a boss might need to clarify who is responsible for what. If incentives reward individual rather than team performance, Human Resources can be called in to help better align incentives with organizational goals

Then, think about how both parties might have to take risks to change the status quo: systems, roles, processes, incentives or levels of authority. To do this, ask and discuss the question: "If it weren't the two of us in these roles, what conflict might be expected of any two people in these roles?" For example, if I'm a trader and you're in risk management, let's talk about how to optimize the competing goals of profits versus safety, and risk versus return, instead of first talking about your conservative, data-driven approach to decision making and contrasting it to my more risk-seeking intuitive style

"Most Work Conflicts Aren't Due to Personality"

Interviewing and Evaluating Candidates Accurately- Challenges

- Using the model of detection theory, there are four scenarios for interviewing and hiring. The first is that a "good" candidate is hired, constituting a "hit." If the "good" candidate is not hired, this is a "miss." In the event that a "bad" candidate is not hired, this is a "correct rejection" and if a "bad" candidate is hired, this is a "false positive"

- People are biased, emotional, and inconsistent when interviewing and as a result, decades of industrial psychology research has found, the validity or predictive power of a typical unstructured job interview is around 20%, meaning that only one in five interviews increases the baseline odds that a hired candidate will be successful

- When a candidate ends up being successful, many people in the organization believe and claim that they spotted her or his talent early on. And when a candidate does not succeed, suddenly it seems that the candidate was hired despite widespread doubts

- In addition to challenges with interviews, organizations often use psychometric testing in improper or inaccurate ways

"A Scorecard for Making Better Hiring Decisions"   **"How to Use Psychometric Testing in Hiring"**

Interviewing and Evaluating Candidates Accurately- Solutions

An interview scorecard can provide a quantitative basis for comparison between interviewers, enabling you to validate your perceptions with your colleagues and learn where your ratings may be outside of the norm

By correlating your predictions with candidates' actual performance on the job, you can also get quantitative feedback about your accuracy at assessing different criteria. Only by developing awareness of our own evaluative interview biases is it possible to correct them

When used properly and consistently, interview scorecards can help level the playing field for candidates, create a quantitative basis for comparison and validation, and enable you and your organization to make better hiring decisions over time

Psychometric testing for cognitive abilities and personality can also add predictive power to, and remove some of the bias and subjectivity from, the candidate evaluation process

"A Scorecard for Making Better Hiring Decisions"   **"How to Use Psychometric Testing in Hiring"**

Gathering "Employment Brand" Feedback- Challenges

"Non-entry" interviews of candidates who receive, but do not accept, job offers can be as informative as exit interviews for companies that are trying to compete for top talent. However, it might be hard for a candidate to directly tell a hiring manager or a human resources business partner that:

- The hiring manager was unfriendly or unfocused

- Some interviewers conveyed a low level of enthusiasm about working at the organization

- There were too many interviewers in the mix

- Different interviewers conveyed divergent ideas about the role

"Why You Should Interview People Who Turn Down a Job with Your Company"

Gathering "Employment Brand" Feedback- Solutions

Given the interpersonal politics involved in this kind of feedback, it's helpful to collect feedback via:

- A third party such as an external search, consulting or research firm

- An internal market research, branding or analytics department outside of both the hiring area and human resources

- And/or anonymously through web surveys or via email

It's also helpful to inform candidates who decline offers that their participation in a "declined offer interview":

- Will be much appreciated

- That there are no hard feelings

- When requested and feasible, their individual feedback can remain confidential or anonymous

"Why You Should Interview People Who Turn Down a Job with Your Company"

Gathering "Employment Brand" Feedback- Solutions

Here are some questions that you can ask the candidates who got away:

What did you see as the potential positive aspects of the role and/or working at our organization?

What were your concerns about the role and/or working at our organization?

What were the most important factors in the decision you made?

What feedback or suggestions do you have about your interviews, interviewers, the interview process itself, or how we could have improved your overall experience as a candidate?

Can you provide any observations about, or feedback or suggestions for the hiring manager, Human Resources, or the organization overall?

What additional feedback or suggestions can you provide about how we might present a more compelling value proposition to candidates like you in the future?

"Why You Should Interview People Who Turn Down a Job with Your Company"

Gathering "Employment Brand" Feedback- Solutions

Based on the feedback that gets collected, controllable factors that the organization may decide to address can include:

- Training hiring managers to be more friendly and focused during interviews, or to ask more relevant job-related questions

- Utilizing a more diverse and enthusiastic group of interviewers who will represent the organization better to different kinds of candidates, and potentially build more positive interpersonal chemistry with them

- Getting all interviewers aligned about how they will describe the role and the company's future direction can help present a unified front and ensure that the candidate does not perceive disorganization or inconsistency

- Limiting the maximum number of interviewers a candidate will see to around four in total

- Setting a time limit on how long after interviews a hiring decision must get made

"Why You Should Interview People Who Turn Down a Job with Your Company"

Succession Planning- Challenges

Succession can be fraught and challenging for leaders in general, and particularly challenging for leaders with certain personality traits, who may try to hold on to power by:

- Having no identified successor or defined succession plan

- Merely going through the motions of trying to find a successor

- Designating the wrong successor

- Undermining or discrediting their successor

- Creating additional challenges for potential successors from diverse groups

"A CEO's Personality Can Undermine Succession Planning"

Succession Planning- Solutions

Organizations need to have iron-clad and exception-free succession policies:

- **Every executive should have one successor ready, or almost ready, at any given time. Organizations need to tell leaders that if they are not replaceable, they will be replaced**

- **Stakeholders need to have a voice and a vote in who the successors for key roles are in order to prevent leaders from using the wrong criteria and standards in making their decisions**

- **Boards and senior management need to monitor succession across the organization to make sure that there is a level playing field and that performance criteria are assessed as fairly as possible**

"A CEO's Personality Can Undermine Succession Planning"

For full articles and additional links/resources:

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