Conducting a Successful Performance Management Interview

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To accomplish the multiple goals of performance appraisals, most organizations are leaning towards the implementation of performance management. Performance management is a dynamic and continuous process that is intended to maximize the productivity of employees and improve overall organizational effectiveness (Gusdorf, 2009). Performance management can be used to increase levels of employee engagement. Engaged employees are those who feel involved, committed, passionate, and empowered. This can be demonstrated in their work behavior (Mon et al., 2011). Effective performance management requires ongoing communication between managers and employees. Performance management interviews are a method of communication between an employee and a manager where assessment of performance and collaboration in developing strategies to improve performance takes place (Fried & Fottler, 2011). The ultimate goal of performance management is to improve overall employee and organizational performance.

According to Jacksonville University (2010) a performance management interview is to help improve employee job performance by using the opportunity to communicate appreciation for employee contributions, to inform the employee of their overall performance appraisal, have open dialogue with the employee to address strengths and weaknesses, clarify expectations, build relationships between employees and managers, and to establish goals for improvement. A key step in this process is to provide the employee with performance information (Fried & Fottler, 2011). In order to conduct a successful performance interview there are key guidelines that should be followed and made clear to the employee to enable them to meet and exceed their goals.
Successful performance management interviews are well prepared for in advance (Fried & Fottler, 2011). According to Jackson University (2010) more harm than good can come during the interview if the manager is not prepared. The manager should have clear goals, data, and strategies for performance improvement, anticipate employee reaction, and engage the employee in the improvement process (Fried & Fottler, 2011). It is also the responsibility of the manager/supervisor to ensure that the employee is adequately prepared for the performance management interview. They should do this by providing employees with ongoing training and continuing education, feedback and coaching, recognition for good work, information about improvement opportunities, and opportunities to correct problems before they become serious (and/or well in advance of the performance interview) (TDMHMR, 2000). A location should also be set in advance and all supporting documents should be available to the employee at the time of the interview (Fried & Fottler, 2011). The performance information and supporting documents should be gathered from multiple sources. Gathering from multiple sources makes the information more reliable and credible to the employee and their position (Fried & Fottler, 2011).

Performance management has historically focused on evaluation or measurement aspects, relatively little attention has been given to its improvement aspects (Fried & Fottler, 2011). There is also much “cynicism” about performance management, because it is believed that aspects of performance management are distasteful, subjective, and uncomfortable. Fried and Fottler explain that this is based on the fact that “performance appraisals traditionally have been punitive in nature and particularly, when closely tied to employee compensation, have high emotional content” (Fried & Fottler, 2011, pp. 196-170). To mitigate this, managers should start the performance management interview with a friendly, constructive atmosphere (Jacksonville
A rapport should be established with the employee, this can serve as a lead into the purpose of the interview and a clear understanding of the improvement process.

During the performance management interview the employee performance is discussed and the performance appraisal is reviewed (Fried & Fottler, 2011). A performance appraisal is an evaluation of an employee’s performance. The employee should be well informed of areas of improvement well in advance of the performance management interview so that a discussion can take place on strategies to improve performance. Performance management allows employees to be prepared for evaluations and not be surprised with the information discussed at the face to face evaluation. When employees are prepared, there is less chance for intimidation or fear and more opportunities for progressive active dialog that can foster great relationships between management and staff.

During the performance management interview SMART goals should be set to improve performance (Fried & Fottler, 2011). These goals are intended to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Goals allow managers to define and set clear expectations about job performance and job improvement, and allow for a basis for future feedback and performance review. Goals should be agreed upon by both the manager and the employee and be realistic for achieving desirable outcomes (Hill International, 2013). SMART goals are also used as a guide in designing the improvement strategies during the performance management interview (Fried & Fottler, 2011). The goals are made collaboratively between the manager and the employee, are clear and comprehensible, and meant to motivate the employee to achieve their goals.
Encouraging employee participation is important during performance management interviews (Fried & Fottler, 2011). Allowing the employee to present performance concerns allows for a more positive environment and likelihood that the employee will engage in discussion (Hill International, 2013). Employee self-appraisals should be part of this process encouraging open discussion. Employees often have a better understanding of their own performance concerns, which typically will match the managers concerns. Employee input should be appreciated and supervisors should allow time for the employee to provide their input during the interview (Hill International, 2013). Asking open ended questions can be an effective strategy. This allows the employee to open up and provide detail during the interview (West Virginia Division of Personnel Employee Relations Section, 2005). Any discrepancies between manager feedback and employee feedback can also be discussed at this time (Gusdorf, 2009). Oftentimes, employees will present underlying causes for marginal performance (Jacksonville University, 2010). Managers should reinforce positive performance during this time (Fried & Fottler, 2011). Rewarding the employee (for their positive performance not just focusing on the negatives) can help build a relationship between the manager and employee making the employee more motivated to improve upon the negative aspects and provide further input.

Managers must remember that the intent of the interview should be to gain the trust and partnership of the employee and to agree upon performance improvement goals. The performance management interview should promote future performance including goal setting and problem solving focusing on employee behavior and results, as opposed to personal traits (Fried & Fottler, 2011). While reviewing past performance is important to determine where future goals and performance need to be directed, it is important to assure constructive feedback is presented as positively as possible. This can be accomplished by describing behaviors rather
than evaluating them (Hill International, 2013). Employee outcomes should be developed from the described employee behavior during this time, and not on values, personality, motivation, or fit with the organization (Fried & Fottler, 2011). Focusing on actual job behavior can help control the emotional level of the interview and keep the intended purpose of the interview (Toten, 2011). According to Hill International (2013) during a performance management interview managers need to put personal relationships with employees aside.

Fried & Fottler (2011) discuss that performance management must be supported by senior managers. Having a supportive senior management creates a motivating environment for employees to meet goals and ensures employees that all levels of the organization are working towards improvement. All levels of management should be trained on the performance management interview process and be given the skills to conduct successful interviews (Totten, 2011). Goals set by senior management, and the organization itself, filters through the organization and affect the goals and activities of employees (Gusdorf, 2009). At the same time, it is important to ensure performance management is taken seriously by planning for follow-up activities and paying attention to expected outcomes and timetables (Fried & Fottler, 2011). If a plan with a timetable is set then follow-up should be done in a timely manner and employees held accountable for their improvement progress.

According to Fried & Fottler (2011) there are important aspects to conducting a successful performance management interview (Fried & Fottler, 2011). Performance appraisals and feedback should be provided on an ongoing basis (Fried & Fottler, 2011). Providing feedback regularly, not just with performance appraisals, is important to ensure the employee is taking the right steps towards meeting improvement goals and to continually motivate the
employee to improve performance. This allows the manager to be more engaged in the improvement process. It also allows for the continuous communication of the performance management system (Gusdorf, 2009). Along with the informal feedback it is important to establish a frequency of formal feedback (Fried & Fottler, 2011). Frequency will depend on the employee and how much reinforcement and motivation they may need to meet goals. According to Hill International (2013) interviews typically are done monthly until the performance management process is well established and employees and managers have strong working relationships with clear expectations.

Summary

Implementing a performance management system can help the success and increase the productivity of employees. The performance management system has some key components that maximize the communication between supervisors and employees. All components work together to increase employee morale and ensure expectations are clear. Performance management interviews should focus on the employee involving them in their own improvement process. Successful performance management interviews can result in highly motivated and productive employees. It is important to remember that the importance of the interview is to focus on performance improvement strategies and set SMART goals to achieve positive outcomes, as opposed to focusing on past performance. Engaging employees in the process and motivating them to take ownership of their performance can help them achieve personal goals and organization goals. A successful performance management interview will leave the employee empowered and motivated with clear goals to improve performance.
Recommendations

It is recommended to ensure successful performance management for the employee, manager, and the organization, that the manager follows the description of the performance management interview as described above. It is further recommended that the manager implement the following strategies to allow for ease of implementation and effective performance management. This way the manager will be able to validate the interview and performance management process demonstrating to the employee investment the manager has in their employee’s success (TDMHMR, 2000). First, it is imperative that throughout the interview the manager promotes employee participation, encouraging employee self-appraisal of his or her own performance concerns. Next the manager must also reinforce the positive performance of the employee (not only formally at the beginning of the interview), but throughout the interview to ensure that the interview focuses on all aspects of employee performance. Finally, the manager must plan for follow-up activities and pay attention to expectations and timelines. Managers must also provide clear direction, coaching, mentoring, and seek reinforcement opportunities often doing so consistently and fairly.
References


