



How to Conduct Staff Performance Appraisals

Staff appraisals are one tool in a suite used by managers to negotiate work performance with their staff. Used well, they can contribute to a strategy, which extracts high performance. Used poorly, they can become as unwelcome as a visit to the dentist for root canal treatment. Below is a list of good practice strategies for conducting staff appraisals.

1) There should be no surprises. Staff appraisals are no substitute for regular ongoing communication between staff and their managers. The staff appraisal should not be the first time that an employee tells a manager that things are going really badly, or really well. Both should know this already.

2) Staff appraisals should be 90% future focussed and concentrate on the “big picture”. Their basic structure should be around the following questions:

- Where is the organisation going?
- What is your part in that?
- What do you need to do to successfully fulfil your part?
- How can we help you do that?

3) Staff Appraisals should never be used as part of a disciplinary process. If staff are underperforming, the specific areas of underperformance need to be addressed as part of an ongoing process of counselling and training. If a staff member has engaged in inappropriate behaviour, the specific behaviour should be addressed at the time it occurs. It should not be ignored, allowed to get worse and then sprung upon them at staff appraisal time.

4) Before you can set new objectives, a staff appraisal should look at objectives set at any previous appraisals. If objectives were not met, this needs to be examined in a frank and open way. The purpose is not to shame or punish but to identify the starting point for new objectives. It is also an opportunity to identify the barriers that prevented them being met so that these barriers can be addressed before you set your next set of objectives.

Where objectives from previous appraisals have been met, this is a great opportunity to acknowledge the work of the staff member. In our busy work lives it's easy to take good performance for granted. We may believe that we give positive feedback, but the reality is that there are precious few times when managers say “well done.” Performance appraisals are a great time to stop and look at the wonderful contribution that individual staff make every day.

5) Let the employee do most of the talking. Use open questions to encourage people to be expansive. In a knowledge-based environment such as ACE, staff need to be able to manage their own learning and development. The ultimate aim is for the staff member to self appraise so that they can manager their own performance into the future, with support and encouragement from you.

6) Come to an agreement. The ultimate aim of a staff appraisal is to come to a shared understanding of how the staff member will focus their performance in the next period of employment. The appraisal should end on a positive note, with the employee energised and motivated to tackle the work journey ahead.



Staff Performance Appraisal Process

Participants

A delegate of the Committee of Management or Board (usually the Chair) conducts the performance appraisal for the CEO or Manager of the ACE organisation on behalf of the Board. The CEO or manager then conducts performance appraisals with the staff they supervise. It is inadvisable for Board members to conduct performance appraisals with anyone other than the CEO or Manager.

Timing

Staff performance appraisal meetings tend to occur once every twelve months although some organisations conduct them more often. Industrial awards or agreements, usually include agreements about when and how performance appraisals should be held, so consult these before you begin. Staff should be notified ahead of time and a mutually agreeable time determined for the meeting. The meeting should be held in a quiet and comfortable location and should go for around an hour.

Documents

A copy of the pro forma to be used plus a copy of last year's performance appraisal should be given to the staff member ahead of time so that they are prepared. They may want to take notes or bring information with them to the meeting.

Objectives / Goals / KPI's

The performance appraisal should be based around goals or objectives of the position. Many organisations refer to these as Key Performance Indicators. When the person is first employed their position description should indicate the initial objectives or KPI's of their job. At the first performance appraisal these goals or KPI's are reviewed and the next 12 months worth of objectives set and so on.

Objectives or KPI's need to be within the general scope of the position description. If a staff member is employed as a junior admin officer, for example, it is not fair to set them more and more challenging KPI's each year such as supervising the work of others, while still maintaining them in the role of a junior admin worker.

Reviewing the Position Description

Over time, staff members shape their jobs to their individual skills and to changing external demands. Sometimes this works in the organisation's interests, sometimes not. The performance appraisal is a chance to review the person's performance against their position description and either refocus them on their intentions of their position or change their position description to match the changes in their job. Where the job has changed, ask yourself "is this change in the organisations' interests"? If so, change the position description to match. If not, does the person need more support and training to meet the needs of their position description? Are there tasks that they are doing that are best done by someone else? Are there other ways to maintain motivation while refocussing the person back on their position description?



Where the demands of a position have altered dramatically, you may choose the opportunity to completely restructure a person's job. You should closely consult the Award or industrial agreement in place with that person before proceeding.

The Organisation and the Individual

A key role of a performance appraisal is to ensure that the individual worker is operating in accordance with the overall strategic goals of the organisation. The supervisor should outline the general goals of the organisation and any objectives or KPI's, which are developed, should be in line with these.

Professional Development

In order for staff to meet new objectives they will need new skills. The performance appraisal should map out a program of professional development for the staff member to follow over the next period to gain these skills. This may include any of the following:

- formal training,
- professional reading,
- mentoring,
- coaching,
- participation in professional networks

The aim is to map out a general program rather than determine specific activities.



Example Pro forma

Date:

Staff Member Name:

Position:

Supervisor Name:

Date of Last Appraisal:

1) What key organisational directions will this position support in the next 12 months?

-
-
-

2) What goals will the staff member work towards in the next 12 months?

-
-
-

3) Were the goals of the previous performance appraisal met? If yes, what were the staff member's greatest successes?

If not, what barriers or blockages prevented them from being met? How can these be overcome?

4) Are there any outstanding goals from the last performance appraisal that can be refocussed for the next performance period?

5) What professional development will the staff member need to meet the challenges of the next 12 months?

6) What other support will the staff member need to meet the challenges of the next 12 months?
t additional support will the staff member need to meet the challenges of the next 12 months?