

FIREFIGHTER EVALUATION- STANDARDIZED MEASUREMENTS

Executive Leadership

Firefighter Evaluation- Standardized Performance Measurements for the

Mesquite Fire Department

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Certification Statement

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

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ABSTRACT

The Mesquite Fire Department's lack of a standardized firefighter performance review program has led to inconsistent performance measures being applied to firefighters in an informal process. The purpose of this research was to find effective performance review processes and components to be utilized in a model performance review program already in development by the department. Action research was used to answer the following: (1) What types of review systems, standards, and components are in use in the human resource industry? (2) What types of review systems are in place in the fire service industry? (3) How and when is firefighter performance measured in departments inside the State of Texas? (4) What performance review criteria and processes are in use currently by the City of Mesquite? A fire department Survey was conducted in conjunction with literature and industry periodical reviews to determine review system types, components, and best practices. The results show that the types of reviews and criteria used inside the fire service and for the City of Mesquite nonpublic safety employees generally follow human resource industry best practices. Recommendations include the development of a firefighter performance review program similar to the existing City of Mesquite process. Additional information needed for firefighter career development will be added as well as a requirement that employee performance objectives be completed. Scenario-based rater training is also recommended as an enhancement to the City's existing supervisory and manager performance review training.

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Firefighter Evaluation- Standardized Performance Measurements for the Mesquite Fire Department

For over a century scholars and practitioners have tried to develop a more objective and accurate employee performance appraisal system (Daley, 1992). For all their efforts the appraisal of the performance appraisal is not good (Smither, 1998) with over 90% of appraisal systems deemed unsuccessful by human resource experts. The reasons that exist for performing employee performance appraisals vary by organization. Some organizations complete the process just because they are required to do so by law or by a higher authority. Some go through the employee review ritual just to determine pay rates for employees. Other organizations perform extensive and continuous employee reviews as a means to develop employees to their maximum potential. No matter what reasons are given, the basic human instinct used to determine friend or foe causes us to form an opinion of a person as either one who helps or one who hinders (Daley, 1992). The question of how this basic human instinct is best carried out in today's civilized organizations, both private and public, is widely debated.

Most fire service organizations perform formal firefighter performance evaluations to ensure that each firefighter knows what is expected of him or her while on the job and how well that person is doing in relation to those expectations (NFPA, 2006). These formal evaluations normally consist of the company officer or supervisor completing a standardized evaluation tool for each firefighter assigned and formally meeting with the individual about the results.

The Mesquite Fire Department (MFD) currently does not have a formal firefighter performance review program. The problem is that the lack of a standardized firefighter

performance review program has led to inconsistent performance measures being applied to firefighters in an informal process. This inconsistent informal process is incompatible with the State of Texas firefighter civil service laws and the City of Mesquite policies and procedures.

The purpose of this research is to examine existing performance review standards and programs that are used both inside and outside the fire service profession. Programs and their components that are found to be effective will be utilized in a model performance review program that is currently being developed for the MFD.

This applied research project will use action research to answer the following research questions:

1. What types of employee performance review systems, standards, and components are in use and can be identified from the human resource industry?
2. What types of firefighter performance review systems are in place in the fire service industry?
3. How and when is firefighter performance measured in departments located inside the State of Texas, and how effective are those reviews perceived by the departments performing them?
4. What performance review criteria and processes are in use currently for general government employees inside the City of Mesquite?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

MFD responds to emergency incidents inside the 44 square miles of the City of Mesquite, Texas. The City of Mesquite is located on the east border of the City of Dallas, Texas, and is

considered urban/suburban in nature. The Department provides fire, emergency medical (EMS), rescue, hazardous material, and bomb response services to the community of 137,539. The Department also has a Fire Prevention Division composed of five full-time code inspectors, three arson investigators, one public education coordinator, and one fire marshal. MFD responded to over 16,000 calls for service in 2007.

The Department is an all-career department consisting of 199 sworn personnel and 7 civilian personnel. Most of these personnel are assigned to seven fire stations located strategically throughout the community. Fire Administrative, Fire Prevention, and support activities have offices at two other locations inside the city. Operations personnel work a 3-shift schedule which consists of 24 hours on duty and 48 hours off duty. Each shift at each station has a Captain assigned to it who is responsible for the supervision of the shift personnel at that station. Each shift has a Deputy Chief who is responsible for the shift. Lieutenants are assigned to double-company stations in which an engine company and truck company are assigned. The Lieutenants are in charge of a single company, usually the engine in these double-company stations.

MFD currently only conducts firefighter evaluations on probationary firefighters. Evaluations on nonprobationary firefighters were discontinued sometime in the late 1990s. According to retired Police Chief Gary Westphal (personal communications, January 2006), the prior public safety evaluation program did more harm than good. Supervisors would give good marks even to below average officers. Inevitably, these below-average officers would face some type of disciplinary action, and the good evaluations would be used to exonerate the officer upon

disciplinary appeal. Although no official document terminating the evaluation program could be found in the Fire Department archives, the Fire Department's program was most likely discontinued at the same time as the Police Department's program according to retired Fire Chief Jimmy Stark (personal communications, September 2008). The State of Texas *Municipal Civil Service for Firefighters and Police Officers* have strict regulations governing equal pay for all covered employees given the same rank, tenure, and training. The discontinuation of the evaluation program therefore had no effect on the distribution of pay raises for sworn personnel in either department and was not missed by most public safety employees.

Problems have surfaced in the Fire Department due to the lack of an effective firefighter evaluation program. Ironically, one of the problems is the lack of firefighter performance documentation that is needed when disciplinary issues arise in the department. This issue was raised as recently as this spring during an appeal of a demotion of a Driver Engineer. The other problem is the informal and undocumented evaluations that different station officers naturally utilize to give performance feedback to their firefighters. Most of the Department's officers understand the necessity of providing performance-related feedback to their firefighters. The problem is the Department has not given them a standard approach that applies to all firefighters in the Department.

All City of Mesquite employees are governed under a common set of work rules. MFD sworn personnel are also covered by the State of Texas *Municipal Civil Service for Firefighters and Police Officers* regulations (civil service rules). If a conflict exists between the two sets of rules, the MFD must obey the civil service rules. Currently all regular full-time and part-time

City of Mesquite employees are required to have their performance evaluated not less than annually by their supervisor prior to completion of their anniversary date (City of Mesquite, 2007). Fire and police civil service rules allow for semiannual efficiency reports to be completed on firefighters as long as proper procedures are developed by the civil service commission (State of Texas, 2006). There is not a civil service exception to the City of Mesquite requirement that regular full-time and part-time employees receive annual performance evaluations. By discontinuing performance evaluations, the MFD is in violation of the policies and procedures adopted by the elected officials of the City.

Recognizing the problems associated with the MFD's lack of a standardized firefighter performance review program, the author established a committee consisting of supervisory officers, non-supervisory firefighters, and representatives from the City of Mesquite Human Resources Department in the summer of 2007 to start the process of drafting a new firefighter performance review system. Their work is almost complete but has not been reviewed and approved by the MFD or the City of Mesquite Civil Service Commission. The purpose of this research project is to examine existing performance review standards and programs that are used both inside and outside the fire service profession. Programs and their components that are found to be effective will be submitted for utilization in the model performance review program that is currently being developed for the MFD.

Research on this topic supports both the United States Fire Administration (USFA) Operational Objective to appropriately respond in a timely manner to emergent issues and the National Fire Academy (NFA) Executive Leadership Course goal of employing effective

executive-level key processes into the fire service organization. An effective firefighter performance review program is a management process that will help to ensure MFD members are capable and competent to succeed current department leadership in future years.

LITERATURE REVIEW

With so many human resource experts dissatisfied with performance appraisals, why go through the process? In fact it is hard to find people who express satisfaction with their review processes (Bacal, 2004). Dennis Daley explains in *Performance Appraisal in the Public Sector* (1992) that the appraisal process is one of basic human instinct in which appraisal is a constant. Human beings almost instinctively seek to appraise each other to determine friend or foe. While the modern organization does not exist as a state of nature, this basic primary instinct is still present.

Human Resource Standards

During informal workplace conversations it is natural to talk about what others have accomplished or not accomplished in the organization. These informal conversations are most often based on perceptions. These conversations are subjective and unreliable indications of how someone in the organization is accomplishing his or her job. Performance appraisals are used in organizations to redress this perception imbalance by making the official conversations objective and constructive (BNET, 2008). Appraisals are about the communication between the manager and employee for the purpose of looking at past performance, identifying ways to improve performance in the future, and planning for improvement (Bacal, 2004). As a decision making

tool, the performance appraisal is designed to positively structure the assessment process (Daley, 1992).

The term “performance appraisal” has many synonyms. Other terms used are performance review, employee evaluation, performance evaluation, and efficiency reports. James Smither (1998) explained that so much displeasure exists with performance appraisal systems that the very term has been almost censored from the human resource vocabulary and replaced with the moniker “performance management systems.” In the *HR Answer Book* (Smith, Mazin, 2004) the term performance management system is more broadly identified as the overall targeted objectives of the organization that are used in a systematic approach to tracking individual performance. It may seem trivial to debate what terminology is used for the function, but one of the characteristics that must exist for an effective performance review is a clear definition of what one is trying to accomplish (Bacal, 2004). Evaluation (or appraisal) of performance focuses on how good or bad an employee has done in the past. A performance review, while it might have an evaluative component, is more focused on improving performance in the future regardless of the present level. The performance review is a problem solving process that puts the employee and manager on the same side (Bacal, 2004).

Another characteristic of an effective performance review system is to have a clear primary purpose for the system (Bacal, 2004). The purposes for which reviews are conducted are numerous but can be grouped into two broad categories, judgmental and developmental. Judgmental purposes follow the management system of command and control authority. These purposes are explicitly linked to disciplinary actions and extrinsic rewards such as pay and

promotion. Developmental methods focus on adding value to the employee, are humanistic in nature, and operate on an intrinsic motivational level such as providing advanced training to improve employee performance (Daley, 1992). A performance review should answer a number of questions such as the following: What is someone expected to do? Have they done it by the standard that is expected? What reward or development will emerge as a consequence of the review (BNET, 2008)? Although there are legitimate reasons to incorporate both these judgmental and developmental purposes into a review system, it does create a paradox by creating conflict between the manager and employee. When compensation discussions are combined with developmental discussions, the openness and vulnerability that is required for development is undermined, and all the ears can hear is the money (Coens, Jenkins, 2000). Bacal (2004) explains that using the review for judgmental purposes creates a situation in which the manager and the employee are normally at odds with each other. To successfully use the review process for developmental purposes, the employee and the manager must work together to identify weak areas where developmental strategies can improve performance. Bacal (2004) concludes that performance reviews normally work best when not linked to rewards and punishment.

The fastest way to destroy the value of performance reviews is to focus too much on an employee's personality and attitude (Bacal, 2004). Since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, case after case brought before the American courts has led to the mandating of objective personnel practices (Daley, 1992). Objective performance reviews are determined by real

quantitative measurement of performance indicators (Bacal, 2004). Smither (1998) outlines three general best practice elements necessary for a positive performance review system:

1. Precision in the definition and measurement of performance is a key element of effective performance review process.
2. Content and measurement of performance should come from both internal and external customers.
3. The system should contain a process to correct for the effects of situational constraints on employee performance (environmental or process elements beyond the employee's control.)

Smither (1998) recommends utilizing clear precise and agreed-upon employee and manager objectives that are heavily focused on customer-required positive outcomes as the measurement of employee performance. For accuracy and employee fairness the outcome measurement must take into consideration and adjust for situational constraints that are beyond the employee's control. Bacal (2004) found it important that employees not be penalized by performance problems that are beyond their control. Smither (1998) further found that formal consideration of situational constraints enhances the perception of fairness and due process and increases the overall performance for the work unit.

Participation of both employees and supervisors in the development of performance standards introduces a number of positive features including acceptance, legitimacy, upfront voicing of concerns, and the clarification of potential misunderstandings. The net result of which leaves employees with a sense of having a stake in the review process (Daley, 1992). Smither

(1998) found that the perception of process fairness by employees can be enhanced by the collection of employee input through surveys and interviews and by making sure that all employees are treated consistently when seeking input.

Another issue surrounding the perception of employee fairness is the need for constant and timely performance feedback coupled with a “no surprises” philosophy. Bacal (2004) describes performance management as an ongoing communications process between the employee and his or her immediate supervisor. This ongoing communication process helps to prevent small problems from escalating and allows frequent midcourse corrections as needed. A review, positive or negative, should never come as a surprise. The review should be a reinforcement of continual communications between the manager and employee (Smith, Mazin, 2004). In a Washington Post editorial, writer Amy Joyce (March 24, 2002) summed up the agreement expressed by many managers that, “the more they talked to employees along the way, the easier it was when the official review time comes along. Constant feedback was the message.”

Human Resource Systems

There is no perfect way to document performance, as each method has its own strengths and weaknesses (Bacal, 2004). In the *HR Answer Book* (Smith, Mazin, 2004, p. 41) explain, “There is no single correct approach for every business. You must take steps to adopt structures that fit within and work for your organization.” Smith and Mazin (2004) went on to describe a good review format as being a simple one that contains clear standards by which employee performance is measured.

In *Performance Appraisal in the Public Sector* (1992) Dennis Daley lists three main categories of appraisal systems as subjective, interpersonal, and objective. Only the Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scales (BARS) and the Management by Objectives (MBO) appraisal instruments were listed under the objective appraisal system. Daley describes both BARS and the MBO instruments as using the same components with a slightly different focus. The BARS instrument utilizes a series of specific examples of acceptable and unacceptable performance measures that must be chosen by the rater for each job dimension. The MBO instrument requires that both supervisor and employee discuss, negotiate, and agree to performance standards that the employee will be reviewed on at a predetermined later date. Bacal (2004) describes the MBO instrument as “not so simple” in that standards need to be specific and measurable but that the instrument is flexible and tailored to the employee.

The most common review system used by managers is the rating system (Bacal, 2004). This system uses a form that typically has a number of statements describing the various Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSA) that have been predetermined as required for the job. A good starting point for these KSAs is the job description (Smith, Marzin, 2004). For each KSA statement the manager is expected to rate the employee on a scale. According to *The HR Answer Book* (Smith, Mazin, 2004) most businesses provide between two to five tiers of achievement within the scale. According to Daley (2004) the rating review system remains popular, because it gives the illusion of objectivity, and the monetary cost to develop the instrument is low. The quality and usefulness of the rating instruments rank from atrocious to fair (Bacal, 2004).

Approximately five percent of U.S. companies use some type of self-evaluation as part of their performance appraisal process (Smither, 1998). The potential uses of self-appraisal in organizations include: promoting self-awareness, providing data for performance appraisal, fostering acceptance of the performance appraisal process, promoting team member development, and identifying training and development needs. Self-raters tend to look at their behavior more in terms of skills and competence rather than of the level of performance that it represents (Smither, 1998).

Ranking systems are instruments used to evaluate an employee by comparing him or her with all of the other employees in similar positions within an organization (Bacal, 2004). The ranking system compares or assesses employees against each other instead of the specifics of the job to be done (Daley, 1992). In almost all situations, ranking of employees creates a competitive, cut-throat working environment and is a poor idea (Bacal, 2004).

Multisource feedback, or the 360-degree review, is one way to open the appraisal and feedback process to include perspectives of internal and external customers as well as others in the organization who works with the employee (Smither, 1998). The process is also used as a popular means for providing managers with feedback from subordinates. Typically, this feedback is collected using a rating system, so, in sense, the process is a subset of the rating method (Bacal, 2004). It is important to have at least six respondents assessing each employee to preserve anonymity (Smith, Mazin, 2004). The strengths of the process are that it expands the scope of feedback, and it reminds people that it's important to pay attention to the effects their actions have on people other than their boss. The weaknesses are that the recipient can't ask for

additional clarification of feedback or take into account the source of the feedback due to the anonymity of the process (Bacal, 2004). The multisource review process may not work in organizations with a distinct hierarchy of management and reporting structure, or where there is a low level of trust among employees (Smith, Mazin, 2004).

The forced ranking system places employees along a curve of performance by placing them in categories of percentiles for performance. It is “forced,” because there is a requirement that ten percent of employees be given the lowest rating regardless of whether their reviewers would have rated them that way on their own (Smith, Mazin, 2004). Forced distribution of employees compares them with each other rather than the specifics of the job to be done (Daley, 1992).

The narrative review process involves writing a story to describe the performance of an employee. This system is flexible and can be composed of one single general narrative, or it can be structured using predesignated categories (Bacal, 2004). The narrative review is dependant on the supervisor’s ability to articulate employee talents, is labor intensive and subjective in nature. To meet legal requirements, the narrative review system must be used in conjunction with another objective appraisal system (Daley, 1992).

The critical incident review process requires the recording of instances of important events where the employee has performed well or performed less effectively. It is usually used with forms or other methods that provide categories. It is a method that is only effective when the manager directly observes and supervises the employee regularly. It is like a news story; it’s who, what, when, where and why (Bacal, 2004).

The forced choice method of employee review requires the rater to rank statements from the one that best describes to one that least describes the employee. Weights, unknown to the rater, are attached to the statements (ICMR, 2008). Although the statements used in the checklist are often derived from rigorous job analysis, the secrecy employed negates that advantage, and neither the supervisor nor the employee is really appraised as to what performance is desired (Daley, 1992).

To be legally sound, the performance review method chosen should be standardized and uniform for all employees within a job group (Smither, 1998).

The Review Meeting

The performance review meeting is a forum for accomplishing many things, but one of the most important is to provide feedback to the employee about his or her performance (Bacal, 2004). Feedback is integral to the performance appraisal process. The primary means is through the appraisal interview (Daley, 1992). The review meeting should be an interactive process, giving the employee the chance to participate, ask questions, respond to feedback, and offer suggestions (Smith, Mazin, 2004). The atmosphere should be one of respect and courtesy, one in which there are no surprises (Smither, 1998). There are three approaches to the review meeting (Daley, 1992):

1. “Tell and sell” communication is centered on convincing the employee to accept the review given.
2. “Tell and listen” is conducted the same as “tell and sell” but allows the employee to provide input.

3. “Problem solving” is designed to be a true discussion of job performance that is focused on stimulating employee development.

It is important that the interview remains an open process that allows managers to obtain additional information on an individual’s performance, and one in which conclusions are still subject to change (Daley, 1992). Feedback must be job relevant and not reflect any personal biases (Smither, 1998). The performance review is not the place to have the first discussion about unsatisfactory performance. A review, positive or negative, should never come as a surprise. If there have been previous discussions about performance problems, the performance review can appropriately be used to put an employee on a performance improvement plan (Smith, Mazin, 2004). The review meeting should last no more than 90 minutes (Bacal, 2004).

Disagreements during performance reviews are going to happen. It is not possible to eliminate a disagreement. The goal is to manage the disagreement to maximize positive outcomes and minimize negative outcomes. The way the disagreement is handled is critical to whether the employee will continue to work to improve over time. Gaining a positive outcome to a disagreement requires both the employee and manager to be committed to listening to each other and understanding each others’ desires, needs, and perceptions (Bacal, 2004). An appeal process should be available to the person being appraised if he or she should have an objection to the rating or the way in which the review is conducted (BNET, 2008). A formal appeal mechanism is recommended for any legally sound review process (Smither, 1998).

Training Components

The biggest mistake employers make in performance reviews is setting calendars, sending out forms, and then expecting the reviews to be completed effectively. Training is critical to give managers the knowledge necessary to provide meaningful feedback (Smith, Mazin, 2004). Few individuals exhibit a natural talent in the art of providing employee feedback. Supervisor training in providing feedback is essential (Daley, 1992). Providing written instructions and training for raters is recommended for a legally sound appraisal process as well as to ensure fairness to the employee (Smither, 1998).

Supervisor training must provide for an experimental component (Daley, 1992). Training should provide managers with a chance to practice their written and verbal appraisal skills before their first review discussion (Smith, Mazin, 2004). Daley (1992) found there are two types of rater training:

1. Behavioral modeling creates a series of examples for the evaluator of good, poor, and average behavior.
2. In frame-of-reference modeling, the rater is solely given a preferred example.

Smither (1998) explained that rater training should be centered on the following three elements:

1. explanation of the performance dimensions
2. opportunity for raters to practice ratings
3. feedback to trainees concerning the practice ratings

The feedback given to trainees should be both qualitative (review of evidence that supports a given rating) and quantitative (target rating associated with performance examples).

Bacal (2004) examined eight types of rater biases that negatively affect performance review accuracy:

1. The halo effect is the tendency to evaluate someone more positive in all categories, because he or she is high in one or two areas.

2. The devil effect is the opposite of the halo effect, when someone is rated low in all areas, because he or she is low in one or two areas.

3. Recency effect is the tendency to evaluate based on the most recent events rather than on events during the entire evaluation period.

4. The central tendency effect is rating the employee in the middle for all the dimensions rated.

5. Leniency bias is the tendency to evaluate the employee higher than is warranted.

6. Severity bias is the tendency to evaluate the employee lower than is warranted.

7. The opportunity bias is the tendency to credit or blame the employee and ignore factors beyond the control of the employee.

8. False attribution errors occur when employee success and failure are assumed to both be under the complete control of the employee.

Bacal (2004) found the best way to counter the various rater biases is to be aware of their influence and make a conscious effort to minimize their effects. Smither (1998) concluded that training raters to be aware of the various biases and to minimize the effects actually decreased rater accuracy. The best training methods include the use of quantitative and qualitative feedback practice sessions and through improving rater observation skills (Smither, 1998).

Anti-Performance Review

There are organizations that have successfully eliminated the formal, structured review process while maintaining a performance management system. Some have replaced the once-a-year review with informal and formal processes that revolve around providing better and more frequent feedback (Smith, Mazin, 2004). Assuming that the review process can effectively serve several functions such as motivation, pay, feedback, coaching, goal setting, and promotions is flawed. Overloading the review process creates impediments and conflicts in which the pursuit of one purpose undermines another (Coens, Jenkins, 2000).

Total Quality Management (TQM) is a method where both management and employees become involved in the continuous improvement of the production of goods and services. A central principle of TQM is that mistakes may be made by people, but most of them are caused by faulty systems and processes (Hashmi, 2008). Individual improvement initiatives are most effective when they are combined with serious efforts toward improving the work climate, systems, and processes (Coens, Jenkins, 2000). Smither (1998) acknowledged the movement of abolishing appraisal systems but argued that doing so will eliminate the consistency of the process and do little to suppress supervisory biases.

Firefighter Reviews

Most career fire departments require a supervisor to conduct an annual performance evaluation for each assigned employee (NFPA, 2006). The National Fire Protection Association Standard 1021 *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications* provides the minimum job performance requirements necessary to perform the duties of a fire officer. Chapter five of

NFPA 1021 lists the qualifications for Fire Officer II. Section 5.2.2 of the Standard lists the required skill of evaluating the job performance of assigned members, given personnel records and evaluation forms, to ensure that each member's performance is evaluated accurately and per human resource policies and procedures. Section 5.2.3 of NFPA 1021 also requires the fire officer to have the ability to create professional development plans, given the requirements for promotion, for members to ensure they acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to be eligible for promotional examinations (NFPA, 2008).

Each company officer must be well equipped to prepare a firefighter evaluation, but it is the organization that has the duty to provide both training and guidance for newly-promoted company officers on the proper methods of completing them. Company officers should practice their evaluation skills on pseudo employees to help develop their evaluation skill set (Hadfield, 2008).

Characteristics of a well-organized personnel evaluation include timely feedback; clearly stated review criteria; application of standards regardless of gender, race, ethnicity or age; consistency in the application throughout the organization; maintenance of thorough records; properly trained supervisors; and the use of objective criteria (Stowell, 2007).

Some of the more recent performance appraisal and evaluation models deal with critical incidents, otherwise known as the necessary KSAs, to complete defined tasks found in an employee's job description (Crawford, 2003). Donny Roberts writes in *Fire Engineering* (2002), "First, you must make the employee understand what is expected of him. To begin the process, review his job description." To keep the evaluation process as consistent and objective as

possible, an evaluation form should be created for all employees in the same job category. Most organizations tailor their evaluation forms to account for the responsibilities of the job position (Hosea, 2004).

Annual firefighter evaluations consist of the following four-step program (NFPA, 2006):

1. The supervisor completes a standardized evaluation that lists the necessary KSAs appropriate for the subordinate's rank and classified job description.
2. The subordinate is allowed to review and comment on the officer's evaluation.
3. A face-to-face interview is conducted between the supervisor and subordinate to discuss the evaluation. Both the supervisor and the subordinate should understand the results.
4. Specific and measurable goals should be established for the subordinate for the next evaluation period.

Hosea (2004) lists several general evaluation dimensions that apply to most positions and are appropriate in an evaluation:

1. attendance and punctuality
2. attention to detail
3. work quality
4. dependability
5. teamwork
6. initiative (willingness to take on new tasks and generate ideas)
7. communication skills (oral and written)
8. management skills (if applicable)

Hosea (2004) also found that items to consider when designing an evaluation form are simplicity, readability, and cost effectiveness. An effective form should be simple and brief with short objective responses whenever possible.

A subordinate's performance can be more accurately portrayed during a performance review when proper record keeping and documentation are enlisted soon after the supervisor witnesses an act that meets appraisal criteria. The greater the period of time between the event and its documentation, the more inaccurate the documentation of the event will be (Crawford, 2004). Company officers should remember that the personnel evaluation process must be approached as objectively as possible with as much information as they can gather and document (Stowell, 2007). A fire officer should maintain a list of the firefighter's activities by date, along with a brief description of the performance observations. A performance log or T-Account can be used to record the positive events as well as the negative ones. A T-Account is similar to an accounting balance sheet listing debits and credits. Assets are listed on the left side of the T-account and liabilities are listed on the right side (NFPA, 2006).

The fire officer should require all firefighters who have completed probation to identify three work-related goals that they want to achieve during the next evaluation period (NFPA, 2006). An employee performance guide defines the expectations of the supervisor and establishes goals and objectives for the employee, given a specified period of time. The employee performance guide is a planning document used to assist in the management of goals for both the supervisor and employee (Hadfield, 2008). A mid-year performance review session

is a good time for the employee to do a self-evaluation of his or her personal goals and for any adjustments to be made because of changes in the work environment (NFPA, 2006).

The current trend in personnel evaluations is to provide continuous feedback to the employee through informal evaluations (Stowell, 2007). The fire officer should provide continual evaluation and feedback throughout the year. The actual completion of the annual forms should be a formality and come as no surprise to the firefighter (NFPA, 2006).

Local and State Regulations and Rules

The City of Mesquite *General Government Policies and Procedures Manual* outlines the purpose and procedures for conducting performance reviews for all City of Mesquite employees. The performance review is defined as a continuous communication process between the employee and supervisor (City of Mesquite, 2007). The Human Resource Director is responsible for the development of the necessary forms and procedures. Section IV of Chapter 17 Performance Reviews reads, “All regular full-time and part-time classified employees shall have their performance evaluated not less than annually by their immediate supervisor prior to completion of their anniversary date (City of Mesquite, 2007, p. 79).” An appeal of the performance evaluation goes through the normal supervisory chain of command or to the Department Director if the employee so chooses.

All sworn police and fire personnel are covered under the State of Texas civil service rules. These rules have been adopted and amended by the City of Mesquite Civil Service Commission. The adopted civil service rules as amended are published as the *City of Mesquite Fire and Police Civil Service Rules and Regulations* (City of Mesquite, January, 2007). Section

.082 of the adopted civil service rules covers efficiency reports. Section .082 (a) allows the commission to develop proper procedure and rules for semiannual efficiency reports. The rules mandate that each firefighter or police officer can receive a copy of the completed efficiency report. The rules also give each the opportunity to place a written statement concerning the efficiency report in their personnel file.

The current City of Mesquite performance review system was developed in June of 2000 (Mones, personal communications, September 18, 2008). The system is computer based and includes an employee questionnaire, performance review, objective plan, and work improvement plan. The performance review electronic form consists of 5 competencies for all employees:

1. job knowledge
2. team work/ability to work with others
3. customer service
4. flexibility
5. work ethic

Managers and supervisors are also rated on 5 additional competencies:

1. leadership and results orientation
2. coaching, mentoring, and developing employees
3. communications and open mindedness
4. vision, innovation, and risk taking
5. empathy

Each employee is rated in the applicable competencies as exceeds expectations, fully successful, or needs improvement. A comments section is provided for free text comments from the rater, and all competencies are listed and linked to a definitions page with examples of fully successful and exceeds expectations behaviors (City of Mesquite, June 2003).

Employee performance review training for supervisors is initially provided during a *Nuts and Bolts* supervisory training program conducted by the City of Mesquite Human Resources Department (Mones, personal communications, September 18, 2008). Tips for supervisors and managers on proper techniques for reviewing employees are available online as part of the performance review system. Performance review system training information is also available online to help supervisors and managers to navigate the computerized system.

Goal setting is part of the performance management system. The City of Mesquite utilizes the RAM philosophy in setting performance objectives. The acronym RAM stands for reasonable, attainable/achievable, and measurable. Performance objectives are agreed to by both employee and manager (Mones, personal communications, September 18, 2008). The agreed-upon objectives are automatically included in the employee's next performance review.

Literature Review Summary

The literature review on this subject includes current information on performance review components, standards, and philosophies from the human resource industry and the fire service. The review shows best practices by both fire service professionals as well as academics for performing employee performance reviews. These resulting best practices can be used in analyzing and interpreting the results of research specific to this author's research questions.

PROCEDURES

The procedures used in this applied research project were chosen to allow the MFD to research employee performance review systems. The action research method was used to study the following:

1. Identify employee performance review systems, standards, and components in use from the human resource industry that can be utilized in the fire service setting.
2. Review the fire service industry to determine the type of performance review programs currently used for firefighter reviews.
3. Survey area departments to determine details of the systems currently being used to measure firefighter performance as well as how effective each department perceives its review process to be.
4. Review the criteria currently used by the City of Mesquite for employee performance reviews.

Literature Review

A literature review was initiated in May 2008 at the National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center (LRC). This literary review continued after returning to Mesquite at the Mesquite Public Library, where books relating to the topic of employee performance reviews in the human resource industry were checked out or requested through interlibrary loans from other institutions. All literature was reviewed for relevancy to the research problem and research questions.

The Internet was used to search for online articles and publications that related to employee performance reviews both inside and outside the fire service industry. Applicable NFPA standards were accessed through the Internet using the MFD NFPA Codes Online subscription.

Survey

An Internet-based survey was conducted to determine details of performance reviews conducted by fire departments inside the State of Texas. The survey consisted of 25 questions used to determine firefighter review processes as well as pertinent demographic data (Appendix B). This survey was constructed and completed using the North Central Texas Council of Government's (NCTCOG) Internet-based survey tool. The City of Mesquite is a member of the NCTCOG, and there was no monetary charge to the author to utilize the survey tool. The NCTCOG is located at 624 Six Flags Drive, Arlington, Texas.

A cover e-mail containing an electronic link to the survey was sent out to the 764 members of the Texas Fire Chiefs Association (TFCA) on August 27, 2008 (Appendix A). Membership in the TFCA is limited to the fire chief, second in command in a fire department, retired fire chiefs, people and organizations whose mission includes fire prevention and protection, and organizations that support the mission of the TFCA. The cover e-mail also requested that copies of department performance reviews and procedures be e-mailed or faxed to the author. The e-mail was sent using the contact center tool located on the TFCA website. This tool allows members who log into the site the ability to send e-mails to selected TFCA members or all members of the TFCA.

A survey completion deadline date of September 16, 2008, was communicated to TFCA members in the cover e-mail. A reminder of the survey was included in the September 5, 2008, TFCA Friday Report that is electronically delivered to all TFCA members. The survey was designed to allow only a single response from each accessed computer. This was done as a quality control measure by the author to try and limit TFCA members from responding more than once to the survey. The survey was also set up so that TFCA members could respond to the survey anonymously. This was done to increase participation and so that members could be honest in their answers without fearing reprisal.

The survey was promptly closed at 02:35 p.m. on September 16, 2008. A total of 188 TFCA members completed the survey (24.6%) and 19 members e-mailed or faxed the requested performance review instruments (2.5%). A report of all survey responses was printed, and the raw data downloaded to the author's office computer. The raw data was imported into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet so that the data could be manipulated and analyzed by the author.

Interview

An interview with Mr. George Mones, Director of Human Resources City of Mesquite, and Mr. Tony Yardley, Manager of Human Resources, City of Mesquite, was conducted on September 18, 2008. The interview was conducted in Mr. Mones's office at 1515 N. Galloway Avenue, Mesquite, Texas. The interview began at approximately 02:30 p.m. and concluded at 03:35 p.m. The intent of the interview was to address the employee performance review criteria currently being used by the City of Mesquite. A dummy performance review was created in the

performance management system at the request of the author. This was done to allow study of the performance review for content and features of the system.

Assumptions and Limitations

The researcher acknowledges that some limitations exist in the survey method chosen and the instrument that was used. Assumptions were made that the chief of the department or a knowledgeable department member completed the survey instrument. In some cases the respondent may not have been a member of a fire department. The selection of the TFCA membership for the survey was determined by time and resource limitations as well as a representative membership base that allowed a large statewide sample to be obtained.

RESULTS

The results of the literature review, survey instrument, and interview with the City of Mesquite Human Resource Director were used and applied to the appropriate research questions.

Research Question 1. What types of employee performance review systems, standards, and components are in use and can be identified from the human resource industry?

Employee Review Systems

There is no perfect way to document performance, as each method has its own strengths and weaknesses (Bacal, 2004). Smith and Mazin (2004) describe a good review format as being a simple one that contains clear standards. To be legally sound, the performance review method chosen should be standardized and uniform for all employees within a job group (Smither, 1998).

Types of employee review systems are as follows:

1. MBO- employee rated by supervisor on mutually agreed upon performance standards

2. BARS- a series of acceptable/unacceptable performance examples selected for each job dimension that is being rated
3. Rating system- statements that describe various job-specific KSAs in which the employee is rated on a numeric or descriptive scale
4. Self evaluation- an instrument in which the employees rate themselves
5. Ranking system- employees in similar positions compared with each other and ranked according to performance
6. Multisource feedback- employee rated by multiple anonymous coworkers and sometimes customers
7. Forced ranking system- the employee is ranked along a bell curve in which 10 percent of employees are forced-ranked at the lower end of the curve
8. Narrative- employee rated by a written description of job performance
9. Critical incident- the recording of individual important events where the employee has performed well or performed less effectively
10. Forced choice- rater ranks employee by selecting statements that best describe and least describe the employee

Human Resource Industry Standards

As a decision making tool, the performance appraisal is designed to positively structure the employee assessment process. The purposes for which reviews are conducted are numerous but can be grouped into two broad categories, judgmental and developmental. Judgmental purposes are explicitly linked to disciplinary actions and extrinsic rewards such as pay and

promotion. Developmental methods focus on adding value to the employee (Daley, 1992).

There are legitimate reasons to incorporate both judgmental and developmental purposes into a review system, but doing so creates conflict between the manager and the employee (Coens, Jenkins, 2000). Ideally, the employee review should be focused on improving employee performance in the future and works best when not linked to rewards and punishment (Bacal, 2004).

Since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, case after case brought before the American courts has led to the mandating of objective personnel practices (Daley, 1992). Objective performance reviews are determined by real quantitative measurement of performance indicators (Bacal, 2004). Smither (1998) recommends utilizing clear precise and agreed-upon employee and manager objectives that are heavily focused on customer required positive outcomes as the measurement of employee performance.

Participation of both employees and supervisors in the development of performance standards can both improve the standards and give the employees a stake in the process (Daley, 1992). Smither (1998) found that employee perception of review fairness was enhanced by utilizing employee input in the development process.

Feedback is integral to the performance appraisal process (Daley, 1992). Feedback must be job relevant and not reflect any personal biases (Smither, 1992). The review meeting should be an interactive process, giving the employee the chance to participate, ask questions, respond to feedback, and offer suggestions (Smith, Mazin, 2004). There should be no surprises

to the employee during the review meeting. The review should be a reinforcement of continual communications between the manager and employee (Smith, Mazin, 2004).

Disagreements during performance reviews are going to happen. An appeal process should be available to the person being appraised if he or she should have an objection to the rating or the way in which the review is conducted (BNET, 2008). A formal appeal mechanism is recommended for any legally sound review process (Smither, 1998).

Training Component

Providing written instructions and training for raters is recommended for a legally sound appraisal process as well as to ensure fairness to the employee (Smither, 1998). Supervisor training must provide for an experimental component (Daley, 1992). Training should provide managers with a chance to practice their written and verbal appraised skills before their first review discussion (Smith, Mazin, 2004). Smither (1998) explained that rater training should be centered on (a) the explanation of the performance dimensions, (b) an opportunity for raters to practice ratings, and (c) feedback to trainees concerning the practice ratings. The feedback given to trainees should be both qualitative (review of evidence that supports a given rating) and quantitative (target rating associated with performance examples).

Bacal (2004) found the best way to counter the various rater biases is to be aware of their influence and make a conscious effort to minimize their effects. Smither (1998) concluded that training raters to be aware of the various biases and to minimize the effects actually decreased rater accuracy. The best training methods include the use of quantitative and

qualitative feedback practice sessions and through improving rater observation skills (Smither, 1998).

Research Question 2. What types of firefighter performance review systems are in place in the fire service industry?

Annual firefighter evaluations should consist of the following four-step program (NFPA, 2006):

1. The supervisor completes a standardized evaluation that lists the necessary KSAs appropriate for the subordinate's rank and classified job description.
2. The subordinate is allowed to review and comment on the officer's evaluation.
3. A face-to-face interview is conducted between the supervisor and subordinate to discuss the evaluation. Both the supervisor and the subordinate should understand the results.
4. Specific and measurable goals should be established for the subordinate for the next evaluation period.

Recent performance appraisal and evaluation models deal with critical incidents otherwise known as the necessary KSAs to complete defined tasks found in an employee's job description (Crawford, 2003). Most organizations tailor their evaluation forms to account for the responsibilities of the job position, but several general evaluation dimensions apply to most positions and are appropriate in an evaluation: (a) attendance and punctuality, (b) attention to detail, (c) work quality, (d) dependability, (e) teamwork, (f) initiative, (e) communication skills, and, if appropriate, (f) management skills (Hosea, 2004). Donny Roberts writes in *Fire Engineering* (2002), "First, you must make the employee understand what is expected of him.

To begin the process, review his job description.” To keep the evaluation process as consistent and objective as possible, an evaluation form should be created for all employees in the same job category.

A well-organized personnel evaluation includes timely feedback; clearly stated review criteria; application of standards regardless of gender, race, ethnicity or age; consistency in the application throughout the organization; maintenance of thorough records; properly trained supervisors; and the use of objective criteria. Company officers should remember that the personnel evaluation process must be approached as objectively as possible with as much information as they can gather and document (Stowell, 2007). A subordinate’s performance can be more accurately portrayed during a performance review when proper record keeping and documentation are enlisted soon after the supervisor witnesses an act that meets appraisal criteria. The greater the period of time between the event and its documentation, the more inaccurate the documentation of the event will be (Crawford, 2004).

The fire officer should require all firefighters who have completed probation to identify three work-related goals that they want to achieve during the next evaluation period. A midyear performance review session is a good time for the employee to do a self-evaluation of his or her personal goals and for any adjustments to be made because of changes in the work environment (NFPA, 2006).

Research Question 3. How and when is firefighter performance measured in departments located inside the State of Texas, and how effective are those reviews perceived by the departments performing them?

An electronic link to firefighter performance review survey was e-mailed to 764 members of the TFCA. Members were asked to fill out the 25-question survey and submit any review instruments or procedures dealing with firefighter performance reviews back to the author. Of the original 764 members contacted, 188 members completed the survey (24.6%), and 21 members (2.7%) representing 19 departments returned the requested firefighter review instruments. Total responses to each survey question can be found in Appendix B.

Survey questions one through five include questions regarding demographics, size, state civil service, and collective bargaining status. Of the 188 returned surveys, 116 (61.7%) respondents worked for paid departments, 57 (30.3%) respondents were combination paid/volunteer, and 15 (7.9%) respondents were from volunteer departments. The distributions of population served by the responding departments are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Population Served

Population Served	Number of Responding Departments	Percentage of Total
10,000 and below	31	17%
10,000- 50,000	70	37%
50,001- 100,000	37	20%
100,001-250,000	29	15%
250,001-500,000	9	5%
Over 500,000	12	6%

Survey question number three asked for the approximate number of fire personnel in the respondent’s department. The average number for the 188 respondents was 191 fire personnel.

The numbers ranged from a low of 1 to a high of 4,000 fire personnel. Seven respondents (3.7%) were members of departments with 1,000 members or more.

Question number four asked respondents if they were members of a department that operated under Texas Local Government Code Chapter 143 *Municipal Civil Service for Firefighters and Police Officers*. Of the 188 respondents to this question, 70 (37%) were covered under the civil service code, and 118 (63%) were not.

Survey question five asked members if they worked for departments covered under a collective bargaining or meet and confer labor agreement. Of the 188 responses, 31 (16%) were covered under one of the labor agreements listed, and 157 (84%) were not.

Survey questions 6 through 17 were related to the department's performance review process. Question number six asked if the member's department conducted performance reviews. Out of a total of 179 respondents who answered the question, 135 (75%) answered "yes," and 31 (25%) answered "no." Respondents that answered "no" to question 6 were directed to skip to question number 25.

Question number seven asked respondents at what frequency the reviews are conducted. Out of 134 who answered the question, 2 (1%) do them quarterly, 33 (25%) do them semiannually, 90 (67%) do them annually, and 9 (7%) indicated another frequency not listed.

Survey question number eight asked if there was an external requirement that performance reviews must be conducted. Out of 142 responses, 80 (56%) answered "yes," and 62 (44%) answered "no." Question number nine was a follow-up question to question eight and asked who or what requires the department to conduct the reviews. Out of 88 responses, 53

(61%) indicated that it was a county, municipal, or fire district requirement; 17 (19%) indicated that it was a civil service requirement; 1 (1%) responded that it was required by a collective bargaining agreement; and 17 (19%) indicated some other entity required it.

Question number 10 asked if firefighter pay was tied to the performance review. Out of the 140 responses to the question, 67 (48%) indicated that it was, and 73 (52%) answered that firefighter pay was not tied to the performance review.

Survey question 11 asked if the results of firefighter performance reviews were used in the promotion process. Out of 139 responses to the question, 73 (53%) indicated they were used in the promotion process, with 66 (47%) indicating they were not.

Question number 12 asked if the results of the performance reviews were used to help determine employee education and training needs. Out of 136 responses, 73(53%) indicated that they were, and 65 (47%) indicated there were not.

Question number 13 asked if the performance review process is covered in the department's collective bargaining or meet and confer contract. Out of 54 respondents, only 1 (2%) indicated that the employee performance review process was covered in their labor contract.

Survey question number 14 asked who in the department is responsible for conducting the performance review on firefighters. Out of 133 responses to the question, 119 (90%) indicate that the direct supervisor is responsible for conducting the performance review. The multisource method was used in one department, and two departments utilized a committee to perform individual performance reviews.

Question number 15 asked the frequency of training given to performance review raters. Out of 134 respondents, 31 (23%) provided no performance review training to raters. The other 103 respondents to question 15 indicated various amounts of initial and refresher training given to performance review raters.

Question number 16 asked if a member is allowed to put a response to the performance review into the review record. Question 17 asked if the performance review record was permanently filed in the member’s personnel file. Out of 136 responses to both questions, 131 (96%) of respondents’ departments allow members’ responses to be put into the record, and 132 (97%) of respondents’ departments permanently file the members’ performance reviews into their personnel or department file.

Survey question numbers 18 through 22 asked respondents about the performance review instruments in use in their departments. Question number 18 asked what type(s) of performance review instrument(s) is/are in use in respondents’ departments. The question allowed more than one response to allow for instruments that use multiple types. The types of instruments used are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Types of Performance Review Instruments in Use

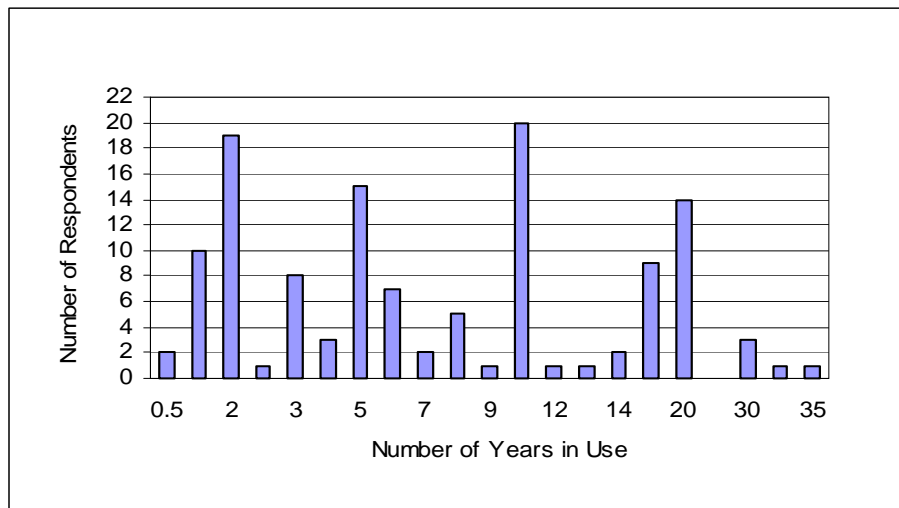
Type of Instrument	Response Total	Percent of Respondents Using
Rating System	104	79%
Ranking System	10	8%
MBO	39	30%
Multi Source (360 degree)	5	4%

Self Assessment	29	22%
Narrative	11	8%
Other	6	5%

Of the 19 rating instruments forwarded to the author as part of this survey 19 (100%) utilized a rating component, 8 (42%) included employee objectives (MBO), 7 (37%) contained a narrative section, and 2 (11%) utilized an employee self-assessment.

Survey question number 19 asked respondents how long the current review instrument had been in use in their department. This question was answered by 134 respondents. The results are displayed in figure 1.

Figure 1. Performance Review Instrument Age



Survey question number 20 asked respondents how their department acquired its current performance review instrument. Out of 132 respondents, 52 (39%) responded that their department developed the instrument, 50 (38%) responded that the human resources department

had prescribed the instrument, 5 (4%) acquired the instrument from another department, and 4 (3%) purchased the current instrument.

Survey question numbers 21 and 22 dealt with employee participation in the performance review instrument development. Question number 21 asked if members of the department were involved in the process. Out of 95 responses, 48 (51%) indicated “yes.” Question 22 asked if a labor representative was involved in the development of the review instrument. Out of 92 responses, 72 (78%) indicated that labor was not a part of the process.

Question number 23 asked respondents if they considered the time and effort put into the performance review process worth it. Out of 131 responses, 100 (76%) indicated that the organization did benefit from the process. Question number 24 asked respondents who answered “no” to question 23 the reason they did not consider the review process beneficial. Out of the 31 respondents, 9 (29%) used the term “too subjective” in their answer.

Survey question number 25 was used for general comments. Comments were left by 67 out of the 188 respondents to the survey (36%). Out of the 67 respondents who left comments, 24 (36%) were either updating or revamping their current survey instrument. This number represents 13% of the total respondents to the survey.

Research Question 4. What performance review criteria and processes are in use currently for general government employees inside the City of Mesquite?

The employee performance review process is outlined in chapter 7 of the *City of Mesquite General Government Policies and Procedures Manual*. A performance review is required annually for all regular full-time and part-time classified employees. Supervisor

training for the performance review process is the responsibility of the City of Mesquite Human Resources Department (City of Mesquite, 2007).

Performance review criteria used for all general government employees (employees not covered under the public safety civil service rules) was developed in 2000 by a City task force that consisted of six employees and six managers. The task force utilized a consultant hired by the Human Resources Department to inject best practices and to keep the task force on track. The developmental process took three to four months with another one to two months spent by the Information Technology Department to computerize the process (George Mones, personal communications, September 18, 2008). The performance review process consists of a self- assessment form titled *Employee Development Questionnaire*, performance review rating instrument, MBO type objective plan, and a work improvement planning tool.

The Employee Development Questionnaire is given to the employee to review and complete approximately two weeks before the actual performance review (City of Mesquite, 2003). The employee to be reviewed is tasked with completing the form from his/her perspective. The questionnaire consists of the following:

1. coworkers who the employee wants the supervisor to speak with for input about the employees' job performance
2. employee strengths, accomplishments, and skills
3. things that the employer can do to improve the employee's effectiveness, service to customers (internal and external)
4. things that the employee can do to improve his/her performance

The questionnaire is returned to the reviewing supervisor before the performance review rating instrument is completed.

The MBO type objective plan is meant to be completed by both the supervisor and employee at the beginning of a rating period. The objective plan consists of three objectives which can be categorized as “required” or “developmental.” During any rating period at least one objective must be categorized as “required” (City of Mesquite, 2003). Once the objectives are agreed upon by the employee and supervisor, they are saved, and a six-month midyear objective review is scheduled. This review is utilized to check on the employee’s progress in achieving the stated goals and to revise as necessary. It is estimated that only about 50% of supervisors in the City of Mesquite utilize this part of the review (Tony Yardley, personal communications, September 18, 2008). The objective plan is not required to be utilized for the employee performance review to be accepted by the City.

The performance review rating instrument consists of a job description review, rating of employee competencies, rating of employee objectives (only when objective plan is completed prior to review period), rating of manager supervisor competencies (if applicable), and an overall narrative section for the reviewer’s comments. The overall narrative section is in addition to the comment section provided for each employee competency. The five employee competencies used for all employees are as follows:

1. job knowledge
2. team work/ability to work with others
3. customer service

4. flexibility
5. work ethic

The five supervisor/manager competencies include the following:

1. leadership and results orientation
2. coaching, mentoring, and developing employees
3. communications and open mindedness
4. vision, innovation, and risk taking
5. empathy

All employee and supervisor competencies were selected by the employee review task force in 2000. Definitions and examples of each competency are provided via a computer system hyperlink. Tony Yardley described most of the employee competencies as being objective with the exception of work ethic. The supervisor/manager competencies were described as being less objective (personal communications, September 18, 2008).

Each general government employee objective and applicable competencies are rated on a descriptive scale as (a) exceeds expectations, (b) fully successful, or (c) needs improvement. A general government employee must rate at least fully successful in all required objectives and competencies to be eligible for a merit pay increase. Tony Yardley expressed concern about the accuracy of the employee reviews due to merit pay being tied into the process. He feels that some supervisors rate employees higher to keep pay raises from being withheld (personal communications, September 18, 2008).

Once the performance review has been completed by the supervisor, a performance review meeting is scheduled between the employee and supervisor. The purpose of this meeting is for the supervisor to provide feedback to the employee and for new performance objectives to be established for the next review period. If an employee's performance does not meet expectations, a work improvement plan is completed, and a follow-up review is scheduled. The employee and supervisor must both electronically acknowledge the review upon completion of the process. A performance review appeal process is available for employees who believe that their evaluation is not representative of their actual performance (City of Mesquite, 2007).

DISCUSSION

Study and research of the topic of employee performance reviews from both human resource and fire industry perspectives show that best practices do exist, but many variables must be considered that are organizationally dependent. Survey results from TFCA members show that many of the human resource and fire industry best practices are followed in many Texas fire departments but are carried out for different purposes in many different ways. Research shows that the City of Mesquite followed most human resource industry best practices in 2000 when the current employee performance management system was developed. Reviewing and comparing the results from all three perspectives should clarify the necessary components for an effective MFD firefighter performance review process.

The State of Texas firefighter and police officer civil service rules allow for firefighter semiannual efficiency reports, but civil service law also mandates that all firefighters in the same classification are entitled to the same base pay (City of Mesquite, 2007). This equal pay

requirement does not allow for a merit pay system to be incorporated into a firefighter performance review program for the MFD. Although different from general government employees, this restriction should alleviate concerns that the City of Mesquite Human Resource Department has about the accuracy of employee reviews being negatively affected by merit pay considerations (Yardley, personal communications, September 18, 2008). Results of the TFCA survey show that although 75% of surveyed respondents work for departments that conduct firefighter performance reviews, less than half of them connect pay with the review process. Ideally, the employee review should be focused on improving employee performance in the future and works best when not linked to rewards and punishment (Bacal, 2004). Taking compensation away from the process allows more focus on employee development, and this is reflected in the TFCA survey with 53% of departments represented utilizing performance review results to help determine firefighter education and training needs.

In the development of the current City of Mesquite general government employee performance review instrument, six supervisors and six nonsupervisors were used to determine the review format and employee competencies (Mones, personal communications, September 18, 2008). Participation of both employees and supervisors in the development of performance standards was found by both Daley (1992) and Smither (1998) to improve standards and promote employee perception of review fairness. Survey results from the TFCA respondents showed that among the departments represented, 51% utilized employee participation in the review process development.

Research shows that there is no perfect way to document performance (Bacal, 2004), but that a good review format is a simple one that contains clear standards (Smith, Mazin, 2004). Review criteria must be objective and job related. Results from the TFCA survey found that subjective review criterion was a primary reason why some respondents found the review process not very beneficial in their departments. Hosea (2004) found that most organizations tailor their evaluation forms to account for the responsibilities of the job position. Roberts (2002) recommends starting the review process by reviewing the employee's job description. General performance criteria based on (a) attendance and punctuality, (b) attention to detail, (c) work quality, (d) dependability, (e) teamwork, (f) initiative, (e) communication skills, and, if appropriate, (f) management skills apply to most positions and are appropriate in most evaluations (Hosea, 2002).

For the performance review process to be legally sound, the review method chosen should be standardized and uniform for all employees within a job group (Smither, 1998). Results from the TFCA survey show that there are various types of survey instruments used in the Texas fire service. Of the 19 firefighter review instruments submitted to the author, 15 utilized multiple types of review systems in their process. Survey results showed the most popular review instrument being utilized is the rating system with 79% of the departments represented using it. The rating system is the most commonly used review system in practice, and its usefulness ranks fair at best (Bacal, 2004). The City of Mesquite currently uses the rating system for the five employee and five manager/supervisor competencies.

The MBO instrument was the next most popular instrument in use at 30% of the departments responding. The MBO instrument is categorized as an objective instrument (Daley, 1992) that is tailored to the employee (Bacal, 2004). Smither (1998) recommends utilizing clear precise and agreed-upon employee and manager objectives that are heavily focused on customer required positive outcomes as the measurement of employee performance. The City of Mesquite utilizes the MBO instrument as one of the three instruments in its employee review process. It is unfortunate that only approximately 50% of managers inside the City use the MBO section of the performance appraisal, since this is the most objective and developmental part of the City of Mesquite's performance review process (Yardley, personal communications, September 18, 2008). The lack of its use is most likely due to the amount of preparation that is required to agree upon and write goals that are specific and measurable (Bacal, 2004).

Survey results show the self-assessment instrument to be ranked number 3 in use by TFCA member departments with a 22% usage. One identified use of the self-assessment instrument is for providing data for the performance appraisal (Smithe, 1998). This appears to be the use of the instrument by the City of Mesquite, since it is completed by the employee approximately two weeks before the actual performance review is completed (City of Mesquite, 2003).

A well-organized personnel evaluation includes timely feedback (Stowell, 2007). Not only does feedback need to be timely, but it needs to be recorded for future reference to prepare for an employee review meeting. A fire officer should maintain a list of the firefighter's activities by date, along with a brief description of the performance observations (NFPA, 2006).

Lack of documentation of critical events occurring during the entire review could cause the employee to be reviewed with a recency bias (Bacal, 2004).

The review meeting should be an interactive process, giving the employee the chance to participate, ask questions, respond to feedback, and offer suggestions. There should be no surprises to the employee during the review meeting (Smith, Mazin, 2004). The City of Mesquite adheres to the rule of “no surprises.” An employee cannot be rated “needs improvement” in any competency unless the employee has been counseled about the deficiency beforehand and given a chance to improve prior to the review meeting (Mones, personal communication, September 18, 2004).

Of the 135 respondents to the TFCA survey requiring firefighter performance reviews, 23% do not conduct formal training for the supervisors/managers required to perform the reviews. Providing written instructions and training for raters is recommended for a legally sound appraisal process as well as to ensure fairness to the employee. Rater training should be centered on (a) the explanation of the performance dimensions, (b) an opportunity for raters to practice ratings and (c) feedback to trainees concerning the practice ratings (Smither, 1998). There is a disagreement regarding the training of reviewers to avoid the various rater biases. Smither (1998) concluded that training raters to be aware of the various biases and to minimize the effects actually decreased rater accuracy. Bacal (2004) found the best way to counter the various rater biases is to be aware of their influence and make a conscious effort to minimize their effects. The City of Mesquite does train reviewers in the various rater biases (Mones, personal communications, September 18, 2008). The City does not provide an opportunity for

raters to practice their rating skills via rating scenarios. It is the opinion of the author that the absence of rating scenarios in the City's training program is a missed opportunity for both the trainee in fine tuning his or her skills and the City as a feedback mechanism on the effectiveness of the training program.

The City of Mesquite has followed most human resource industry best practices in the development of its general government employee review system. The current system also follows most practices found in the fire service industry and of many of the fire departments in the State of Texas. Results from this research shows several areas in which the City of Mesquite can make improvements in its employee review program. Action can be taken to include these improvements in a new MFD review program that will make the program less of a judgmental process and more of a firefighter developmental program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The MFD task force assigned to develop a specific Fire Department employee performance review instrument included supervisory and nonsupervisory firefighters as well as representatives from the City of Mesquite Human Resources Department. The task force was assigned to develop an instrument similar to the general government employee review system but tailored to the fire service and the MFD specifically. The draft firefighter review instrument is currently undergoing Fire Department review.

MFD should develop a standard operating procedure that outlines a firefighter performance review program similar to the current electronic City of Mesquite general government employee review program (Appendix C). The new program should include a

method for fire officers to document firefighter performance over the entire annual review period. The new firefighter performance review program should require that all review instruments, including the MBO section, be completed before the review is accepted. The firefighter review program should include the required appeals processes found in both the *City of Mesquite General Government Policies and Procedures Manual* and the *City of Mesquite Fire and Police Civil Service Rules and Regulations*.

The current draft firefighter performance review instrument should be reviewed and updated as necessary to ensure that it is in compliance with best practices found in both the human resource industry and fire service (Appendix D). The new instrument should include a section that identifies the employee's future training and educational interests. This section can be utilized by the Training Division to identify training opportunities that appeal to an individual or group of firefighters. The instrument should also include a section that identifies the firefighter's future career aspirations. This section can be used by chief officers as a tool to help match firefighters with Department positions that fit their career goals.

The new firefighter performance review program will need to be presented to the City of Mesquite Fire and Police Civil Service Board. This process will give management a public forum to discuss and demonstrate the new program and the firefighters an additional opportunity to comment on it. Concerns and recommendations can be addressed by the board before approval of the program.

The Fire Department Training Division should work with the Human Resources Department to modify the current supervisor and manager performance review training program

to include practice scenarios. The scenarios will give the rater trainees feedback on the proper use of the instrument. The training of all MFD officers on the use of the new performance program must be completed before the program can be instituted.

Benefits of the program include Department standardization of firefighter reviews that insure feedback and career development goals. The new program will give the Training Division information on what types of education and training is desired within the Department and will give chief officers a tool to help match personnel with Department positions. In the event of poor performance, the new program will give fire officers the necessary tools to document deficiencies and work with firefighters for improvement.

MFD must constantly research and implement new or revised best practices as they relate to employee performance measurements. Practices listed in this ARP represent the most up-to-date at the time it was written. Researchers reading this project are encouraged to review any new human resource trends covering the subject matter in the future.

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Appendix A
Survey Cover Letter

TFCA Members:

My name is Mark Kerby, and I am the Fire Chief of the Mesquite Fire Department in Mesquite, Texas. I am currently wrapping up my final year in the Executive Fire Officer Program (EFO) at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland. I am currently working on my last applied research project, and I am conducting an online survey of Texas fire departments regarding firefighter performance reviews.

I am asking that you or someone on your staff complete a short 25-question online survey titled "Firefighter Performance Reviews." If your department does not do firefighter performance reviews, I still need your participation (you only have 6 questions.) If at all possible, I would also like a copy of any firefighter performance review instruments and/or standard procedures that your department uses to conduct such reviews. The information gathered for this applied research project will be combined with information from departments across Texas, and your department will not be identified by name.

I realize that everyone's time is limited and that surveys are not always popular. I have purposely tried to make the survey instrument as convenient and short as possible, and your participation will be greatly appreciated. It is important that the survey be completed before September 16, 2008. Copies of firefighter performance reviews and/or standard procedures used to conduct performance reviews can be e-mailed to me at mkerby@mesquitefire.org or faxed to 972-329-8315. The link to the online survey is:

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Mark Kerby
Fire Chief
Mesquite Fire Department
1515 N. Galloway Ave.
Mesquite, TX 75149
972-216-6304

Appendix B
Performance Review Survey

Firefighter Performance Reviews

Department Characteristics

1. Please indicate which of the following best describes your department.

- Fully Paid 116
- Volunteer 15
- Combination 57

2. What is the approximate population of the area that your department serves?

- 10,000 and below 31
- 10,001 – 50,000 70
- 50,001 – 100,000 37
- 100,001 – 250,000 29
- 250,001 – 500,000 9
- Over 500,000 12

3. What is the approximate number of fire personnel in your department?

Average was 190.5

4. Is your department operated under Texas Local Government Code Chapter 143 “Municipal Civil Service for Firefighters and Police Officers”?

- Yes 70 No 118

5. Does your department work under a collective bargaining contract or a meet and confer agreement?

- Yes 31 No 157

Performance Review Process

6. Does your department conduct performance reviews on each of your members?

- Yes 135 No 44

7. If performance reviews are done, at what frequency are they conducted?

- Monthly 0
 Quarterly 2
 Semi-Annual 33
 Annually 90
 Other. Please specify 9

8. Is there an external requirement that performance reviews must be conducted on your members? External is defined as beyond your department's control. Examples: City policy, civil service requirement, etc.

- Yes 80 No 62

9. If you answered yes to questions #8, who or what is requiring the review process? Check all that apply.

- County, Municipal, or District Rule 53
 Civil Service Rule 17
 Required by Collective Bargaining Contract 1
 Required as a result of Meet and Confer agreement 0
 Other. Please specify. 17

10. Is firefighter pay tied to the performance review process?

- Yes 67 No 73

11. Are performance review results used in promotion decisions in your department?

- Yes 73 No 66

12. Are your department's performance review results used to help determine employee education and training needs?

- Yes 73 No 65

13. If your department is under a collective bargaining contract or meet and confer agreement, does either the contract or agreement spell out how the review process is conducted?

- Yes 1 No 55

14. Who is responsible for conducting member performance reviews in your department?

119 (90%) indicated that the direct supervisor is responsible

15. What is the frequency of performance review training given to reviewers?

- Initial 54
 Annual refresher 38
 Bi-Annual refresher 6
 None 31
 Other. Please specify. 23

16. Does your performance review process allow the member being reviewed to put his/her comments into the review record?

Yes 131 No 5

17. Once the performance review is completed, is it permanently filed in the member's personnel or department file?

Yes 132 No 4

Performance Review Instrument

18. What type(s) of performance review instrument(s) is/are in use in your department? If multiple types are used or if your instrument consists of multiple types, check all that apply.

- Rate (numerical, descriptive, or graphic scale) 104
- Rank (member ranked against other members) 10
- MBO (objectives set and reviewed for each member) 39
- 360 degree (multiple rates are used to rate members) 5
- Self-Assessment by Member 29
- Essay/Narrative (blank sheet of paper) 11
- Other. Please specify. 6

19. How long has your current performance review instrument been in use in your department?

Average 8.76 years

20. Did your department develop your current review instrument or was it purchased or acquired from your human resources department?

- Department developed 52
- Acquired from another department 5
- Purchased 4
- H.R. prescribed 50
- Other. Please specify 21

21. If your performance instrument was developed by your department, was a representation of the department members involved in the development? Members from different ranks and responsibilities assigned to the rank.

- Yes 48
- No 47

22. If your department developed its own review instrument, was a union/association representative involved in the process? Assigned to the process specifically as a union/association representative.

- Yes 20
- No 72

23. Do you consider the time and effort put into the performance review process worth it? Do your members and organization benefit from the review process?

- Yes 100
- No 31

24. If "no," why?

9 out of 31 listed "too subjective"

25. General comments?

Appendix C
MESQUITE FIRE DEPARTMENT

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

Subject: Employee Performance Reviews

Number: 103.20

Replaces: New

Date of Issue: 11/06/2008

Effective Date: 01/01/2009

I. Purpose

The purpose of the annual performance review is to enhance the performance and productivity of each member and to identify individual training needs and career goals. This is accomplished through oral and written feedback from supervisors to employees and through agreed upon goals/objectives that are both achievable and measurable.

II. Responsibilities

A formal, written performance review will be conducted for each nonprobationary member by his/her supervising officer prior to the individual’s anniversary date with the department. If an employee has not worked for an officer for at least 90 days before the due date of the review, the member’s prior supervising officer shall complete the review. If a member is attending outside training during the review period, the review will be delayed until completion of the training activity. Each supervising officer is responsible for documenting assigned members’ critical incidents throughout the performance period.

The training division will be responsible for scheduling all new supervisors for performance review training through the Human Resources Department. Performance review training is mandatory, and will be completed before new supervisors are tasked with the review process. The training division will meet once per year with Human Resources to review the training program and to suggest additions or changes to the program.

The performance review program is computer based. Access to the City’s e-mail system is essential for employee review notifications. The Human Resources Department is tasked with initiation of the employee review notification. This notification is generated and e-mailed to the Fire Department approximately 30 days prior to the deadline for completion. The Operations Assistant Chief will ensure that all notifications are routed to the proper Deputy Chief. Each Deputy Chief will ensure that the review notification is routed to the proper supervisory officer.

III. Definitions

Critical Incidents- Supervisor-observed instances of important job related events where an employee performs well or less effectively.

Employee performance review- The process in which supervising officers review the job performance of assigned members, give and receive job specific feedback regarding members' performance, document members' performance using the computerized employee performance instrument and work with the assigned members to develop agreed-upon career goals/objectives for the next review period.

Employee performance review instruments- The computer based performance review forms that consist of the (1) employee development questionnaire (2) performance review rating instrument (3) goal/objective plan.

Work Improvement Plan- A written plan of action to correct poor employee performance. Work improvement plans will be initiated for any rating of "does not meet standards" on the performance review rating instrument.¹

IV. Procedure

A. Notification

1. An employee review notification will be e-mailed to the supervisory officer to start the employee review process.
2. The supervisory officer will log into the performance review system, utilizing the link embedded in the notification e-mail, and print the Employee Development Questionnaire.
3. The Employee Development Questionnaire will be delivered to the employee who is being reviewed. The supervisor and employee will determine the deadline for returning the form but it must be returned prior to the start of the employee performance review interview.

B. Completing the Performance Review Rating Instrument

1. The supervising officer will review documented critical incidents and attendance records for the employee being reviewed.

¹ Employees must have received prior feedback from the supervisor before the annual review for any competency that is rated "does not meet standard." There should not be any surprises during the employee review.

2. The supervising officer will review the completed Employee Development Questionnaire form and contact persons listed about the employee's job performance for the performance period being reviewed.
3. Supervisor will meet with the employee to discuss his/her performance during the review period.
4. The supervisor will complete all applicable sections of the electronic performance review rating instrument for the employee who is being reviewed.
5. Employee and the supervisor will acknowledge the completed on-line review by electronic signature.
6. The completed review will be forwarded to the next level of supervision for approval. The appropriate assistant chief is the final approval for the ranks of captain and below. The Fire Chief is the final approval for chief officers.

C. Employee Goal/Objective Planning

1. The supervisor will meet with the employee who is being reviewed and jointly identify at least two job related goals/objectives for the next performance period.
2. Goals/objectives must be reasonable, specific, attainable within the next performance year and measurable.
3. Once the goals/objectives are establish and recorded in the electronic performance review system the supervisor will determine the date for a six-month goal/objective review meeting and record it on the station calendar.
4. At the six month mark the supervisor and employee will meet to determine the employee's progress toward his/her documented goals/objectives. Goals/objectives will be modified as needed by the supervisor to account for situations beyond the employee's control (modified goals/objectives must be updated in the electronic performance system).

D. Work Improvement Plan

1. A work improvement plan must be completed for any employee receiving a "does not meet standards" grade on any applicable competencies contained in the performance review instrument.

2. The supervisor will notify his or her immediate supervisor of the need for the work improvement plan and his or her corrective action recommendations.
3. The work improvement plan must be specific and understood by the employee and approved by the supervisor's immediate supervisor.
4. The supervisor and employee will meet monthly until the employee has made the necessary improvements (attendance issues will be monitored for at least six months). Employees who do not make necessary improvements will be subject to disciplinary actions up to and including indefinite suspension from the department.

E. Appeal Process

1. Employees who believe that their performance review is not representative of their performance may appeal the performance review up through their supervisory chain of command. The decision of the Fire Chief shall be final.
2. Within 10 calendar days after the date of the performance review, employees may submit a written statement concerning the review to the appropriate assistant chief. The written statement will be electronically filed and attached to the review.

Approved By: Mark Kerby
Fire Chief

Appendix D
City of Mesquite
Fire Department Performance Review

Employee Name _____ Employee # _____

Rank:

- Firefighter Driver/Engineer Lieutenant Captain Deputy Chief
- Asst. Chief

Division:

- Operations Administration Prevention Training
- EMS

Date of Review: _____

Ratings:

1. **Does not meet standards:** Consistently demonstrates the inability to perform the task(s) that meet the established standards.
2. **Meets standards:** Demonstrates the ability and/or performed the task(s) that meets the established standards.
3. **Exceeds standards:** Performs the acceptable level and occasionally exceeds the established standards.

(Documentation is required for a 1. or a 3.)

JOB DESCRIPTION
Firefighters and Officers

(Check Box)

- Reviewed job description and employee performs all the essential duties and responsibilities.
- Reviewed job description and employee does not meet standards on all the essential duties and responsibilities.

Please list the duties and responsibilities that do not meet standards:

COMPETENCIES
Firefighters and Officers

Job Skills/Knowledge/Ability

- Demonstrates skills, knowledge and ability to perform the duties and responsibilities of the job by producing quality work in a timely and efficient manner.
- Makes timely, well-informed and correct decisions with minimal supervision.

Rating: 1. Does not meet standards 2. Meets standards 3. Exceeds standards

Note to IT: The user cannot proceed if comments are not entered for the ratings of “does not meet standards” or “exceeds standards.”

Comments: (Comments are required if the employee receives a rating of “does not meet standards” or “exceeds standards.”)

Initiative

- Identifies opportunities for improvement and presents solutions.
- Willing to help others.

Rating: 1. Does not meet standards 2. Meets standards 3. Exceeds standards

Comments: (Comments are required if the employee receives a rating of “does not meet standards” or “exceeds standards.”)

Teamwork

- Works in cooperation and harmony with all persons within the outside of the immediate work group.
- Improves and promotes division/department/City.

Rating: 1. Does not meet standards 2. Meets standards 3. Exceeds standards

Comments: (Comments are required if the employee receives a rating of “does not meet standards” or “exceeds standards.”)

Customer Service

- Strives to meet the needs to internal and external customers in a professional manner.
- Listens, identifies concerns, conducts research, and communicates effectively to provide assistance above and beyond customers' expectations.

Rating: 1. Does not meet standards 2. Meets standards 3. Exceeds standards

Comments: (Comments are required if the employee receives a rating of “does not meet standards” or “exceeds standards.”)

Interpersonal Skills/Diversity

- Treats people with dignity and respect.
- Resolves conflict/problem situations with others, obtains cooperation from others.

Rating: 1. Does not meet standards 2. Meets standards 3. Exceeds standards

Comments: (Comments are required if the employee receives a rating of “does not meet standards” or “exceeds standards.”)

Physical Fitness

- Complies with the Department’s wellness and fitness requirements.

Rating: 1. Does not meet standards 2. Meets standards 3. Exceeds standards

Comments: (Comments are required if the employee receives a rating of “does not meet standards” or “exceeds standards.”)

Attendance/Punctuality/Dependability

- Consistently follows policies regarding attendance.
- In uniform and prepared for duty at the beginning of each shift.

Rating: 1. Does not meet standards 2. Meets standards 3. Exceeds standards

Comments: (Comments are required if the employee receives a rating of “does not meet standards” or “exceeds standards.”)

Attendance: (Indicate numbers of sick leave days, family sick leave days, personal leave days, and injury leave days missed.)

Educational/Training Interests

- List all career-related educational and/or training opportunities that the employee is interested in pursuing.

Long Term Career Interests

- List employee’s long term (2-15 years) fire department career interests/goals.

Officers

Leadership

- Coaches, motivates, and provides feedback to employees, and fosters a positive work environment.
- Demonstrates the knowledge and skill to manage both emergency and nonemergency incidents safely, efficiently and in compliance with SOPs.
- Delivers creative training solutions to maintain skills, and provides opportunities for employees to advance job knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Rating: 1. Does not meet standards 2. Meets standards 3. Exceeds standards

Comments: (Comments are required if the employee receives a rating of “does not meet standards” or “exceeds standards.”)

Communication

- Provides complete, accurate, and timely information.
- Listens, empathizes, and encourages feedback.

Rating: 1. Does not meet standards 2. Meets standards 3. Exceeds standards

Comments: (Comments are required if the employee receives a rating of “does not meet standards” or “exceeds standards.”)

Information and Resources Management

- Effectively organizes and manages resources.
- Maintains records, and produces reports efficiently, accurately, and timely.

Rating: 1. Does not meet standards 2. Meets standards 3. Exceeds standards

Comments: (Comments are required if the employee receives a rating of “does not meet standards” or “exceeds standards.”)

GOALS

Note to IT: The user cannot proceed if at least two goals and measures are not entered.

Goal 1:

Measures:

Goal 2:

Measures:

Goal 3:

Measures

APPROVALS

Immediate Supervisor Name _____ Signature: _____

Immediate Supervisor Rank: _____

Immediate Supervisor Comments:

Employee Name: _____ Signature: _____

Employee Comments:

Supervisor II Name: _____ Signature: _____

Supervisor II Rank: _____

Supervisor II Comments:

Supervisor III Name: _____ Signature: _____

Supervisor III Rank: _____

Supervisor III Comments:

