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Performance Evaluations: Are We Using the Right Metrics for Success?

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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 the appropriate credit is given where I have used

the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

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Abstract

Fire department evaluations should be based on job performance objectives as it relates to the goals within the organization. The problem was that the City of West Carrollton Fire Department performance evaluation process did not reflect the duties and responsibilities associated with that position. The purpose of this research is to identify a performance evaluation process that can accurately assess the competencies of a firefighter in the City of West Carrollton. Descriptive research was used to answer the following questions: 1. How is the current performance evaluation process for firefighters perceived by fire department officers? 2. How do other fire departments perform a firefighter appraisal? 3. What regulatory requirements are compulsory for an employee appraisal process? 4. What are the necessary elements of an effective employee appraisal process? The procedures used for this research project included a group discussion, a literature review, a firefighter performance evaluation survey, and an interview. The result from this research is the current evaluation process was not an effective instrument to adequately evaluate a firefighter's job performance. Recommendations included the need for an effective firefighter evaluation, critical job performance objectives, address the need for career development, frequency of evaluations, for using a 360-degree evaluation as an alternative process, for training of supervisors, and to establish criteria for updating process.

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Introduction

Private and public agencies have utilized the process of employee performance appraisals

for many years. This process is used to rank individuals against a set of objectives identifying

strengths and opportunities for improvement. Employees should have a clear and meaningful

understanding of what is expected and are provided a means for feedback through the evaluation

process. These constructs are essential for motivating, retaining, and developing a high-class

workforce (Tziner & Kopelman, 2002). Additionally, they suggest that performance evaluations

offered in a timely and precise manner can make a positive difference in job behavior. Not only

will employees benefit from the process, but so do managers. The problem is the West

Carrollton Fire Department's performance evaluation process for a firefighter does not currently

reflect the duties and responsibilities associated with that position.

By accurately measuring results and providing feedback, supervisors can strengthen the

management-employee relationship to align performance to organizational goals. Additionally,

this structured format establishes a record for all employees and can be used to inform

supervisors in making sound decisions on future promotions (Smith & Mazin, 2011). The

purpose of this Applied Research Project [ARP] is to identify a performance evaluation process

that can accurately assess the competencies of a firefighter in the City of West Carrollton. Using

the descriptive method of research, the research questions are (a) how is the current performance

evaluation process for firefighters perceived by fire department officers, (b) how do other fire

departments perform a firefighter appraisal, (c) what regulatory requirements are compulsory for

an employee appraisal process, and (d) what are the necessary elements of an effective employee appraisal process?

Background and Significance

The City of West Carrollton is located in the southwestern portion of Montgomery County, Ohio, consisting of about 13,143 residents. The city is in a suburban setting of 6.1 square miles near Dayton, Ohio, (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Industries include two large paper mills, a range of tool and die manufacturing shops, and a hazardous waste recycling plant. West Carrollton is located among several transportation arteries that include an interstate highway and two rail lines.

The West Carrollton Fire Department [WCFD] is a full-service combination department providing fire suppression, prevention, EMS, and technical rescue services. Additional services provided by the department include fire prevention programs conducted for preschool to secondary education and home fire inspections. Our annual budget is $1.5 million employing 3 full-time captains, 3 full-time career firefighter-paramedics, 30 part-time firefighters, 1 fire prevention officer, and 1 chief officer. The fire captains and career firefighters work on a 24-48 platoon, while the chief and fire prevention officer works a traditional 40-hour week. Each platoon consists of a career a shift captain, firefighter-paramedic, and a range of part-time personnel. Divided between the two fire stations is a combination of three engines, one ladder truck, and two medic units. Station 57 is staffed by a combination of full-time and part-time personnel while Station 56 staff comprises of mostly part-time employees.

In the WCFD, primary responsibility for completing firefighter evaluations is the three platoon captains. In a given year, each captain has to complete several firefighter evaluations for

probationary firefighters. These formal appraisals are important to WCFD to validate the skills

of probationary firefighters while offering feedback for improvement. However, for the

remaining firefighter staff, evaluations have not been given the proper consideration, as the

majority of firefighters in WCFD are not evaluated annually. The result from this policy is that

firefighters during their career are given little guidance on how they are performing. Without

this timely feedback, WCFD has limited its potential to grow both in productivity and career

development of its firefighters.

Early in 1980, the evaluation form (Appendix A) was developed to be used as the criteria

for appraisals of firefighters in WCFD. The evaluation form was presented to supervisors with

little explanation on how to perform or rate employees. This form uses a six level grading scale

based on 15 tasks and traits that a firefighter in WCFD is evaluated.   At the bottom of the form

is a general area for comments by the supervisor. An ongoing problem in the evaluation process

is how arbitrary the rating of firefighters has become. For example, the majority of firefighters

in WCFD are medically trained and certified to the level of emergency medical technicians

[EMT] or paramedics. This is important because the preponderance of emergency runs in West

Carrollton are currently for medical reasons. Unfortunately, the evaluation form does not

address any tasks related to emergency medicine by EMT's or paramedics leaving a huge

disparity in the rating process.

The significance of this ARP is to improve the overall performance of firefighters

working for WCFD. There are three principal reasons this research is important to WCFD.

First, this research will help explain the importance of an effective employee performance

appraisal process. Secondly, the research may provide direction in solving the problem with the

ineffectiveness of the current process. Lastly, a well-developed firefighter is more likely to be

positive, productive and creative, all of which benefits the community and the WCFD.

This research directly relates to the National Fire Academy's [NFA] Executive

Leadership [EL] course goal of developing and utilizing key interpersonal skills and processes

by executive-level managers (United States Fire Administration, 2011). Unit Two in the EL

course discusses the concepts of providing feedback and how properly to communicate the

message. The research will show the importance of providing feedback on a firefighter's work

through the performance appraisal process. The formation of this applied research satisfies the

United States Fire Administration's [USFA] operational objectives in improving the fire and

emergency services' capability for a response to and recovery from all hazards through an

improved and productive workforce (Department of Homeland Security, 2011).

<div style="text-align:center">Literature Review</div>

A literature review is an important segment of this ARP as it provides an understanding

of what others have studied and applied concerning the metrics of performance evaluations.

Common practices, research, and essential concepts of what others have accomplished on

performance evaluations were identified.

History has shown as far back as 200 BCE that organizations used some form of a

performance appraisal. Although it was not called a performance appraisal, the Chinese used

merit exams to rate civil servants and military officers on their capability to be physically and

mentally fit (Wiese & Buckley, 1998). In the early part of the 19th century, industry started to

use the concept as a performance appraisal system. Robert Owen, a manager in a small Scottish

cotton mill, marked a beginning during this era by using a crude but effective performance

system. Owen's use of "silent monitors" or pieces of wood blocks used different colors painted

on each side. These wooden blocks were placed beside each workstation and at the end of the day; a manager would rate the work using a particular color for all employees to see. This system proved to affect behavior and gained Owen the notoriety as a pioneer in human resource management (Wren & Bedsian, 2009)

Early appraisal systems in the United States were first conducted by the Army General in 1813. Soldiers were evaluated using descriptions such as "a good-natured man" or "a knave despised by all." Future wars and the expansion of the Federal Civil Service necessitated a system of evaluating employee's performance. In response to public concern for government efficiency, managers sought ways to document performance for the intent to promote top achievers (Wiese & Buckley, 1998).

Despite the efforts of a supervisor's good intentions of maintaining a fair and objective performance evaluation, there will be some form of judgment error that occurs. Bias and its effect on rating employees has been a pervasive liability plaguing many supervisors. Thorndike (1920) is credited for naming the halo effect, a specific type of bias. This bias occurs when a rater allows a single attribute or impression either good or bad, to influence the overall impression of the person. Halo effect can lead to confusion about what the real strengths and weaknesses of an employee are (Jacobs & Kozlowski, 1985).

Psychologists and academicians have studied and identified several more common errors in rating employees. Grote (1996) and Willing (2010) had acknowledged these pitfalls and caution against the following when rating employees:

1. Contrast effect – the tendency to evaluate people against others rather than standards.

2. Central tendency – the inclination to rate people in the middle of the scale despite their performance.

3. Negative and positive skew – the rating of all individuals either higher or lower than their performance.

4. Recency effect – the temptation to rate employees based on events that have happened recently rather than the sum of their work.

The rating mistake with the potential for the most damage to an organization is the central tendency error. This rating error does a disservice to both the employee and to the organization because it labels everyone average. The unintended consequences are that it penalizes talented employees and rewards poor performing employees. Employee morale and confidence in the process can suffer by supervisors who continually use this philosophy. Unfortunately, efforts to reduce errors in rating employees by using various rating methods, instrument formats, and education have made little impact in solving these problems (Grote, 1996).

Supervisors who rate employees (Smith & Mazin, 2011; Tziner & Murphy, 1999) have expressed their frustration and discomfort in the evaluation process over many years. Regrettably, many performance reviews are prepared without concern or research (Risher, 2008). Poor training, a lack of communication, or displeasure to provide negative feedback is just some of the reasons why supervisors dislike the process. For example, a supervisor may inflate a rating to avoid an unpleasant conversation or perhaps preserve the reputation of the employee. Regardless, either one of these behaviors undermines the support in the evaluation process and its effectiveness to develop individual and organizational goals.

A recent study (Vasset, Marnburg, & Furunes, 2011) on the effects of performance appraisals in the Norwegian health services suggest that feedback, active participation, and career development are key factors in motivating employees. The researchers make the

correlation that if done correctly; the performance appraisal can be a powerful tool in job

satisfaction and motivation. Feedback provided for the appraisal process focused on enhancing

the knowledge of the employees creating a better working environment.

Martinette (2005) describes the employee appraisal process as one person's opinion of

work performed by an individual. He states that a typical performance appraisal is meaningless

to the extent that it assesses appearance, reliability, fitness and if the employee is a hard worker.

Since most fire departments have vision and value statements that guide employee's behavior to

an accepted standard, then why do organizations rehash the obvious in a performance appraisal?

Martinette noted that a better approach for employee appraisals is to look at how firefighters are

contributing to the goals of the organizations. Performance evaluations should also encourage

firefighters to improve their knowledge and perhaps to become a more effective employee.

The earliest public jobs in the United States were relegated to the privileged and those

who had political connections. The political parties in power mostly became the driving force in

who was hired and fired in federal government jobs. A "spoils system" emerged into where

political allegiance was paramount. People were hired based on their loyalty to a political party

regardless of their credentials. This highly volatile environment created uncertainty in providing

efficient government services. Reform was needed and in 1883; the Pendleton Act was approved

by Congress. This act shifted the federal government away from the patronage system to a

system that was based on merit believing the most qualified person would bring professionalism

to the job (Klingner, Nalbandian, & Llorens, 2010).

The laws pertaining to employee appraisals in the federal government continued with

Congress creating a new law in 1912. This piece of legislation was directed by the U.S. Civil

Service Commission (now the U.S. Office of Personnel Management) established a uniform

rating system for federal agencies. The Classification Act of 1923 instituted a rating scale

grading employee performance that proved effective but was found to be unpopular with

employees. A series of other reforms took place over the next four decades that improved the

process in how employees were rated. Unfortunately at the time, federal agencies were not

required by law to participate in the appraisal process. When the Civil Service Reform Act was

ratified in 1962, all agencies of the federal government were now compelled to develop an

appraisal system. Additionally, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management became the regulatory

agency of the federal government to enforce, maintain, and authorize employee performance

standards. (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2012).

One of the major laws passed affecting public and private agencies was Title VII of the

Civil Rights Act of 1964. This legislation made it illegal for employers to discriminate based on

race, sex, color, religion, or national origin. In the evaluation process, supervisors must avoid

the appearance of discrimination or prejudice by either writing or saying anything protected by

Title VII. Supervisors must be specific and focus on the behavior of the employee to eliminate

bias entering the performance evaluation. Additionally, the law requires the evaluation process

to be validated by ensuring the criterion used to measure job performance is relevant. The

protection offered by this legislation protects the employee from acts of discrimination as well as

all terms and conditions of employment, including performance appraisals (DelPo, 2007)

Documentation of the employee performance appraisal is one of the most important

managerial functions a fire department can perform (Crawford, 2003). Boice & Kleiner (1997)

agree that maintaining adequate records is paramount to decrease the chance of legal action.

They also stress that organizations have a duty to follow their employee handbook as it can be

understood as promise or a contract for the employee. For example, if the organization

articulates that annual performance reviews will be conducted and then does not; this can be construed as a breach of contract in many states. This can leave an organization venerable by a disgruntled employee that may seek adjudication in the court system.

The performance appraisal is a two-fold process that provides an opportunity for the employee and the organization to have an honest communication about expectations. Simply stated, both managers and employees believe the evaluation process (a) provides a formal setting to discuss the employee's performance, (b) improves morale by allowing input from employees, (c) provides a system of salary increases or promotions, and (d) identifies skills and needs for career development (Klingner et al., 2010; Longenecker & Nykodym, 1996).

High-performance organizations are prosperous because they have invested years into refining methods that make it productive, efficient, and successful. The same can be said of an employee appraisal system given the deserved support and resources. Longenecker and Fink (1999) identified 10 characteristics of an effective performance appraisal system:

1. Communicate and define the rationale for appraisals.

2. Promote input from employees and supervisors.

3. Keep the forms and the process simple and easy to understand.

4. Ongoing education required for all supervisors on how to evaluate employees.

5. Supervisors must prepare all employees of the expectations early in the process.

6. Provide continuous informal feedback throughout the year.

7. Ensure all supervisors are motivated to conduct effective appraisals.

8. Upper management must practice what they teach and support the process.

9. Employee rewards need to be linked to job performance and not politics.

10. Periodically assess the system and take the necessary steps to correct deficiencies.

W. Edwards Deming (1986) contends that the appraisal process is fundamentally flawed causing more harm than good and identifies it as one of the seven deadly diseases of management. His argument is why go through a process when 95% of employees perform at a level that is acceptable and only 5% cause significant issues. Many employees loathe the word "performance evaluation" because of the fear and negative connotation that it creates. Deming states that an appraisal process coupled with pay for performance, breeds internal competition, making for a miserable workplace. He further discusses how biases of management can rate employees as poor performers, although their work is of high quality. Employees will naturally compare themselves to others that are rated above average and wonder why the difference exists possibly comprising the legitimacy of the system.

Culbert and Rout (2010) agree with Deming (1986) that employee performance evaluations do not make sense and are harmful to the organization and the employee. Unfortunately, the typical performance evaluation is driven by a top-down principle that fosters antipathy between the supervisor and the employee. This idea can be realized by the fact that most conversations in an employee evaluation are one-sided, usually coming from the supervisor. The employee has very little input throughout the process, and if asked, will likely say what the boss wants to hear to avoid any conflict. And at the end of the day, the supervisor's decision is the only one that counts.

In contrast to the traditional performance evaluation, is the 360-degree feedback appraisal. Swinhart (2008) suggests that fire departments can improve the performance evaluation process by using the 360-degree appraisal system. He states the process allows each coworker to understand how their performance is viewed by others. A mixture of peers, subordinates, and supervisors provide the evaluation by placing thoughtful suggestions on a

form. A software program can be used to facilitate the process for confidentiality. By using a

diverse group of evaluators, the 360-degree process can instill confidence that the ratings are

objective and credible. This is especially important if a supervisor has limited exposure to

observe the employee.

However, (Maylett, 2009; Risher, 2008) explain there are some issues with using the 360-

degree process. The collection of data can be an arduous and expensive task with most

organizations hiring a contractor to oversee the program (Smith & Mazin, 2011). Organization

culture can play a significant role because there are friends and rivals in all organizations. A

great deal of thought must be considered on who will be asked to rate another's performance.

This can be especially true if the feedback is used for performance when the results are used for

raises, promotions, and terminations. Consequently, the 360-degree system may be better suited

to provide feedback for career development than rating performance. Maylett (2009) and

Swinhart (2008) suggests both systems have a role to play within an organization, and they

should be used accordingly to provide a more accurate and objective view of evaluating an

employee.

<div align="center">Procedures</div>

This ARP used the description method of research to identify and understand the

problems regarding firefighter performance evaluations in WCFD. In the planning and

implementation process of this ARP, the researcher designed, organized, considered, and

interpreted information on employee performance evaluations.

The first part in the process was to conduct a group discussion with two of the three fire

captains which conduct all the firefighter performance evaluations for WCFD. In attendance

were Captain Huffman and Captain Shepherd. For clarity and full disclosure, the remaining

captain, the author of this ARP, recused himself to answer any of the questions. Discussion was

centered on answering the first and fourth research question, "How is the current performance

evaluation process for firefighters perceived by fire department officers?" and "What are the

necessary elements of an effective employee appraisal process?" The discussion group

assembled in the captain's office at Fire Station 56 on January 10, 2012. Seven questions were

asked (Appendix B) of the captains to guide the conversation towards answering the research

questions. Before the discussion began, the purpose and intent of the meeting were explained.

This group discussion provided valuable information on the current firefighter evaluation

process. A literature review was also conducted to address these two questions.

A survey (Appendix C) of the Ohio Fire Chiefs membership from January 12, 2012 to

January 27, 2012, sought information about how firefighter appraisals were conducted in their

fire department. In designing the survey, the focus was to understand the characteristics of

firefighter evaluations using fire departments in the State of Ohio. The Ohio Fire Chiefs

membership was selected to be surveyed based upon their expertise and experience in the fire

service. Analysis of the data should provide reliable information as a means to justify any

changes to the existing evaluation process.

Survey Monkey was chosen as the online instrument for collecting the data due to its

ability to reach a large number of people with the least amount of cost. An e-mail request was

sent to Erica Schortgen of the Ohio Fire Chiefs Association asking for assistance in conveying

the survey link to the membership. The request was approved, and an e-mail was sent by the

Ohio Fire Chiefs Association to 1,516 of its current members. Included in the e-mail, was a

cover letter explaining the general purpose to the study, its use solely for academic purposes, and

that all responses will be kept anonymous. During the response period, 223 surveys were

completed and the results are located for review in (Appendix C).

A personal interview was conducted on January 18, 2012, at the West Carrollton Civic

Center with Teresa Brooks, Human Resource Manager for the City of West Carrollton

(Appendix D). The questions developed for this interview established Brooks's professional

qualifications as the Human Resource Manager. The main purpose of the interview was to

provide information about any federal, state, or local laws pertaining to employee evaluations.

Through this knowledge, WCFD can consider any legal requirements and elements necessary for

an effective firefighter appraisal system.

There were some limitations discovered in this ARP. Only two fire officers could

provide reliable information in the group discussion about the firefighter appraisal process. The

lack of diversity in the discussion group may have limited the amount of information obtained.

The survey seeking information about firefighter evaluations (Appendix C) sampled only

one demographic population. Utilizing the Ohio Fire Chiefs Association as the sole group to

examine how firefighter evaluations are completed, may have inadvertently biased the survey

results.

The survey instrument was sent out to 1,516 members of the Ohio Fire Chiefs

Association. However, only 223 people or 15 % responded. This demonstrates that a majority

of the sampled population failed to respond to the survey. Consequently, the researcher

understands the quantitative analyses from the survey instrument are not statistically valid.

Definition of Terms

360-degree feedback – is a system or process that employees receive anonymous feedback from coworkers, peers, or supervisors. Sometimes it is known as a multi-rater instrument.

Employee evaluation – is the assessment and review of an employee's job performance over time.

Performance evaluation – also known as an employee evaluation, is the assessment and review of an employee's job performance over a given time period.

Results

The four research questions that were asked to obtain the information needed were: (1) How is the current performance evaluation process for firefighters perceived by fire department officers? (2) How do other fire departments perform a firefighter appraisal? (3) What regulatory requirements are compulsory for an employee appraisal process? (4) What are the necessary elements of an effective employee appraisal process? The results from the research were gathered through the use of a literature review, personal interview, group discussion, and survey instrument that provided insight and statistics for each research question.

Information collected for research question one, "How is the current performance evaluation process for firefighters perceived by fire department officers?" presented itself with some interesting points to reflect upon. Using the group discussion (Appendix B), several questions were asked to answer this research question.

Question one of the discussion group asked "Does the current firefighter appraisal system adequately address the job skills and performance of firefighters?" "Why or why not." Both fire captains agreed that the current evaluation is outdated, and the process does not reflect the skills and objectives to assess a firefighter accurately. The criterion used to evaluate a firefighter is

based upon mostly traits and absent from any skills or objectives. Additionally, the process is

perceived by the captains as fulfilling a requirement. This usually occurs when there is a change

in status for a probationary firefighter to regular status or when there is a change in pay grade.

Question two of the discussion group asked "Does the current firefighter appraisal

process encourage professional development?" Career development is not part of the formal

process. An exception would be if a captain had an interest with a particular firefighter, usually

one that has demonstrated outstanding performance. Otherwise, career development would only

be discussed if the firefighter initiated the conversation. And then, it most likely would be an

informal conversation.

Question three of the discussion group asked "Why do you feel this way?" There is little

guidance from the department to help develop firefighters in their career. There is financial help

for job-related classes and seminars, but no official succession planning.

Information collected for research question two, "How do other fire departments perform a

firefighter appraisal?" was attained from the survey (Appendix C). The answers provided a wide

variety of areas to consider.

Results from the Ohio Fire Chiefs Survey are as follows;

1. What best describes your job title?

Fire Chief	63.7%
Chief Officer	24.2%
Company Officer	6.7%
Firefighter	1.3%
Other (please specify)	4.0%

   a. Special Project Coordinator

   b. Fire Marshal

   c. Program Manager, hospital helicopter program

      d. Fire Prevention Lieutenant

2. Check the most appropriate box that describes your department.

Volunteer	13.9%
Part-Time	4.5%
Combination	44.8%
Career	36.8%

3. With exception to new hires, how often does your department perform firefighter appraisals?

Quarterly	2.2%
Every six months	3.6%
Yearly	70.4%
Other (please specify)	23.8%

    a. 23 responded as never

    b. Not often

    c. Full-time employees only

    d. Only if a behavior or training issue arises

    e. From probation to firefighter

    f. Evaluate firefighters for the first 3.5 years, evaluations are monthly with reviews 6 and 12 months

    g. Evaluations are informal and not used for promotional

    h. Sporadic intervals over past 5 years

4. In the past year, were there any firefighter appraisals that you were responsible for not completed?

Yes	13.9%
No	86.1%

5. If you answered yes in question 4, briefly explain the main cause for the delay.

    a. Five responses for not enough time

    b. Three responses for Department restructuring

c. Township did not want to review any appraisals

d. Overworked

e. Lack of effective process

f. Failure to follow policy

g. Poor buy in by firefighters

h. Three responses for changes in supervisor

i. Laziness

6. How long has your department used the current firefighter appraisal system?

Less than 5 years	35.1%
5-10 years	25.2%
Greater than 10 years	27.2%
Not sure	12.4%

7. Is your current firefighter employee appraisal process used as a means for salary progression or merit pay?

Yes	16.8%
No	83.2%

8. The current firefighter appraisal system use evaluation metrics that reflect the individual's performance and contributions.

Strongly agree	14.4%
Agree	63.9%
Disagree	13.9%
Strongly disagree	7.9%

9. The current firefighter appraisal system is a key element in the promotional process of the individual.

Strongly agree	8.4%
Agree	42.6%
Disagree	30.2%

Strongly disagree   18.8%

10. The current firefighter appraisal system is an effective tool in changing the attitudes and behavior of the individuals you have to rate.

Strongly agree   6.4%

Agree   53.5%

Disagree   30.2%

Strongly disagree   9.9%

11. Does your department utilize a 360-degree feedback evaluation process?

Yes   34.7%

No (skip to question 14)   65.3%

12. How does your department use the 360-degree evaluation process?

For appraisals   22.4%

For career development   10.4%

Both   67.2%

13. The 360-degree evaluation process has been an effective tool in improving the performance of the firefighter.

Strongly agree   11.9%

Agree   82.1%

Disagree   6.0%

Strongly disagree   0

14. Does your fire department devote appropriate resources and priority in maintaining an effective firefighter appraisal process?

Often   13.8%

Sometimes   49.0%

Seldom   20.4%

Never   16.8%

In evaluating the results of the Ohio Fire Chiefs Survey, (Appendix B) 223 members

responded, equating to 15% of the total number of surveys distributed. The low response rate

was identified as a limitation in this ARP. Those who responded to the survey, 64% were the

chief of the department, 24% were chief officers, 7% were company officers, 4% were classified

as other, and less than 2% were firefighters. Of the fire departments that responded, 44.8% were

combination fire departments, 37% career fire departments, 14% were volunteer fire

departments, and less than 5% were part-time fire departments. The results show 70% of the fire

departments perform yearly firefighter evaluations resulting in a channel of communication

between the supervisor and employee.

Four percent of the fire departments conducted bi-annual firefighter evaluations, and 2%

evaluated firefighters quarterly. Twenty-four percent of the fire departments had a response that

was different than the survey was requesting. An interesting fact was that 23 fire departments in

the other category did not perform a firefighter evaluation. No reason was given as to why the

evaluation was not completed.

Deming (1986) contends that the appraisal process is fundamentally flawed causing more

harm than good. His argument is why go through a process when 95% of employees perform at

a level that is acceptable and only 5% cause significant issues. The majority of respondents did

complete their firefighter evaluations on schedule. Of those respondents who did not, a lack of

time was the compelling reason behind the delay. Almost 90% of the fire departments are using

a performance appraisal system that is less than 10 years old.

Eighty-three percent of fire departments indicated their performance appraisal process is not used for salary. Over 85% of the respondents believe their performance evaluation reflects the firefighter's skills and performance. The response was equally divided whether their current firefighter evaluation process is an integral part of the promotional procedure. About 50% surveyed did not believe a reward or benefit in the promotional process. A majority of those respondents considered their evaluation process to be an effective instrument in changing behavior of the employee.

Longenecker and Fink (1999) identified specific characteristics of an effective performance appraisal system. One of which is to assess the evaluation system periodically and take the necessary steps to correct deficiencies.

Klingner et al., (2010) stress that both managers and employees believe the evaluation process should provide a formal setting to discuss the employee's performance, improve morale by allowing input from employees, provide a system of salary increases or promotions, and identify skills and needs for career development.

About, 35% of those surveyed are using a 360-degree evaluation. Sixty-eight percent of those surveyed are using the process for both performance and career development. The results demonstrate that 94% of the respondents believe the 360-degree evaluation process is an effective instrument in improving firefighter performance. Only 5 people who use the 360-degree process disagree with using the system as an effective evaluation tool.

Swinhart (2008) suggests that fire departments can improve the performance evaluation process by using the 360-degree appraisal system. He states the process allows each coworker to understand how their performance is viewed by others lending credibility to the system.

Information collected for research question three, "What regulatory requirements are compulsory for an employee appraisal process?" was provided from an interview (Appendix D) with Teresa Brooks, Human Resource Manager for the City of West Carrollton. Brooks states the Codified Ordinances for the City of West Carrollton only speaks to performance evaluations for probationary employees. It requires a performance evaluation at six months except for safety forces, which is one year. After probation, employees are to be evaluated yearly by their immediate supervisor according to the personnel manual of the City of West Carrollton. She addressed Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as a law that prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, color, religion, or national origin. Performance evaluations must follow Title VII, including any comments, whether written or verbal during the process. Additionally, Brooks states that all performance evaluations must be maintained in accordance to the Ohio Public Records law (T. Brooks, personal communication, January 18, 2012).

One of the most important managerial functions a supervisor can perform during a performance review is to maintain all pertinent records (Crawford, 2003). Boice & Kleiner (1997) state that employers can reduce their liability if they retain all employment records, including performance appraisals in accordance to any federal, state, or local laws.

Title VII of the Civil Right Act of 1964 prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Supervisors must focus on the behavior of the employee to remove any biases from entering the performance evaluation.

Research question four: "What are the necessary elements of an effective employee appraisal process?" A group discussion (Appendix A), personal interview (Appendix D), and literature review discovered several components that an effective performance evaluation process should include.

Question four of the discussion group asked "How often do you think firefighter appraisals should be conducted?" was attained from (Appendix A). For probationary firefighters, evaluations should be quarterly to ensure proper feedback and correct any behavior issues. Permanent firefighters should receive an annual performance evaluation to provide guidance and formal feedback.

Question five of the discussion group asked "If you could develop a new firefighter performance evaluation, what ideas would you include?" was attained from (Appendix B). To ensure a continuum of feedback between supervisors and firefighters, make a yearly performance appraisal compulsory. Include a provision that firefighters can self-evaluate their performance lending some credibility to the process. Avoid generalized traits that are on the current form and focus more on performance-based criteria.

Question six of the discussion group asked "What do you think of a 360 degree appraisal system and would you be in favor of instituting a similar process?" was attained from (Appendix B). The answers for instituting the process were diverse. The main reasons against the 360-degree appraisal system are the high administration costs, lack of familiarity by the workforce, and a diminishing return on feedback after several years. The advantage to the program is the ability to have feedback from multiple sources eliminating the one-sided approach of performance evaluations.

Swinhart (2008) suggests that fire departments can improve the performance evaluation process by using the 360-degree appraisal system. He states the process allows each coworker to understand how their performance is viewed by others. Consequently, the collection of data can be an arduous and expensive task with most organizations hiring a contractor to oversee the program (Smith & Mazin, 2011). Continuous training of supervisors and employees would need

to occur for the purpose of ensuring credibility in the system. Unfortunately, emphasis on performance evaluation training in the City of West Carrollton has been limited to a small portion of the workforce (T. Brooks, 2012).

Question seven of the discussion group asked "Would you be in favor of totally eliminating any type of formal firefighter appraisal system and why?" was attained from (Appendix B). Eliminating any type of formal performance appraisal would be a poor suggestion. The performance evaluation is needed to provide a formalized method of feedback for all firefighters. Documentation provides a paper trail of performance that can be readily accessible for purposes of either disciplinary action or as a means for career development.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

The research and literature review has demonstrated that WCFD has some challenges to address with its existing firefighter performance evaluation in making the current process effective. History has demonstrated the value of giving feedback to employees in all organizations. Whether the feedback started out as a crude painted block of wood in a cotton mill (Wren & Bedeian, 2009) or an elaborate 360-degree process (Swinhart, 2008) can improve performance both individually and organizationally. Tziner and Kopelman (2002) identified the importance of performance evaluations in providing feedback that is clear, meaningful, and in a timely manner. Supervisors and employees believe the evaluation process is a setting to discuss job performance, provide input, increase salary, and promote job development (Klingner et al., 2010). Results from the group discussion with the fire captains (Appendix B) strongly indicate that firefighters are not receiving or providing adequate feedback that can improve job performance or development. Additionally, the results demonstrate the inconsistency and genuine purpose to the evaluation process.

Deming (1986) argues the performance appraisal process is unnecessary because the majority of employees do just fine without direction. He further discusses the fallacies of the evaluation process and the damage it can inflict to an organization or the individual. The results of the group discussion showed no indication of retraction, but rather an enthusiasm toward improving the existing performance evaluation process.

Other fire departments in Ohio were surveyed to gain a perspective on how they perform firefighter performance evaluations. The survey (Appendix C) results demonstrate a commitment by other fire departments to have an updated, valid, and effective evaluation process to promote job performance and development. This is in stark contrast with the results of the group discussion (Appendix B). The results are clear that WCFD performance evaluation process needs to be corrected.

In addressing what regulations are compulsory for an employee appraisal process, the literature demonstrated there are important laws, and guidelines to be followed. Again, Performance evaluations must follow the values of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (DelPo, 2007), including any comments, whether written or verbal during the process. All recordkeeping, including performance evaluations must be maintained in accordance with the Ohio Public Records law. Employee performance reviews in the City of West Carrollton must follow the local ordinance and personnel manual in the timing of reviews (T. Brooks, 2012). Concerning performance appraisals complying with regulatory requirements, WCFD (Appendix B) was not following the yearly reviews that are listed in the personnel manual. This is because the lack of importance placed on yearly performance appraisals by the fire department.

In addressing the components of an effective employee appraisal process Longenecker and Fink (1999) identified 10 characteristics of an effective system. These qualities provide an

organization with the tools to provide an environment that (Tziner & Kopelman, 2002; Wiese & Buckley, 1998; Klingner et al., 2010) if done correctly, can motivate employees to create a better working environment (Vasset et al., 2011). Consequently, failing to recognize certain pitfalls can derail a well-intentioned process (Grote, 1996; Willing, 2010). One glaring issue that was discovered in the results of this ARP was the lack of training for supervisors and employees (T. Brooks, 2012). Training can be a factor in helping to prevent errors in rating and how to perform an employee evaluation. The researcher's suggestion is to follow up with supervisor and employee training with additional research beyond this ARP.

Swinhart (2008) suggests that using a 360-degree evaluation process can improve the performance within an organization. This mixture of peers, subordinates, and supervisors can be useful in career development. WCFD fire captains (Appendix B) were tentative in endorsing such a process because of the complexity and cost to administer. Smith and Mazin (2011) voiced their concerns about the same issues that data collection and administration costs burdens. Survey results (Appendix C) illustrate just the opposite and that the process is overwhelmingly an effective tool. While the model and the constructs of a 360-degree performance evaluation demonstrate its effectiveness, the application for WCFD may be restrained by the available resources to put into such a program.

A well-trained and prepared firefighter is paramount to the success of WCFD. Without this quality, the mission of WCFD to protect the community in the most efficient and effective manner can be compromised. The researcher agrees with the literature with some exceptions noted. Lastly, the significance of an effective performance evaluation is to ensure a competent workforce when the next emergency occurs.

Recommendations

The evidence presented by the completion of the group discussion, survey, interview, and literature review has demonstrated that the West Carrollton Fire Department's evaluation process is ineffective. The purpose of this ARP is to identify a performance evaluation process that can accurately assess the competencies of a WCFD firefighter. Because of this document, there are seven recommendations to improve the evaluation process.

1. Address the need for an effective firefighter performance evaluation. The evidence from the group discussion clearly demonstrates the deficiencies of the current process.

2. The department should establish the critical performance objectives that should be evaluated. The results from the research reveal the current process as subjective and generalized to assess accurately a firefighter's job performance.

3. Address the need for using the performance evaluation for promotional and career development. The conclusion from the research, employee performance evaluations should have some component of career development.

4. The department should address the frequency of all firefighter performance evaluations. After probation, the results demonstrate a complete lack of formal feedback for firefighters. Performing yearly evaluations should be the minimum accepted practice.

5. Research the possibility of using a 360-degree performance evaluation. Evidence from the research demonstrates the effectiveness of using such an instrument.

6. Address the need for training of supervisors in the process of conducting employee performance evaluations. The results demonstrate the need to have continuous education in the methods on how to evaluate employees.

7. The department should establish the criteria for a periodic assessment of the employee evaluation system. The results have demonstrated that the current evaluation process is fundamentally flawed and outdated.

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Appendix A

City of West Carrollton Fire Department Evaluation Form								
Employees Name		**`Position**			**Evaluation Period**			
Reason for Evaluation: Regular Mid-Probation Final Probation									
SECTION A: Itemized Checklist Officer to check each item to the rating best suited to the employee's ability to perform in the listed area.	Does Not Apply	Outstanding	Above Standard	Standard	Below Standard	Unsatisfactory	**Comments**	
1. Acceptance of new ideas and procedures of WCFD.								
2. Accuracy of work performed.								
3. Alertness to instructions.								
4. Attitude.								
5. Compliance with rules and SOP's.								
6. Cooperation.								
7. Effort.								
8. Equipment operation.								
9. Friendliness.								
10. Interest in the Fire Department								
11. Learning ability.								
12. Performance in new situations.								
13. Personal neatness.								
14. Physical fitness.								
15. Promptness to accept orders.								
SECTION B: Overall Evaluation								
SECTION C: Comments .									

Appendix B

Group Discussion Questions
Conducted on January 10, 2012
West Carrollton Fire Station 56
13:30 hrs.

1. Does the current firefighter appraisal system adequately address the job skills and performance of firefighters? Why or why not?

    ▪ **No, they are seen as irrelevant by supervisors and employees**

    ▪ **No skills or objectives to meet, the criteria is based mostly on traits**

    ▪ **Too vague and generalized**

    ▪ **Currently they are not performed on firefighters that are not on probation**

2. Does the current firefighter appraisal process encourage professional development?

    ▪ **No, it is not part of the form or process**

    ▪ **Occasionally during an evaluation, then only verbalized**

3. Why do you feel this way?

    ▪ **There is little guidance from the department to help develop firefighters other than paying for job related seminars or classes**

4. How often do you think firefighter appraisals should be conducted?

    ▪ **For probationary firefighter – quarterly**
    ▪ **For permanent firefighters – yearly**

5. If you could develop a new firefighter appraisal process, what items would you include?

    ▪ **Make compulsory yearly evaluations for all firefighters.**
    ▪ **Include a self-evaluation process to better have buy-in on the system**
    ▪ **Avoid generalizations, eliminate personality characteristics**
    ▪ **Needs to be performance driven or based upon a criteria of a firefighter**

6. What do you think of a 360 degree appraisal system and would you be in favor of instituting a similar process?

- **Expensive and would be difficult to administer- not in favor**
- **Would be in favor of the program as there is some value in getting feedback from multiple sources**
- **Might work initially, but may not be as valuable in the following years**

7. Would you be in favor of totally eliminating any type of formal firefighter appraisal system and why?

- **No. Formalized feedback is important to the employee and organization, some type of written documentation in needed**
- **No. Need to have a paper trail of performance for either disciplinary action or as a means to help with career development**

Appendix C

Survey Results
Firefighter Evaluation

Response Summary   **223 Responses**

1. **What best describes your job title?**

Fire Chief

Chief Officer

Company Officer

Firefighter

Other (please specify)

2. **Check the most appropriate box that describes your department.**

Volunteer

Part-Time

Combination

Career

3. **With exception to new hires, how often does your department perform firefighter appraisals?**

Quarterly

Every six months

Yearly

Other (please specify)

4. **In the past year, were there any firefighter appraisals that you were responsible for not completed?**

Yes

No

5. If you answered yes in question 4, briefly explain the main cause for the delay.

6. How long has your department used the current firefighter appraisal system?

Less than 5 years

5-10 years

Greater than 10 years

Not sure

7. Is your current firefighter employee appraisal process used as a means for salary progression or merit pay?

Yes

No

8. The current firefighter appraisal system use evaluation metrics that reflect the individual's performance and contributions.

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

9. The current firefighter appraisal system is a key element in the promotional process of the individual.

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

10.   The current firefighter appraisal system is an effective tool in changing the attitudes and behavior of the individuals you have to rate.

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

11. Does your department utilize a 360 degree feedback evaluation process?

Yes

No (skip to question 14)

12. How does your department use the 360 degree evaluation process?

For appraisals

For career development

Both

13.   The 360 degree evaluation process has been an effective tool in improving the performance of the firefighter.

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

14. Does your fire department devote appropriate resources and priority in maintaining an effective firefighter appraisal process?

Often

Sometimes

Seldom

Never

Appendix D

Personal Interview with Human Resource Manager

Name: Teresa Brooks

Position: Human Resource Manager, City of West Carrollton

Date of Interview: January 18, 2012

Location of Interview: West Carrollton Civic Center

1. **How long have you been employed with the City of West Carrollton?**
    Eight years

2. **What other positions have you worked for the City of West Carrollton?**
    From 1996 to 2001 as an Account Analyst
    From 2008 to present as the Human Resource Manager

3. **Does the City of West Carrollton require a performance appraisal system and if so, what is the frequency of evaluations?** *Probationary employees are evaluated at the end of their probation period which is usually six months or one year. This is directed by the West Carrollton Code of Ordinances. Regular employees are to receive an annual evaluation by their supervisor according to the personnel manual for the City of West Carrollton.*

4. **What purpose does an employee appraisal process provide?**
    For employees to receive a step raise, the evaluation process will recommend a pay raise. Gives documentation of an employee's performance to be used for future promotion opportunities or can be an effective means of identifying employee's goals. Documentation for employees with performance problems in conjunction with progressive discipline may prevent lawsuits.

5. **What are your responsibilities in the employee appraisal system process?**
    All completed evaluations are reviewed by me however; I am not involved in the process before the evaluation is given to the employee. Some supervisors have me involved in the evaluation meeting with the employee. Maintain employee all records including performance evaluations.

6. **What are the legal requirements for an employee appraisal system?**
    Specific laws pertaining to employee evaluations address record keeping and discrimination. The Ohio Public Records law gives directions to public agencies on how they are to maintain public records including performance evaluations. Title VII prevents against employees on the basis of race, religion, age, gender, disability, marital status, pregnancy, or sexual preference. Any documentation including comments in the employee evaluation should avoid inflammatory and controversial language.

7.   **Based on your experience, would you be in favor of expanding the employee appraisal process to include a 360 degree evaluation? Why or Why not?**
Yes, but training of staff and employees would need to occur before implementing the process. The expense of a 360 degree program would be an obstacle to overcome in these difficult economic times the city is experiencing.

8.   **What if any are supervisors trained on how to properly perform employee performance appraisals?**
Department heads have periodic trainings on how to conduct employee performance appraisals. However, mid or lower level supervisors are not offered any training. All employees who desire to become supervisors are required to attend a management course through a local municipal organization. This course prepares them for being a supervisor including how to conduct employee performance evaluations.