

General Introduction

This material focuses on the theoretical side of appraisals: what they are meant to achieve, why companies choose to use them, and why they do and don't work.

You might also want to include in your lessons some practical details of how an appraisal works in different companies, such as examples of the forms used by appraisers and employees being appraised, examples of the questions that are discussed, etc. This would be especially useful for pre-experience learners (for whom the reading text has been written).

Much of this information is readily accessible on the Internet. The template forms provided by Microsoft® (<http://office.microsoft.com/en-001/templates/employee-performance-evaluation-TC103973922.aspx>) might be a good starting point.

If your trainees work in a particular industry or field, it should be relatively easy to find more specific examples.

If you are working with job-experienced learners, give them lots of opportunities to refer to their own personal experience of being appraised, carrying out appraisals, or both.

Worksheet A

A. Pre-reading

Get students to answer this global comprehension question as quickly as they can.

Point out that this structure – description > arguments against > arguments for – is quite typical in certain kinds of formal writing.

Key:

1. d; 2. a; 3. e

B. Comprehension

The answer key shows the sentences or expressions in the text that should guide students to the correct answers. Encourage stronger students to find these for themselves, before you tell them what they are.

Key:

a. F. 'They frequently require the line manager to make a recommendation about pay'. However, 'some

organizations separate discussion of individual performance and career development, as it can be difficult to discuss both at the same time.'

[paragraph 1, lines 9-11 and 17-20]

b. F. 'They also very often include some form of planning for employee development, including training, coaching and giving the employee specific tasks for the coming year.' [paragraph 1, lines 13-17]

c. T. 'A lot can go wrong with them', 'each [element] carries risks', etc. [paragraph 2, lines 3 and 11]

d. F. 'particularly in big organizations' (but not exclusively in them). [paragraph 3, line 4]

e. T. 'executives have long been able to see a valid and important role for formal performance appraisal', 'From the employee's perspective, there is also potentially something to gain'.

C. Vocabulary 1

For weaker students, try giving them extra letters before you tell them the correct answer. Alternatively, you could turn some of the items into a game of 'hangman' played with the whole class.

Key:

1. evaluating; 2. to affect; 3. to separate; 4. to undermine; 5. to vary; 6. carries; 7. vast; 8. perspective; 9. to occur; 10. assertive

D. Vocabulary 2

The key to this activity lies in knowing the correct matching prepositions. Encourage students to check their answers in a dictionary.

Key (suggested answers):

1. d; 2. b; 3. a; 4. f; 5. c; 6. e

E. Discussion

Students can either compare answers with other pairs, or with the whole class.

Worksheet B

A. Pre-listening

Point out that the two correct answers are quite close in meaning, which should help them get to the correct answer. The speaker's negative attitude is revealed quite early on ('performance appraisals are usually a complete waste of time'). From then, it's

just a question of students listening out for further arguments that confirm their initial impression.

Key:

negative and cynical

B. Comprehension

The answer key shows the sentences or expressions in the listening that should guide students to the correct answers. Encourage stronger students to find these for themselves, before you tell them what they are.

Key:

1. a *"all the things they teach you on these training courses – well, they don't happen in real life."*
[paragraph 12, lines 2-3]

2. c *"It also has a lot to do with the manager's personality."* [paragraph 14, line 2]

3. c *"Criticism should help people to improve. There's no point criticizing things that the employee can't change or control." This also helps to eliminate option b. Tom may also feel option a is true, but he doesn't actually say it.* [paragraph 16, lines 3-4]

4. a *"Or, they could be jealous of the person because they are too successful."* [paragraph 20, lines 1-2]

5. b *"... they prefer to avoid conflict because they don't want to risk spoiling their relationship with the employee."* [paragraph 24, lines 3-4]

6. a *"people who are performing badly often get promoted to a job that they are not capable of doing."*
[paragraph 26, lines 2-3]

C. Vocabulary

If you have time, get students to check each other's answers in pairs before you play back the first part of the listening.

Encourage them to note down the gapped items in complete phrases, as they are all useful for talking about performance appraisal (and other aspects of HR in general).

Key:

1. *for*; 2. *depends*; 3. *supposed*; 4. *set*;
5. *performance*; 6. *comment*; 7. *constructive*;
8. *suggest*; 9. *improve*; 10. *career*; 11. *company*;
12. *contribution*; 13. *motivated*; 14. *deal*; 15. *just*

D. Discussion

Encourage students to use the vocabulary they have previously looked at and to make notes of any extra vocabulary they need to get their points across.

For stronger students, you could extend this into an essay task or a more formal class presentation.

Worksheet A: Level 1 (Intermediate)

A Pre-reading

You are going to read a short text about performance appraisals. Match the headings to the correct paragraphs. Two of the headings in the list do not match.

- a. What are the potential drawbacks of performance appraisals?
- b. What are the different stages of a performance appraisal?
- c. Why do many employees not respond well to performance appraisals?
- d. What does a performance appraisal involve?
- e. How can performance appraisals benefit both managers and employees?

What is Performance Appraisal?

1. _____

Performance Appraisal (PA) systems are formal methods of planning and evaluating employee performance that involve interviewing (typically annually) to discuss work goals or standards of behaviour and to record what the employee has achieved in these two areas. In goal-based systems, new goals can then be agreed for the next year or period. But PA systems are not just about performance planning and feedback. They frequently require the line manager to make a recommendation about pay (for example a pay increase based on what the employee has achieved). The PA may affect decisions about promotion to a higher position. They also very often include some form of planning for employee development, including training, coaching and giving the employee specific tasks for the coming year. However, some organizations separate discussion of individual performance and career development, as it can be difficult to discuss both at the same time.

2. _____

The complexity of HR systems means that how well PA systems are designed and implemented varies enormously. A lot can go wrong with them, which can undermine employee motivation and trust rather than strengthening them. The notion that 'performance appraisal improves performance' just because the word 'performance' is included in it should be treated carefully; (the same is true of any HR technique

containing the word 'performance'). Each element in a PA system means that managers need to be skilled and each carries risks. Reviews of research on PA systems stress that they can be useful, but only if they are managed carefully.

3. _____

Despite the serious challenges, executives have long been able to see a valid and important role for formal performance appraisal, particularly in big organizations with large numbers of salaried staff. Research in Britain shows that PA systems are growing as a way of managing individual performance, particularly in managerial and professional work. As noted above, the range of individual performance in jobs that involve higher levels of personal decision-making is vast and it seems only logical to manage each employee as an individual. From the employee's perspective, there is also potentially something to gain from a PA system. PA systems can form the basis for discussing the individual's job and their career development in a way that otherwise only occurs at their recruitment interview. This means that employees are often keen to have an annual review: it is frequently their best chance to talk back to their manager. PA systems provide a one-to-one forum for employees to speak. The employees – especially the more assertive ones – find this very useful.

Adapted from: *Management, Work & Organisations* by Peter Boxall and John Purcell, pp. 215-217; © Peter Boxall and John Purcell, 2011

Worksheet A: Level 1 (Intermediate)

B Comprehension

Do these statements match the information in the text? Mark each statement true (T) or false (F).

1. The employee's pay rise for the following year is always agreed at the performance appraisal meeting.
2. Performance appraisals are used to review the past year's performance and don't normally involve planning for the future.
3. The author questions whether performance appraisal always helps to motivate employees.
4. The author thinks that performance appraisal only really works well in big companies.
5. The author feels that, in the right circumstances, performance appraisal benefits employees as well as employers.

C Vocabulary 1

Complete the words that have similar meanings to the ones below. Then look back at the text and check your answers.

1. assessing e_____
2. to influence (e.g. a decision) to a_____
3. to keep apart to s_____
4. to weaken to u_____
5. to differ to v____
6. 'This system involves risks.' 'This system c_____ risks.'
7. huge / enormous v____
8. viewpoint p_____
9. to happen to o_____
10. confident (e.g. in expressing personal opinions) a_____

D Vocabulary 2

Match the two halves of the sentences.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. We need to agree your goals ... | a. ... for PA in our company. |
| 2. The manager has to make a recommendation ... | b. ... about your pay increase this year. |
| 3. We see an important role ... | c. ... with this. |
| 4. There is definitely something to gain ... | d. ... for the coming year. |
| 5. A lot can go wrong ... | e. ... for discussing your job in detail. |
| 6. This can form the basis | f. ... from having this system. |

E Discussion

Make a list of questions that you think would be good to ask during a performance appraisal. Then make a second list of questions that you think would be (a) inappropriate (b) not useful. Make notes of the reasons for your choices. Then compare your list with other people in the class. Do you agree with their ideas?

Worksheet B: Level 1 (Intermediate)

A Pre-listening

You are going to listen to a conversation between Laura, a new employee, and Tom, who has been working at the same company for a long time.

As you listen, decide which two of the adjectives in the box best represent Tom's opinion of performance appraisals.

positive

negative

idealistic

confused

cynical

B Comprehension

Listen to the conversation again and choose the best answers (a, b or c).

- Tom thinks that training to prepare people for carrying out performance appraisals or for being appraised tends not to work because:
 - the training doesn't reflect how people actually behave in reality.
 - the training is too basic and doesn't anticipate the problems that come up.
 - the training is too complicated and people don't understand it properly.
- Tom thinks that a manager's knowledge of appraisal procedures and how well he or she has prepared:
 - have no importance.
 - are extremely important.
 - have some importance, but the manager's personality is equally significant.
- Tom believes that when managers criticize employees during an appraisal, they should always aim:
 - to be completely honest.
 - to explain to employees how they can change their personal attitudes and behaviour.
 - to help people to perform better in their job.
- Tom believes that some managers will criticize an employee because:
 - they are jealous of how well the employee is doing.
 - they think that they could do the employee's job better.
 - they think that the employee doesn't like them.
- Tom believes that some managers avoid criticizing employees because:
 - they are unfairly criticized by their own manager and don't want to behave like them.
 - they are too worried about staying friends with the employees who report to them.
 - they are not confident enough that they have reached the right decision.
- Tom argues that 'soft' appraisals are bad for companies because they lead to:
 - poorly performing employees being over-promoted to jobs they aren't able to do well.
 - employees being paid too much.
 - good employees deciding to leave the company.

Worksheet B: Level 1 (Intermediate)

C Vocabulary

Complete the description using the words in the box. Then listen to the first part of the conversation and check your answers.

career	comment	company	constructive	contribution
deal	depends	for	improve	just
motivated	performance	set	suggest	supposed

Tom: Well, _____ [1] one thing, so much _____ [2] on how good the manager is. Think about what managers are _____ [3] to do during appraisals. They need to _____ [4] goals and _____ [5] standards. They are meant to _____ [6] on your performance during the past year in a way that is accurate, _____ [7] and fair. And they are required to _____ [8] ways you can both _____ [9] your performance and develop your _____ [10].

Laura: Yes, that's a lot.

Tom: And that's not all. While doing all this, the managers are expected to make sure you're performing well for the _____ [11]. But at the same time they are have to ensure that that you feel that the company values the _____ [12] you're making; in other words, the appraisal should help you to stay _____ [13] as an employee. That's a great _____ [14] to achieve successfully in _____ [15] one interview.

D Discussion

Tom has given some of the key arguments against performance appraisals, but there are also a lot of positive reasons for doing them. Make a list of arguments in favour of carrying out performance appraisals. Then compare them with other people in the class. Do you agree with each other's points?

Listening transcript: Level 1 (Intermediate)

Laura, a new employee of a company, is talking to Tom, who has been working at the same company for a long time. They are talking about performance appraisals.

- Laura:** Tom, next week it's my first performance appraisal since I joined the company. You've been working here a long time, so you must have been appraised lots of times.
- Tom:** I certainly have Laura! Can't you see all these grey hairs on my head?
- Laura:** I never noticed them! So, what can I expect?
- Tom:** Well, I think you might be asking the wrong person.
- Laura:** Why's that?
- Tom:** Well, in my experience, performance appraisals are usually a complete waste of time.
- Laura:** That's a bit negative, isn't it? I did the training course about how to prepare for appraisals last month, and it seemed like a useful process to me. Why do you have such a bad opinion of them?
- Tom:** Well, for one thing, so much depends on how good the manager is. Think about what managers are supposed to do during appraisals. They need to set goals and performance standards. They are meant to comment on your performance during the past year in a way that is accurate, constructive and fair. And they are required to suggest ways you can both improve your performance and develop your career.
- Laura:** Yes, that's a lot.
- Tom:** And that's not all. While doing all this, the managers are expected to make sure you're performing well for the company. But at the same time they have to ensure that you feel the company values the contribution you're making; in other words, the appraisal should help you to stay motivated as an employee. That's a great deal to achieve successfully in just one interview.
- Laura:** But just like I got trained to prepare for my appraisal, surely the managers are trained to carry out appraisals, aren't they? Won't that training help them?
- Tom:** Well, yes. Of course they are trained to carry out appraisals, just as you've been trained to be appraised. But, unless you're very lucky, all the things they teach you on these training courses – well, they don't happen in real life. It's a bit like when you learn to drive. When you take your driving test, you do everything perfectly. But when people start driving on their own, they start to develop bad habits.
- Laura:** What do you mean?
- Tom:** What I'm saying is that it isn't just a question of how well-prepared or knowledgeable your manager is. It also has a lot to do with the manager's personality. I've had lots of different managers since I started here, so I've seen all sorts of problems.
- Laura:** What sort of problems?
- Tom:** Well, some managers are too critical. They just enjoy criticizing the people working for them, whether it's fair or not. And the problem is even worse when the feedback the manager gives is unconstructive. Criticism should help people to improve. There's no point criticizing things that the employee can't change or control.
- Laura:** Yes, I can see that.
- Tom:** And the worst situation of all is when a manager is criticizing someone for personal reasons, rather than because they are really performing badly.

Listening transcript: Level 1 (Intermediate)

- Laura:** But why would a manager want to do that?
- Tom:** Oh that's simple. They might not like the person they are appraising. Or, they could be jealous of the person because they are too successful. Or they may even see the person as a threat or a rival – somebody who might take their job.
- Laura:** That's really bad. So do you think the main problem with appraisals is the managers who criticize too much, or criticize unfairly?
- Tom:** Well, no actually. In my experience, the opposite problem is more common. A lot of managers are much too soft in appraisals.
- Laura:** But why would a manager not want to criticize a person in an appraisal if there's a real problem that needs to be addressed?
- Tom:** There are all sorts of reasons. Some managers think criticizing a person will reflect badly on them when it's their turn to be appraised by their boss. Some realise that they have to continue working with the person after the appraisal has been completed, so they prefer to avoid conflict because they don't want to risk spoiling their relationship with the employee. And some managers are simply lazy – they just don't want to do the additional work needed to deal with a problem.
- Laura:** That's terrible.
- Tom:** Yes, and it's terrible for the company, too. When performance issues aren't dealt with during the appraisal, then people who are performing badly often get promoted to a job that they are not capable of doing.
- Laura:** Yes, I see.
- Tom:** And because the poorly performing manager has been promoted, this means they get a higher salary, so they are less likely to want to leave the company. So the whole problem is passed on to the next manager to deal with.
- Laura:** Well, I can see some of the problems now you've explained them. But surely there's a positive case for having performance appraisals ...