THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL PROCESS AND TOOLS IN CONTEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONS

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The success of the organization in meeting the strategic objectives set in the long-term depends on its ability to manage its workers' performances and on its ability to ensure that their measures of performance are commensurate with the organization's needs. As a result, the management of the organization's performances became a strategic issue for the organizations (Mello, 2011).

Key Words: Performance Appraisal, Appraisal Process, Systems of performance appraisal, Worker Appraisal, Process of Performance Appraisal, Motivation, Organizational Politics

This article deals with issues of employee evaluation in organizations. It is useful to distinguish between the 'system' performance appraisal and the 'process' of performance appraisal. The system includes the elements of forms of the appraisal and a feedback conversation between the worker and the direct manager. The appraisal process includes various biases, cognitive and other. The element of organizational politics may also be a bias in the evaluation process and organizations should address this and try to minimize these effects as much as possible.

The term **'Performance Appraisal'** addresses a broad group of activities, the goal of which is the improvement of the workers' performances. It focuses on ways to motivate workers to improve their performances. The goal of the process of the management of performances is to improve performances, at first on the level of the individual worker and eventually on the level of the organization (DeNisi & Pritchard, 2006).

Campbell (1999) defines **performance** in the organization as a collection of behaviors, the adoption of which is relevant to the achievement of the goals of the

company or the organization. The attainment of the organization's goals, or in other words, effectiveness, is the outcome of these behaviors.

According to Campbell (1999), the performance is composed of eight **different factors**:

- 1. Expertise in the performance of the tasks unique to the position.
- 2. Expertise in the performance of the tasks not unique to the position.
- 3. Expertise in both written and oral communication related to the position.
- 4. Investment of effort in work (physical, intellectual, and mental).
- 5. Self-discipline (upholding the fulfillment of procedures, directives, etc.).
- 6. Interpersonal behavior (help of work colleagues).

7. Leadership (expressed in the ability to indicate a direction and influence others to follow).

8. Management and administration.

Research studies indicate that the direct performance, which includes the completion of the work tasks and the nature of the activity aimed at the completion of the position tasks, is determined by the expertise in the position (for instance, knowing the data and worker expertise), while the indirect (contextual) performance, which includes all that goes beyond the completion of the work tasks (such as how the worker fits into the staff, what his relations with other factors in the organization are), is determined by the worker's personality, achievement-oriented motivation, and believability (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993).

Performance Appraisal definitions.

According to DeNisi and Pritchard (2006), **performance appraisal** is an isolated event that is formally supported by the organization, generally does not occur very frequently (once or twice a year), when the organization declares clearly the criteria used in this process. From a different perspective, performances appraisal is a process which quantitative scores are given on the basis of the judgment of the workers' performances (DeNisi& Pritchard, 2006).

Cascio (1978) maintains that **the performance appraisal** plays an important role in the field of occupational psychology, out of the need to judge the workers' achievements and abilities, so as to obtain efficiency and effectiveness and better

performance in the organizations that employ them. The goal is to obtain as reliable and accurate information as possible on the certain worker's manner of performance of the tasks in the framework of his role and on his behavior relevant to the role.

Tziner and Rabenu (2011) indicate that the process of worker performance appraisal is intended to obtain as reliable and accurate information as possible regarding the manner of performance of the tasks assigned to a certain worker in the framework of his role and regarding the worker's behavior relevant to the position. The performance appraisal enables the differentiation between excellent, average, or weak workers, according to parameters considered essential to the determination of the satisfaction with their performances.

Performance appraisal is a structured process intended to evaluate the workers' performances in the preceding period and to provide them with feedback about their performances, for the purpose of future performance improvement. This is an ongoing process of the accumulation of data on the worker's different performances, which the appraiser analyzes in regular periods of time through the appraisal form. The goal is to identify areas that need preservation, change, reduction or gaps, or improvement. The process evaluates the worker's past performances and the future potential of his performances (Lazar, 2006).

The following article will present a distinction between the terms 'system for worker appraisal' and 'process of worker appraisal'. After the definition of the term performance and performance appraisal, it is also important to address the matter of measurement and appraisal. Measurement is defined as the attribution of numbers objectively. Through measurement, numerical values are produced independent of the measurer. Every person who will observe a worker and measure the worker's output is supposed to reach the same values/appraisals.

However, Bernardin and Villanova (2005) hold that regarding the performance objective measures are not accessible in most of the roles. Although there are objective measures, they too are 'polluted' by non-relevant factors. In other words, a gap may be created between the actual performance of the worker and the appraisal of the superiors of the performance.

The systems of performance appraisal of workers are tools used by different organizations. These are systems that require the implementation of many resources in

terms of the investment of organizational effort, time, budget, and so on. Therefore, there is a special significance to consider performance appraisal, since it is a management tool that might have a powerful influence on organization's effectivity.

Tziner and Rabenu (2011) maintain that performance appraisal as a human judgmental process always contains an element of subjective interpretation. Therefore, a gap may be created between the worker's functioning in actuality and the superiors' evaluation of his functioning. Regarding the functioning, the measures are often 'contaminated' by **irrelevant factors**. The system for the performance appraisal of the worker is complex, delicate, complicated, and **influenced by factors both on the level of the individual and on the level of the organization**. The processes often awaken many questions and dilemmas and entail difficulties and problems. The **main difficulties and obstacles in the process of worker performance appraisal will be discussed**.

According to Esteban (2008), the topic of the measurement and appraisal of the performance of the public-sector workers constitutes one of the most current issues in the field of public administration today. The processes of worker performance appraisal and feedback between the manager and the worker are one of the useful instruments in management and in the field of human resources management (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Tools of this type enable managers to examine the extent to which the human resource employed by them in the organization is effective and efficient (Sarusi, 2012). Performance appraisal in the organization is a planned formal organizational process that is found among other main functions of human resource management in the organization, such as the research of positions, staffing of positions, connectivity at work, worker guidance and instruction, and remuneration (Tziner & Rabenu, 2011).

Many organizations hold processes of worker performance on a regular basis, annually, acting out of the fundamental assumption according to which the process of worker appraisal meets the workers' needs and provides benefit to the organization. In many workplaces, in both the public sector and in the private sector, there today is the tendency to make use of these processes (Chai - Shafrey & Koren, 2014). Recently, it was published that the Yahoo Corporation also chose to rank its workers using tools of appraisal (Shiloach, 2014).

This part will differentiate between the terms 'system for worker appraisal' and 'process of worker appraisal', in the way in which the present article addresses them. The 'worker appraisal system' refers to the main mechanism in the organization and is a planned and formal organizational function among the main functions of the human resource management in the organization, including the research of roles, the staffing of roles, socialization at work, worker instruction, and worker reimbursement.

This mechanism is composed of the filling out of forms and the holding of feedback conversations between the manager and the worker. The system of the worker appraisal cannot exist without this.



Fig. 1. Performance appraisal system

Main Elements in the System Performance Appraisal.

The system of the performance appraisal is composed of a part that required the manager's prior preparation and of another part, frontal, conducted with the worker. **The system** process of performance appraisal of workers has the following two main components:

1. *Appraisal Sheet* - A form for the performance appraisal of the workers (there may be different forms/tools, according to the organization and type of position and occupation).

2. *Appraisal Interview* - The feedback conversation on the appraisal between the manager in charge and the worker, based on the appraisal forms and summarizing the appraisal process for that period. The feedback is supposed to constitute the objectives and activities for the coming work year (Shtuckman, 1996).

Campbell, Dunnetee, Lawler, and Weick (1970) define the concept of 'performance' as the workers' activities and conduct in the organization, aimed at the achievement of a certain goal in a defined period of time.

Bernardin and Beatty (1984) add that the behaviors and activities need to be appraised by the given organization so as to examine their suitability. In most organizations, in the performance appraisal system the direct manager of the worker is the main source of information, sometimes even the sole one.

Goals of the Performance Appraisal System and Organizational Effectiveness.

The systems of performance appraisals are used in many organizations as a management instrument that serves different goals. Some of the goals are organizational, such as the influence on the level of the organizational effectiveness, and some are personal and developmental, such as transfer of information to the individual and to the organization.

According to Murphy and Cleveland (1991), in the orderly organizational system the system of appraisal constitutes a management instrument that serves many goals. For the appraisal to be effective and efficient, there must be a regular and well-defined method of appraisal, with clear goals known to all the related factors, which is managed according to clear procedures of follow-up, analysis, and summary and whose content is related to the organization's goals.

According to Tziner and Rabenu (2011), worker appraisal serves as an important management tool that helps achieve both the workers' personal goals (such as, for instance, promotion, remuneration, management of career paths, and personal development) and the organization's business goals (such as, for example, improvement

of the management effectiveness, identification and training of a management reserve, and improvement of the organizational climate).

Mohrman, Resnick-West, and Lawler (1989) also address the system of performance appraisal as having a dual role. It both provides information to the individual and to the organization and influences the performance. In other words, it constitutes a means through which the organization attempts to influence the worker's behavior.

In the professional literature, it is possible to differentiate in general between two main groups of goals in the implementation of the system of performance appraisal of workers in the organization.

1. Organizational, administrative, and systemic goals. The appraisal systems can provide significant and valuable information to the managers and to the human resources managers in the organization for the workers' performances. It is possible to derive from them uses and organizational decisions such as promotion, identification of workers with potential, division and allocation of rewards, salary raises, evaluation of the needs for instruction and training, planning of future personnel needs, documentation of performances for 'legal needs;' of the organization, and so on (Bernardin& Beatty, 1984; Cleveland, Murphy, & Williams, 1989; Murphy & Cleveland, 1991).

2. **Developmental and personal goals**. These goals include improvement of the worker's performance, feedback, guidance and identification of the instructional needs, setting personal objectives, and so on. On the level of the worker, appraisal systems can provide the worker with important information about his output and the quality of his work and can spur him on to reach higher levels of performances (Allen, 1994).

The importance of the system of performance appraisal is increased in light of the fact that many researchers maintain that despite the existence of many diverse guidance frameworks, internal and external, primarily development and progress in the worker's work occur during his ongoing work in the position (Tziner & Rabenu, 2011).

According to Tziner and Rabenu (2011), the system for performance appraisal serves (primarily in public organizations and in large organizations) for the purpose of the determination of salary rankings and periodic salary raises. Through it criteria are

set for the degree of the worker's contribution in a certain role to the organization and accordingly he is remunerated. On the basis of the appraisal system it is possible to compare between workers through criteria of performance and to appraise the relative contribution of each worker to the general output. In addition, Tziner and Rabenu (2011) emphasize that the periodic appraisal system that reflects objectively the worker's performance, to the extent this is possible, may help the relations between the worker and his superiors and contribute to the creation of a climate of reciprocal trust, good communication, and cooperation.

Many research studies have engaged over the years in the question of the effectiveness of systems of worker performance appraisal.

Roberts (1995) and others maintain that most of the systems for the performance appraisal are effective to a certain extent, in terms of the processes of appraisal and the influences on the motivation and output. However, there also are conflicting testimonies in the professional literature. These hold that effective performance appraisal systems continue to remain a desired goal, unrealistic, and many systems have even failed in their contribution to the organizational effectiveness (George, 1986; Meyer, 1991).

Latham and Wexley (1981) address the question of the effectiveness of the appraisal system and assert that such a system influences the organizational effectiveness in a number of ways:

1. By **setting clear definitions for goals** and for performance tasks, by determining clear performance standards.

2. By fixing and **improving weak performances** of workers.

3. By **making personal decisions**, such as the division of rewards in a fair manner.

Organizations attempt constantly to improve their appraisal systems, since many research studies indicate that appraisal systems need to constitute an ongoing and cyclical process. Carroll and Schneier (1982) maintain that only in such a way can the appraisal process improve. Fox (1995) maintains that the system must be flexible and simple, with the ability to adopt orders of priorities for the changing needs, alongside being a cyclical process.

According to Latham and Wexley (1981), for the appraisal system to effectively and efficiently act to achieve its goals, it is necessary to determine procedures and

conditions suitable for the construction, operation, and monitoring of the system. The system must be adjusted to the organization according to its specific needs; there is no point in adopting in one organization a method of appraisal that succeeded in another organization. In many organizations even if goals were determined for the appraisal system, the system is not suited to these goals, and the goals and the system are not clear and are not known well by the different ranks in the organization.

Since one of the main goals of appraisal, as previously noted, is to provide the organization with information about the worker's level of performance, inaccurate appraisals that give mistaken information harm the organization's ability to make correct and accurate decisions on the basis of the appraisal and consequently also harm the organization's business success.

Alongside the main goals of the performance appraisal system, it is important to examine the different uses in organizations for these systems.

Organizational Uses of a System for Performance Appraisal. Despite the aforementioned statements, the following question is asked. What organizational uses is the system of worker performance appraisal actually used for?

The research study of Cleveland et al. (1989) addresses the question of the uses of the worker performance appraisals. The researchers gave the respondents (organizational and industrial psychologists in the United States) a list of tens of possible uses for performance appraisal and asked them to note the most frequent use they make of the information obtained from the performance appraisal.

First, the researchers found that it is possible to classify the uses of the performance appraisal into four categories:

1. *Between person decisions*. Uses of appraisals that focus on the differences between the appraised people and include decisions about salary, promotion, worker retention, worker employment termination, recognition of the individual's contribution to the organization, and identification of poor performers.

2. *Within person decisions*. Uses of appraisal that focus on the appraised people themselves and include identification of the individual's instructional needs.

3. *System maintenance*. Uses of appraisal for the planning of the work force, determination of the instructional needs in the organization, evaluation of the achievement of goals, assistance in the identification of the goals, evaluation of human

resources systems, strengthening of the authority structure, and identification of the developmental needs in the organization.

4. *Documentation*. Documentation of the human resources decisions regarding workers and meeting legal requirements.

Second, the researchers found that the first two categories were commonly cited as goals of the appraisal system more than the system maintenance or documentation. It further became clear that the respondents noted that the two most frequent uses of performance appraisals are salary decisions and feedback for worker development. The less common uses were evaluation of the human resources system, determination of the instruction needs, strengthening of the structure of authority, and planning of personnel.

It was found that the main goals achieved through the system are the improvement of the allocation of rewards (primarily salary and promotion) and improvement of the output, primarily in the element of the supply of ongoing information to the worker about his performance. In contrast, the goals that are pushed to the sidelines in performance appraisals are the improvement of the organizational effectiveness (for instance, appraisal of the human resources system or reinforcement of the authority structure in the organization) and definition of the organizational instructional needs.

In the professional literature, there are a number of conditions that contribute to the effectiveness of performance appraisal system. The clarity of these conditions will contribute to the utmost effectiveness in the deployment of worker appraisal in organizations.

Conditions of Effective Performance of the Appraisal System. Tziner and Rabenu (2011) note that the system for performance appraisal needs to meet **seven main conditions** to act effectively and efficiently.

1. The appraisal needs to **most objectively reflect** the worker's performances in his occupational role in the organization and differentiate between excellent, average, and weak workers according to the measures that were determined.

2. In the appraisal system there must be a **direct relation between the workers'** achievements and the rewards offered to them. The increase of the work productivity depends on this relation. As the workers' performance is better, the package of rewards and benefits is richer. It is clear that the compensation needs to suit the workers'

preferences and the value they attribute to them so as to bring about the increase of the productivity.

3. There **must be feedback** in the appraisal system, since the information on the appraisal of the performance helps the process of the change of the worker's behavior and the increase of his motivation.

4. The appraisal system **needs to be reliable**. Despite the biases that influence the judgment, different appraisers need to draw identical conclusions about the same appraised worker.

5. The system **needs to be flexible** and to have the **ability to change**, so that it will suit technological innovations or changes in the structure of the role.

6. The system needs **to be simple** so that it will be useful and understood by the different role-holders in the organization.

7. The different role-holders in the organization **need to trust the system** and to feel that it has value for them, for their different needs. Therefore, it is desirable that the building of a system for the evaluation and assimilation of the performance appraisal system in the organization will be undertaken through cooperation and mutual trust between all the ranks in the organization.

Ratnawat and Jha (2013) even emphasize in this context the importance of the workers' perception of fairness of the system and note that it is important that the system be perceived by the workers as important, fair, and honest.

Process of performance appraisal.

The process was intended to appraise the worker's past performances and the future potential of his performances. It means the rating process.

Murphy (2008) listed the reasons why the process of performance appraisal is based on subjective judgment about the workers' performances, despite the desire to create systems of appraisal that will allow the examination of the workers' performances in an objective manner.

The term 'work appraisal process' from the researcher's perspective is that there is no engagement in objective measurement but in subjective appraisal, which is the product of a human judgment process that always has a component of subjective interpretation. This interpretation is influenced by many factors, such as the manager's management style, quality of interpersonal relations between the manager and the worker, desire to preserve and promote certain interests, organizational politics, organizational climate, different influences on the appraiser's part, personal relations, and other judgment biases.

The following figure presents the constellation of factors that may influence in the worker appraisal process (fig. 2).

Complexity of the Performance Appraisal Process.

Although the idea that people are ranked according to some scale of evaluation has been known to humanity for centuries, the first documented use of a ranking according to performance was in a Scottish cotton factory at the beginning of the 19thcentury. Above each worker's station a square of wood was hung, and the color changed according to the worker's performances (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995).

Tziner and Rabenu (2011) describe the complexity of the process of performance appraisal and emphasize two main components of the process:

Judgment. In this process information is obtained about the worker's functioning in his job and the appraiser forms his appraisal from this. However, there are limitations in the human judgment process and often there are cases in which the appraisal that was created does not always reflect precisely the performance.

Recording of the appraisal score. In this process the performance appraisal is recorded in the appraisal sheet. However, a gap may be created between the performance appraisal that was formed by the appraiser and the appraisal score in the appraisal sheet. This gap generally derives from the appraiser's decision not to write the precise appraisal for the worker in the appraisal sheet (because of non-relevant considerations, such as discomfort with giving the worker pointed feedback about his poor performances, assumption that other appraisers 'inflate' their performance appraisals so as to obtain benefits for their department).



Fig. 2. Elements in Worker Performance Appraisal Process

Biases and Failures of Judgment in the Performance Appraisal of Worker.

There is special importance for the performance appraisals to be precise and devoid of mistakes, to the extent possible. If the appraisals are not accurate, then they lead to distortion of the reality in a certain way. In addition, appraisals that are not precise will distort the organization's ability to reveal deficiencies in its performance and in its workers' performance. However, since the tools for performance appraisal are fundamentally judgmental, it can be expected that the appraisals given will be influenced by the appraisal or judgment biases.

There are main biases and failures of judgment relevant to the processes of worker appraisal. The professional literature on performance appraisal greatly addressed the mistakes that the appraisers make. These mistakes are perceived as the main obstacle that stands in front of precise and objective appraisals (Decker & Cornelius, 1981). Tziner and Rabenu (2011) emphasize that the process of appraisal is performed by a human factor, and therefore it is subjective and exposed to biases. The biases of appraisal are distortions in the judgment of the appraisal and in the recording of the appraisal in the appraisal record, which harm the performance appraisal that loyally reflects the appraised performance in actuality.

The biases occur for **different reasons**: some are **cognitive** (biases related to the processes of the perception and absorption of stimuli, attributed to the performance of the appraised worker, for example, selective absorption of facts, organization of the information, memory and drawing conclusions), some are **non-cognitive** (biases related to the appraiser's personal and personality characteristics, beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, towards the appraisal system and the organization, emotions towards the appraised worker, his experience, and his skills in appraisal, the appraiser's commitment to the appraisal process, and so on).

Tziner and Rabenu (2011) also note that some of the appraisal biases are **conscious** (such as, for example, intentional distortions in appraisal because of the desire to obtain a bonus for the team) and some are **unconscious** (such as the appraiser's ignoring of the appraised worker's behaviors, which are not measured in financial terms, such as help of a new colleague in the team, organization of department activity and suggestion of ideas for increase of efficiency).

The biases leave a **significant impression on the quality of the performance appraisal**, and therefore those who use performance appraisals often doubt their reliability and validity.

According to Tziner and Rabenu (2011), a number of phenomena indicate that the performance appraisal is a problematic topic and subject to bias. First, frequently it is possible to find a situation in which 80-90% of the workers are ranked as 'above average'. Second, the differences between the performance appraisals of different workers seem for the most part most minimal, even when clear differences in the performance are found.

The factors that influence the performance appraisals include not only cognitive factors but also motivational factors. The way in which motivational factors influence the precision of the appraisal can be described through the model proposed by Murphy and Cleveland (1995) in which there is **reference to motivation** for providing precise or biased appraisals.

In addition, it is necessary to remember that the **manager** who is appraising **may suffer directly** from the fact that he gave an accurate appraisal since he must continue to work with the worker who was appraised even after the appraisal was given and an accurate appraisal may sometimes harm the interpersonal relations between them, the worker's motivation, and the work atmosphere in the unit, and inspire difficulties in the effective management of the work (Kingstorm & Mainstone, 1985).

Tziner and Rabenu (2011) emphasize that the appraisal of the performance requires the appraisers to invest considerable effort and to take upon themselves **significant risk** since low performance appraisal, for instance, **may harm the interpersonal relations in the work group** and cause resentment, angers, and complaints. However, a comfortable interpersonal atmosphere may be expressed in displays of solidarity between members of the organization that will cause the appraisers to 'round corners' regarding the appraisal scores (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995; Tziner et al., 2003).

Furthermore, if workers receive low appraisals, then this may also indicate **the manager's abilities**, since he is supposed to facilitate the development of his workers and the realization of their abilities. Accurate appraisal may harm the manager's ability to function effectively. In many organizations there is social pressure to appraise according to the organizational norm, and if the norm is to be lenient, then it will be difficult for the manager to provide accurate appraisals, without paying a social price or suffering criticism for this (Napier &Letham, 1986).

According to Murphy and Cleveland (1995), another factor that may bring the appraisers to raise the appraisal scores they give is the desire to **avoid negative reactions** among the appraised workers following a poor appraisal. The appraiser will be forced to face the worker who is being appraised when he responds to the negative appraisal he received and often the aim is to avoid this situation (Napier & Letham, 1986).

Providing inaccurate appraisals may also derive from the **desire to preserve the positive image of the organization or the unit** where the appraiser works, an organization where the workers are of quality and perform quality work. Providing

negative appraisal may harm this image and therefore the inflation of the appraisals may derive from motives to improve the image of the organization, motives that may not even be on the conscious level (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995). Some of the influences related to the appraiser himself will be presented in the following part, since they lay the foundations that help us in the understanding of the complexity of the appraisal process.

Organizational Politics as a significant element in Appraisal. This part presents the topic of the organizational politics and the influence on the **political interests in organizations** on the processes of performance appraisal. According to Tziner and Rabenu (2011), in recent years there is increasing evidence that the lack of accuracy in the performance appraisal derives from voluntary and intentional distortions by the appraisers. For example, a review of appraisers, appraised people, and administrators of the system for appraisal showed that most of the respondents in these groups felt that the distortions pertain far more to the intentional lack of accuracy in the appraisal than cognitive mistakes of distraction (Bernardin Villanova, 1986). According to empirical data, these intentional distortions of the system of appraisal and its results and they reflected the superiors' conscious efforts to produce appraisals that would achieve personal goals. These manipulative behaviors can be included under the title of 'organizational politics'.

Organizational politics is an inseparable part of the organizational life that addresses power, authority, and influence, when power is defined as the attempt to influence others (Cobb, 1984) and the ability to recruit sources, energy, and information for a goal or preferred strategy. There are more than a few cases in organizations in which managers do not act according to recommendations that derive from the tool of human resources development following **'political' interests or organizational politics**.

CONCLUSION

First, it is important to differentiate between the terms system for worker appraisal and process of worker appraisal, and it is not possible to use these terms in parallel. The term 'system' addresses the structured mechanism and the organizational function. The term 'process' is intended for the process of judgment and the ranking and

needs to consider the many factors that influence the appraiser's subjective judgment: factors related to the appraiser and the organization, factors related to relationships between the manager and the worker, to the management style, etc.

Second, alongside the considerable advantages, the instrument for performance appraisal in organizations also has disadvantages that related to the biases and failures of thought that are an integral part of the appraisal and human judgment.

Third, the professional literature indicates that organizational politics, by its very definition, is related strongly to the topic of performance appraisal. The mixture of organizational politics in the performance appraisal is destructive and harmfull. Decisions that are not based on objective and fair considerations but are guided by erroneous and discriminatory considerations are a main problem in organizations. For the performance appraisals to achieve their objective, **they must be reliable and clear** of every **nonprofessional consideration**. Without the full trust of the workers and the managers in the system, there is no point in using performance appraisals.

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