Peer and self assessment in
Performance and Reward Management
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Context:

Performance and Reward Management is a postgraduate course contributing to the Master of Human Resource Management program.

The course is intended to provide an overview of the main issues involved in performance management, including rationales for conducting it, the costs and benefits of performance management, alternatives to traditional methods and expected as well as unintended outcomes that may emerge from performance management approaches. The course examines the nature of workplace performance, factors that contribute to performance improvement, techniques for measuring and monitoring performance, reward management and motivation, and methods for integrating individual and organizational performance management.

The overall aim of this course is to provide students with the theoretical frameworks and practical skills required to successfully design and administer performance management systems within modern organisations. This involves a diverse range of management and technical skills and knowledge. The course allows students to integrate and contribute knowledge from many of their discipline specific management areas.

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Explain key concepts underlying performance management, by effectively describing, and critically evaluating specific performance management practices

2. Identify, discuss and evaluate the major human resource management factors that managers need to address to support performance improvement,

3. Compare different performance management models, by Designing performance management systems for specific circumstances
4. Competently demonstrate a range of skills required for performance management, including measurement, feedback

5. Participate in the debate between practitioners and researchers, and

6. Demonstrate an understanding of the relevant academic literature by appropriately applying relevant theories and research to performance management issues

Assessment

The assessment in this course consists of 4 items. These are: an applied literature review (30%); a group seminar presentation of a case study about a performance management system (10%); two 500 word seminar critiques (5% each); and a final examination (50%). It is the seminar critiques which involve peer assessment, but the learning benefit of these interacts with the learning through the course.

Peer assessment

Group seminar

Students are required to form groups of up to 3 members each. Each group is then required to present their findings on either a case-study of a performance management system, or a topic of contemporary significance within Performance Management. The case study should highlight key aspects of the performance management system and describe how relevant literature explains what has been observed in the case study. Preferably, the case study will be linked to an organisation one of the group members is currently employed in.

Alternatively, if students are completely unable to access an organisation for their case study, they may negotiate with the course convenor, to present an in-depth review of research associated with a specific Performance Management problem. However, students may not proceed with this alternative unless they have negotiated a topic with the course convenor, and may only treat this alternative as a last resort.

Skills in measuring performance and providing motivating feedback are important aspects of performance management. Accordingly, peer assessment is included in this course because it models, and allows students to practice, performance management practices. In the most recent offering of this course (Semester 2, 2008), there were two types of peer assessment used: (1) students decided a mark for each other’s presentations and (2) students provided each other with detailed, written critiques of each other’s presentations.

The criteria for the peer assessment and the written critiques were developed in consultation with students, using a process designed by a consultant in the field of performance measurement (Barr, 2007). This process is based upon principles of measurement derived from organisational behavioural research. The specific steps are as follows:
1. Students identify key result areas for presentations (i.e., what criteria will the presentations have to satisfy to be of appropriate standard for Masters-level course?)

2. Students are then asked to identify how the result area can be observed. In other words, the criteria are described in behavioural terms (i.e., made sensory-specific – What would you see? What would you hear? etc)

3. The criteria are then checked against the overall objectives for the course (In Barr’s terms, students are asked to check the bigger picture)

4. Students then list potential evidence for achievement against these criteria

5. Finally, students select and name the measure(s)

As a result of this procedure, the students generate a detailed and internalised understanding of the criteria which are important to achieving good performance in critiquing performance, and also to generating appropriate feedback on performance. Because the criteria are generated in a collaborative fashion, they are richer than if only a few people generated them – for example, many more diverse perspectives and cultural factors are integrated (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 1999, 2001). In addition, the students are able to develop an appreciation of the criteria in their own words rather than having the challenge of understanding what is meant by the criteria being worded and explained by someone else.

**Peer Assessment of Group Seminar**

In the most recent offering of this course, limitations of space and time combined with the number of students (60) required presentations to be provided in two separate rooms. However, this meant that the convenor for the course could only observe and assess one-half of the presentations. Consequently, students were given the option of being assessed by the convenor or by their peers, knowing that they would still be assessed against the same criteria. Roughly one-fifth of presentation groups opted for convenor assessment, so the other students were provided with a procedure for assessing presentations in the convenor’s absence.

Peer-assessment of the student presentations proceeded in the following manner.

1. Students were initially asked to make comments and observations on a pro-forma based on the student-developed criteria (Appendix B presents an example of this pro-forma from a previous year). These comments were used as the basis for providing behavioural feedback about the presentation, emphasising things that went well and things that needed improving. When commenting on improvements that were needed, students were required to suggest alternatives that would have improved the presentation.

2. At this point the convenor, or one of the students if the convenor was not present, took the role of marking facilitator. The first task of the marking facilitator was to ask the presenting group to leave the room, so as to not provide social pressure when their work was being assessed.

3. The remaining students were then asked to individually decide upon a mark between zero and ten that corresponded to their assessment of the worth of the presentation. Students were reminded at this point that a mark of ten did not represent perfection, but instead represented a presentation that was as good as could reasonably be expected from students in a Masters-level course, while five
represented a barely adequate presentation and zero represented a complete failure to address requirements.

4. While students were deciding their marks, the marking facilitator wrote the numbers representing the scale from zero to ten on the whiteboard. Then students were asked to raise their hand to indicate their mark as the marking facilitator’s hand was moved along the scale on the whiteboard. When half the students in the room had raised their hands, the point at which the marking facilitator’s hand lay was taken to represent the median mark, which was then assigned to the presentation.

Seminar Critiques

The Seminar Critiques require students to assess seminars presented by other students, and to structure appropriate feedback for these students. Consequently, the Seminar Critiques provide a useful learning experience in themselves, and generate valuable guidance to students, prior to preparing for their final piece of assessment.

Each student is assigned two seminar presentations to critique. Students who do not attend the presentation they are assigned to critique automatically receive a mark of zero (0) for the relevant critique. Criteria for the Seminar Critiques are developed collaboratively within the course, as described above. All students are provided with guidelines for critiquing the presentations (See Appendix A). One by one, each student group presents their case study. Each is given twenty minutes. For each presenting team, there may be multiple reviewers (approximately seven in the most recent offering of the course). The students who are critiquing a particular presentation use the same pro-forma for note-taking as described earlier (i.e., Appendix B). After the class, students use their notes as the basis for compiling their written critiques, but are also expected to provide relevant literature support for any theories or concepts used within their critiques. Critiques are submitted one week after the presentation. One copy is submitted to the convenor for marking out of 5, according to the criteria described in Appendix A. At the same time, copies of the critiques are provided to each member of the relevant presenting group. These critiques constitute a form of detailed written feedback which provide students with assistance with preparing for their final assessment.

Evidence of effectiveness and impact

As a check on the reliability and validity of the peer assessment of the presentations, peer-assessed marks were obtained for each group that presented in the room in which the convenor was present. The level of agreement with the convenor’s mark was very high, with peer marks always within half a mark of the convenor’s assessment. (NB: it should be noted that this is a postgraduate course with only mature age students enrolled.) The quality of the feedback provided by the critiques is further confirmed by the average mark accorded to this piece of assessment (roughly 75% within a course with an overall average mark of 71%).

The peer assessment and critique process has been a point that has been particularly appreciated by students within this course. Students have noted the value of the feedback they have been provided within their critiques, as well as the fact that
being assessed tends to reduce their anxieties in preparation for a presentation. Further, student evaluations of this course are typically in the range from 5.8 to 6.2 (out of 7), which is consistent with their overall acceptance of the process.

Principles of Good Practice illustrated by the practice

Valuing diversity, forming a collaborative cooperative culture (Boud et al., 2001)

Engaging students in collectively determining the criteria by which their work will be assessed helps to form a cooperative, collaborative learning culture. As Boud says (1995) "We live alongside others in community with them and share common cultures and understandings. Therefore peers ... are vital." (p.15).

Engagement / "time on task" (Chickering & Gamson, 1999)

All students are engaged in the process of peer review since all are involved in determining a mark for each presenting team. The nature of this engagement entails students actively reflecting upon the quality of the work in relation to relevant criteria and standards. This builds upon the engagement of students in producing the work – where it is likely that they will have also reflected on the criteria and standards required.

Authenticity (Biggs, 2006)

This task authentically models the processes involved in performance management, allowing students to practice with guidance.

Managing motivation (James, McInnis, & Devlin, 2002)

The presentation and peer review tasks deliberately do not provide students with many marks – but, do provide some marks, and do so relatively early in the semester - early, low-stakes formative assessment (James et al., 2002). Far from reducing motivation, this has the effect of reducing anxiety. It allows students the opportunity to learn how to perform well before they are more substantially assessed. This ensures that the knowledge and performance skills which are most highly prized are also the ones most highly rewarded with marks.

Students know that they will benefit from receiving peer feedback, this helps to motivate them on a quid pro quo basis to contribute meaningfully to providing high quality feedback.

Multiple exposure (Bowden & Marton, 2003)

Students get to see multiple examples of different, and genuine, performance management cases. Through exposure to difference students are better able to internalise an appreciation of the characteristics of good practice, and thereby to relate this to appraising and enhancing their own performance.
How to do it yourself

The key components of this assessment method include:

1. The collaborative process by which the assessment criteria are determined
   - The reason this is so important is that it allows students to internalise a detailed understanding of the meaning of the assessment criteria (something that is very hard to achieve any other way).

2. Ensuring guidance is given to ALL students as reviewers
   - Students should not be expected to possess the skills which the practice is designed to help develop. Accordingly, guidance must be given, especially with respect to constructing, interpreting and assessing against the specific criteria. Previous experience has found that providing students with explicit anchors for zero, pass and full marks has increased the reliability of the marks they provide. Example sheets are included in this case study as appendices A and B by way of illustration.

3. Involving all students are reviewers for all presentations, but requiring two students to be responsible in each case for compiling more detailed and more formal feedback
   - Motivating students to pay attention to the multiple presentations that they see, and to focus their cognitive effort on actually thinking about the quality of the presentations helps students to genuinely engaged and to achieve deeper learning outcomes. Sharing the role of critiquing a presentation and preparing detailed written feedback recognises that such an act requires somewhat more concentration and effort than simply listening attentively. Involving all students in all phases of the presentation and critique activity helps generate an environment of mutual professional responsibility.
Teaching materials:

Appendix A

7419MGT Performance & Reward Management
Presentation Critiques – Guidelines & Criteria

In completing your critique, remember that this is feedback for the group you are critiquing. Most of us find getting feedback on our performance a little threatening (think about what it is going to be like getting your own critiques!) so make sure that you write your critique in a manner which is helpful, respectful and clear. Some of the things you can do to make this happen is to follow these principles:

Provide Behavioural Descriptions
Describe what you saw, heard, or experienced as clearly as you can so that the reader will be able to recognise precisely what you are referring to.

Link Evaluation to Description
If you believe that something was well done or needed improvement, make sure that you clearly identify what you are referring to eg:

Avoid statements like – ‘The presentation was good’
Instead, use statements like – ‘The presenters spoke clearly and with a good range of vocal expression. The examples provided were particularly helpful in explaining the key points.’

Provide Alternatives
No-one gets things perfect, but it is more helpful to explain what they could do differently rather than just point out what went wrong. You might do this by providing suggestions or referring to examples from other presentations or from the performance management literature. However even here it is important to describe alternatives using behavioural terms.

Explain Reasons
An important part of critique involves explaining why something worked or failed to work, or why an alternative would be an improvement. It is at this point that references to theories, models and other issues from the literature are most likely to be useful. Make sure that your reasons are supported by some form of logic or rationale.

Criteria
The Presentation Critiques will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Quality of Observations
- Performance Management Insights Demonstrated
- Usefulness of Critique (including alternatives provided)
- Standard of Presentation (including clarity & respectfulness)
Appendix B

7419MGT Presentation – Feedback

Please Note: This sheet is for taking notes, not for presenting to the students whose presentation you are critiquing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names &amp; Student Numbers:</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Innovation &amp; Ideas</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gives good definitions; description of why certain ideas are important; takes existing ideas and applies to something new; challenges old ideas; shows how ideas work (evidence); makes the ideas tangible through good examples</td>
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<tr>
<th>Useful</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
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<tr>
<td>Learn some presentation skills; how to apply knowledge that is being presented; how to use in real applications or examples; how, when, where to use the information; what information to be used and what not to be used</td>
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<tr>
<th>Practical &amp; Proven Examples</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
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<tr>
<td>Evidence including: statistics, case study, research, journal articles (beyond the text); relating theory/concept to correct practical organisation management tools; contextual factors relating directly to the organisation; organisational overview (background knowledge); how the performance management system operates in the organisation</td>
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<tr>
<th>Quality/Exciting/Time</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
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<tr>
<td>Audience engagement (questions from audience, body language); visual impact of slides/presentation; within time; logical structure; clear/easy to follow; keep to the point</td>
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<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
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<th>Good</th>
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<tr>
<td>Clarity of concept; good quality references (minimum of 5 to 10); sounds convincing/depth of understanding; clear thought process/ well-developed</td>
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References


