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BLOGS

Discipline;Discrimination;Health Care;Hiring & Firing;Social Media & Technology;Workplace Policies

Technology and the Performance Review

Performance reviews can be a managers least favorite part of the job. They can be uncomfortable, confrontational and emotional. So, often, instead of addressing incidents of misconduct or poor performance with the employee, managers avoid the issue, and may even give a neutral or positive review. Then, when the manager concludes that discipline or termination are warranted, there is no documentation to back-up assertions of negative job performance, which can make things difficult if an employee later claims the action was taken for unlawful reason. But even leaving aside the issue of documentation, [which we have addressed here](#), its a fact that employees need feedback to perform their jobs well, and managers are often ineffective at giving employees good feedback.

Thus, over the last twenty years or so, there has been a rise in feedback mechanisms that, to some extent, let managers off the hook. One example is a multi-rater feedback instrument, like a 360 review. A recent development in this arena is the online, real-time, social-media type of feedback provided by [ClearGears](#). According to the [companys website](#), the ClearGears review process allows all of the employees in a business to answer questions daily about their co-workers. This daily, anonymous and democratic information is compiled so that the employee sees a real time graph of how his or her work is perceived. But does this kind of immediate and ongoing feedback address concerns about infrequent or untimely reviews? Is it likely to improve employees performance? Does it create legal risks different from those associated with a traditional review?

The data compiled and provided by the ClearGears review process or similar products may be an appealing way to get information about the quality and quantity of employees work. The legal and logistical implications of any review process, however, should always be taken into account.

First consider what the function of the performance review will be within the organization.

Development Tool: Performance reviews can be used to help employees recognize the areas of their job in which they excel and the areas in which they could improve. Key questions to ask when this is your goal are:

- Does this format give clear, meaningful and in-depth feedback?
- Does the employee have sufficient resources to take action and change his or her behavior once the feedback is given?
- Does this format give enough data to create an accurate picture of the employees relationships at work?
- Does it give too much data? Is the data too personal?
- Is the correct amount of attention paid to the issues that are creating problems within your organization?



Performance Management: Performance reviews may also be used to determine which employees receive promotions, raises in pay or bonuses, or which employees will be retained in the event of a reduction in force. Key questions to ask when performance management is your goal are:

- Does this format give a clear picture of the quality of work the employee is providing?
- Does the feedback provide valuable information in relation to timeliness and productivity?
- Is this type of feedback reliable enough to form the basis of decisions about promotions, compensation, or retention?
- Is this type of feedback reliable enough to qualify as actual documentation of poor performance?

Issues to consider for all types of performance reviews include the cost of implementing the review process, the time required to administer the review and compile data, and how your employees will react to the type of feedback being given. Will co-worker feedback be considered credible and valuable? Do co-workers have enough information to give meaningful feedback? Will responses be used as a way to back-bite and criticize co-workers anonymously? Also consider that ClearGears and other forms of 360 reviews are often done on-line, so it must be determined at the outset who will have access to the data and how it will be secured.

Finally, remember that real improvement and change are ongoing. Once any type of performance review has been given, the employees should have the opportunity, resources and continued support needed to truly adjust behavior. ClearGears and other on-line performance review services look like an easy and cost-effective way to see how your employees really feel about each other, but understanding what the true goals of the performance review are will help you choose the best format for your company.