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COMMUNICATION IN ORGANIZATIONS AND 360-DEGREE EVALUATION: WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO CONCEPTS?

Rita Andreia Mourão e Sandra Miranda

Abstract The performance appraisal has a very important role in the strategic objectives of the organization, because it contributes to its efficacy (Aguinis, 2007). However, some limitations of top-down performance appraisal like the subjectivity have been proposed other evaluations, like 360-degree evaluation (Kondrasuk, 2012). This is a specific evaluation that considers more than one appraiser (Brutus & Gorriti, 2005).

The purpose of this research is to know if the application of 360-degree evaluation influences organizational communication. We conducted a qualitative exploratory study through the interviews with experts. The results that will be presented are still preliminary and have theoretical and practical applications. In general, we conclude that 360-degree evaluation could be advantageous for organizational communication (e.g. active voice of employees; symmetrical and bi-directional communication).

Key-words Performance Appraisal; 360-degree evaluation; Organizational Communication

Introduction

The performance evaluation has a central role in organizations because it allows justify the decision making of managers (Becton & Schraeder, 2004; Bracken, Timmreck, Fleenor & Summers, 2001). These decision-making may have consequences at different levels, such as reward systems management (*i.e.*, increase of salaries); justification of decisions about the management of professional careers (*i.e.*, transfers, promotions, progressions, changes in labor contracts); identification of training needs of evaluated people, with a view to personal and professional development (Bracken *et al.*, 2001; Brutus & Gorriti, 2005, Caetano, 2008; Caetano & Vala, 2000). Some authors also argue that the application of performance evaluation may be useful in selection and recruitment procedures (Aguinis, 2007; Brutus & Gorriti, 2005; Caetano, 2008; Tannenbaum, 2006).

In recent years some factors began promoting other type of performance appraisal that may include more than one evaluator (e.g. colleagues, clients and supervisors) and this particular type of performance evaluation is called 360-degree evaluation. A previous study found that 360-degree evaluation may be advantageous when compared with traditional performance appraisal (*i.e.*, manager evaluate their subordinates) (Mourão, Miranda & Ramalho, 2015). According to the same study, the diversity of perspectives that 360-degree evaluation has, could be relevant to: a higher reliability of the evaluation process; a decentralization manager's power; a neutralization of the influence of emotional relationships; and a possible resolution of conflicts among employees. In this sense, the interviewed employees consider that this type of evaluation will evaluate the employees mostly considering their professional performance, rather than the quality of personal relationships that they establish in organizations. Furthermore, the analysis of focus group allowed to realize that respondents consider that the 360-degree evaluation may help discover possible conflicts between employees (Mourão, Miranda & Ramalho, 2015).

When we are studying the practice of communication we can consider that the 360-degree evaluation may promote a more effective organizational communication (Carson, 2006). This is because organizations with a power-sharing culture could be responsible to have a horizontal organizational communication that tends to be promoted by 360-degree evaluation (Heijden & Nijhof, 2004; Mamatoglu, 2008).

In this study we pretend to understand how some kind of experts define and understand organizational communication and 360-degree evaluation and we intend to understand how experts perceive the practice of organizational communication, under the application of 360-degree evaluation. Some authors argue that, there are specific ways of communication, depending on the type of appraisal used and the sharing of power in organizations (e.g. Heijden & Nijhof, 2004). This research allows us to have a general idea about the possible relationship between organizational communication and 360-degree evaluation.

Literature Review

360-degree evaluation: Definition and advantages

360-degree evaluation is a specific type of performance appraisal. It is different from other methods, because it includes several evaluators (Brutus & Gorriti, 2005; Caetano, 2008). The majority of authors argue that the evaluators are: the employee (through its self-evaluation); colleagues; direct supervisors (Bracken *et al.*, 2001; Craig & Hannum, 2006; Nowack, 2009).

The main objective of 360-degree evaluation is the development of organizational actors (Nowack, 2009), allowing them an identification of their learning needs and therefore an understanding of its performance, promoting communication and trust between them (Slenttenhaar, 2008).

The 360-degree evaluation could be relevant to overcome some limitations of traditional performance appraisal (*i.e.*, top-down evaluation). Firstly, it is important to note the confidentiality of the process. Confidentiality is crucial to increase participation of the individuals. However, the evaluation of traditional performance does not include this confidentiality, because it is made by the superior of the employee who prepares an analysis of the strengths and areas for improvement, discussing with the employee which may be the possible future action plans (Caetano, 2008). This aspect can be also seen as an obstacle of traditional performance appraisal, because when the evaluation process is not confidential, may develop conflicts between evaluators and evaluated people. This is because disagreements may arise between them (Craig & Hannum 2006). Considering the aspects mentioned above, 360-degree evaluation is seen as advantageous. The 360-degree evaluation is a confidential and anonymous process, unlike other evaluation methods (e.g. traditional performance evaluation) (Carson, 2006; Craig & Hannum, 2006; Gillespie & Parry, 2006; Kline & Sulsky, 2009). This confidentiality and anonymity mean that there is greater acceptance of this evaluation by the individuals who are evaluated (Heijden & Nijhof, 2004).

The majority of companies promotes an organizational structure in which the managers have more power and therefore the performance evaluation of employees is

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ABSTRACTS/RÉSUMÉS

Abstracts

Communication in organizations and 360-degree evaluation: what is the relationship between the two concepts?

Rita Andreia Mourão e Sandra Miranda

The performance appraisal has a very important role in the strategic objectives of the organization, because it contributes to its efficacy (Aguinis, 2007). However, some limitations of top-down performance appraisal like the subjectivity have been proposed other evaluations, like 360-degree evaluation (Kondrasuk, 2012). This is a specific

evaluation that considers more than one appraiser (Brutus & Gorriti, 2005).

We would like to know how the application of 360-degree evaluation could influence organizational communication. We conducted an exploratory study through the interviews with experts. The results that will be presented are still preliminary and have theoretical and practical applications. In general, we conclude that 360-degree evaluation could be advantageous for organizational communication (e.g. active voice of employees).

Keywords Performance appraisal; 360-degree evaluation; organizational communication