

Performance Appraisal Practices in a Developing Country: Case Study of a NGO in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are playing an increasingly important role towards development of Bangladesh by providing a range of services, i.e. poverty alleviation through micro-credit, employment, women empowerment, ensuring education and health, etc. As a service providing organisations, NGOs' performances are dependent on their human resources as retaining high quality human resources has become a challenge in this sector. That's why the organisations are now putting increased accentuates on performance appraisal practices to not only improve employee performance but also apply as a motivating tool. Thus the case study aims to explore and assess the existing performance appraisal practices of PIACT Bangladesh, a NGO of Bangladesh. The study examines the characteristics, elements, assessment approach and methods of performance appraisal, and methods of appraisal interview in PIACT. This discussion is followed by a critical assessment that identifies the effectiveness of current performance appraisal practices.

Key Words: Performance Appraisal, NGOs, Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

Performance appraisal practices are now considered as one of the key contributing factors to the success of an organisation. But in Bangladesh it is relatively a new human resource practice. Very few organisations are putting increased emphasize on performance appraisal to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their employees to improve their productivity, which in turn helps the organisations to gain competitive advantage with human resources. These organisations have realized that a well developed performance appraisal process can be useful for assessment of employee training needs, employee merit appraisal, determining of employee salary, feedback and suggestion for performance development (Levin, 1986). Moreover, performance appraisal can be used as a motivational tool for communicating performance expectations to employees and providing them with feedback (Thomas & Bretz, 1994). So, like any other organisations, performance appraisal plays a vital role in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as

Chowdhury (2011) explored that high level employee turnover is prevailing in the NGO sector of Bangladesh. The reasons for high turnover can be related with several human resources challenges as identified by Huda, Karim and Ahmed (2007) in their study on NGOs of Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, NGOs first emerged soon after the war of liberation in 1971 (Zohir, 2004). NGOs are active in the efforts of international development and increasing the welfare of poor people in poor countries (Werker & Ahmed, 2007). According to these authors, “NGOs work both independently and alongside bilateral aid agencies from developed countries, private-sector infrastructure operators, self-help associations, and local governments”. NGOs in Bangladesh stand out from the traditional private voluntary organisations (PVOs) for two reasons (Zohir, 2004). Firstly, NGOs usually engage in the activities, which have been the responsibilities of the government agencies. As the government agencies fail to accomplish these activities successfully, the NGOs take over the responsibilities. Secondly, NGOs are participatory, which enables them to deliver the services to target group better than the bureaucratic government agencies (Zohir, 2004). No exact estimation for the number of NGOs in Bangladesh can be found due to the absence of registration practices with one authority (Zohir, 2004). Including the non-registered entities, the number can range from 19,000 to 24,000 (Zohir, 2004; Banglapedia, 2011; Wikipedia, 2011). This large number indicates that NGOs play as dynamic entities in the development of Bangladesh. As the NGOs are human resources intensive organisations, it is very usual that the performance of the NGOs will depend on employee performance. It is evident that trying to explore performance appraisal within the organisational context can help not only to improve the organisation’s performance but also provides an opportunity to contribute in the performance appraisal research (Bernardin & Villanova, 1986).

With this background, the present study attempts to explore the performance appraisal process of PIACT Bangladesh, a non-profit, and a NGO of Bangladesh. First, the study provides a description of the current performance appraisal practice of PIACT. Second, it makes a critical analysis of the existing performance appraisal practices of PIACT.

2. Literature Review

Performance appraisal was once considered as a process involving a line manager completing an annual report on subordinate’s performance. But as time passes it has become an integral part of performance management system and performance appraisal is today considered as the key element of performance management (Fletcher, 2001). The history of performance appraisal has its root in the early 20th century pioneered by Taylor’s Time and Motion studies, which became a formal management procedure from the time of the Second World War (Archer North, 2010). Performance appraisal is the process through which an organisation gets information on how well an employee is doing his or her job (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart & Wright, 2006). Mathis and Jackson (2005) extended this definition by adding that performance should be compared to a set of standards and then communicated with the employees. Performance appraisal is also known as, employee rating, employee evaluation, performance review, performance evaluation, and

results appraisal (Mathis and Jackson, 2005). According to Khan (2008), it is an objective way to evaluate employee work-related behaviour. Performance appraisal is widely used for determining wages and salaries, promotion, training and development, providing performance feedback, and identifying employee strengths and weaknesses (Mathis & Jackson, 2005; Noe, et al. 2006; Khan, 2008). Bohlander and Snell (2007), and Mathis and Jackson (2005) identified two types of uses for performance appraisal information; these are (a) developmental uses, and (b) administrative uses. Developmental uses include, providing performance feedback, identifying individual strengths/weaknesses, recognizing individual performance, assisting in goal identification, evaluating goal achievement, identifying individual training needs, determining organisational training needs, reinforcing authority structure, allowing employees to discuss concerns, improving communication, and providing a forum for leaders to help (Bohlander & Snell, 2007). Administrative uses include, documenting personnel decisions, determining promotion candidates, determining transfers and assignments, identifying poor performance, deciding retention or termination, deciding on layoffs, validating selection criteria, meeting legal requirements, evaluating training programs/progress, personnel planning, and making reward/compensation decisions (Bohlander & Snell, 2007).

Many researchers have emphasized that performance appraisal results must be linked with other HRM activities and strategic decision making, which would ultimately help the organisations to develop and grow (Cleveland, Murphy & Williams, 1989; Greer, 2001). In Bangladesh, performance appraisal and its benefits are not yet recognized. According to Islam (2006), fewer than 20 percent Bangladeshi organisations hold performance appraisal on regular basis and only 10 percent organisations link performance appraisal result with human resources related decision making. Several researchers from Bangladesh have tried to explore performance appraisal practices and their effectiveness in Bangladeshi organisations and found that in most of the organisations performance appraisal processes are full of errors that are resulting employee dissatisfaction (see Haque & Hossain, 2009; Zafour, 2009; Abdullah, Boyle & Joham, 2010; Mahmood 2010). Chowdhury (2011) ascertained that performance appraisal practices are absent in the NGO sector of Bangladesh. According to this author, NGOs may have less orientation with corporate management practices, i.e. HRM practices, as they are involved in development activities of rural area.

3. Research Methodology

The nature of research article is case study based. PIACT Bangladesh does not have separate Human Resource Department. Major part of this case study is based on the face-to-face interviews with Director, and Administration Officer, which consists of view and opinions of those particular people that might raise the question of biasness. Interviewing has provided the primary sources of information here. Furthermore, literature review in the relevant field, organisation brochures, documents, and the company website were the secondary sources of data. Finally, due to time constraint it was not possible to conduct extensive interviews and surveys which could make the research paper more informative. Case study is the 'fact' of any

particular issues, the contents of which require an in-depth focus of the social sciences area to understand its phenomenon on the basis of it being an individual problem (Leedy, 1997). One of the essential characteristics of using the case study approach is that it focuses on “one instance of the thing that is to be investigated” (Denscombe, 1998). The advantage of the case study over other methods is that it attempts to be comprehensive that involves the researcher in describing and analysing the full notes and results. Criticisms of using case study method are also found as it is a less rigorous form of inquiry and based on the accumulation of information there is a lack of discipline. Thus Smith (1991) described it as the logically weakest method of knowing. According to Mitchell (1999), the basic problem in the use of case material is theoretical analysis. But at the same time, case studies can do a whole variety of things. Bonoma (1985) argues that case studies prove valuable in situations as it can often provide in-depth contextual information where existing knowledge is limited, which may result in a superior level of understanding. Furthermore, case studies prove to be advantageous when the focus of the study is not typicality but the unusual, unexpected, covert or illicit (Hartley, 1994).

4. PIACT Bangladesh – Organisation Overview

Established in 1980, PIACT Bangladesh is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation committed to the welfare of the people of Bangladesh. The broad objectives of PIACT Bangladesh are as follows,

- To promote better reproductive health by providing expanded and effective uses of fertility regulating methods in Bangladesh.
- To conduct operations research and implement programs for improvement of reproductive health, mother and child nutrition, literacy level, equity in health and development, gender equality, development of the socially disadvantaged groups of population and addressing the current issues as they emerge overtime in health, nutrition and social development.
- To conduct advocacy programs as for the social needs and establishing human rights.

Currently, there are several distinct functional units that carry out activities of PIACT. These units are functionally linked in performing their activities. Each unit is distinctly responsible for their specific tasks but all the units are functionally integrated to perform the activities of the organisation. The units are as follows:

1. Project Management Unit (Corporate Head Office)
2. Research, Evaluation & Consultancy Unit (RECU)
3. IT/MIS Unit
4. Project Implementation Unit (PIU)
 - (a) Educational Project/Program
 - (b) Health program/Project
 - (c) Training/Workshop
 - (d) Human Rights Program

(e) Behaviour Change Communication/Information Education Communication Unit (BCC/IEC)

The present activities of PIACT are,

- Developing BCC support materials for improvement of reproductive health, mother and child health and nutrition, equity in health and development, prevention of HIV/AIDS.
- Implement programs for development and realizing the rights of the socially disadvantaged group of women and their children such as commercial sex workers.
- Implement programs for prevention and protection of HIV/AIDS/STDs.
- Implement programs for increasing the literacy rates, particularly among the economically and socially disadvantaged groups of the population.
- Implement programs for enhancing competency of applying Information Technology for the realization of the broad objectives of PIACT Bangladesh, as well as to support its all current programs/projects and studies.
- Conduct research survey in education, FP-MCH Management Information Systems and Logistics Management Information Systems (PIACT Bangladesh, 2008).

5. Characteristics of Performance Appraisal System in PIACT Bangladesh

5.1 The Appraisee

In PIACT different types of persons are evaluated such as,

- The individuals working as PIACT's core employees,
- the individuals of different project related persons, generally these employees are employed on the contractual basis.
- a project team,
- a whole project.

5.2 The Appraisers

Employees and projects are evaluated by different individuals in PIACT based on their nature of job activities such as,

- The individuals working as PIACT's core employees are evaluated by the top level management consisting of Director, Deputy Directors and Administration Officer.
- The individuals working in projects are evaluated by their Coordinator and if that individual is a member of any project team then he/she is evaluated by the Team Leader.
- A project team is evaluated by the Project Administration Officer. The finance and accounts related activities of a project team are usually evaluated by the Finance Manager.

- A whole project is evaluated both internally and externally. Internally it is evaluated by the top level management and externally it is evaluated by the representatives of the project donors.

5.3 Time Frame of Evaluation

Different time frames are maintained for the evaluation of different entities. Such as,

- The core employees are evaluated once in year.
- The project based employees and the project teams are evaluated quarterly.
- The whole project can be evaluated quarterly and sometimes it can be conducted phase-wise. Each project has different phases in its whole lifetime. Usually phases are determined based on the years required to complete a project.

5.4 Objective versus Subjective Evaluation

In PIACT subjective judgment is used in most of the cases. Because there are lots of issues related to the successful completion of a project which cannot be measured in any numeric scale, i.e. quality of work of a field officer. This is not measured by any numeric scale. Quality of work depends on the officer's intelligence, smartness, promptness, etc. But there are some issues which are measured in numeric scale, i.e. employee attendance.

5.5 Relative versus Absolute Performance

In PIACT employees are evaluated on both absolute and relative basis. Absolute performance means measuring the performance on accomplishments of job activities. But in case of relative, the performance is measured by comparing one's performance with others.

- Most of the time, the project employees are evaluated on absolute scale as they have certain goals and objectives which are pre-determined. Sometimes their performances are also measured on relative basis if they have any near competitor who is performing the same job.
- A project team is always evaluated on relative basis. Usually several teams are found in one project to reach the project goals. So this type of evaluation is used to compare one team's competency with others.
- A whole project is evaluated on absolute basis as each project is unique.

5.6 Force Distribution versus Unspecified Percentages

In PIACT for performance appraisal forced distribution is not found. The employees are not evaluated specifically. There is no classification system under which the employees are categorized. Here the objective of performance appraisal is not to group the employees in different classes rather.

5.7 Multi-source versus Single-source Evaluation

According to the previous discussion, most of the employees are evaluated by multi-sources in PIACT, i.e. a project team is evaluated by the Administrator Officer and the Finance Manager. Even the whole project is evaluated both in internally and externally.

5.8 Multi-criteria versus Single Summary Statistic

For most of the evaluations multi-criteria reports are generated. Only very few issues such as attendance, leave of absence, etc. are converted to single summary statistic. As most of the evaluations are subjective it is difficult to derive single summary statistic reports.

6. Elements of Performance Appraisal System in PIACT Bangladesh

The four key elements of a typical appraisal system are, performance criteria, performance standards, performance assessment, and use of the appraisal information for employee feedback and human resources decisions. Here PIACT's appraisal system is described in light of these elements which will present a clear idea about the different elements of the appraisal system in PIACT.

6.1 Performance Criteria

Measuring performance requires the use of relevant criteria that focus on the most important aspects of a job (Mathis & Jackson, 2005). At PIACT, performance criteria for the project employees and teams are determined by the top level management along with the project directors. These criteria depend on the nature of the job and job contents. Such as for a Field Officer it is necessary to be a hardworking person. He also must have the willingness of taking and meeting job responsibilities. He must maintain timeliness, speediness and accuracy for each activity.

6.2 Performance Standards

According to Mathis and Jackson (2005), "performance standards define the expected level of performance, and the benchmarks, or goals, or targets". It has been emphasized that these standards should be realistic, measurable and clear (Mathis & Jackson, 2005; Khan 2008). Performance standards or benchmarks against which performance is measured in PIACT are determined by the top level management along with the project directors. While establishing these benchmarks they try to make it achievable for the employees and appropriate for the projects. Some examples of benchmarks in a project of PIACT can be, provide the training to the school teachers within 7 days, build up a sanitary system in a village within 60 days, etc.

6.3 Performance Assessment

The extent to which an employee or team meets the performance standards is typically evaluated or assessed by using different types of documentation processes. Such as in the head office the core employees' entrance and exit time is recorded in a register book. In projects a separate file is maintained for each project employee to record daily activities. The employee himself and his Coordinator and Team Leader in case of a team, maintain the individual files of project employees everyday. These information about the project employees' daily activities and daily improvement information of the project are reported by the Coordinator and Project Administration Officer at the head office of PIACT. All the information about the projects are then stored in the head office.

6.4 Use of Performance Appraisal Information

Use of performance appraisal information is important for employee feedback and decisions to be made by the human resources department. The performance appraisal information can be used for developmental and administrative purposes (Bohlander & Snell, 2007). As PIACT does not have any separate human resources department the information is used mainly by the supervisors of the employees, the top level management and the project management. Performance appraisal information of the employees in PIACT are used for the following purposes,

- *Performance Improvement*: The supervisor of an employee communicates the performance review results of that employee and gives advice to improve his performance in future.
- *Placement Decisions*: Depending on the performance evaluation information the promotions and transfers take place. These decisions are taken by the top level management of PIACT along with the project directors.
- *Career Planning and Development*: Based on the information from performance evaluation the top level management tries to find out the potential employees who can improve the overall performance of the organisation.
- *Identifying Job Design Errors*: After conducting the evaluation it is found whether the problem is with the employee or with the job designing. If the employees fail to accomplish the tasks due to the error in job designing then the jobs are redesigned to perform to enhance its effectiveness.

7. Performance Assessment Approaches in PIACT Bangladesh

Most organisations have a variety of approaches to assess the performances of their employees. There are wide variations in these approaches based on size, culture, strategy, industry characteristics, etc. Generally the approaches are grouped into three major categories, past oriented, present oriented and future oriented. In PIACT two of these approaches are followed for performance appraisal. These are past oriented and present oriented.

7.1 Past Oriented Approaches

Past oriented approaches focus performance that has already occurred. There are several structured techniques for assessing past performance such as checklists, rating scales, critical incident method, etc. But in PIACT no such structured techniques are used. The employees are evaluated on the basis of their output quality. Most of the time the employees are observed by their supervisors while they are working. Thus the most important factor of measuring past oriented performance is the observation of work and quality of the output.

7.2 Present Oriented Approaches

Present oriented approaches focus on the present performance of the employees. Under this approach PIACT uses field review method. This method is the process where a skilled representative visits to the actual job situation and either assists the immediate supervisor with ratings or does the ratings alone. In PIACT the representatives from the top level management go for field review. In every phase of the project a representative team of the donors conducts field review. They gather data from the field and later sit together with PIACT management to discuss about the evaluation.

8. Methods of Performance Appraisal in PIACT Bangladesh

Performance appraisal methods can be categorized into four groups; (a) category rating, (b) comparative, (c) behavioural/objective, and (d) narrative method (Mathis & Jackson, 2005). At PIACT three categories of performance appraisal methods are found. These are category rating method, comparative method, and narrative method.

8.1 Category Rating Method

Although there are different types of methods under category rating, PIACT uses graphic rating scale for some jobs. Graphic rating scale allows evaluator to mark an employee's performance on a continuum (Mathis & Jackson, 2005). Through this method performance is evaluated based on the predetermined performance criteria. As mentioned previously, these criteria are determined from the job description. With the help of graphic rating scale the appraisers evaluate the individual employees by comparing actual performance with the performance standards.

8.2 Comparative Method

With comparative ranking method, the supervisors compare the performance of one employee with others (Mathis & Jackson, 2005). Ranking technique is used in PIACT to list the employees from highest to lowest in performance. Usually this method is applied to evaluate the employees who have the same types of job responsibilities and duties. Sometimes it is also used to evaluate the employees who work in the same project.

8.3 Narrative Method

Narrative method provides the evaluators with opportunity for providing written appraisal information. Field review is widely used in PIACT for the evaluation of project employees. The Project Administration Officer and sometimes the donor representatives visit the project work-area and collect data from Project Coordinator and project employees and prepare reports on employee performance. Besides, sometimes the supervisors use essay technique to describe each an employee's performance in PIACT. For example, the Project Coordinator uses this technique to evaluate the performance of the Field Officers. These narrative methods are applied to evaluate both the individual employee and a project or a team.

9. Appraisal Interview in PIACT Bangladesh

The appraisal interview provides a manager the opportunity to discuss a subordinate's performance record and explore areas of possible improvements and growth (Bohlander & Snell, 2007). It also provides an opportunity to identify the subordinate's attitudes and feelings more thoroughly and thus improve communication. Maier (1958) suggested three approaches to conduct employee appraisals. According to him these three approaches are,

- (i) Tell and Sell
- (ii) Tell and Listen
- (iii) Problem Solving

PIACT's way of conducting appraisal information falls under the category of both Tell and Sell, and Tell and Listen approach.

9.1 Tell and Sell

The purpose of this approach is to let the employees know how well they are doing and to persuade them to set specific goals for improvement (Maier, 1958). In PIACT the project team leaders and coordinators sit with their subordinates to let them know about their performances. They also tell them about the necessity of performance improvement. In this case the project employees do not have any right to say. They only listen to their supervisors and try to abide that.

9.2 Tell and Listen

The purpose of this approach is to communicate the supervisor's perception of the employee's strengths and weaknesses, and to let the employees respond to these statements (Maier, 1958). In PIACT the top level management sits with the project directors, project coordinators, and team leaders to discuss about their performance along with the overall performance of the project. The top level management communicates with the evaluation information and also listens from the project related employees to know their perception and opinion about their performances and the project. Thus it becomes a two-way communication for the employees and the evaluators.

PIACT follows this approach for communicating the appraisal information with managers and core employees as well.

10. Findings and Discussion

In PIACT, all the individuals' and teams' performance are evaluated on a regular interval. Though the core employees are evaluated once in year, the project employees are evaluated quarterly. Frequently done performance appraisals can result in improved performance and low employee turnover (Mathis & Jackson, 2005; Khan, 2008). Thus this practice can help the NGOs of Bangladesh to retain employees as high employee turnover rate prevails in this sector. The employees are evaluated by multiple appraisers in PIACT. As different people see different things from different perspectives, this practice can be useful for any organisation as it can ensure comprehensive and quality performance information. Though it is a complex and time consuming process, it can also lead to a bias/prejudice free appraisal (Bohlander & Snell, 2007). The performance appraisal information are used for placement, career development, job design and performance improvement in PIACT. But the most important use of performance appraisal information, compensation is not related with performance appraisal process in PIACT. Performance based compensation can be a useful practice as it can lead to increased employee satisfaction, which in turn can guarantee increased production (Mathis & Jackson, 2005; Noe, et al. 2006).

Different methods are applied to evaluate individual and team performance in PIACT. Among these, graphic rating scale is the most common and widely used performance appraisal method. It is advantageous to evaluate a person as it has the focus on the duties and responsibilities of a job though it can be ambiguous for the evaluator in terms of rating factors or traits, their measurement, and the interpretation of the measurement (Mathis & Jackson, 2005; Khan, 2008). Ranking method is also utilized at PIACT for performance appraisal. Though ranking provides the opportunity to directly compare one employee with other, it can be difficult to apply if the size of the differences among individuals is not well defined (Mathis & Jackson, 2005). Besides these two techniques, PIACT also use essay method which is a free-form writing that provides flexibility and its effectiveness depends on evaluator's writing skill and expressiveness (Mathis & Jackson, 2005), and at the same time it is also time-consuming (Bohlander & Snell, 2007). Along with essay method, field review method is frequently used to evaluate the projects and project employees in PIACT. This practice is definitely justified as NGOs have the greatest amount of accountability towards the donors of the projects. PIACT only utilizes these conventional performance appraisal methods though many contemporary techniques are available. Many organisations are adapting Behaviourally Anchored Rating Scale (BARS), Behaviour Observation Scale (BOS), Management by Objectives (MBO), etc. which have high degree of content validity, flexibility and control over the jobs (Bohlander & Snell, 2007; Khan, 2008).

PIACT uses two types of appraisal interview technique; one is Tell and Sell and the other one is Tell and Listen. The first approach is definitely useful it involves persuading the employees for

new behaviours along with emphasize on skilful use of motivational incentives (Bohlander & Snell, 2007). The later approach provides an opportunity for the employees to express their feelings regarding the appraisal, which can in turn reduce the feeling of dissatisfaction and frustration (Bohlander & Snell, 2007). A third approach of conducting appraisal interview is Problem Solving, which is found in PIACT. This approach is particularly advantageous as it seeks growth and development of employee by discussing the needs and problems. In fact, it is suggested in literature that using more than one type of interview approach can be effective and flexible (Bohlander & Snell, 2007).

Poorly done performance appraisal can lead to disappointing outcome for the organisations. Thus it is important to ensure an effective performance appraisal. There are several characteristics to designate an effective performance appraisal system. Whether the performance appraisal of PIACT is effective or not that will be found by reviewing the attributes of effective appraisal system with compare to PIACT's appraisal system.

- **Validity:** Though the whole appraisal system in PIACT is not structured and well organized, the performance measures and instruments used for appraisal are valid.
- **Involvement:** All persons who are concerned and affected by the system do not have input to the system design. Only the top level management and project directors can have their input while developing the system.
- **Training:** As the appraisal system was not developed with proper care and importance, so the persons concerned with the system did not receive any training.
- **Acceptable Standards and Targets:** Generally most of the performance standards and targets are acceptable by the employees though these are not always communicated with the employees.
- **Linked to Other Systems:** Appraisals have consequences on several matters such as performance improvement and placement. But it is not linked with the most important system that is compensation and rewards.
- **Input into Appraisals:** The employees do not get the opportunity to participate in the evaluation process and they can not offer any suggestions for the system.
- **Sources of Information:** Different assessors and sources of information are employed to improve overall accuracy and the consistency is checked by the top level management.
- **Employee Feedback:** The employees receive timely and valid feedback on their performance with guidance to improve in future.

11. Conclusion

NGOs in Bangladesh are actively engaged in grass-root development. It should be ensured that the expansion path of development does not get slender due to the inadequate employee performance. Establishing an effective performance appraisal process can improve the employee performance, which in turn can boost organisational performance. Thus performance appraisal can be the road to competitive advantage by ensuring the retention of quality human resources in

NGOs. Finally, reviewing the current performance appraisal practices will lead to a competent future for PIACT Bangladesh as the objective of performance appraisal is to ensure performance improvement, and link it with other human resources practices and organisational strategies. Any mismatch in this regard can cost an organisation a great deal of money, time and energy, which will ultimately affect the employee retention and organisational performance in long-term.

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