Rater Error: Eliminating Rater Bias in Performance Evaluation

Performance Management is an integral part of the employee experience, and of aligning employee work with university goals and expectations. Completing and communicating annual performance evaluations are a responsibility of each manager. As a manager sits down to complete an employee's review, it is important to be conscious of biases that can occur in the process.

What is "rater error"?
Rater errors are errors in judgment that occur in a systematic manner when an individual observes and evaluates another.

Personal perceptions and biases may influence how we evaluate an individual's performance. What makes these errors so difficult to correct is that the observer is usually unaware that she or he is making them.

Why concern myself with rater error?
When we understand what kinds of rater errors exist and how they occur, we are able to take steps to minimize them.

Types of Rater Error

● Halo Effect – The tendency to make inappropriate generalizations from one aspect of a person's job performance. This is due to being influenced by one or more outstanding characteristics, either positive or negative.

● Leniency – The tendency to evaluate all people as outstanding and to give inflated ratings rather than true assessments of performance.

● Central Tendency – The tendency to evaluate every person as average regardless of differences in performance.

● Strictness – The tendency to rate all people at the low end of the scale and be overly critical of performance.

● Contrast Effect – The tendency for a rater to evaluate a person relative to other individuals rather than on-the-job requirements.

● First Impression Error – The tendency for a manger to make an initial favorable or unfavorable judgment about someone, and then ignore subsequent information that does not support this impression.

● Similar-to-Me Effect – The tendency to more favorably judge those people perceived as similar to the leader. Diversity of talent, style, ability, perspective, background, and opinion are important characteristics of an effective team. This may be the most important rater error to avoid!

Minimizing Rater Errors

Since rater errors can seriously undermine the value of the Performance Development Process, it is important to work on avoiding them.

Questions to Ask Yourself to Avoid Rater Errors:

● Am I basing my rating on documentation of my observations of the Employee's behavior, or am I making judgments based on my perceptions?

● Am I looking at each of this Employee's competencies separately, or have I generalized about his or her performance?

● Have I looked at this Employee's competencies over time, or have I generalized according to initial perceptions of her or him?

● Have I recognized any biases I may have so I do not let them influence my judgments?

● Have I rated this Employee on his or her actual behavior or have I rated her or him compared to other individuals?

As always, if you are experiencing difficulty in conducting performance evaluations for your staff, come talk to a Human Resources representative for assistance.