

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

The Effects of Performance Evaluations on the Job Satisfaction, Motivation, Engagement and
Productivity of Public Sector Employees

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Public Administration in Public Sector Management and Leadership

By

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August 2020

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Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the professors and staff of the Masters of Public Administration Program at California State University, Northridge. Your guidance, knowledge, and support have instilled in me the drive to continue my professional growth and dedicate my work to the betterment of public service.

I would also like to thank my parents, siblings, and loved ones for their unconditional support, words of wisdom, and patience as I reached the finish line towards my Master's Degree. I will forever be thankful for all of the encouragement and heartfelt guidance throughout this journey.

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Abstract

The Effects of Performance Evaluations in the Job Satisfaction of Public Sector Employees

By

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Master of Public Administration in Public Sector Management and Leadership

The question of whether or not performance evaluations are fair and consistent across public agencies is often openly expressed by public sector employees. Public sector performance evaluations are the primary method of rating employee progress over a 12-month period. The rating criteria of performance evaluations often comes into question with employees due to vague evaluation requirements. The purpose of this study is to examine the effect performance evaluations have on public sector employees' job satisfaction. For this study, job satisfaction encompasses employee motivation, engagement, and productivity.

This study will focus on public sector employees of the Social Services Agency of Orange County, California. Using a survey, data will be collected to analyze public sector employees' job satisfaction as well as their levels of motivation, engagement, and productivity. The results of this study will highlight the need for reform of public sector performance evaluations and the streamlining of consistent rating criteria.

Keywords: performance evaluations, motivation, engagement, productivity, public sector

Introduction

Performance evaluations are critical to the function of human resource teams in organizations across the nation and as such, these evaluations are used to support the organizational goals the organization seeks to fulfill (Longenecker & Nykodym, 1996). Performance evaluations are both constructive and pivotal to the development and career outlook of employees. The impact performance evaluations have on employees' job satisfaction can result in either enhancing the employees' experience or derailing their motivation, engagement and productivity.

For public sector employees, performance evaluations mark a 12-month period of documenting important work activities along with showcasing special projects and accomplishments that align with business objectives (County of Orange, 2012). The format of evaluations varies between public agencies however, most are composed of nominal rating scales used to measure employee performance. These rating scales include criteria such as job knowledge, work habits, interpersonal skills, productivity and attendance, and rating categories: exceeds performance objectives, meets performance objectives, and does not meet performance objectives (County of Orange, 2012). Performance evaluations can be a stressful time for many employees as they can be attributed to emotions such as anxiety, excitement, disappointment, and shock. These emotions may be caused by the uncertainty of what is expected of workers based on vague rating criteria and redundant, over-used language used by managers writing these evaluations.

Performance evaluations have a direct impact on employee's attitudes regarding job satisfaction and management. Previous research suggests that managers and employees often do not share the same understanding of the purpose of performance evaluations (Longenecker &

Nykodym, 1996). Many employees, especially the younger eager generations, seek to obtain honest feedback and ratings from their leaders. This feedback works as a driving force to continue to improve their skillsets and knowledge within the organization and help further their professional growth and career prospects. Performance evaluations are dependent upon managers' judgment and as such, errors in judgment can be common occurrences along with statements that are positively or negatively bias (Lin & Kellough, 2019).

Performance evaluations are expected to be completed with fairness and accuracy to correctly capture the skills and duties of employees (Khan, 2020). Bias in evaluations can reflect poor supervisory skills along with low motivation from the rater to complete a detailed and individualized evaluation (Khan, 2020). Poorly conducted performance evaluations can negatively impact employees' job satisfaction which highlights the important role evaluations have in altering employee attitudes (Linna et al., 2012).

In addition, previous research has identified that importance is not always placed on evaluations and as such, they are not conducted as a necessary part of employee development (Daley, 1992). Furthermore, the supervisors conducting these ratings may not have the support from their superiors or the adequate time to thoroughly complete these evaluations (Lin et al., 2018). When performance evaluations are conducted properly, employees obtain the feedback and encouragement needed to further develop their skills and meet the organization's goals and objectives (Dusterhoff et al., 2014).

Aims and Objectives

This study seeks to identify the effect performance evaluations have on public sector employees' job satisfaction including motivation, productivity, and engagement. Further, this study will examine whether evaluations that include individualized and specific feedback for

professional growth result in increased levels of job satisfaction in public sector employees. Using a random sample population of employees from the Orange County Social Services Agency, employee attitudes towards performance evaluations will be used to measure job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and productivity. This data will aid in looking into the relationship performance evaluations have on motivation, engagement and productivity, and overall job satisfaction. Increasing awareness on the importance of performance evaluations can not only have positive impacts on employee's job satisfaction; it can also reshape organizational culture for improved methods of providing employees substantial feedback (David et al., 2015).

The findings of this study could benefit County agencies across the state to reinvent performance evaluations for increased employee job satisfaction and organizational success.

Background

Procedures used to evaluate employee performance are an essential part of managing any organization (Lin & Kellough, 2019) and they are increasingly important in the management of public sector organizations. Performance evaluations have a significant impact on both the effectiveness of employees and the entire organization (Lin & Kellough, 2019). Performance evaluations consist of important measures for organizations to ensure staff are meeting the goals aligned for the success of the organization and aim to help employees understand and accept organizational standards (Ayers, 2015; Lin & Kellough, 2019).

Performance evaluations are used to assess employee performance using a specific set of rating criteria including quality of work, worker's level of effort and output, employee behaviors as well as "...feedback, goal setting and training, as well as reward systems" (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017; Heinrich & Marschke, 2010). Studies on the subject of performance evaluations suggest the use of simple rating measures is often easier to use rather than the time and cost to develop more modern methods and as a result, these inconsistent measures are still the basis of the majority of performance evaluations (Heinrich & Marschke, 2010). In addition, previous studies suggest managers are more concerned with evaluation forms and rating types whereas employees are concerned with the outcomes and feedback in the evaluations (Mount & Ellis, 1989).

The format and rating criteria of performance evaluations vary for every public sector agency however, most are commonly conducted annually and measure similar core performance competencies related to job duties. The County of Orange utilizes a Performance Incentive Program (PIP) to evaluate employee performance. According to the County of Orange PIP Manual, the purpose of PIP is to improve business results and clarify expectations for employees in ensuring alignment with departmental goals. The PIP evaluation aims to identify employee

strengths along with areas for improvement by rating employees in the following core competencies: job knowledge and skills, work habits and quality, interpersonal skills, productivity and effectiveness, and attendance and punctuality. In addition, a yearly PIP goal, also known as a special project, is established between the employee and supervisor to encourage employee development by working on a project outside of normal duties. Upon the successful completion of the PIP goal and a minimum rating of ‘meets performance objectives’ in the core competencies of the evaluation, the employee is rewarded with an allocated number of hours which can be used for vacation time-off requests in addition to any applicable merit increase. This type of performance evaluation caters to the business goals and objectives of the County of Orange.

Taking a look into the history of performance evaluations sheds light on the importance and progression of performance evaluations for employees and organizations. Although previous studies suggest the history of performance evaluations can be traced back to ancient China, the literature on this subject did not emerge until the 1920s with the works of Edward Thorndike and Harold Rugg (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). Thorndike (1920) coined the term ‘halo error’ to describe the probability that errors in ratings substantially lessen their accuracy due to bias while Rugg also argued that rating scales were also prone to errors in this area. Over the next several decades, researchers studied and placed focus on graphic rating scale formats of performance evaluations however by 1980, the focus on rating scale formats was seen as unproductive to the understanding of performance evaluations as they did not “...solve the problems of subjectivity, inaccuracy, and lack of creditability...” (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017, p. 423). Since the late 1990s, researchers continue to view performance evaluations through an exploratory lens and have turned their focus on to the reactions resulting from evaluation ratings,

the importance of ratings for employees, and the overall approach to functional performance ratings from organizations (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017).

Analyzing the impact performance evaluations have on employee motivation, engagement and productivity will further explore the efficacy consistent employee ratings have on employee job satisfaction.

Literature Review

This literature review addresses three areas focusing on the effect performance evaluations have on public sector employees' job satisfaction including employee motivation, engagement, and productivity. The first section of the literature review focuses on the definition of performance evaluations and includes a brief background on public sector leadership. The second section will report on inconsistencies in performance evaluations as they relate to job satisfaction. Lastly, the last section of the literature review will discuss the components of job satisfaction including motivation, engagement, and productivity as they relate to performance evaluations. These areas of focus will highlight the importance of placing focus on a key component of a professional's life; a performance rating.

Definition

A performance evaluation is a formal process by which employees are evaluated by management to assess their performance using a rating system that results in an overall score for the employee (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). The term performance evaluation is often used interchangeably with the term performance appraisal (Kleiman, 2020). Many performance evaluations rate employees based on knowledge, job skills, interpersonal skills, achievements, and attendance. Performance evaluations are especially important for public sector employees as they have an influence on the promotional, merit, and bonus opportunities within an organization (Caillier, 2010). Additionally, performance evaluations serve the purpose of improving employee performance to align the employee with organizational goals (Dusterhoff, 2014).

Public Sector Leadership

Servant leadership is a term often attributed to public sector leaders due to the emphasis placed on serving the needs of their followers (Slack et al., 2019). Servant leadership is a

leadership style that encompasses the characteristics of openness, vision, and moral responsibilities (Reinke, 2003). Previous research argues that public sector leaders have a substantial influence on employees' attitudes toward the organization and the goals of the organization (Geys et al., 2020). As Baxter (2012), Park (2014) and Roberts (2003) discuss in their studies, public sector leaders are responsible for managing and implementing the performance evaluation process and exerting influence on the overall success of the process (as cited in Lin & Kellough, 2019). Public sector leaders should be well versed in the positives and negatives of performance evaluation systems and are expected to provide insightful resolutions to employee issues (Lin & Kellough, 2019). Furthermore, Mount's (1984) study indicates that managers who are satisfied with the organizations' policies regarding evaluations including the use of forms tailored to employee job functions and clear discussion points, assist managers in satisfying the requirements to carry out adequate performance evaluation discussions.

Leaders have a significant impact on producing changes in aspects of employee's self-concept thus affecting their behaviors and attitudes (Geys et al., 2020). Through consistent monitoring and open communication, managers can provide specific feedback that will explain the overall score of the performance evaluation (Moon, 2019).

Inconsistencies in Performance Evaluations

As previously discussed, the role of public sector management in the process of performance evaluations is important and valuable however, inconsistencies in performance evaluations are often a source of tension between employees and managers. Previous studies have highlighted the subject of rater errors and bias when conducting performance evaluations (Battaglio, 2015). The "halo effect" (Thorndike, 1920) is a prominent term relating to rater errors and bias that emerged in the 1920s and continues to be used in research related to this topic

(Kwon, 2020). As Battaglio (2015) discusses, the 'halo effect' suggests raters allow themselves to be influenced by a specific situation or characteristic attributed to an employee which subsequently affects the remaining rating criteria for the employee. The 'halo effect' thus creates a trend of rating an individual based on strengths or weaknesses and maintaining this bias throughout the performance evaluation while overlooking other areas of growth or concern (Borman, 1975). Additional research on the "halo effect" explains there is a tendency to overemphasize the validity of judgments for the sole purpose of maintaining reasonable narratives (Kahneman, 2011). In addition, differences in rater motivation pose a contributing factor in the way raters respond to evaluation and this can also significantly alter the accuracy of the performance evaluation (Park, 2014).

A second factor attributed to inconsistencies in performance evaluations is the issue of fairness. It is the responsibility of management to conduct performance evaluations in a fair and ethical and unbiased fashion (Roberts, 2002). Initial studies associated with fairness explored the relationship between goal identification, frequency of evaluations, and rater's knowledge as predictors of levels of fairness and accuracy in performance evaluations (Landy et al., 1978, 1980). Although raters may feel content in delivering supportive feedback to employees, they can also have reservations in providing negative feedback, causing ratings to be inflated in order to avoid confrontation and not go against organizational norms (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995). Researchers have found that differences exist between managers and employees in the role and perception of performance evaluations in terms of the purpose of the evaluation, variations in fairness, honesty, and effective feedback among other factors that contribute to the overall validity of evaluations (Bernardin & Beatty, 1984). Employees who receive lower ratings in evaluations may question the fairness of the process and circumstances that resulted in the low

score (Ilgen et al., 1983). For employees, being treated fairly throughout the evaluation process is important because this impacts the caliber of the rating received (Fortin, 2008) and results in "...higher levels of trust and satisfaction with the appraisal system" (Gabris & Ihrke, 2000; Hedge & Teachout, 2000; Mani, 2002; Masterson et al., 2000; Roberts & Pavlak, 1996 as cited in Harrington & Lee, 2015).

A third factor in the inconsistencies of performance evaluations is the issue of organizational politics involved in the evaluation process. Political concerns involving tactics and relationships can be seen as critical components as opposed to issues related to accuracy and fairness (Longenecker et al., 1987). Given that public sector agencies are closely linked to political figures at all levels of government, politics can influence rater decisions when conducting evaluations. According to Ferris et al. (2007), "...social astuteness, apparent sincerity, interpersonal influence, and networking ability" can all influence organization politics (p. 293). Additionally, politics can affect the social influence shared by individuals with social similarities thus creating a more positive relationship between employee and supervisor (McDonald & Westphal, 2011). As such, this positive relationship entices the perception that the employees' evaluation will be scored higher than that of their peers.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is defined as displaying feelings of positivity and gratification towards experiences or ratings related to one's job (Locke, 1976). According to Zhang et. al. (2014) performance evaluations influence employees' motivation related to merit opportunities and enhance job satisfaction. Zhang et. al. (2014) study found that employees with elevated levels of job satisfaction are more likely to communicate problems within the organization and are proactive members of the workforce. Additionally, employees who are satisfied with their

evaluations and who display high levels of job satisfaction contribute to the organization's innovative and challenging ideas to the organization (Zhang et al., 2014).

On the contrary, performance evaluations can also be attributed to lower levels of job satisfaction (Selvarajan et al., 2018) and decreased job performance (Daniels & Bailey, 2014). Researchers have identified the importance of trusting in management and collaborating in the decision-making process holds for employees (Leung et al., 2001). Furthermore, it has been found that feedback that is individualized and comes from a credible rater, will promote beneficial organizational results (Zhang et al., 2014). Performance evaluations can elicit negative reactions from employees if the basis of the evaluation is negative and also due to the negative connotation associated with the term evaluation, which infers the employees' job performance is being questioned (Boswell & Boudreau, 2000). Boswell and Boudreau's (2002) study explains that employees are more apt to receive performance evaluations that showcase professional development milestones as opposed to structured ratings. Further, Caillier (2010) reported that public sector workers who feel they have inadequate information regarding their job duties and ways to effectively complete these duties experience lower job satisfaction.

Motivation

Job satisfaction has been identified as one important component of increasing employee motivation (Wright, 2001). Motivation is useful in identifying how employees' work-related behavior can be energized, sustained, and guided (Perry & Porter, 1982). Previous studies have suggested public sector employees are primarily motivated by their eagerness to help and serve the public, the loyalty they feel towards their job and their constructs of social justice (Alonso & Lewis, 2010; Perry & Wise, 1990; Wright, 2010).

Perry & Wise (1990), coined the term Public Service Motivation (PSM) to elaborate on the idea that public sector employees are more influenced by factors related to their devotion to civic duty and among other factors including social equities and compassion for public interests rather than monetary or other reward incentives. Kjeldsen & Hansen's (2018) study relating to PSM have linked extrinsic incentives such as pay raises to higher levels of motivation in public sector employees. Additionally, Paarlberg & Lavigna's (2010) study on PSM explains how leadership and management influence job performance for a public employee. As Ayers (2015) discusses, performance evaluations can be useful in enhancing motivation when proper feedback is given to employees. When given frequently, feedback can improve employee effectiveness and lead to better goal alignment (Ayers, 2015).

Engagement

Employee engagement is defined as the overall desire to be fully involved in one's job duties and job functions and is associated with positive performance outcomes along with feelings of vigor, inclusion, worthiness and dedication (Khan, 1990; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Shuck & Wollard, 2010; Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012). Studies have found that employee engagement is further developed in employees when leaders are responsive to their demands, provide personalized attention, and display care towards their employees (Walumbwa et al., 2004). This concept aids in creating positive leader-subordinate relationships and gives employees a sense of belonging to the organization (Zhu et al., 2009).

Furthermore, competence also plays an important role in the level of employee engagement. Employees who feel confident in their skills and job knowledge are more prone to focus on meeting organizational goals and positive outcomes (Bandura & Cervone, 1983). Additionally, competence leads to the development and mastery of skills thus creating a resource

necessary for the engagement of employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Additionally, employees who are part of an organizations' decision-making process and provide input to their superiors also have increased levels of engagement (Pradhan et al., 2019). Lastly, organizations that invest in the development of employees' abilities and expertise and also are fair and unbiased, will produce more highly engaged employees (Pradhan et al., 2019).

Productivity

Public sector productivity is defined as the amount of output for work-related activities (Lina et al., 2010). Productivity is used to measure employee performance and is thus essential to the evaluation process (Byus & Lomerson, 2004). Previous studies suggest that public agencies tend to focus more on employees' workloads rather than producing quality services (Linna et al., 2010). By focusing on maintaining employee workloads at a constant level, management overlooks the opportunities to improve and increase outcomes of services (Linna et al., 2010). Although measurement is used widely in public organizations as a means of identifying productivity levels, "...aspects of quality and long-term effectiveness should be developed..." to better capture productivity levels (Lina et al., 2010, p. 314). Additionally, previous studies have found that employees who receive substantial feedback in their performance evaluations have resulted in increased productivity rates while backlogs of work and error rates decrease (Guzzo & Bondy, 1983; Guzzo et al., 1985; Kopelman, 1986). Lastly, research indicates that an effective feedback system can help elevate performance gains and positively impact productivity levels (Landy et al., 1982).

Section Summary

The objective of this literature review was to further understand the factors of job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and productivity and the relationship between these factors

and performance evaluations. It is important to understand the dynamics of performance evaluations and recognize the effects they have on employees' job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and productivity as these factors could have positive or negative indications for employees' career development.

This literature review sheds light on how performance evaluations influence professional development, career advancement, and promotional opportunities for employees. Although public sector leadership was not an exclusive factor for this study, it is important to understand the purpose and the influence the rater has in the evaluation process. As previously stated, studies have suggested that inconsistencies in performance evaluations can be attributed to rating errors, concerns over fairness, and political influences. Previous studies also suggest that higher levels of job satisfaction, productivity, engagement, and motivation are found when employees receive substantial feedback from their leaders. Job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and productivity are interrelated factors that suggest a relationship exists between these and performance evaluations.

Although an adequate amount of research was located regarding performance evaluations, there is limited information available as to the impact evaluations have in the key areas of job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and productivity. More specifically, there was little research found to support how these factors are affected by the results of employee performance evaluations. Therefore, this study will seek to describe if a positive or negative relationship exists between performance evaluations and employees' job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and productivity.

Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to describe the effect performance evaluations have on public sector employees' job satisfaction. Job satisfaction includes employee motivation, productivity, and engagement. Previous studies suggest that the performance evaluation process can play a role in the overall efficiency of an organization (Brown et al., 2010). Performance evaluations are valuable to employees as they provide opportunities for professional development and advanced career options. Additionally, performance evaluations are also used to provide feedback to low performing employees (Brown et al., 2010).

It is important to note that research on this topic is limited and focuses on the subjectivity of performance evaluations, pay-for-performance incentives, and rater bias and errors (Heinrich & Marschke, 2010; Lin & Kellough, 2019; Park, 2014). Further, information on the effects that performance evaluations have on job satisfaction including motivation, productivity, and engagement is missing from research related to public sector employees. This graduate project study will use a mixed-method approach exploring both quantitative and qualitative data. Using a survey with multiple choice answers and open-ended questions, data will be collected to further develop the in-depth understanding behind the effects performance evaluations have on employee job satisfaction and the influence public sector management has in this process.

Research Design

The research design for this study will be descriptive using a mixed-methods approach to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The variables for this research will not be manipulated or controlled. This research will be used to describe the phenomenon between performance evaluations, job satisfaction, motivation, productivity, and engagement.

This research design will focus on the employees of the County of Orange Social Services Agency. The Social Services Agency provides health insurance, food stamps, housing, and cash assistance to the County's most vulnerable and low-income residents. The Social Services Agency is composed of 4,300 employees within four divisions: Administrative Services, Assistance Programs, Children and Family Services, and Family Self-Sufficiency and Adult Services. This research design will allow the participation of all employees of the Social Services Agency.

The instrument for the collection of data will be an online survey. The survey will be distributed to Social Services employees via their County email address and a simple random sample will be collected given that all Social Services Agency employees are allowed to participate. The survey will begin with a short description of the background and purpose of the survey. The survey will consist of five multiple-choice questions and five open-ended questions. The five multiple-choice questions will be measured using a Likert scale. Employees of the Social Services Agency will have the choice to select the following answers: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. These questions will focus on whether or not public sector employees feel performance evaluations affect their job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and productivity. The remaining five open-ended questions will allow public sector employees to describe any inconsistencies they can identify in the measures of performance evaluations, what challenges they have experienced throughout the evaluation process, the effectiveness of the feedback they receive from the supervisors, what changes could improve the performance evaluation process and how performance evaluations have affected their overall job satisfaction, productivity, motivation, and engagement.

This mixed-methods research design will provide a framework for future studies to focus on the importance of performance evaluations and how they can have an elevated impact on the professional development and job satisfaction of employees.

Setting

This study will focus on the employees of the Social Services Agency of Orange County, CA. The Social Services Agency includes 4,300 employees who provide public assistance programs and services to the residents of Orange County. These programs include health insurance, food stamps, housing, cash assistance, foster care, child abuse prevention, adult protective services, drug, and alcohol rehabilitation services, and in-home supportive services. The job classifications for Social Services Agency employees range from clerical and eligibility specialists to social workers, clinicians, and different levels of management. The participants of this study will include managerial and non-managerial staff. The County of Orange is an equal employment opportunity employer and encourages a diverse workforce.

Participants

The participants for this study will include all employees of the Social Services Agency in all departments and office locations. The selection of participants will be a random sampling and all employees will have the opportunity to take the online survey. The demographics of the participants include all genders, all age groups, and all socioeconomic backgrounds. The Social Services Agency was selected due to its large employee population of over 4,000 employees.

Measures

Job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and productivity will be measured using a five-point Likert scale. The scale will measure responses to statements with the following choices: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. The Likert scale questions will be

the first five questions of the online survey and the participant must provide an answer to each question in order to proceed with the survey.

The second set of questions will include five open-ended questions and the participants must respond to each question in order to complete the survey. These questions will gather descriptive narratives from employees and their views on performance evaluations. The questions will focus on inconsistencies and challenges with performance evaluations, the effectiveness of managerial feedback, suggestions for improvements, and the impact performance evaluations have had on the participants' overall job satisfaction, productivity, motivation and engagement.

Data Collection

Permission and clearance to distribute the survey to all Social Services Agency employees will be obtained from Human Resources before the dissemination of the survey. Once cleared, the online website SurveyMonkey will be used to create the survey. The survey will be arranged so that the first five questions contain the Likert scale responses and the next five questions include the open-ended responses (Exhibit A). The survey will be distributed to all Social Services employees via their designated County email address and five business days will be given to complete the survey. The day prior to the close of the survey, an email will be distributed to remind staff of the opportunity to participate. A participation rate of at least 50% is expected for this survey.

Before beginning the survey, the participants will read a brief background of the purpose of the survey followed by a disclaimer explaining that survey questions are confidential and will be used for research purposes only. Additionally, as an incentive to completing the survey, employees who participate will be given the opportunity to enter a raffle for a \$50 Starbucks gift

card by receiving a participation code at the end of the survey. The gift card will be paid by the researcher and no County funds will be used for purchase.

The five Likert scale questions will have five response choices and only one response can be selected for each question. The open-ended questions will be displayed with a textbox of unlimited characters to allow employees to share their experiences and views on performance evaluations. Each survey question will need to be answered in order to complete the survey. The survey will allow a time limit of 30 minutes to complete all 10 survey questions. Upon completion of the survey, an automated thank you email will be distributed to each participant with their participation code to enter the gift card raffle. At the close of the fifth business day, all data will be retrieved from SurveyMonkey and will be exported into an Excel workbook for analysis.

Lastly, at the closing of the survey, all participation raffle codes will be entered into an online application for a random draw. The selected winner will be notified via email and an email congratulating the winner will be sent out to ensure transparency between the participants and the research study is maintained.

Projected Results

The results of this study will describe whether performance evaluations affect employee job satisfaction including motivation, engagement, and productivity. In addition, the results will be used to make assumptions and gain the employees' perspectives on whether or not performance evaluations benefit or complicate their opportunities for professional growth and career advancement.

The hypothesis declaring that inconsistencies in performance evaluations will lead to less motivation, engagement, productivity as well as overall lower levels of job satisfaction in public sector employees will be proved to be consistent with the literature review and the data obtained from the survey. Additionally, by allowing the employees to provide open responses, the results will point to other possible underlying factors that may provide feedback to commonly overlooked problems with performance evaluations.

Discussion

Major Findings

The findings of this study conclude that performance evaluations do affect employee job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and productivity. An online survey was distributed to 4,300 employees of the Social Services Agency and received a total of 3,200 survey responses. Seventy-five percent of respondents described their experience with performance evaluations as leading to less motivation, engagement, and productivity. The most common response to the surveys' Likert scale questions regarding job satisfaction, productivity, engagement, and motivation was "strongly disagree" to the statement "performance evaluations have a positive impact in my job satisfaction, productivity, engagement, and motivation."

The open-ended questions generated an array of responses. After careful analysis, the responses were grouped by similarity to gain a more comprehensive understanding. Approximately eighty-five percent of respondents discussed the notion that inconsistencies in performance evaluations cause the evaluations to be less effective as a means of promoting employee development and career opportunities. The factors attributed to the inconsistencies in performance evaluations including unclear expectations of job duties, ratings based on favoritism, lack of managerial support, and lack of a collaborative relationship between manager and subordinate.

To further elaborate, the unstable leader-subordinate relationship was a common distinction made by employees. According to eighty-five percent of respondents, the lack of a collaborative and progressive evaluation system causes inadequate feedback, elevated strain and stress on the rater and employee, feelings of unworthiness and low levels of job satisfaction, motivation, productivity, and engagement.

Lastly, the most common suggestions submitted for the improvement of performance evaluations included: a redesign of the performance evaluation template and updated rating criteria, monthly employee check-ins between leader and subordinate to discuss progress, clarity of rating criteria and scoring and clear expectations outlined prior to the beginning of the rating period.

Implications for Masters of Public Administration

This study takes an in-depth look into the impact performance evaluations have on employee job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and productivity. This study further highlights the need for consistency in performance evaluations as a means to sustaining employee motivation, engagement, and productivity and promoting elevated levels of job satisfaction. Public agencies need to develop consistent and fair rating criteria and provide ethical and substantial feedback for employee development. Encouraging feedback and collaboration between the leader and subordinate will further enhance productivity, engagement, and motivation and will lead to the more efficient attainment of business objectives.

Limitations

This study was based solely on the Social Services Agency of Orange County and does not consider the views of all County public sector employees. Additionally, there is a possibility that both multiple-choice and open-ended questions were not answered as elaborately or as honestly as possible due to time constraints, fear of potential repercussions, and lack of trust in the research study. In addition, the survey questions for this study included a negative implication that could have influenced biased answers. Furthermore, there is also the possibility that the descriptive nature of this study contributed to unintended bias in responses. Lastly, the possibility of misinterpretation of responses to open-ended questions could also alter the overall

impact of performance evaluations on employee job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and productivity. Future studies relating to this topic could consider different alternatives to survey questions that are more neutral in nature and include follow-up questions that will clearly distinguish the result of the study.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed of the confidentiality terms and assured their personal information would not be disclosed at any point in the research study. Participation in the study was voluntary and the incentive offered was the ability to enter a raffle for a \$50 Starbucks gift card upon completion of the survey. The gift card was bought by the researcher using personal funds and no donations or County funds were used for this purchase. Participants had the option to refuse to answer any questions and terminate the survey at any point during the process. Early termination of the survey resulted in the disqualification of the raffle. The information obtained from the surveys will be securely retained for 5 years and will not be repurposed for any means outside of the intended use of this study.

Conclusion

This study enhances the understanding of the effect performance evaluations have on job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and productivity. Previous studies and the results of this study indicate there needs to be reform in the way public sector agencies conduct their employee performance evaluations as a method for rating job knowledge, skills, and overall performance. The performance evaluation process should be a collaborative event between the leader and subordinate to ensure there is transparency when discussing employee progress and goal attainment. This study suggests ongoing research is needed to further investigate the impact performance evaluations have on employees' professional development and how inconsistencies, subjectivity, and lack of constructive feedback in performance evaluations affect employee job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and productivity.

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Appendix A: Employee Survey

Purpose: The purpose of this survey is to obtain an in-depth understanding of the effect performance evaluations have on employee job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and productivity. The data gathered from this survey will be used to develop a framework for better efficiencies in the performance evaluation process.

Incentives: Upon completion of this survey, participants will receive a raffle code via email to enter for a chance to win a \$50 Starbucks gift card.

Disclaimer: This survey is anonymous and all information will remain confidential and secured for the purpose of this research study.

Please select one response to the statements below

- 1) The outcome of performance evaluations leads to a decrease in my job satisfaction. *Job satisfaction is defined as experiencing feelings of positivity and gratitude towards one's job.*
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 2) The outcome of performance evaluations leads to a decrease in my motivation. *Motivation is defined as consistent work behavior that is energized, sustained, and guided.*
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 3) The outcome of performance evaluations leads to a decrease in my engagement with work-related duties and activities. *Engagement is defined as the desire to be fully involved and dedicated to one's job duties.*
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 4) The outcome of performance evaluations leads to a decrease in my overall productivity. *Productivity is defined as the amount of work completed during business hours.*
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
- 5) The feedback I have received from performance evaluations has helped my professional development.
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Please answer each open-ended question below to the best of your abilities

- 6) What changes could be implemented to improve the current performance evaluation process?
- 7) What challenges have you experienced throughout the performance evaluation process?

- 8) Has the feedback your manager or supervisor provided helped your professional growth?
Why or why not?
- 9) In your opinion, how effective are the current criteria in place used to evaluate employee job performance?
- 10) Describe how performance evaluations have improved or disadvantaged your overall job satisfaction, productivity, motivation, and engagement.

Thank you for taking this survey. You have received the opportunity to enter a raffle for a \$50 Starbucks gift card. Your raffle code will be emailed to you shortly.