

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (NAPA) EVALUATION OF THE CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL SERVICE TWO-LEVEL APPRAISAL SYSTEM

Background

The Corporation for National and Community Service was established by Congress in 1993 to implement President Clinton's new national service program. It merged ACTION, the Commission on National and Community Service, the White House Office of National Service, and added a collection of new programs to be known as AmeriCorps.

Congress granted the Corporation authority to implement an alternative personnel system that would be exempt from title 5 of the U.S. Code in hiring, classification and compensation. Further, because of its status as a government corporation, it was exempt from chapter 43 performance management provisions.

In its FY 1996 appropriation language, Congress directed the Corporation to commission the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) to study the Corporation's structure, organization, management and to make an interim assessment of the Corporation's Alternative Personnel System.

NAPA's methodology

- Mail-in surveys to all staff.
- Interviews with selected managers, employees, and union officials.
- Site reviews in Headquarters and selected Field offices.

Managers' views

- Majority of managers favored a pass-fail system because it simplified the appraisal process but did not favor it for their own appraisals.
- Majority believed that Corporations feedback-oriented performance appraisal system helped career growth.
- Minority felt most employees wanted a more definitive rating such as the previous 5-level system.
- Most said the new system made it easier to deal with poor performers.
- Many supervisors did not understand their performance appraisal responsibilities. They received training upon its implementation but did not absorb much because there was no context for information on a pass-fail system.
- Managers had conflicting views about whether performance plans were linked to mission and organizational objectives. The absence of a results-oriented strategic plan at the time of NAPA's study made it difficult for managers to link performance plans to agency objectives.

- Several supervisors criticized other managers for not dealing with well-known poor performers. They said managers, not the system, were at fault.

Significant findings

- 73% of employees had written performance plans.
- 77% of employees received annual ratings.
- Two-level appraisal system emphasizes feedback and employee development.
- Considerably more performance improvement plans have been issued since the implementation of pass/fail.
- Reason: Benchmarks for successful performance are established when the improvement plan is issued, not when the work plan is developed, thus, eliminating predetermined standards and elements.
- Corporation's primary use of term appointments helps managers release problem employees without resorting to adverse actions. Most supervisors indicated that is their preferred route to take with poor performers.
- Unlike other pass/fail systems evaluated, the Corporation did not utilize 360-degree appraisals nor require quarterly reviews.

Conclusions and recommendations

- This system had been running for two years at the time of the evaluation. Based on NAPA research, major organizational system change takes four to ten years to achieve full implementation. Weak spots are attributable to the newness of the system.
- Continue the pass/fail system.
- Require quarterly progress reviews.
- Execute performance contracts with top managers that specifically define human resources expectations.
- Incorporate in every supervisor's performance plan a critical element for managing the organization and its human resources.
- Supervisors should not receive a passing rating unless they are current with performance plans, ratings, and progress reviews for all subordinates.
- Monitor compliance with the appraisal system through management chain, not Human Resources. [**Note: This has proven to be very effective.**]

For more information contact:
e-mail:

Arthur Lerner, (202) 646-3959
Arthur.Lerner@fema.gov