

12-5: Employee performance appraisal

Periodic appraisal

Employees should have a periodic formal appraisal of their overall performance. This is broader than competency assessment and includes the following elements:

- technical competency
- efficiency
- adherence to policies
- observance of safety rules
- communication skills
- customer service
- punctuality
- professional behaviour.

Feedback

Appraisal can affect an employee's morale, motivation and self-esteem, and should be conducted equitably for all employees. People respond to criticism differently, even if delivered tactfully; therefore, consider unique approaches that match personality when counselling employees. Positive feedback, as well as suggestions for improvement, should be provided.

All identified problems should be addressed with the employee when they occur, so that they can correct any issue before the formal evaluation. A periodic appraisal that is part of the employee's record should not have items that were not previously discussed with the employee.

Cause of poor performance

Poor performance may not always be due to technical incompetence. Performance may be affected by:

- distractions—especially personal issues such as a sick child or parent, or financial problems, which can make the employee's concentration difficult;
- excessive workloads that pressure or hurry the employee, which may cause them to inadvertently make errors;
- insufficient initial orientation or training;
- resistance to change—some people may not want to use new procedures (“We’ve always done it this way, why change?”).

The following factors could also contribute to poor results performance.

- Compromised sample—the laboratorian may or may not know that the sample arrived in the wrong preservative or was improperly stored.
- Absence of SOPs or failure to update them—test kits may come with modified manufacturer's instructions, and these modifications need to be reflected in the SOPs.
- Poorly written procedures—including omitting certain steps, the wrong sequence of steps, or incorrect sample or reagent quantities—can cause very serious errors and should always be suspected when several employees obtain erroneous results.
- Job descriptions that are not clear may be a source of error—for example, confusion about who has responsibility for calibrating an instrument could result in the calibration not being done, causing erroneous results.