O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs

Undergraduate Honors Thesis

An Exploration of the Effectiveness of Cutting-Edge Performance Management Methodology

By: Yi - Shiuon (Ariel) Huang

Major: Human Resource Management

Betsy Larson

Faculty Advisor

Abstract

People are the key human capital assets that give a company a competitive advantage. Effective performance management helps the company align its employees, resources, and system to meet its strategic goal. Performance management is a tool used to motivate employees to perform to their full potential. There are many ways to evaluate individual performance, and there has not been a perfect standard way. In recent years, there has been a shift from the traditional appraisal processes to cutting-edge practices such as the use of crowdsourced feedback, ongoing feedback, and ratingless reviews. The shift caused by several issues including the inconsistent rating, inadequate performance reviewed, and infrequent feedback. The cutting-edge practice can address some of these issues and provides a more well-rounded feedback system that has shown many positives effects and limited negative effects. This paper compares the effectiveness of the traditional appraisal process and the cutting-edge practices among four different companies. Companies with conservative cultures tend to remain in the traditional appraisal process where companies with more progressive cultures are on the path to transit into the cutting-edges practices. There are limited studies on the effectiveness of the cutting-edge practice but there is research showing feedback frequency and development feedback is key to positive employee performance management experience. Organizations these days are focusing on the coaching and development for employee improvement and reaching their fullest potential.

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Introduction

Performance management is key in the Human Resource (HR) world as it helps leverage the human capital for the company and improves employee engagement and performance. Performance management has been a heated discussion topic for centuries. The traditional appraisal process is beneficial to the organization to a certain extent, with more voices rising from both the managers and the employees about their dissatisfaction of the performance appraisal process, new innovative performance appraisal has appeared to improve the current state (Corporate Executive Board [CEB] 2014). The new innovative performance appraisals are the cutting-edge performance appraisal practices: ongoing feedback, crowdsourced feedback, and ratingless review.

This thesis is going to look at the current problems of the traditional performance appraisal, explain the three cutting-edges practices and their effectiveness, the current state of the company in their transition to the cutting-edge practices, what it takes to have a successful cutting-edge practice and the future trend of performance management. In order to support my research, I interviewed 4 different organizations, Cummins, Deloitte, MassMutual, and Coorstek regarding their performance management system, ranging from using traditional appraisal problems to the adaptation of the cutting-edge practices. Together the research and the interview will show performance management is transforming from formal rating to focusing on conversations about coaching and development for improvement as an employee.

Current Problems

Managers and employees are rarely satisfied with the current traditional appraisal process For many decades, managers and employees are not completely satisfied with the traditional appraisal process. According to the CEB survey in 2014, more than 75% of the managers

expressed that "their PMSes are ineffective and/or inaccurate." (CEB 2014). From the
WorldatWork survey in 2017, more than half of the employees are not satisfied with the
evaluation process (Table 1) (WorldatWork 2017). In Mercer's "2019 Global Performance
Management Study", they found that only "2% of human resources leaders globally believe their
existing performance management system delivers exceptional value" (Christie 2019). Research
also showed that "only 14% of employees" agree that their performance reviews motivate them
to improve (Table 2) (LinkedIn Learning).

The current system has not shown to be improving employee performance and
engagement dramatically and has cause problems such as unfair rating, single-sourced feedback
system, and number-scale rating. We can see a trend in the past that the organizational leaders
and employees have been expressing the ineffective of their traditional performance management
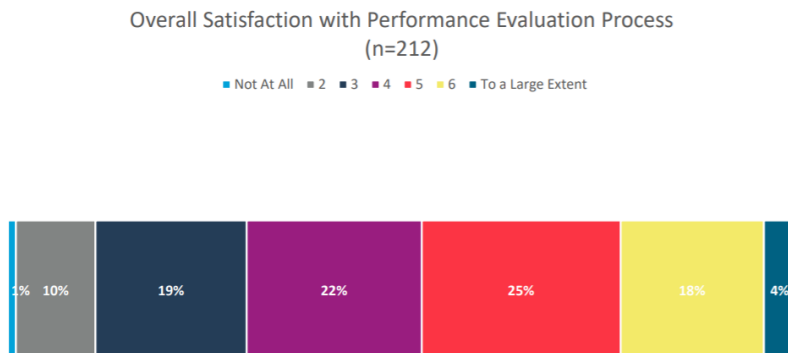system.

Table 1: More than 50% of the employees are not
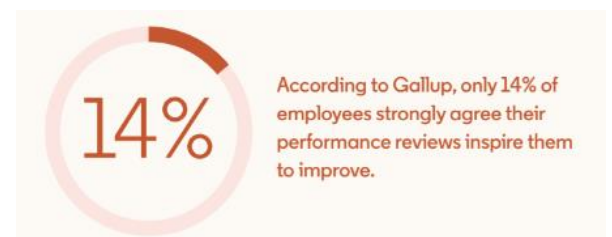satisfied with the performance evaluation process

Table 2

Before going into a detailed explanation of the cutting-edge performance appraisal, we will first examine the traditional performance method to see what caused this system to be viewed as ineffective or inaccurate for the employees and the managers.

<u>Traditional Performance Method</u>

In the traditional appraisal process, employees are rated by numbers once or twice a year, usually during mid-year and the end of the year. During my interview with a Cummins HR generalist, she said that Cummins follows the traditional appraisal process where they use a number rating scale and pay for performance methodology for their employees' performance management. Employees receive a number from the scale from 1-3 where 3 indicates employees that exceed expectations and 1 indicates employees did not meet the expectations (Cummins Interview). The person rating the employees are usually managers. However, employees tend to interact with several different groups throughout the organization, therefore getting a review from a single manager cannot provide a well-rounded review for the employee. Managers spend more time evaluating employees by going over different pre-set criteria rather than focusing the conversation on the idea of development and goal.

The thought of improving the performance appraisal process leads managers to reconsider the system and process that focus on the coaching and development for the employees, which in turn leads them to the new innovative approaches of the appraisal system.

The Three Cutting-edge Practices

The widely discussed innovative system is the three cutting-edge practices that are made up of ongoing feedback, crowdsourced feedback, and ratingless review. They are recommended to replace or supplement the traditional annual performance review.

<u>Ongoing Feedback</u>

Ongoing feedback is where managers check-in with employees on a frequent basis. The reason why ongoing feedback is beneficial is that frequent feedback helps improve the supervisor and employee relations. It is better for employees' development as managers are able to provide support and feedback in real-time. Some early adopters of ongoing feedback are Adobe and Microsoft. (Stone, Thomas H, et al 2019).

In 1965, 55 years ago, Meyer, Kay, and French stated that one of the key components of performance appraisals is to incorporate frequent feedback and coaching as the focus of discussions between employees and managers (Stone, Thomas H, et al 2019). The organization needs to be aware of the frequency of feedback and how that translates to value for the employees. Too much or too little discussion might be harmful instead of being beneficial. What is most important is the quality of the conversation. The ongoing feedback improves the supervisor's and employee's relationship and provides a better understanding of the employee's development for the supervisors.

Marcus Buckingham, a motivational speaker and business consultant who started The Marcus Buckingham Company (TMBC) and created management training programs and tools (Marcus Bio). In his video The Check-In Conversation, Marcus mentioned that managers need to ask the question "what are your priorities and how can I help" each week to their employees. Leaders need to learn to check in on a regular basis to build a relationship with their employees to offer real-time assistance. If the check-in happens every six weeks, a lot of the information has been lost and managers and employees are looking backward in the past rather than moving forward. The check-in conversation should not just revolve around aligning personal goals with the organization's goal, but rather focusing on the coaching and development piece. If the

managers do not know where to offer help, it is more difficult to think about the bigger picture.

Crowdsourced Feedback

Crowdsourced feedback uses social media to provide "cheer to peer" or "high-five" feedback to employees. It is similar to the 360-degree rating (which is providing performance feedback using inputs from peers and other colleagues), however, it is more informal and immediate. Feedback can be delivered to employees at any time rather than requiring specific steps (Steinheider, Brigitte, et al 2018). This serves as an advantage as employees are able to receive real-time feedback and it is also convenient for managers to provide feedback immediately.

During my interview with the Deloitte consulting analyst, he mentioned that mangers and peers are able to send individuals an "applaud award" over the inter-company network if you perform well on the project. You will receive an immediate comment on your current performance and he personally really enjoyed this feature as he knows whether how and what to continue with his current work style (Deloitte Interview). The company that adopts crowdsourced feedback "tends to be high-tech companies with team-based culture such as Spotify, Hootsuite, and Media Agility" (Goldberg 2014).

One advantage of the crowdsourced feedback is that millennials are very familiar with the technology and it provides great data for the manager (Steinheider, Brigitte, et al 2018).

The use of technology helps decrease workload and "provide a more efficient way to collect standardized performance data" (Ledford et al. 2016). However, organizations need to take the culture of the organization into consideration. The organization needs to support a culture of "open dialogue" before this type of feedback can be implemented effectively.

<u>Ratingless Review</u>

Ratingless review is as its name implies - instead of the formal detail number scale rating, there will be no numbers that rate the employees. This type of review aims to motivate employees and let them focus on collaboration rather than competition. Mangers used to assume employees want to know where they stand compared to the others, but research has shown that using a rating will decrease the self-confidence of an employee (Rock 2008). Leaders want to shift away from the traditional formal rating as they think filling out the feedback document is not particularly useful and a good use of time if the results are not completely reliable and valid.

The survey from the CEB Caproate Leadership council found that "millennials are more motivated by evaluating relative to their specific role rather than others" (CEB 2014). Studies have shown that by 2025, 75% of the global workforce will be makeup by the millennials (Economy 2019). Therefore, the new ratingless PMS may work better for some than others, especially in the near future.

Current Situation

We mentioned previously the three different cutting -edge practice, now we will look at where are we on the timeline of adopting the cutting-edge appraisal system. Currently, companies are adopting the innovative cutting-edge appraisal system to improve employee performance and engagement.

According to Deloitte Survey 2015, "88% of businesses plan on rethinking their PMS" and the Harvard Business Review 2016 stated that "More than 1/3 of US companies…are replacing annual reviews with frequent, informal check-ins between managers and employees." University of Southern California's Center for Effective Organization showed that "Out of the 244 organizations that were surveyed, 97% used ongoing feedback, 51% use rating less review,

and 27% use crowdsourced feedback." (Stone, Thomas H, et al 2019). Although there is a lot of companies are thinking about transiting into the new PMS, actually very few organizations have completely dropped traditional performance appraisal methods.

The Bersin Deloitte survey found that "56% of high-performing organizations compared to 0 low-performing organizations provide multisource and peer feedback". These high-performing organizations have the culture and are ready to adapt and implement the new cutting-edge performance management system since "70% of multinationals corporations are in the process of adoption" (Bersin by Deloitte) and some have adopted multiple cutting-edge practices (SHRM 2017).

However, some organization while having a cutting-edge PMS, still retain some of their traditional practices. Some organizations, on the other hand, are not looking to adopt those innovative methods. In the case of Cummins, they are not looking into completely getting rid of the traditional rating system as the company has a strong pay to a performance culture. Pay to performance is widely used by a lot of companies where they provide annual merit pay and annual bonuses based on employee's performance.

The Effectives of the Three Cutting-edge Practices

The cutting-edge practices are some of the upcoming trend and practices, therefore are limited by the amount of information and studies regarding the effectiveness of the system and whether it truly improve employee's performance and engagement. However, by using the available studies and examples we can see in what types of work culture and environment do these feedback systems work best in, and if there is any combination of the feedback systems that would provide a positive trend for the PMS system. There are indeed various studies and examples that can serve as a guideline for future companies.

Ongoing Feedback

The USC CEO survey of 244 organizations conducted by Ledford, Benson, and Lawler, and Bersin-Deloitte Survey found "ongoing feedback is the most effective method", especially when combined with crowdsourced feedback (Enderes and Deruntz 2018).

MassMutual is an example of where ongoing feedback was adopted. Mangers focused on facilitating the conversation and looking ahead to the roadblocks and goal of the next 90 days rather than looking back and spending time evaluating employees. The company encouraged a two-way conversation and managers focused the conversation on coaching and development rather than filling out feedback reports and forms.

There are several positive outcomes with the implementation of ongoing feedback. First, it takes the pressure off the manager's shoulder to give employees a rating or label. Second, it reduces time as the conversation is based on a growth mindset rather than filling out forms based on past recollection of the employee's performance. Third, the previous perception of unfair rating and biases have decreased as the main objective of the conversation is to help the employee achieve their fullest potential.

The change in the PMS at MassMutual also caused a shift in the pay for performance. The pay for performance has changed from merit pay to pay for bonuses. Merit pay is determined by the ratings provided by the manager, however, only 32% of HR executives "said their merit pay program is effective at differentiating pay based on induvial performance" (Miller 2016). The base pay should be determined by the employee's potential contribution rather than giving a score to the employee's past performance and achievement.

At Coorstek, while they remain their systematic 3 factors rating system, they are working on training managers to have ongoing conversations with their employees. However, they are not

looking at the get rid of the 3 factors rating, they feel it is necessary to retain some sort of rating system as they have a strong culture of pay for performance.

Ongoing feedback has been proven to be effective and several organizations have adopted it and showed desirable results.

<u>Crowdsourced Feedback</u>

Looking at the crowdsourced feedback, Ledford and Lawler discussed several advantages of using this technology-based feedback: "to help facilitate the frequent and dynamic performance review and the calibration process transforms ratings into more efficient decisions and actions" (Stone, Thomas H, et al 2019).

For example, in Deloitte, as mentioned before mangers and peers can send employees an "applause award" over the inter-company network if one performs well on a project. A company such as IBM created its own app called the Checkpoint that allows employees to set their own goals and to obtain feedback from their peers. Accenture also has its own App called the Accenture people, it is designed to foster a "performance achievement culture" (SHRM 2017). Crowdsourced feedback has been effective in mostly team-oriented culture and in the company that is comfortable with implementing new technology. With that said, the crowdsourced feedback is not suitable for all company.

Some of the pitfalls to consider when using crowdsourced feedback are the wide use of technology might cause a decrease in face-to-face interaction, the "potential loss of confidentially if the system is hacked' (Ledford and Lawler 2015).

The effectiveness of crowdsourced feedback is strongly affected by the organization's culture. With a team-based and open dialogue culture, the employee is more inclined to learn

new technology that enables such a feedback system and provide feedback for their peers.

Ratingless Review

Several studies showed that the ratingless review is not as effective in improving employee's performance and the relationship between managers and employees as the media portrayed. The CEB survey estimated 10,000 employees across 30 organizations and found that there is actually a "10% decline in employee performance and quality manager-subordinate interactions" at companies that eliminated ratings (CEB 2016).

In the DIRECTV Case, the organization studies 3 pilots' group in a well-established company with an effective performance management system. They use a different rating system to see whether the differences in rating will cause improvement in employee engagement and performance. One group uses the origination's five-point scale, one uses a simplified three-point scale, and the last group had no rating. They concluded that ratingless reviews led to a more positive result, but the frequency of feedback and the focus on development was the key to improve performance management effectiveness. Since the company they tested at is already doing well in their performance management system, they cannot certainly say rating less review is effective (Ledford and Benson 2019).

Although there is organization adopted the ratingless review, the effectiveness of these practices is influenced by many factors and variables. However, the overall conclusion for this practice is so far there are more negative conation relate to the ratingless review, and we cannot be certain whether it is truly effective or not.

Factors to Consider for a Successful and Effective Cutting-Edge Practice

A successful and effective cutting-edge appraisal needs to consider the company culture, nature of works, and individual differences. It is not a guarantee that if a company implement the

new cutting-edges practice it will increase their employee engagement and performance. These practices might not be suitable for all organizations.

Company Culture

The company with a more progressive culture and dynamic culture tends to be more successful with these practices since it suits the employees. For example, it might be better for Cummins to have a rating system rather than ratingless because of the strong tie to pay culture, there needs to be a rating in order to determine their pay. According to Goldberg, for feedback to be successful, it must fit the orientational culture (Goldberg 2014).

At Coorstek, the culture between young employees and older generations are different, the difference in work style and preferences in feedback leads HR to think about what the most appropriate performance management system would be to address various generations in the organization.

It is important for the company to have a pilot program to test whether the implemented cutting-practices is a good fit for the organization. In MassMutual, before implementing the ongoing conversation, they launched a pilot program consisted of 1000 people, who are mostly in HR. After one year of testing, they performed an evaluation and talked with the stakeholders to gather feedback and data. The careful planning and the testing program allow the company to see whether the newly adopted PMS is suitable and effective for their company culture.

Nature of Work

This cutting-edge practice might not be the best for routine work and in less progressive organizations. When adopting the innovative practices, the organization should determine the appropriate frequency of ongoing feedback for their work and culture, too much or too like is

likely to not be helpful. Crowdsourced and ongoing feedback fits well with the growing use of

teams and a fast-paced environment.

Table 3 indicates different natures of work, routine vs dynamic, independent vs

interdependent, and the corresponding cutting-edge practices. The characteristic of routine work

is stable, clear methods, and process. These usually work as a call center worker, assembling line

worker. Dynamic work is characterized by always changing, ambiguous, or unknown methods.

These are professionals such as consultants, analysts, project managers. When the work in

dynamic and interdependent, ongoing and crowdsourced will be useful. Interdependent refers to

which employees work closely with others and share materials (Stone, Thomas H, et al 2019)

<div align="center">

Nature of Works

	Independent	Interdependent
Routine	None	Crodsourced feedback
Dynamic	Ongoing feedback	Both

</div>

Table 3

For example, at Coorstek and Cummins, both of them are made up of white-collar and

blue-collar employees. It would not make sense for managers to regularly check in with

assembling line employees as they are doing routine work. The cutting-edge practices might not

be the most beneficial for workers doing a repetitive job. But the conversation about coaching

and development can continue to be implemented. For an organization to improve, the manager

needs to focus the discussion on the potential and ongoing contribution for the employee rather than always looking back at the past achievement.

Individual Difference

How feedback is interpreted is important to consider when implementing new PMS. Dweck's research in 2006 showed that people with a growth mindset benefit more from performance feedback by using the feedback to improve their skills and performance, while those with a fixed mindset tend to maintain, then unlikely to learn from feedback (Dweck 2006).

From the study that was conducted by a test development company in 2017, with a sample size of 332, the study concluded that personality differences were significantly correlated with feedback preferences. In addition to describing their current appraisal system, the respondents also completed the Hogan Development Survey (HDS) which assesses the disruptive qualities that can thwart individual careers, relationships, and the others.

Respondents with high scores on "dutiful" (compliant but conflict-averse) prefer positive supervisor feedback face to face significantly more than less dutiful respondents (Table 4). Respondents score high on distancing tends to push others away in stressful situations (Steinheider, Brigitte, et al 2018).

TABLE 4 Means and Standard Deviations of Preference for Performance Appraisal and Hogan Characteristic

		PosFtFSuper		PosTechSuper		PosFtFPeer		NegFtF		NegTech	
	N	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Diligent											
Low	137	8.33	1.62	7.41	2.12	6.47	2.59	4.37*	2.41	3.98	2.38
High	155	8.42	1.65	7.51	2.14	6.72	2.45	4.95*	2.62	4.50	2.49
Dutiful											
Low	109	8.10*	1.81	7.47	2.06	6.44	2.48	4.69	2.54	4.29	2.43
High	152	8.51*	1.50	7.42	2.17	6.87	2.50	4.73	2.54	4.16	2.42
Distancing											
Low	110	8.55	1.53	7.45	2.19	6.50	2.60	4.92*	2.57	3.82	2.27
High	116	8.39	1.70	7.74	1.94	6.67	2.57	4.23*	2.25	4.40	2.54
Seductive											
Low	111	8.51	1.48	7.34*	2.31	6.60	2.78	4.62	2.53	4.19	2.39
High	111	8.59	1.46	7.97*	1.75	6.89	2.30	4.71	2.32	4.54	2.44

* – significant difference at the .05 level; significant F statistics reported in the text.

Source: Cutting-Edge Performance Appraisal Practices: The Disconnect Between Employee Preference and Public Attention, 2018

Table 4

While implementing feedback, managers should expect personality and other individual differences (such as age) in feedback preference to affect motivation and performance for each employee.

Future Trend

From the two tables below (Table 5&6) we can see that in the next two years it is not likely for the company to get rid of formal performance appraisal. The majority of the company still using a formal performance appraisal/rating. Ongoing feedback is most likely to be implemented by the company compared to the other 2 cutting edges practices.

The company will continue to keep some of the traditional practices while complementing with cutting-edge practice. Research shows only a few organizations have dropped traditional performance. The cutting-edge practices are "just an evolution of traditional appraisal processes and methods" (Stone, Thomas H 2019) Although we can't have a definite answer of which performance management system is the best, from research and studies we can conclude that multisource and well-rounded feedback on a frequent basis has a higher probability of being beneficial to the company.

Table 5

Table 6
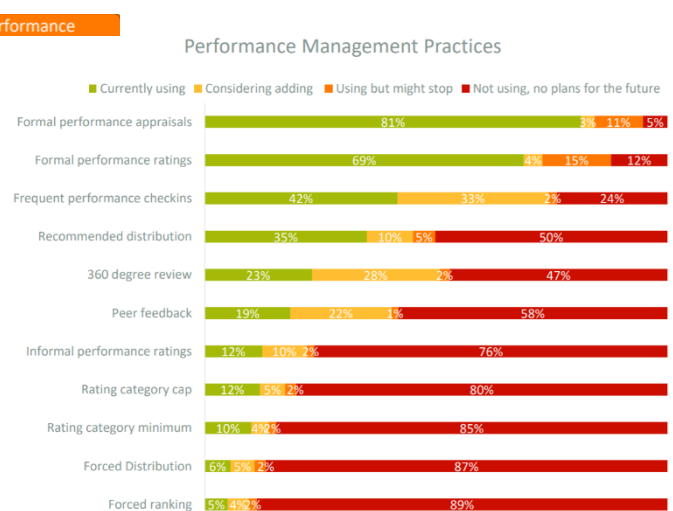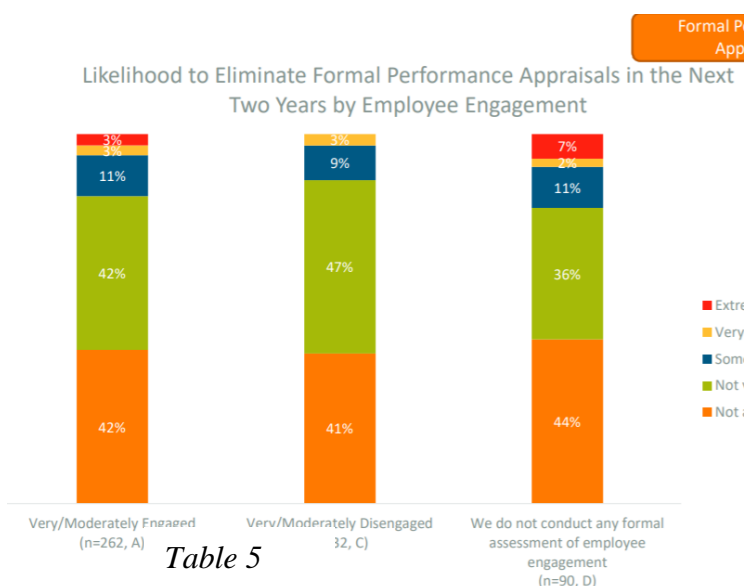
The high-performance organization is more likely to train leaders on how to provide feedback and coaching and how to use technology to provide performance development feedback (Stone, Thomas H, et al 2019). Training is a key and essential aspect of the success of PMS. The use of new technology to support ongoing feedback will not be successful unless accompanied by "a strong focus on employee and manager training, support and encouragement" (Ford and Hunt 2018) Even if one has the best PMS in the world, without proper training, it would not be useful and produce its proper effect.

In Marcus Buckingham video To Accelerate Performance, Solve for Coaching, Not Feedback, the main question the manager needs to consider is how to they help their employee to become a bit better every day. Marcus said the tools that were made in the past to build relationships are the feedback tool, but the main problem here is coaching. The feedback tool is not helping managers to get to know employees more, but coaching is.

Conclusion

The culture, norms, and individuals in the organization shape the appraisal process and outcomes. Limited study on the effectiveness of the cutting-edge practice but there is research showing feedback frequency and development feedback is key to positive employee performance management experience. There are several studies showing that future-oriented rating appears to be more beneficial than traditional past-focused rating. Ratingless reviews are associated with more negative than positive employees and organizational outcomes.

Bersin Deloitte's study found that more than half of high performing organizations, compared to low-performing origination, used ongoing multisource peer feedback. We also observed a trend of companies beginning to adopt some of the cutting-edge practices. The most important factor to a successful PMS is whether there is an honest, open two-way conversation

between managers and employees. Future-oriented ratings appear to be more beneficial than

traditional past-focused ratings and it is critical to focus on the development of employees rather

than spending time evaluating them.

Interview Company Information

Company	Cummins	Deloitte	MassMutual	Coorstek
Interviewee Job Title	HR Generalist	Human Capital Analyst	Former Vice President of Compensation	Vice President of Total Rewards
Performance Management System	Traditional Rating	Cutting-edge Practices	Pay for bonus+ focus on development and coaching	Traditional + ongoing feedback
Future Plan	Remain the same	Experience different PMS	Remain the same	Remain the same with improve ongoing feedback

Interview Objective

To understand the past, current, and future PMS the company is using and the effectiveness of each system. Align and compare the interview result with the research to show the types of cutting-edge practices company are adopting and if there are significant positive result from the implementation.

Interview Questionnaire

1. What is the current performance management system (PMS) at your company?
2. Is the current PMS effective?
3. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the PMS?
4. Is the PMS the same across all levels and functions?
5. How many people give performance review to the employee?
6. How has the PMS affected employee engagement and motivation?
7. Is the company thinking of changing the current PMS? If so, what makes you want to change it?
8. What are some of the past attempt the company have tried?
9. What is the future plan for the PMS? Is the company going to revise performance plan?
10. Did you see any connection between the company culture and the type of performance management method it adopts?

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