

**PERCEIVED FAIRNESS OF PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL SYSTEM
AND JOB RELATED FACTORS– A CONCEPTUAL DEBATE**

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ABSTRACT

Performance Appraisal is a critical portion of the cycle of Performance Management. It is one of the most controversial and complex activities to implement and has hence been viewed by academicians with intrigue. Research highlights several variables and several associations have been established between Perceived Satisfaction of Performance Appraisal systems and other constructs. There is however, minimal research that attempts to unearth the relationship between Job related factors and Perceived Satisfaction with Appraisal Systems. The focus of this paper is to bridge this gap and attempt to establish a conceptual connect between Job Related Factors and Performance Appraisal Perceptions.

Introduction

Effective human resource management is essential for organisations to achieve their work aims (Inayet et al, 2008). Work organisation, personnel selection, training, promotion, career planning, performance appraisal, pay, and motivation define the scope of human resources management as determinants in developing harmonious relationships between the organisation and its employees (Bernardin and Russell, 1998).

The issue of employees' performance in furtherance of organizational objectives has occupied management attention for long. Differences in levels of performance have been attributed to differences in skills and abilities on the one hand, and to different theories of money on the other. (Frank et al. , 2011)

One of the essential elements in employee related decision making for an organisation is Performance Appraisal. Performance Appraisal is one of the most commonly used tools in the Indian scenario. Specific to the Indian IT Sector, Performance Appraisal is a cyclical/ yearly event which is the evaluation methodology to determine an employee's reward and growth for the said accounting year, with respect to his/ her performance. Performance appraisal is one of the most widely researched areas in industrial/organizational psychology (Murphy & Cleveland, 1993). The traditional research agenda has however, contributed minimally to highlight the utility of performance appraisal as an organizational and managerial tool. (Walsh, 2003).

In his comprehensive definition of Performance Appraisal, Walsh (2003) states , "Performance appraisal is a process by which a superior evaluates and judges the work performance of a subordinate. Performance appraisal systems include the processes and procedures involved in implementing, managing, and communicating the events involved in performance appraisal. In many cases it is a formal process and is a part of the personnel management policy."

Research on performance appraisals (PA) spans an entire range of aspects and constructs that include psychometric issues, rater/ratee characteristics, cognitive processes, rater training, and appraisal fairness (Bretz, Milkovich, and Read, 1992). PA and its usage has been a topic of research interest to authors who link usage to behavioural and organizational outcomes. How PAs are used has proven to influence rating behavior and results (e.g., Williams, DeNisi, Blencoe, & Cafferty, 1985; Zedeck & Cascio, 1982) and be an important predictor of employee attitudes and perceptions of their appraiser, the job, and the performance appraisal system as such (Meyer, Kay, & French, 1965; Prince & Lawler, 1989).

Research has investigated several constructs that can be correlated to appraisal perceptions. However, there is scarcity in literature pertinent to the Job Related factors and Appraisal opinions. This research paper aims to bridge that gap and conceptually correlate Employee Performance Appraisal Perceptions from the viewpoint of the various job related variables.

2.6 Job Related Factors

The various Job Related factors that have been factored in the conceptual framework of the study have been explained in this section.

2.6.1 Job Design – Job Diagnostic Survey

First-generation job design theory focusing on individuals was proposed by Viteles (1950) in initial literature. His aim or objective was to integrate the methods of job rotation and job enlargement to resolve issues related to the reduction of employee morale and Job performance due to job monotony and boredom from job specialization. Furthermore, Walker and Guest (1952) opined that, if an employee's job characteristics are repetitious in nature, requiring minimal innovation, creativity and working techniques, and where the right to choose his/here working methods, the employee will perceive his/her job to be monotonous and boring, thereby bringing about reducing morale and productivity. Yoder et al. (1958) proposed that job rotation was a definite method to reduce employee monotony, boredom and tiredness, which was an outcome of organizations' mass production methodologies and job specialization practices in the past years. Lindbeck and Snower (2000) also noticed that conventional organizations demanded highly simplified and specialized techniques from their employees in order to support standardized production procedures.

Job design has generated a lot of interest in recent decades (Fried & Ferris, 1987; Parker, Wall, & Cordery 2001). A basic principle in job design research is that stimulating jobs are associated with motivating psychological states that contribute to favourable attitudinal and behavioural work outcomes (Morgeson & Campion, 2003; Parker & Wall, 1998).

The Herzberg (1968) two-factor theory of job satisfaction and motivation explains how job satisfaction is affected by the presence or absence of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Herzberg postulates that there are two factors that affect job satisfaction--the motivator and hygiene factors. Hackman and Oldham (1976, 1980) expand on Herzberg's theory with a theory of job characteristics. Hackman and Oldham identified five core job characteristics that lead to outcomes of job satisfaction. The five core job characteristics are skill variety, task identity, task

significance, autonomy, and feedback. Hackman and Oldham (1975) pursued their work in motivation theory by developing not only a comprehensive model of work motivation, but also a measurement tool (the Job Diagnostic Survey) to identify the various components of their model.

Hackman and Oldham (1980) have developed a model based on a theory that individuals experience internal motivation when certain conditions of their work itself are satisfied. Figure X outlines the model which grew out of the researchers' attempts to determine which characteristics of a job are related to job satisfaction. Hackman and Oldham (1980) propose that there are three conditions, known as psychological states, that individuals must experience for a job to be internally motivating. Jobs that are high in the critical psychological states are referred to as enriched jobs.

Job Characteristics Model

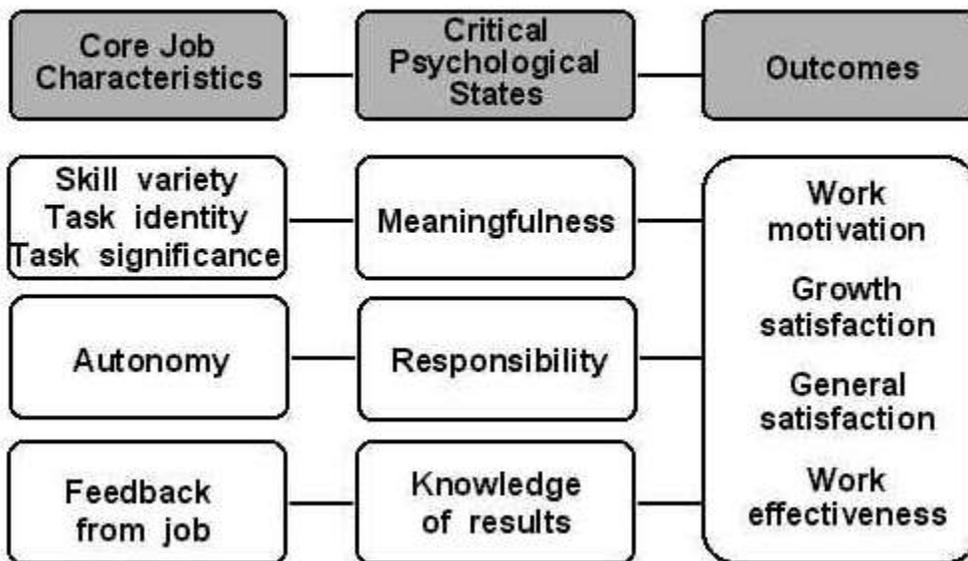


Figure 6 Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Model.

Knowledge of results, the first job critical psychological state, is an important condition because individuals will be more satisfied when they are aware of the results of their work. The core job characteristic leading to knowledge of results is the job feedback. Feedback is defined as “the

degree to which carrying out the activities required by a job results in individuals obtaining direct and clear information about the effectiveness of their performance” (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Job feedback is an important component as it allows individuals to gauge whether or not they are meeting the expectations of their jobs. Individuals need to know when they are performing well so they can continue to do so, and those who are not performing well need to know so they can make the necessary changes to improve (Spector, 2000). The second critical psychological state is experienced responsibility which results from the core characteristic of autonomy. Autonomy is defined as “the degree to which a job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out” (Hackman & Oldham, 1980, p. 79). As individuals are given a greater degree of job autonomy, they will take more responsibility for their successes and failures, and will be less likely to attribute them to other people.

The third critical psychological state is experienced meaningfulness of the work which results from the core characteristic of skill variety, task variety, and task significance. Skill variety is defined as “the degree to which a job requires a variety of different activities in carrying out the work that involves the use of a number of different skills and talents of the individual” (Hackman & Oldham, 1980, p. 78). An employee with a job that challenges his or her skills and abilities, or is made up of a variety of tasks, will perceive the job as more meaningful than an employee who works in a more routine and monotonous environment.

According to Hackman and Oldham (1980), skill variety is important because many employees seek out occasions to explore their work environment by using different skills and abilities, and are more motivated by these opportunities. Task identity is “the degree to which a job requires completion of a whole and identifiable piece of work”; that is, carrying out the entire job from start to end with a visible outcome (Hackman & Oldham, 1980, p. 78). Performing only a piece of a task is not as meaningful for employees because they do not achieve the satisfaction of seeing the entire product of their efforts. Task significance is “the degree to which a job has a substantial impact on the lives or the work of other people” (Hackman & Oldham, 1980, p. 79). An employee with a job that has an impact on the psychological and/or physical health of others will derive a stronger sense of the meaningfulness of the work. According to Hackman and

Oldham (1980), not all three characteristics need to be present simultaneously for the sense of meaningfulness to exist.

Hackman and Oldham (1980) hypothesized that a combination of these core characteristics produced an overall estimate of the motivational potential of a job. They referred to this estimate as the Motivating Potential Score (MPS) of a job, and its equation is summarized in Figure 7. An internally motivating job should be high in autonomy, feedback, and at least one of the characteristics of meaningfulness.

A review of the literature finds that their Job Characteristics Model (JCM) has been applied mostly to organizational settings (Batt & Applebaum, 1995; Campion, Medsker, & Higgs, 1993; Riggs & Knight, 1994). Little empirical research has been conducted on the relationship of the scientists' job satisfaction and job characteristics. This provides an opportunity through this research to add to the overall body of literature on Hackman and Oldham's JCM and job satisfaction.

$$\text{Motivating Potential Score (MPS)} = \left(\frac{\text{Skill Variety} + \text{Task Identity} + \text{Task Significance}}{3} \right) \times \text{Autonomy} \times \text{Job Feedback}$$

Figure 7 MPS for the JCM by Hackman & Oldham

The JCM describes job dimensions influencing critical psychological states that, in turn, influence job outcomes, such as job satisfaction. The job characteristics model is a hybrid between behavioral and systems approaches in that it focuses on: 1) the actual work that individuals perform, 2) individual and group design of work, 3) individual differences in how people react to jobs and to redesign efforts, and 4) the importance of collecting diagnostic data before a work system is changed (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Hackman and Oldham (1975) suggest that jobs differ to the extent to which they involve five core dimensions: 1) skill variety, 2) task variety, 3) task significance, 4) autonomy, and 5) task feedback.

According to the job characteristics model, jobs with higher motivating potential scores are likely to result in satisfaction of three critical psychological states: experienced meaningfulness of work, experienced responsibility for outcomes of work, and knowledge of the actual results of work activities. Hackman and Oldham posit that skill variety, task identity, and task significance are key in generating experienced meaningfulness of work. Autonomy is key in generating responsibility for outcomes of work, and feedback from the job is key in generating knowledge of the actual results of work activities. Satisfaction of these psychological states should result in higher internal work motivation, higher performance, and job satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1980).

Although research suggests that there is a relationship between JCM and Job Satisfaction ((Batt, & Applebaum, 1995; Campion, Medsker, & Higgs, 1993; Fried & Ferris, 1987; Glisson & Durick, 1988; Loher, Noe, Moeller, & Fitzgerald, 1985; Marchese, 1998; Rousseau, 1997; Song, Daly, Rudy, Douglas, & Dyer, 1997; Zawacki, Shahan, & Carey, 1995), there is little evidence to examine the relationship between the JCM dimensions and perceived satisfaction with performance appraisal. This gap will be studied in this research and a possible relationship will be investigated.

2.6.2 Job Uniqueness

Job Uniqueness is a new variable that has been unearthed. Job Uniqueness has emerged as an important variable in the research conducted by Fay (2006). The study involved the relative contributions of individual attributes, perceived job characteristics, organizational positions, and social context in explaining variation in employee reactions to Performance Appraisal.

As a larger part of the study, the questionnaire was initially administered for a pilot assessment to 25 employees who completed the survey. Thereon, there were volunteers involved in focus group discussions to evaluate the survey. During these discussions, the researcher felt it was necessary to add an element called Job Uniqueness as a part of the survey, since a large part of

the employee's work was dependant on the presence of their counterparts in the organization. Essentially, this tells us whether the job incumbent is the only one, one of several, or one of many employees sharing the job title. According to these informants, job uniqueness has a powerful effect on social lives at work, and on reactions to performance appraisal.

With reference to my research work, I have applied Job Uniqueness as a Job related dimension to evaluate its effect on perceptions to performance appraisal. In my view, it will be intriguing to examine how the presence of a unique job title can contribute to the reactions to an appraisal.

2.6.3 Leadership Credibility

Today's changing work environment calls for greater understanding of the behavioral aspect of leadership and its effect on job satisfaction. The increasing popularity of books on leadership indicates that leaders and managers recognize that new or different approaches to leadership will be needed due to the rapid changes demanded of today's global business environment (Utley & Dawn, 2000).

Part of the role of organizational leaders is to help employees deal with feelings of ambiguity and uncertainty, and to help them feel "more connected" to the organizational changes being implemented. The extent to which this change can be established is largely based on the leaders' credibility and their communication about the change. Most of what has been written on the relationship between leader credibility and communication has been theoretical (Covey, 1991; Fairholm, 1994; Kouzes & Posner, 1993a; O'Toole, 1995; Rost, 1991) rather than empirical. Communication practices are a challenging aspect of change and leaders often fail to see the central role of communication in the creation of a shared understanding of a change event (Ford & Ford, 1995; ; Lewis 2000; Colvin & Kilmann, 1990; Kanter, 1983). In fact, numerous studies indicate that two thirds of all restructuring and reengineering efforts fail in some way, including living up to expectations (Trahan, Burke, and Koonce, 1997) because of a lack of leader credibility. This research is suggestive of the importance of leadership credibility to the success

of planned organizational change and that leaders must follow through on their words and actions and “do what they say they will do.”

Employees base their perceptions of leader credibility largely on the communication comfort they enjoy with the leader. When employees view their leaders as credible, it can be supremely beneficial to organizations. Studies have linked employee perception of credible leadership to greater organizational commitment among employees (Kouzes & Posner, 1993), employee satisfaction (Falcione, 1974, 1976; Klauss & Bass, 1982), employee perceptions of organizational effectiveness (Klauss & Bass, 1982), and increased and more open communication (O'Reilly & Roberts, 1976). Communication is a key feature of the leader-employee relationship. It has a positive impact of this relationship when leaders lead from the employees' perspective and communicate in ways that make employees feel needed, appreciated, and understood. Research has also indicated that an employee's direct manager has the greatest influence on whether an employee finds a job satisfying (Bass, 1985a; Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Therefore, the leadership practices employed by immediate managers have an important role in determining whether an employee is satisfied or not (Cranny, Smith, & Stone, 1992; Hater & Bass, 1998; Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Kuchinke, 1999; Lawler & Porter, 1967; Shoemaker, 1999; Fuller, Morrison, Jones, Bridger, & Brown, 1999).

Very few empirical studies have even investigated the leader-follower relationship in general (Kouzes & Posner, 1993a; Hartford, 2000). Few research studies have investigated the link between leadership credibility and communication (O'Reilly & Roberts, 1976; Falcione, 1973, 1974, 1997; Posner & Kouzes, 1988). There is however very little evidence to suggest the relationship between Leadership Credibility and Performance Appraisal perceptions.

2.6.3.1 Background to Leadership

It is observed in literature that leadership theories have continued to flourish over the last 20 years and have illustrated movement in our thinking about leadership. From the review of the literature, the prevailing theories of leadership appear to be organized into four general

theoretical groupings. These are Trait Theory (Gibb, 1947; Jenkins, 1947), Style or Behavioral Theory (Stogdill & Coons, 1951), Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1967), and Attribution Theory (Bass, 1990). Found in the literature only on attribution theory is evidence that acknowledges the importance of communication. This body of work centers on the differentiation between transactional, transformational, and the role of charismatic leadership.

Theories about leadership and supervision in organizations have come into being over the past fifty years, evolving from a scientific management perspective into human relations and gradually adopting an organizational behavior emphasis. The relationship between leadership style and employees' job satisfaction has been studied extensively (DeRoot, Kiker, & Cross, 2000; Dobbins & Zaccharo, 1986; Dubinsky, Yammarino, Jolson, & Spangler, 1995; Gresham & Brown, 1997; Kim, 2002; Medley & Larochelle, 1995; Putti & Tong, 1992; Valenzi & Dessler, 1978; Yusaf, 1998). The leadership style of managers is exhibited by their behavior patterns when attempting to guide their subordinates. The leadership practices of research and development managers can be a detriment to the scientists' reactions to their work, and can result in low job satisfaction, high turnover, and an increased rate of absenteeism. Research indicates that effective leaders do not rely on only one leadership style, but adjust their styles to specific situations as they occur (Kouzes & Posner, 1995).

2.6.3.2 Kouzes and Posner's Transformation Leadership Model

The transformational leadership model developed by Kouzes and Posner (1995) incorporates the elements of transformational, moral, charismatic, and visionary leadership. Their model describes specific, observable behaviors that were found to be performed by the outstanding leaders they researched. These leadership behaviors are explained in detail below.

Modeling the Way

Modeling the way involves being a role model for all followers (Conger, 1989; Kotter, 1996) so that leadership consistently demonstrates the values of the organization. "Leaders take every

opportunity to show others, by their own example, that they are deeply committed to the aspirations they espouse. Leading by example is how leaders make visions and values tangible” (Kouzes & Posner, 1996).

Inspiring a Shared Vision

Inspiring a shared vision involves infusing a sense of purpose, direction, and meaning into subordinates’ daily activities (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Conger, 1989; Conger & Kanungo, 1988, Kotter, 1996; Kouzes & Posner, 1995). This requires that leaders make full use of their intuitive knowledge to formulate an inspiring vision of the future, assuring that the vision incorporates the aspirations of the followers (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). The leader must articulate the vision in a way that allows subordinates to imagine an exciting picture by using “powerful language” (Kouzes & Posner, 1996, p. 134).

Challenging the Process

Challenging the process refers to a leader’s ability to question the status quo (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Conger, 1989; Conger & Kanungo, 1988) and to innovate and initiate change. This behavior also involves risk-taking (Sashkin, 1988) and learning from mistakes.

Enabling Others to Act

Leaders enable others to act by fostering collaboration, building trust, and sharing power (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). This means creating opportunities for others (Covey, 1996; Sashkin, 1988) and hence giving the “gift of authorship,” that is, the pride associated with ownership and added value (Bolman & Deal, 1995). Kouzes and Posner (1995) also include providing education, choice, and support in this practice.

Encouraging the Heart

Encouraging the heart refers to recognition and celebration (Kouzes & Posner, 1995), which demonstrates appreciation and builds morale. It includes participating in the rewards of risk-taking (Sashkin, 1988), which reinforces innovative behavior. Celebration is a symbolic way to strengthen the bond among people thereby maintaining their commitment to the shared vision

(Deal & Key, 1998).

Kouzes and Posner (1988, 1993) argue that the above behaviors in leaders enable them to transform organizations. Transformational leaders motivate followers by getting them to buy into a newer vision, rather than obtaining their cooperation through transactional bargaining (Burns, 1978). A study by Gabris & Ihrke (2000) tested the relationship between leadership Credibility and employee acceptance of Performance Appraisal and merit pay systems. The authors propounded that this more potent form of transformational leadership is needed for employees to genuinely accept performance appraisal systems, which to employees may be perceived as either procedurally unfair, invalid, inequitable, or as some combination of all three of these perceptions. Thus, the more a leader or rater is perceived as credible the more likely that employees will accept the new performance appraisal and merit pay systems.

2.6.3.3 Importance of Leadership Credibility

As illustrated in previous literature, leadership credibility is important to people and to organizations in general. Falcione (1974) indicated that credibility is the single most important variable in supervisor-employee relationships. Others such as Campbell (1993) and Hellweg (1978) have reported its importance as well. In his years of researching, Campbell (1993) said that credibility has been a crucial component of successful leadership. He discovered that it is the characteristic that singles out the best leaders from the mediocre and worst. In simple language, if leaders are not perceived to be credible, they are not viewed to be good leaders. He also reported that people do not want to be perceived as not having credibility. While undertaking research on leader's credibility within organizations, he concluded that leaders who were rated low in credibility by their subordinated or followers were always "concerned, usually incredulous, often resistant and critical of the credibility scale". Hellweg (1978) also found several aspects of credibility that were most desired in leaders in organizational settings. In her study, the ideal supervisor was one who is perceived as competent, safe in terms of interaction, outgoing, and emotionally stable, as well as slightly similar to the leader in attitudes and values.

Other studies have also reported aspects of credibility that are important in leaders. For example, a joint study by the highly respected and successful search firm of Korn/Ferry International and the Columbia University Graduate School of Business reported that ethics were rated most highly among the personal characteristics needed by the ideal CEO in the year 2000. Respondents wanted their chief executive officers to be above reproach (1989). In the same study, 93% of U.S. executives rated ethical behavior as highly important in leadership, and 96% indicated that it would even be more important by the year 2000. Similarly, 85% of office employees in a study sponsored by Steelcase (1991) said that it was very important for their management to be honest, firm on stances, and ethical in their approach. Executives in the Korn/Ferry International and the Columbia University Graduate School of Business study (1989) reported that inspiration was also important for leaders. Of those executives surveyed, 91% said that by the year 2000 it will be very important for CEOs to be inspiring.

Drawing from the aforesaid findings, it is appropriate to consider Leadership Credibility as a predictor for Performance Appraisal perceptions and attempt to establish a relationship between the two variables.

2.6.4 Role Clarity

The concepts of role specificity and role ambiguity or role clarity have been discussed under various labels by almost every major organizational theorist (Tuckson, 1966). Yet, as Hiekson points out, there is no unanimity among these writers about the effects of varying degrees of specificity or ambiguity of member roles. More than most, this topic is apparently over-discussed and under-researched. There have been surprisingly few direct investigations of these concepts and even fewer studies of their behavioral constructs and correlates.

Role clarity and role competency result from a clear and well developed framework that guides the thinking of an individual, which, in turn, influences his or her behavior, and ultimately defines how a professional practices. Role clarity refers to the degree to which required information is provided about how the employee is expected to perform his/her job (Teas *et al.* ,

1979). Role clarity is the extent to which an individual receives and understands information required to do the job ([Kelly and Hise, 1980). Role clarity perceived by the employees is not only a needed trait to enhance customer satisfaction, but is also associated with employee's job satisfaction, organizational commitment and enhanced job performance (de Ruyter *et al.* , 2001). According to role theory, employees who have customer interfacing job roles have a strong need for clarity on how they are expected to perform their jobs (Bush and Busch, 1981; Teas *et al.* 1979). A lack of role clarity has a negative impact on job performance (Churchill *et al.* 1985).

Some theorists have suggested increased motivation and satisfaction as benefits of lower specificity of organizational roles (Argyris, 1960; Barnes, 1960; Likert, 1961; McGregor, 1960; and, to some extent, Bennis, 1959). Others have suggested that lower specificity may be a condition for greater innovation (Bennis, 1959; Burns & Stalker, 1961; Frank, 196a;tinge, 1965; Thompson, 1965). Alternatively, there also exists the possibility of increased anxiety and tension of members resulting from ambiguous roles (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Presthus, 1958; Sullivan, 1953). The concept of role clarity or ambiguity can be operationalized in at least two ways. First, it can refer to the presence or absence of adequate role-relevant information due either to restriction of this information or to variations of the quality of the information. This would be an operationalization of objective role clarity. Role clarity or ambiguity can also refer to the subjective feeling of having as much or not as much rolerelevant information as the person would like to have. Both types of measures of role clarity have been found to relate to satisfaction and reduced tension.

Role ambiguity has been found to be related also to group and individual performance. Torrance (1954) concluded that unclear situations and unclear group structures were detrimental to the survival of Air Force crews downed in enemy territory. Smith (1957) found unclear roles in laboratory groups resulted in less group productivity in addition to less satisfaction and increased defensiveness. In nine of the eleven studies reviewed by Locke (1968) persons with highly specified goals performed at significantly higher levels than persons with the more general goal of "doing their best." Role ambiguity was not found by Kahn and his associates (1964) to be related to another form of behavior, namely behavioral withdrawal as measured by frequency of

communication with role senders. They interpreted their modest correlations to be the result of the two opposing tendencies of attempting to reach clarity by increasing communications and of attempting to avoid tension by withdrawing from the situation.

As Kahn and his associates (1964) have suggested, three general organizational conditions significantly contribute to role ambiguity: organizational complexity, rapid organizational change, and managerial philosophies about communication. The increased size and complexity of an organization with greater differentiation and specialization of labor may exceed an individual's span of comprehension. Role ambiguity tends to be increased by organizational change in terms of: (1) growth which may require reorganization; (2) technological changes which may require changes in the social structures, or at least changes in the way work is performed; and (3) frequent personnel changes which produce ambiguities for the person transferred and also for his associates. Restriction of the flow of communication, intentional or not, is another contributor to role ambiguity.

Conclusion

Investigation and related literature reveals that there is a definite gap in terms of the lack of studies that investigate the relationship between Job Characteristics, Leadership Credibility, Job Uniqueness and role clarity with performance appraisal perceptions. Moreover, these relationships are critical to understanding the improvisations that can be made to the existing appraisal framework in the organization. This paper however, has taken into account only the conceptual foundation of this study. Also, several other System Related, Personality Related and other Organisational Constructs have not been taken into account.

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