

## THE PRESENCE AND IMPORTANCE OF PERFORMANCE EVALUATION FEEDBACK IN COMPANIES IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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### ABSTRACT

**T**he research aim of this paper is to assess the presence of work evaluation processes and the existence of evaluation feedback as motivational strategies in companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through the analysis of research results, this work will examine the hypothesis which states that job characteristics, employee education levels and organizational attributes influence the presence and importance of offering performance evaluation feedback. A special challenge for this empirical research is to examine whether regular receiving of feedback information (from manager to employee) positively influences employee motivation. The research results could be used as guidelines for managers in companies across Bosnia and Herzegovina, notably when it comes to reexamining conversation strategies and defining possible ways for improvement. This is essential in order to build success on the assumption that employees need to accept the process of performance evaluation.

**Key words:** performance evaluation, feedback, employees, motivation

## 1. Introduction

The process of employee performance and potential evaluation, as well as the attempt to influence their behavior and work results, represent some of the key tools of each manager, which allows for the achievement of multiple management goals (Rahimić, 2010). Here, we are considering a process in which management is able to gain information on individual employee performance results and/or their potential, as well as gain insight into employee's contribution to organizational goals within a specific timeframe.

In order to be organized, each company requires a continuous evaluation and guiding of work behavior and results. Monitoring employee successfulness and their potential is considered to be the most important activity in the internal evaluation procedure, moreover because it represents "the cornerstone of an effective system of human potential", and as such it is vital in each organization which aims at connecting organizational and human successfulness. When companies are successful in conducting the above described activities, they are able to reach a high level of employee and management satisfaction and motivation on one hand, but also monitor and improve the overall results or better manage the success and company development, on the other. In other words, monitoring and evaluating performance and potential is in the best interest of employees, managers, and finally the entire organization (Bahtijarević-Šiber, 1999). At the end, a follow-up conversation with the manager regarding employee's accomplishments is an indispensable last step in the whole evaluation process. The topic of the conversation should inevitably focus on the results achieved, singling out the potential departures from company goals and expectations, discussing possible sanctions in case of workplace deviations and agreeing on goals for the upcoming period.

That workplace achievements feedback is a relevant topic is also confirmed by the research results of a study conducted in Germany, which comprised 1789 managers from different

industries and questioned their weak points, as well as their opinion on the source of their weaknesses. Lack of feedback was singled out as the biggest management mistake (91%), followed by conflict avoidance and critical conversations (83%), procrastination of decisions (65%), delegating mistakes (53%) and non-transferring of responsibilities (46%) (Sengpiel, 2012).

Considering the fact that evaluation of workplace successfulness without feedback is an aim in itself, the goal of this research is to evaluate the presence and importance of employee potential and performance in companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. After a short theoretical overview in the second part of the paper, the third part will focus on presenting the results of the empirical research in order to offer an answer to the question of whether the presence and importance of giving feedback information is influenced by organizational and workplace characteristics and employee education levels.

## 2. Impact of Feedback on Behavior and Job Results – The Theoretical Framework

The primary aim of employee performance evaluation is to confirm whether and to what extent are employee performance results compatible with company's goals and requirements, as such compatibility contributes to an overall organizational capacity and achievement of strategic company goals (Torrington, 2004; Albert, 2009). Effective employee performance management and professional development is an imperative for any company (Nearby, 2002). It is an instrument in the process of researching the characteristics, abilities and employee behavior, and its main goals and tasks are mirrored in more efficient management of human resources, optimal employment levels, awarding according to results and expectations, decisions on personnel development, intensifying communication, motivating employees and creating an objective process of evaluation and success control (Rahimić, 2010, 243-244). At the end of the evaluation process it is necessary to have a conversation between a superior and an employee in order to assess workplace successfulness and potential, as well as set-up goals for the upcoming period.

It is important to distinguish between the different types of feedback such as performance appraisal feedback, upward feedback and multisource feedback. The bulk of the research on feedback that was done prior to 1990 was conducted on performance-appraisal feedback delivered to employees by supervisors. This feedback was not anonymous, as it was usually done face to face, and it was often evaluative in that decisions about pay increases or promotions were dependent on the evaluation. Multisource feedback implies that feedback is collected from individuals in addition to superiors (e.g., subordinates, peer review on the same hierarchical level, customer evaluation and self-evaluation) and is generally provided anonymously to the feedback recipient. One aspect of multisource feedback is upward feedback wherein subordinates provide anonymous feedback to their supervisors. All three types of feedback are designed to give the recipient information about how others see his or her behavior and performance (Atwater et al., 2002).

In a review of the performance evaluation literature, Bretz Jr., Milkovich, and Read (1992) conclude that we need a better understanding of how organizational context affects performance assessment issues (Atwater et al., 2007, 287). While the direct supervisor is a good choice within it comes to evaluating employee performance in functional organizational structures, in team-oriented companies these managers have less insight into employee behavior and performances results, and is thus not considered an adequate evaluator. Hence, recent practice has seen an increase in multiple evaluators, or the so called 360 degrees model (Gmuer, 2007). Initially, this model was intended to evaluate managers with the aim of advancing their managerial skills and abilities. Its widespread use increased with a need to broaden the formal evaluation process and leave an impression of openness and participation on external stakeholders.

Although, 360s are widely used by well known organizations such as DuPont, Boeing, Intel, Xerox, FedEx, for both personal development and evaluation, multisource feedback has been designed and implemented as a developmental rather than evaluative process for the most part. Unlike multisource feedback, performance appraisal feedbacks are often linked to administrative purposes and have consequences for merit increases and promotion and layoff decisions (Atwater, 2007). Employees need to see how the results of their performance appraisal fit with rewards and development opportunities offered in the organization.

Much of the research conducted in recent years has been done on upward feedback rather than on feedback from multiple sources. There are exceptions to this, such as the study by Hazucha, Hezlett and Schneider (1993), which studied feedback from subordinates and peers, and those by Goldsmith and Underhill (2001) and Brett and Atwater (2001) that studied feedback from peers, subordinates, and supervisors.

More recent studies have questioned the true impact of feedback on behavioral change and other research suggests that outcomes from feedback may not be positive for everyone. Kluger and DeNisi (1996), in their seminal piece on the impact of feedback on performance, cautioned that not all feedback interventions result in improvements. In their meta-analysis based largely on performance appraisal feedback, Kluger and DeNisi concluded that, in over one third of the cases, feedback actually resulted in decreased performance. Similarly, Atwater, Waldman, Atwater, and Cartier (2000) found that improvement following upward feedback only resulted for 50% of the managers who received feedback. Although the purposes of performance-appraisal feedback and upward feedback differ in that one is evaluative and the other is not, these results nevertheless suggest that there may be a myriad of factors that influence how individuals react to feedback as well as who will improve following feedback and who will not.

Another assumption behind the use of multisource feedback is that individuals who receive information from various sources that they are not performing optimally should be motivated to change their behavior. Because most multisource feedback is anonymous, feedback providers feel comfortable providing honest feedback. Anonymity combined with the tendency for self-raters to see themselves positively (Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988) results in many cases where feedback recipients receive feedback that is more negative than expected. While we would like to believe that this new awareness would motivate positive change, research on performance appraisal feedback suggests that when individuals receive negative feedback, they are often discouraged rather than motivated to improve (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). While multisource feedback is generally not evaluative, it is clearly possible that individuals will respond similarly to negative feedback regardless of its purpose. This may account, in part, for the fact that not all individuals react favorably to multisource feedback.

DeNisi and Griffin (2001) summarize the major advantages: (1) they provide rates with information on how they are perceived by others; (2) they provide more information for improvement (by addressing weaknesses) than any other technique; and (3) ratings and feedback from different groups with special insights can be obtained. Conversely, the major problems associated with 360s have been identified: (1) they provide an overwhelming amount of information, making it difficult for the rate to effectively process all the information; (2) it is difficult to reconcile the differences between self-ratings and others' ratings; and (3) there is need for help and guidance to figure out what to do with the conflicting information. In conclusion, DeNisi and Griffin (2001, 243) note that, "although these systems are becoming extremely popular, their effectiveness is still not known" (as cited in Luthans & Peterson, 2003).

It is evident that performance and potential appraisal feedback of both, employees and managers, represents a potential for their mutual understanding and cooperation. Hence, it is indispensable that each company build the so called "feedback culture", which is characterized by a constant interchange of feedback providers and receivers (Knebel, 2009). This new culture replaces the traditional and standardized process of evaluation, as well as the old mechanisms of conversation, which actually became a ritual, but also encourages better perception of voluntary feedback. Moreover, volunteerism contributes to additional conversations. Through an additional feedback, each employee is able to gain further insight into the aims of the company, which, in turn, allow him or her to create a more constructive and successful interaction with the company and its business environment. As a result, an individual creates a personal competitive characteristic, while a company increases its overall capacity.

### **3. Research conducted on the example of companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The rationale behind this research lies in the fact that for more than half a decade, performance appraisal has been one of the most prominent topics within the business environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Unfortunately, the author of this research has not been able to reveal that this concept has been formalized and adequately applied in companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite her consultative work in numerous business organizations. Hence, the aim of this work is to research the presence and importance of performance evaluation and feedback as a motivational technique in companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The theoretical framework applied in this research represents a classical division of elements which comprise the system of motivation, according to which the motivation system consists of two elements, including material compensation which employees receive in form of a salary or other material benefits, and non-material stimulation which companies employ in order to satisfy different employee needs.

To analyze whether regular performance appraisal feedback motivates employees represents the qualitative aspects of performance appraisal, or the so called social context. While researchers generally agree on the importance of the social context of performance appraisal and appraisal participation as related to appraisal reactions, the literature is not clear as to the way in which these constructs are related to appraisal reactions. Social exchange and procedural justice theories offer different propositions about the way in which these predictors of appraisal reactions should be interrelated. It is important to understand how performance appraisal session characteristics are related to appraisal reactions, in part because appraisal reactions are related to job attitudes and changes in job performance (e.g., Jawahar, 2006). Performance appraisal is an opportunity for information exchange, and rater-ratee relationship quality (including for instance, trust) is essential to the effectiveness of this process (Pichler, 2012). Primarily, the focus of this research was on the presence of traditional conversation with the superiors, without much attention on multisource feedback or the 360 degree model. Furthermore, this research will pinpoint the differences between motivational techniques in different companies. A detailed analysis will try to answer the question of whether there is any difference in motivational technique when it comes to age, gender, education levels and years of experience. Taking into account the subject and the objectives of the research, we propose the following hypothesis:

- Organizational characteristics influence the presence of regular performance appraisal feedback.

- Job characteristics and employee's level of education influence the importance of receiving performance appraisal feedback.

### 3.1. The Demographic Structure of the Examinees

Data collection in Bosnia and Herzegovina's companies was conducted using the method of survey, on a sample of 124 interviewees. Most interviewees are employed in the non-profit sector (63% in government/budget sector), followed by those employed in the non-governmental sector (24%), while employees coming from profit organizations made up only 13% of the whole sample. The justification for this lies in the fact that the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina employs the highest number of people. For the purpose of this analysis, we refer to the non-profit sector in the context of organizations supported by state budget (government sector), while the non-governmental sector (which is also considered non-profit in the context of profit determination) is examined separately. As far as examinees' gender, the data acquired is satisfactory (47% male and 53% female). When it comes to education levels, most examinees have university or alternative degrees (86%). Only 8% of examinees have only high school degrees, while examinees with master or doctoral degrees are represented by 6%. Most examinees are between 37 to 45 years old (41.94%), while only 26.61% of all examinees are between 46 to 60 years old (more in Figure 1).

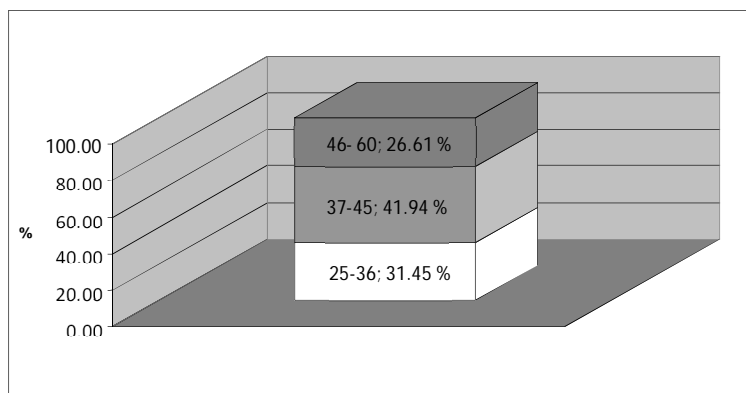


Figure 1. Examinees' age structure

When looking at the years of service spent in a single organization examined, the largest number of examinees fell under the category of „11 to 20 years of service“ (43%), while the smallest number of examines fell under the interval of „under 5 years“ (15%).

rewards (salaries) and a set of seven other non-material motivational techniques.

### 3.2. Research Question, Empirical Results and Discussion

Starting with a basic division into material and non-material motivational strategies, the respondents had to provide, on a scale from 1 to 5, their own opinion on the presence of financial

Ranks	Motivational techniques already in place	Full sample	Non-profit orgs.	NGO Sector	Profit orgs.
		Av. grade	Av. grade	Av. grade	Av. grade
1.	Direct material compensation – financial rewards	<b>4,07</b>	3,97	4,27	4,19
2.	Management style	<b>3,69</b>	3,42	4,07	4,25
3.	Organizational climate and culture	<b>3,64</b>	3,44	4,03	3,88
4.	Performance evaluation and feedback	<b>3,61</b>	3,60	3,77	3,38
5.	Work design, integrity and challenge in the workplace, diversity of required skills	<b>3,52</b>	3,37	4,00	3,38
6.	Possibility for career advancement	<b>3,33</b>	3,05	3,97	3,50
7.	Freedom of decision-making and goal-setting	<b>3,15</b>	3,05	3,37	3,25
8.	Flexible working hours	<b>3,13</b>	3,03	3,53	2,88

Table 1: Motivational techniques ranks, sample comparison according to organization type

Source: Author's calculations

As it can be seen from the table, the presence of financial rewards (salaries) is absolutely dominant, with an average grade of 4.07. Regardless of the type of organization, this criterion was ranked first in profit companies, but also non-profit and non-governmental organizations.

Using the Kruskal-Wallis Test, it was verified whether there were any statistically significant

differences between the observed types of organizations, notably in terms of ranking certain motivators. Statistically significant difference between the interviewees coming from various organizations exists when it comes to these motivational techniques: possibility for career advancement and management style (values of P are less than 0.05).

<b>Motivational techniques</b>	<b>chi-squared</b>	<b>P Value</b>
Possibility for career advancement	10,2914	<b>0,0058</b>
Management style	10,8764	<b>0,0043</b>

Table 2. Overview of the interdependence of motivational techniques and organization types

Source: Author's calculations

Unfortunately, the possibility for career development was not ranked as one of the top motivational techniques in all organizations. When looking at the overall ranking of the seven non-material motivational techniques, career development is placed only on the fifth place. One probable reason is a relatively difficult economic situation in the country, together with high unemployment rates and low living standards; hence investment into additional education is weakly present in all organizations. This is an alarming indicator, notably if the analyzed organizations aim at long-term sustainability and successfulness. Analyzing the results, it can be concluded that the possibility for career development is most present in non-governmental organizations (3.97), while this is least so in non-profit, state financed organizations (3.05).

Management style, as a non-material motivational technique, is most represented on the overall level of the organizations studied (3.69), including the profit sector (4.25) and non-governmental organizations (4.07), while it is less so in non-profit organizations (3.42). Since the latter include state or federal institutions, or institutions which are state-financed and where certain hierarchical positions require political party membership, these results are not surprising. The style of these politically elected managers does not have a motivating effect and is not used as a motivational technique. It would be beneficial for these institutions to focus on the issue of training, notably of high-ranking state officials on the topic of leadership style (autocratic or democratic), goal-setting, conversation techniques and

strategies and providing evaluation feedback.

As a non-material motivational technique, performance evaluation and feedback is underrepresented in comparison to management style and organizational climate and culture in the analyzed organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In order to test the hypothesis, we have analyzed and ranked the descriptive statistics for the entire sample, as well as groups and types of organizations, but also tested the significance of the differences between groups. Firstly, in order to test the "normality" of distribution, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied. Since all values of  $p$  are lower than 0.05, we can conclude that assumed normality is not satisfied, and hence non-parametric tests were used for further comparisons. Using the Kruskal-Wallis test, it was confirmed that there is no statistically significant difference between the organizations. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this activity is most present in non-profit, state-funded organizations (state institutions). Far less is this activity represented in non-governmental (3.77) and profit (3.38) organizations. This is especially worrisome for profit organizations, since managers often rely on a saying that „the grade does not matter as long as results are achieved“.

When it comes to examining the level of presence of performance evaluation and feedback, it is interesting to observe the opinion of respondents with different levels of education in organizations across Bosnia and Herzegovina. The respondents who hold a master's or a doctoral degree believe that this technique is adequately represented (4.25), while those examinees with only a high

school diploma do not have the same opinion (grade of 3.20). One possible explanation is that positions which require a master's or a doctoral degree are differently designed, and as such provide more autonomy, more motivational potential and less direct feedback. Nevertheless, we should keep in mind the fact that this positive image on the presence of feedback might be distorted, since employees with higher levels of education receive feedback thanks to informal communication and prestige.

No interesting differences worth of mention were noted based on respondents' gender. Women gave a slightly lower grade to this criterion (3.56), while men rated in with 3.67. On the other hand, younger employees from 25 to 36 years old graded it with 3.44 in comparison to the employees from 37 to 45 years old (3.58). The highest grade was given by the oldest group of respondents, from 46 to 60 years old (3.88). It is evident that men and older employees believe that this grading system does exist, while women and younger employees do not see it.

The situation is identical when it comes to years of experience. Those employees with over 21 years of experience believe that this technique is represented (3.88), while the most critical and least satisfied group were those with 6 to 10 years of working experience (3.25). It is obvious that they are still developing their careers and thus highly value the presence of feedback information.

At the end of this short overview of a large-scale research, it is essential to draw attention to a response to one more question, which dealt with respondents' opinion on whether there is focus on different motivational techniques (3.85) companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Using the Kruskal-Wallis test, it was concluded that there are statistically significant deviations between different types of organizations when it comes to this question (chi-squared 6, 9895 and P Value 0, 0304). Hence, non-governmental organizations were least satisfied (4.37), while profit organizations gave the lowest grade (3.38), which

means that respondents from the latter sector believe that attention is indeed given to other motivational techniques, apart from financial rewards.

Aside from analyzing the presence of motivational techniques, a special challenge for this empirical analysis was to research whether the frequency of receiving evaluation feedback from the superiors about the quality of one's work has a motivational effect on the employees; in other words, do they really care about feedback and how much do they want to receive it? Relying on Herzberg's Two Factory Theory of Motivation, grading performance and potential and receiving feedback information are considered as motivator factors, and not hygiene factors. An average grade of 3.17 was given by respondents who said that this factor is not important to them and that regular salaries are more essential (4.77). Using the Kruskal-Wallis Test, it was verified whether there were any statistically significant differences between the observed types of organizations, notably in terms of ranking certain motivators. Definitely the lowest grade was given by respondents from profit organizations (2.75), whereby a statement that "nobody likes to be graded" was confirmed. In fact, it is expected that through feedback, employees receive far more critiques and repercussions for their work than praises and awards.

Regular feedback about the quality of one's work from a superior is equally important to women and men. In regards to the level of education, there are also no statistically significant deviations, but it interesting to note that this criterion was graded the lowest – in other words, it has the least motivating effect and it is least desirable (2.88) by those examinees who hold a master's or a doctoral degree. The explanation for this can be found in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which states that each unsatisfied need causes people to react (it has a motivating effect), but also in the characteristics of the workplace itself (e.g. the existence of personal autonomy, feedback, frequent communication with the direct



superiors, especially for employees with higher levels of education (master's or doctors). Although low and worrisome, these grades are useful, since they can serve as a good starting point for managers in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the process of building good organizational climate and culture of direct feedback, but also in the process of increasing communication, praises, rewards and employee development support.

#### 4. Conclusion

Establishing and advancing a system for continuous monitoring and performance evaluation of all employees is crucial for company development and survival. There must exist a system of measuring results, aims and competences, since it allows for recognizing and consequently rewarding the best employees. If such a system does not exist and the organization is not focused on results, then its most ambitious and result-oriented employees will leave, since the message that a company in question sends is that it does not care whether results are achieved or not, because everybody is paid equally. The reasons and justifications for establishing a performance evaluation system lie in the fact that an institution which chooses to do so helps all of its employees to improve their potential, skill and motivation and complete their tasks more successfully. This is impossible to achieve without adequate feedback. Hence, in order for good feedback culture to be in place, it is not enough to solely rely on the existing set of rules, but also on management support which will advocate and move these activities forward.

One of the main reasons for which the above presented research was conducted in the first place was to determine the level of presence of performance evaluation feedback as a motivational technique. The research was based on a sample of 124 companies from different sectors in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including profit, non-governmental and state or non-profit companies. Research results showed that

performance evaluation and feedback as motivational techniques in companies across Bosnia and Herzegovina are insufficiently present (average grade of 3.61). Although there are no statistically significant variations between different types of organizations in terms of feedback providing, which means that the research hypothesis is not confirmed, it is important to note that this non-material motivational strategy is least present in profit companies (3.38). It is equally interesting to note the deviations in terms of grades given by employees with different levels of education. While those employees who hold a master's or doctoral degree believe that feedback is relatively present in their organization (4.25), employees with high school degrees, and thus supposedly placed on the lower level in the organizational hierarchy, do not share the same opinion (3.20). The explanation for this can be linked to the very characteristics of their workplace, considering the position in the organizational hierarchy and their approach to workplace design.

The analysis of the data presented showed that in Bosnia and Herzegovina there is little attention to different motivational techniques; hence, the system of financial rewarding (salaries) is dominant in most organizations (grade of 4.07). The employees in Bosnia and Herzegovina's companies are more motivated by regular paychecks (4.77), while performance feedback is much less imperative to them (average grade of 3.17). With an average grade of 2.75, the respondents from profit organizations demonstrated that performance feedback is not so important, or that it does not act as a motivator factor.

As all previous researches, this one also has its advantages and limitations, all of which will be summarized in the following lines. Most importantly, this research emphasized the importance of performance appraisal feedback; this should serve as the basis for decision-making when it comes to further education and training of each employee, as well as in the process of fair awarding, but also creating a better organizational

climate. The practical significance of this research is mirrored in the fact that the affirmed level of presence of regular performance feedback in companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a warning sign, but also a guideline for managers who must undertake different activities related to human resources.

A special limitation during this research was employee fear of possible consequences in case of honest answers. What is more, the respondents viewed feedback as an additional activity, or better an activity which is performed just for the sake of it. Since samples of such opinions were not considered, in the future it would be interesting to analyze the application of feedback results to other activities of human resource management, as well as the influence of national cultural characteristics on the presence and importance of feedback. Additionally, it would be interesting to research whether performance appraisal and feedback influence company success.

Thus, the grades given to the presence of performance evaluation and feedback and their importance for the employees in Bosnia and Herzegovina's companies are low and worrisome. On the other hand, considering the importance of regular performance evaluation conversations between employees and their superiors, as well as conversations about workplace conditions improvement, the increase in productivity and employee potential development, these grades must be a signal for managers of Bosnia and Herzegovina's companies to introduce a system of regular performance evaluation and feedback. In fact, building a culture of feedback contributes to regular and further dialogue between employees and managers, which is a process that ultimately sustains competitiveness and contributes to company development.

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