

Formal Employee Appraisal Carried out in Agricultural Businesses in the Central Bohemian Region

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Abstract: *The article focuses on issues of employee appraisal with emphasis on the formal appraisal of employees in agricultural businesses in the Central Bohemian Region. The main aim of the article is to evaluate the use of formal employee appraisal in agricultural businesses in the Central Bohemian Region. A partial aim is to compare theoretical approaches to employee appraisal from the point of view of Czech and international authors. The survey showed that 87% of agricultural businesses have no system of formal employee appraisal. Among the reasons for not having implemented a formal employee appraisal system, 36% of agricultural businesses stated that they did not consider formal appraisal important, 34% mentioned capacity reasons (only 17% of agricultural businesses have a personnel department within their corporate structure), 15% indicated financial reasons, 10% time demands and 5% other reasons. The outcomes of the survey also showed there is a lack of interest by businesses to implement a system of formal appraisal of employees (only 22.5% of agricultural businesses, that do not use any system of formal employee appraisal, plan its implementation), despite the fact that, currently, people are considered to be the most important strategic asset of any business for achieving a competitive advantage.*

Keywords: Employee Appraisal · Formal Appraisal · Performance · Human Resources · Agricultural Businesses

Jel Classification: J24 · M12 · Q13

1 Introduction and literary survey

At present, people are an enterprise's most important asset and, therefore, it is necessary not only to develop them, but also to evaluate them (Hroník, 2006; Koubek, 2007; Banfield & Kay, 2008; Bělohávek, 2009; Plamínek, 2009). According to Hroník (2006) and Kociánová (2010) employee appraisal is an important factor for personal development and employee performance improvement. It is, also, an integral part of the process of human resources performance management (Lussier & Hendon, 2012; Snell & Bohlander, 2012) and appraisal, as such, is a critical human resource management tool (Roberts, 2003; Dessler, 2011; Boachie-Mensah & Seidu, 2012). Human resources are an essential internal asset of any business and it is, therefore, necessary to evaluate them and, thus, enhance their performance. In both Czech and international technical literature, the term "appraisal" is defined as formal appraisal (systematic, standardised, and periodic). Some authors (Koubek, 2007; Pilařová, 2008; Štěpaník, 2010) in their publications distinguish between formal and informal appraisal, but despite such classification, they concentrate solely on formal employee appraisal. There is only one Czech language equivalent used by Czech authors for three different English terms, which are "appraisal", "assessment" and "evaluation". The article will use the term "performance appraisal" as it suits best the content of the article.

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Approaches to Performance Appraisal

The term appraisal may be defined from several perspectives. Technical literature describes three approaches. The first approach is that appraisal is an independent process that gives an organisation a picture of the performance, behaviour and abilities of individuals (Kociánová, 2010) and is conducted on a systematic basis (usually once a year) to enable a comparison of individual (or group) performance expected and performance provided (Giangreco et al., 2010; Spence & Keeping, 2011).

The second approach underlines the importance of appraisal as a part of the human resources performance management process, where, firstly, in this process, goals are defined in compliance with other higher goals and standards and then the formal appraisal of employees may be conducted (Snell & Bohlander, 2012). A modified version of this approach views appraisal as a part of human resource management (Bělohlávek, 2009; Štěpaník, 2010). The third approach is a combination of the two above-mentioned views on appraisal. It sees appraisal as a process, but at the same time as a part of a comprehensive process of human resources performance management or another process (Dessler, 2011; Lussier & Hendon, 2012). Selected Czech authors (see Table 1) give preference to either the first or the second approach, i.e. they see it as an independent process or an essential part of a specific process (in particular the process of human resource management).

Table 1 Definition of the term “employee appraisal” (Czech authors)

| Czech authors | | | |
|-----------------|------------|------|--|
| Criterion | Author | Year | Definition of the term “appraisal” in relation to human resources |
| Process | Koubek | 2007 | An important personnel activity focusing on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • determining how employees perform their work, how they fulfil their tasks and meet the requirements of their job (what are their skills and development potential), what their behaviour is like and what kind of relationships they have with their colleagues, customers and other persons they are in contact with, • communicating the results obtained to individual employees and discussing these results with them, • searching for methods to improve work performance and behaviour and implementing measures aimed at the above. |
| | Pilařová | 2008 | A process containing the following information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • performance appraisal date, • appraisal timeline, • who appraises whom, • method of appraisal recording, • the relationship between the system of appraisal and other personnel systems, • methodological guidelines, • other obligations of evaluators and the evaluated. |
| | Kociánová | 2010 | An important activity that provides an organisation with a picture of performance, behaviour and working skills of individuals (of areas of employee appraisal) and gives feedback to employees concerning their activity in the organisation. |
| Part of process | Bělohlávek | 2009 | A part of human resource management. |
| | Štěpaník | 2010 | An important part of personnel management. |

Source: own elaboration, adjusted according to Venclová (2013)

On the contrary, selected international authors perceive appraisal, not only in the context of the first approach (i.e. that appraisal is an independent process), but they also take into consideration, unlike the Czech authors mentioned above, that appraisal is an independent process which is simultaneously a part of another superior process (see Table 2).

Table 2 Definition of the term “employee appraisal” (International authors)

| International authors | | | |
|--|--|------|--|
| Criterion | Author | Year | Definition of the term “appraisal” in relation to human resources |
| Process | Lyster & Arthur | 2007 | A formal process in which managers and employees engage on an annual or biannual basis. |
| | Banfield & Kay | 2008 | A process that is commonly used through many organisations to evaluate or appraise employees’ performance in the past and to consider how to maximise the employees’ future contribution. |
| | de Andrés, García-Lapresta & González-Pachón | 2010 | A process used by some firms to evaluate their employees’ efficiency and productivity in order to plan their promotion policy, salary policy, etc. |
| | Giangreco et al. | 2010 | Performance appraisal is a formal organisational process conducted on a systematic basis to provide a comparison between individual (or group) performance expected and the performance provided. |
| | Spence & Keeping | 2011 | Performance appraisal is an evaluative process whereby managers rate and deliver feedback regarding employees’ performance. |
| Process and simultaneously a part of a process | Armstrong | 2007 | A typical process conducted by organisations. A formal evaluation and appraisal of employees by their managers, usually on an annual basis. |
| | Dessler | 2011 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An instrument or form to assess an employee’s job performance. • An interview where an employee’s job performance is assessed and feedback is given to the employee. • A system of setting employee job expectations, employee actual job performance, assessed performance, feedback to the employee on performance assessment and how to improve it in the future, setting new goals and expectations for another period. • A part of performance management. |
| | Lussier & Hendon | 2012 | Performance appraisal is an ongoing process of evaluating employee performance, so appraisal is just one piece of performance management. |
| | Snell & Bohlander | 2012 | Performance appraisal is the result of an annual or biannual process in which a manager evaluates an employee’s performance relative to the requirements of his or her job and uses the information to show the person where improvements are needed and why. Appraisal is an important part of the system of human resources performance management. |

Source: own elaboration, adjusted according to Venclová (2013)

Performance Appraisal in Agriculture

The specific role of human resources in agriculture is focused on recruiting and managing a staff composed of highly specialized professionals, semi-skilled labourers and unskilled labourers. Agribusiness includes technical and labour-intensive activities that are required to optimise production from the inputs that are invested in crop production and animal husbandry (Merchant, 2012).

According to Bitsch (2009), one of the challenges faced by agricultural businesses in the 21st century is the attraction, motivation, and retention of sufficient and qualified labour. However, personnel management research is mostly focused on other industries. Consequently, when developing personnel policies and procedures, agribusiness managers have little to rely on once a business has

grown beyond the labour capacity of the immediate family. Personnel management can become an important issue. Especially so as practices developed for large corporations do not always scale down well to smaller businesses or may not fit the agribusiness environment (Venclová, Königová & Fejfar, 2013). Duft (2012) adds that managing the agricultural businesses is filled with many challenges and demands a broad range of skills and abilities. Bitsch (2009) states that experienced managers in agriculture typically have an adequate conceptual frame of the personnel management functions, and potential challenges and risks. They acknowledge all textbook personnel management functions (recruiting, selection, training, performance appraisal, compensation, discipline, and labour law and regulation), although they do not necessarily practice conscientious management with respect to all of these functions. Bitsch (2009) also emphasises that performance appraisal is rarely practiced. Also, gaps and misconceptions persist with respect to the details of each practice and potential alternative practices, and typically the details decide the success of these practices. On the other hand, managers perceive a need for additional practices, rarely discussed in the literature, with respect to performance management, the social environment at the workplace, working conditions and organisational structure, as well as, hiring immigrant employees.

The main aim of the article is to evaluate, based on the analysis conducted, the use of formal employee appraisal in agricultural businesses in the Central Bohemian Region. A partial aim of the article is to compare theoretical approaches to employee appraisal from the point of view of Czech and international authors. The first part of the article deals with theoretical approaches to employee appraisal from the point of view of Czech and international authors. The second part analyses the outcomes of a questionnaire survey aimed at the assessment of the use of formal appraisal of employees in selected agricultural businesses in the Central Bohemian Region. The final part emphasizes the continuity of a system of formal employee appraisal for their remuneration.

2 Material and Methods

The article has been processed based on the analysis of secondary and primary sources, outcome synthesis and the evaluation of results of a questionnaire survey. Based on the analysis of secondary sources, in particular research studies focusing on performance appraisal, the definition of human resources appraisal has been determined, with regard to the comparison of the approaches of Czech and international authors according to set criteria. Further, special factors of appraisal of employees in agriculture have been identified. Primary data is derived from a survey (questionnaire survey) that was concentrated on the use of formal employee appraisal in agricultural businesses in the Central Bohemian Region. The questionnaire survey took place in the period between June and August 2012. The questionnaire contained a total of 19 questions: 14 questions were aimed at the use of formal appraisal of employees in agricultural businesses in the Central Bohemian Region and 5 questions were identification questions. The sample of respondents originated through intentional selection. The questionnaire was distributed among legal entities, whose main specialisation is agriculture and who operate in the Central Bohemian Region. Natural persons were intentionally excluded from the survey since they are usually managed in a more informal and flexible way rather than formally (de Kok & Uhlauer, 2001). The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents through the online survey tool - LimeSurvey.

The obtained data was evaluated using the tools of descriptive statistics (absolute and relative frequency) and the Microsoft Excel 2007 programme. Due to the low return rate of questionnaires (21.4%, i.e. 46 duly completed questionnaires out of 215 distributed), it was not possible to test dependencies between selected qualitative characteristics.

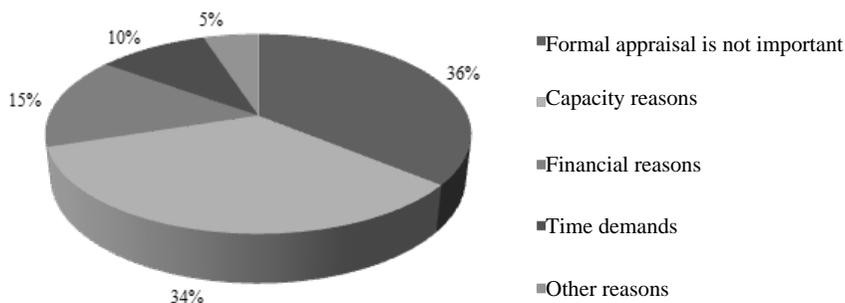
3 Results

In 2010, there were a total of 22 864 agricultural businesses in the Czech Republic. Out of 3 031 entities registered in the Central Bohemian Region, 449 were legal entities and 2,582 were natural persons (Czech Statistical Office, 2011a). The number of employees in agriculture in 2011 amount-

ed to 145 800, out of which 17 400 were employed in the Central Bohemian Region. This is the highest share of employees working in agriculture of all 14 regions of the Czech Republic (Czech Statistical Office, 2011c).

215 agricultural businesses, whose main purpose of business is agriculture and who have a legal form of a legal entity were contacted in the period from June to August 2012, within the frame of the conducted survey, which was targeted at the analysis of the current state of formal employee appraisal in agricultural businesses in the Central Bohemian Region. The questionnaire was duly completed and returned by 46 agricultural businesses. The overall questionnaire return rate was 21.4 %. Out of these 46 agricultural businesses, 72 % were small enterprises (up to 50 employees) and 28 % were middle-sized enterprises (51 to 249 employees). In terms of their legal basis, 46 % of these businesses were limited liability companies, 32.4 % were joint-stock companies, 16.2 % were agricultural cooperatives and 5.4 % were companies of other legal forms. 94 % of these businesses were Czech enterprises while Czech businesses with international participation represented only 6%. Large enterprises (over 250 employees) did not take part in the questionnaire survey as these businesses represented only 0.059 % of Central Bohemian enterprises in 2011 (Czech Statistical Office, 2011b). The exact percentage of agricultural businesses with more than 250 employees is not possible to determine, as the size of agricultural businesses is usually measured according to the area of agricultural land rather than the number of employees. Furthermore, according to the Czech Statistical Office (2011b), the Register of Economic Entities contains the information on the size according to the number of employees for only one half of economic entities with registered offices in the Central Bohemian Region.

Figure 1 Reasons for the absence of formal employee appraisal in agricultural businesses in the Central Bohemian Region



Source: own elaboration

The survey showed that 87 % (40) of agricultural businesses have no system of formal employee appraisal in place, i.e. a formal system of employee assessment is used only by 13 % (6) of agricultural businesses. Enterprises with an implemented appraisal system evaluate their employees at least once a year based on set goals and the meeting of set standards. To evaluate employees, these enterprises rely on the opinion of employees' direct superiors and higher superiors. Opinions of the given employee, customer(s) and colleague(s) are also taken into account. All enterprises that have a system of formal employee appraisal implemented permit their employees to comment on the outcomes of the appraisal and keep the results for further use, in particular for the purposes of remuneration, but also for the purposes of personnel planning and employee education and development. Among the reasons for not having implemented a formal employee appraisal system, 36 % of agricultural businesses stated that they did not consider formal appraisal important, 34 % mentioned capacity reasons (only 17 % of agricultural businesses have a personnel department within their corporate

structure), 15 % indicated financial reasons, 10 % time demands and 5 % other reasons (specifically the small size of their business). The above results are shown in Figure 1.

The survey has also revealed that agricultural businesses in the Central Bohemian Region do not use a formal system of employee appraisal despite the fact that a small number of enterprises that use formal appraisal have confirmed that formal appraisal of employees determines their performance. These enterprises have also confirmed that they saw an improvement in productivity following the implementation of a system of formal employee appraisal. Alarming, in particular, is the fact that only 22.5 % of agricultural businesses that do not use any system of formal employee appraisal plan its implementation in the future.

4 Discussion

Employee appraisal is an essential tool of human resource management. Despite the fact that the majority of above-mentioned Czech authors (Koubek, 2007; Pilařová, 2008; Kociánová, 2010) are inclined toward formal employee appraisal as an independent process to which other independent processes in the area of human resource management may be linked, international authors (Dessler, 2011; Snell & Bohlander, 2012; Lussier & Hendon, 2012) emphasise that appraisal is an independent process, but simultaneously an important part of a superior process of human resources performance management. The significance of formal employee appraisal lies in the fact that its outcomes represent an important background for strategic personnel decisions. Employee evaluation should, therefore, form part of the recruitment process and should be involved in all other employee activities in the enterprise. Enterprises which have a system of formal employee appraisal in place agree that formal employee appraisal impacts their performance. This is also confirmed, among other factors, by the outcomes of the follow-up survey which is currently in progress and which concentrates on the use of formal employee appraisal in agricultural businesses in the Czech Republic. Preliminary results show that 88 % (257 out of 292) of agricultural businesses do not use formal employee appraisal despite the fact that 83 % of agricultural businesses that have an appraisal system in place confirm the impact of the formal system of employee appraisal on employee performance. 55 % of agricultural businesses saw an improvement in employee performance after the implementation of a formal system of employee appraisal.

These results are confirmed also by Billikopf (2003) who also points out that performance improved substantially (11 to 27 percent) in a number of settings when employees were given specific goals to achieve and received performance feedback. Billikopf (2003) states that one way to classify on-the-job employee behaviour is by considering the three “P’s” - productivity (what was done), personal traits (how it was done, conduct) and proficiency (skill). Productivity can be measured in terms of specific performance accomplishments, e.g. reducing calf mortality, increasing yield of the alfalfa crop, or diminishing bruises in the cherry harvest. Personal traits such as motivation, willingness to take criticism, cooperation, initiative, dependability, and appearance may be considered. Personal trait ratings are useful, even though they sometimes say more about how supervisors get along with an employee than how well the employee performs on the job. When personal traits are considered as part of a performance appraisal, specific characteristics should be related to the job. Proficiency - skill, knowledge, and ability - plays an important role in employee performance. A personnel manager in agricultural business may be appraised in terms of understanding labour management principles, knowledge of applicable labour laws, skill in conducting interviews, or ability to counsel employees. In evaluations, agricultural managers need to strike the right balance between productivity and personal traits. Jobs vary in regards to the importance that can be attached to such factors (Billikopf, 2003). The efficiency and overall level of employee appraisal is, to a certain extent, determined by the appraisal methods used, but also by conclusions arising from the appraisal. Employee appraisal may fail for a variety of reasons; therefore the practical aspects of the

whole process are also important. Billikopf (2003) confirms that despite the importance of formal appraisals, an effective manager does not wait for formal performance appraisal interviews to communicate with employees. Sharing information about performance should be done frequently and in a positive manner. An effective negotiated performance appraisal helps the employee take additional ownership for both continuing effective performance and improving weak areas (Venclová, Königová & Fejfar, 2013). Employee goals set through performance appraisals should be difficult but achievable, as goals that are overly ambitious are doomed for failure. Some employees tend to boycott their own progress by setting impossible goals to achieve. Finally, employees want to know what you think of their work. Letting employees know that you have noticed their efforts goes a long way towards having a more motivated workforce (Billikopf, 2003).

The implementation of a formal system of employee appraisal helps create a basis for fair remuneration of employees based on their performance. This is linked to another important aspect – salaries in agriculture are generally lower than salaries in other sectors of the national economy. At the same time, agriculture provides fewer benefits than other sectors. According to the Czech Statistical Office (2012), in the first quarter of 2012 the average gross monthly wage (per full-time equivalent employee) in agriculture, forestry and fishery amounted to CZK 17,926. Average gross monthly wage (per full-time equivalent employee) in the Czech Republic was CZK 24,126. The above shows that wages in agriculture equal approx. three fourths of the national average. In the first quarter of 2012 this sector employed 93,200 employees (average number of registered employees (full-time equivalent)). Agriculture is also facing the problem of an outflow of employees (2.5 % decrease compared to the 1st quarter of 2011) and labour ageing (in 2010, 57.5 % of employees working in agriculture in the Central Bohemian Region were in the age category of 45 and over, the national average in the same year was 58.3 % agricultural employees in the age category of 45 and over (Czech Statistical Office, 2011a).

4 Conclusion

The 21st century is characterised by minor interest in agricultural jobs. Surveys in the area of personnel management usually focus on other sectors (Bitsch, 2009). If the agricultural sector takes advantage of any employee appraisal, it is usually done on an informal basis (Bitsch, 2009). This is confirmed by the outcomes of the survey conducted. The survey showed that 87 % of agricultural businesses have no system of formal employee appraisal. Only 22.5 % of agricultural businesses that do not use any system of formal employee appraisal plan its future implementation. The approach of agricultural businesses to formal employee appraisal will be further examined by means of semi-structured interviews with managers; the aim of which will be to gain a deeper insight into the issue. Based on the findings from the questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews, a model for a formal appraisal system of employees in agribusiness will be designed.

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