

Employee and Rater Lessons Learned 2008

A. Purpose. Below are observations and comments from Pay Pool Panel (PPP) member reviews of appraisal packets and rater evaluations for the NSPS appraisal period covering 1 October 2007 to 30 September 2008 with a January 2009 pay out.

Comments and observations are intended to assist Pay Pool raters with feedback on current appraisals, assist Pay Pool raters in planning for preparation of future appraisals, and assist the Pay Pool Manager with supplemental information for submittal and discussion at Civilian Performance Board (CPB) meetings and any Pay Pool Process after-action report.

Comments regarding employee self-assessments and objectives are limited or not addressed in this summary.

B. Background. The Pay Pool Panel (PPP) process is required to “reconcile” employee appraisals. The reconciliation process involves review of three appraisal elements: the job objective, the employee self-assessment, and rater assessment. The PPP reviews each employee appraisal packet to ensure the employee self-assessment addresses the job objective and that the rater evaluation for the particular objective appropriately assesses employee performance per NSPS defined performance parameters. Deliberations by the PPP are conducted to reconcile potential appraisals that do not provide continuity between the stated objective, the employee self-assessment and the rater assessment as well as review appraisals for continuity with stated performance indicators and contributing factors (CF) for the corresponding pay band.

C. Appraisal Philosophy. The most important point any Rater can remember when preparing the Rater Assessment is the audience to whom the assessment will be read. There are two distinct audience groups.

The first audience group or member is the employee. The employee deserves an appraisal that provides honest and fair feedback. Wording should not be confusing, contradictory or such as to be construed as sending a “mixed message”. The rater must also remember “they” are the voice of management in presenting the employee with the final rating and assessment. Employees should receive an appraisal that is professional in appearance, represents honest and thoughtful consideration, and meets the intent and principles of NSPS.

The second audience group is the PPP. The PPP has the job of reconciling all Pay Pool appraisals. The PPP not only reviews appraisals against criteria discussed above but reviews appraisals to limit the potential for requests for reconsideration due to possible wording errors, omissions, conflicts or misinterpretations.

Understand the PPP, any PPP, means understanding the development of group dynamics or group psychology. The PPP develops a group mindset for reviewing appraisals. The mindset determines how evaluations are then equally reviewed.

D. Additional PPP “thoughts” are presented below.

1. Editorial Issues:

a. Follow instructions for standard information -

“I concur with the employee self assessment” or “I non-concur with the employee self-assessment because...” Or “I concur with the employee self assessment for this objective” or “I concur with the employee self assessment for this objective except...”

“Employee met this objective” or “Employee exceeded this objective” or “Employee minimally met this objective”.

b. Read what you wrote and make sure words are not missing, misspelled, and tense is correct. In addition, make sure numerical rating matches with corresponding word category – failed to meet (1), marginally met (2), met (3), exceeded (4), role model (5). Examples of word misuse: “...employee had a stealer year”, “...I condemn my employee”, “Employee was developing ...”,

Disconnects generate a closer look by the PPP and taking a closer look generates requests to hear from the rater. Raters have better chance at getting the PPP concurrence with a good write-up the first go around than having the rater speak to some uncertainty with a write-up when the rater does not know exactly what the PPP is questioning. Be thorough and right the first time.

c. Organize your thoughts, separate objectives, organize information under the specific objective and keep relevant information related to a contributing factor in one place. Do not spread out information specific to a CF justification throughout the objective or direct the reader that evidence to document the CF is contained in the body of the write-up.

d. It is imperative that the employee and write-ups match and address the specifics of the objective. Pay pool panel saw disconnects between the objective and the information used by the rater to justify an objective rating. Pay pool panel was skeptical and scrutinized all ratings of 4 and 5. Disconnects were viewed with skepticism and resulted in questions being asked of the rater to justify the rating.

2. Make sure you write to the objectives. Do not repeat employee information without showing impact. Do not repeat the employee accomplishment, e.g., “The employee worked on the Brooklyn Bridge completing four passes of the highway surface using a new sweeper”. Embellish on the accomplishment. Why was this important? Did it help clean up road debris and increase commuter safety as well as saving commuters from unnecessarily slowing down to miss objects? Did the employee identify potential sweeper problems that were identified to the maintenance supervisor so the sweeper could be fixed, new parts ordered and the machine kept in operation avoiding major

highway delays? Embellish on quality, quantity and impact. The employee made special efforts to remove accident debris as well as construction debris.

3. Address any metrics, eg, completed reports in 30 days 90 percent of the time. If you are rating an objective greater than a three then make sure you mention the metric. Raters were not commenting on employee quantity of reports or services being less than, expected, greater than expected. For example, “employee completed 18 spacewalks, 12 antenna repairs and assisted others with 4 dress-out exercises.” So what? Is this less than expected, expected, or more than expected? Need to add impact and significance. Also, if the metric was 10 widgets and employee accomplished 12 then speak to the significance of increase, decrease and maybe meeting the metric. Employee produced 13 factsheets but rater did not state good, bad or indifferent.

4. Do not talk about “systems” and why or how the system works. Talk about the impact of the employee’s involvement with the system, why what the employee did was important.

5. Do not write about one element of an objective as justification for a higher objective evaluation. Use one key accomplishment as an example of impact but discuss the overall accomplishments of the objective as well. It is difficult to look at a high objective rating using one accomplishment unless that accomplishment was either the only action of the objective or objective was so strong that the one action can justify an increase above “met”.

6. Do not use superlatives for describing impact, quality and quantity in a “met” objective. For example, “his exemplary level of support...” is better written as “his high level of support...” The objective is at the met level so use words that reflect a “middle of the road”. Save the superlative words and terms for the “exceeded” and “role model” write-ups. Do not confuse the PPP member by potentially placing a “contradiction” in the meaning of your intent justifying the rating. Do not use phrases that look like something taken from existing guidance, like “superior performance indicator”, because there is no superior performance indicator.

7. Higher level reviewer comments – follow format and content of component unique box.

8. Understand the psychology of the PPP. The PPP develops a group mindset for judging appraisals. The mindset determines how evaluations are equally reviewed.

a. There is a balance that must be met between embellishing too much and presenting solid examples. Must balance the glowing words with solid examples of what the words mean.

b. Although not spoken about in training, consider the impact of the weighting of the objective and consider speaking to impact of accomplishments regarding priority or weighting of the objective. There is an underlying thought process within this year’s PPP

to look for any means to rate an employee against some quantitative criteria and the objective weighting at least allows some gradation in assessing that objective rating. Rating an employee at a 4 or 5 level for a heavily weighted objective received heavy scrutiny.

c. Contributing factors – still viewed as difficult to justify and harder to judge. Write clearly using the definitions for the pay band, know what the performance indicators are, and write with strong justifications for the enhanced level. Do not give a CF to plus up a rating without good justification and explanation. Pay Pool Panel wanted strong differentiation between credit for the objective and then the CF. Pay Pool Panel did not allow employee to receive credit for objective and then non- or weakly written plus up for the CF. Pay Pool Panel very sensitive to potential that the rater was adding a plus up because they just like the employee.

d. Contributing factors – Realize the PPP is critical of weak write-ups and knows when the rater understands the CF definitions and can articulate actions and results at the enhanced level.

e. Contributing factors – stay away from leadership and technical competence because they are very hard to document and justify as separate actions above and beyond meeting or exceeding accomplishments of a technical objective. The majority of PPP members also believe technical competence and leadership are part of doing the job and implied in a person's pay band and responsibilities.

f. Speaking to the Pay Pool – Pay Pool Contact. When contacted by the PPP to discuss reasoning/logic for a particular objective/contributing factor make point in less than two minutes (then you will easily make the projected five minute timeframe). Do not ramble and do not read or repeat what you wrote. The intent is not to hear you speak the words you wrote. The PPP wants more (more clarity, more details, and assume they are either on the fence or they do not understand why something was rated as it might appear to be based on a write-up that may be weak or nonexistent).

Do your homework and be ready to speak – do not fumble around when asked to respond to request for additional information by obviously taking discussion time to read the write-up. This year there was no time limit placed on the rater but next year there may be a time period specified per objective (eg 5 or 3 minutes). Pay pool panel will give you heads up on what area (objective or CF) is wanted for more information. Review performance indicators and CF definitions and add information based on those factors. Speak knowledgeably and with confidence.

Speak without stuttering (uhhmmm) and without constantly searching for words. Don't make excuses. Assume up front that the PPP can see BS in a snow storm.

Be sure of your facts. This deserves repeating. Be sure of your facts. Be sure what you say to the PPP about one person does not conflict with information in another employee's rating. Example: Rater made statement about employee being the lead and primary on a project that employee self assessment stated employee was only secondary. This

example was extremely embarrassing because the true primary lead on the project was previously discussed between the PPP and the rater and the particular employee was heralded as the primary and SME on the project. This diminished the credibility of the rater and the facts presented by the rater on both the specific employees plus other employees being questioned by the PPP for this rater.

Be careful making comments like “we have the only experts in the Army that can do this work” and “this is such complicated or complex work” because PPP members can easily be “threatened” that they or their people have less “significance”. Better to talk about your program work in light of complexity, challenge with military unique settings, etc, without making statements that could demean another profession or directorate.

9. Rater using terms that reflect “role model status” (example: exhibited role model customer focus) then providing rating of “exceed” potentially gives impression to employee that rating for objective might be incorrectly evaluated by pay pool for wrong rating.

10. Somehow need to project impact and importance of employee self-assessment with number of reports accomplished or widgets generated.

11. Raters need to justify with impact and examples, relevance or importance etc, when recommending more than met. Why was greater than some number of widgets important? Must consider objective both from what is in the objective to how others may evaluate the objective, employee accomplishments and rater comments. Appraisals do not say what significance the action has – example, what percentage of work did this exemplify, how has an objective exceeded, or what task added by the supervisor did the worker take on.

12. Pay Band 2 Professional – “employee, with guidance, met overall objective” and rating was met (3). Statement “with guidance” led PPP to review performance indicator and query the rater about intent. Potential is for PPP to question whether rating should be 3 or dropped to a 2.

13. Statements that speak to philosophy should be avoided, “Sometimes, one has to have a broader perspective as to a cultural mindset to see the significance of the change at hand. Bullwinkle’s work was....” Statements like this do not add to the impact or write-up and understanding for the pay pool panel. Remember that next year new PAA will only allow 2000 characters and everyone needs to be focused, succinct, and to the point.

14. Employees should not write statements that can be construed as possible complaints or resulting from an underlying issue, for example, “within objective for which I had control”