Rater Motivation in the Performance Appraisal Context: A Theoretical Framework

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Although researchers have indicated the potential importance of rater motivation for understanding and improving performance appraisal processes, little empirical research or conceptual writing has addressed this topic. The purpose of this paper is to offer a model of the antecedents and outcomes of appraiser motivation, and suggest hypotheses for research. Researchers are encouraged to conduct further research on this important issue.

Performance appraisal has been the focus of a flurry of research activity in the past several decades (Bretz, Milkovich & Read, 1992; Fisher, 1989). There has also been continued use of performance appraisal systems by business and industry, with recent surveys indicating that between 74 to 89% of firms have a formal system (Murphy & Cleveland, 1991). Formal performance appraisal systems are used for a number of different purposes, including human resource decisions, feedback, and program evaluation (Cleveland, Murphy & Williams, 1989).

Although there has been a substantial amount of research on performance appraisal, practically all of this work has focused on understanding and improving appraisers’ ability (Banks & Murphy, 1985; Bernardin & Beatty, 1984). Thus, a plethora of research exists regarding such issues as the effect of rating formats (Landy & Farr, 1980) and training (Smith, 1986) on appraisers’ ability to evaluate subordinates. More recently, though, a number of researchers have bemoaned the dearth of writing on appraisers’ motivation in the performance rating context (e.g., Bernardin & Villanova, 1986; Heneman, Schwab, Fossum & Dwyer, 1989; Murphy & Cleveland, 1991). Despite recent calls for more work in this area (e.g., Banks & Murphy, 1985), there has been practically no published empirical research and only limited conceptual work regarding the nature, antecedents, and consequences of appraiser motivation (Cleveland & Murphy, 1992; DeNisi & K. Williams, 1988; Fisher, 1989).
The purpose of this paper is to describe a model of causes and effects of rater motivation in the performance appraisal context. Although there have been several book chapters and papers that provide conceptual models of rater motivation (e.g., DeCotiis & Petit, 1978; Mohrman & Lawler, 1983; Murphy & Cleveland, 1991), the present paper differs from other work in several ways. First, other models of rater motivation have focused primarily or exclusively on appraiser motivation at the rating stage. As a result, many of these models assume that the rater has accurate information, but may be unwilling to publicly report that information (Hauenstein, 1992). An assumption of the present paper is that a nonmotivated rater will use less thorough and deliberate information processing techniques than a motivated rater, and therefore may have limited information about a particular ratee. In addition, the models that focus on the rating stage do not consider the possible effects of rater motivation on other stages of the performance appraisal process, such as the acquisition of information. An assumption of this paper is that rater motivation may affect all stages of the performance appraisal process. Finally, the focus on the rating stage has led researchers to conclude that appraisers have limited motivation, when in fact there is some evidence that raters may be more motivated to provide feedback. As observed by Longenecker, Sims, and Gioia “accuracy is not the primary concern of the practicing executive in appraising subordinates. The main concern is how best to use the appraisal process to motivate and reward subordinates” (1987, p. 191). A second feature of the present model is that rating inaccuracy resulting from motivational deficiencies may be both intentional and unintentional; other writing on the topic has implied that rating inaccuracy is predominantly intentional. Finally, the present paper takes a broad perspective by incorporating recent social psychological research on rater motivation. In particular, work by Tetlock (e.g., Tetlock, 1985) on accountability is described, as well as other social psychological research on rater motivation.

This paper is divided into five sections. First, a brief overview of the theoretical model is offered. The second section of this paper provides a detailed discussion of the determinants of rater motivation. Factors affecting the determinants are reviewed next. The fourth section discusses the effects of rater motivation on performance appraisal processes and behaviors. The final section considers some additional questions related to rater motivation.

It should be noted that the focus of this paper concerns the supervisor of a particular ratee. The reason for concentrating on this appraiser, rather than peer, subordinate or other raters, is that the subordinate's supervisor is by far the most common rater (Bretz et al., 1992). However, many of the concepts discussed here may be applicable to other raters, such as peers.

Rater Motivation: An Overview

Motivation is a difficult construct to define (Steers & Porter, 1987). In keeping with other approaches, however, rater motivation will be described here in terms of the basic goals or objectives that drive behavior (Cleveland & Murphy, 1992). Rather than attempting to advance or apply a more universal...
theory, the present model was designed to explain and understand issues pertaining specifically to rater motivation in the performance appraisal context (cf. Pinder & Moore, 1979). Nevertheless, the framework contains many features of the cognitive choice models (see Kanfer, 1990, for a recent review of such models).

An overview of the model of rater motivation in the performance appraisal context is provided in Figure 1. It is assumed for present purposes that the performance appraisal process involves a series of behaviors during which the appraiser observes, stores, and when necessary, recalls and integrates appraisee behavior (Wexley & Klimoski, 1984). Collectively, these behaviors will be referred to here as information processing. At various times, and for a litany of different purposes, the rater may make ratings of, or provide feedback to, the appraisee. The three determinants of rater motivation are perceived rewards, perceived negative consequences, and impression management. In turn, these determinants are hypothesized to be affected by both situational (e.g., accountability) and personal (e.g., mood) variables. A more detailed discussion of the determinants follows next.
Determinants of Rater Motivation

A number of scholars have discussed determinants of rater motivation in the performance appraisal context (e.g., Cleveland & Murphy, 1992; Longenecker, Gioia & Sims, 1987; Murphy & Cleveland, 1991). Much of this section, therefore, is simply a summary or extension of previous work. Nevertheless, there are several points raised here that have not been made explicit in previous work.

Rewards

An important determinant of almost any behavior is the attainment of valued rewards (Kanfer, 1990). In the performance appraisal context, raters are likely to consider the possibility of receiving extrinsic rewards, such as raises and promotions. That is, it is possible that engaging in careful information processing, making accurate ratings or providing feedback to subordinates will be directly rewarded by the organization. Likewise, the rater may consider whether engaging in performance appraisal activities will indirectly result in achievement of rewards. For instance, providing feedback that leads to improved employee performance may result in improved unit performance. In turn, this could lead to higher pay increases or promotions for the manager. Alternatively, a rater may value attainment of intrinsic rewards from engaging in performance appraisal activities. Some raters, in other words, may find engaging in performance appraisal activities to be inherently satisfying. Providing helpful feedback to subordinates, for example, may result in increased esteem and recognition from subordinates or supervisors.

The limited field research addressing rewards for doing performance appraisals portrays a dismal picture. Napier and Latham (1986) examined managers’ expected outcomes (e.g., raises, promotions, employee appreciation) for providing both negative and positive feedback to employees. Other than employee dismay (in the case of negative feedback) and employee appreciation (in the case of positive feedback), respondents generally felt that the primary result would be “nothing.”

In practice, then, the direct, extrinsic rewards for engaging in performance appraisal activities may be few and infrequent (Murphy & Cleveland, 1991). This is likely to be particularly true for making accurate ratings. There may be, however, greater perceived rewards for giving feedback to employees. As discussed later, some organizations may encourage managers to give feedback to subordinates (e.g., Friedman & LeVino, 1984).

Negative Consequences

A second determinant of rater motivation in the performance appraisal context is the avoidance of negative consequences. There are a number of negative consequences that are associated with performance appraisal activities. These may be organized into five, albeit somewhat overlapping, categories: damage to subordinate-supervisor relationships, demoralization of employees, criticism from the rater’s subordinate, criticism from the rater’s supervisor, and interference with other tasks.
Many researchers have commented on the potential for performance appraisal activities to negatively affect supervisor-subordinate relationships (e.g., Lawler, 1990; Murphy & Cleveland, 1991). In particular, a common concern expressed by managers is that making accurate (i.e., lower than the employee expects) performance ratings or giving negative performance feedback will hurt their relationship with the subordinate. Similarly, a frequently encountered fear on the part of raters is that making accurate ratings or providing feedback will demoralize rather than motivate the employee (Longenecker et al., 1987).

Possible subordinate criticism of feedback and ratings is also a frequently voiced concern by managers, particularly when the ratings or feedback are negative (Murphy & Cleveland, 1991). Although rare in practice (Bernardin & Villanova, 1986), one’s supervisor may also criticize performance ratings.

In addition to the many negative consequences associated with making accurate ratings and giving feedback, there is at least one negative consequence of engaging in performance appraisal activities: interference with other tasks. Recent writing on motivation (e.g., Kanfer, 1990) has postulated that individuals consider the importance of competing goals and outcomes in determining which activities to engage in. In the present context, most managers have a myriad of job responsibilities beyond performance appraisal; time spent on performance appraisal activities may be viewed by the organization and appraiser as detracting from other, more important, tasks (Heneman et al., 1989). This would be particularly true when the appraiser has limited time availability. A recent survey by Bernardin and Villanova (1986) revealed that a common characteristic of the performance appraiser’s role was inadequate time to devote to this task. Moreover, lack of time was regarded by supervisors as a major reason for inaccuracy. Thus, while an appraiser may wish to engage in performance appraisal activities, other work-related tasks often take priority.

Impression Management Concerns

Concern for impression management is the third determinant of rater motivation. Impression management activities are ubiquitous in the workplace (Ferris & Judge, 1991; Gardner & Martinko, 1988). Although most of the writing regarding this construct in the performance appraisal situation has been directed towards subordinate behavior (e.g., Wayne & Ferris, 1990; Wayne & Kacmar, 1991), researchers have also acknowledged that raters engage in impression management activities (Villanova & Bernardin, 1989). Ferris and Judge, for example, observed that the behavior evinced by a supervisor giving feedback may be more influenced by how their behavior will look to their superiors than by the anticipated effect on the subordinate.

Impression management activities can, in turn, be broken down into two components: self-impression management and management of others’ impressions (Zerbe & Paulhus, 1987). Beginning with self-impression management, there are at least three aspects related to rater motivation. First, a manager may be more likely to perceive him/her self to be a successful manager if subordinates are rated highly. Second, a rater may wish to maintain
a positive image of the organization. In accord with this image, the rater may believe the mere fact an employee is working there indicates the individual is minimally satisfactory, which may in turn affect motivation to inflate ratings (Murphy & Cleveland, 1991). Third, raters are likely to have different perceptions of their role as manager (Cleveland & Murphy, 1992; Larson, 1989). For example, some raters may believe that part of their role is to provide continuous, careful feedback or make highly accurate ratings. To maintain this self-impression, raters may behave far differently from raters who have a different perception of their role.

With regard to managing others’ impressions of oneself, a rater who is considering giving relatively low ratings may feel that his or her competence as a manager will be questioned by superiors (Murphy & Cleveland, 1991). Similarly, a rater may wish to maintain an appropriate image vis-a-vis his or her subordinates. That is, a rater may desire to be perceived as being fair (Greenberg, 1988) and as being effective in providing rewards to subordinates. Another consideration is adherence to organizational norms. In particular, many organizations have norms that encourage giving high, and therefore inaccurate, ratings. Finally, with regard to giving feedback, some organizations have norms that reinforce the giving of feedback (Larson, 1984). Thus, impression management strategies may encourage giving feedback. In short, although impression management may be a complex construct, it appears to be a potentially important factor here.

To sum up, three determinants are hypothesized to affect rater motivation in the performance appraisal context. For the most part, these factors appear to have the most direct effect on rating and feedback activities, as opposed to information processing activities (e.g., observation, storage, recall, and integration). Nevertheless, it is reasonable to expect that raters who are not motivated to give feedback or to make accurate ratings will not be motivated to engage in careful information processing (Hauenstein, 1992).

Factors Affecting Motivational Determinants

A review of the performance appraisal and social psychological literatures revealed a number of variables that are likely to affect rater motivation. As shown in Figure 1, these variables may be categorized as either situational or personal factors. Before discussing each of these variables in greater detail, however, two points should be noted. First, there are other variables (e.g., personality traits) that may affect rater motivation which are not discussed here. The variables included here are ones deemed most likely to affect rater motivation in this context, given what is currently known about performance appraisal. Second, due to the paucity of research, it is presumptuous at this time to speculate as to the order of importance of these various factors.

Situational Factors

Accountability. While accountability has received limited attention from human resource management (HRM) and organizational behavior (OB)
scholars (Klimoski & Inks, 1990), social psychologists have investigated the effects of accountability on rater motivation for a variety of judgments and decisions (e.g., Tetlock, 1985). Moreover, some recent conceptual work in the performance appraisal context has encouraged further application of the accountability principle (Folger, Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1992). Accountability is a complex variable, and its specific effects depend on a number of factors. Accordingly, a brief general summary of the accountability principle is provided next, followed by a discussion of its application to rater motivation in the performance appraisal context. The reader will note that this construct is discussed at greater length here than the other factors. This is due, however, more to its theoretical richness and complexity than to the presumed importance of accountability over other factors.

As defined by Tetlock and Kim (1987), accountability refers to the amount of social pressure to justify one’s judgments to others. When accountability is high, it is likely that perceived rewards, costs, and impression management concerns are also higher. According to Tetlock and his colleagues (Tetlock, 1985; Tetlock & Boettger, 1989; Tetlock, Skitka & Boettger, 1989), raters typically have limited motivation and “generally prefer ‘least effort’ solutions: They simply adopt positions likely to gain the favor of those to whom they feel accountable” (Tetlock, 1985: 310). However, under certain circumstances, raters will be more motivated to carefully consider their judgments. Specifically, when the rater is not clear what the most acceptable position or rating is for the “audience,” much more careful information processing will be used, and more accurate ratings are likely to result (Tetlock, 1985). The exception to this latter finding is that when raters feel committed to a particular rating, they will merely attempt to rationalize and justify their position (Tetlock et al., 1989).

In applying the accountability principle to the performance appraisal situation, a distinctive difference between this context and the typical social psychological experiment is that there are at least two possible “audiences” here: the appraiser’s supervisor, who typically signs off on the appraisal form (Bernardin & Villanova, 1986), and the subordinate (Klimoski & Inks, 1990). Given that self-ratings are generally inflated (Harris & Schaubroock, 1988), the subordinate is likely to have a much different position from the appraiser. Conversely, the rater’s supervisor may have no position about the ratee. Accordingly, accountability to one’s subordinates and accountability to one’s supervisor are discussed separately.

**Accountability to one’s subordinates.** As observed earlier, appraisers’ concerns about adversely affecting subordinates’ motivation and supervisor-subordinate relationships suggest that this “audience” is often deemed a potent force to whom the appraiser is accountable. Moreover, work indicating that the purpose of performance ratings affects leniency (Bernardin & Villanova, 1986) may be an effect of accountability to one’s subordinates (Klimoski & Inks, 1990). Motivation to make accurate ratings is likely to be negatively affected by increased accountability to subordinates. Generally, the motivation will be to provide inflated ratings. For example, one of the executives in Longenecker et al.’s study observed that “[t]he mere fact that you have to write out your
assessment and create a permanent record will cause people not to be as honest or as accurate as they should be..." (1987: 185). In certain circumstances, however, some raters may be motivated to provide deflated ratings. For instance, one executive is quoted in Longenecker et al. as saying: "once a manager has made up his or her mind that an employee isn't going to make it, the review [i.e., the written documentation] will take on an overly negative tone.... The appraisal process becomes downwardly biased...." (1987, p. 189). Thus, it is hypothesized that increased accountability to subordinates will typically decrease rater motivation to make accurate ratings.

With regard to performance appraisal information processing activities, an argument may be made for either increased or decreased motivation when accountability to subordinates is high. On the one hand, when motivation to rate accurately is low (i.e., the rater intends to inflate the ratings), as suggested by Tetlock (1985), one would expect lower motivation to engage in information processing. On the other hand, Schmitt and Klimoski asserted that "Accountability appears to increase the care and rigorousness with which an evaluation is made" (1991, p. 182), and observed that: "having to face the worker ... causes the manager to exert more care in the evaluation" (p. 182). While these statements seem to conflict with the perspectives advanced here, a reasonable explanation is that if the rater is intending to deflate the ratings, or rate accurately (and presumably lower than the appraisee would like), the rater will be motivated to obtain as much information as possible, and will be prepared to produce that evidence as needed. Alternatively, perhaps this strategy will be used when the rater is attempting to justify his or her position.

Given that accountability to one's subordinates seems to play an important role in appraiser motivation, it is appropriate to hypothesize as to which factors might increase accountability to this audience. One factor is the confidentiality of the ratings (DeCotiis & Petit, 1978); the performance ratings may never be seen by the subordinates (e.g., if the ratings are for research purposes only), provided to the appraisee anonymously, or given by the appraiser in a face-to-face setting (Klimoski & Inks, 1990). The less confidential the ratings, the more accountable the appraiser will become. A second likely determinant of accountability to the appraisees is the visibility of the ratings among the employees (Padgett, 1989). That is, the more employees exchange information with one another and the more readily available pertinent information is (e.g., salaries at state universities are generally publicly available), the more accountable the appraiser is likely to be to the subordinates. A third factor concerns the perceived likelihood that subordinates will file a grievance or dispute the ratings. For example, some companies have formal grievance procedures that enable subordinates to protest a low rating (Bernardin & Beatty, 1984), which should serve to increase accountability to the subordinate.

Accountability to one's supervisor. Although the appraiser's supervisor usually must authorize the final ratings (Bernardin & Villanova, 1986), there has been practically no consideration in the literature as to the effect of this "audience" on performance appraisal practices. As noted by Bernardin and Villanova, "A supervisor's boss rarely disagrees [with the ratings]" (1986, p. 51).
This suggests that in practice, appraisers experience little accountability to the supervisor, particularly relative to the accountability felt to the subordinates. There are, however, two factors that might increase an appraiser's accountability to his or her supervisor. One factor is the extent to which the supervisor is perceived to carefully review the ratings. A second factor is the estimated likelihood that the supervisor will challenge a particular rating. Assuming that accountability to one's supervisor is high, and the supervisor's position regarding the ratee is unknown, it is hypothesized that rater motivation to engage in performance appraisal information processing and make accurate ratings will be relatively high. Of course, the rater may believe his or her supervisor has a particular position about the ratee, which would then reduce the appraiser's motivation to engage in careful information processing and make accurate ratings.

Given that the performance appraisal process potentially involves at least two (i.e., one's subordinate and one's supervisor), and possibly additional (i.e., the HRM department or a grievance review board) "audiences," a rater may have to balance different pressures. How a rater deals with conflicting "audiences" and justifies subsequent ratings and feedback is an interesting topic for future research.

Organizational human resource management strategy. A number of HRM and OB scholars have addressed the linkages between business and HRM strategy and performance appraisal procedures (e.g., Butler, Ferris & Napier, 1991). Kerr (1985) identified diversification process to be a major determinant of managerial appraisal and reward systems. In perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of business strategy, HRM strategy, and HRM policies and practices, Sonnenfeld and Peiperl (1988) articulated four organizational archetypes. Among the differences between these archetypes was the emphasis on internal staffing, with certain types of organizations placing heavy emphasis (i.e., the academy) and other types of organizations (i.e., the baseball club) placing little or no emphasis on such practices. Organizations which attach a high priority to internal staffing must have the requisite training and development programs in order to succeed, and effective performance evaluation and feedback mechanisms are a necessary component (Hall, 1984). Accordingly, it is hypothesized that organizations which emphasize internal staffing will be more likely to reward performance appraisal activities than organizations which do not emphasize internal staffing.

Task and outcome dependence. Larson (1984) proposed that task and outcome dependence were important determinants of whether the rater provided feedback to a subordinate. It is hypothesized here that the greater the degree to which the supervisor's work outcomes are dependent on the subordinates (task dependence), the greater the rewards associated with giving feedback. Likewise, it is predicted that the more the supervisor's pay and promotions are linked to the success of the subordinates (outcome dependence), the greater the rewards for giving feedback. Similarly, it seems reasonable to expect that task and outcome dependence will increase careful information processing.
Although there has been research support for the link between task and outcome dependence and feedback (Larson, 1986), there has been practically no speculation as to the effects of task and outcome dependence on the motivation to make accurate ratings. It would appear that greater task and outcome dependence will increase the rater’s concern that low ratings will be negatively received by subordinates, who may be able to retaliate by decreasing their performance. Hence, it seems likely that motivation to rate accurately would be lower under conditions of high task and outcome dependence. Further research in settings where raters and ratees interact together on an ongoing basis (Ilgen & Favero, 1985) is needed to empirically examine this possibility.

**Trust in the system.** Trust in the performance appraisal system is likely to affect rater motivation. As defined by Bernardin and Beatty (1984), trust in the performance appraisal system refers to the extent to which appraisers and subordinates believe that performance data will be used fairly and objectively. Research has shown that low trust in the system is related to rating leniency (Bernardin, Orban & Carlyle, 1981). It seems likely that low trust in the system will increase the negative consequences associated with rating accuracy. Low trust in the system, therefore, is hypothesized to reduce motivation to rate accurately.

**Performance appraisal forms.** Although many researchers have called for a moratorium on studies concerning forms (e.g., Landy & Farr, 1980), this appears to be due to the lack of support with regard to ability to rate accurately. Empirical research, however, has shown that appraisers express different reactions to alternative rating forms. DeCotiis (1977), for example, found that police sergeants preferred a trait scale over a behaviorally anchored rating scale (BARS); Wiersma and Latham (1986) found that managers preferred a behavioral observation scale (BOS) over both a trait scale and a BARS approach. Two predictions are made with regard to the effects of rating forms on appraiser motivation.

First, the perceived complexity, difficulty in understanding (DeCotiis & Petit, 1978), and length of the forms is likely to affect rater motivation. That is, forms which appear difficult to understand or to require a great deal of work to complete are likely to be seen as taking much time. In turn, this will detract from other job responsibilities, a negative consequence. Some support for the nature of the forms being an important issue is provided by Bernardin and Beatty (1984), who noted that the critical incidents format introduced by Flanagan and Burns (1955) was eliminated because “[f]oremen apparently did not want to take the time to record incidents” (Bernardin & Beatty, 1984, p. 82). Similarly, Bernardin and Beatty (1984) noted that supervisor resistance to using the system required by the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 stemmed in part from the amount of time required to complete the form.

Second, forms may differ with regard to how much documentation they require. For instance, critical incidents forms generally would require far more documentation than graphic rating scales. As suggested by Hauenstein (1992), forms that do not require much justification for the ratings are likely to reduce motivation to engage in extensive information processing.
It should be noted that these two predictions might produce conflicting forces. That is, a form requiring extensive documentation might increase perceptions regarding distraction from other work-related tasks, and therefore decrease motivation to engage in performance appraisal activities. Conversely, this type of form may increase likelihood of supervisor or subordinate criticism if the rater does not engage in the necessary information processing activities, which in turn would increase rater motivation.

**Personal Factors**

*Amount of information.* According to most models of the performance appraisal process (Feldman, 1981), the rater eventually categorizes a ratee into a schema. In fact, appraisers make ratings on the basis of little information (DeNisi & Williams, 1988). There is evidence from several sources that the amount of information a rater has will affect motivation. Chaiken and her colleagues (e.g., Maheswaran & Chaiken, 1991) found that decision makers will be motivated to engage in information processing until they feel they have sufficient information to make an accurate judgment. Once the rater believes enough information has been obtained, motivation to engage in information processing will decrease. Similarly, Fried, Tiegs, and Bellamy (1992) found that supervisors were less likely to provide feedback to, or make ratings of, subordinates for whom they have limited information. Thus, given insufficient amounts of information, it likely that the rater will not have formed a particular position about the appraisee, and will be concerned about making a mistake. In turn, this should adversely affect motivation to give feedback to subordinates.

*Self-efficacy.* Although there has been almost no research, Bernardin and Beatty (1984) discussed the role of rater self-efficacy in providing feedback. It seems likely that self-efficacy will affect other aspects of the performance appraisal process as well, including the information processing steps. Thus, it is hypothesized that self-efficacy will affect motivation in each aspect of the performance appraisal process. More specifically, lower self-efficacy will be associated with decreased rater motivation in the performance appraisal context. Whether there is a general self-efficacy regarding the performance appraisal context, or self-efficacy varies from behavior to behavior in the performance appraisal context, should be addressed by future researchers.

*Mood.* There is a growing literature in social psychology regarding the effects of affect on a variety of judgments (e.g., see Spielman, Pratto & Bargh, 1988, for a review). As described by Spielman et al., there are several different components to affect, ranging from simple reactions to specific stimuli (i.e., liking) to generalized feeling states (i.e., mood). In the present context, it is the latter type of affect that seems most closely related to motivation.

Social psychological research has demonstrated several interesting effects of mood on judgment processes. Among the findings is that raters in a positive mood more readily recall positive information, and exhibit greater integration of diverse information (Isen, 1987). However, empirical research indicates that decision makers who are slightly depressed engage in more thorough and careful information processing; decision makers who are elated are likely to use much
more superficial information processing and judgment procedures (Forgas, 1992; Schwarz, 1990). A number of possible explanations have been offered for the effects of mood; at this point in time, one of the most plausible is that mood serves as a motivator (Schwarz, Bless & Bohner, 1991). Similar effects have been replicated in the performance appraisal context; for example, Sinclair (1988) found that slightly depressed raters were more accurate in their ratings than other raters. Whether other aspects of affect (e.g., liking for particular ratees) are related to rater motivation is unclear at this time.

**Effects of Rater Motivation on Performance Appraisal Behaviors**

This section of the paper suggests various aspects of the appraisal process that might be affected by rater motivation. In keeping with the model of performance appraisal described much earlier, this section considers the potential effects of rater motivation, or lack thereof, on observation, storage, retrieval, integration, rating, and feedback steps.

**Performance Appraisal Behaviors**

*Overview.* Several social psychological theorists have suggested that motivation affects the type of information processing used by the rater (Chaiken, 1980; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Tesser & Shaffer, 1990; Tetlock, 1985). These theorists, as well as others (e.g., Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Mitchell & Beach, 1990), have postulated the existence of two quite different information processing strategies. Specifically, researchers have argued that a rater may use a very thorough, analytic approach (hereafter referred to as deliberate processing), or a quick, heuristic-based approach (hereafter referred to as nondeliberate processing) to judgment and decision-making. In the performance appraisal context, Feldman (1981) made a similar distinction between controlled and automatic processing. Although recent scholars (e.g., Lord & Maher, 1990) have criticized several of the assumptions regarding the distinction between controlled and automatic processing, many of the propositions offered by Feldman regarding the performance appraisal process are consistent with the distinction between deliberate and nondeliberate information processing. Hence, the general proposition here is that motivated raters will be more likely to use deliberate processing, while nonmotivated raters will be more likely to use nondeliberate processing. The remainder of this section discusses implications of this general proposition at each step of the performance appraisal process.

*Observation.* In the first step, the appraiser must recognize and attend to relevant behavior and information concerning the appraisee. It seems likely that motivation will affect the amount of information and detail observed by the appraiser. That is, in nondeliberate processing, attention is focused on highly salient characteristics of the individual, such as gender and race, and fewer details and less information will be attended to by the appraiser (Ilgen & Feldman, 1983). Under deliberate processing, more information will be attended to by the rater (Murphy & Cleveland, 1991).
Rater motivation is also likely to affect whether the appraiser will attempt to confirm initial impressions or seek out additional relevant information. Research suggests that the more motivated the rater, the more likely the rater is to seek out additional information, rather than merely attempt to confirm initial impressions (Higgins & Bargh, 1987; Neuberg, 1989; Tetlock, 1983b). In a simulated interview study, Neuberg found that motivated raters asked more questions, and the questions they asked were of better quality, than nonmotivated raters. Thus, it seems that rater motivation will affect the amount and type of information observed and sought.

Storage. In the second step of the performance appraisal task, the appraiser must categorize and store relevant information into schemata. Research by Tetlock (1983a) suggests that rater motivation affects the likelihood information will be stored in long-term memory. Other research suggests that motivated raters may use different storage arrangements. More specifically, Williams and DeNisi and their colleagues (DeNisi & Williams, 1988; Williams, DeNisi, Blencoe & Cafferty, 1985; Williams, Cafferty & DeNisi, 1990) have considered the effects of performance appraisal salience on information processing and rating. Given that salience and motivation are probably related constructs, some of these findings may be pertinent here. Among the relevant findings was that raters in the high salience condition made greater use of person, rather than task, categories in memory. The implications of this are described in subsequent steps.

Retrieval. In the retrieval stage, the appraiser must recall stored information about the appraisee. As noted above, it is assumed that information is stored in bins, which contain basic schemata, rather than specific details of behavior. Furthermore, it is generally assumed that various biases exist which affect the recall of information (e.g., the most recently used bins are more likely to be accessed by the appraiser). It is also believed that a fairly brief examination of memory is ordinarily conducted by the appraiser (Ilgen & Feldman, 1983). As observed by Ilgen and Feldman (1983), however, conscientious appraisers may be more careful in scrutinizing their memory. Similarly, Williams et al. (1990) found that subjects in the high saliency condition correctly recalled more information. Thus, motivated appraisers are predicted to retrieve more information from memory than nonmotivated appraisers.

A second issue in the retrieval stage concerns recategorization. That is, on occasion, when new information seriously challenges the prior schemata for an appraisee, the cognitive model proposes that an appraisee may be placed into a different schemata. Although little is known about the process of recategorization (Ilgen & Feldman, 1983), Fiske and Neuberg (1990) asserted that rater motivation affects whether recategorization will occur when appropriate. Tetlock (1983b) reported empirical evidence to support this contention wherein initial impression bias was less likely to occur for motivated raters than for unmotivated raters. Tetlock thus concluded that increased motivation leads raters to be more “willing to revise initial impressions ... in response to changing evidence” (Tetlock, 1985, p. 319). Rater motivation, therefore, is hypothesized to affect the likelihood that recategorization will occur when appropriate.
Integration. The appraiser must in some fashion integrate the available information in preparation for forming a position regarding the ratee or making formal ratings. A number of researchers in social psychology have found that low motivation results in simplistic decision-making and integration processes, and increased influence of rating biases (e.g., Chaiken, 1980; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Tetlock and his associates found that rater motivation is likely to affect such things as whether the recency effect occurs, contradictory information is integrated, and more complex decision processes are used (Tetlock & Kim, 1987; Tetlock & Boettger, 1989). Thus, rater motivation is likely to affect the thoroughness of the integration process.

Despite the above assertion that motivated raters are less likely to be affected by rating biases, other research would suggest the possibility of increased halo. As noted above, highly motivated raters may be apt to make greater use of person categorization. In turn, use of person categories facilitates development of general impressions, which would result in increased halo (DeNisi & Williams, 1988: 143). However, halo does not necessarily produce greater inaccuracy (Murphy & Balzer, 1989).

Rating. As noted earlier, most of the writing on rater motivation in the performance appraisal context has focused on the rating stage. The typical assumption is that an appraiser consciously and deliberately chooses to be inaccurate (e.g., Kane & Lawler, 1978), at times inflating and on other occasions deflating the assigned ratings (Villanova & Bernardin, 1989). However, as Hauenstein (1992) has shown, low motivation to rate accurately may also affect earlier information processing steps. Thus, rating inaccuracy may not simply be due to limited motivation to rate accurately.

Precisely what the effects of providing rewards to raters will be on rating accuracy is unclear. Neuberg (1989), for example, found that interviewers who were motivated to be accurate still demonstrated cognitive biases. Their increased accuracy was due to superior information processing. Thus, the effect of rater motivation on accuracy may be an indirect (e.g., through superior information processing), rather than a direct, effect.

Feedback. Aside from work by Larson (Larson, 1984, 1986, 1989), there has been little writing that addresses motivation to give feedback. Moreover, based on a thorough review of potential moderators of feedback approaches, Wexley and Klimoski (1984) concluded that: “most research to date [on feedback] does not reflect the true complexities of organizational reality” (p. 67). Thus, Wexley and Klimoski argued that the most effective feedback strategy probably depends on such things as the rater’s characteristics (e.g., managerial style) and employee characteristics (e.g., whether the employee was performing above, below, or at average levels). It is, therefore, somewhat premature to hypothesize as to the effects of rater motivation on provision of feedback. Nevertheless, research has indicated that raters who are reluctant to provide feedback use a number of strategies, including delay in giving feedback (Benedict & Levine, 1988), distortion of feedback (Larson, 1989), and decreased specificity (Larson, 1986). Accordingly, it is hypothesized that a motivated rater will be more likely to provide timely, accurate, and specific feedback than a nonmotivated rater.
Other Consequences of Appraiser Motivation

In addition to its effects on various steps in the performance appraisal process, appraiser motivation is likely to have several other consequences. These are discussed next.

Appraiser behavior. A number of other appraiser behaviors may be affected by motivation. First, it seems plausible that motivated raters will be more likely to maintain a diary of subordinates' behavior. Second, it is likely that appraiser motivation will affect the time and energy spent preparing for feedback sessions. Third, in accord with Neuberg (1989), the more motivated the appraiser is, the more likely the appraiser will seek out performance-related information from a variety of sources, including peers, customers, and others. Finally, appraiser motivation is likely to affect whether a performance appraisal form is completed (Fried et al., 1992).

Appraiser reactions. Ratee reactions are a frequently employed indicator of performance appraisal system effectiveness (e.g., Dipboye & de Pontbriand, 1981; Giles & Mossholder, 1990; Landy, Barnes & Murphy, 1978), and there are several reasons to believe that rater motivation will increase employee satisfaction with the performance appraisal system. First, research by Folger and Konovsky (1989) and Greenberg (1986) has indicated that the performance appraisal process (e.g., whether the appraiser was familiar with the appraisee's work) is separate from performance appraisal outcomes (e.g., size of one's raise) and both of these constructs play a role in ratee reactions to the system. Given that appraiser motivation is hypothesized to increase the amount of information gathered and recalled, the thoroughness with which this information is processed, and so forth, it seems likely that higher rater motivation to engage in performance appraisal activities will result in superior procedural justice perceptions, which in turn will improve appraisee reactions to the appraisal system. Second, assuming that rater motivation will lead to more specific, timely, and accurate feedback, subordinates should also be more satisfied with the performance appraisal session (Giles & Mossholder, 1990). Hence, it is hypothesized that higher rater motivation will result in greater employee satisfaction with the appraisal process.

Additional Research Issues

In addition to the many hypotheses offered above, several basic research issues related to the model should be considered as well. In specific, issues pertaining to types of motivation, the role of the subordinate, and the relationship between appraiser motivation and other constructs are examined in further detail next.

Motivation to Do What?

Most writers in this area have focused on lack of motivation to be accurate as a kind of unwillingness to be accurate. An alternative possibility is that a rater is uninterested in being accurate, which is most likely caused by a lack of any rewards. Rather than forming two ends of a continuum, these two types
of low motivation appear to be qualitatively different, and would appear to have different consequences. While there has been some discussion of the former type in the literature, empirical research is needed on both types.

A related issue is whether different sources of rater motivation will encourage different types of information processing. The implicit assumption of this paper is that different determinants (e.g., rewards vs. impression management concerns) will have similar effects on performance appraisal activities. It seems quite likely, however, that different determinants will motivate different behaviors. For example, raters who perceive they will be rewarded for being accurate may seek to obtain information that will help rank order their subordinates; raters who are primarily motivated by intrinsic rewards may seek information that will be helpful for subordinates’ career development. Thus, different motivational factors may result in different observation, storage, recall, and integration processes.

**Role of Subordinate In Appraiser Motivation**

An important question regarding this model is the effect of the subordinate. In particular, it remains to be seen whether rater motivation will vary from subordinate to subordinate. Logically, some of the parameters of the model should remain constant for a particular rater, while other parameters may differ, depending on the subordinate. For example, a rater may believe one appraisee is more likely to complain than another appraisee, and therefore experiences a different motivation level for these two appraisees. The issue of stability across subordinates is particularly critical for measurement purposes; if the parameters of the model differ from subordinate to subordinate, this would suggest the need to measure motivation separately for each supervisor’s ratees.

One subordinate-related variable that might be particularly important here is overall performance. That is, subordinates who are doing either very well or very poorly may induce much different levels or types of motivation than an employee who is performing at an average level. Empirical research on this issue is sorely needed.

**Relationship Between Antecedents of Appraiser Motivation and Other Constructs**

In addition to testing the many hypotheses outlined in this paper, there is a need to assess the relationship between appraiser motivation and other constructs, such as appraiser ability. As suggested by Neuberg and Fiske (1987), lack of rater knowledge or skill would prevent even motivated raters from being accurate. Researchers have assumed that motivation and ability form a multiplicative relationship (Steers & Porter, 1987), and the issues raised here would also suggest a multiplicative relationship in the performance appraisal context. Researchers should also explore the effect of such variables as training on rater motivation. It seems possible that a well-designed training program could improve such variables as rater self-efficacy, which would in turn increase motivation.
Conclusions

A number of researchers have recently suggested that rater motivation is a key factor in understanding performance appraisal issues. Schmitt and Klimoski, for instance, asserted that lack of rater motivation “may account for the greatest amount of variance in the quality of data” (1991, p. 189). Murphy and Cleveland argued that “Raters do not fail to give accurate ratings because they are incapable of accuracy but rather because they are unwilling to rate accurately” (1991, p. 209). The present paper provides a model of the antecedents and outcomes of rater motivation, and differs from previous work by emphasizing not only the rating stage, but other stages of the performance appraisal task as well. This model also points to the need to more fully understand raters' feedback-giving activities. It is possible, for example, that raters may provide quite helpful feedback to subordinates, even though their ratings are not accurate. Finally, the model has a number of practical implications for improving rating processes in organizations. More work concerning rater motivation may help bridge the gap between practice and research in the performance appraisal area (Banks & Murphy, 1985).

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Notes

1. I distinguish here between ratings, which will be defined as information with an evaluative purpose, and feedback, which will be defined as information with a developmental, growth, or motivational purpose. Ratings and feedback may be provided in a written medium, oral medium, or both. Although at times it may be difficult to distinguish between information provided for evaluative purposes and information provided for developmental and growth purposes, this appears to be the important difference between ratings and feedback.

References


