

Leniency and Severity Errors in Performance Appraisal in the Context of Collectivist and Individualist Culture

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Abstract: Although the difficulty in carrying out the human resources' practices into life in different cultures is a major problem that the implementers have been handling for years, the "appraisal errors", which are important obstacles in front of an effective performance appraisal, are needed to be examined more deeply in terms of socio-cultural factors. Because, performance appraisals may be affected much by the value judgments that may have quite serious differences with respect to the cultures. Therefore putting forward the effects of the context in which the appraisal errors take place, has a critic importance for making sense of the error reasons and for creating solutions. In this study, leniency and severity errors, those are included in the performance errors, have been examined in the context of collectivist and individualist cultures. Besides, the question as "how do the judgment values of those cultures affect the tendencies of the raters towards leniency and severity error?" has been tried to answer. This theoretical study has revealed that the variety of the cultural differences could affect the tendencies of the raters towards leniency and severity influentially.

Keywords: Performance Appraisal Errors, Leniency and Severity Errors, Collectivist and Individualist Culture.

Introduction

Performance appraisal whose necessity and benefits have been proved by numerous researchers has been presented as an objective and rational function in business management books and guide books; most of its appraisal methods have been developed basing upon the assumption that the raters will be objective and free from prejudice in their observation and decisions. Otherwise; it does not matter how perfectly and impeccable your system works for the errors will be inevitable during the process since the people who will carry out the appraisal and the ones who will be affected by its results are all human beings. When the complexity of today's human behavior patterns and the inadequacy of the appraisal systems in encompassing these behavior patterns are considered, it is obvious that performance appraisal errors will play an important role in the theoretical and the practical researches in the forthcoming years.

The researchers have made great efforts and developed numerous methods in order to find a method which is free of errors. This effort is displayed evidently by Landy and Farr's (1980:82) statements: "Mighty efforts have been made to discover the potential effects of various appraisal formats for many years. The alleged hypothesis states that the instrument being used to obtain the information has a substantial importance on the accuracy and expedience of the obtained information." In fact, one of the reasons of these numerous methods to be able to choose in performance appraisal is the indefinite attempts made by researchers to develop an enduring method against appraisal errors. But, a method which is free of errors has not been developed yet.

The prevalence of appraisal errors are stated by Warmke and Billings (1979:124) by following words: "The subjective appraisals made about the employee's performance are usually get spoiled and corrupted by the errors like halo or leniency." Another comment made by Spool (1978:853) that supports this view and also states that appraisal errors are everywhere: "The methods based on observation are nearly much more vulnerable against human error margin than almost all other methods." The importance of the problem resulting from the appraisal errors is also highlighted by Borman (1979:410): "Unfortunately, performance appraisals are nearly inevitably corrupted by appraisal errors (e.g. halo, leniency error) and they probably present in accurate appraisal results of individuals which were obtained during performance appraisal process."

Proved existence of appraisal errors are an obstacle to the validity and reliability of performance appraisal and have a negative effect on organization employees' beliefs and satisfaction regarding appraisal results. Ilgen

proved that despite the researches done for years to develop and improve this process, the dissatisfaction about performance appraisals have not decreased. Murphy and Cleveland displayed that performance appraisals are hard core target of criticism and complaints and this dissatisfaction have become a norm in most of the companies (Holbrook, 2002:102). Because performance appraisal results form a basis for management decisions and the dispute among performance appraisal results which arise between the uppers and the inferiors probably cause interpersonal conflicts (Greenberg, 1991:51-60). The employees get satisfied with appraisal results only if their beliefs about their performances, which are high, match with the results. Employees consider that the feedbacks are unfair when their appraisal results are low and especially when they get less positive results than their expectations.

As this will be inferred from the explanations given above, typical dependent variable of the performance appraisal researches is the accuracy of the performance measurement and in this context a lot of independent variables (roles, instruments, goals, criteria etc.) have been examined in order to determine their effects. But there is a quite need to examine "the appraisal errors" which are one of the most important factors that have adverse effects on the validity and reliability of performance appraisal and also to research in depth the effects of the context in which these errors took place. In this work, from performance appraisal errors, leniency and severity errors have been examined in the context of collectivist and individualist culture. The main purpose of the work is to display how collectivist and individualist values affect the raters' tendency towards leniency and severity errors. In the framework of this basic purpose, the answers for the following questions are being looked for in this research:

1. How do the collectivist and individualist culture values affect leniency and severity errors?
2. Does the raters' individualist or collectivist cultural background differentiate their tendency towards errors (leniency and severity)?
3. Can the collectivist and individualist culture values be the explanatory of leniency and severity error?

It has been aimed at attaining the goals of this work in the context of these questions. Leniency and severity errors have been theoretically examined in terms of a socio-cultural factor by using secondary data by means of literature study.

Culture and Performance Appraisal Errors

We can define culture in brief as an integrated system consisting of characteristic behavior models of the members that belong to society (Czinkota et al., 1999:35). In other words, culture consists of perception, believing, evaluation, communication and the shared factors which provide acting among the people who share a language, a historical period, and a geographical region (Triandis, 1996:408). Thereby, it is considered that culture has a strong and continuous impact on individual and corporations in all over the world. Especially starting from 1970s, culture has become a controversial concept in terms of culture, business and management. Until recent years, while it is alleged that management is universal, international culture was being ignored but in the recent years it has been started to investigate about the influences of the intercultural differences on the management and it has been proved basing upon the specific researches that cultures affect the individuals and direct them to different behavior models. It has been observed that the people who live in different cultures react differently against similar subject and conditions. Consequently, this intercultural differentiation is an explanatory of important problems since they affect working methods of the corporations, behavior models of the individuals and management styles (Sargut, 2001:137). One of the problems is the errors made in performance appraisal which provide how effectively the human resources are used in the organizations, most outcomes of which are used in managerial operations and actions.

Appraisal errors are judgmental errors which occur while an individual observes and assess the other one (Latham et al., 1975:550-555). What is ideal in performance appraisal is that the appraisal results reflect the accurate, unprejudiced judgments processes. But, as it has been mentioned earlier, since the people are at stake in the appraisal, lots of emotion, needs, attitudes and values involve in the process. Accordingly, it depends on a lot of factors to find out what extend it was created in an unprejudiced way and whether it was really used or not to guide the appraisal. The most important factor among these is the cultural characteristics that the rater possesses.

Leniency and Severity Error, Collectivist and Individualist Culture

Before starting to discuss how cultural differences of the raters affect their tendency towards leniency and severity errors, it is useful to present the definitions of these errors and what collectivist and individualist culture means in order to be able to understand the case.

Leniency error is one of the common errors which are faced in performance appraisals (Ilgen and Feldman, 1983). Leniency error is defined as an error which impels to make higher appraisals compared to other raters and a valid/reliable tendency as to certain raters (Kane et al., 1995:1039). According to another definition, leniency error is the case when the raters unjustly give higher scores, appraisal results. These scores are

evaluated by the distances of middle point of the scale to other scores or by their range to an accurate score (Saal et al., 1980:413-428). In other words, leniency errors limit the used value range and this causes a statistical decrease in the validity.

Just opposite of the leniency error is *severity error* that this is the case when the rater evaluate the employee's performances lower than it actually is (Can et al., 1998:167). In other words, it is the case when the rater evaluates an employee or a group of employees lower than they actually are without taking into account their actual success level. This tendency is usually observed among the raters who are inexperienced and not exactly aware of the factors that affect the performance, whose self-confidence is low and also who get low appraisals. Besides that the desire to show themselves as a perfectionist and an exacting manager and high standards in the corporation play a role in such appraisals (Bayar, 2002).

Collectivism means that people connect tightly to the social environment, the social members' take care of each other and protect the organization's members and interests. *Individualist* means that individuals have loose connections with the social framework and they are responsible for themselves (Hofstede, 1983:79). According to another definition, individualism is the tendency that people only care about their and their families interests (Hudgetts and Luthans, 1993:103). The first main discrepancy between collectivist person and individualist person falls out in the point how these people define themselves. While the collectivist person feels himself dependent on the other members of the group, individualist person displays more independent attitudes. Second discrepancy point falls out in the positioning regarding the goals. While the individualist person's goals differentiate from the goals of the group that he/she belongs to, collectivist person's goals make compliance with the goals of the group. While the individualist person determines his/her collectivist behavior according to his/her personal requirements and the rights which he/she perceives, collectivist person acts group norms according to his/her duties and responsibilities. For a collectivist person, having relationships with internal group and other people comes before rationalism. However individualist person makes rational calculations which keep cost and benefit rates in the front (Sargut, 2001:187).

Collectivist culture individuals have the features of owning alignment, challenge, conflict avoidance and more compatible behavior models. It seems that individual initiatives are not encouraged and the ideas are determined within the group (Hofstede, 1984). On the contrary individualist cultures are described with their features which accept conflict, consistency and put less emphasis on compliance, individual initiative is expected and individual's thought expressions are valuable. Therefore, in individualist cultures it is expected to show greater tendency to opinion diversities.

Performance Appraisal in Collectivist and Individualist Culture

These distinctive features of the societies which have been mentioned above reflect on organizational structures according to dominant culture and accordingly on performance appraisal systems. Here, Hofstede's individualist and collectivist dimension in the research that he carried out in order to explain how and why the people from different cultures act as they will be expository as to be able to understand the issue better. Forasmuch as some performance appraisal researchers claim that collectivist and individualist dimension is the most important cultural dimension which has an impact on performance appraisal. Because, the person who provides the assessments and feedback affect performance appraisal process in many aspects such as the purpose and content of performance appraisal process (Milliman et al., 1998:157)

Hofstede analyzed culture in four dimensions in his study which he carried out on 116,000 employees in 40 countries. These dimensions are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and collectivism, masculinity and femininity. Hofstede's individualism and collectivism dimension corresponds to "the relationship between the individual and collectivism which rifles in a certain society" (Hofstede, 1984:148). To express more explicitly, individualism and collectivism dimension is related to what extent the individuals' goals and need prevail over the groups that is belonged to goals and needs (Triandis, 1989; Hofstede 1984). Individualist societies care for individuals' competition over the group's welfare and individuals define themselves with their own characteristics and success (Fiske et al., 1998). For instance, in such a culture, individuals act according to their personal interests and employee-employers' relations are generally perceived as a business exchange (Seddon, 1987) and freedom of choice and individual initiative are emphasized. Within this culture, most of the multi-sourced performance appraisal systems have been designed to obtain a comprehensive and objective assessment about the individual's performance (London and Smither, 1995; Denisi and Kluger; 2000). Usually, individual performance assessments which have been obtained from various sources are valued. As long as feedback performance develops self-confidence and success, individualists attribute value to constructive and critical feedback (Milliman et al., 1998). The importance of personal relations between the subject and raters has been reduced in order to facilitate to provide the critical feedback and performance development.

On the other hand, due to the collectivist cultures' nature, they have shown a tendency not to overrate the role of the individuals in any case. Thus, in performance appraisal, it is focused on group performance rather

than individual performance of each members of a group. The employees who work in a collectivist culture make an effort to see their own interests above the groups' interests (Hofstede, 1984) and employers recruit the individuals who take place in their groups and whose behavior overlap with the group behavior (Huo and Von Glinow, 1995). For the collectivists, it is very important to save the appearance (Fiske et al., 1998), to reduce the differences and to maintain the harmony and good relations among the group members. The practices which are individual-based human resource management covers is perceived as a threat to the team spirit since it moves attention from group success to the individuals' success.

The Impact of the Raters' Collectivist and Individualist Cultural Background on Their Tendency to Make Mistakes about Leniency and Severity

It is not too surprising that cultural differences which affect organizational structures appraisal systems also have influences on leniency and severity errors from assessment errors. As mentioned before collectivist cultures care about in-target goals togetherness, cooperation, loyalty and commitment; challenges and disputes among group members are ignored at all costs. Therefore, raters in performance appraisal mostly make lenient assessments; so disputes, resentments, in-group this harmony are being ignored (Milliman et al., 1998). The data obtained from feedback sessions proves that the collectivists tend to ignore the disputes among the employees (Cascio and Bailey, 1995).

Within the collectivist cultures, it is more important to ensure compliance with others, to gain a sense of belonging than reflecting a positive personal image which could disrupt the group harmony (Korsgaard et al., 2004:874). To ignore these problems in order not to distort the image may cause the appraisals regarding employee performance to be more lenient and inaccurate. The researchers have revealed in a research that the Malaysians whose individualism is low avoid giving negative feedback and Chinese managers make leniency errors in the appraisals they perform (Chow, 1998; Seddon, 1987). As a support to this, in a research carried out in Republic of China, in which 982 couples who work in 9 different institutions in leader and subordinate positions have been used as subjects, the appraisals regarding performance that individuals carried out on their own are compared to the appraisals regarding inferior performance that were performed by supervisors. Results indicate that Chinese employees assessed their own performance less tolerant than their supervisors. These results contrast with the performance appraisal results which American employees typically do about themselves and are more lenient compared to their inspectors (Farh et al., 1991:129). These results coincide with the results of Hofstede's (1997).

Hofstede has found out in his study that the employees who belong to Republic of China are the most collectivist and American employees are the most individualist. Leniency error which arises among American employees is compatible with view that the individualist appraisers have the impulse to see/perceive themselves as positive as possible.

This view rooted in a profound way in western, individualist tradition which emphasizes individual achievement, personal competence and self-respect. Exaggerated personal perceptions accord with individualist cultures; and don't accord with collectivist cultures which promote interpersonal harmony a interdependence, solidarity and group harmony (Farh et al., 1991:131).

The Effects of Psychological Process on Leniency and Severity Errors

To display the psychological processes regarding the appraisers who have different cultures can lead to some different results as to performance appraisals. Thus, individualists focus on their own uniqueness, to achieve their goals, their internal reference forms, self ego (Oyserman et al., 2002). This case potentially drives them to do harsher assessments on other people's behaviors models. The collectivists think that self-ego may easily be affected by static social environment (Triandis, 2001). For collectivists, happiness implies control and self-restraint in emotional and behavioral expressions. Thus it will be possible to maintain relations away from dispute. Contrary to the judgments of collectivists, the question of causality and attributions are based on social context in which social boundaries and behaviors take place. Collectivists' focus on the case and context (on the attitudes and behaviors of, in other words, on the content and characteristics of cases compared to individualists) in which a behavior is being fulfilled can be a disadvantage to obtain accurate performance appraisals.

Collectivists have higher chances to make leniency error to maintain in-group harmony, because they want to ensure the group to attain its goals and to maintain its happiness. Furthermore, the group members' behaviors can be interpreted in the context of social boundaries (Oyserman et al., 2002). As a result, determined for collectivists rationalism means the importance of determined fixed and static group relations in which the exchange is based on the principles of equality and generosity. While explaining the research results, Smith (2004) claims that in-group harmony in collectivist societies will encourage the individuals to do more tolerant assessments which include consent/acceptance.

In individualist cultures, it is not a big problem for individualists (compared to the collectivists) not to give negative feedback for the fear of creating conflict among the employees. On the contrary, it is a priority to express the attitudes and opinions in an honest way. In addition, individualists may tend to present harsh appraisal results; because task performance and development are more important than the goal of maintaining compatible relations among the employees. According to them, if the old relationships are quite troublesome, new relationships can be easily established. According to the individualists, the relations are perceived as the facilitator factors which serve to obtain their own interests. This makes the appraisal differences between the individualists and collectivist to be noticed easily.

Cultural Differences between the Rater and Ratees

Another case which the culture can have a significant impact on appraisal behavior is the case when the rater and ratees have different cultural backgrounds. For example, since the labor force is culturally more different, this situation may occur often in North American institutions. In these cases, since the rater is not aware of the behavior models within the ratee's culture, the accuracy of the appraisals decrease (Triandis and Brislin, 1984:1006-1017). For instance, an individualist rater may not be focusing on the contributions of the ratee to the group he/she belongs to and may not care his/her team work skills. On the contrary, a rater with a collectivist perspective may put more emphasis on the roles of the ratees in the team, the contributions they make for the achievement of the team's goals and he/she may pay less attention to their individual performance. As a result, these cultural misunderstandings may cause to be fallen in leniency error in one and severity error in another.

Motivation Approaches of the Raters

Another issue that must be dealt with here is the relationship between severity error and motivation in the context of individualism and collectivism. Researchers offered explanations on the effect of motivation behind the appraisers' lenient and severe appraisals. Accordingly, it's possible that managers can make different appraisal regarding the employees' motivation according to their individualist and collectivist cultural background. Increasing number of studies suggest that North Americans for whom individualist values are dominant within the context of business, are less aware of their colleagues' socio-emotional expressions (Sanchez-Burks, 2002). Although the recent intercultural surveys which have been carried out indicate that people constantly say that the money is a factor that satisfies least their needs (Sheldon et al., 2001) an intercultural research which was carried out by Morris and his friends about global company the idea that North Americans bring a "Market Orientation" to their interpersonal relationships, in other words, they evaluate their relationships according to their interests (Morris et al., 2000:97-123). As a support to this research, Miller claims that Western individualism puts a greater emphasis on the role of external factors about the others' behaviors and has a common belief about "self-interest norm" (Miller, 1999:1053-1060). Self-interest norm defends that if any economic interests exist, even if in the cases which employees believe that they are internally motivated, external factors would be more effective. However, within the collectivist cultural contexts that self-interest norm is less determinant, it is expected that managers potentially will pay more attention to the internal factors that motivate the employees. When the managers' who belong to collectivist culture compared to the individualists, their employees will be assessed in the most useful way for the groups. Therefore, if the high appraisal results will mean more employee satisfaction and more compatible relations, the managers will make lenient errors depending on high assessments. In accordance with this, according to Morris and his friends' findings, unlike North American employees who have individualist values, Spanish employees have demonstrated a proximity orientation (having a high emotional commitment with his work-mates) and Chinese employees have demonstrated a family orientation (a self-sacrifice orientation for group) (Morris et al., 2000:97-123).

As a result, in the collectivist cultures, even if the low assessment results are deserved, the motivation decrease among the people at the point of performance development (Longenecker et al., 1987), the raters' tendency to maintain positive relationships with the subjects (Murphy and Cleveland, 1995) may cause them to fall in leniency error.

As it will be understood from the researches, in the performance appraisal, the raters' cultural differences will influence their tendency to fall in leniency and severity errors. An effective performance appraisal system will only be possible with the creation of a system which offers valid and reliable results that are free of errors. In the establishment of such a system, the need for not ignoring cultural differences among the raters, determination of the socio-cultural factors in the error analysis play a critical role.

Conclusion

Performance appraisal has become available in all areas of industry in today's business life and it has become an application which has a strategic competition advantage in the globally severe competitive conditions. In a survey made by Locher and Teel, it has been observed that 89 % of the companies that participated in the survey placed their performance appraisals on a regular basis (Locher and Tell, 1977). Bass and Barrett argued that all institutions have a method regarding employee's performance appraisal that they carry out secretly or explicitly (Bass and Barrett, 1981:259). Despite the increasing popularity of performance appraisal, there is a need to do a further examination as to socio- cultural factors on appraisal errors which affect negatively the performance appraisal activities.

The research indicates that there is a need to do a very good analysis of social and cultural factors in order to be able to explain the variability of leniency and severity errors are judicial errors which the raters do during the appraisal process. So it is a result of distorted judicial process that here raters' tendency to fall in leniency and severity errors. To determine the intercultural differences in the context of leniency and severity errors is very important both as a reflection of cultural differences on independent dimension and also as to intercultural research methodology and the inferences in terms of emic/ethic features.

An aspect of the methodology will be emic when it is associated with a culture, in other words, only when it moves in a certain way in a culture. If it works in a similar way in many cultures then it is considered to be independent from culture and it is called ethic. When seen from this perspective, our study was to reveal an emic reality. What this reality is that raters' cultural differences affect their tendency to fall in leniency and severity errors.

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