Key Messages for FAS Managers on Differentiating Performance

Overview

This year, FAS managers are being asked to approach assessments differently than in prior years. We are looking through a new lens in this regard and we need your help.

For FY15, when you assess the performance of your employees, please evaluate your staff members’ performance based on the description attached to the assessment, not on the assessment label itself. Understanding these descriptions is key to understanding how you should assess your staff members’ job performance.

1. Dean Smith’s goal for the FAS has been for managers to provide credible performance assessments.

- To date, FAS assessments have been out of alignment with the rest of Harvard and with other U.S. employers.

- FY14 FAS assessments as compared to the rest of Harvard:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harvard School</th>
<th>Average Assessment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FAS</td>
<td>4.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSPH</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEAS</td>
<td>4.09</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Harvard Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.91</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>HBS</td>
<td>3.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>HKS</td>
<td>3.57</td>
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<td>HMS</td>
<td>3.27</td>
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FY14 FAS assessments as compared to average performance assessments of other U.S. employers (including non-profits):

Why focus on assessments?

- Because it will enable FAS managers to provide true feedback and performance coaching to FAS employees. (Our engagement survey data has consistently shown that FAS staff are looking for credible feedback and performance coaching.)

- Because it will allow FAS managers to effectively identify their strongest performers.

- For FAS exempt and non-HUCTW, non-exempt staff members, calibrating performance enables the FAS to truly pay for performance. (‘My performance has an impact on my pay’ has been the single best predictor of engagement at Harvard.)

- Because arriving at a common approach to assessing performance across the FAS increases fairness and equity for all FAS employees (lessens “easy graders” vs. “hard graders” disparity).

- Because the data shows us that we are out of alignment with the rest of Harvard and with the majority of other U.S. employers.
2. Given this, starting this year, FAS managers are asked to approach assessments differently than in prior years.

How to approach this:

- When you assess the performance of your employees, evaluate performance based on the description attached to the assessment, not on the assessment label itself.

- Your direct report whose performance is best described as:
  
  “Consistently demonstrates effective performance…reflective of a fully qualified and experienced individual…who gets the job done and effectively prioritizes work… [and who] achieves valuable accomplishments in several critical areas of the job” should be assessed as “solid.”

- Your direct report whose performance is best described as:
  
  “Consistently demonstrates high levels of performance… [and who is] viewed as a role model in position… [and who] demonstrates high levels of effort, effectiveness, and judgment with limited or no supervision” should be assessed as “strong.”

- Only those few employees whose:
  
  “Contributions have tremendous and consistently positive impact and value to the department and/or the organization… [who have] unique, often one-time achievements that measurably improve progress towards organizational goals… [who are] easily recognized as a top performer compared to peers… and viewed as an excellent resource for providing training, guidance, and support to others…demonstrates high level capabilities and proactively takes on higher levels of responsibility” should be assessed as “leading” this year.

  - Managers should discuss staff whose performance merits a “leading” assessment with their divisional administrative dean or unit head, as appropriate.

  - At a divisional level, no more than 15% of staff should be assessed as “leading.”
Your direct report who:

“Is working toward gaining proficiency... [who] demonstrates satisfactory performance inconsistently... [and who] achieves some but not all goals and is acquiring necessary knowledge and skills. And for new employees: [who] are coming up to speed with their job duties as appropriate, based on their tenure in the position” should be assessed as “building performance.”

- Managers are encouraged to designate this description to the newest employees in their group.
- Given this guidance, FAS HR recognizes that a “building” assessment for new staff members is appropriate, and does not generally indicate that performance issues are present.

Your direct report who:

“Demonstrates inadequate performance and shows little or no improvement... [and whose] knowledge, skills, and abilities have not been demonstrated at appropriate levels” should be assessed as “not meeting expectations.”

- These staff members may already be in progressive discipline.
- Your staff member should already be aware of performance issues at hand when you assess their performance as “not meeting expectations.”

3. Calibration of performance assessments

- Before finalizing performance assessments, we strongly encourage you to calibrate, as appropriate, with other managers in your unit or department to ensure consistency and fairness.

- Your divisional leadership will work with you, as appropriate, to calibrate your assessments across your group or department.

- More about calibration:
  - What is it: An approach for reaching alignment around performance assessments, calibration is a way for managers (within a department or group) to align their thinking around the related strengths and contributions of their employees.
Why do it: So you can get to alignment on where your employees fall in terms of performance for purposes of fairness and consistency. Having this candid conversation early on (so varying perspectives and views can be shared) is important.

How to approach it: Managers should meet early in the performance review phase to share their preliminary assessments and to explain their reasoning to support their assessment. Managers are open to a range of feedback, including varying perspectives based on the experiences and observations of others. This broader lens helps managers reach a consensus on how employees should be assessed within a department or group.

4. Keep in Mind

- For FAS exempt and non-HUCTW, non-exempt staff members, this year’s 3% merit increase (for “solid” and “strong” performance) is higher than the highest available increase last year (2.75%) for “leading” performance.

- “Strong” and “solid” assessments are positive indicators of performance. Given this new lens, FAS candidates for lateral job moves who are assessed as “strong” or “solid” will be well positioned to be considered for a new FAS role or opportunity.

- FAS staff will be provided with guidelines for completing self evaluations that focus on the descriptions of performance, and will specify the very high level of performance needed to qualify as leading.

- Your HR Consultant is available to help you think through your performance assessments and performance calibration.