

# APPRAISING INDIVIDUAL WORK IN A TEAM SETTING

## Introduction

The process of appraising individual employee performance in the Federal government is governed by the requirements of Title 5, United States Code, Chapter 43, and Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 430. Critical elements, one of the building blocks of a performance plan necessary to appraise individual performance, and a new concept, "additional performance element," are defined as follows in the CFR:

Section 430.203 Definitions.

*Additional performance element* means a dimension or aspect of individual, team, or organizational performance that is not a critical or non-critical element. Such elements are not used in assigning a summary level but, like critical and non-critical elements, are useful for purposes such as communicating performance expectations and serving as the basis for granting awards. Such elements may include but are not limited to, objectives, goals, program plans, work plans, and other means of expressing expected performance.

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*Critical element* means a work assignment or responsibility of such importance that unacceptable performance on the element would result in a determination that an employee's overall performance is unacceptable. Such elements shall be used to measure performance only at the individual level (emphasis added).

Further the Headquarters performance management system implementation plan calls for at least one non-critical element. Non-critical elements are defined as:

**Non-critical element is a dimension or aspect of individual, team, or organizational performance, exclusive of a critical element, that is used in assigning a summary level. Such elements may include, but are not limited to, objectives, goals, program plans, work plans, and other means of expressing expected performance.**

In response to downsizing and to the less hierarchical approach to program management articulated in the National Performance Review, the agency and others have shifted the responsibility for project implementation, the initiation and completion of special assignments, and service to customers from individuals to work teams. Those assignments and responsibilities must be measured and evaluated. How can that be done in view of that part of the regulation underlined above? The following guidance adapts the basic requirements of performance management to a team setting.

## **The Development of Performance Plans**

A performance plan must still be written for each employee regardless of the participation by the employee on one or more work teams. If teams have been introduced, this process could be adapted from the traditional method in which the supervisor and the employee develop the plan, to have a group of employees who either occupy similar positions or are member of a team prepare individual critical elements, non-critical elements, or "additional elements," that would apply to each member of the team, as appropriate. As with all plans, the plan prepared by the team would be subject to the rating and reviewing officials' approval.

### **Critical Elements**

As with plans that are unique to individuals, critical elements for team members should address discrete work assignments or responsibilities, even though the same critical elements are applied to a number of people. Activities or goals and objectives are important to the clarification of critical elements but should not be articulated in the elements themselves; there is a specific place on the performance plan/appraisal form for listing tasks. Please note that the critical element(s) listed and clarified should not be "works (functions, performs, etc.) on a team," or words to that effect. Rather, the elements should describe the activity of the team member toward the goal, objective, etc. toward which the team was formed.

### **Tasks for Critical Elements**

The tasks for critical elements related to work performed on teams would not differ from tasks that would be prepared for an individual's elements. Please note that the tasks of the element should only address performance that is under the employee's control. Accordingly, care should be taken when preparing the tasks to ensure that the work of teammates does not adversely influence the employee's own work measurements.

### **Non-Critical Elements and Additional Elements**

As noted in the regulations, critical elements must measure individual performance. This leaves it to non-critical and additional elements to measure team performance. However, additional elements may not be used in calculating an employee's summary rating. Neither type of element may be used to support any type of performance-based corrective action. Accordingly, either of these elements may be used to address a team's responsibility or they may address the employee's contribution to the team.

### **Tasks for Additional Elements**

Tasks for non-critical elements and additional elements may be more loosely constructed than tasks for critical elements. However, if the intent of the rating official is to use additional elements as developmental or as pilot testing of new methods of work, it is

important that specific tasks be listed. Perhaps the increased flexibility that is associated with additional elements may be used here to measure interpersonal communications, or input into meetings, or other, less quantifiable behaviors that are difficult to integrate into critical elements' tasks.

### **Assigning Work and Monitoring Performance**

Although use of work teams may well make implementation of projects and customer service easier because of the development of a back-up system and a collegial environment that the concept of teamwork implies, the adequate monitoring of a team's work may be initially more difficult.

#### **Making Work Assignments**

A performance plan "assignment sheet" has been developed for use by those who assign work. The sheet is attached to this guidance. It may be used for critical elements, non-critical elements or additional elements. If the work assignment is associated with a critical element, it is important for the person assigning work to the team to identify the persons on the team responsible for specific actions related to the assignment. As an alternative, the person assigning the work can give the assignment to the team and have the team report back on who is doing what. The purpose of this exercise is to ensure that individuals are given proper credit for activities performed and, conversely, not penalized for the lack of performance by others. If it turns out that more than one person worked equally on tasks and shared equal responsibility for the measures applied to the tasks, they can all be informed that they will be assessed equally. If work assignments are on-going, and/or are not necessarily distributed through the rating official, and if there are no separable responsibilities within the team, then a reporting mechanism should be developed by the rating official and the team that would allow the rating official to determine who is doing what; or, in the alternative that would inform all team members that tasks, responsibilities and credit will be apportioned equally.

#### **Input From Various Sources Regarding Performance**

Because employees are frequently grouped into work teams in order to provide customer service or to interact with the world outside the immediate unit, it is reasonable for the rating official to tap those outside sources for feedback on the team's performance. Please note that the Headquarters performance management implementation plan requires that only management officials may provide feedback to rating officials; that feedback must be in writing. The information about the team cannot be confined to the customer and the rating official, though. All team members should be aware of whom the rating official will consult during the performance period and how the persons consulted responded. There should be no "secret" source of evaluation material; information that is not shared with employees cannot be used in the formal appraisal process.

## **Progress Reviews**

Progress reviews may have to be conducted in stages: two progress reviews for the individual employee and two progress reviews for the team as a whole. The need for progress reviews for the team as a whole is especially important if they are to share equally in responsibility/assessment/credit as described above or if they are also to be evaluated through the use of non-critical or "additional" elements related to their contributions to the team.

## **Evaluating and Rewarding Performance**

### **Appraising Performance**

Prior to the formal appraisal, the rating official should ensure that he/she has all available information upon which to base a rating. The rating official should share with the team the information and the sources of that information. He/she should give the team an opportunity to provide more information or feedback that may have been overlooked or that was otherwise unavailable. Whereas soliciting more information from team members is appropriate, requiring a summary of work performed from the team as a pre-requisite to rating the employees is not proper.

After the reviewing official has signed the performance appraisal, the rating official should meet with individual employees to discuss their ratings in the usual manner. If there were non-critical or "additional elements" used for team performance, a meeting to discuss the rating on those elements may be held as a group.

### **Rewarding Performance**

Individual performance will be rewarded according to the methods described in the directive. "Additional elements" used for the team's performance cannot be calculated when the summary rating is prepared. However, if the additional elements indicate that there is some behavior or interaction or developmental aspect that merits rewarding, the team could be eligible for a special act award or other informal award granted by the team's Headquarters.