Peer Performance Appraisal of Reference Librarians in a Public Library

ABSTRACT

The reference librarians at Ramsey County Public Library, a suburban Twin Cities public library, developed an innovative performance appraisal system that includes self-evaluation and a peer group discussion. Each librarian rates her/himself on a thirteen-page list of reference librarian competencies and assesses the effect of other factors on his/her ability to do the job. A summary of these two parts plus a report on past objectives, a draft of future objectives, and a list of prioritized duties are given to each member of the reference department prior to a one-hour group discussion. Initial evaluations of the process were primarily positive; all twelve participants wished to continue its use. Relating competencies to objectives resulted in a specific self-development plan. Relating self-development needs and job duties facilitated priority setting. The process has now been expanded to include nonprofessional public services personnel, technical services staff, and branch libraries.

INTRODUCTION

The past ten years have seen a publication explosion in the subjects of management theory and organizational structure. Phrases like participatory management, democratic management, matrix manage-
ment structure, horizontal organization, etc. are used to describe the “new management.” This new management is characterized by greater individual responsibility, authority, and control over one’s job, as well as by recognition that many jobs are now being accomplished by groups or teams of people working together. Studies of job satisfaction and motivation indicate greater individual responsibility, involvement in projects, and commitment; and the opportunity to change, to learn, and to develop on the job results in higher levels of satisfaction.

Stanley Davis (1987) proposes the theory that the organization and structure within which people work is the last element to change when revolutionary developments happen in the workplace. Davis’ theory is that we are now in the early stages of the organizational changes brought about by the “post-industrial” workplace (p. 6).

One area which has particularly lagged behind even in organizations adopting much of the “new management” is performance appraisal. Most performance appraisal is still implemented in an authoritarian style and is based on a theoretical structure which is suited to a hierarchial management style and organizational structure. That is, it is a one-on-one judgment by the supervisor (“boss”) of the worker (“employee”)—more akin to the roles of the king and the feudal vassal than to the coach and team or to the members of a group of co-equals working together.

A recognition of this lack of congruity between their performance appraisal system and the kind of management structure they had developed led the twelve librarians in the Ramsey County Public Library reference department to experiment with peer performance appraisal. For ten years, the reference staff had been involved in increasing collegial and participatory management practices in the department. Starting in the early 1970s, they began referring to themselves as a “team” with a manager. Regular weekly departmental meetings, at which matters needing decisions were discussed and decided on by vote, were initiated. Management duties such as scheduling the desk, coordinating selection of reference materials, training of new staff, etc., were gradually allocated among the various staff members, partly on the basis of who was good at doing a particular task and partly on a rotating basis so that each person could experience and learn several tasks. As time went on, the person in the department head position was handling no more administrative duties than any other member of the department. In the fall of 1983, the department head transferred to a branch library. The vacancy was filled so the reference group had the same number of people, but no department head was named. Instead, the department adopted the term project manager to describe the duties of the several
staff members who were in charge of the various management tasks. Developing a peer performance appraisal system seemed a logical next step for a group of professionals working as a team.

During this same ten-year period, another component of a participatory management system was established. The reference department began writing annual departmental objectives, and staff members were required to write individual annual objectives. By the time the peer performance appraisal experiment was initiated, all librarians wrote six-month objectives as well. Although the staff members were clearly involved in collegial management practices, the department was still using the standard performance appraisal form and the supervisor interview required by the county civil service. The Associate Director of the Library was acting as the supervisor for this purpose.

Over the years, the department members talked about the inadequacy of the civil service check-list and discussed trying other systems. Twice during the ten-year period, the county brought in outside consultants and held workshops on performance appraisal. The county system was acknowledged as unsatisfactory yet remained in place.

In writing their departmental objectives for 1984, the reference department included an objective to experiment with peer performance appraisal. A task force of department members was formed to work out a proposal. The Library Director consulted with the County Director of Civil Service, who agreed that the experiment could be undertaken provided that interim reports were made to the Library Director.

The peer performance task force proposed guidelines which were subsequently agreed to by the entire reference department staff. Those guidelines were:

- A competency checklist would be developed and used to aid reference personnel in judging themselves.
- Each staff person would draft his/her own professional objectives.
- The approach to evaluation would be constructive rather than critical.
- Each staff member could expect help and suggestions from their colleagues on projects and problems.

The task force reviewed the literature on peer performance appraisal in librarianship and found that the systems described involved a committee and/or departmental chairperson and not the entire staff. To the Ramsey County task force, a "peer" system meant that each person would have equal weight or status in the process. They concluded that a peer system appropriate to the Ramsey County situation did not exist and that they would have to develop their own system. At
this point, the task force contacted the state library agency consultant in library research, one of whose areas of expertise was librarian competency research, who agreed to work with the task force.

The task force and consultant met and refined the criteria for the system. Two additional important concerns were identified. Because many of the tasks and projects in the reference department were accomplished by two or more librarians working together, an individual's achievements were affected by their colleagues' work. An individual's performance was also dependent in part on other factors over which they had little or no control, such as library funding.

Thus, the amended criteria for peer evaluation included the individual's competencies; a "committee-of-the-whole" approach to peer appraisal; evaluation of the team and of projects as well as of individuals; a consideration of other factors relevant to performance such as budget, equipment, etc.; and individual objective setting. To meet the criteria, a system was developed which included the following parts:

- a self-assessment based on competencies,
- a self-assessment of factors affecting performance other than competencies,
- a listing of past and future objectives, and
- a one-hour group discussion for each individual based on the self-assessment and individual objectives.

Developing the Competencies

The consultant agreed to develop an initial comprehensive, reference librarian competency list which the group would tailor to their particular department.

Two competency identification studies had been conducted in Minnesota with public library personnel. In those studies, the competencies had been identified by those performing the functions and by observers, such as supervisors, familiar with the job. Both studies used the job element method to identify and rate the elements, i.e., knowledge, abilities (including skills), attitudes, and personal traits required by a worker to perform a job and included both observable and unobservable elements. The terminology used was consistent with Bloom's (1956) taxonomies which describe the precise levels of knowledge and attitudes required by a job. One study identified competencies for performance at the entry level, the other at a superior level (Office of Public Libraries and Interlibrary Co-operation, 1980; Mahmoodi, 1978.) The authors were involved in both studies.

The consultant used the competencies identified by these two studies as the basis for the list compiled for the Ramsey County Library reference staff. The King Study (1984) competencies for the reference function
in public libraries had been tested for validity by the Ramsey County Library staff, and were compared with the compiled list. Managerial and automation-related competencies were developed by staff members based on their own experience and a literature search. The compilation of competencies from these sources was then tested by the staff for its validity in the Ramsey County Library setting. The edited list was used by the participants, in preparation for their peer appraisal discussions, to self-assess their most outstanding or significant competencies and those competencies which were their top priority for improvement.

Related Factors

As noted by the task force, an individual's job performance was affected by other factors in addition to personal competencies. Factors within the workplace, within the individual's personal life, and from the environment may have a positive or a negative effect on performance.

The factors, identified through a literature search and developed by the consultant, are listed in Appendix C, "Factors Affecting the Level of Performance." This listing of factors became the second part of each individual's preparation for the peer appraisal. Each individual listed those factors which affected his/her performance and summarized the effect.

Objectives

The individual's preparation for the peer appraisal also included objective setting. Prior to adopting the peer appraisal system, each librarian had been developing six-month objectives using the system outlined in M. Scott Myers' Every Employee a Manager (1981, p. 240). For each performance appraisal with the department head or Associate Director, they had summarized, on one sheet of paper, their responses to Myers' questions:

1. What were your major achievements during the past six months?
2. What are your goals for the next six months?
3. What are your long-term goals?

Each person's objectives had been modified by negotiation with the department head. For the peer performance appraisal, this practice was continued with the person listing her/his previous six-month objectives, briefly reporting on their current status and adding a draft of the next six-months objectives for consideration by the group.

These four parts prepared by the individual—competency assessment, other performance factors, previous objectives, and new objectives—were summarized on one side of an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet in a
standard format. Once they had experienced the first two peer appraisal discussions, the group expressed a need to add priorities and job functions to the information provided to the group so that competencies and objectives could be discussed within those parameters. As a result, a section requesting a listing of job functions (duties, responsibilities, etc.) in a self-determined priority order (time, importance, etc.) was added to the form (see Appendix A). This revised self appraisal form replaced the official civil service form for library and county use. Individuals, as they were upcoming subjects of the peer appraisal discussions, distributed copies of their completed form to their colleagues. The individual’s responses would be the basis for the peer discussion. Following the group appraisal discussion, the individual revised the responses as agreed upon within the group. This revised self-appraisal form was then placed in the individual’s personnel file.

**Peer Discussion**

The procedure agreed upon by the group for the initial round of appraisals was that each person’s discussion was to last for one hour. These discussions were scheduled one per week. Members of the peer performance task force agreed to be the first and second subjects for the process. Objectives for the peer discussion were: honest assessment; constructive criticism; problem solving for the individual and the group; and clarification of functions, objectives, and priorities.

To participate in and be comfortable in a group without an assigned leader, each individual had to have group process skills and be willing to assume various group member responsibilities. The consultant provided the group with a discussion skills outline, “Tips for Peer Evaluation Participants” (see Appendix D). Since the majority of the participants had worked together for more than five years and had participated in various team efforts, their group process skills and trust in each other in a group problem-solving setting were already highly developed.

At the beginning of the one-hour group session, a few minutes were allowed for reading the individual’s written responses to the items on the self appraisal form. Then the first subject for discussion was the competencies the individual had listed as those five she/he considered to be outstanding and those five that were top priority for improvement. The initiator of the discussion could be any member of the group, including the individual whose performance was being evaluated. The individual might volunteer or be asked to give specific examples of his/her strengths or needs for improvement. A member of the group might begin by giving specific examples of an identified strength he/
she had observed in the person. Another member might ask for clarification of something listed as needing improvement by requesting specific reasons why the individual considered it a deficiency.

After discussing the individual's strengths and needs for improvement, the group would discuss the "factors affecting level of performance." On the self-appraisal form, the individual was asked to identify those factors which most hindered performance and those which most influenced good performance. For each factor, the group would elicit specific instances and examples of how the person was affected. They then turned to group problem solving and identified solutions or strategies. The group often identified hindrances to good performance they had in common with the individual and would spend some time sharing similar experiences. These shared problems would then be referred to the regularly scheduled departmental meetings for problem solving.

As the group turned to the topic of objectives, they acknowledged accomplishments, analyzed progress towards previous six-month objectives, and did problem solving on how the unmet objectives might be accomplished. They also accepted or rejected objectives proposed for the next six months. The group often used the job functions for understanding objectives.

When discussing objectives the person was proposing for the following six months, the group used all items on the self-appraisal form—competencies, factors, job functions and priorities, and objectives—as well as their knowledge of departmental and library goals and objectives to help the individual set realistic objectives. They would suggest objectives and strategies for using personal strengths as well as improving the abilities of the individual; they would also suggest options and resources for meeting personal developmental objectives.

At times, honest co-assessment could only be achieved through use of confrontation and conflict resolution techniques. When there were conflicts, the consultant reminded the group that peer discussion offered such an opportunity for resolution of conflict and obligated them to handle conflict openly and in a non-threatening manner. Suggestions for revising the individual's responses on the form were made throughout the discussion, and agreement was negotiated between the individual and the group.

The closing questions of the discussion were, "Has everything been discussed that you think should have been?" and "Are there ways in which we could help you further?" Following the discussion, the self-appraisal form was modified by the individual on the basis of the discussion, then checked by a member of the group to verify that it truly reflected changes agreed upon in the discussion. This form was
then turned in as the official evaluation form to the Library Administrative Office and, subsequently, to the County Civil Service Department.

PROJECT EVALUATION

The project was evaluated by the state library agency consultant. Evaluation procedures used included a telephone interview with each person following her/his individual peer discussion and a questionnaire distributed four months after the first round of appraisal discussions. Following the second round of appraisals, another telephone interview was conducted with each person. Process observation of the discussions was also part of the evaluation.

The first telephone interviews took place within two days of the individual’s performance appraisal peer discussion. Nearly all participants reported experiencing feelings ranging from uncertainty to apprehension and anxiety prior to their appraisal discussion. However, half of the participants noted that their feelings of nervousness and uneasiness were mixed with feelings of trust and of being secure, open, and confident. After their individual appraisal discussions, all but one noted positive feelings, including feeling reinforced, supported, a member of the group, appreciated, and more self-confident as a result of the experience. One third added they felt relieved and satisfied. One person expressed feeling let down and disappointed because of having a personal incident aired.

All but one considered the peer appraisal process worthwhile. Two had had doubts about the process prior to participating but had found it beneficial. All but the one person expressing disappointment were willing to participate in the process again.

The participants were asked about the self-assessment exercise used prior to the group discussion. They considered the exercise helpful because it gave them the opportunity to organize their thoughts, a vocabulary for communicating about themselves to others, concrete examples to use, and an awareness of their own and others’ personal priorities and objectives. Some considered the self-assessment exercise as valuable as the peer performance discussion because of the self knowledge and understanding they gained. One considered the self-assessment part of the process only somewhat helpful.

Each person was asked several questions concerning the group discussion:
1. Did you participate fully?
2. Were you heard?
3. Did the participation of the others help/hinder?
4. Was what was said of you accurate/inaccurate? Helpful/useless? Vague/specific?
5. Were you satisfied?
6. Were important issues aired?
7. What was helpful, not helpful?

All felt they had participated fully, had been heard, that important issues had been aired, and that the discussion had been helpful. Two-thirds of the participants considered what was said of them to be accurate, helpful, and specific. One reported that the suggestions given were too vague to be helpful, another reported being uncomfortable about a confrontation, and a third wanted more direction for personal improvement.

When asked what was most useful about the discussion, one half of the participants identified the problem-solving aspect. Some mentioned the opportunity to clarify their specific job duties and others considered receiving support, appreciation, and feedback from their colleagues as most useful to them. Only four responded to what aspect of the discussion was least useful. They identified as not useful both lack of concrete suggestions and descriptions of specific situations.

Participants were asked whether their knowledge of themselves and others had changed and whether they anticipated making any personal changes based upon the experience. One half learned more about themselves; one half, more about others. Half expected to be making personal changes as a result of the experience; half did not.

Written Survey

Four months after the first round of peer appraisal discussions, participants were asked to respond to a survey on whether any personal changes had occurred as a result of the experience and whether the process fulfilled functions usually associated with performance appraisal. Ten of the eleven respondents (the twelfth had retired during this period) had experienced personal change they considered attributable to use of the technique. They reported improved ability in setting personal objectives and priorities, increased sense of responsibility, and self-identification as a committed professional. An increased willingness to share with other team members and to learn from and problem-solve with others was also attributed to the peer appraisal experience. Other changes reported were being more at ease in making decisions and expressing ideas, being more confident about abilities, and being more tolerant of others. Eight of the eleven also experienced change in others. They reported as examples of this change an increase in the team approach to problem-solving among their
colleagues, an increase in mutual understanding, improved communication, and openness. They also reported less stress, higher morale, and more accommodation of requests for specialized duties.

Survey respondents acknowledged some of these changes reported could be attributed to other factors as well. They identified as other possible contributors to the changes: committee assignments, added experience, influence of project manager and associate director; personnel rotation, stability of the reference work force, other problem-solving techniques tried, and personal observation and motivation. Those reporting little or no change resulting from the use of peer appraisal identified increased workload, lack of time, and preoccupation with personal problems as factors which may have contributed to their not experiencing change during this period.

FUNCTIONS OF PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

Fifteen functions of performance appraisal were listed. Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of the peer appraisal process for fulfilling each function on a scale of 1-7. (1 = very effective, 4 = not different from other evaluation processes, 6 = not effective at all, 7 = have not observed.) Of the functions which are listed below, the majority of the respondents rated the peer appraisal process as effective to very effective in serving each function with the exception of making employment decisions. For this function, three had not observed a relationship and two others rated peer appraisal as no more effective than other evaluation processes in making employment decisions.

The fifteen performance appraisal functions which the respondents used to rate the effectiveness of the peer appraisal were:

1. learning about others with whom one works,
2. providing performance feedback to colleagues,
3. eliciting feedback from colleagues,
4. supporting job development,
5. providing ideas about learning and personal development needs,
6. improving work relationships,
7. acknowledging work that was done well,
8. creating a base for modification of behavior,
9. improving work focus,
10. putting fears to rest,
11. facilitating personnel planning,
12. improving communication skills,
13. improving productivity,
14. identifying work that could have been done better, and
15. making employment decisions, i.e., identifying candidates for branch and project management, etc.

They were also asked for further comments on the process. They identified being better able to co-assess personal plans, understanding the relationship of their and others' individual goals and objectives and their day-to-day activities, being able to relate better with coworkers by giving and receiving feedback and support, and being able to benefit from group problem-solving through the peer appraisal process.

Two individuals reported, however, that they remained hesitant about participating in peer appraisal, one giving as a reason a personal crisis and the other, the possibility of “group think.” Some noted that the group could improve in identifying needed changes, in confronting one another about problem behavior, and in being critical about each other's work. They added that more experience with the peer appraisal process might increase open communication.

Second Interviews

After a second round of peer appraisal discussions, the participants were also interviewed by phone. Once again, they expressed positive reactions to the process. They identified the following as benefits:

- a positive change in relationships related to increased understanding of one another;
- being able to use personal strengths, identified through the process, in facing new challenges such as the implementation of an automated system;
- greater and more accurate self-knowledge;
- willingness to be more open;
- peer evaluation of personal accomplishments;
- solving problems productively and with quality, e.g., developing strategies for working with staff shortages and being overworked;
- seeing the wholeness of one's job and of one's role in the institution;
- identifying personal needs, e.g., for additional training in supervisory skills;
- understanding nonverbal expressions;
- understanding that compensating for others' shortcomings is more stressful than confrontation;
- learning to whom to speak to get things done;
- reorganizing work in own area of responsibility;
- becoming positive about the process, especially because of its problem-solving potential; and
- learning how to compensate for personal uneasiness in confrontations.
When asked about changes needed in the process, the majority saw no change needed at that time but were open to the idea of possible future change. Two suggested that other procedures to provide one-on-one feedback, such as coaching and mentoring, should be used in conjunction with peer appraisal. When asked about scheduling of the process, some wanted the rounds of discussions to be scheduled every six months. Having the benefit of group problem-solving focused on their own problems and objectives, they wished that opportunity to be made available more often than once a year.

CONSULTANT OBSERVATIONS

The consultant observed both the first and second rounds of peer discussion. She and the group discussed her observations on content and process at the end of each individual peer discussion. The group learned from this evaluation to recognize and interpret nonverbal gestures, to gain confidence in situations which demanded confrontation, to assign problems to appropriate groups for solving, and to assume various group process roles as needed.

In her evaluation of a group without a designated leader, the consultant observed various leadership behaviors. The discussions were led by the interviewee or any other member of the group. If the interviewee appeared to want to be in control of the discussion, he or she would lead the discussion. In this case, other group members would assure that all sections of the self-assessment form were covered by intervening when needed. If the interviewee seemed to not want to initiate the discussion, another group member, usually self-selected, would take the lead by asking the first question. By the second round, interviewees tended to lead their own discussions.

As they became more experienced in the process, all became more skilled in isolating problems, working through conflict, giving specific examples of an individual's strengths and needs for improvement, and understanding when certain personal traits needed to be accommodated.

Members of the group were supportive of one another. They helped those lacking self-confidence to make statements about themselves; they were empathetic about problems and frustrations shared; they helped one another analyze problems; they offered options for solutions; they listened; they reminded one another that the five competencies needing improvement were to be provided for in the objectives; they cajoled, if needed. Phrases that became part of each discussion included "What could help you?" and "How could we help you improve?" Each discussion ended with "Have we discussed everything you wanted to discuss?"
CONCLUSION

The peer evaluation technique met all four objectives: honest co-assessment, constructive criticism, problem-solving for individual and group, and clarification of functions, objectives, and priorities. The technique offered both self and group assessment of factors that affected an individual’s performance. Participants voiced satisfaction with both their self-assessment, which involved responding to the questions on the self-appraisal sheet, and the group discussion, which assessed, validated, and corrected the individual’s responses. Two-thirds considered what was said of them to be accurate and specific. Both parts—the self-appraisal and the group discussion—were necessary to achieve this objective. As the group accepted and used confrontation and conflict resolution, they reported even more openness and satisfaction with their personal appraisals by others and their appraisals of others. The technique met the objective of constructive criticism. The participants viewed the criticism of themselves as accurate, helpful, and specific. A few wished for even more specific comments. The group adopted the practice of helping individuals incorporate changes which needed to be made into the following six months’ objectives.

The problem-solving portion of peer evaluation is one of its outstanding features. The group problem solving for the individual with its clarification of issues, examples of specific situations, and suggestions of strategies and resources the individual may use led to evaluative comments such as the following:

Changes in technology are accompanied with changing relationships and procedures. Peer evaluation makes us aware of how to use our strengths in such situations.

We need peer evaluation every six months for problem solving.

I have everyone's attention on me and my problems for an hour—wonderful!

Alleviates feeling of being overworked when we know we will have an opportunity to problem-solve.

The clarification of functions, objectives and priorities were achieved by use of the self-appraisal form as well as within the discussion. The individual was asked to self-identify these on the form, and the group used these self-identified items as a basis for their discussion. Perceptions were clarified and changed by the discussion.

The peer evaluation process as used by the Ramsey County staff accomplished the objectives set by the group as well as fulfilled the functions of performance appraisal identified in the literature. Its success might be attributable in part to the Ramsey County staff's having experience with various participative techniques, trusting in their leader, being accustomed to innovative approaches used in the library, and having other experiences with team organization. However, the use of
this technique clearly improved the problem solving of the group, the self-knowledge of the individual, and the clarification of functions, objectives, priorities and perceptions.

This system of employee performance evaluation strengthens and fits in with participatory management in two valuable ways: (1) the process contributes to establishing an environment of trust, and (2) the process provides the opportunity for the communication and discussion needed for coordination and setting of priorities. The work of individual professionals and the various group projects involving some but not all of the group can be integrated into a logical departmental plan.

Trust is established and fostered by the repeated experience of discussing their individual jobs and objectives and their commitment to providing information for people. The individuals' self-esteem is enhanced by seeing themselves as their colleagues see them and by having their colleagues validate their self-assessment. They are "empowered" by this enhanced self-esteem, by the support of and the help given them by their colleagues, and by their acknowledged commitment to the projects each manages. They and their colleagues benefit from reaching mutual agreement on each person's objectives and priorities. As an additional benefit, the clarification of objectives and functions and agreement upon priorities allow the individual to ask for and receive help without worrying about personal image and status as perceived by others.

Discussing activities and projects as they relate to each individual and that person's work objectives allows for continual readjustment of priorities and refinement of projects as each person's perspective is taken into account by the group. A work group such as the Ramsey County reference department can truly become a team which minimizes the effect of individual shortcomings, which benefits from the strengths of each individual, and which creates a whole greater than the sum of its parts through using management techniques that recognize coworkers as co-equals, such as the peer appraisal process described herein.

Subsequent Experience with the Peer Appraisal Process

Five years after the initial experience with peer appraisal, the Ramsey County reference librarians are still using this process. In the intervening five years, the process has been expanded so that the majority of Ramsey County Library employees are evaluated in this way.

Five years have resulted in few changes in the way the reference department practices peer appraisal. The list of competencies has proved remarkably stable. Twice in five years, a formal process of revision of the list has been carried out. The first revision resulted from the
introduction of an integrated automated system into the library. Changes and expansion were needed in the Information Technology section of the list; changes in database searching procedures also provided some new competencies for this section. An example of an added competency is "is able to teach users to do computerized searching." At the time these changes were made, the entire list was reviewed by all the reference librarians but no other changes were made.

The second revision was handled with the assistance of the state library consultant. She provided the librarians with some readings about the future of library service and then met with them to brainstorm new or revised competencies. Except for some editorial changes to clarify meaning, the established list was not changed. A carefully prepared list of competencies appears to need little revision except for the changing terminology of new technologies; the Information Technology section seems to need revision about every two years.

Working out the optimum scheduling and timing of the appraisals has been a continuous tension between what would make the process work best, how much time can be devoted to the formal process, and the annual requirements of the County. During the first year and a half, the feeling was that individual objectives needed to be monitored by the group about every nine months. Since the nine-month interval did not fit the County's requirements, in 1988, a midterm process was skipped. However, letting a whole year go by made it too easy to forget one's objectives and priorities, whereas a six-month interval seemed too onerous on the work schedule.

An alternate midyear process was tried in 1989 in which each librarian did a one-page written report on his/her personal objectives. Copies of these reports were handed out to each person in advance and then a one-hour group planning conference was held. Group planning and priority-setting were accomplished in this session, but there was not time to deal with each individual. And the kind of trusting atmosphere necessary for individual concerns could not be established in so short a time period. Again in 1990, no midyear formal review has been held. What seems to be the best compromise between the needs of the library and the annual requirement of the County is for each individual to monitor her/his own objectives. He/she can then request informal feedback from the group or other individuals as desired.

The most significant aspect of long-term use of the appraisal process is dealing with new librarians coming into the group, both transfers and job rotations from other Ramsey County Library branches and newly hired reference librarians. While the reference librarian group had been quite stable prior to the introduction of peer appraisal and
for the first two years of its use, approximately one-half the work group changed as a result of the introduction of a job-rotation plan near the end of 1987.

Integration of these new group members was handled in two ways. New employees were eased into the peer appraisal process. The County requires a six-month probationary period for them and they must be evaluated on the County form at three months and at six months. During their first six months, new employees participated in the discussion periods for their colleagues but were not evaluated by that process themselves.

For those coming from other branches, individual educational meetings were held where the background and rationale for the process were explained, the experience with it and its evaluation were described, and the various forms were studied. These transfers were scheduled for their evaluations after they had participated in the peer appraisal sessions for the “veterans.” This caused only the usual initial apprehension at the first time one is the subject of the peer discussion.

Another effect of job rotation was that those former members of the reference group wanted to expand peer appraisal to the Ramsey County branch libraries.

The change in group composition had some effect on the openness and trusting atmosphere of the group discussion sessions. A person’s initial appraisal by this process is often primarily an informative or educational process for one’s peers. The second time that person is evaluated in this way, more help is usually provided for solving one’s problems. As the individuals get to know each other better, more trust is established and confrontation of difficult issues is easier to do. To some extent, changing the group membership temporarily sets back the effectiveness of the peer appraisal process for team building and individual development. However, as the process has expanded to other branches, individuals who have had experience with it in one location transfer their understanding of the process and tolerance for stress in the group discussion to the new location. In the long run, the rotation plan strengthens the process throughout the Ramsey County Library system.

Expansion of the Peer Appraisal Process to Less Homogeneous Groups

The first attempts at using this peer appraisal process by work groups composed of professional, paraprofessional, and clerical employees took place at about the same time in a local college library and in a branch library of Ramsey County. The staffs of both of these libraries were about the same size. The branch library had acquired
some of the original reference librarian group as a result of job rotation. They were eager to continue using peer appraisal but wanted to expand it to include the paraprofessional and clerical branch staff; the nature of branch library work is such that the various types of employees work more closely together and their roles overlap more than in a larger or headquarters library. To have a group of a reasonable size for discussion—eight to twelve rather than three to five—it was necessary to include more than the librarians. This same rationale applies to the college library.

The major piece of work which needed to be done before the process could be expanded was to provide competency lists for other levels of staff. The college library asked the state library consultant to work with them in setting up their process. The consultant met with them and presented an overview of the process and the steps needed to start using it. They were able to begin their construction of competency lists with the King Study (1984) lists which were compiled for academic libraries.

The branch public library needed to go back to some of the competency lists from the earlier Minnesota studies (1980) which included public library competencies in addition to the reference ones already mentioned such as "Staff-Patron Relations" or "Staff Communications."

At the same time as these experiments were getting underway, the authors were also working with other public library assistant and associate directors to draft a "top management team" competency list for public libraries. This project started with generic management competencies as well as selecting the management competencies from the various librarian lists already mentioned.

Part of this list of library management competencies, combined with some of the competencies from the Minnesota studies mentioned above, formed the basis for expanding the peer appraisal process to the management team of the headquarters library, which includes the nonlibrarian supervisors of the circulation services. This became the basis for developing lists for branch library managers by including the reference librarian competency list. This list also was used as a starting point for other circulation clerical workers at both the headquarters and branch libraries.

It was possible to begin using the process with draft lists, refining them in use and combining them with training and orientation checklists which were also being developed for the library system.

Another kind of job rotation plan led to the technical services staff adopting the peer appraisal process. Each librarian and paraprofessional and all full-time clerical workers in technical services work one day each week in public services. As a result of their public service day
in the various libraries, some of them were participating in the peer appraisal processes in those public service libraries. They requested that the technical services department adopt the process. In 1989, the technical services staff was divided into two- to three-member subcommittees to work on the parts of competency lists for their work. Some of the subdivisions such, as management, had many ready-compiled lists. Others, such as processing, had to start from the very beginning, modelling their lists on the style of those already completed and using their training manuals as guides to the competency content. They developed lists for five competency areas which were used for their 1989 evaluations: acquisitions, cataloging, processing, management and communications, and computer/automation skills.

The process is now sufficiently well-developed at Ramsey County Public Library that it can be carried on with only a little more time than a traditional appraisal system. Beginning in October each year, each week someone in the work unit is scheduled for an appraisal-discussion period to precede the weekly work-unit meeting. The group discussions often cover topics that would need to be discussed in the work-unit meetings. By the end of the year, most units have completed the individual appraisals and developed and prioritized their list of unit objectives for the coming year. They have a clearer understanding of how the unit and the individual objectives fit together than they would had they had traditional individual appraisals.
APPENDIX A
Self-Appraisal Form

RAMSEY COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY
Peer Performance Appraisal Summary Form

Name ___________________________ Date ___________________________

I. Competencies. List the five that you think are your outstanding competencies or the five most significant competencies on which you rate yourself highly. Also list the five that are your top priority for improvement.

Outstanding competencies

Needs improvement

II. List factors, both positive and negative, which affect your level of performance, and which you would like to discuss with the group.

III. List your previous year's objectives. Write one or two sentences about your achievement for each one.

IV. List your next 12 months objectives as suggestions for consideration by the group.

IVb. List your long-range objectives.

V. List your present duties and try to put them in priority order.

_________________________ DEPT.
_________________________ HEAD'S
_________________________ SIGNATURE
_________________________ SIGNATURE
A. RESEARCH SKILLS
Of critical importance (essential)

Is able to analyze information needs with careful attention to detail.

Understands how library materials and information sources are organized.

Is able to match the best available information resource to the information need.

Is able to use various search strategies.

Is able to decide whether a manual or an on-line search is more appropriate.

Is able to use information networks as appropriate.

Is able to interpret information sources as appropriate

Very important (should)

Is able to use Boolean logic in conducting on-line searches.

Is able to use print thesauri and on-line indexes to develop search strategies for on-line searches.

Is able to compile bibliographies.

B. COMMUNICATION SKILLS
Of critical importance (essential)

Is able to accurately comprehend the oral communications of others.

Is able to remember, evaluate and use data obtained through listening.

O = Outstanding
S = Superior (above average)
A = Acceptable (average/moderate)
NI = Needs improvement
NET = No experience or training
APPENDIX B (Cont.)

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**B. COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

*Of critical importance (essential)* (cont’d)

- Is able to orally express or present ideas and factual information clearly and effectively.
- Is able to use interviewing techniques to determine the individual’s information needs.
- Is able to teach individuals how to use information sources.
- Is able to use bibliographic instruction techniques appropriate for groups.
- Is able to interpret library policy, goals, services, and procedures for individuals or groups.
- Is able to give directions clearly.
- Is able to translate between users, their needs, and information sources, translating information into terms used by both.
- Is able to work with users of all ages appropriately and fairly.
- Is able to convey to the public knowledge of materials and services.
- Establishes initial climate that facilitates open communication.
- Is able to balance the need for efficiency and friendliness in telephone reference transactions.

O = Outstanding
S = Superior (above average)
A = Acceptable (average/moderate)
NI = Needs improvement
NET = No experience or training
APPENDIX B (Cont.)

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B. COMMUNICATION SKILLS (cont')

**Very important (should) (cont'd)**

- Is able to interpret and/or summarize information accurately for telephone reference transactions.
- Is able to perceive and react to the feelings and needs of others.
- Is objective in perceiving own impact on others.
- Is able to clearly express concepts and information, in writing, in well-organized and good grammatical form.
- Is able to use non-verbal communication effectively.
- Is able to evaluate the individual user's response to information provided.

**Of moderate importance**

- Is able to work with individuals, local media and other groups using appropriate techniques to promote reference service.
- Is able to use questionnaires and discussion techniques.
- Is able to conduct meetings with individuals and groups both within and outside the library.
- Is able to convey the image of friendly, professional library service in contacts with others.

O = Outstanding  
S = Superior (above average)  
A = Acceptable (average/moderate)  
NI = Needs improvement  
NET = No experience or training
APPENDIX B (Cont.)

Q = Outstanding
S = Superior (above average)
A = Acceptable (average/moderate)
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NET = No experience or training

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C. KNOWLEDGE OF COMMUNITY

Very important (should)

Is familiar with community demographic, social, economic, and political information.

Is able to identify specific needs of clientele groups.

Is able to anticipate future needs based on knowledge of the community.

Knows current events in the community.

Is familiar with institutions, organizations, agencies and industries within a community.

Knows history of the community.

Is aware of the relation of a community’s political structure to a library.

Participates in community organizations.

Is able to work with community groups and agencies on cooperative projects.

D. MANAGING SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Of critical importance (essential)

Knows when to accept or delegate responsibility.

Is able to identify problems, research relevant information, identify possible causes of problems, and suggest workable solutions.

Is able to set, modify and follow through priorities.
**APPENDIX B (Cont.)**

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D. **MANAGING SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE**

Of critical importance (essential) (cont'd)

- Is able to develop and maintain good working relationships with personnel in other library areas.
- Knowledge of the operation of other sections in the library and how they work.
- Is able to perform effectively under pressure with frequent interruptions, and when faced with difficult tasks.
- Is able to manage personal and task time effectively.
- Has political skills, e.g., planning strategies for accomplishing objectives.

Very important (should)

- Formulates and interprets reference policies.
- Is able to organize the available personnel resources to optimize strengths and compensate for weaknesses.
- Is able to utilize appropriate interpersonal styles or methods in order to effectively guide individuals (subordinates, peers, supervisors) or groups toward task accomplishment.
- Is able to train and develop staff.
- Is able to establish procedures to monitor and/or regulate processes, tasks, or job activities and responsibilities of subordinates.
APPENDIX B (Cont.)

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NET = No experience or training

D. MANAGING SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE (cont’d)  
Very important (should) (cont’d)

- Is able to evaluate personnel, using appropriate standards, measures and methods.
- Is able to develop alternative and appropriate courses of action based on logical assumptions and which reflect factual information and rational and realistic thinking.
- Is able to develop new and innovative services.
- Is able to measure and evaluate reference service.
- Knowledge of evaluation methods and techniques to evaluate systems, services and products.
- Is able to collect, analyze and interpret data.
- Is able to manage a budget.
- Is able to anticipate long-range needs of the library.
- Is able to design systems and procedures to improve library operations.
- Is able to arbitrate and negotiate among staff.
- Has knowledge of statistical description, analysis, interpretation and presentation.
- Has knowledge of standards, measures and methods for evaluating personnel.
APPENDIX B (Cont.)

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**D. MANAGING SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE (cont’d)**
Very important (should) (cont’d)

- Has knowledge of alternative management structures and their implications for the operation of the library.
- Encourages innovation and new ideas of others
- Is able to work as a member of a group to reach decisions & accomplish tasks.
- Has knowledge of the costs associated with library resources (materials, personnel, space, etc.)
- Has knowledge of cost analysis and interpretation methods.

**E. KNOWLEDGE OF INFORMATION RESOURCES**
Of critical importance (essential)

- Is familiar with the mission, goals and objectives of the library.
- Knows the policies and procedures relevant to the library.
- Is able to use the expertise of the entire staff.
- Is able to identify and use community information or referral sources.
- Has a broad generation knowledge in order to interpret patrons’ questions and information sources.
- Is familiar with the expanding information community, its participants and their interrelationships (social, economic technical, etc.)

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APPENDIX B (Cont.)

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**KNOWLEDGE OF INFORMATION RESOURCES**

*Of critical importance (essential) (cont'd)*

- Knows the characteristics & use of the most commonly used information resources.
- Very important (should)
  - Is familiar with the entire library collection.
  - Is familiar with alternative approaches to the organization of information, e.g., classification schemes.
  - Is familiar with the literature of various subject areas, both fiction and non-fiction, especially those of primary interest to users.
  - Is familiar with authors and titles, both current and standard.
  - Knows the arrangement (structure) of information resources in all formats.
  - Is able to identify appropriate resources of other libraries.
  - Is familiar with the operations of other sections of the library and how they relate to reference.
  - Of moderate importance
    - Understands the relation of the publishing industry to libraries.
  - Is familiar with the contracting process.

O = Outstanding
S = Superior (above average)
A = Acceptable (average/moderate)
NI = Needs improvement
NET = No experience or training
Evaluation of Public Services & Personnel

APPENDIX B (Cont.)

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F. ATTITUDES

Of critical importance (essential)

Is aware of the purpose of library service in society.

Is committed to promoting libraries and library services.

Is committed to equal service for all patrons.

Willingness to draw upon and share knowledge and experience with others.

Maintains a nonjudgmental attitude toward patron questions.

Has the persistence to obtain requested information or to locate a correct source for information.

Is alert toward recognizing and responding to patron needs.

Is committed to maintaining a high standard of personal and professional ethics.

Is tolerant of individual differences.

Is sensitive to others’ feelings in dealing with people.

Participates in educational activities to improve her/his job performance.

Is committed to protecting the patron’s right to privacy in his search for information.

Is willing to learn to use equipment necessary for library service.
APPENDIX B (Cont.)

F. ATTITUDES
Of critical importance (essential) (cont’d)

Is committed to defending the right of patrons to intellectual freedom in their pursuit of knowledge.

Listens objectively to other people’s ideas and suggestions.

Accepts responsibility for decisions and their consequences.

Is committed to participating in professional organizations.

Is receptive and adaptable to change.

Is committed to achieving user satisfaction.

Very important (should)

Is interested in and seeks to become better educated in a wide variety of subjects.

G. PERSONAL TRAITS
Of critical importance (essential)

Respects others.

Is tactful.

Is cheerful.

Shows self-confidence.

Has a sense of humor.

Has self-control.
### APPENDIX B (Cont.)

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**G. PERSONAL TRAITS**

- **Of critical importance (essential) (cont’d)**
  - Is imaginative and resourceful in meeting patrons needs.
  - Is able to use calm, logical approaches to library problems.
  - Projects a friendly, pleasant manner.
  - Admits the need to confer with, or refer the patron to another person or agency.

**Very important (should)**

- Has poise.
- Is committed to maintaining good physical and mental health.
- Is committed to maintaining appropriate appearance/grooming.

**H. KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

- **Of critical importance (essential)**
  - Understands basic information technology (e.g., computer, telecommunications) terms.
  - Is able to use protocol and command terms of two or three major database vendors.
  - Is familiar with the contents and characteristics of the most commonly used on-line databases.

**Very Important (should)**

- Is familiar with the keyboarding functions of commonly available cathode ray terminals, (CRTs).
APPENDIX B (Cont.)

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**H.** KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FOR
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (cont'd)
Very important (should) (cont'd)

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Keeps up with trends in hardware and software which relate to reference work.

Understands how various hardware parts fit together and can do simple trouble-shooting to determine which part failed.

Is able to train other staff to do on-line searching.

Is informed about available and emerging information technologies and their application.

Is able to teach users to do computerized searching.

Understands MARC fields in order to effectively search &/or evaluate on-line catalogs.

Is able to use command terms of all modules of in-house integrated automated system.

**Of moderate importance**

Is able to communicate with analysts or programmers to facilitate development of new programs.

Can apply knowledge of command languages to obtain results in such various applications as information and retrieval file creation and word processing.

**Of minimal importance**

Is familiar with one programming language.
APPENDIX C
Factors Affecting Level of Performance

Discussion of each factor as it affected my job for the past 12 months—why this factor has a positive (or negative) effect on my performance, how this factor could be improved, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTORS</th>
<th>DISCUSSION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Personal</td>
<td>Physical condition/Health Emotional stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Motivation</td>
<td>Personal interest in work satisfaction with job assignment Incentives and rewards feedback recognition salary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Resources</td>
<td>Equipment Facilities Availability of resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Work group</td>
<td>Cohesion Leadership Co-workers competencies interpersonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Work environment</td>
<td>Conditions Space allotment Arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Staffing</td>
<td>Sufficient Scheduling</td>
</tr>
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APPENDIX C (Cont.)

7. Users
   Competencies, especially attitudes

8. Organization
   Climate
   Structure
   Size
   Management levels
   type
   Policies and practices

9. Funding
   Sufficient

10. New Technology Impact

11. Cooperative efforts
    Intralibrary
    Interlibrary

SUMMARY: a 2 or 3 sentence summary highlighting the worst and the best (to be transferred to summary sheet #2)
APPENDIX D

Tips for Peer Evaluation Participants

Participants in peer evaluation should:
Understand agenda: setting, keeping on
Have listening skills, i.e.,
  Adopt attitude of I can always learn something new
Withhold judgment & action until meaning is clear, i.e., don’t jump to conclusions
Listen for meaning
Ask questions
Concentrate on ideas & information; avoid becoming defensive
Avoid preconceptions, i.e., avoid putting a label on someone (job or position)
Be able to communicate feelings and understand the communication of feeling
Be able to gather data by:
  Interview
  Observation
    Look for accomplishments, skills, and style
    Manage your biases, i.e., be cognizant of your personal values and stereotypes
    Observe specifics, i.e., what person does, how he/she works, what the effects are on others, what is accomplished
    Have a broad enough perspective, i.e., recognize factors which might affect performance
Understand group process by demonstrating responsible group membership, voluntary expression, and mutual acceptance of other persons involved
Understand the principles of working as a group (team)

During the evaluation:
1. LISTEN; let interviewee talk
2. DIALOGUE, do not pronounce
3. Acknowledge all bring feelings, emotions, values, needs and opinions to discussion. Realize interviewee comes in with emotions, such as being on edge, apprehensive, defensive, or with guilt, fear, pleasure, regret, hope. Participants may fail to hear clear messages, may distort.
4. DON’T BE JUDGMENTAL
5. TAKE other person’s feelings into account
6. BE CLEAR, be sure the other person knows what you mean
7. DON’T TALK ABOUT ISSUES other person can do nothing about, or are beyond his control
8. BE SPECIFIC, talk in concrete terms, etc.
9. EXPLAIN, but not how to do it your way
10. REASSURE, but do not undermine evaluation
11. CRITICIZE CONSTRUCTIVELY; negative criticism may blunt initiative & encourage mindless conformity.
   a. Avoid terms “always”, “never”
   b. Criticize actions, not the person
   c. Be specific, not ambiguous
   d. Make criticism objective
   e. Be clear, non-threatening
APPENDIX D: (Cont.)

12. Use attending skills
   a. Set tone for interview
      Nonverbally
      1) A slight, but comfortable forward lean of upper body trunk
         (leaning back can encourage or discourage participation)
      2) Maintain eye contact (you are paying attention; breaking eye
         contact indicates your disinterest)
      3) Speak in a warm, but natural voice
         Verbally
         1) Use minimal encouragers: head nods, “I see’s” “Uh-huhs”
            and simple repetition of key words: “Policy?” “Budget
            problems”
         2) Encourage interviewee to go on with explanations
         3) Stay on a topic—exhaust topic to your satisfaction; don’t topic-
            hop; don’t propose solutions before problem is thoroughly
            discussed
   b. Feedback
      1) Feedback should contain clear, concrete data; statements
         should be precise, not vague, e.g., vague: “Your work with
         patrons has been very good this year”; concrete: “This year
         you’ve increased responses by 20%, while cutting complaints
         in half.”
      2) Adopt a non-judgmental attitude, i.e., be factual, matter-of-
         fact, analytical, e.g., judgmental: “You’re terrible in meetings
         with other people. Every time I take you, you foul it up.”
         Non-judgmental: “You seem too eager to me in meetings. Your
         behavior could be misinterpreted as pushiness, and be turning
         people off.”
      3) Timely/present-tense statement: use recent problems, e.g.,
         Distant Past Feedback: “You’ve screwed up the budget for the
         past three years, and this time I’ve had enough of it.” Recent
         Past Feedback: “In reviewing the annual budgets last week,
         I found yours to be fouled up the worst. As usual.” Timely/
         Present-Tense Feedback: “Hurry, I’ve just made some
         suggestions to you on how you can improve your budget. But
         you don’t sound too enthusiastic about them. How can I help
         you become more effective in your budget preparation?”
      4) Deal with correctable items over which the subordinate has
         some control
   c. Paraphrase: A concise statement in your own words of the essence
      of what interviewee has just said. Should be non-judgmental, matter
      of fact, e.g., “If I heard you correctly...,” “You’re saying that ...
      “It seems that what you’re telling me is...” To check for accuracy of
      your paraphrase at end “Is that close?” or “Is that what I hear you
      saying?” e.g., Interviewee: “...So the headquarters problem is why our
      requests filled are down.” Interviewer: “You’re saying that the new
      Director’s staff shakeups have lowered their productivity. And that
      now it’s spilled over to your desk: Is that about right?” Interviewee:
      “Yeah. And what’s more...”
APPENDIX D (Cont.)

d. Reflect Feelings; empathize
   Similar to paraphrase
   Literal, matter-of-fact, timely statement or question with a structure
   First use interviewee’s first name or pronoun “you”; then, “It sounds like you feel...” or “I hear you expressing some...”

Next comes the label for the emotion, concentrating always upon the person seated in front of you.

Third, mention the context in which the emotion occurs.

Finally, if you wish, check with “Am I right?” “Is that so?” e.g., “Hank, I sense that you’re really anxious about this interview. Would you like to talk about it?” e.g., “Jane, you seem to be feeling frustrated right now about your performance in this area. Perhaps we could talk about it for a few minutes?” Share your own similar experiences to illustrate that you “know what it’s like...”

e. Use Open & Closed Questions
   Open: “Could..., Would..., Why... Tell me..., How...” Encourage interviewee to talk, to share. An open question offers an invitation to respond in more than just one or a few words. Good at beginning of interview, to promote understanding. Closed: “Did, Is, Are, How Many?”, to speed up interview, to clarify, to be specific, e.g., Open question: “How is that new budget coming along?” e.g., Closed question: “Is your new budget in?”

f. Establish Focus; helps us identify five potential areas of organizational problems and possible direction to take: person, problem, other, context, self.

—A person focus concentrates upon the person. Using the person’s first name, or the pronoun “you” can help, e.g., “John, you sound frustrated about this performance appraisal system.”

—A problem focus deals with the issue at hand while trying to gain more information about it. A major concern could be the technical aspects to the problem. e.g., “John, could you tell me of your complaint with the appraisal instrument we used this year?”

—Another person or other people become the highlight in another focus, e.g., “John, do you realize that every civil servant in this state is evaluated using the instrument you object to?”

—In a self focus, attention is concentrated upon you. Here, you seek information from another about the impact of your actions upon her/him, e.g., “John, I’d like to know if I said or did anything in this performance appraisal process to upset you so much?”

Sources:

REFERENCES