



A Study on the Effect of Evaluative Performance Appraisal on Coworker Rejection

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Abstract

Employee's performance is a major issue in an organization. It is important to acknowledge the potential negative impact it may have on the appraisees' emotions and psychology, which can lead to negative workplace behaviors. Based on the frustration-aggression theory and social exchange theory, the article constructs a relationship model between assessment-based performance appraisal and coworker rejection, and analyzes the mediating role of interpersonal trust. Using multi-temporal valid data from 351 employees from three enterprises, the regression modeling method and Bootstrap method were used for empirical testing. The results of the study show that assessment-based performance appraisal significantly and positively predicts employees' perceived coworker rejection, and interpersonal trust mediates the relationship between assessment-based performance appraisal and coworker rejection. Organizations can leverage these findings to support managers in identifying negative functions of organizational HRM practices and enhance employee well-being for a more productive and supportive work environment. The findings from the analysis emphasize the importance of management potential in shaping better employee experiences and organizational success.

Subject Areas

Human Resource Management, Sociology

Keywords

Assessment-Based Performance Appraisal, Interpersonal Trust, Coworker Rejection, China

1. Introduction

Human resources have become the number one resource of an organization, and

the choice of employee performance appraisal methods has received extensive attention from today's organizations [1]. Assessment-based performance appraisal is a formal evaluation mechanism for organizations to measure whether employees have met the job requirements, which can effectively help organizations make reasonable management decisions and is conducive to improving organizational performance and achieving the organization's established goals, and thus is widely valued by organizations [2]. According to Touma (2022) in performance evaluation, the method should match the company's nature. In production and manufacturing, blue-collar workers should be evaluated using work standards based on production rates and time-motion studies, ensuring clear objectives aligned with management's standards [3]. For white-collar and professional staff, result-based systems are suitable for assessing outcomes but should be paired with rating scales to address employee development and ease of use for administrative staff [3]. However, assessment-based performance appraisal overemphasizes the function of performance evaluation and comparison, which is prone to triggering the negative emotions and psychology of the appraisees, which may result in a variety of negative workplace behaviors [4]. Based on the potential risks of assessment-based performance appraisal, scholars have called for an in-depth discussion of the negative effects of assessment-based performance appraisal in order to provide a theoretical basis for actively preventing its negative effects. Past research on the workplace effects of assessment-based performance appraisal has mainly focused on the impact of appraisal-based performance appraisal on organizations, appraised managers and appraised employees [5]. However, no research has been conducted to establish a link between assessment-based performance appraisals and perceived coworker rejection by appraised employees. Research has shown that appraisal-based performance appraisals can trigger interpersonal competition among organizational members and are detrimental to collaboration among colleagues [6]. Therefore, in order to further explore the impact of the assessment-based performance appraisal approach on appraisees, this study used interpersonal trust as a mediating variable to reveal the path of the impact of assessment-based performance appraisal on coworker rejection.

2. Literature review and Hypothesis

2.1. Performance Appraisal Approach

Performance appraisal is an important influence on the success of an organization [7], and because of the differences in the workability of employees in an organization, the role of performance appraisal in organizational management cannot be ignored. However, when performance appraisal is set up in an unreasonable way, it can also have a negative impact on employees' emotions and work attitudes, and may even lead to an increase in the tendency of employees to leave their jobs [5]. In terms of the division of the types of performance appraisal purposes, scholars are generally concerned with assessment-based performance appraisal and developmental performance appraisal [8]. Assessment-based per-

formance appraisal refers to a type of appraisal that evaluates the fulfillment of employees' performance objectives or compares employees' performance, and determines employees' salary and compensation, promotion, rewards and punishments based on the results of evaluation and comparison [9]. Developmental performance appraisal is an appraisal method that applies the results of performance evaluation to employee performance feedback, employee training and development, etc., in order to stimulate the work potential of employees [9]. In the current competitive business environment, companies are paying more and more attention to assessment-based performance appraisal. According to the theory of situational power, the organizational context will provide some important external guidelines to employees, and, the organizational context can influence the transformation of employees' psychological factors to different behaviors and intentions through the degree of strength and weakness of the context, and ultimately form a facilitating or hindering effect [10]. As a mandatory form of performance appraisal, assessment-based performance appraisal may prompt organizational members to be constantly concerned about the results of the organization's evaluations and appraisals, which may lead to greater psychological pressure on organizational members [1]. Touma (2022) emphasized performance appraisal is crucial for enhancing employee motivation, identifying training needs, and evaluating recruitment effectiveness. It recognizes employee efforts, guides training initiatives, and assesses recruitment outcomes, all of which contribute to organizational success [3]. In the workplace, employees not only hope to obtain the ideal salary through performance appraisal, but also desire to realize the improvement of self-competence. However, since assessment-based performance appraisal lacks the step of performance feedback, employees are not able to receive support for their career development based on the results of appraisal-based performance appraisal.

2.2. Assessment-Based Performance Appraisal and Coworker Rejection

Workplace coworker rejection can be viewed as an employee's perceived neglect, coldness, or rejection from coworkers in the workplace [11], and is a form of unethical behavior. The frustration-aggression theory facilitates a systematic analysis of unethical behaviors of organizational members in the workplace. In real-life work situations, organizational members may encounter various frustrations and pressures, for example, substandard performance appraisal, unfair organizational distribution, reduced salary level, stagnation of personal promotion, etc., which may induce organizational members to commit unethical behaviors in the workplace. According to the frustration-aggression theory, individuals who are unable to self-regulate in a positive and effective way after experiencing an evaluative performance appraisal tend to transfer the frustration or stress faced by the individual to others, which is conducive to relieving their own stress [12]. However, this way of transferring frustration and stress to others is exactly the unethical behavior itself. If performance appraisal is measured based

on results, and the appraisal results play a decisive role in an individual's salary level and promotion, etc., then, under the dual effects of negative emotions and profit-driven, organizational members may engage in unethical behaviors that exclude other individuals. Zhao Jun et al. (2014) confirmed the relationship between assessment-based performance appraisal and deviant behaviors through an empirical study, in which they pointed out that assessment-based performance appraisal tends to breed utilitarian tendencies in organizational members, causing them to do whatever it takes to achieve their personal goals [4]. Huaqiang Wang and Wenxing Liu (2017) explored the impact of assessment-based performance appraisal on managers' deviant behavior, and concluded that assessment-based performance appraisal leads to the perception of obstructive pressure by the appraised managers, which results in the appraised managers' abusive management of their subordinates [2]. As a result, this study proposes:

Hypothesis 1: Assessment-based performance appraisal positively affects employees' perceived coworker rejection.

2.3. The Mediating Role of Interpersonal Trust

Assessment-based performance appraisal builds an atmosphere of "institutional competition" for appraisees, which encourages more intense competition among organizational members and further deteriorates coworker relationships [13]. This means that evaluative performance appraisal leads to increased competition among organizational members and tends to trigger negative interpersonal interactions among employees [14]. This is also evidenced by the findings of our scholars Zhang Weibing and Zhang Yongjun, who pointed out that assessment-based performance appraisal belongs to the autumn settling of scores type of appraisal, and under the influence of this type of appraisal, the appraisees are prone to utilitarian tendencies and short-term behaviors, and will increase interpersonal competitive behaviors [6], and thus, the assessment-based performance appraisal may trigger mutual suspicion among coworkers, and reduce the trust among coworkers. Chen *et al.* (2011) also found that assessment-based performance appraisal promotes competition among organizational members, which in turn may reduce team satisfaction and deteriorate relationships among organizational members [15].

Workplace ostracism refers to the intentional disregard or isolation of other organizational members by individuals in the workplace, which is an interpersonal "inaction" behavior [11]. This behavior is influenced by the quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace. According to social exchange theory, both parties involved in a social exchange must abide by the principles of exchange, e.g., an individual who receives friendly treatment from others must reciprocate [16]. Therefore, mutual trust between coworkers will lead to more positive "payback" behavior, which is conducive to the formation of friendly collaborative relationships and reduces the likelihood of exclusionary behavior. On the other hand, a lack of trust can lead to a decrease in the collaborative rela-

tionship between employees and coworkers [17], and a distrustful, uncooperative relationship can bring about retaliatory emotional responses, which may lead to destructive negative behaviors in the workplace. Simply put, the atmosphere of “institutional competition” created by evaluative performance appraisals can erode the trust between coworkers, and such mistrustful and uncoordinated relationships have the potential to trigger rejectionist behaviors [12]. Research has shown that in the workplace, ostracism is also a way for organizational members to protect their own interests [11]. Thus, this study proposes:

Hypothesis 2: Assessment-based performance appraisal negatively affects interpersonal trust.

Hypothesis 3: Interpersonal trust mediates the relationship between assessment-based performance appraisal and coworker rejection.

The theoretical model diagram for this study is as follows: (See **Figure 1**)

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Samples

This study mainly selected three mature and standardized enterprises in Wuhan, Tianjin and Shenzhen as the survey targets, which are mainly involved in the industries of software development, garment manufacturing and pharmaceutical services. In order to avoid the problem of homoscedastic error, this study adopts a multi-temporal longitudinal survey to collect data. After obtaining the list of employees from the human resource department of the relevant enterprises, we launched the questionnaire survey from January 13 to March 13, 2022. The first stage questionnaire was distributed on January 13, mainly to collect the demographic information of the employees and the data of assessment-based performance appraisal. One month later, the second stage questionnaire was distributed to collect data on employees' evaluation of interpersonal trust with coworkers. On March 13, the third stage of data collection was conducted to collect data on employees' perceived coworker rejection. In order to ensure the effective matching of the three stages of data, we designed matching information, such as the last four digits of the phone number, in each stage of the questionnaire.

In this study, 525 questionnaires were distributed at each stage, and after deleting the questionnaires that were not filled out correctly and those that could not be effectively matched at the three stages, finally, a total of 351 sets of valid questionnaires were obtained. Among the valid samples, the gender ratio was 56.7% male and 43.3% female; the age structure was 11.4% 25 years old and below, 39.9% 26 to 30 years old, 34.2% 31 to 35 years old, 9.4% 36 to 40 years old, 2.0% 41 to 45 years old, and 3.1% 45 years old and above; and the education structure was 2.8% high school and below, 14.8% college, and 71% bachelor's degree; and the education structure was 2.8% high school and below, 14.8% college, and 71% bachelor's degree. 14.8%, bachelor's degree accounted for 71.8%, and master's degree and above accounted for 10.6%; in terms of working time in this organization, less than 1 year accounted for 3.1%, 1 to 2 years accounted for

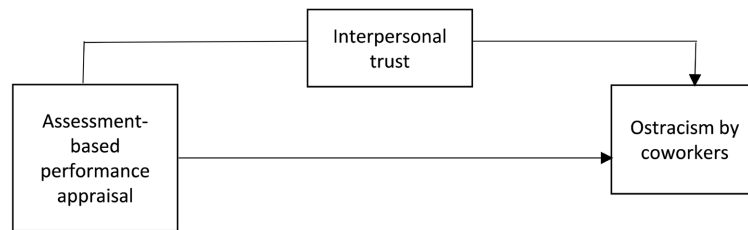


Figure 1. Theoretical model.

11.7%, 3 to 5 years accounted for 57.0%, 6 to 10 years accounted for 23.1%, and more than 10 years accounted for 5.1%.

3.2. Measurement of Variables

This study used the evaluative performance appraisal dimension of the Performance Appraisal Purpose Scale developed by Boswell and Boudreau (2000) [9], which consists of four question items. The Interpersonal Trust Questionnaire was adopted from the Chinese version of the Interpersonal Trust Questionnaire [18] revised by Wang Peng *et al.* (2019), which consists of 8 question items. The coworker rejection questionnaire developed by Ferris *et al.* (2008) [19] was used in this study, with 10 question items. In order to control the effect of individual characteristic variables on employees' perceived coworker rejection, we relied on the common practice of previous scholars and included employees' gender, age, education level, and working time in the organization as control variables in this study.

4. Empirical Data Analyses

4.1. Reliability and Validity Tests

In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the assessment-based performance appraisal, interpersonal trust, and coworker rejection scales are 0.832, 0.837, and 0.789, respectively, which are all greater than 0.7, indicating that the scales selected for this study have good reliability. In addition, this study used Mplus 8.0 to conduct a validated factor analysis to test the discriminant validity of the three variables of appraisal-based performance appraisal, interpersonal trust, and coworker rejection. The results showed that the three-factor model was significantly better than the other models in terms of each fit index ($\chi^2/df = 2.426$; CFI = 0.897; TLI = 0.884; RMSEA = 0.069; SRMR = 0.071). Therefore, from the results of the combined fitting index, the three-factor model has the best discriminant validity and is suitable for the next statistical test.

4.2. Descriptive Statistical Analysis

We used SPSS 25.0 to conduct descriptive statistical analysis of the means, standard deviations and correlation coefficients of the variables in this study, and the specific results are shown in **Table 1**, which shows that evaluative performance appraisal is significantly positively correlated with coworker rejection ($r = 0.223$,

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients of variables.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1) Gender	1.433	0.520						
2) Age	2.584	1.042	0.004					
3) Education level	2.930	0.541	0.002	0.431*				
4) Tenure with the organization	3.407	0.613	0.004	0.034	0.009			
5) Assessment-based performance appraisal	3.703	0.581	0.007	0.010	0.016	0.052		
6) Interpersonal trust	2.864	0.620	0.011	-0.046	0.192	0.049	-0.246**	
7) Co-worker rejection	2.258	0.348	-0.038*	0.021	-0.008	0.107	0.223**	-0.335**

Note: N = 351; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, two-tailed test.

p < 0.01), evaluative performance appraisal is significantly negatively correlated with interpersonal trust ($r = -0.246$, $p < 0.01$), and interpersonal trust and co-worker rejection are significantly negatively correlated ($r = -0.335$, $p < 0.01$). The preliminary correlations between these variables provide a basis for further testing of the hypotheses.

4.3. Main Effects Test

The results of the above correlation analysis regarding the variables indicate that appraisal-based performance appraisal is positively related to coworker rejection. However, the relationship between evaluative performance appraisal and coworker rejection is disturbed by the fact that demographic variables such as the employee's gender, age, education level, and the length of time working in the organization may have a greater impact on coworker rejection. Therefore, when constructing the hierarchical regression model, we included the above demographic variables as control variables. The test of main effects in this study was mainly conducted by SPSS 25.0. When constructing the hierarchical regression model, we first take employees' gender, age, education level and working time in the organization as independent variables and coworker rejection as dependent variables to construct Model 3. Then, we take the above demographic variables as control variables, assessment-based performance appraisal as independent variables and coworker rejection as dependent variables to construct a regression model on Model 4, and the results are shown in **Table 2**. After controlling for the effects of the demographic variables of employees' gender, age, education level, and working time in the organization, Model 4 improved the explanatory power of the variance by 18.2% relative to Model 3, and the assessment-based performance appraisal had a significant positive effect on coworker rejection ($\beta = 0.249$, $p < 0.001$; see Model 4). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was tested.

4.4. Test of Mediating Effect

In order to test the mediating effect of interpersonal trust, this study first adopts the mediating effect validation model proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) [20].

Table 2. Multiple regression analysis.

Variable	Interpersonal Trust		Coworker Rejection		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
1) Gender	0.043	0.081	-0.029*	-0.041*	-0.035*
2) Age	0.124	0.182	0.054	0.166	0.124
3) Education level	0.222	0.331	-0.063	-0.057	-0.044
4) Tenure with the organization	0.078	0.126	0.001	0.013	0.008
5) Assessment-based performance appraisal		-0.284**		0.249***	0.131**
6) Interpersonal trust					-0.363***
R ²	0.031	0.155	0.022	0.204	0.395
ΔR ²		0.124***		0.182***	0.191***

Note: N = 351; reported coefficients are standardized regression coefficients; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

As can be seen in **Table 2**, after controlling for the effects of the variables of employees' gender, age, education, and working time in the organization, the negative effect of appraisal-based performance appraisal on interpersonal trust is significant ($\beta = -0.284$, $p < 0.01$; see Model 2). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was tested. Regression analysis of coworker rejection by adding both assessment-based performance appraisal and the mediating variable interpersonal trust revealed that the negative effect of the mediating variable interpersonal trust on coworker rejection was significant ($\beta = -0.363$, $p < 0.001$; see Model 5), and the positive effect of assessment-based performance appraisal on coworker rejection was reduced ($\beta = 0.131$, $p < 0.01$; see Model 5). Thus, interpersonal trust mediates the relationship between assessment-based performance appraisal and coworker rejection, and Hypothesis 3 was tentatively tested.

Based on the Bootstrap method proposed by Hayes and Scharkow (2013) [21], we used Model 4 in the PROCESS program of SPSS to further test the mediating effect of interpersonal trust. In the case of Bootstrap sample size of 5000 and confidence interval of 95%, the test results are shown in **Table 3**, the indirect effect of evaluative performance appraisal on coworker rejection through interpersonal trust is 0.103, the confidence interval is [0.062, 0.138], which does not contain 0, and hypothesis 3 is valid.

5. Conclusions and Implications

5.1. Conclusion of the Study

Assessment-based performance appraisal is a double-edged sword, on the one hand, it is conducive to the organization to test whether the employees have met the job requirements, but also helps the organization to make the correct management decisions, so as to achieve the organization's established goals [2]. However, on the other hand, it may also cause certain negative impacts, such as too high appraisal intensity or unreasonable appraisal standards, then it will trigger employees' negative emotions, which will cause a series of management

Table 3. Bootstrap analysis results for mediating effects.

	Effect Value	BootSE	95% Confidence Interval
Collective Effect	0.234	0.044	[0.128, 0.339]
Direct Effect	0.131	0.037	[0.038, 0.224]
Indirect Effect	0.103	0.023	[0.062, 0.138]

problems [2] [4] [5]. Based on the frustration-aggression theory and social exchange theory, this study explores the formation mechanism of rejection behavior from the level of appraisal system, and draws the following conclusions through a multi-temporal longitudinal empirical study: 1) Assessment-based performance appraisal positively affects coworker rejection. 2) Assessment-based performance appraisal negatively affects interpersonal trust. 3) Interpersonal trust mediates the relationship between assessment-based performance appraisal and coworker rejection. In other words, the competitive atmosphere created by assessment-based performance appraisal will weaken interpersonal trust and induce coworker rejection.

5.2. Research Implications

5.2.1. Theoretical Implications

First, it enriches and develops the research on the efficacy of HRM practices in Chinese organizational contexts. Previous scholars have conducted a great deal of research on the efficacy of various types of HRM practices and have confirmed that HRM systems have varying degrees of influence on variables such as employee job satisfaction, job motivation, organizational trust, organizational commitment, and job performance. However, past studies have focused mainly on the positive impact effects of HRM and neglected to examine its negative functions. Poorly implemented HRM may also trigger negative workplace behaviors among employees; therefore, this study examines the effects of assessment-based performance appraisal on coworker rejection in a Chinese organizational context, and its findings can enrich and develop research on the efficacy of corporate performance management and HRM practices.

Second, this study deepens the mechanism of the impact of assessment-based performance appraisal on coworker rejection. Coworker rejection in the workplace is a kind of unethical behavior, a negative interpersonal experience for the individual suffering from rejection, and its negative impact is almost self-evident. From the perspective that management research serves management practice, this study uses interpersonal trust as a mediating variable to explore the mediating mechanism by which assessment-based performance appraisal affects coworker rejection, which has important theoretical value in opening the black box between assessment-based performance appraisal and coworker rejection.

5.2.2. Practical Implications

First, it provides theoretical support for managers to pay attention to the nega-

tive functions of organizational HRM practices. Although the logic of efficiency has been followed in the past to explore and validate the positive impact of an organization's HRM system on employees' work attitudes and behaviors, as well as its contribution to organizational performance. However, this study confirms that the negative functioning of HRM practices cannot be ignored from the perspective of interpersonal interactions of the employees being appraised. A performance management system that overemphasizes performance results and employee competition and neglects performance feedback and employee enhancement can exacerbate the anxiety of appraised employees, undermine good interpersonal trust among members within the organization, and thus induce unethical behaviors in the workplace. In pursuing efficiency-oriented management systems and practices, managers should also consider the potential spillover effects that these practices may cause.

Second, provides countermeasures for organizations to manage unethical behaviors in the workplace. The main purpose of employee performance management is to promote the mutual development of employees and the organization. Employee performance appraisal is only one part of performance management. Paying and adjusting positions according to the results of performance appraisal is not the ultimate goal of performance management; employee performance appraisal should also provide the basis and preparation for subsequent performance feedback and employee promotion. Therefore, performance appraisal is only a means to assist employees and organizational development. Organizations should not put the cart before the horse in actual management practice, focusing only on performance results and performance and neglecting employee development and improvement, otherwise these competitive employee performance appraisals will lead to the generation of negative emotions and psychology of the appraisees, undermine the relationship of trust between members of the organization, and bring about more negative behaviors in the workplace. Therefore, the findings of this study can provide countermeasures for preventing unethical workplace behaviors in organizational management.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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