Eliminating a Quantitative Measure of Performance Means Our Science Is Starting From Square One

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In their debate about whether companies should keep traditional, numerical ratings of employee performance in an ever-changing world of work, Colquitt and colleagues argued that performance ratings are too hard to do correctly, while Adler and colleagues (Adler et al., 2016) countered that "'too hard' is no excuse for I-O psychology." I would like to build on this by suggesting that "too hard" is not only no excuse but also a complete dismissal of the central aspect of what our science seeks to achieve.

Across all the industrial–organizational (I-O) courses, applied experiences, and real-world work that I have been exposed to in my training as an I-O scientist, the one consistent message I have seen is that employee performance is the "ultimate criterion" that we are trying to influence. When we develop a selection measure or a training program, our aim is to effectively predict and improve employee performance. When we design and evaluate initiatives intended to alleviate work–family conflict, stress, or role overload, we are ultimately trying to get employees to a state of well-being in which they can achieve high performance and productivity within their organizations. This "performance as the criterion of interest" approach is not a relic of the past. I have recently taught and continue to teach several I-O courses as an adjunct professor, and I can say with certainty that this message continues to be taught to the future bright minds of our field.

When I look at the argument from a purely scientific perspective, I can't help but think that *of course* we need some systematic, common way of measuring performance. Without it, we are flying blind in everything we do: conducting research that influences real-world organizational issues and challenges, designing and evaluating organizational tools, and consulting companies on how to develop and deploy effective human resource (HR) processes—all of these activities become questionable when we don't have a solid outcome to which to tie them. Within organizations, the millions of dollars potentially spent on HR and employee well-being initiatives are going to be extremely hard to justify without some evidence that they've impacted

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this "ultimate criterion" of employee performance (let alone the difficulties in justifying individual employment decisions in the absence of a systematic way of explaining why they were made).

I-O psychology is a science at its core, and our mission is to scientifically understand and influence how employees behave at work. If we take away our ability to measure this behavior in favor of inconsistent, poorly documented methods meant to please employees and managers who have developed a distaste for being rated, we take away the science, and we're left with a field that unfortunately won't be of much use to the organizations of tomorrow.

Reference

Adler, S., Campion, M., Colquitt, A., Grubb, A., Murphy, K., Ollander-Krane, R., & Pulakos, E. D. (2016). Getting rid of performance ratings: Genius or folly? A debate. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice, 9*(2), 219–252.

Other Important Questions: When, How, and Why Do Cultural Values Influence Performance Management?

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Adler et al. ([2016](#)) raise some controversial issues about whether performance rating systems should be eliminated or not. We strongly believe that the decision to do away with performance ratings is premature because more research needs to be done, as suggested by "the better questions" that Adler et al. listed at the end of the focal article. We propose that those questions can be extended further by testing them in other cultures and supplemented with these questions: When, how, and why do cultural values influence performance management? Given the nature of our increasingly diverse workforce in which employees with different cultural values work together within the same organization, it is crucial to identify and document the influence of culture on performance appraisal practices. In this commentary, we briefly

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