



TenStep Supplemental Paper

13 February 2004

Individual Performance Should be Linked to Project Results

Have you ever been on a project that missed all of its commitments for cost, schedule, and quality? Although it may seem counterintuitive, there are a number of projects that have major problems, even some that are cancelled, on which the team members all receive great reviews and the project manager is promoted.

In the past, the review process in many companies was based on overall effort and knowledge level. That is, if you were very knowledgeable in technology and the business, and if you worked hard, you tended to be rewarded with good reviews every year. On the surface, this seems fine, right?

It is fine up to a point, but these criteria don't adequately tie actual job performance to your performance review. The review process should be based on performance against the expectations of the job description, performance against objectives, and performance against expectations.

More and more, companies are reviewing people against performance criteria instead of effort. That way, you don't end up in a position where a project fails miserably, yet all the participants receive above-average reviews. There are not many problem projects where the project team was not partially, if not totally, responsible.

Consider a project where everyone on the team tried hard, but the results weren't successful. In the past, management might have brushed this all under the rug and given everyone good reviews to reflect their hard work and get them pumped up about the next assignments.

However, that's not how things are done today. Hard work is something that should be applauded and recognized, but missed deadlines should also be recognized, as should unit-testing problems that didn't formally surface until user testing. Project management weaknesses should also be recognized, as should project issues that the team allowed to sit too long.

The bottom line is that individual contributions—and the project results—should be factored into the performance feedback. Team leaders should be recognized for their contributions, but also held accountable for the project results. Make sure that the overall project results, good and bad, are factored into personal performance evaluations.