

Eudaimonic Performance Review System: Because humans made machines and not the other way around

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This paper proposes a new performance evaluation system -Eudaimonic Performance Review (EPR) System against the conventional bell curve system. EPR model is based on 3 main ideas - goals compatibility, neutralizing Power Distance and real time modeling. A pre-test survey was conducted to examine the constructs. Findings show significant percentage of employees oppose the bell curve and seek EPR system. An inspiration to write this paper comes from harsh work-experiences with bell curve system while working with a French-based MNC in Mumbai, India. This paper is an effort to bring the change we wish to see in the world. To the best of our knowledge, this research is the first to propose a 'real time' PR model. We believe that fitting into standardized graphs is likely a job of machines, but we are humans hence evaluation should be Eudaimonic ("happy") in nature.

INTRODUCTION

The human resource is an organization's biggest asset, and its efficient utilization determines a company's fate. The most important asset at your company isn't something you can put your hands on. It isn't equipment or the physical plant, and it isn't data, technology, or intellectual property. The most valuable part of your company is the people—the human capital—and any plans to move your business forward have to start there. ("Why human capital is your company's greatest asset," 2015). Human Resource Management (HRM) has the power to make or break an organization. Hence, this paper focuses on the most important aspect of HRM i.e. Performance Review. Performance review basically determines the compensation and pay of an employee, and job satisfaction is closely related with compensation and pay. According to the research report by Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2017), roughly two-thirds (61%) of U.S. employees noted compensation/pay as a very important job satisfaction contributor, yet a mere one-quarter (26%) of employees stated they were very satisfied with it, marking this factor with the largest gap at 35 percentage points (SHRM, 2017).

Hence, it is vital to have a fair performance review system that effectively evaluates and values employee contribution.

The conventional way of conducting a performance review is following the Bell curve ('rank and yank') model. The forced ranking system assumes that all the employees in a company can be ranked approximately as; top performers (20%), average performers (70%) and non-performers (10%) (Bhatia,

2016). This might prove to be highly unfair for employees in a team that has all the best performers. Our personal experience serves as an evidence that in such circumstance employees attempt to flatter their managers, they try to outdo each other by refraining from helping each other. This stagnates employee growth, resulting in biased appraisals. Also, the rigid categorization of the bell-curve usually forces managers to label a high performer as a mediocre. A high performer, unmotivated by such artificial demotion, then starts behaving like a mediocre. Further, managers begin to reward visible performance over the actual. Finally, the erosion of social capital could cripple the company. (Vaishnav et al., 2006).

In this paper, we propose a new performance review (PR) model, the *Eudaimonic Performance Review Model (EPR model)*, which measures employee performance based on the degree of goals compatibility between organization and employee, neutralizing high power distance using top-down and bottom-up evaluation approach and implementation of this model as a real time dynamic model which dismisses the concept of annual or semiannual performance review.

Further, using the pre-test survey we examine ground level issues of employees in organizations that follow the bell curve model, mainly in areas of job satisfaction, goals, fairness in performance evaluation process and an upgradation to a frequent or real time dynamic process. We examine the efficiency of our EPR model which also serves as a solution to the problems in bell curve model. The responses show that majority of the employees across different countries are unhappy and find bell curve as an unfair evaluation process, they seek its replacement with EPR like model.

From the point of view of practical implementation, most companies follow the conventional way of reporting time and performance separately using timesheet and PR system respectively. Our proposed EPR model breaks the conventional separate reporting way and introduces a cohesive approach, where both, time and performance, are reported, evaluated and rated on real-time basis in a single place. The cohesive approach might bring a big relief to HR department as it will keep them from following up employees for submitting their timesheets.

In a real-time system, integrating the time reporting and rating such that any delay in time reporting delays display of updated rating would compel the employees to keep the system up-to-date without any reminder emails thus, making the work faster and easier for the HR department. This cohesive approach would save a lot of time and energy that can be invested by the HR department in other meaningful activities.

However, different companies would have different time reporting system, integration of EPR model across different technical platforms and business modules can be challenging. While the proposed EPR model does not support the rigid ranking system to the extent that it is unfair for the employees, it is a matter of further research to ensure that the EPR model does not prove too lenient on employees. Also, we look forward to proposing a constructive way of handling the weak performers of a company.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The bell curve model is based on several assumptions and prejudices that might not hold true for all groups of people depending on varying circumstances. The current bell curve model when used for employee appraisal, categorizes employees as, top performers, average performers and low performers. It is not always true that all groups will be accurately represented by these specific categories. Sometimes, teams have highly skilled employees, and all belong to the category of top performers or they all might be a group of low performers. In either of these cases, an unfair review is conducted by forcefully grading at least 10% of high performers as low, or in latter case, low performers as high. Hence, managers are forced to place employees in specific gradients just to meet the bell curve requirements.

What if a company had hired Mark Zuckerberg, Indra Nooyi, Bill Gates, Sundar Pichai, Tim Cook and Steve Jobs and put them in one team? According to the bell curve model, some of these would fall into the category of underperformers and might also be thrown out of the company! This for us is not a correct way of evaluating performance. Moreover, this might highly demotivate employees by adversely impacting their job satisfaction. The goal is to recognize weak performers to improve them, and not to be able to fit into a standardized model or graph by firing them.

One of the greatest disadvantages of bell-curve is blind acceptance of the appraisals/analysis performed by the immediate supervisors regarding their juniors. These supervisors are assumed to be benchmarks and ‘performance bars’ themselves. The ability, efficiency and objectiveness of the supervisors performing these appraisals is hardly questioned or doubted. (Parshuram & Hegde, 2016). This limitation of the bell curve approach plays a major role in unfair employee assessment because it drives away attention from the main reason behind underperformers (i.e. the mismatch between their skill sets and the task assigned to them by their managers), while inviting rise to high power distance in the hierarchy.

Incompatible Organization and Employees Goals

Traditional performance management systems often fail to deliver desired business objectives because communications from the top are not always clearly understood further down the line, leading to a mismatch between corporate strategy and how it is translated into targets at a team or individual level. (Bagga & Srivastava, 2014) A mismatch in understanding company goals does more harm to the company by keeping it away from achieving its goals. A common mismatch seen in IT companies is between the task assigned to the employee and her skill sets (which is highly related to employee goals). An incompatibility in this area is certainly going to make an employee underperform.

High Power Distance in Hierarchy

What is a power distance? It is one of the 6 cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede. Power Distance Index (PDI): This dimension expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. The fundamental issue here is how a society handles inequalities among people. People in societies exhibiting a large degree of Power Distance accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place, and which needs no further justification. In societies with low Power Distance, people strive to equalize the distribution of power and demand justification for inequalities of power. (Hofstede, 2017). Hence, high power distance means high hierarchy gap and inequality among people.

Since the managers are loaded with huge power of solely rating the employee, in a highly competitive industry, this gives rise to glaringly obvious biasedness and favoritism. In some cases, employees suffer merely for being bold and manager’s lack of skills in handling constructive criticism from the subordinates. A feeling of superiority engulfs supervisors thus making subordinates pay a big price during review for voicing their opinion that may have hurt the manager’s ego. Also, at times, managers find it hard to keep personal opinions away from appraisals of employees. For, an employee not being good at unnecessary flattering or being a manager’s favorite doesn’t mean he is not good at work too. Employees have no control or power to defend their performance against unjust ratings especially due to favoritism. One of the relatively few studies on the topic, surveyed senior executives at companies with over 1,000 employees, and found that 84% admitted favoritism takes place at their own organizations. (Lipman, 2018). This supports our claim that favoritism exists and in a high-power distance environment it is obvious to see it impact an employee PR, giving no other choice to an employee than accepting the biased PR. The issue is not only about favoritism but also its grave impact on employee morale. Favoritism can lower the morale of all other employees, as other good employees will likely be aware that their peer is enjoying extra perks while their own hard work goes unnoticed and unrewarded. As a result, these performers might feel neglected and unmotivated. (Fleischman, 2015).

Lack of Dynamic Real-Time Model

In today’s dynamic world, it is important to have a dynamic real time performance review. The idea of waiting for annual or semiannual reviews to know area of improvements serves no purpose and is too outdated to follow.

Considering these critical limitations of the bell curve model, it is highly essential to develop a new model that overcomes these limitations.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Bell Curve Model

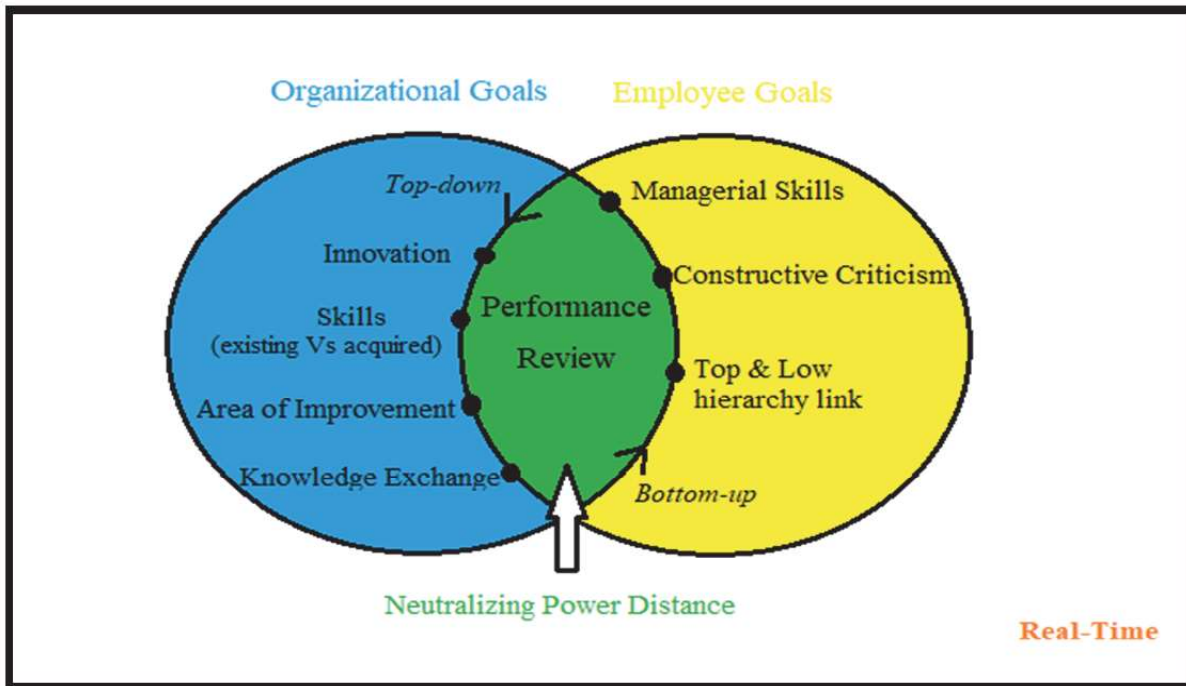
As described in the sections above, the bell curve approach promotes unhealthy work culture, often leading to politics and favoritism at work to gain a biased positive performance review and outdo co-workers. These factors neither contribute towards organizational goals nor employee goals. Also, it results in a large amount of wasted resources like time, money and energy. A Deloitte manager for instance, referred to the review process as “an investment of 1.8 million hours across the firm that didn’t fit our business needs anymore.” (Cappelli & Tavis, 2016).

In a bell curve model, managers are forced to rate employees as underperformers even if they don’t deserve a poor rating. In this approach, even the managers have no power but to follow the forced ranking system. Big companies like Microsoft, General Electronics, Adobe etc. have axed the bell curve PR system considering its extreme nature and negative impacts on employees. Managers will no longer be required to rate workers on a fixed scale of performance rankings, Lisa Brummel, Microsoft’s executive vice president of human resource, said in a memo to the company’s 99,000 staff. (“Microsoft axes bell curve,” 2013).

The bell curve represents what statisticians call a ‘normal distribution’. A normal distribution is a sample with an arithmetic average and an equal distribution above and below average like the curve below. This model assumes we have an equivalent number of people above and below average, and that there will be a very small number of people above and below the average (mean). In performance management, this curve results in a ‘rank and yank’. A company is forced to distribute raises and performance ratings by this curve (which essentially assumes that real performance is distributed this way). To avoid ‘grade inflation’ companies force managers to have a certain percentage at the top, certain percentage at the bottom, and a large swath in the middle. (Bersin, 2014). However, this forced ranking is not only depressing but also usually evaluates employee performance incorrectly.

Proposed Eudaimonic Performance Review (EPR) Model

FIGURE 1
PROPOSED EUDAIMONIC PERFORMANCE REVIEW (EPR) MODEL



In this paper, we introduce the Eudaimonic PR model that aims to bring sense of purpose and well-being for employees, as per its name. An Eudaimonic view of well-being conceptualizes well-being in terms of the cultivation of personal strengths and contribution to the greater good (Aristotle, trans. 2000), acting in accordance with one's inner nature and deeply held values (Waterman 1993), the realization of one's true potential (Ryff & Keyes, 1995), and the experience of purpose or meaning in life (Ryff 1989). (McMahan, & Estes, 2011). Also, a two-year study with 122 business owners showed that Eudaimonic well-being results in bringing the best out of the employee by making them proactive (Hahn et al., 2017).

The EPR model as shown in *Figure 1* above, is filled with colors, each conveying a significant message. While different cultures might have different meaning for each color, the model displays organizational goals in blue to represent the depth and stability traits of a company like that of sky and sea. Employee goals are shown in yellow, the color of sunshine to represent employee traits of happiness, energy and intellect. Eventually, both mixing together to produce green, the color of prosperity. The more they mix, the more positive the performance reviews, thus, greater the prosperity. Finally, the entire model being real-time represented by the color orange-the color of dynamism.

We propose EPR model in which power distance would be neutralized to promote growth and prosperity. A low power distance environment enables easy exchange of ideas without having to think twice about the consequences on one's PR for speaking one's mind, especially when disagreeing with supervisor's opinion. In EPR model, the bottom-up approach spreads the power of performance evaluation to lower hierarchy for rating a manager on important aspects like handling criticism, managerial skills and so on. This avoids unnecessary suppression of ideas irrespective of position in hierarchy. Thus, actions taken would be more thoughtful, precise and with consensus resulting in better decisions and overall prosperity.

The proposed model is structured keeping in mind the bell curve limitations, effectively overcoming them. The comparison table below highlights the difference between the two models.

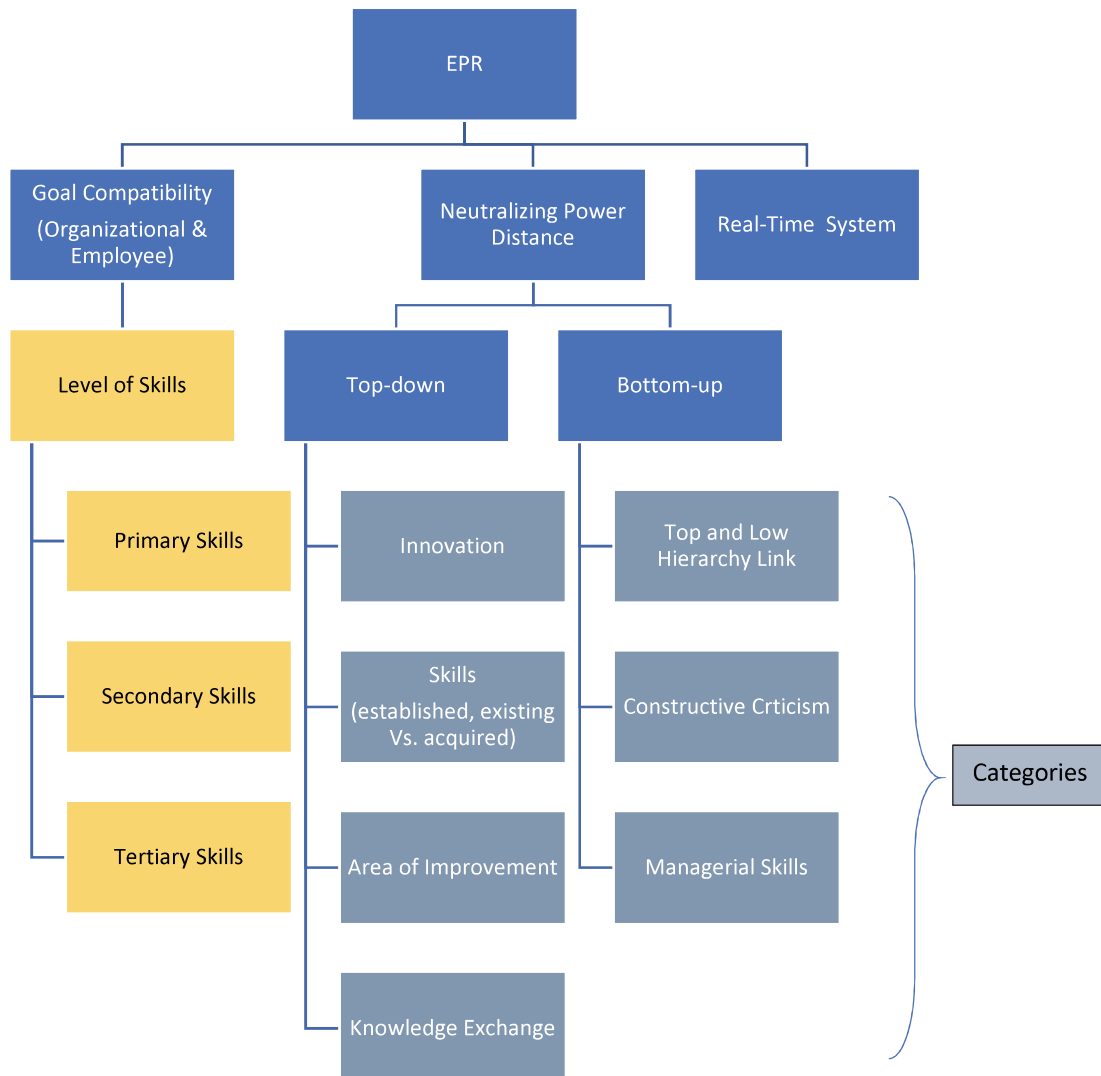
TABLE 1
COMPARISON TABLE

Sr. No	Bell curve model	EPR Model
1	Supports restricted categorization	No restricted percentage categorization. Based on degree of intersection between organizational goals and employee goals
2	Compete with co-workers (outdo each other)	Compete with oneself
3	Inefficient utilization of resources (time and money)	Efficient utilization of resources
4	Stagnates growth (gossip, politics, favoritism etc.)	Promotes growth (innovation, measure existing and acquired skills etc.)
5	Separate time reporting process	Comprehends and expedites time reporting process
6	High Power distance	Low Power distance
7	Annual review	Real time
8	Not beneficial	Highly beneficial
9	Usually off tracks the employee from his goals and deprives him from achieving them	Enables the organization and individual to be on track and achieve their goals together.
10	Mostly hated by employees. Promotes demotivation	Eudaemonic. Promotes job satisfaction and motivation

Characteristics of Conceptual Model

We propose a completely unique EPR model that breaks the traditional way of perceiving performance review. It does not stick to a specific ratio or number, like in the bell curve or the recent L-curve; doesn't mean that it isn't tangible. However, we believe that change is constant, especially in dynamic work culture with diverse human resources, a restricted performance model won't survive or do justice. Human skills and efforts are an important factor that should mainly go into the measuring of one's performance, at times, even sidetracking the success or failure of the task in certain circumstances. The below structure in Figure 2 gives a summary of the characteristics of the EPR model which are described in detail in the sections below:

**FIGURE 2
CHARACTERISTICS OF EPR MODEL**



Goals Compatibility

Skills are talents or proficiencies that help us achieve our goals, hence, skills and goals are closely related to each other. Primary skills are the major essential skills or expertise of an employee to perform their job and they contribute immensely in achieving goals. For instance, in an IT company a software developer’s technical skill like programing language(s) are his primary skills. The secondary skills are comparatively less essential to perform the job than primary skills. Secondary skills are usually acquired along the way while doing the main job. For a software developer, technical skills that are required to complete the task in addition to primary skills can be termed as secondary skills. Tertiary skills are even less essential to perform the job than secondary skills. Usually, companies are more interested in primary and secondary skills of an employee but, some companies require information on tertiary skills as well, to know the well-rounded competence of an employee. Tertiary skills in the given example of a software developer can be her soft skills or hobbies other than her technical skills that might contribute towards smooth working of the project with coworkers.

If employee tasks are recorded according to their skills utilized: primary, secondary or tertiary, we would get a fair idea about the number of opportunities employee are given to showcase their talent and if they are being efficiently used by doing so. The greater the tasks performed under primary skills, the fairer the evaluation. In some cases, employee don't even get an opportunity to work on tasks that require their primary skills and are given poor rating for underperforming on tasks that do not match their goals and skill sets, which shouldn't have been assigned to them in the first place.

Construct 1: Compatibility between organizational and employee goals is directly proportional to the employee performance review hence, overall organization's prosperity.

Practical Implementation: We believe that the best way to get these skills records is to comprehend the timesheet or time reporting model of an organization with EPR model. When submitting time against each project code and tasks, an option of selecting the level of skill set(s) (primary or secondary) that was required for completing the task will get us the required information. (Refer Table 2 below). This will also have an option of selecting multiple skill levels for a single task and mentioning the weightage of each. PR is of great importance to employees hence, employees would keep it most updated thus, giving a big relief to the HR department from sending those follow up emails and reminders to get the timecards submitted on time by the employees. Thus, if an employee is not given minimum percentage of primary skill tasks, she may not have been utilized efficiently and not given enough opportunity hence, cannot be considered as an under performer.

**TABLE 2
REPORTING LEVEL OF SKILLS**

Date	Project code	Task	Time	Level of skill	Level of skill weightage
Tuesday 01/01/2019	Project A	Task A1	3 hours	Primary skill	100%
Wednesday 01/02/2019	Project A	Task A2	5 hours	Primary skill	70%
				Secondary skill	30%

Neutralizing Power Distance (Top-down, Bottom-up Approach)

The proposed model does not concentrate power into one person's hand, it introduces a way of balancing by spreading out the power. A team is the reflection of its leader. If a manager can effectively manage his team, the team performs in harmony and takes ownership of tasks without indulging in blame game or politics. Thus, managerial skills speak a lot about a manager's performance and are crucial in manager's PR. A manager's skills of handling criticism, communication and decision-making are closely observed & experienced by her team. Moreover, team members can evaluate the effectiveness of manager's skills from technical and practical perspectives. Hence, team's feedback holds importance when evaluating managers. While many companies take feedback about their managers from employees, it isn't effective since it never contributes to the manager's rating and is merely done for formality. The lack of transparency between team and senior manager i.e. manager's manager or above, at times, results in immediate managers taking advantage to hide their weakness and report their failure as team's failure or as other business reasons.

In EPR model, the rating & feedback given by the team for its manager on bottom-up categories will be taken into consideration while calculating manager's rating. This will bridge the high power-distance gap between team and senior manager, thus, making it an effective bottom-up approach by increasing transparency.

Construct 2: Neutralization of high-power distance is directly proportional to transparency and organizational prosperity.

Practical Implementation: In addition to selecting levels of skill (primary or secondary), a provision to select categories stated in the following paragraph sections **A** and **B**, (refer Table 3 below) for each task, while reporting the time, can help measure the categories depending on the weightage set for them by the company.

**TABLE 3
REPORTING CATEGORIES**

Date	Project code	Task	Time	Level of skill	Level of skill weightage	Category
Tuesday 01/01/2019	Project A	Task A1	3 hours	Primary skill	100%	Innovation
Wednesday 01/02/2019	Project A	Task A2	5 hours	Primary skill	70%	Newly acquired Skills
				Secondary skill	30%	Innovation

Top-down Approach (Managers to Employee)

This is the usual approach where managers rate their team members, however, the difference here are the categories (stated below) on which they will be rated. Companies can decide for themselves the weight of each category depending upon the company goals and priorities.

Innovation

We believe innovation should be encouraged. Often due to tight deadlines innovation is given less priority and employees and managers don't invest time in this major building block of company as it does not count towards their rating. If innovation is given more weightage in PR, employees will prefer investing comparatively more time in it.

Skills

Skills are the basic aspect of almost every PR system, in EPR model a systematic assessment of previously achieved skills, existing skills and newly acquired skills or efforts in that direction are evaluated. Basically, measures new skills an employee has acquired.

Area of Improvement (AoI)

An AoI can be of three basic types: Severe, Moderate and Low. A Severe AoI means severe loss or damage incurred due to poor performance. This is the most important aspect of EPR model, because, if an employee gets a severe AoI from his supervisor, he can be given low rating even if he has not met the minimum percent of primary skill tasks. In this way, further damage can be avoided by not having to wait until the minimum percent primary skill task is met. Because if we wait for an extremely poor performer to complete his minimum percentage of primary skill task to be eligible for under performer rating, he would continue incurring loss to the company due to his bad performance.

Knowledge Exchange

With the industries getting more and more competitive across the globe, it's getting harder for companies to tackle 'knowledge hiding' by employees. This is mainly because the bell curve PR approach compares employees and given the tough competition, employee restrict themselves from sharing the knowledge that might result in knowledge receiver getting better rating than the giver. Thus, more the competition, more the knowledge hiding. Current study shows that information does not flow through the employees of sample organizations, and employees prefer to hide their organizational knowledge from their colleagues to maintain their own portfolios. (Labaf, 2017). Hence, Knowledge exchange - a feature of EPR model can be implemented in a way that will allow an employee to see what other employees

have to offer. Just like online shopping allows us to select and purchase an item and pay the cost of that item online. Similarly, an online system that allows employee to select and purchase ideas or knowledge by making a payment with their knowledge in exchange. Basically, this will give the employee a feeling of not losing anything on getting something in return.

Also, one can simply take knowledge but in this case the knowledge giver would earn more credits or points compared to when exchanging. It will gain an employee some points in the rating depending on the weightage allocated for this category by the company.

Bottom-Up Approach (Team Members to Managers)

Below are the categories on which managers will be assessed by their lower hierarchy, depending upon the weightage allocated for each category by the company.

Top & Low Hierarchy Link

Manager should be able to communicate clearly between his team and his upper hierarchy, giving proper updates of new development, decisions and expectations so that employees align their focus and priorities accordingly. Lack of knowledge about the organization results in an ill-informed team being less productive.

Constructive Criticism

Ego factor of the managers becomes a big issue, especially in countries with collectivistic culture, which suppresses innovation and talent in the industry. A manager's ability to handle criticism and openness to suggestions even from the lowest member in his hierarchy should be appreciated and graded accordingly.

Managerial Skills

The leadership and management skills are important factors on which a manager can be rated by her team. A manager's ability to manage time, communicate, motivate, make decisions, produce ideas, analytical skills, problem solving, negotiation etc. are some of the skills that the team gets to closely observe and learn from supervisors on daily basis. Hence, a feedback from team in this area would help in measuring manager's performance and efficiency to a certain extent.

Real-time Model

There are various approaches that are being adopted by businesses. Instead of a yearly review system, many companies are opting for more regular and frequent feedback to their employees to help them to achieve their goals. (Hassan, 2017)

Construct 3: Real time performance review system provides regular and frequent feedback to the employees to help them achieve their goals.

Pre-test Survey

We conducted a survey to study examine 2 major aspects:

- Our understanding of issues with bell curve model
- Our proposed solution in the form of EPR model is in the right direction.

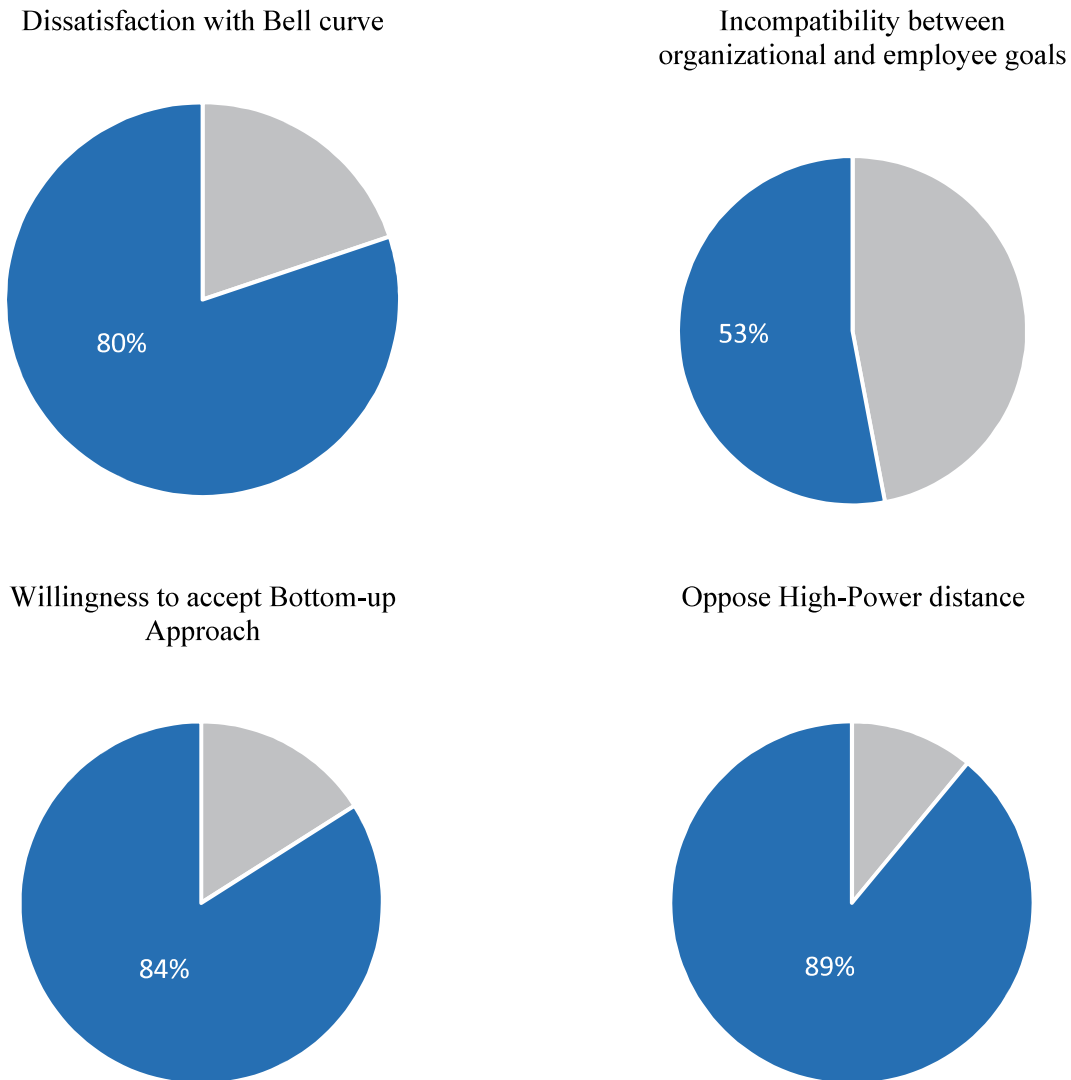
It is important to have some confirmation on these two aspects before taking the research further, to ensure its efficient practical implementation in the form of web application in future. A survey was conducted using Google form, focusing questions mainly on 4 areas:

- Level of Satisfaction with Bell curve
- Degree of compatibility between organizational and employee goals.
- Willingness towards acceptance of bottom-up approach.
- High-Power distance preference.

The target audience of this survey were employees who were working with organization that used Bell curve model for their performance evaluation. The survey was taken by 91 employees including freshers and managers from middle as well as higher management. These employees belong to different country of origin mainly Sweden and India, there were other employees that work in different countries like Singapore, UAE, Canada and USA. The responses were recorded on 5 likert scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly Agree)

We summarize the findings by mainly observing the supportive responses received on each of the 4 areas stated above (refer Figure 3, summary chart below).

**FIGURE 3
SUMMARY CHART-PRESTUDY TEST**



We believe that the above summarized chart is strong evidence that supports our proposed constructs. It is evident that majority of the employee are not satisfied with the Bell curve and would like to change it with new model. The primary idea of compatibility of goals is lacking in the bell curve system. Also, employees highly favor the idea of bottom-up approach as proposed in the EPR model. and prefer low power distance work environment as opposed to the high-power distance environment of bell curve.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

We believe that there is a fine line that is to be maintained while further structuring and implementing the EPR model. Although, we talk about equalizing the power we should also take care that the model doesn't end up being too lenient or too rigid on employees. For this reason, each aspect of the model is yet to be made specific about the area that need to be lenient and where rigidity is required and to what extent. Specific quantitative research on the permutation and combination between the two attributes, level of skills and categories relation is required to check for any loopholes in the evaluation on a deeper level.

Also, different companies would have different time reporting system, portals and platforms that might be integrated deeper in their entire business process systems, hence, implementing the EPR model that comprehends time reporting system efficient enough to surpass or at least be equivalent to their existing time reporting system needs to be designed and developed.

Lastly, a graceful way to deal with real underperformers that motivates them to change their failure into success should be a subject of further research.

CONCLUSION

Human resource market is very competitive in current scenario. Usually the underperformers don't make it to get a job hence, most of the underperformers are filtered right during recruitment process. An important factor that reduces the count of underperformers in the company would be to incorporate better hiring process. Hence, greater positive performance reviews.

We believe that employees that already exist in the company have qualities that make them good in one area or other, the need lies in just figuring out the best in them, giving them opportunity by allocating tasks that allow them to showcase their talent and utilizing these resources to the maximum. The EPR model should not be perceived as a threat for the managers or their respect, but, a healthy and fair way to get correct reviews that have been going unnoticed and un conveyed until now.

In the end, we are humans and our evaluations should be like that of humans that appreciate creativity, values, even mistakes and not like that of machines, to fit in standardized graphs or curves.

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