Annual appraisals at the TU Darmstadt – a handout

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Introduction

Annual appraisals are a primary component of improving collaboration between managers and employees. In its mission statement on staff development the TU Darmstadt\(^1\) has committed itself to ensuring a management culture guided by the principles of fair, trusting treatment of one another, mutual regard and respect and a strong sense of responsibility on the part of everyone in his/her respective working area.

What is an annual appraisal?

An annual appraisal is an employee appraisal\(^2\) that is regularly conducted at all organisational and management levels of the TU Darmstadt.

It is a private, confidential consultation and development appraisal conducted between a manager and an employee. The interview should be conducted in an atmosphere of openness and honesty. It assumes a willingness to engage with the other's point of view on both sides.

The outcome and insights of the annual appraisal and any agreed measures and objectives are documented in agreement, signed by both sides and treated as absolutely confidential. The participants keep them.

Objectives and use of annual appraisals

In annual appraisals managers and employees should be made clear about the objectives in their working environments and in the organisation and reflect on how they contribute to achieving these objectives.

Employees have the opportunity to evaluate their work situations, the organisation of their work, collaboration with others and the layout of their workplaces, together with their managers. Together they analyse their assignments so far and agree on any new assignment fields if applicable.

In this context employee performance is recognised, allocation of performance-related bonuses and performance-based payments are checked.

Annual appraisals also act as opportunities for discussing the objectives of professional and career-related qualifications, and agreeing on any professional development measures with managers. This can include recognising employee potential and better tailoring work plans to employees' individual strengths.

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\(^1\) See mission statement on staff development at the TU Darmstadt, May 2007.

\(^2\) See framework document, Employee Appraisals
Better communication between managers and employees benefits not only specific working areas but also the organisation of the TU Darmstadt as a whole.

Who conducts appraisals?
Annual appraisals are always conducted between line managers and their employees. Line managers are the people who can issue instructions to their employees and have the authority to instruct them professionally.

Preparation of annual appraisals
Annual appraisals must be prepared thoroughly by both sides. The date and time of an annual appraisal should be set at least two weeks in advance so that manager and employee have sufficient time in which to prepare. Both sides should use the appraisal guidelines in the attached handout as a preparation sheet. The participants keep the preparation sheet. In addition, there is advice on how to prepare the appraisal.
A date and a time window of at least an hour should be agreed for the appraisal. The appraisal should be in a place where it is not disturbed (no telephone etc.).

Contents of annual appraisals
The following topics should be discussed in an annual appraisal:
- Review of the past year, recalling the agreed objectives
- Evaluation of current assignments and the work situation
- Plans for future assignments with agreements that are then included in agreed objectives if applicable
- This includes explaining which development measures or what professional development the employee wishes or the manager recommends.

Documentation of annual appraisals
The outcome and insights of the appraisal and any agreed objectives and measure are recorded in writing and signed by both sides. In order to reduce workload, a form for ensuring an outcome and agreeing on objectives, which is based on the structure of the preparation sheet, is available as a file.
If no agreement can be reached on the outcome of the appraisal, both sides have the option of writing this down in the shared document under 'open questions'.

The agreed objectives should be realistic, specifically formulated and include a time frame for their implementation.
The contents of the appraisal, the documented outcome and the agreed objectives are confidential. Only the participants in the appraisal keep the relevant documents. Information, e.g. on the agreed measures for obtaining qualifications, can only be passed on to third parties by mutual agreement. This is recorded in the shared documents.

Note on disagreements
If, in an annual appraisal, consensus cannot be reached in the preliminary stages or when agreeing on the objectives, or should there even be conflict, each side involved has the right to turn to an institution or person whom they trust, in order to solve the problem.

From a data protection point of view and in accordance with the purpose of employee appraisals only the protocol of each current appraisal should be kept. The ‘old’ protocol must be destroyed after a recent appraisal, for which the previous appraisal document acts as a memory aid. This means the manager only ever has one employee appraisal document. Assuming an appraisal takes place every year, the mandatory period for it to be kept is one year.
Framework document

Employee appraisals at the TU Darmstadt

In its mission statement on staff development the TU Darmstadt has committed itself to the principles of the fair and trusting treatment of one another, mutual regard and a strong sense of responsibility on the part of everyone in his/her respective working area. These principles are connected to a personal commitment to a management culture which supports all employees in being pro-active, creative and innovative, treating all people equally and fostering mutual trust. In addition to their professional work, they are requested to review and adjust their objectives as well as the current development of their work together, and also to identify and reduce stress factors. The TU Darmstadt also intends to complement current daily communications, by developing and maintaining a culture of employee appraisals.

The following statements are intended to create a common understanding regarding employee appraisals at the TU Darmstadt.

Definition

Employee appraisals are planned interviews between managers and employees, which are prepared in terms of their content, confidential and lie outside daily and spontaneous communications.

Objectives

Employee appraisals represent an interactive, participatory management culture and working atmosphere

whose aims include:

- Developing and maintaining trust and transparency;
- Creating an insight into and understanding of the structures of the working environment;
- Identifying and reducing weaknesses;
- Improving leadership and collaboration;
- Raising motivation and activating personal resources;
- Fostering cooperative and creative behaviour among the employees;
- Supporting employees’ professional development.
Pivotal features of employee appraisals

- Employee appraisals may be conducted both regularly (e.g. annual appraisals) and for a current reason (e.g. critical reviews).

- Employee appraisals are usually conducted between two people. In specific cases (e.g. appraisals the content of which refers to disciplinary measures or employment law) an additional, trusted person may be involved.
  - Managers are in charge of conducting the appraisal and are responsible for the arrangements.
  - An employee appraisal may be initiated by either parties.

- Employee appraisals are confidential conversations between two people who respect each other equally.
The conversation is to take place in an open and honest spirit in which both participants are prepared to take one another’s point of view.

- The difference between an everyday conversation and an employee appraisal is that the latter are planned, result-oriented and targeted.
  - The employee appraisal is scheduled for a specific date on which the parties are able to discuss the matters without any interruptions.
  - The parties prepare for this conversation.
  - They must be familiar with the reason of the meeting.
  - An employee appraisal always has a specific content and objective. These shall be specifically defined and agreed by the parties in good time before the meeting. In this process the parties should limit the objectives sensibly if needed.
  - The parties take care to keep them realistic.
  - On conclusion of the appraisal, the results and agreed measures or objectives are usually recorded in a joint document. Confidential documents shall always be filed by the parties only.
  - The results of the appraisals may only be forwarded to third parties if this has been agreed previously or is required for specific reasons.

The TU Darmstadt provides training for conducting employee appraisals. All parties, managers in particular, are requested to use the relevant offers in order to extend their competencies.
Employee appraisals conducted on a regular basis

- Annual appraisals are employee appraisals which are conducted at the TU Darmstadt on a regular basis. The TU Darmstadt provides a handout for preparing and conducting them.
- Appraisals are performed in accordance with the guidelines for the assessment of civil servants in the state of Hesse (Staatsanzeiger (government gazette) of 21 May 2007).

Appraisals also for current reasons, including:

- Introductory conversations and those on completion of a trial period
- Conversations recognising achievements
- Critical reviews
- Conversations about promotion (even if the promotion is refused)
- Conversations about academic qualifications
- Conversations about absence from work
- Conversations after an employee's return to work (after leave, long-term illness)
- Conversations about warning notices
- Discussions about how to deal with alcohol and drugs in the workplace (see service agreement of May 1994)
- Conversations about transfer
- Severance talks following notice of termination to an employee by a colleague
- Conversations following notice of termination to an employee by his/her employer
- Conversations about an employee's departure due to old age or illness
- Discussions about the integration and participation of severely disabled persons.

Further reading on the topic of employee/annual appraisals:

1. R. Fiege, P.M. Muck, H. Schuler: das Mitarbeitergespräch (the employee appraisal); in: Publisher H Schuler, Lehrbuch für Personalpsychologie; Göttingen 2006
2. Publisher J. Ryschka, M. Solga, A. Mattenklott; Praxishandbuch Personalentwicklung; Instrumente, Konzepte, Beispiele; Wiesbaden 2005
3. O. Neuberger; Das Mitarbeitergespräch, praktische Grundlagen für erfolgreiche Führungsarbeit; Leonberg 2004 (6th edition)
4. Publisher R. Nagel, M. Oswald, R. Wimmer: das Mitarbeitergespräch als Führungsinstrument, Stuttgart 2002
5. Publisher H.-E. Meixner; Das Mitarbeiter-Vorgesetzten-Gespräch – Neue Wege der Personalentwicklung und Förderung in der öffentlichen Verwaltung; Kronach, München, Potsdam 2001 (3rd edition)
# Recommendations for preparing and performing annual appraisals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Manager</th>
<th>Employee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Before the annual appraisal</strong></td>
<td>Before introducing annual appraisals managers shall inform employees about the reasons for establishing annual appraisals (team meetings, letters to employees, preparation workshops).</td>
<td>Employees may visit our homepage or attend workshops to learn more about the content and objectives of annual appraisals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>At least 2 weeks before the annual appraisal</strong></td>
<td>Agree on a date and a place. Hand out preparation sheet.</td>
<td>Confirm the date, if applicable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 week before the annual appraisal</strong></td>
<td>Read the topics on the preparation sheet thoroughly and familiarise yourself with the topics of the appraisal.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review your job description and find out which of the tasks are still current and/or whether new jobs have been added.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Start of the annual appraisal</strong></td>
<td>Signal to the other party that you are willing to have a constructive talk and create an atmosphere of trust. Remove any sources of disruption (phone, mobile, interruption by third parties) Agree on topics and objectives of the appraisal.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>During the annual appraisal</strong></td>
<td>Give feedback to employees regarding the topics discussed, ask questions, do not try to ‘persuade’ employees. Express praise and highlight special achievements.</td>
<td>Communicate clearly how you assess the individual topics (see preparation sheet) and provide feedback on the manager’s assessment, if needed. Explain what you particularly like about your work and your working environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If you express criticism, relate it to a specific example and ask whether your criticism has been understood. Be open to criticism.</td>
<td>If your work is criticised ask for the reason if you do not understand it clearly and find out which situation it refers to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concluding the annual appraisal</strong></td>
<td>Discuss the assessments of the individual topics jointly and derive precise objectives for the next year, if applicable. Record the objectives and steps to implement them and sign the agreement on the objectives. Agree on a time period for the next annual appraisal.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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