

# **Analysis of Travis County Performance Appraisal Systems**

**By**

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## ABSTRACT

Performance appraisals are utilized in an attempt to measure employee performance in organizations. Often times the outcome of these appraisals affect the employees retention, promotion, or salary. An effective performance appraisal system should improve morale, motivation, and overall productivity of an organization by identifying employees' strengths and addressing areas that need improvement.

This applied research project assesses the performance appraisal systems of Travis County Departments based on the assessment model developed in previous research and described through a literature review.<sup>1</sup> The ideal type model for effective performance appraisal systems contains seven categories: Policies and Procedures; Managerial Support; Training; Setting of Employee Goals; Setting of Performance Standards; Observation of Performance; and Appraising Performance.

The assessment is performed through the case study research design and uses multiple sources to collect evidence. Survey research, focus interviews, and content analysis enhance the reliability of the research through a triangulation of data. The results indicate that performance appraisal systems of Travis County Departments adhere to the seven model categories listed above. Future recommendations include development of more comprehensive policies and procedures relating to the performance appraisal process and the consistent application of rewards to employees who perform at or above standards.

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<sup>1</sup> See "Analysis of Municipal Government Performance Appraisal Systems", By Le Ann Estes Piatt, 1998. The conceptual framework and model used to assess the performance appraisal systems were taken directly from "Analysis of Municipal Government Performance Systems".

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

County governments deliver a wide variety of services to the citizens under their jurisdiction. These services include, but are not limited to law enforcement, health and human service delivery, upkeep of county maintained roads, collecting property taxes, and operating the judicial system. To provide such services county departments must rely on employees.

Since the departments ultimately depend on employees to achieve its goals, the most powerful control mechanisms are those that provide employees with the motivational impetus to direct their own behavior (Burstein 1983: 184). By aligning individual and team objectives with departmental goals, employees at all levels will have greater ownership of departmental goals. Departments must manage employee performance in an attempt to direct organizational behavior toward task or goal accomplishment. “A performance management system requires that employees and managers jointly prioritize and determine goals and objectives, establishes how employees or teams contribute to organizations goals, identifies strengths and weaknesses of an individual’s performance, and recognizes and rewards high performance” (Selden, Ingraham, and Jacobson 2001: 605). To ensure that employees understand what is expected of them and how they are performing, counties use performance appraisals.

There is consensus in the literature that appraisals are utilized for employment decisions such as promotion, retention, assignment, transfer, and discharge as well as an employee development tool for providing feedback, conducting research, and

constructing training.<sup>2</sup> Further, an effective performance appraisal system would provide the employee with feedback regarding his or her individual performance, reward superior performance, and correct poor performance. Therefore, it is expected that a valid and reliable performance appraisal system will give employees and managers data about employees' strengths and needs for development. If the data is used to reinforce strengths and to plan and provide developmental assignments in areas of need, then one might also expect improvements in morale, motivation, and productivity (Mani 2002: 141). Dissatisfaction with the performance appraisal system, however, could potentially lead to decreased motivation, feelings of inequity, and even employee turnover (Dobbins, Cardy, and Platz-Vieno 1990: 620).

A study presented in a 1992, by Robert D. Bretz, George T. Milkovich, and Walter Read<sup>3</sup>, consolidated surveys from hundreds of companies. The study showed that managers spend about seven hours per year evaluating the performance of high-level employees and about three hours per year in evaluating those at lower levels. Many companies reported spending less than one hour per employee per year. Further, a study presented in a 2002, by Mark C. Ellickson<sup>4</sup>, consolidated surveys of hundreds of municipal employees representing several different departments. The study found a strong relationship between employee satisfaction with the performance appraisal system and job satisfaction.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example, Casio and Bernardin, 1981, p. 221; Feldman, 1992, p. 9; Gabris and Ihrke, 2001, p. 158; Janahar and Williams, 1997, p. 906, Kleiman and Durham, 1981, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> See *The Current State of Performance Appraisal Research and Practice: Concerns, Directions, Implications*, by R. Bretz, G. Milkovich, and W. Reed, *Journal of Management* 16, no. 2, 330-333.

<sup>4</sup> See *Determinants of Job Satisfaction of Municipal Government Employees*, by Mark C. Ellickson, *Public Personnel Management* 31, no. 3, 346-352.

The performance of an organization goes hand in hand with the performance of its employees. Implementing a successful performance appraisal system is one of the most challenging aspects of performance management. An effective performance appraisal system is an important tool for measuring and improving productivity. Most would acknowledge the value of documenting, communicating about, and targeting areas of performance. Cederblom and Pernerl (2002: 131) suggest that many employees become frustrated about the limited value, in actual practice, of performance appraisals in their organizations.

### **Previous Applied Research Projects**

Le Ann Estes Piatt in “Analysis of Municipal Government Performance Appraisal Systems” developed the practical ideal performance appraisal system used in this research. Her research focused on performance appraisal systems of Texas cities. Piatt developed and conducted a survey of cities with a population between 20,000 and 50,000. Further, content analysis of policies and procedures and performance rating forms of these cities was conducted.

Piatt found that policies and procedures did not consistently provide an explanation of setting of employee goals, setting of performance standards, rating criteria, and appeal procedures. Her research indicates that cities do not consistently compensate employees who perform above standards. Further, Piatt found that cities do not consistently provide training to employees on the appraisal process and conducting self-appraisals. She recommends that cities set goals and performance standards jointly between rater and

employees and encourages raters to provide on-going feedback to employees during the performance period.

Paul Johnson in “Analysis of Texas Juvenile Probation Department Performance Appraisal Systems” conducted a study based on Piatt’s work. Johnson conducted a survey and performed content analysis developed in Piatt’s study. His study, however, focused on performance appraisal systems of Juvenile Probation Departments in Texas rather than Texas cities.

Johnson found that policies and procedures did not provide detailed information on setting of employee goals, setting of performance standards, rating criteria, and who is responsible for performing appraisals. Further, he found that performance standards are not always set and used to evaluate employees’ achievements. Like Piatt, he recommends that employee goals and performance standards should be set jointly between rater and employee.

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to assess performance appraisal systems of Travis County Departments using the assessment model developed in previous research. Departments closest to the ideal type are identified and recommendations for improvement of existing performance appraisal systems are provided.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See “Analysis of Municipal Government Performance Appraisal Systems”, By Le Ann Estes Piatt, 1998. The conceptual framework and model used to assess the performance appraisal systems were taken directly from “Analysis of Municipal Government Performance Systems”.

## **Chapter Summaries**

Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature on the subject of performance appraisals. It provides a historical perspective of performance appraisals followed by an examination of both legislation and case law affecting performance appraisal. The chapter then focuses on the purpose of performance appraisals in an organization. At the conclusion of the chapter, the performance appraisal process is discussed. Chapter 3 presents the conceptual framework for this study. The chapter gives an explanation of the assessment model used. Chapter 4 provides background information on Texas County government. The chapter then focuses on Travis County and describes Travis County Departments. Chapter 5 is a discussion of the research methodology and the operationalization of the categories presented in the conceptual framework. The results of the study are presented in Chapter 6. Lastly, Chapter 7 provides a conclusion of the results in which departments closest to the ideal are identified and the results are applied toward specific recommendations for improvements in Travis County performance appraisal systems.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the available literature on performance appraisals. The history of performance appraisals and the affects of legislation and case law are described. Additionally, the purposes for utilizing a performance appraisal are discussed. After examining the history and purpose of appraisals the performance appraisal system is reviewed. This review includes the use of job analysis, the importance of performance standards, and the performance appraisal process.

#### **History of Performance Appraisals**

The practice of reviewing and assigning worth to the performance of an individual is not a new concept. Murphy (1995: 3) found evidence of the use of appraisals dating back as far as third century AD. One of the first applications of an employee appraisal system came in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century from a cotton mill owner in Scotland (Murphy 1995: 3). Murphey (1995: 3) further relates that the United States Civil Service has had a rating system since the mid 1800's. Piatt states, "By the early 1950's, appraisal was an accepted practice in many organizations in the United States" (1998: 6). Arvey and Murphy add, "Between 1950 and 1980, most research was concerned with improving the instruments used in making performance ratings" (1998: 143). Considering the significant legislation enacted between 1950 and 1980 it is not surprising that the research was dedicated to improving performance ratings. Legislation has had a direct impact on performance appraisals.

## **Legislation Affecting Performance Appraisals**

The previous discussion indicates the use of performance appraisals is growing. The performance appraisal process can serve both as a tool to manage employee performance and as a safeguard against costly litigation (Johnson 2000: 9). “Performance appraisals figure prominently in many cases involving personnel actions in organizations” (Martin, Bartol, and Kehoe 2000: 379). The growth of appraisals and the use in personnel actions has brought increasing attention to the legal rights of employees (Piatt 1998: 22). Werner and Bolino note, “There is no dispute that performance appraisal practices are subject to employment legislation” (1997: 1).<sup>6</sup> Key legislation that forms this backdrop are highlighted below.

### Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination based upon race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Performance appraisals used for promotion clearly fall under within the purview of the act (Kleiman and Durham 1981: 103). Personnel actions that utilize appraisals for dismissal, layoffs, and merit pay must take into account the legislation (Martin, Bartol, and Kehoe 2000: 380). Retaliation against employees seeking protection under the legislation is prohibited (Johnson 2000: 10).

### Equal Pay Act of 1963

The Equal Pay Act of 1963 prohibits discrimination on account of sex in the payment of wages by employers. Specifically, the act requires employers to pay

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<sup>6</sup> Legislation presented in the chapter is not all inclusive of the laws affecting performance appraisal systems.

employees the same for equal work on jobs the performance of which requires equal skill, effort, and responsibility, and which are performed under similar working conditions. Exception is made where payment is made pursuant to a seniority system, a merit system, a system that measures earnings by quantity or quality of production, or a differential based on any factor other than sex. Therefore, the act pertains to cases involving performance appraisals that relate to promotion and merit pay (Martin, Bartol, and Kehoe 2000: 380).

#### Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967

The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 prohibits discrimination based on a person's age. The intention of the act is to protect employees' 40 years of age and older. There are however, exceptions, such as positions in public safety and airline pilots due to the belief that age might jeopardize safety. Further, the act allows an employee to work for as long as he or she wants provided they meet set performance standards.

#### Uniform Guidelines (1978)

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Civil Service Commission, the Department of Labor, And the Department of Justice issued a single set of guidelines for employee selection procedures (Werner and Bolino 1997: 1). The intention of the guidelines was to eliminate instances, which employees and employers were subject to different and contradictory rules. Performance appraisals are often viewed as a "test" that is defined in the act. Clearly, when performance appraisals are used as a basis for

promotion decisions the governmental guidelines apply (Kleiman and Durham 1981: 103).

### Civil Service Reform Act of 1978

The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 has greatly influenced performance appraisals in the public sector. Provisions of the act apply only to the public sector and give specific guidance to the application of personnel appraisals. Further it introduced merit pay into the federal government (Kellough 1999: 663). Key provisions of the act include:

- Agencies are required to create performance appraisal procedures.
- Appraisal systems must encourage employee participation in creating performance standards based on elements of the job.
- The critical elements of the job must be put in writing.
- Employees must be advised of the critical job elements before the appraisal.
- An employee's performance appraisal must be based entirely on the individual's actual performance of the critical elements of the job.
- Appraisals must be conducted and recorded in writing once a year.
- The appraisals must provide information that can be used for making decisions regarding the training, rewarding, reassigning, promoting, reducing in grade, retaining, and removing employees.
- Each agency is required to provide training to those who create and conduct appraisals.
- The effectiveness of each agency's performance appraisal system must be periodically evaluated to ensure its effectiveness (Grote 1996: 325-329).

### Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits discrimination based on a person's physical or mental disability. Specifically, the act provides that no covered organization:

“shall discriminate against a qualified individual with a disability because of the disability in regard to job application procedures, the hiring, advancement, or discharge of employees, employee compensation, job training, and other terms, conditions and privileges of employment” (Section 102).

Therefore, employers cannot use a person's disability as a fact or in decisions relating to promotion, discharge, training, and compensation (Colella, DeNisi, and Varma 1997: 29).

### Civil Rights Act of 1991

The Civil Rights Act of 1991 was established to respond to recent decisions of the Supreme Court.<sup>7</sup> It confirmed that employers are liable for employment decisions utilizing any prejudice. Additionally, the change allowed for the recovery of punitive and compensatory damages (Martin, Bartol, and Kehoe 2000: 380).

The list of legislation discussed, as previously noted, is not inclusive of all acts that affect performance appraisals. They do, however, show that such laws must be considered in the development of performance appraisal systems. Appraisals can be used in litigation involving alleged discrimination or unfair termination (Feldman 1992: 9). Performance appraisals often come under attack in cases involving bias and discrimination (Arvey and Murphy 1998: 144).

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<sup>7</sup> Wards Cove Packing Co. v. Atonio, 490 U.S. 642 (1989)

## Case Law Affecting Performance Appraisals

Performance appraisal is an important part of the management function (DeNisi 1992: 71). Employers attempt to gain utility from the system by utilizing it to manage employee performance and relate the outcomes to promotion, discharge, merit pay, and layoff decisions. Employees are confident in a system that they perceive to have equity and are more likely to accept performance ratings (Roberts 2002: 334). Charges of bias and discrimination between employee and employer are often times resolved in court. The literature indicates that in these cases performance appraisal evaluations are used as evidence.<sup>8</sup> These cases involve the Civil Rights Act, Age Discrimination in Employment Act, and the Equal Pay Act (Martin, Bartol, and Kehoe 2000: 380).

In 1972 one of the first rulings regarding performances appraisals was made. *Rowe v. General Motors* found that appraisal methods must be validated to prevent discrimination.<sup>9</sup> A year later in *Brito et al. v. Zia Company* the courts ruled that an employer used an invalid appraisal and as a result discriminated against a protected group under Title VII.<sup>10</sup> When performance appraisals are involved in decisions rendered by the courts there is often an impact on current and future appraisal systems. **Table 2.1** provides a summary of recent key court rulings where performance appraisals were presented into evidence. The table identifies the case and corresponding legislation. Further, it presents the employment decision in question and the employee's performance rating. Lastly, it identifies the prevailing party.

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<sup>8</sup> See for example, Arvey and Murphey, 1998, p. 144; Feldman, 1992, p. 144; Johnson, 2000, p. 9; Kleiman and Durham, 1981, p. 104; Martin, Bartol, and Kehoe, 2000, p. 380.

<sup>9</sup> *Rowe v. General Motors*, 457 F.2d. 348 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1972)

<sup>10</sup> *Brito et al. v. Zia Company*, 428 F.2d. 1200 (10<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1973)

**TABLE 2.1**

**Summary of Key Court Rulings Involving Performance Appraisals**

<b>Case</b>	<b>Legislation</b>	<b>Personnel Action</b>	<b>Performance Rating</b>	<b>Prevailing Party</b>
<i>Fox</i> v. <i>McDonnell Douglas Corporation</i>	ADEA	Layoff	Low	Employer
<i>Chaffin</i> v. <i>Textron</i>	ADEA	Layoff	Low	Employer
<i>Cronin</i> v. <i>Aetna Life Insurance Company</i>	ADEA	Layoff	High	Employee
<i>Scales</i> v. <i>George Washington University</i>	Title VII	Promotion	High	Employer
<i>Lawson</i> v. <i>Bruno's Inc. Food Fair</i>	Title VII	Promotion	Low	Employer
<i>Lidge-Myrtil</i> v. <i>Deere &amp; Company</i>	Title VII	Promotion	Low	Employer
<i>Daniels</i> v. <i>Daniel Goldin</i>	Title VII	Promotion	High	Employee
<i>Ennis</i> v. <i>National Association of Business and Educational Radio Inc.</i>	Title VII	Discharge	Low	Employer
<i>Collins</i> v. <i>James River Paper</i>	ADEA	Discharge	Low	Employer
<i>Briscoe</i> v. <i>Fred's Dollar Store</i>	Title VII	Discharge	High	Employee
<i>Hairston</i> v. <i>AT&amp;T</i>	Title VII	Performance Pay	High	Employer

<b>Case</b>	<b>Legislation</b>	<b>Personnel Action</b>	<b>Performance Rating</b>	<b>Prevailing Party</b>
<i>Ford v. E-Systems Inc.</i>	Equal Pay Act	Performance Pay	Low	Employer
<i>Hamilton v. 1<sup>st</sup> Source Bank</i>	ADEA	Performance Pay	High	Employee
<i>Brundage v. National Broadcasting Company Inc.</i>	Title VII ADEA	Promotion Discharge Performance Pay	Low	Employer

Source: Martin, David C., Kathryn M. Bartol, and Patrick E. Kehoe. "The Legal Ramifications of Performance Appraisal: The Growing Significance." *Public Personnel Management* 29 (Fall 2000): 381-399.

A review of **Table 2.1** might leave the impression that the court rulings were based on the employee performance rating. The performance rating was important in the rulings. It was, however, the process the employer used to formulate the rating and make the personnel decision that had the greatest impact on the courts. As demonstrated, effective performance appraisal systems take into account legislation and case law. Therefore, both have to be considered due to the impact they have on performance appraisal systems. Gabris and Ihrke state, "Performance appraisal serves many purposes within organizations" (2001: 158). Therefore, before a model is introduced that assesses employee performance the purpose of the appraisal must be defined.

### **Performance Appraisal Purpose**

"The use of performance appraisals in employment settings is widespread" (Kleiman and Durham 1981: 103). The linkage between the performance appraisal results and their use should be clear to all involved" (Martin and Bartol 1998: 226).

Performance appraisals have four different purposes in organizations. They are: (1) administrative; (2) developmental; (3) incentive; (4) a legal document.

### Administrative

Performance appraisals utilized for administrative purposes include employment decisions such as promotion, retention, transfer, layoff, and discharge. This approach allows employers to keep and advance employees who demonstrate wanted organizational behaviors based on the appraisal. To be effective for this purpose the performance appraisal must:

- Provide criteria whereby selection, classification, and placement systems may be validated.
- Provide direct input to personnel decisions, such as promotion, job assignment/transfer, and termination.
- Influence the distribution of outcomes such as advancement, raises, and bonuses (Feldman 1992: 10-11)

### Developmental

Performance appraisals utilized for the purpose of development provide employees with feedback, aid in the development of training, and clarify role expectations. This format serves as a communication tool between employers and employees (Piatt 1998, 7). The purpose should be constructed so that:

- Evaluating organizational interventions such as training and goal setting are conducted.
- Formal and informal feedback to subordinates, influencing not only behavior but also feelings of competence and self-efficacy is encouraged.
- Employees are educated in the norms, values, and objectives (Feldman 1992: 10-11).

## Incentive

Performance appraisals implicitly assume that pay is an incentive associated with performance. Specifically, when performance is high, higher pay increases should be available; when performance is low, little or no pay increase should be provided (Kellough 1999: 663). According to Burstein (1983: 187) incentive systems are effective because they operate to develop, maintain, and enhance employees' desired behavior. Mani (2002: 158) views, "pay as a motivator and an incentive for employees to improve productivity and remain with the organization." An effective incentive system must:

- Be perceived as distributively just (Gabis and Ihrke 2001: 162).
- Provide criteria so that ratings can be validated.
- Provide adequate funding (Mani 2002: 158).

## Legal Document

Performance appraisals can be utilized as a legal document.<sup>11</sup> The document and the process can protect employers from litigation and penalties (Johnson 2000: 9). A defensible system must:

- Be free from bias and discrimination of the subordinate.
- Allow due process for employees subject to demotion, termination, or other penalty.
- Provide a record that can serve in possible litigation (Feldman 1992: 11).

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<sup>11</sup> See for example, Feldman, 1992, p. 11; Johnson 2000, p. 9; Piatt, 1998, p. 22; Taylor and Smith, 1987, p. 218.

Performance management involves a systematic attempt to direct organizational behavior toward overall goals (Burstein 1983: 184). Organizations commonly use appraisals for a combination of or all of the purposes discussed to manage employee performance. Employee satisfaction in the appraisal system usually depends on their perception that the system has a level of equity and trust (Mani 2002: 158). According to Gabris and Ihrke, “If public organizations intend to reward individual employees on some type of performance basis, they need a method for rating, measuring, and scoring in a routine way” (2001: 158). The following section discusses the performance appraisal process.

### **Performance Appraisal Process**

“A performance appraisal is one of the most complex, and controversial human resource techniques” (Roberts 2002: 333). According to DeNisi (1992: 71), “performance appraisal has always been, and continues to be an important part of the management function.” A valid and reliable appraisal system gives employers and employees useful information relating to the employees’ strengths as well as needs for development (Mani 2002: 141). Ideally appraisal provides employees with concrete steps they can take to be successful in their organization (Lee and Son 1998: 210).

An effective performance appraisal system is among the tools for measuring and improving organizations productivity (Mani 2002: 142). Bretz, Milkovich, and Read (1992: 330) note that most appraisal systems are designed by personnel specialists with limited or no input from managers or employees. Typically, the performance appraisal focuses on the employees past performance without consideration for the organizations

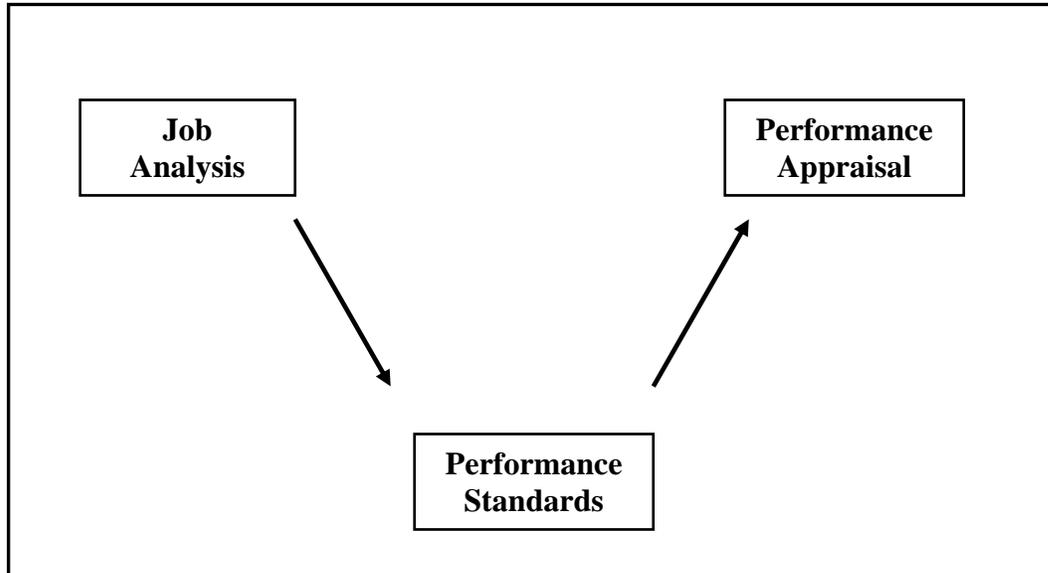
current or future direction (Cederblom and Pernal 2002: 132). Nevertheless, appraisal systems in organizations often share the common goals of providing feedback to employees about individual performance, rewarding superior performance, and correcting poor performance (Johnson 2000: 3).

“Accurate feedback about performance is regarded as critical to an employee’s ability to perform effectively in an organization” (Nathan, Mohrman, and Milliman 1991: 352). Performance feedback is the means by which the appraisal causes changes in employee behavior (Nathan, Mohrman, and Milliman 1991: 365). “Performance reviews can satisfy important personnel growth and development needs of subordinates” (Nathan, Mohrman, and Milliman 1991: 366).

If, however, an employer cannot give employees usable feedback then it is less likely that a performance appraisal will have credibility (Mani 2002:150). Mani (2002: 158) found employee satisfaction with the appraisal system is related to the perception that the system is fair. “The notion that job performance is more than just the execution of specific tasks and that it involves a wide variety of organizational activities has important implications for the understanding and measurement of job performance” (Arvey and Murphy 1998: 162). **Figure 2.1** illustrates the “prescriptions for performance appraisal systems” according to Cascio and Bernardin. The figure graphically illustrates that appraisal of job performance must be based upon analysis of job requirements as reflected in performance standards.

**FIGURE 2.1**

**Prescriptions for Performance Appraisal Systems**



Source: (Cascio and Bernardin 1981: 211)

The components of the performance appraisal process play an important part in the overall performance appraisal system. The following section addresses the components of the performance appraisal system.

**Performance Appraisal Components**

Performance appraisal systems can be deconstructed into component parts. Components most often associated with effective performance appraisal systems are:<sup>12</sup>

- Formal written policies
- Objectives setting
- Performance planning

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<sup>12</sup> See for example, Grote, 1996, p. 19; Roberts and Pavlak, 1996, p. 396.

- Employee participation
- Documentation of appraisal
- Rater training
- Support of top-level management

Keeping a performance appraisal system responsive to the needs of an organization and employee is important because many decisions are based on the appraisal system (Martin and Bartol 1998: 223). “Participation in system development enhances employee understanding of job requirements, develops a consensus on what aspects of the job are important and how the performance is to be measured” (Roberts and Pavlak 1996: 390). The following section discusses job analysis.

### Job Analysis

Werner and Bolino suggest that an appraisal should be based on job analysis (1997: 6). Employee knowledge of the job requirements affects how they process information relating to the appraisal system (Bretz, Milkovich, and Read 1992: 323). Effective job analysis occurs when organizations with employee input develop specific job descriptions and policy and procedures to follow. Mani notes that, “Employees who do not know policy and procedures are less likely to promptly comply with them. This may lead to lower performance ratings, lower morale, and lower productivity – it’s hard to play by the rules if you don’t know the rules” (2002: 147).

According to Williams and Levy (1992: 837) employees should be given information about objectives and this knowledge should lead to understanding and

acceptance of the of the performance appraisal system. Appraisal systems must be accepted by those being rated if they are to work (Cascio and Bernardin 1981: 219). Particular attention should be given to techniques used for job design (Hays and Kearney 2001: 595). Employee participation in job design is a plus for both the organization and the employee. Burstein relates, “Overall organizational control can increase as employees gain more direction over their work and employees may benefit from the increase in overall control” (1983: 184). Appraisal of job performance is based upon analysis of job requirements that are reflected in performance standards (Cascio and Bernardin 1981: 211). Standards are criteria that are established on an individual’s work task (Bobko and Colella 1994: 3). The next section addresses performance standards.

### Performance Standards

Employee performance appraisal should be based on the specific tasks the employee accomplishes or fails to accomplish (Martin and Bartol 1998: 224). Piatt (1998: 34) asserts performance standards should be established to evaluate how well employees perform. “The use of standards allows the organization to state clearly and specifically the work behaviors it desires, expects, and must have if the organization is to accomplish its goals” (Taylor and Smith 1987: 219). Arvey and Murphy (1998: 162) suggest that these standards be narrow and job focused. An effective performance appraisal system relies on the quality of the standards used to appraise the performance of employees (Martin and Bartol 1998: 225).

Nevertheless, the issue of who and how the standards are set is important to consider (Bobko and Colella 1994: 7). Research indicates that to achieve a higher level

of commitment employees should participate jointly in the process of developing clear, specific, fair, and valid standards.<sup>13</sup> “Understanding the standards increases when employees participate in setting the standards they are to achieve” (Martin and Bartol 1998: 225). Johnson strengthens the need for employee participation by stating, “The persons doing the work are the persons with the most direct knowledge of their jobs” (2000: 26). Appraisal of job performance becomes effective when performance standards have been communicated and understood by employees (Cascio and Bernardin 1981: 212). The appraisal interview is discussed in the next section.

### Appraisal Interview

One of the most demotivating experiences for an employee is to receive an unexpected negative appraisal rating (Roberts 199: 308). Martin and Bartol suggest that performance reviews should be scheduled in advance and conducted when scheduled. Further, they suggest that both the rater and ratee should be prepared (1998: 225). Performance reviews normally come directly from an employee’s immediate supervisor (Bretz, Milkovich, and Read 1992: 331). There is consensus in the literature that yearly performance reviews are no substitute to the necessary on-going relationship between a supervisor and subordinate that provides day-to-day performance feedback throughout the appraisal period.<sup>14</sup> Piatt (1998: 34) suggests that this on going observation should include the practice of documenting performance.

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<sup>13</sup> See for example, Bobko and Colella, 1994, p. 8; Johnson 2000, p. 65; Roberts, 2002,p. 335; Taylor and Smith, 1987, p. 219.

<sup>14</sup> See for example, Janahar and Williams, 1997, p. 922; Nathan, Mohrman, and Milliman, 1991, p. 353; Piatt, 1998, p. 34; Roberts, 1998, 314; Roberts and Pavlak, 1996, p. 385.

“A common performance appraisal system problem is the absence of clear and specific performance documentation to support performance appraisals” (Roberts 1998: 308). Roberts (1998: 308) further relates that this documentation is needed to demonstrate employee’s strengths and weaknesses. Research indicates that raters must be allowed sufficient time to properly discharge their responsibilities of evaluating employee performance.<sup>15</sup> Bretz, Milkovich, and Read (1992: 331) found that raters only spend three hours per year assessing performance. “Employee participation in developing rating forms and appraisal procedures is the logical extension of the development of performance standards” (Roberts 2002: 335). The following section presents methods used for rating performance.

## Methods

“The rating form summarizes the formal operational definition of what the organization considers worthy of appraisal” (Roberts 2002: 335). The appraisal system should be based on the best technology available in form content and format (Taylor, Tracy, Renard, Harrison, and Carroll 1995: 497). There exists a wide range of performance techniques. “Most performance appraisals fall broadly into three categories: traditional performance appraisal (emphasis of traits of the individual); use of behavioral criteria; and objective setting (results oriented) performance appraisal” (Piatt 1998: 12). **Table 2.2** summarizes many of the numerous tools utilized to appraise performance. In addition, the table identifies methods used for performance appraisal and provides a brief explanation of each method.

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<sup>15</sup> See for example, DeNisi, 1992, p. 73; Roberts, 1998, p. 311.

**TABLE 2.2**

**Summary of Appraisal Techniques**

<b>Trait Checklist</b>	Features standardized rating forms for broad groups of employees (Piatt 1998: 12).
<b>Responsibility Rating</b>	This rating involves the development of and use of position descriptions for each position to include all major responsibilities an, where appropriate, standards for performance (Piatt 1998: 13).
<b>Management By Objectives</b>	The employee suggests and the supervisor agrees on the employee's performance objectives for the coming year (Piatt 1998: 13).
<b>Free Form</b>	Supervisors are free to rate performance directly without being forced to rate specific aspects and attributes (Piatt 1998: 14).
<b>Essay</b>	Raters write a paragraph or more covering an individual's strengths, weaknesses, potential, and so on. (Piatt 1998: 14).
<b>Graphic Rating Scale</b>	Rates employees on a scale. Does not yield the depth of an essay appraisal but is more consistent and reliable (Piatt 1998: 14).
<b>Forced Choice Rating</b>	Rater chooses from among groups or statements those that fit the individual being rated (Piatt 1998: 15).
<b>Critical Incident</b>	This rating gives the supervisor actual, factual incidents to discuss with the employee (Piatt 1998: 15).
<b>Ranking</b>	Appraiser rates employees based upon performance of other employees (Johnson 2000: 33).
<b>Group</b>	Based on the groups performance rather than the individual (Arvey and Murphy 1998: 154).
<b>360 Degree</b>	Incorporates evaluations from a number of different rater perspectives. These include: Supervisor, peer, subordinate, self, and customers (Arvey and Murphy 1998: 154).
<b>Self</b>	Provides the employee with the opportunity to systematically assess their own performance (Roberts 2002: 335).

An organization may have the most sophisticated performance appraisal instrument, yet, if employees perceive their rating as poor, it is unlikely the employees will accept the system (Gabris and Ihrke 2000: 50). "Raters should be consistent in how they rate employees, which can be greatly assisted through the use of reliable and valid measures of performance" (Gabris and Ihrke 2001: 161). The following section will discuss rating accuracy.

## Accuracy

A primary goal of the performance appraisal system is rating accuracy (Werner and Bolino 1997: 2). “Rating errors reduce the reliability, validity, and utility of performance appraisal systems” (Roberts 1998: 309). “Employees’ reactions to the fairness and accuracy of the appraisal system may affect their motivation to correct weak performance or develop unused potential” (Taylor, Tracy, Renard, Harrison, and Carroll 1995: 499). **Table 2.3** provides a summary of rating errors. The table is not inclusive of all rater errors. It does, however, provide a list of the most common. Further, it provides a brief description of each.

**TABLE 2.3**  
**Summary of Rating Errors**

<b>Halo Effect</b>	This is the tendency to rate a person who scored highly on one portion of the appraisal high in all other areas of the appraisal.
<b>Horns Effect</b>	This is the opposite of the halo effect.
<b>Central Tendency</b>	This error is the tendency of raters to avoid both high and low extremes, lumping all ratings in the middle category.
<b>Positive Leniency</b>	This occurs when the rater gives all high rating or a disproportionate number of high ratings.
<b>Negative Leniency</b>	This is just the opposite of positive leniency.
<b>Similar-to-Me</b>	This error occurs when raters assign unduly high scores to persons with similar biographical backgrounds and attitudes.

Source: (Johnson 2000: 23-24)

The ability to identify and define these errors should minimize their occurrence. Requiring raters to justify and record all ratings assists in preventing such errors (Feldman 1992: 225). Further, raters should receive adequate training and be held accountable for their ratings.

## Training

Arvey and Murphy found that trained raters were more accurate than untrained raters (1998: 158). According to Piatt, “Rater training provides raters with the requisite skills and abilities required in the appraisal process” (1998: 16). Ideally, the application of a training program should assist in ensuring the performance appraisal system is reliable, valid, fair, and error free. Roberts (2002: 338) suggests that managers receive training in setting both goals and performance standards, conducting interviews, providing feedback, counseling employees, managing conflict as well as avoiding errors.

“Organizations are encouraged to commit to a high level of training for appraisers and appraisees” (Piatt 1998: 31). Employees normally receive very little related to the appraisal process. “Top-level support and commitment is demonstrated by holding managers accountable for how well they administer their performance appraisal responsibilities and by providing comprehensive performance appraisal training” (Roberts and Pavlak 1996: 386).

## Managerial Support

“In addition to employee participation the support of an organization’s top-level management is needed for the performance appraisal system to be successful” (Piatt 1998: 18). According to Gabris and Ihrke (2001: 161) top-level management must hold managers accountable for ratings provided to employees during the appraisal process. Accountability can be achieved in part by ensuring raters are evaluated on how well they administer the process. The other way is ensuring that when a poor decision occurs it can be corrected. There is consensus in the literature that employees should be provided with

clear rules for appealing any decision they disagree with relating to a supervisors appraisal.<sup>16</sup> “When employees possess a meaningful role in the appraisal process, employee acceptance and satisfaction with that process is strongly enhanced” (Roberts 2002: 339).

An effective performance appraisal system should include the purpose and should adhere to the ideal appraisal cycle. Le Ann Estes Piatt in “Analysis of Municipal Government Performance Appraisal Systems” developed the practical ideal performance appraisal system that this research used to assess the performance appraisal systems of Travis County Departments. The literature from this chapter supports the assessment model developed by Piatt. Chapter 3 presents the assessment model for this study.

### **CHAPTER 3**

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<sup>16</sup> See for example, Cascio and Bernardin, 1981, p. 212; Gabris and Ihrke, 2000, p. 50; Gabris and Ihrke, 2001, p. 161; Martin and Bartol, 1998, p. 226.

## ASSESSMENT MODEL

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the assessment model used in this study. This assessment model is used for gauging the performance appraisal systems of Travis County Departments. The model was developed and tested by Piatt in her research on performance appraisal systems of Texas cities. Johnson conducted a follow up study to Piatt's work. His study further tested the assessment model by gauging the performance appraisal systems of Texas Juvenile Probation Departments. The model contains seven categories:

- Policies and Procedures
- Managerial Support
- Training
- Setting of Employee Goals
- Setting of Performance Standards
- Observation of Performance
- Appraising Performance

Each category is discussed in the following sections.

### **Policies and Procedures**

Policies and procedures provide an explanation of the performance **appraisal process**. Additionally, these procedures explain the setting of both **employee goals** and **performance standards**. Further, there is indication in the policies of **frequency** of appraisals and the **responsible party** for administering the system. Lastly, the model

requires that **rating criteria** and required **documentation** be explained and **appeal** procedures be defined.

### **Managerial Support**

Managerial support is demonstrated in a performance appraisal system when **raters are held accountable** for the administration of the system. Managerial support should also include providing **additional compensation/benefits** to employees who perform at or above standards.

### **Training**

The assessment model requires that all employees receive training on the performance **appraisal process** and conducting **self-appraisals**. Raters should be trained in establishing both **employee goals** and **performance standards**. Further, rater training also includes providing continuous **performance feedback** and steps of the appraisal process to **involve employees** in.

### **Setting of Employee Goals**

Employee goals are tailored to the **individual employees' job**. These goals should be **prioritized** and **set jointly** by the rater and employee. Lastly, goals always need to be **documented** in writing.

## Setting of Performance Standards

Performance standards are used to **evaluate employees' achievement** of established goals. Like the goals discussed in the previous section, performance standards should be **set jointly** by rater and employee and **documented** in writing.

## Observation of Performance

Observation of performance in an effective performance appraisal system includes on-going **feedback provided** by raters to employees during the performance period. Further, raters should **document** their observations of employee performance in writing and encourage employees to do the same.

## Appraising Performance

Rater and employee both complete a **written appraisal** of employees' performance. They meet to discuss the **ratings**. Raters should always provide **specific examples** to justify all ratings. Lastly, changes in performance and future **performance** are discussed.

**Table 3.1** illustrates the assessment model discussed in this chapter. Each category and corresponding sub-categories are presented. Further, a link to the literature is provided. Chapter 4 provides a discussion on Texas County government. Specifically, Travis County and its departments. Lastly, the state of performance appraisal systems in Travis County is described.

**TABLE 3.1 ASSESSMENT MODEL**

<b>Ideal Characteristics</b>	<b>Source</b>
<p><b>I. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES</b></p> <p>A. Explanation of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. performance <b>appraisal process</b></li> <li>2. setting <b>employee goals</b></li> <li>3. setting <b>performance standards</b></li> <li>4. rating <b>criteria</b></li> <li>5. required <b>documentation</b></li> </ol> <p>B. Indication of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>frequency</b> of appraisals</li> <li>2. <b>responsible party</b> for administering appraisal</li> <li>3. requirement of employee <b>self-appraisal</b></li> <li>4. <b>appeal</b> procedures</li> </ol>	<p>Mani (2002), Piatt (1998), Roberts and Pavlak (1996), Johnson (2000), Williams and Levy (1992), Martin and Bartol (1998), Casio and Bernardin (1981)</p>
<p><b>II. MANAGERIAL SUPPORT</b></p> <p>A. <b>Raters held accountable</b> for administration of appraisal system</p> <p>B. Provision for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Additional compensation/benefits</b> to employees who perform at or above standards</li> <li>2. <b>career opportunities</b> for employees who perform above standards</li> </ol>	<p>Piatt (1998), Bretz, Milkovich, and Read (1992), Gabris and Ihrke (2001), Gabris and Ihrke (2000), Martin and Bartol (1998), Cascio and Bernardin (1981), Feldman (1992), Roberts (1998), Lee and Son (1998), Taylor and Smith (1987)</p>
<p><b>III. TRAINING</b></p> <p>A. Raters trained on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. components of the <b>appraisal process</b></li> <li>2. establishing specific <b>employee goals</b></li> <li>3. establishing <b>performance standards</b></li> <li>4. continuously <b>documenting performance</b></li> <li>5. completion of the appraisal <b>rating document</b></li> <li>6. providing continuous <b>performance feedback</b></li> <li>7. steps of appraisal process to <b>include employees</b> in</li> </ol> <p>B. Employees trained on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. performance <b>appraisal process</b></li> <li>2. conducting <b>self-appraisals</b></li> </ol>	<p>Arvey and Murphy (1998), Bretz, Milkovich, and Read (1992), Feldman (1992), Lee and Son (1998), Johnson (2000), Martin and Bartol (1998), Piatt (1998), Roberts (2002), Roberts (1998)</p>

Ideal Characteristics	Source
<p><b>IV. SETTING OF EMPLOYEE GOALS</b></p> <p>Employee goals:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. tailored to the <b>individual employees' job</b></li> <li>2. <b>set jointly</b> by rater and employees</li> <li>3. <b>prioritized</b></li> <li>4. <b>documented</b> in writing</li> <li>5. <b>communicated</b> to employee</li> </ol>	<p>Bobko and Colella (1994), Lee and Son (1998), Martin and Bartol (1998) Piatt (1998), Roberts (2002), Seldon, Ingraham, and Jacobson (2001), Radhakrishnan, Arrow, and Sniezek (1996)</p>
<p><b>V. SETTING OF PERFORMANCE STANDARDS</b></p> <p>Performance standards:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. used to <b>evaluate employees' achievement</b> of established goals</li> <li>2. <b>set jointly</b> by rater and employees</li> <li>3. <b>documented</b> in writing</li> <li>4. <b>communicated</b> to employees</li> </ol>	<p>Martin and Bartol (1998), Roberts and Pavlak (1996), Bretz, Milkovich, and Read (1992), Mani (2002), Piatt (1998), Burstein (1983), Casio and Bernardin (1981), Bobko and Colella (1994)</p>
<p><b>VI. OBSERVATION OF PERFORMANCE</b></p> <p>Performance:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Documented</b> by raters during performance period</li> <li>2. on-going <b>feedback provided</b> by raters</li> <li>3. employees encouraged to <b>document own performance</b></li> </ol>	<p>Roberts (1998), DeNisi (1992), Nathan, Mohraman, and Milliman (1991), Martin and Bartol (1998), Roberts and Pavlak (1996), Piatt (1998), Bretz, Milkovich, and Read (1992)</p>
<p><b>VII. APPRAISING PERFORMANCE</b></p> <p>A. Employee completes <b>written appraisal</b> of employees' performance</p> <p>B. Rater:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. completes <b>written appraisal</b> of employees' performance</li> <li>2. provides <b>specific examples</b> to justify ratings</li> </ol> <p>C. Rater and employee <b>meet to discuss</b>:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>ratings</b></li> <li>2. <b>changes in performance</b>, if needed</li> <li>3. future goals and future <b>performance</b></li> </ol>	<p>Roberts (1998), DeNisi (1992), Nathan, Mohraman, and Milliman (1991), Martin and Bartol (1998), Roberts and Pavlak (1996), Piatt (1998), Bretz, Milkovich, and Read (1992), Arvey and Murphy (1998), Gabris and Ihrke (2001)</p>

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH SETTING**

This study assesses the performance appraisal systems of Travis County Departments. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of Texas County government. Next the chapter will focus on Travis County and describe Travis County Departments. Lastly, the performance appraisal systems of the departments are discussed.

#### **Texas County Government**

Texas County government focuses primarily on administering the judicial system, health and social service delivery, law enforcement, and upkeep of county maintained road and bridges. Unlike other parts of the country, Texas counties seldom have responsibility for schools, water and sewer systems, electric utilities, and commercial airports. The Texas County government structure is spelled out in the Texas Constitution, which makes counties functional agents of the state. Counties, unlike cities, are limited in their actions to areas of responsibilities specifically designated by the legislature. County governments in Texas, therefore, have no ordinance making powers other than those explicitly granted.

Each Texas county has a county wide elected judge and four elected precinct commissioners who make up the commissioners court. This body is charged with overseeing financial matters and conducting the general business of the county. The Texas Constitution creates a checks and balances system by establishing other elected

offices in each county. The elected offices found in most counties include county attorneys, county and district clerks, county treasurers, sheriffs, tax assessor-collectors, justices of the peace, and constables. The county auditor is appointed by the district courts.<sup>17</sup>

The Commissioners Court serves as both the legislative and executive branch of county government, and exercises budgetary authority over all county departments including those headed by other elected officials. County services in Texas are financed primarily by an ad valorem tax on real property and business inventory, and an array of fees, fines, service charges, and state payments. The Commissioners Court set the property tax rate for each county annually. Much like ordinance making powers revenue sources are established by state law and may only be changed by legislative action.<sup>18</sup> The next section discusses Travis County.

## **Travis County**

Travis County is a large Texas county located in the central portion of the state. The 2000 Census indicated that the county had a population of 812,280 citizens. The county covers an area of 989 square miles. Travis County governmental services are provided by 47 departments operating both under the authority of the Commissioners Court and under the authority of other elected officials. According to the Travis County fiscal year 2002 adopted budget, these departments are made up of 3,988 full time employees.

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<sup>17</sup> Information relating to Texas Counties was obtained from the Texas Association of Counties website: [www.county.org](http://www.county.org)

<sup>18</sup> Information relating to County revenue sources see “Fiscal Year 2002 Budget” Travis County, Texas

## **Travis County Departments**

Travis County departments are organized around four basic program areas.<sup>19</sup>

These program areas include:

- **Justice and Public Safety**
- **Health, Human and Veterans Services**
- **Transportation and Natural Resources**
- **General Government and Support Services**

### Justice and Public Safety

The Justice and Public Safety program area consists of 28 departments made up by 2,875.07 full time employees. The Commissioners Court established this program in the Spring of 1994 as part of Travis County's strategic planning process. The departments in this program area serve all the citizens of Travis County and the victims of crime. They share the following common goals:

- Provide Justice
- Promote Adherence to Law
- Prevent and Deter Crime
- Protect the Community
- Address the Effects of Crime
- Prevent and Resolve Disputes in a Peaceful Manner

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<sup>19</sup> Information about Travis County Departments was taken directly from "Fiscal Year 2002 Budget" Travis County, Texas

The general fund budget for the Justice and Public Safety program was \$169,304,405 for the fiscal year 2002. **Table 4.1** identifies and lists the departments assigned to this program area and indicates how many full time employees are in each department.<sup>20</sup>

**Table 4.1**  
**Justice and Public Safety**

DEPARTMENT	FY 02 FTE
County Attorney	143
County Clerk	89
District Clerk	86.5
Civil Courts	70
District Attorney	136.13
Criminal Courts	70.5
Probate Courts	9
Justice of the Peace, Prct. 1	11
Justice of the Peace, Prct. 2	16.25
Justice of the Peace, Prct. 3	12.7
Justice of the Peace, Prct. 4	11.2
Justice of the Peace, Prct. 5	11.5
Constable, Prct. 1	12
Constable, Prct. 2	15.2
Constable, Prct. 3	20.95
Constable, Prct. 4	10.7
Constable, Prct. 5	52.5
Dispute Resolution Center	7
Sheriff	1,306.5
Medical Examiner	21
Community Supervision and Corrections	296.25
Counseling and Education Services	34.5
Pretrial Services	40.19
Juvenile Public Defender	12
Juvenile Court	342.5
Emergency Services	19
Civil Service Commission	1
Justice and Public Safety	17

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<sup>20</sup> Information about the Justice and Public Safety program area was taken directly from “Fiscal Year 2002 Budget” Travis County, Texas

Health, Human and Veterans Services

The Health, Human and Veterans Services program area consists of 3 departments made up by 244.5 full time employees. This program area was also established in the Spring of 1994 as part of Travis County’s strategic planning process. This program area provides services to both residents and non-residents of Travis County. Specifically they serve taxpayers and fee-payers, county employees, parents, and Travis County elected officials. The departments in this program area share the following common goals:

- Address and prevent illness, chemical addiction, injury, and the spread of disease.
- Encourage the preservation, restoration, and responsibility of the family unit.
- Maximize healthy child development.
- Assure effective, efficient, and responsive services to reward veterans.
- Prevent and mitigate suffering from hunger, homelessness, and deprivation and enable self-sufficiency to people in need.

The general fund budget for the Health, Human and Veterans program area for fiscal year 2002 was \$24,714,513. **Table 4.2** lists the departments assigned to this program area and illustrates how many full time employees make up each department.<sup>21</sup>

**Table 4.2**  
**Health, Human and Veterans Services**

<b>DEPARTMENTS</b>	<b>FY 02 FTE</b>
Veterans Services	6
Agriculture Extension Services	12
Health and Human Services	226.5

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<sup>21</sup> Information about the Health, Human and Veterans Services program area was taken directly from “Fiscal Year 2002 Budget” Travis County, Texas

## Transportation and Natural Resources

The Transportation and Natural Resources program area consists of one department made up by 384.25 full time employees. This program area provides services to the following populations:

- Taxpayers
- Resident Citizens
- Commissioners Court
- Travis County Employees
- Lower Colorado River Authority
- Texas Department of Transportation
- Builders and Developers
- Capital Metro
- City of Austin
- Austin/Travis County Environmental Community

These populations are served by the following departmental goals:

- Manage and protect our natural resources for future generations.
- Provide a cost-effective, efficient, and safe transportation system in balance with the social, economic, and environmental needs of the community.
- Provide increasing and diverse recreational opportunities using public resources.

The general fund budget for the Transportation and Natural Resources program area for fiscal year 2002 was \$34,774,477. **Table 4.3** lists the department and provides the number of assigned full time employees.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Information about the Transportation and Natural Resources program area was taken directly from “Fiscal Year 2002 Budget” Travis County, Texas

**Table 4.3  
Transportation and Natural Resources**

DEPARTMENT	FY 02 FTE
Transportation and Natural Resources	384.25

General Government and Support Services

The General Government and Support program area is comprised of 15 departments consisting of 484.5 positions. This program area provides services to all county departments, county employees, and taxpayers. Like two of the previous program areas, the General Government and Support Services area was established in the spring of 1994 as part of the strategic planning process. These departments share the common goals of:

- Supporting the goals of Justice and Public Safety, Health and Human Services, and Roads and Land.
- Serving taxpayers and protecting their assets.

The general fund budget for General Government and Support services for fiscal year 2002 was \$49,001,421. **Table 4.4** provides a list of departments assigned to this program area. It will also show the number of full time employees that make up each department.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Information about the General Government and Support Services program area was taken directly from “Fiscal Year 2002 Budget” Travis County, Texas

**Table 4.4  
General Government and Support Services**

DEPARTMENTS	FY 02 FTE
County Judge	5
Commissioner, Prct. 1	4
Commissioner, Prct. 2	4
Commissioner, Prct. 3	4
Commissioner, Prct. 4	4
County Auditor	66
Facilities Management	86
Human Resources Management	24
Information and Telecommunications Systems	78
Planning and Budget	13
Purchasing	29
Records Management and Communication Resources	45
Tax Assessor-Collector	104.5
Exposition Center	13
Treasurer	5

Travis County has number of elected officials, including many with judicial authority. This creates an organizational structure unlike more familiar public sector designs, which usually contain an Executive Officer and a Board that focus on policy matters. **Appendix A** provides a chart identifying the organizational structure of Travis County government.

### **Travis County Performance Appraisal Systems**

Travis County has a decentralized employee performance appraisal system. Each Travis County Department is responsible for the administration of its performance appraisal system. In 1996, the Human Resources Management Department developed and made available to all departments a standardized performance rating form. Further, the Travis County Commissioners Court approved this form. There is no evidence

available, however, to indicate how many departments are utilizing the approved performance rating form.

This decentralized approach is further demonstrated by the Travis County FY 02 adopted budget relating to additional employee compensation. An amount equal to 5% of each department's salary line item was provided for performance based pay, job restructuring, market adjustments, reclassifications, reorganizations, internal equity adjustments, and other compensation adjustments, depending upon the department's circumstances.<sup>24</sup> Again, there is no data relating to how each department utilized these funds. Specifically, how much was utilized to support each departments performance appraisal system. The research methodology is discussed in Chapter 5.

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<sup>24</sup> Information relating to additional employee compensation see "Fiscal Year 2002 Budget" Travis County, Texas

## CHAPTER 5

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The performance appraisal system of Travis County Texas is assessed using case study methods. Evidence for the case study is collected using the ideal characteristics developed earlier. Case studies allow for depth but often can be criticized for being weak in reliability. Triangulation is used to gather research data. Triangulation strengthens validity by minimizing the inherent weakness of each method of analysis. The unit of analysis in this research is the appraisal system or variables that define the system of Travis County Departments. Data is collected through: (1) surveys of departmental human resource liaisons, (2) content analysis of the department's policy and procedures and appraisal rating forms, and (3) focus interviews with personnel. This chapter discusses these research methods and describes the methodology used to conduct this research. In addition, the chapter describes the operationalization of the assessment criteria developed in the conceptual framework.

#### **Operationalization of the Conceptual Framework**

A case study is a comprehensive research strategy with the logic of design incorporating specific approaches to data collection and to data analysis (Yin, 1994: 13). **Table 5.1** illustrates the operationalizing of the conceptual framework (Piatt, 1998: 44). The table lists each component of the conceptual framework. Further, the table lists the corresponding research method and questionnaire item for those components.

**Table 5.1 OPERATIONALIZING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

<b>Performance Appraisal System Components</b>	<b>Method Used</b>	<b>Item*</b>
<b>I. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES</b>		
A. Explanation of:		
1. performance <b>appraisal process</b>	Survey Content Analysis	Q1 PP1
2. setting <b>employee goals</b>	Content Analysis	PP2
3. setting <b>performance standards</b>	Content Analysis	PP3
4. rating <b>criteria</b>	Content Analysis	PP4
5. required <b>documentation</b>	Content Analysis	PP5
B. Indication of:		
1. <b>frequency</b> of appraisals	Content Analysis	PP6
2. <b>responsible party</b> for administering appraisal	Content Analysis	PP7
3. requirement of employee <b>self-appraisal</b>	Content Analysis	PP8
4. <b>appeal</b> procedures	Content Analysis	PP9
<b>II. MANAGERIAL SUPPORT</b>		
A. <b>Raters held accountable</b> for administration of appraisal system	Survey	Q22
B. Provision for:		
1. <b>Additional compensation/benefits</b> to employees who perform at or above standards	Survey Focus Interview	Q23 FI8
2. <b>career opportunities</b> for employees who perform above standards	Survey	Q24
<b>III. TRAINING</b>		
A. Raters trained on:		
1. components of the <b>appraisal process</b>	Survey Focus Interview	Q12 Q13 FI1
2. establishing specific <b>employee goals</b>	Survey	Q14
3. establishing <b>performance standards</b>	Survey	Q15
4. continuously <b>documenting performance</b>	Survey	Q16
5. completion of the appraisal <b>rating document</b>	Survey	Q17
6. providing continuous <b>performance feedback</b>	Survey	Q18
7. steps of appraisal process to <b>include employees in</b>	Survey	Q19
B. Employees trained on:		
1. performance <b>appraisal process</b>	Survey Focus Interview	Q20 FI3
2. conducting <b>self-appraisals</b>	Survey	Q21

\* Q = Survey Questionnaire Number  
 PP = Policies and Procedures Coding Sheet  
 FI = Focus Interview Question

<b>Performance Appraisal System Components</b>	<b>Method Used</b>	<b>Item*</b>
<b>IV. SETTING OF EMPLOYEE GOALS</b>		
Employee goals:		
1. tailored to the <b>individual employees' job</b>	Survey	Q2 Q3
2. <b>set jointly</b> by rater and employees	Survey Focus Interview	Q4 FI2
3. <b>prioritized</b>	Survey	Q5
4. <b>documented</b> in writing	Survey	Q6
5. <b>communicated</b> to employee	Survey	Q7
<b>V. SETTING OF PERFORMANCE STANDARDS</b>		
Performance standards:		
1. used to <b>evaluate employees' achievement</b> of established goals	Survey	Q8
2. <b>set jointly</b> by rater and employees	Survey Focus Interview	Q9 FI3
3. <b>documented</b> in writing	Survey	Q10
4. <b>communicated</b> to employees	Survey	Q11
<b>VI. OBSERVATION OF PERFORMANCE</b>		
Performance:		
1. <b>Documented</b> by raters during performance period	Survey	Q25
2. on-going <b>feedback provided</b> by raters	Survey Focus Interview	Q26 FI4
3. employees encouraged to <b>document own performance</b>	Survey	Q27
<b>VII. APPRAISING PERFORMANCE</b>		
A. Employee completes <b>written appraisal</b> of employees' performance	Survey Focus Interview	Q28 FI5
B. Rater:		
1. completes <b>written appraisal</b> of employees' performance	Survey Focus Interview	Q29 FI6
2. provides <b>specific examples</b> to justify ratings	Survey	Q30
C. Rater and employee <b>meet to discuss</b> :		
1. <b>ratings</b>	Survey Focus Interview	Q31 FI7
2. <b>changes in performance</b> , if needed	Survey Focus Interview	Q32 FI7
3. future goals and future <b>performance</b>	Survey Focus Interview	Q33 FI7

\* Q = Survey Questionnaire Number  
PP = Policies and Procedures Coding Sheet  
FI = Focus Interview Question

## **Survey Research**

Surveys are appropriate for studies that are descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory (Babbie 2001: 238). Survey research was chosen to describe the performance appraisal systems of Travis County Departments. Further more, survey research is “the best method available to the social researcher who is interested in collecting original data for describing a population too large to observe directly” (Babbie 2001: 238).

### Study Population

The study population includes human resource liaisons from 33 Travis County departments with 2 or more employees and whose service delivery is not directly related to an elected official. **Appendix B** provides a listing of departments surveyed. The Travis County Human Resources Management department was used to obtain the names of the human resource liaisons. The surveys were sent out in Travis County interoffice mail on May 14, 2003, with instructions to return the survey by May 26, 2003. Reminder notices were emailed on May 28, 2003, requesting that the surveys be returned as soon as possible.

### Response Rates

Twenty out of the thirty-three departments provided a response. Therefore, an overall response rate of 61% was achieved. These twenty departments represent 70% of all Travis County employees (See **Appendix B** for responding departments). All survey responses were fully complete and usable. Ten departments furnished policies and

procedures and eighteen rating forms were received. Twelve focus interviews were conducted. These consisted of interviewing three staff from each of the four county program areas.

### Survey Instrument

The survey instrument developed and was directly constructed from the framework by Piatt (1998) is used for this study. The instrument consists of 33 self administered forced choice questions allowing for responses of “always”, “sometimes”, and “never”. Additionally, respondents were asked how many appraisal systems were administered by their department and how often. The respondents were also afforded the opportunity to provide comments (See **Appendix C** for a copy of the survey instrument). Further, it was also asked that a copy of policies and procedures and appraisal rating forms be returned with the survey for the purpose of content analysis.

SPSS software was used to tabulate results. Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine whether the departments performance appraisal system met the ideal criteria established earlier. **Table 5.2** demonstrates the linking of the survey instrument to the conceptual framework. The table lists each component of the conceptual framework. The table then lists the corresponding survey question for those components.

**Table 5.2 Operationalizing: Linking the Survey to the Conceptual Framework**

<b>Performance Appraisal System Components</b>	<b>Survey Question</b>
<b>I. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES</b>	
A. Explanation of:	
1. performance <b>appraisal process</b>	Do you have written policies and procedures for performance appraisals?
2. setting <b>employee goals</b>	
3. setting <b>performance standards</b>	
4. rating <b>criteria</b>	
5. required <b>documentation</b>	
B. Indication of:	
1. <b>frequency</b> of appraisals	
2. <b>responsible party</b> for administering appraisal	
3. requirement of employee <b>self-appraisal</b>	
4. <b>appeal</b> procedures	
<b>II. MANAGERIAL SUPPORT</b>	
A. <b>Raters held accountable</b> for administration of appraisal system	Are raters held accountable for administration of the performance appraisal system?
B. Provision for:	
1. <b>Additional compensation/benefits</b> to employees who perform at or above standards	Is additional compensation or additional benefits provided for employees who perform at or above standards?
2. <b>career opportunities</b> for employees who perform above standards	Are career advancement opportunities provided for employees who perform above standards?
<b>III. TRAINING</b>	
A. Raters trained on:	
1. components of the <b>appraisal process</b>	Is training provided to employees on the performance appraisal system?  Are raters trained on the components of the performance appraisal process?
2. establishing specific <b>employee goals</b>	Are raters trained on how to establish specific employee goals?
3. establishing <b>performance standards</b>	Are raters trained on how to establish performance standards?
4. continuously <b>documenting performance</b>	Are raters trained on how to continuously document performance?
5. completion of the appraisal <b>rating document</b>	Are raters trained on how to complete the performance appraisal rating document?
6. providing continuous <b>performance feedback</b>	Are raters trained to continuously provide performance feedback?

<b>Performance Appraisal System Components</b>	<b>Survey Question</b>
7. steps of appraisal process to <b>include employees in</b>	Are raters trained on the steps of the performance appraisal process that employees should be included in?
<b>B. Employees trained on:</b>	
1. performance <b>appraisal process</b>	Are employees trained on the performance appraisal system?
2. conducting <b>self-appraisals</b>	Are employees trained on conducting performance appraisals on themselves?
<b>IV. SETTING OF EMPLOYEE GOALS</b>	
<b>Employee goals:</b>	
1. tailored to the <b>individual employees' job</b>	Are goals set for employees to accomplish?  Are goals tailored to the individual employee's job?
2. <b>set jointly</b> by rater and employees	Are goals set jointly by the rater and employee?
3. <b>prioritized</b>	Are goals prioritized by the rater?
4. <b>documented</b> in writing	Are the goals documented in writing?
5. <b>communicated</b> to employee	Are the goals communicated to employees?
<b>V. SETTING OF PERFORMANCE STANDARDS</b>	
<b>Performance standards:</b>	
1. used to <b>evaluate employees' achievement</b> of established goals	Are performance standards set that are used to evaluate how well an employee has achieved each established goal?
2. <b>set jointly</b> by rater and employees	Are performance standards set jointly by the rater and employee?
3. <b>documented</b> in writing	Are performance standards documented in writing?
4. <b>communicated</b> to employees	Are performance standards communicated to employees?
<b>VI. OBSERVATION OF PERFORMANCE</b>	
<b>Performance:</b>	
1. <b>Documented</b> by raters during performance period	Do raters document employee performance on an on-going basis during the appraisal period?
2. on-going <b>feedback provided</b> by raters	Do raters provide on-going performance feedback to employees during the appraisal period?
3. employees encouraged to <b>document own performance</b>	Are employees encouraged to document their own performance during the appraisal period?

<b>Performance Appraisal System Components</b>	<b>Survey Question</b>
<b>VII. APPRAISING PERFORMANCE</b>	
A. Employee completes <b>written appraisal</b> of employees' performance	Do employees complete a written appraisal of their performance?
B. Rater:	
1. completes <b>written appraisal</b> of employees' performance	Do the raters complete a written appraisal of employees' performance?
2. provides <b>specific examples</b> to justify ratings	Do the raters provide specific examples to justify the employees' ratings?
C. Rater and employee <b>meet to discuss</b> :	
1. <b>ratings</b>	Do the rater and employee meet to discuss the ratings assigned to the employee?
2. <b>changes in performance</b> , if needed	Do the rater and employee discuss changes in performance, if changes are needed?
3. future goals and future <b>performance</b>	Do the rater and employee discuss future goals and future performance?

### **Content Analysis**

Content analysis allows researchers to examine written documents (Babbie 2001: 304). Department policy and procedures and appraisal rating forms were examined utilizing content analysis. A coding sheet was assigned to each department with “yes” or “no” responses to each ideal characteristic. Descriptive statistics were utilized to determine the frequency of each answer. Additionally, the number of words dedicated to each item was measured to determine the degree to which the characteristics were covered. A separate coding sheet for policies and procedures and appraisal rating forms was used (See **Appendix D** for the coding sheet for the policies and procedures, and **Appendix E** for the coding sheet for the employees performance rating forms).

## **Focus Interviews**

Focus interviews will be used to supplement the findings from the survey. Focus interviews are short open-ended interviews that follow a pattern derived from the case (Yin 1994: 84). For this research, agency personnel were used to corroborate the data collection. Interviews were conducted with three employees from each of the four Travis County program areas. The questions come directly from the categories that make up the ideal type (See **Appendix F** for the focus interview form). **Table 5.3** illustrates the linking of focus interviews to the conceptual framework.

**Table 5.3 Operationalizing: Linking Focus Interviews to the Conceptual Framework**

<b>Performance Appraisal System Components</b>	<b>Interview Question</b>
<b>I. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES</b>	
A. Explanation of:	
1. performance <b>appraisal process</b>	
2. setting <b>employee goals</b>	
3. setting <b>performance standards</b>	
4. rating <b>criteria</b>	
5. required <b>documentation</b>	
B. Indication of:	
1. <b>frequency</b> of appraisals	
2. <b>responsible party</b> for administering appraisal	
3. requirement of employee <b>self-appraisal</b>	
4. <b>appeal</b> procedures	
<b>II. MANAGERIAL SUPPORT</b>	
A. <b>Raters held accountable</b> for administration of appraisal system	
B. Provision for:	
1. <b>Additional compensation/benefits</b> to employees who perform at or above standards	Does your department provide additional compensation/benefits to employees who perform at or above standards?
2. <b>career opportunities</b> for employees who perform above standards	
<b>III. TRAINING</b>	
A. Raters trained on:	
1. components of the <b>appraisal process</b>	Does your department provide training on the performance appraisal process?
2. establishing specific <b>employee goals</b>	
3. establishing <b>performance standards</b>	
4. continuously <b>documenting performance</b>	
5. completion of the appraisal <b>rating document</b>	
6. providing continuous <b>performance feedback</b>	
7. steps of appraisal process to <b>include employees</b> in	
B. Employees trained on:	
1. performance <b>appraisal process</b>	Does your department provide training on the performance appraisal process?
2. conducting <b>self-appraisals</b>	

<b>Performance Appraisal System Components</b>	<b>Interview Question</b>
<b>IV. SETTING OF EMPLOYEE GOALS</b>	
Employee goals:	
1. tailored to the <b>individual employees' job</b>	
2. <b>set jointly</b> by rater and employees	Are employee goals set jointly by rater and employee?
3. <b>prioritized</b>	
4. <b>documented</b> in writing	
5. <b>communicated</b> to employee	
<b>V. SETTING OF PERFORMANCE STANDARDS</b>	
Performance standards:	
1. used to <b>evaluate employees' achievement</b> of established goals	
2. <b>set jointly</b> by rater and employees	Are performance standards set jointly by rater and employee?
3. <b>documented</b> in writing	
4. <b>communicated</b> to employees	
<b>VI. OBSERVATION OF PERFORMANCE</b>	
Performance:	
1. <b>Documented</b> by raters during performance period	
2. on-going <b>feedback provided</b> by raters	Is on-going feedback provided to the employee by raters during the appraisal period?
3. employees encouraged to <b>document own performance</b>	

<b>Performance Appraisal System Components</b>	<b>Interview Question</b>
<b>VII. APPRAISING PERFORMANCE</b>	
A. Employee completes <b>written appraisal</b> of employees' performance	Do employees in your department complete written self-appraisals?
B. Rater:	
1. completes <b>written appraisal</b> of employees' performance	Do raters in your department complete written appraisals of employees' performance?
2. provides <b>specific examples</b> to justify ratings	
C. Rater and employee <b>meet to discuss</b> :	
1. <b>ratings</b>	In your department do raters and employees meet to discuss ratings, changes in performance, and future performance?
2. <b>changes in performance</b> , if needed	In your department do raters and employees meet to discuss ratings, changes in performance, and future performance?
3. future goals and future <b>performance</b>	In your department do raters and employees meet to discuss ratings, changes in performance, and future performance?

### **Statistics**

Upon receipt of the completed surveys and completion of coding sheets, summary statistics (frequency distribution and mean) were calculated. This allowed for a determination whether the performance appraisal systems currently used by Travis County departments meet the ideal type. The results of this study are presented in Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER 6

### RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of this case study. The findings are used to assess the performance appraisal systems of Travis County Departments using the ideal characteristics developed earlier. The results of the survey of human resource liaisons, the content analysis of the policies and procedures and the appraisal rating forms, and focus interviews are presented in this chapter.

#### **Assessment Results**

The results of the survey are presented to assess the performance appraisal systems of Travis County Departments using the ideal characteristics developed by Piatt's study. Each survey question is directly related with an ideal characteristic. The following tables describe the results obtained from the survey. Further, Travis County personnel were interviewed to corroborate the data collected from the survey. The questions came directly from the categories that make up the ideal type. A summary of the interviews will be provided following each corresponding table.

#### **Policies and Procedures**

**Table 6.1** reveals that 85% departments responding have some type of written policies and procedures. Only three of the departments responding reported having no written policy and procedure related to performance appraisal.

**TABLE 6.1 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES RESULTS**

<b>Elements</b>	<b>% Yes</b>	<b>% No</b>	<b>Total (n=20)</b>
Written policies and procedures for performance appraisals	85.0	15.0	100.0

**Content Analysis of Policies and Procedures**

In addition to the survey, this study includes an analysis of written policies and procedures submitted by the departments. The intent of the analysis is to measure the policy and procedures against the practical ideal type. **Table 6.2** presents the results of the content analysis. Although 85% of the departments responding to the survey indicated they had policies and procedures for performance appraisals only ten were received. All of the policies and procedures received provided an explanation of the performance appraisal system. An average of 139 words was dedicated to this explanation. Additionally, nine out of the ten policies received included an explanation of performance standards, rating criteria, required documentation, frequency of appraisals, and responsible party for administering the appraisal. Only three of the department’s policies and procedures revealed the process for appeal procedures.

**TABLE 6.2 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES RESULTS**

Elements	# Yes	# No	Total (10)	Average # Words
Explanation of:				
1. performance <b>appraisal process</b>	10	0	100.0	139
2. setting <b>employee goals</b>	4	6	100.0	87
3. setting <b>performance standards</b>	9	1	100.0	148
4. rating <b>criteria</b>	9	1	100.0	99
5. required <b>documentation</b>	9	1	100.0	65
Indication of:				
1. <b>frequency</b> of appraisals	9	1	100.0	45
2. <b>responsible party</b> for administering appraisals	9	1	100.0	67
3. requirement of <b>employee self-appraisal</b>	2	8	100.0	11
4. <b>appeal</b> procedures	3	7	100.0	76

**Managerial Support**

Table 6.3 reveals that only 45% of the respondents reported that raters are “always” held accountable for the administration of the performance appraisal system. Additionally, compensation and benefits to employees are “always” or “sometimes” provided in 90% of the departments responding.

**TABLE 6.3 MANAGERIAL SUPPORT RESULTS**

Elements	% Always	% Sometimes	% Never	Total (n=20)
Raters held <b>accountable</b> for administration of appraisal system	45.0	40.0	15.0	100.0
Provision for:				
1. <b>additional compensation/benefits</b> to employees at or above standards	15.0	75.0	10.0	100.0
2. <b>career opportunities</b> for employees who perform above standards	5.0	85.0	10.0	100.0

## Focus Interviews

The interviews revealed that additional compensation is provided to employees at or above standards when funding is available. When funding is available, however, the amount of additional compensation is not usually made available to the employee until after the performance period.

## **Training**

Only 35% of the respondents indicated that training is “always” provided to employees on appraisal system. Training on the appraisal system is “never” provided in 20% of the departments responding. In the majority of departments raters are “always” trained on completing the appraisal rating form and steps in the process to include employees in. It is disappointing to see that 60% of the departments “never” train employees on conducting self-appraisals. Overall, survey responses showed limited support for training on the performance appraisal system.

**TABLE 6.4 TRAINING RESULTS**

<b>Elements</b>	<b>% Always</b>	<b>% Sometimes</b>	<b>% Never</b>	<b>Total (n=20)</b>
Training provided to employees on <b>appraisal system</b>	35.0	45.0	20.0	100.0
Raters trained on:				
1. components of <b>appraisal process</b>	40.0	50.0	10.0	100.0
2. establishing specific <b>employee goals</b>	15.0	75.0	10.0	100.0
3. establishing <b>performance standards</b>	15.0	70.0	15.0	100.0
4. continuously <b>documenting performance</b>	15.0	75.0	10.0	100.0
5. completion of the appraisal <b>rating document</b>	65.0	25.0	10.0	100.0
6. providing continuous <b>performance feedback</b>	15.0	75.0	10.0	100.0
7. steps of the appraisal process to <b>include employees in</b>	65.0	25.0	10.0	100.0
Employees trained on:				
1. performance <b>appraisal process</b>	35.0	45.0	20.0	100.0
2. conducting <b>self-appraisals</b>	5.0	35.0	60.0	100.0

Focus Interviews

The majority of those interviewed indicated that training is provided on the performance appraisal system, however it was not considered mandatory. All of those interviewed recalled that raters are trained. The focus interviews support the findings from the survey. Only limited support is provided to this ideal characteristic.

**Setting of Employee Goals**

**Table 6.5** reveals that 65% of departments responding to the survey “always” set goals for employees to accomplish. Only 30% of the departments “always” set goals jointly and 65% “sometimes” prioritize them. It is notable that over three-fourths of the departments always document goals in writing and communicate them with employees.

**TABLE 6.5 SETTING OF EMPLOYEE GOALS RESULTS**

Elements	% Always	% Sometimes	% Never	Total (n=20)
Goals are set for <b>employees to accomplish</b>	65.0	25.0	10.0	100.0
Employee goals:				
1. tailored to the <b>individual employees' job</b>	80.0	10.0	10.0	100.0
2. <b>set jointly</b> by rater and employee	30.0	60.0	10.0	100.0
3. <b>prioritized</b>	25.0	65.0	10.0	100.0
4. <b>documented</b> in writing	75.0	15.0	10.0	100.0
5. <b>communicated</b> to employees	80.0	10.0	10.0	100.0

Focus Interviews

All of the personal interviewed do participate in setting goals. One-half of the interviews revealed that raters and employees set the goals jointly. The other half related that they routinely provide goals to their supervisor at the end of the performance period. Those from the Justice and Public Safety area indicated that the goals were used more for training needs rather than for evaluating accomplishments. These responses support the findings from the survey.

**Setting of Performance Standards**

**Table 6.6** illustrates the results of the portion of the survey on setting of performance standards. Nine out of ten departments “always” or “sometimes” use performance standards to evaluate employees’ achievement of established goals. Seventy percent (70%) of the departments responding “always” document these standards and communicate them to employees. Only 20% of the departments “always” set performance standards jointly between the rater and employee. It is concerning that 40% “never” set these standards jointly.

**TABLE 6.6 SETTING OF PERFORMANCE STANDARDS RESULTS**

<b>Elements</b>	<b>% Always</b>	<b>% Sometimes</b>	<b>% Never</b>	<b>Total (n=20)</b>
Performance standards:				
1. used to <b>evaluate employees' achievement</b> of established goals	60.0	30.0	10.0	100.0
2. <b>set jointly</b> by rater and employee	20.0	40.0	40.0	100.0
3. <b>documented</b> in writing	70.0	20.0	10.0	100.0
4. <b>communicated</b> to employees	70.0	20.0	10.0	100.0

### Focus Interviews

Interviews conducted relating to performance standards revealed that performance standards are used to evaluate employees. Further, these standards are documented and available to employees. Five out of the twelve interviews revealed that performance standards are set jointly. The remaining seven indicated that top-level management develops performance standards. The results of the focus interviews support the findings from the survey.

### **Observation of Performance**

**Table 6.7** presents the results of the portion of the survey on observation of performance. Only in 35% of departments “always” document employee performance during the performance period. The majority of departments stated that raters “sometimes” document performance and provide on-going performance feedback. It is noted, however, that 55% of the departments reported that employees are “always” encouraged to document their own performance during the performance period.

**TABLE 6.7 OBSERVATION OF PERFORMANCE RESULTS**

<b>Elements</b>	<b>% Always</b>	<b>% Sometimes</b>	<b>% Never</b>	<b>Total (n=20)</b>
Performance:				
1. <b>documented</b> by raters during performance period	35.0	55.0	10.0	100.0
2. on-going <b>feedback provided</b> by raters	30.0	60.0	10.0	100.0
3. employees encouraged to <b>document own performance</b>	55.0	25.0	20.0	100.0

### Focus Interviews

Interviews from the Health and Human services program area reveal that on-going performance feedback is provided. The three interviews indicated that performance reviews are conducted quarterly allowing for feedback to be provided verbally as well as in writing. The remaining interviews concluded that it is common to only receive feedback during the formal performance appraisal, which normally occurs once a year. The focus interviews only provide limited support for the survey results.

### **Appraising Performance**

**Table 6.8** presents the results of the survey on the process of appraising employees' performance. Only 15% of the respondents reported that employees "always" complete written self-appraisals. In 70% of the departments, the raters "always" complete written appraisals of employees' performance, and ""always" discuss changes in performance with employees.

**TABLE 6.8 APPRAISING PERFORMANCE RESULTS**

<b>Elements</b>	<b>% Always</b>	<b>% Sometimes</b>	<b>% Never</b>	<b>Total (n=20)</b>
Employee completes written <b>self-appraisal</b>	15.0	65.0	20.0	100.0
Rater:				
1. completes <b>written appraisal</b> of employee performance	70.0	20.0	10.0	100.0
2. provides <b>specific examples</b> to justify ratings	35.0	55.0	10.0	100.0
Rater and employee meet to discuss:				
1. <b>ratings</b>	80.0	10.0	10.0	100.0
2. <b>changes in performance</b> , if needed	70.0	20.0	10.0	100.0
3. future <b>goals</b> and future <b>performance</b>	45.0	45.0	10.0	100.0

Focus Interviews

The interviews found that all departments complete written appraisals of employee performance. Further, the employee and rater meet to discuss the ratings and future performance. All but two of those interviewed complete written self-appraisals.

**Content Analysis Results of Appraisal Rating Form**

In addition to conducting content analysis of the policies and procedures, performance appraisal rating forms were also analyzed. **Table 6.9** presents the results of this analysis. All of the forms received included quality of work, quantity of work, interpersonal skills, and in accordance with job performance standards. Seventy-two percent of the rating forms received, employees are rated on attendance. The vast majority, thirteen of eighteen, did not rate on achieving specific goals. Additionally, only eight of eighteen, rated employees on activities performed outside the usual work requirements.

**TABLE 6.9 RATING FACTORS RESULTS**

<b>Elements</b>	<b>% Yes</b>	<b>% No</b>	<b>Total (n=18)</b>
Employees rated:			
1. on <b>attendance</b>	72.2	27.8	100.0
2. on <b>quality</b> of work	100.0	0	100.0
3. on achieving specific goals	27.8	72.2	100.0
4. in accordance with job <b>performance standards</b>	100.0	0	100.0
5. on <b>interpersonal skills</b>	100.0	0	100.0
6. on use of <b>equipment</b>	55.6	44.4	100.0
7. on <b>quantity</b> of work	100.0	0	100.0
8. on <b>activities</b> performed <b>outside</b> their usual <b>work requirements</b>	44.4	55.6	100.0

**Methods of Rating**

In addition to conducting content analysis of performance appraisal rating forms, the methods of rating used by departments were also assessed. All of the respondents utilize a graphic rating scale. The number system, did however, vary. Seven departments used a five scale system. Eight other departments utilized a four scale system. Three forms were received that only had a three number scale.

**Number of Appraisals per Year**

Number of times per year employees performance is appraised was also assessed. Seventy percent of the departments surveyed indicated that employees’ performance is appraised one time per year. Twenty percent appraise performance more than one time per year while two departments indicated performance appraisals are not conducted.

## **Number of Performance Appraisal Systems**

The number of performance appraisal systems in Travis County Departments ranges from 0 to 3. Fifty percent of the departments conducted only one system. Forty percent conducted two or more systems and two departments did not have a performance appraisal system.

This chapter presented the results of the instruments used to assess the performance appraisal systems of Travis County Departments. Chapter 7 presents the overall results and discusses whether the performance appraisal systems assessed met the ideal type developed earlier.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to apply the practical ideal type performance appraisal system developed by Piatt (1998), to Travis County Departments. It was a follow up to her work “Analysis of Municipal Government Performance Appraisal Systems” (Piatt 1998). This chapter will provide the overall results of this study. It will indicate whether the components of the assessed performance appraisal systems meet the ideal characteristics developed by Piatt (1998). Further, Travis County Departments closest to the ideal are identified. Lastly, recommendations are made for the improvement of performance appraisal systems.

#### Overall Conclusions and Results

**Table 7.1** presents the overall results and recommendations. The table reveals whether Travis County Departments meet, do not consistently meet, or do not meet the ideal characteristics. The possible conclusions for the table include:

<b>Yes</b>	The majority of departments meet both the broad category of the characteristic and the subcategories of the recommended characteristic.
<b>No</b>	The majority of departments do not meet the characteristic
<b>Not Clear</b>	The majority of departments either always or sometimes meet the broad category of the characteristic but do not consistently meet the subcategories of the characteristic

**TABLE 7.1 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Characteristic	Evidence		Meets Ideal Type	Recommendations
Policies and Procedures	Survey	Content Analysis	Not Clear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies and Procedures should be more comprehensive and detailed.</li> <li>• Policies and Procedures should include steps for appeal.</li> </ul>
	Strong Support	Limited Support		
Managerial Support	Survey	Focus Interview	Not Clear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Departments should always provide additional compensation/benefits to employees performing at or above standards.</li> </ul>
	Limited Support	Limited Support		
Training	Survey	Focus Interview	Not Clear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training on the performance appraisal process should always be provided to all employees.</li> <li>• Employees should also be trained on conducting self-appraisals.</li> </ul>
	Limited Support	Limited Support		
Setting of Employee Goals	Survey	Focus Interview	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rater and employee should set goals jointly.</li> </ul>
	Strong Support	Strong Support		
		Content Analysis		
		Limited Support		

Characteristic	Evidence		Meets Ideal Type	Recommendations		
<b>Setting of Performance Standards</b>	<b>Survey</b>	<b>Focus Interview</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Rater and employee should set performance standards jointly.</b></li> </ul>		
	<b>Strong Support</b>	<b>Strong Support</b>				
		<b>Content Analysis</b>				
		<b>Strong Support</b>				
<b>Observation of Performance</b>	<b>Survey</b>	<b>Focus Interview</b>	<b>Not Clear</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Raters need to observe and document performance on an on-going basis.</b></li> <li>• <b>Raters should also provide on-going feedback to the employee during the performance period.</b></li> </ul>		
	<b>Support</b>	<b>Limited Support</b>				
<b>Appraising Performance</b>	<b>Survey</b>	<b>Focus Interview</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ensure that employees always complete a written self-appraisal.</b></li> </ul>		
	<b>Strong Support</b>	<b>Strong Support</b>				

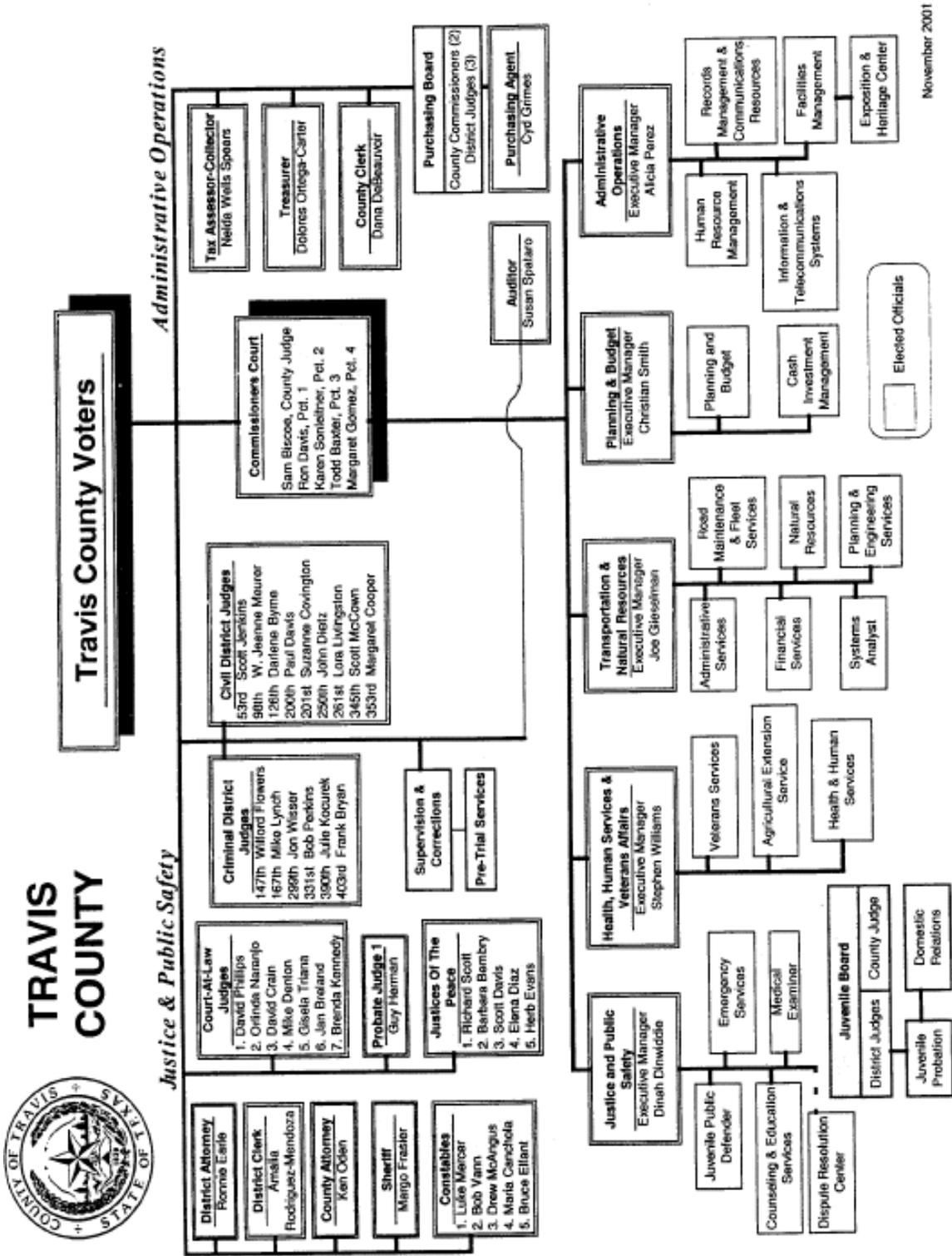
## Conclusion

Travis County Departments for the most part adhere to the practical ideal type performance appraisal system presented in this study. The Transportation and Natural Resources Department’s performance appraisal system appears to be closest to the ideal. Other departments could benefit from reviewing this system.

The practical ideal type performance appraisal system developed by Piatt (1998), and used in this study can be applied to evaluate any existing appraisal system. Organizations could benefit by utilizing this tool to review an existing system. Further, the tool provides a road map for organizations developing a performance appraisal system for the first time or making revisions to the current appraisal system.

APPENDIX A

TRAVIS COUNTY ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



November 2001

**APPENDIX B**

**SURVEYED DEPARTMENTS**

<b>DEPARTMENT</b>	<b>FY 02 FTE</b>	<b>RESPONING DEPT</b>
County Attorney	143	
County Clerk	89	
District Clerk	86.5	
District Attorney	136.13	<b>X</b>
Constable, Prct. 1	12	
Constable, Prct. 2	15.2	
Constable, Prct. 3	20.95	
Constable, Prct. 4	10.7	<b>X</b>
Constable, Prct. 5	52.5	
Dispute Resolution Center	7	<b>X</b>
Sheriff	1,306.5	<b>X</b>
Medical Examiner	21	<b>X</b>
CSCD	296.25	
TCCES	34.5	<b>X</b>
Pretrial Services	40.19	
Juvenile Public Defender	12	<b>X</b>
Juvenile Court	342.5	<b>X</b>
Emergency Services	19	<b>X</b>
Justice and Public Safety	17	<b>X</b>
Veterans Services	6	<b>X</b>
Agriculture Extension Services	12	<b>X</b>
Health and Human Services	226.5	<b>X</b>
TNR	384.25	<b>X</b>
County Auditor	66	
Facilities Management	86	<b>X</b>
Human Resources Management	24	<b>X</b>
Information and Telecommunications Systems	78	
Planning and Budget	13	<b>X</b>
Purchasing	29	
Records Management and Communication Resources	45	
Tax Assessor-Collector	104.5	<b>X</b>
Exposition Center	13	<b>X</b>
Treasurer	5	<b>X</b>

## APPENDIX C

### Survey of Travis County Departments

This survey is being conducted to obtain information on employee performance appraisal systems in Travis County Departments.

If your department conducts appraisals of employees, please complete and return the survey.

If your department does not conduct performance appraisals of employees, please indicate on the last page, and return the survey.

#### Instructions

Beside each of the questions presented below, please answer with one of the following responses:

**[A] Always, [S] Sometimes, [N] Never**

		[A]	[S]	[N]
1.	Do you have written policies and procedures for performance appraisals?			
2.	Are goals set for employees to accomplish?  <b>(If the answer to question 2 was “Always” or “Sometimes”, proceed to question 3. If the answer was “Never”, proceed to question 8.)</b>			
3.	Are goals tailored to the individual employee’s job?			
4.	Are goals set jointly by the rater and employee?			
5.	Are goals prioritized by the rater?			
6.	Are the goals documented in writing?			
7.	Are the goals communicated to employees?			
8.	Are performance standards set that are used to evaluate how well an employee has achieved each established goal? <b>(If the answer to question 8 was “Always” or “Sometimes”, proceed to question 9. If the answer was “Never”, proceed to question 12.)</b>			

		[A]	[S]	[N]
9.	Are performance standards set jointly by the rater and employee?			
10.	Are performance standards documented in writing?			
11.	Are performance standards communicated to employees?			
12.	Is training provided to employees on the performance appraisal system?  <b>(If the answer to question 12 was “Always” or “Sometimes”, proceed to question 13. If the answer was “Never”, proceed to question 21.)</b>			
13.	Are raters trained on the components of the performance appraisal process?			
14.	Are raters trained on how to establish specific employee goals?			
15.	Are raters trained on how to establish performance standards?			
16.	Are raters trained on how to continuously document performance?			
17.	Are raters trained on how to complete the performance appraisal rating document?			
18.	Are raters trained to continuously provide performance feedback?			
19.	Are raters trained on the steps of the performance appraisal process that employees should be included in?			
20.	Are employees trained on the performance appraisal system?			
21.	Are employees trained on conducting performance appraisals on themselves?			
22.	Are raters held accountable for administration of the performance appraisal system?			
23.	Is additional compensation or additional benefits provided for employees who perform at or above standards?			

		[A]	[S]	[N]
24.	Are career advancement opportunities provided for employees who perform above standards?			
25.	Do raters document employee performance on an on-going basis during the appraisal period?			
26.	Do raters provide on-going performance feedback to employees during the appraisal period?			
27.	Are employees encouraged to document their own performance during the appraisal period?			
28.	Do employees complete a written appraisal of their performance?			
29.	Do the raters complete a written appraisal of employees' performance?			
30.	Do the raters provide specific examples to justify the employees' ratings?			
31.	Do the rater and employee meet to discuss the ratings assigned to the employee?			
32.	Do the rater and employee discuss changes in performance, if changes are needed?			
33.	Do the rater and employee discuss future goals and future performance?			

Does your department administer more than one performance appraisal system (i.e. one for managers and one for line staff)?

If yes, how many systems are administered?

How many times are employees' appraised during a one-year period?

Feel free to use the back of this form for additional comments you may have regarding the performance appraisal system used by your department.

Please provide the following information:

Name of Department:

Your Name (optional):

Your Position Title:

**Please return the survey by May 26, along with a copy of your policies/procedures relating to performance appraisals and a copy of your current appraisal form.**

**Return the completed survey through interoffice mail to:**

**Chad Worley  
Juvenile Probation  
854-7091**

**Thank you for your time.**

## APPENDIX D

### Coding Procedure for Content Analysis of Policies and Procedures

<b>Policies and Procedures</b>	<b>Included</b>	<b>Degree</b>
1. Explanation of performance appraisal system		
2. Explanation of setting employee goals		
3. Explanation of setting performance standards		
4. Explanation of rating criteria		
5. Explanation on required documentation of performance		
6. Frequency of appraisals		
7. Responsible party for administering appraisals		
8. Requirement of employee self-appraisal		
9. Appeal procedures		

## APPENDIX E

### Coding Procedure for Content Analysis of Employee Rating Performance Forms

Rating Forms	Included	Method
1. Rated on attendance		
2. Rated on quality of work		
3. Rated on achieving specific goals		
4. Rated in accordance with job performance standards		
5. Rated on interpersonal skills		
6. Rated on use of equipment		
7. Rated on quantity of work		
8. Rated on activities performed which are outside the usual work requirements		

## APPENDIX F

### Focus Interview Questions

1. Does your department provide training on the performance appraisal process?
2. Are employee goals set jointly by rater and employee?
3. Are performance standards set jointly by rater and employee?
4. Is on-going feedback provided to the employee by raters during the appraisal period?
5. Do employees in your department complete written self-appraisals?

<p>6. Do raters in your department complete written appraisals of employees' performance?</p>
<p>7. In your department do raters and employees meet to discuss ratings, changes in performance, and future performance?</p>
<p>8. Does your department provide additional compensation/benefits to employees who perform at or above standards?</p>

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