

Case 23

The Bulge

39

Hints about Solution

The narrative of this case study is rather long and contains a lot of information, which has no relevance to the problem. At best, the length of the case study can be justified as aimed at familiarising the student-manager with the environment of the IAF, since many readers may not be aware of the working and history of that service. The problem is to consider all possible lacunae in the performance appraisal/annual confidential report system of the IAF. The case study does state that these issues were thrown up when Deep Selection system was introduced, but the concluding lines do not impose any restrictions on the proposals for improvements to be recommended by the consultants. Basically, the appraisal system consists of quantified assessment of certain characteristics of the assessed officer. It has built-in checks and balances like inconsistency between overall rating and average of assessment of different characteristics, the pen picture and answer to the question whether the assessor would like to have the assessee work under him again, in future. The last assurance of fairness is through the reviewing officer. A possible cause of doubt about the accuracy of these reports could be due to the fact that in earlier years the force was small, the seniors knew juniors, the dossiers were informally supplemented by the views of the seniors and, thus, the assessing officers did not give too much importance to the performance appraisal reports. The annual confidential reports raised during this period came into reckoning when

performance for 10 years was considered for Deep Selection system. Hence, the complaint that the reports were not raised bearing the requirements and refinement of Deep Selection in mind.

Many proposed problems arise out of the personality of the assessor. Firstly, the difference that a strict or a lenient assessor could make to the careers of the officers. A possible solution could be to evolve a multiplication factor for each assessing officer. The ratings given by an assessor could be moderated by multiplying with this multiplication factor to even out the problem created due to honest differences between a strict and a lenient assessor. This multiplication factor could be computed by considering the grades given by that assessor to all the officers compared to the average of grades obtained by these very officers during their entire career. For example, if an officer 'A' is given seven points by the assessor, but the average of all the appraisals of 'A' during his career is six then, the assessor is a liberal assessor. The ratio of six by seven obtained in case of 'A' is averaged by considering the ratios of all the officers assessed by this assessing officer. The average ratio will be the multiplication factor.

The second problem is of the appraisals being unduly depressed or popped up during a particular year due to various reasons. This would cover points two and three in case study. There can be two techniques for guarding against these large variations. Firstly, calculate the average of all the assessments for an officer till date and permit a new report to vary from the average by a maximum of 10–15 per cent, unless there have been special circumstances for a larger variation, e.g. performance during a conflict war, unnatural and unforeseen calamities, etc. Alternatively, the average and maximum variations in dossiers of each officer are calculated and marked in the dossier. Maximum variations, so marked, constitute the permissible limits in which all the future assessments should lie. The average and the limits will vary every time a new report is added to the dossiers. Average moving up indicates that the assessee is improving and average going down points to worsening performance.

Thirdly, guidelines, based on statistical distribution of performance applicable to random sample should be withdrawn or diluted. Fourthly, the problem of secrecy could be overcome

by making it obligatory for the assessor to counsel the assessee at the time of raising the performance appraisal report. The report itself should be signed by the assessed officer as having been seen and he having been duly counselled. Fifthly, the benchmark for an adverse report should be same as would come in the way of the promotion of the officer. Lastly, though the reports could continue to be raised annually, the assessor should be directed to hold a review meeting with the assessee every quarter and discuss his performance during the period under consideration. A note on these discussions should be attached to the performance appraisal and should form a part of the appraisal.

Another area of concern could be the reports raised by an assessor who is senior to the assessee only by a couple of years. The assessor would know that during Deep Selection both these officers would compete with each other, possibly for the same vacancy. There could be a tendency to underassess in such circumstances. A precaution against such tendencies would be to ensure that the assessor is senior to the assessee by at least five years. Otherwise, the report could be directed to be raised by the reviewing officer. Secondly, instructions regarding excessive variation would protect the junior.