



Annual Performance Evaluations with a Positive Twist

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In earlier columns we have discussed the use of the formula **PAR** (Problem + Action + Result) as a construct to determine accomplishments and from them competencies.¹ Deconstructing the competencies yields a cluster of generic skills and traits, which can help determine a career path. The results of **PAR** work can then be used as bullet points in executive summaries,² and as the basis for “stories” in interviews.³ Behavioral interviews specifically beg for the “stories” that can be generated from preparation that includes a review of one’s PARs.

Through the years, feedback from search committee members and from applicants for positions has lauded the usefulness of an applicant taking the time to do the PAR work. It has provided a strong basis for determining the extent to which one knows he or she has the skill sets that are being marketed, and whether the opportunity is a good match with the skills one excels in and enjoys using.

Let’s take a moment to review the construct **PAR** as a method for competency analysis. Reflecting on your achievements, **P** asks that you determine if there was a problem, issue, challenge, or opportunity to be solved or resolved, and **A** asks for the action or activities taken to do this. **R** stands for the positive result, outcome, or benefit, phrased in as quantitative terms as possible.

An accomplishment statement begins with the **A** and follows with the **R**. This can become a bullet point on an executive summary² and might read, “Chaired departmental program review for re-accreditation, which resulted in full accreditation for seven years.”

PAR Use Expanded

With this summary of the **PAR** method, let’s consider how it can be extended beyond

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applying and interviewing for positions, into performance management.

“...the task of leadership is to align strengths in ways that make weaknesses irrelevant.”

—Peter Drucker



Judith Kapustin Katz: “We believe that the use of the PAR process in performance appraisal adds a much-needed dimension to the traditional faculty–chair meeting.”

What has become increasingly clear is that determining competencies is also quite helpful in preparing for annual performance appraisal or review. Focusing on strengths is increasingly acknowledged as an effective approach to managing performance appraisals and coaching employees for change. Many experts today

recommend strength- or asset-based approaches rather than the more traditional deficit- or problem-based approach.^{4,5}

Moreover, Torbeck and Wrightson⁶ have advocated for determining promotion criteria for family medicine residents based on demonstrated competencies in a variety of areas suggested by the

Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). Their report provided guidelines for developing and demonstrating knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Clifton and Harter give another rationale for the focus on strengths, writing, “When people become aware of their talents, through measurement and feedback, they have a strong position from which to view their potential. They can begin to enlarge their awareness of their talents with knowledge and skills to develop strengths.”⁷

Information such as the above and feedback from clients has led to our recommendation to use the **PAR** work approach in preparing oneself for an annual evaluation. Reviewing **PAR**s for the past year and deconstructing them as suggested¹ provides one with an understanding of his or her competencies. Moreover, the **PAR** approach enables preparation of a performance report that is focused on results or outcomes, rather than being the all-too-common list of activities conducted during the year.

Moving from PAR to CAR for Performance Management

To focus on goals for the coming year, we find it helpful to substitute **C** for **P** and use the acronym **CAR**. Challenges, problems, opportunities or issues can be set, with details of the Action to be taken and the Results expected. This acronym, **CAR**, implies forward movement and is thus distinguished from past accomplishments. In our



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framework, the **PAR** then becomes a focus on **P**ast Problems, opportunities, issues or challenges and **CAR** on **C**urrent/future challenges, opportunities, issues, or problems.

One to several **CARs** can be written for each area to be appraised—such as teaching, research, service, and scholarship. The amount of detail and degree of "stretch" in the goals is up to you and your supervisor to determine—whether your **CAR** is a high-performance Porsche or a reliable and efficient Prius.

Here are a couple of examples that depict the basic format:

- ❖ **Scholarship:**
 - ❖ **Challenge**—Submit two articles for publication.
 - ❖ **Action**—Complete data collection and draft manuscripts for intradepartmental review.
 - ❖ **Results**—Submit articles to the Journal of XXX by April 1.
- ❖ **Teaching:**
 - ❖ **Challenge**—Develop integrated curriculum for pathology course.
 - ❖ **Action**—Collect and review curriculum from several other institutions; convene small task force to discuss and draft proposal.
 - ❖ **Result**—Submit new curriculum to department chair by April 30.

These statements are written in the present tense, are grounded in your history, represent

a preferred future, and move toward positive accomplishments and change that you desire for your career. The statements also help you identify aspects of your work that ultimately will make you feel good about yourself. Finally, the work of constructing your **CARs** helps to define areas on which to focused up in the following year as you do your yearly reflection, with questions such as: How much of my current position allows me to use the skills that I enjoy? Are there ways that I can build more of this into my current job?

What follows is a "live" example prepared for an annual performance discussion with a supervisor:

*During the past year, a department chair was dealing with resource allocation issues. A faculty member took it upon herself to identify the problem (**P**): faculty members were unhappy that research space allocation in the department was inconsistent. She evaluated the current allocation, put together a task force of faculty who researched what other departments had done, designed a quantitative methodology to assign research space based on funding and mission, discussed alternatives, and achieved buy-in from every member of the department (**A**). She then presented to the chair a solution that completely solved the problem, and demonstrated to members of the department that their concerns had been heard and the issue was being handled in a transparent manner. The new system was considered fair and was implemented as a departmental policy (**R**).*

*This successful **PAR** resulted in the faculty member identifying skills she had used for this task, and therefore being asked to handle other issues that would require similar skill sets during the following year. In the goals for the year, the faculty member was asked to take on the **Challenge** of leading a task force to reorganize the student educational facilities to better meet the needs of students and faculty. Her **Action** plan involved bringing together all stakeholders, assessing needs in relation to existing facilities (new construction was not an option), and developing a satisfactory plan. The expected **Result** was that student educational resources would reside in a more efficient and suitable environment, making both teaching and learning more pleasant and effective. This **A** and **R** would also increase visibility for the faculty member, a requirement for career advancement at her institution.*

This accomplishment did not "fit" in the normal CV template, and therefore could



Page S. Morahan: "There is a great need for medical schools to develop methods that document and value contributions such as advising, mentoring, directing courses, and the like."

not be formally recorded as an "accomplishment" by the faculty member for the previous year in that format. By using the **PAR** statement and deconstruction (in addition to the institution's standard annual review format), the faculty member's accomplishment and skills were clearly identified and formally documented in her personnel file, therefore also coming to the attention of the administration. This will likely result in greater opportunities for the faculty member in the future.

For this process to be effective, it is important for the faculty member to focus on the actual **Results** that have occurred, and not merely on the **Activities** or **Action**. In the example above, space allocation (a notoriously touchy subject) was achieved in an equitable manner, satisfactory to all. Another **Result** might be enhanced departmental ability to obtaining extramural funding.

We believe that the use of the **PAR** process in performance appraisal adds a much-needed dimension to the traditional faculty-chair meeting. The process enables faculty and their supervisors to identify, and then to acknowledge, faculty members' concrete results-oriented contributions to the school—traditional peer-reviewed publications and grants, clinical service, or teaching—as well as nontraditional contributions that advance the missions of the school. As recently highlighted by an AAMC Consensus

Meeting on documenting and evaluating contributions in education, there is a great need for medical schools to develop methods that document and value contributions such as advising, mentoring, directing courses, and the like.⁸

Some internal CV report templates allow for short verbiage to describe such contributions, and we suggest that more schools could usefully adopt this process as an optional component of the annual review. Formal inclusion would benefit all parties:

- ❖ The faculty member gets credit for a task well done, yet not easily added to a traditional CV, and takes personal satisfaction in the accomplishment. Furthermore, the deconstruction allows the faculty member to identify skills and strengths that can be developed further.
- ❖ The department benefits from faculty willingness to take on projects that otherwise would not be considered worth their time and effort ("What do I get out of doing this?").
- ❖ The school, which always benefits from the success of its faculty, will identify a pool of talented individuals with specific skills that may be invited to participate

in important processes that enhance the school's mission.

This change in performance appraisal will require a shift to focus on how to document the outcomes, rather than just listing the activities in which a faculty member is involved. For example, it is not sufficient to note that one served on the IRB committee; for this to be used as an accomplishment, the faculty member must focus on what was accomplished that year. This requires considering elements such as: Was the process streamlined so that time from application submission to approval was shortened? Were there improved explanations of what was needed in IRB applications, so that fewer resubmissions were required?

This recommended approach for using **PAR** for past accomplishments and **CAR** for current and future challenges aligns with the values of Appreciative Inquiry. One model uses the appreciative approach to determine strategic objectives by analyzing Strengths and Opportunities, Action, and Result.⁹ The CAR focus is thus strength-based, and one is being valued for contributions as well as potential. Your annual review becomes a *valuation* rather than an evaluation—built on strengths rather than deficits. ❖

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