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Appraisal interviews at Crate.io

In order to improve and motivate, employees and leaders need to give and get feedback. Unlike a baseball player who gets immediate and consistent feedback based on hits, runs, errors and wins, employees in the knowledge economy often rely on feedback from their manager to improve their performance. Without feedback, employees tend to lose the opportunity to improve their skills and performance. Feedback improve working processes and motivate the employees. That's the reason why we do appraisal interviews.

Goals of an appraisal interview
- Allow the employee to determine their individual position
- Define the expectations from each other (employee and leader)
- Get feedback from the employee
- Detect issues early ahead
- Get rid of existing misunderstandings and avoid them going forward
- Set goals for the employee
- Talk about the level of commitment
- Encourage personal development
- Keep the level of satisfaction with the current position and even try to raise it
- Show appreciation/recognition of the achievements
- Increase mutual trust and acceptance

Organizational structure
- The appraisal interview should happen on a regular basis – every six-months
  (once per year also regarding salary, preferable in sync with work anniversary)
- The interview is scheduled for the duration of an hour.
- The meeting is face-to-face.
- Prior to the interview an agenda should be sent (or be part of the calendar invite)
- Commitments and decided goals and actions will be documented

Topics for the talk
- Functional talk about professional competence and organizational structure
- Relationship between employee and leader, organization, other employees
- Personal agenda items, such as personal behavior, patterns, but also performance.
- Once a year: Salary

Attitude for the person leading the talk
Essentially, guide the meeting like a coach - e.g.
- Create a Dialog
- Give suggestions/help so the employee can help themselves
- Based on the situation/topic one might also give advice, or at least offer to give advice

Basic Elements during the talk
- Mutual Respect
- Be clear about privacy and confidentiality of the meeting. Which parts and topics will be shared with others?
  - Privacy transparency: Appraisal interviews are basically talks between an employee and their lead.
  - HR relevant information and changes with affect the work contract (i.e. change on salary, change on job description, …) will be shared with the HR department
  - If both parties agree, other specific aspects can be communicated to other involved parties as well.
- Make sure the employee knows that this is a voluntary talk and that feedback happens on an absolutely voluntary basis
- Partial Openness is totally fine (You don't have to say everything, you're free to skip topics someone isn't comfortable with)
- Find the right balance between intimacy and distance

Methodology
- Dialog - active listening, also use the technique of asking questions ("Systemic Coaching") (German: Fragetechnik)
- Give and get feedback
- Use visualizations to explain and understand
- Coaching techniques to structure the discussion (German: "Strukturtechnik")

The typical appraisal interview

Invitation to the appraisal interview
Should include (if available):
- the to-dos of the last interview
- the expectation chart (see below)
- the agenda of the interview
- tools that will be used in the appraisal interview and their explanation

Mood check
Possible Questions/Topics:
- Expectations to the appraisal interview
- How do you feel? How do you feel on a happiness scale of 1 to 10?
- How do you feel within your team? Within the Crate.io organization?
- What happened recently? since last check in?

Structured clarification of expectations
Both parties brainstorm and think about their mutual expectations along a structured process. If this process was already done once, the old chart is the starting point. Otherwise it's fine to start from scratch.

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Step 1: Brainstorm expectations
Each party takes 1-2 minutes to think about the four categories of expectations. Each expectation is written on a separate post it. First the Post-Its are kept private.

Step 2: Present your expectations
Each party has a chart like below and presents one post-it after each other. First one party presents its post-its. No discussion happens in this step. Only questions to make sure the expectation is understood are allowed. Afterwards the other party presents its expectations on a separate chart.

less of...	More like that	Continue with that	New! Start doing this

Step 3: Exchange expectations
Each party hands-over the expectation chart to the other party. Each party thinks about the expectations separately (e.g. 4min timebox).
Each party goes to the Post-Its and marks them with one of the symbols:

- ☑ I'm ok with that expectation

- ✗ I'm sorry, but i can't meet this expectation

- ⅋ we need to talk about that

Step 4: Match expectations
One party starts and shows the outcome of its findings. One Post-It after another.

- A ☑ Post-It is easy, as it is clarified and doesn't need further discussion

- For a ✗ Post-It the party explains why it can't meet that expectation. Hopefully the other party can accept that this expectation can't/won't be matched. If this is the case the next card can be tackled. Otherwise it needs further clarification and either stays ✗, ends up as ☑, or if impossible stays ⅋.

- The ⅋ Post-Its need further discussion and hopefully can be agreed on - or "agree to disagree". if no solution is found it stays as ⅋.

The goal is to get all Post-Its to ☑ or ✗ state.

The results of this process will be documented/kept - and should be reused in the next appraisal interview (Ideally sent with the invite).

Check of agreements and to-dos of last interview
Within each meeting we usually create a list like below. We tick off items from last time and potentially add new items of the current interview (Should be part of the invite).

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NR	ACTION	WHO	UNTIL WHEN

Salary

Once a year we talk about the salary. Ideally around the time of the work anniversary.
We're also working on a framework to support structured personal development. This is in progress and will be added later to the guidelines.

Feedback

Each party gives feedback and collects/receives feedback. Ideally on all levels: personal, team, department, company.