

'Japanization' of a performance appraisal system: A historical comparison of the American and Japanese systems

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Abstrak

The Japanese performance appraisal system, which plays an important part in employment practices here, was initially introduced in the 1920s and 1930s, modeled after a system that was gaining wider use in the USA. But after undergoing different histories of development, the two systems in their present form cut a stark contrast. The system now in use in Japan is characterized above all else by the fact that it has kept intact, as its cornerstone, what used to be the defining features of the American system until the early 1930s (e.g. its application to production workers and non-disclosure of rating results to employees), and has incorporated minor additions of Japanese origin (e.g. an emphasis on ability-based factors), while it has refused to emulate most of the significant changes in the American system since the 1930s. One telling difference between the two systems today can be found in the fact that the Japanese system is frequently (and even intentionally and openly) used as a means of discriminating against 'undesirable' employees. Yet legal, remedial measures for victimized employees remain far from appropriate, whereas in the USA use of the performance appraisal system as a tool of employment discrimination is strictly prohibited by the Civil Rights Act.