

This is a question used in a previous semester.

Jamal Ryan, a software engineer, worked for Missiles and Space Company (MSC). Jamal received “Excellent” ratings for 10 years. In 2018, he got a new manager, Jake O’Brian. Three months into his new position, Jake rated the performance of his 49 software engineers. MSC used a system that required managers rank subordinates from best to worst based on ratings determined by the scale shown below. Based on the ratings performed by Jake, Jamal’s ranking went from **2** (second best) to 48 (second worst) among 49 employees. Below are the rating Jamal received in November 2017 (**X**) and received in November 2018 (**Z**). In May 2019, MSC had a decline in orders. The company decided to eliminate five software engineer positions based on the 2018 rankings. Jamal was terminated because he was ranked 48 out of 49. Jamal was one of only two African Americans in the department. The other African American engineer was ranked **45** out of 49. Both African American engineers plan to file a complaint with the EEOC.

Do you believe MSC will have trouble defending the current performance appraisal system if the two black employees claim illegal discrimination. (350 to 450 words)

RATING FORM

	POOR 1	BELOW AVERAGE 2	AVERAGE 3	ABOVE AVERAGE 4	EXCELLENT 5
Attitude		Z			X
Energy		Z		X	
Intelligence	Z				X
Effectiveness	Z				X
Technical Expertise		Z			X

What does a software engineer do at MSC (company’s job summary)?

(Below is company’s description for Jamal’s job)

They are responsible for planning, conducting, and coordinating software development activities. They design, develop, document, test, and debug software that contains logical and mathematical solutions to problems or questions in computer language for solutions by means of data processing equipment. They are involved in the entire development life cycle applying computer hardware and software knowledge for programming initiatives. They correct program errors, prepare operating instructions, compile documentation of program development, and analyze system capabilities to resolve questions.

Basic Qualifications:

Experience with C++

- Strong analysis and mathematical skills
- Willingness to learn and adapt to new technologies
- Effective oral and written communication skills
- Ability to work effectively in a rapid-paced, team environment

EXCELLENT ANSWER

I believe that the company should be concerned. MSC is using a typical graphic rating scale. It is a very popular appraisal method, but it is **not S.M.A.R.T.** First, it is not **specific**. What does attitude mean? Two managers could have different definitions of what attitude means (low interrater reliability). How would you **measure** attitude? I recommend getting rid of attitude but at least make it more measurable by **“anchoring”** the term with something like attendance or completing reports on time or number of errors in a program. If the new manager did not like Jamal for some reason, Jake might think Jamal had a bad attitude. If appraisals are not specific, they can't be **achievable, relevant, or timed**.

Vague terms like attitude and energy allow a lot of errors, but I think **halo error** is the best explanation. This is when **one trait or behavior influences your overall perception of someone**. The fact that Jake gave Jamal low ratings in every category looks like halo error to me.

Severity error wouldn't explain why Jamal got low ratings because **severity means a manager tends to give everyone a lower rating**. Even if Jake is a severe rater, that doesn't explain why Jamal's rating was so much lower than the other engineers. **Primacy and recency errors** wouldn't apply because there is no mention of Jamal making a big mistake when Jake first started (first impression) or right before Jake had to rate Jamal (basing rating on something that just happened). **Since both black employees got low ratings, race could be the cause of halo error.**

This looks like **disparate treatment**. Jamal could argue that he was treated differently because of his race. Since he got high ratings for 10 years, Jamal looks like he is qualified. MSC would have to prove that his termination was based on **any reason other than Jamal's race**. The employer could try to argue that Jamal deserved to be fired because he was a bad performer, but they can't **prove it based on the invalid performance appraisal**. The employer has the burden to prove there was no discrimination. I think MSC should have a better job description and then change the appraisal system to **Management by Objective**. Starting at the top, every manager should have performance goals that **“cascade down the organization.”** Each employee should know exactly what their goals are and how their performance will be evaluated. It is every manager's responsibility to make sure employees understand how they can succeed. In my opinion, Jake should not be a manager. His **unconscious bias** is too obvious. (431 words)